

## Helpdesk Research Report

# Drivers of irregular migration in North Africa

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## Question

*What is the evidence on the drivers of irregular migration from and through North African countries?*

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## 1. Overview

This brief literature review collates evidence on the major facets of irregular migration through and from North African countries, including considerations of: the impact of underlying challenges on irregular migration; whether North African countries are source or transition countries; motivations of irregular migrants; needs, vulnerabilities and resources of irregular migrants; and drivers and interventions for organised immigration crime. This feeds into a larger piece of work on the drivers of instability in the North African region<sup>1</sup>.

The **meaning of irregular migration** is not always clear as there is no universally accepted definition. It is still often used interchangeably with 'illegal migration' even though 'illegal migration' is increasingly restricted to cases of smuggling and trafficking of persons (Lopez Lucia, 2015). For the International Organization for Migration (IOM), irregular migration is movement of people that takes place outside the

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<sup>1</sup> Accompanying papers are available on: [state-citizen relations](#); and [security and justice](#).

regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries<sup>2</sup>. Individuals can enter irregularly through three main routes (Kuschminder et al., 2015):

- Entering a country without proper authority, either through clandestine entry or with fraudulent documents;
- Entering with authorisation but overstaying that authorisation;
- Deliberately abusing the asylum system.

DFID's priority countries in the region are Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, but they also include Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania. Due to the recent political events in the region, such as the Arab Spring and the Syrian conflict, this report prioritises literature written after 2011.

Much of the literature looks at the relationship between North African countries and migration to Europe, but a healthy body of literature also examines intra-regional migration and migration from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa. Geographically, most literature examines Morocco, Libya and Tunisia. Due to considerable difficulties with collecting data on irregular migration, the evidence base is weak, but the literature is quite consistent.

A complex array of factors drives irregular migration. Most literature states that economic and conflict reasons, along with social networks and social support, are the major factors influencing migration. Economic migrants usually cite several reasons for moving, in the search for a better life, while refugees and asylum-seekers have political reasons, fleeing conflict or violence.

The **key findings** are:

- Irregular migration is not a first choice for anyone. Repressive policies on legal migration increase the likelihood of opting for irregular migration, as migrants are pushed into this choice.
- Economic reasons are by far the primary motivation for migration, in this region. This is broader than 'poverty' and is better understood as a multi-faceted mix of unemployment, wages, living conditions at home and abroad.
- Conflict and outbreaks of violence are important drivers of irregular migration, and can be considered shocks or 'tipping points'. Refugees and asylum seekers are willing to risk lives and use irregular routes in order to escape appalling conditions at home.
- Network ties are an important determinant of destination choice. Social networks and returnees provide knowledge about migration and often influence the decision to leave.
- Migrants are subject to difficult conditions in transit, and those fleeing conflict particularly need psychosocial assistance as well as livelihoods support. Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are commonly subjected to xenophobic abuse.
- Smuggling and trafficking are primarily driven by the economic gains for the providers, and lack of alternatives for migrants. Smuggling and trafficking are facilitated by conflict.
- Migration gains momentum through networks and self-reinforcing mechanisms which are not necessarily affected by state policies. Responses to irregular migration must be holistic and respond to the economic and conflict drivers.

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<sup>2</sup> See IOM key definitions: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

The literature considered in this review was largely gender-blind, except for literature on smuggling and trafficking.

## 2. Drivers of irregular migration

The estimates of irregular migration flows are uncertain. The most important problems are: a lack of current data within and across countries; data on migration can be reported differently by the receiving country and the sending country; and different data collection procedures and methodologies across countries and organisations complicate comparing data (Lopez Lucia, 2015). Because irregular migrants are operating in a shadow economy, numbers of departures and arrivals are almost impossible to track (Heller, 2014). Irregular migrants may be difficult to contact and fear speaking to the authorities; and may misrepresent their motivations for migrating, deliberately or not (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013).

It is not always possible to disaggregate regular and irregular migration in the literature. There are parallels between regular and irregular motivations, but some factors are unique to irregular migration, although these have not been specifically examined in the literature on migration (Kuschminder et al., 2015). The literature tends to assume that motivations for migrating are the same for regular and irregular migrants. Broadly, irregular migration is due to limited options for regular migration (Kuschminder et al., 2015).

There are therefore considerable knowledge gaps on international irregular migrants, making evidence-based positions difficult to establish.

### Source, transition and destination countries in North Africa

Countries in North Africa tend to experience both inflows and outflows of irregular migrants, due to their geographical position.

Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia are primarily **countries of origin**, which rely on labour out-migration (to Gulf states and Jordan) to help ease unemployment pressures at home, and for the economic benefits of remittances (IOM, 2015). From this region, Morocco was the main source country of irregular migrants to Europe until the mid-2000s (Kuschminder et al., 2015). Egypt is overwhelmingly an emigration country, but also a transit country (Seeberg, 2013). Egyptians are usually temporary migrants, and often unemployed young men (Kahn et al., 2014; Reitano et al., 2014). Most go to Saudi Arabia, followed by Italy. There is limited migration from Egypt to the EU, and the political changes in 2011 did not change the *preferred* destination countries of Egyptians (Seeberg, 2013). Irregular migrants in Morocco tend to be less wealthy and skilled than legal migrants, but not the poorest of the poor, and often hold high school education and a moderate income (Cherti & Grant, 2013). Most are single young men (Cherti & Grant, 2013).

North Africa is also a **destination region**, mainly for sub-Saharan migrants. Libya has historically been a destination country for many African migrants (Seeberg, 2013). As many as 250,000 third country nationals were living in Libya in 2011 (Cherti & Grant, 2013). Some other North African countries have become destination countries by accident, when sub-Saharan African migrants moving north end up staying in North Africa (Reitano et al., 2014). Many irregular migrants routing through Morocco stay for years, in a state of semi-permanent migration, causing a shift from a transition country to a destination country (Cherti & Grant, 2013). Within the EU, border states such as Greece and Italy have received the largest numbers of irregular migrants from, or who have passed through, North Africa (Kuschminder et al., 2015).

All the North African countries are **transition countries** to some extent. Tunisia is no longer a significant departure point for Europe; migrants mostly exit from Libya or Egypt, with Libya currently the most common departure point (Altai Consulting, 2015; Kuschminder et al., 2015). Refugees in Egypt have increasingly started to move on irregularly, due to increasingly unfavourable conditions for asylum seekers in the country (Altai Consulting, 2015). Libya and Morocco, and to a lesser extent Tunisia, are the key destination and transit countries for irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa fleeing political persecution and economic crises (Natter, 2015). As Morocco and Tunisia have both increased security in efforts to reduce irregular migration, the instability in Libya created an environment that enabled increased irregular migration (Kuschminder et al., 2015).

Migrants passing through the North Africa region tend to be from countries which are experiencing conflict and thus producing refugees and asylum-seekers (Kuschminder et al., 2015; Reitano et al., 2014). In this region, there are increased numbers of Syrians, Somalians and Eritreans (Reitano et al., 2014). Half of the migrants passing through the Central Mediterranean route in 2014 were Syrian and Eritrean, and most passing through the Western Mediterranean route were Senegalese, Cameroonian, Guinean, and Nigerian, but with an increase of people from asylum-seeking countries (Altai Consulting, 2015). Factors influencing the length of stay in a country of transit include the political situation in the country of transit, tightened border control regimes in the EU, social capital, access to help through networks and NGOs, and the ability to accumulate funds to pay for the crossing to Europe (Kuschminder et al., 2015).

There is no evidence of a recent increase in migrants from North African countries arriving in the EU. There is no evidence that North African countries are shifting from transition countries to source countries.

## **General drivers in the region**

The broader literature provides strong evidence that, globally, conditions of poverty, inequality, conflict and lack of economic opportunities at home, and reports from trusted social networks about conditions abroad, play a strong role in decisions to migrate internationally (Browne, 2015). Push and pull factors in North Africa include a mix of: 'proximate' causes (the outbreak of violence, loss of livelihood or death of a family member) and 'root' causes (such as political instability, economic uncertainty or prolonged unemployment) (Cherti & Grant, 2013).

Various motivations usually contribute to the decision to migrate, rather than a single factor (Cherti & Grant, 2013). Poverty, while important, is rarely the sole driver of irregular migration (Cherti & Grant, 2013). In the MENA region, migration is partly driven by fleeing from conflict and crises, and partly by demand for labour and the search for livelihoods, jobs and opportunity (IOM, 2015). IOM states that "acute and protracted political crises as well as natural disasters and environmental degradation are the key drivers of forced migration to, from and within the Middle East and North Africa region" (IOM, 2015: 6). Motivations may also change over time (Cherti & Grant, 2013). The literature is clear that a complex combination of factors influence decisions to migrate (Kuschminder et al., 2015).

One of the assumptions about irregular migration is that a lack of accurate information generates irrational and risky irregular migration behaviours (Pécoud, 2010). If migrants were informed of the proper conditions of entry, they would be deterred from unlawful migration (Pécoud, 2010). Some authors find it unlikely that information campaigns will have any effect on decisions to migrate (Browne, 2015). Risk information does not seem to change decisions to migrate, as the perceived opportunity abroad continues to outweigh the risks (Heller, 2014), and the most trusted information comes from social networks, not government sources (Kosnick, 2014).

The IOM recently commissioned a study on regular and irregular migration through the Mediterranean. Based on 60 interviews with migrants and 73 interviews with key informants, across Egypt, Italy, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia, the key findings on drivers are (Altai Consulting, 2015):

Western Mediterranean route, via Algeria and Morocco towards Spain:

- The push factors emerge as far more influential than the pull factors and the most significant push factor is the need to flee from instability: either war or conflict (asylum seekers) or economic or societal pressures that inhibit a stable life.
- Aspirational migration: a feeling of inequality is often more influential than absolute need in a decision to migrate, which is why many of the migrants on the Western Mediterranean route were not the worst-off in their home countries.
- The tipping point: for most migrants life back home was precarious and held together by very thin threads that could very easily come undone. When one of those threads gives in, migrants often finally decide to leave.
- For other migrants, the tipping point comes when they observe returnees who come back in a better situation or when friends who return from a migration abroad decided to migrate again and offer to take them along.

Central Mediterranean route, via Libya and Tunisia towards Italy and Malta:

- While some argue that [the Italian rescue mission] Mare Nostrum acted as a pull factor, the reality is that a number of push factors led to an increase in the number of people on the move towards the North African coast (conflict in Iraq, Syria, Central African Republic, South Sudan, and worsening repression in Eritrea).
- Moreover, since the end of Mare Nostrum, the number of migrants on boats that departed the Libyan coast has increased (with over 33,000 arrivals having been reported in Italy by May 2015, compared to just over 26,000 in the same period in 2014).
- The crisis in Libya also created a migratory pressure for migrants already in the country as well as a perception of the doors to Europe being 'open,' which increased opportunistic flows.

Figure 1 shows some of the key factors in migration through Morocco, based on interviews with migrants conducted by IPPR (Cherti & Grant, 2013). These findings are supported in the literature and are broadly applicable to other countries in this region.

**Figure 1: Factors in irregular migration in Morocco**

### Factors in irregular migration

#### Push factors

**Violence and instability** The spread of conflict in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mali in recent years has been a primary driver of irregular migration through Morocco. Among our respondents, almost a quarter (22 per cent) had experienced conflict or political persecution in their country of origin. An additional 7 per cent fled due to domestic or community violence.

**Limited opportunities** Among our respondents, these included the failure of a business, the lack of a viable livelihood, limited education prospects or climate change.

**Mobility and the 'culture of migration'** Families, friends, neighbours and the wider community can play a major role in perpetuating migration from key sending areas. In particular, as was the case for many of our respondents, the pressure to support parents and relatives can prove decisive.

#### Pull factors

**The influence of the diaspora** A crucial element in the facilitation and promotion of migration is the diaspora who, besides often providing advice or financial support, also present a visible 'success story' for prospective migrants. Returning migrants can play a similar role in communicating the apparent benefits of migration.

**Media and social technologies** The television, internet and social media have led to an increasingly globalised outlook among young people in sending regions, together with an acute awareness of the inequalities between their own countries and developed countries in Europe.

**Improved prospects** Migration is often driven by the pursuit of a better quality of life. While this frequently includes education or employment, it can also encompass political freedoms, security and other benefits unavailable in sending countries. A corollary of this is the idealisation of Europe. This positive outlook on Europe was surprisingly prevalent among our respondents, despite the global financial crisis and the EU's increasingly assertive approach to border management.

**Source: Cherti & Grant, 2013: 3.**

## Economic

Economic reasons are consistently cited in the literature as the primary motivation in decisions to migrate to or through North Africa. This is broader than just the experience of living in poverty, but also includes a lack of high-skill job opportunities, youth bulges, visible inequality, and low wages in home countries.

The literature is consistent in noting that the poorest of the poor are much less likely to migrate, due to the high costs (Kuschminder et al., 2015). Migrants are likely to be moderately educated and with some resources, to spend on the costs of migration.

African countries have a high population growth rate, but without the corresponding increase in jobs for young people (Reitano et al., 2014). Reitano et al., (2014) suggest that the increasing gap between rich and poor contributes to the desire to migrate.

Economic factors influencing irregular migrants' choice of where and how to migrate include: the cost of travelling to a certain destination; the economy of the destination country; and the perception of the mix of economic factors such as employment, wages, and benefits in the destination country (Kuschminder et al., 2015). Migrants with less money might choose closer or more accessible locations, or more dangerous routes, meaning that socio-economic status plays a role in destination choice (Kuschminder et al., 2015). The financial crisis in Europe had an impact on the views of potential migrants in Morocco, making them slightly less likely to want to migrate to EU countries (Kuschminder et al., 2015). On the whole, migrants appear to have only a basic understanding of the economy of destination countries.

For **Egyptians**, the overwhelming main reasons for out-migration are economic (El Mahdi, 2013; Seeberg, 2013). Egyptian youth see regular and irregular migration as an opportunity to escape low wages, poor living conditions, and lack of job opportunities (El Mahdi, 2013). This is supported by the visibility of return migrants, and the importance of remittances (El Mahdi, 2013). Using data from 1997 (the only data available for interpreting the effect of migration on poverty), Kahn et al. (2014) show that remittances and family members in the destination country are the most important variables influencing decisions to migrate. Poorer individuals were more likely to migrate than richer individuals, and migration appears to have reduced poverty for this group.

Before 2010, the main reasons for Egyptian youth to migrate irregularly were (El Mahdi, 2013):

- The increasing severity of unemployment.
- The difficulty for Egyptian youth to find employment in the Arab Gulf countries due to competition from cheap South East Asian labour arriving in massive numbers.
- Geographical proximity and the ease of travelling to Libya where most of the migrant boats to Europe set off.

IPPR conducted research with 50 male Moroccan nationals who had migrated to Europe and **returned to Morocco** (Cherti, Balaram & Szilard, 2013). This report notes that migration to Europe was mostly due to pull factors, not entirely related to poverty. Many cited the allure of moving abroad to Europe for adventure, the opportunities for financial and material success, and the idea of living a different lifestyle elsewhere. These concepts were strongly driven by stories told by returnees. Push factors were less important, but these included economic uncertainty, political instability, and the desire to provide for family. Proposed drivers for the return of irregular migrants fall into two theoretical camps:

- Return migration is a result of a 'failure' to find a job or improve their lives in the receiving country.
- Migrants return if they are able to secure work and meet their financial goals abroad.

The Moroccan research found no particular support for either theory; instead, the factors driving return are as complex and multi-faceted as those driving out-migration.

## Conflict

Conflict and outbreaks of violence are important drivers of irregular migration, and can be considered shocks or 'tipping points'. Recent outbreaks of conflict have triggered many migration movements in the region. Refugees and asylum-seekers are willing to risk lives and use irregular routes in order to escape appalling conditions at home (Reitano et al., 2014). De Haas (2011) posits that most significant shifts in past migration are responses to shocks, rather than incremental changes. In this region, these changes are mostly changes in the political-economic structures.

The Arab Spring instigated a large surge in irregular migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing North Africa in **2010 and 2011** (Reitano et al., 2014). During this time of political chaos, control over the Libyan shoreline ceased and migrant smuggling increased (Kuschminder et al., 2015). There were temporary spikes in irregular migration flows from Libya to Europe (Reitano et al., 2014) and Tunisia to Europe (Natter, 2015). Decreased irregular entries into Spain and Malta at the same time suggests that people were adapting their routes to take advantage of the security void on the Central Mediterranean border and favourable weather conditions for sea crossings (Natter, 2015).

However, this flow to Europe does not appear to be sustained (Natter, 2015). Most migrants stayed within North Africa. Libya has historically been a destination country for many African economic migrants, and the conflict in 2011 caused many migrants living in Libya to exit into neighbouring countries (Seeberg, 2013). In 2011, the IOM reported that 900,000 migrants had fled Libya, including 250,000 third country nationals (Cherti & Grant, 2013). Most went to other African countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Niger, Algeria, Chad and Sudan) with a small number (perhaps two per cent) of displaced people going to Europe (Cherti & Grant, 2013). Many went to Egypt (Reitano et al., 2014), including a large number of Egyptian nationals returning home for their own security (Seeberg, 2013).

Libya's outbreak of violence in **mid-2014** triggered a pressure to leave the country, both for Libyans and migrants, mostly by crossing the Mediterranean (Altai Consulting, 2015). Those that stayed in Libya either had stable employment, or were stranded (Altai Consulting, 2015). Migrant inflows decreased but did not cease (Altai Consulting, 2015). In response, Tunisia closed its border with Libya to non-Libyan migrants (Altai Consulting, 2015).

There has been a recent increase in the number of Nigerian and Malian migrants **since 2012**, supporting the premise that conflict drives migration as conflict has broken out in both countries since then (Reitano et al., 2014).

## Structural

It is perhaps worth noting that migrants would choose legal routes into countries if those were available to them. Irregular migration is a forced decision, when no legal options are available. Some institutional structures in the region facilitate this choice of irregular migration, including corruption, weak border control, and easy access to smugglers and therefore support its continuation.

De Haas (2011), in an analysis of drivers of migration in the Mediterranean over the past 60 years, suggests that fluctuating labour demand in host countries is a key factor in migration. As most of the Southern Mediterranean countries have remained poor through this period, it appears that the most significant economic drivers are a combination of modest economic development, middling levels of education, relative poverty, and opportunity gaps with neighbouring countries.

The literature is fairly clear that restrictions on labour migration to EU countries have not decreased migration, instead, they may support increased irregular migration (de Haas, 2011). Labour migration has been driven by economic growth, EU expansion, labour market segmentation and intra-regional economic inequalities (de Haas, 2011). Migration tends to gain momentum through networks and self-reinforcing mechanisms which are not necessarily affected by state policies (de Haas, 2011). If migration policies do not match the actual demand for labour, this often results in irregular migration (de Haas, 2011). There is some evidence that regulations on legal migration increase the number of illegal migrants (El Mahdi, 2013). Increased border controls do not stop migration (Kuschminder et al., 2015).

However, stricter border controls in Israel and the Gulf region appear to have reduced irregular migration (Reitano et al., 2014). Border walls in Saudi Arabia and Israel have stopped migrants entering, and diverted the flow towards Europe (Reitano et al., 2014).

The Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) have identified a number of structural factors that contribute to illicit flows of people in North Africa (JACS, 2013, cited in Hinds, 2014). These include:



- **Physical geography:** Borders are long and easily traversable, while the terrain of many parts of North Africa makes the region particularly difficult to police.
- **Weak border security institutions:** States' abilities to control borders varies notably across the region. In August 2013, the Tunisian state announced it was 'stepping up' security along its 460km border with Libya in an effort to deter smugglers and terrorists. A Presidential decree made the border a 'restricted' zone, with those wishing to enter the area requiring a permit.

The choice of which route to take into Europe is influenced by four key factors (Kuschminder et al., 2015):

- Safety and conflict along the routes;
- Weather conditions;
- Border surveillance and push-back policies;
- Changes in countries' political status or visa regimes.

The choice between routes to Europe is usually a function of the following considerations: how heavily border-crossing points are controlled; the ease of passage to Europe; the possibility for regularisation at some point along the route; the levels of abuse and conditions in the transit countries; the risks involved; the duration of the journey; the cost of the journey; the presence of networks or friends along the way or in transit countries (Altai Consulting, 2015). Most of the land borders into Europe are currently closed, meaning there is great pressure on the sea crossing points (Altai Consulting, 2015). The Central Mediterranean route saw an increase of 376 per cent between 2013 and 2014 (Altai Consulting, 2015).

Along with economic factors, migrants can choose to leave because of poor institutional quality in their home countries (El Mahdi, 2013).

## Social

Social networks are generally recognised as playing a strong role in migration. The existence of networks in a destination country increases the chance of choosing to migrate there (Kuschminder et al., 2015). The information received through social networks is usually considered more trustworthy than that from other sources (Kuschminder et al., 2015). As noted above, the stories told by returnees and the visibility of their success have strong influences on migration choices.

## Environmental

There is a considerable body of literature which posits that environmental changes, particularly climate change, will increase migration out of the Sahel region towards North Africa. There is little empirical evidence to demonstrate this (de Haas, 2011).

## 3. Needs, vulnerabilities and resources

Large influxes of people place strain on host communities, labour markets, housing costs, and demand for services (IOM, 2015). This may cause tension between migrants and hosts. Several sources note that migrants in North Africa are subject to xenophobic and racist prejudices, sometimes escalating into violence. In Morocco, for example, sub-Saharan African migrants experience low-level violence, harassment and intimidation from Moroccans (Strachan, 2014). Figure 2 shows some of the experiences of irregular migrants in Morocco.

**Figure 2: Experiences of irregular migration in Morocco**

### Experiences in Morocco

<b>Irregularity</b>	The irregular status of most sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco is perhaps the central factor in their lives. Without legal documentation to work or reside in the country, irregular migrants or 'sans papiers' are effectively forced into a clandestine existence that exposes them to exploitative labour conditions, inflated rents and violence without recourse to police protection.
<b>Discrimination and racism</b>	Irregular migrants face stigmatisation from all levels of society, not only from ordinary Moroccans and the police but also at the level of policy and the media. This is based not only on race but also language and religious divisions, particularly for Christian or anglophone migrants, as well as their status as irregular residents in the country.
<b>Underpaid and exploitative employment</b>	Irregular migrants, even those with relatively high levels of education or training, often find themselves in the most dangerous or poorly remunerated areas of employment, frequently working at a wage far below the accepted rate for Moroccans and without basic protections. Many are unable to access even this level of employment and so are reliant on begging or remittances for their survival.
<b>Lack of access to basic services</b>	Migrants in Morocco struggle to access even basic services such as healthcare, education or legal assistance, especially outside the cities. The gap in government provision is filled to some extent by NGOs, support groups and (in the case of recognised refugees) UNHCR, but this provides only partial coverage. Particularly troubling is the 'second generation' of migrant children, born in Morocco or in transit, growing up without basic education or healthcare.
<b>Social exclusion</b>	Besides hostility from some Moroccans, sub-Saharan migrants also face divisions within their own communities based on nationality, language or religion. Furthermore, many find themselves increasingly alienated from contacts in their country of origin due to the incomprehension and unrealistic expectations of family and friends.
<b>Poor living conditions</b>	The combination of underpaid work or unemployment with inflated living costs for basic needs such as accommodation translates into acute poverty for many migrants. While in the cities this may mean exploitative and overcrowded lodgings, the situation is even worse in border areas such as Oujda, where many migrants are forced to hide in the forests and even clean water and electricity are unavailable to them.
<b>Insecurity and the threat of deportation</b>	Migrants are especially vulnerable to violence and crime, and may be reluctant to report incidents of robbery or assault to police out of a perception that no action would be taken or that the migrants themselves, lacking legal documentation, would be treated as criminals. In fact, deportation is a constant threat for migrants and often accompanied by human rights abuses, including <i>refoulement</i> .

**Source: Cherti & Grant, 2013: 4.**

In 2011, several hundred thousand people crossed from Libya to Tunisia, requiring the government to suddenly respond to the practical challenges of providing accommodation, health care and food, having not been an immigration country for some years (Natter, 2015).

Libya's renewed violence in mid-2014 led to internal and cross-border displacement, which affected migrants already in the country (IOM, 2015). Many needed humanitarian assistance, but sudden returns home affected their communities in terms of loss of remittances. Many of these people left their assets and savings in Libya, and have experienced difficult conditions on return to their home countries (Seeberg, 2013). There was a sharp increase in 2014 of the number of minors migrating across MENA, many of whom were unaccompanied (IOM, 2015).

Refugees and asylum seekers who have fled appalling conditions are in need of psychological assistance and livelihoods assistance (Reitano et al., 2014). Many have lost families and community ties (Reitano et al., 2014). IOM's work in the MENA region in 2014 has included: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support interventions; resettlement assistance such as processing legal documents to facilitate the safe departure of refugees accepted for resettlement; medical assessments and counselling; pre-departure orientation; movement assistance; and transportation of refugees (IOM, 2015).

Those who are in desperate conditions are more likely to reach out to smugglers, and their situation makes them very vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (Reitano et al., 2014). The conditions of smuggled and trafficked people are frequently horrific (Reitano et al., 2014). IOM (2015) states that there was an increase in 2014 in the level of physical and psychological abuse occurring in smuggling and trafficking contexts. Female migrants travelling to Europe are at risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking, being forced into prostitution to pay their smugglers (Reitano et al., 2014). Many women start migration voluntarily but become victims of human trafficking during the journey (Reitano et al., 2014).

## 4. Organised immigration crime

### Drivers

Smuggling is defined by UNODC as ‘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’ (Kuschminder et al., 2015: 12). Smuggling implies that the person is not necessarily a victim, while trafficking is defined by UNODC as ‘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’ (Kuschminder et al., 2015: 12). The difference can be summarised as “in the case of human trafficking, the victim is transported against their will; whereas in the case of smuggled migration, a victim is transported voluntarily” (Reitano et al., 2014: 15). Migrants who choose to be smuggled may find themselves becoming victims of trafficking during the journey.

Up to 80 per cent of irregular migration to Europe is facilitated by smugglers or criminal groups, with Libya the major hub (Reitano et al., 2014; Kuschminder et al., 2015). IOM (2015) notes that the current border control systems lack effective coordination, which facilitates transnational crime. Smuggling and trafficking require collusion, if not corruption, from border guards and authorities (Reitano et al., 2014). Smuggling migrants is well-established and to some extent permitted by the authorities in many parts of North Africa (Browne, 2013).

Irregular migrants may attempt to complete their journeys without organised criminal groups, but turn to smugglers when they encounter an insurmountable obstacle (Reitano et al., 2014). Refugees and asylum seekers who are in desperate conditions might not contact social networks, making them vulnerable to exploitation without a social safety net (Reitano et al., 2014).

Complex and protracted humanitarian and migration crises can lead to an increase in trafficking (IOM, 2015). Continued insecurity in Libya has led to increasing reports of trafficking for forced labour or slavery and slaverylike practices (IOM, 2015). In the south of the country, the semi-nomadic Tuareg and Tabu peoples turned to migrant smuggling as a means of earning a living due to their marginalisation and established transnational ethnic networks (Reitano et al., 2014). In the political crisis, border controls relaxed and these networks flourished.

Migrants are seen as people with money to spend and therefore lucrative opportunities for local communities (Browne, 2013). There are few economic incentives for smugglers to desist (Browne, 2013). Instead, smuggling has become a core economy of some towns (Reitano et al., 2014). Migrant smuggling is often linked to drug smuggling, using the same routes, and sometimes using migrants to carry drugs in

return for free passage (Reitano et al., 2014). The economic benefits of human trafficking far outweigh the costs, for the traffickers (Reitano et al., 2014).

## Responses

There is relatively little evidence on the impact of anti-trafficking programmes globally (Walton, 2010). The absence of baseline data on levels of trafficking, and the failure to interview victims or survivors are particular problems. As trafficking involves illegal networks, conducting rigorous research on the topic is likely to remain inherently challenging.

Irregular migration routes are extremely flexible. While restrictive immigration measures have reduced migration in one area, this tends to simply divert migrants to somewhere else (Reitano et al., 2014).

In 2014, eight countries<sup>3</sup> signed the Declaration on African Union–Horn of Africa Initiative on Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants, which commits them to equal assistance measures to both trafficked persons and abused smuggled migrants (IOM, 2015). Sudan adopted an anti-trafficking law in 2014, and similar laws are pending in Libya, Tunisia and Morocco (IOM, 2015).

The literature suggests that a security approach to stopping smuggling has been ineffective, and that a holistic approach which addresses the underlying drivers of migration would be more effective (Browne, 2013). The literature suggests that a cohesive, sustainable response is needed which involves both European and African actors, which tackles the insecurity and fragility in home countries, and which provides alternatives to irregular migration (Reitano et al., 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, Sudan, South Sudan and Tunisia.

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## Key websites

- IOM: <http://www.iom.int/>
- Determinants of International Migration – DEMIG: <http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/projects/demig>

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Carter, B. (2015). *Facts about security and justice challenges* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1273). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. <http://www.gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/HDQ1273.pdf>

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