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PERCEPTION OF “SMUGGLING BUSINESS” AND DECISION MAKING PROCESSES OF MIGRANTS

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July 2017**

Foreword

Straddling Europe and Asia, Turkey has been at the center of migration flows for centuries. Due to recent regional conflicts and crises, the country has increasingly become both a major destination and transit country for people fleeing poverty and conflict.

When they do not have the option to travel in a regular manner, many migrants resort to migrant smugglers. In the last two decades and particularly over the years following the Arab Spring and conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, there has been a dramatic increase in migrants attempting to cross borders through the services of migrant smugglers. Migrant smugglers have turned out to be an integral part of migrant's journey.

Once paid, smugglers often have little or no interest in migrants' wellbeing, leaving them particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. All too often, migrants also pay with their lives: they suffocate in containers, perish in deserts or drown at sea. Under the project "Counter Migrant Smuggling Initiatives in Turkey" that is funded by the Government of Norway, IOM supports Turkey's efforts to combat migrant smuggling. The research report prepared under this project's framework focuses on one of the most critical provinces in migrant smuggling-İzmir. The research sheds light on the existing perceptions about migrant smuggling as well as migrants decision-making processes, and the smuggler marketing practices. The report provides details behind the context of migrant smuggling and will support the implementation of evidence-based and effective responses.

Turkey has taken significant steps to combat migrant smuggling and provide safe, legal options for the migrants to rebuild their lives. As the geographical link between Europe and Asia, Turkey's measures to combat migrant smuggling will impact the European Union and other Western countries measures to combat against irregular migration.

As the UN Migration Agency, IOM has provided comprehensive assistance on migration for over 65 years. IOM believes migration policies must be holistic and works closely with international policymakers to help ensure orderly and humane migration management and promote international cooperation. For over 25 years, IOM has built a strong partnership with the Turkish government to strengthen its migration management system and to promote policies that effectively respond to migration challenges. As Turkey continues to combat migrant smuggling, IOM remains a steadfast partner to advocate for safe, legal options for migrants to rebuild their lives.

Finally, I would like to thank Asst. Prof. Ayselin YILDIZ, her team and all the contributors of this study.

Vladimer GVILAVA
Chief of Mission, The UN Migration Agency (IOM), Turkey

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1. Introduction

The smuggling of migrants across international borders is a growing global concern and an on-going challenge for countries to maintain the integrity of their migration governance. Added to this is the obligation for governments and civil society to protect the fundamental rights of migrants regardless of their legal status. The need for such protection is vital for smuggled migrants who are vulnerable to abuse and criminal exploitation (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012).

Migrant smuggling is commonly interlinked within the broader context of irregular migration (Koser, 2010) and as McAuliffe and Laczko (2016) note, “migrant smugglers have become an integral part of the irregular migration journey”. Although there is an increasing amount of academic literature on migrant smuggling, most studies tend to focus on the criminal aspects and on how the smugglers actually operate. Research and data that address the knowledge gap in relation to migrant smuggling and its interaction with migrants’ decisions to embark on such journeys remain limited. More studies developed on evidence-based research are crucial in order to strengthen our understanding of migrant smuggling and enable governments to respond with effective policies that help prevent it from happening in the first place.

1.1 Aim and Scope of the Research

This study provides a small-scale, data-driven, qualitative field research conducted at the local level, in Izmir, on the existing perceptions of smuggling and the decision-making processes of migrants. In this context, while referring to the report “Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A Global Review of the Emerging Evidence Base” (McAuliffe and Laczko, 2016), it uses a migrant-centric approach with a focus on migrants’ decisions, perceptions of their smugglers and their personal experiences rather than a state-centric one. The analysis focuses on the relationship between the smugglers and smuggled migrants, its impact on changing smuggling practices and decision-making processes of the migrants in the whole process.

This report also aims to contribute to policy recommendations to support Turkey’s efforts in combating migrant smuggling. The research intends to provide some insights and findings to further stimulate and guide comparative analysis and development of effective policy responses. It contributes to the existing literature by providing data and information on the smuggler-migrant interaction by conducting interviews with state and non-state actors in Izmir. The research findings also provide, to a certain extent, an insight into the broader complexities of migrant smuggling and the smuggling business model.

1.2 Field Research: Izmir as a “migrant transit hub” and “migrant smuggling hotspot”

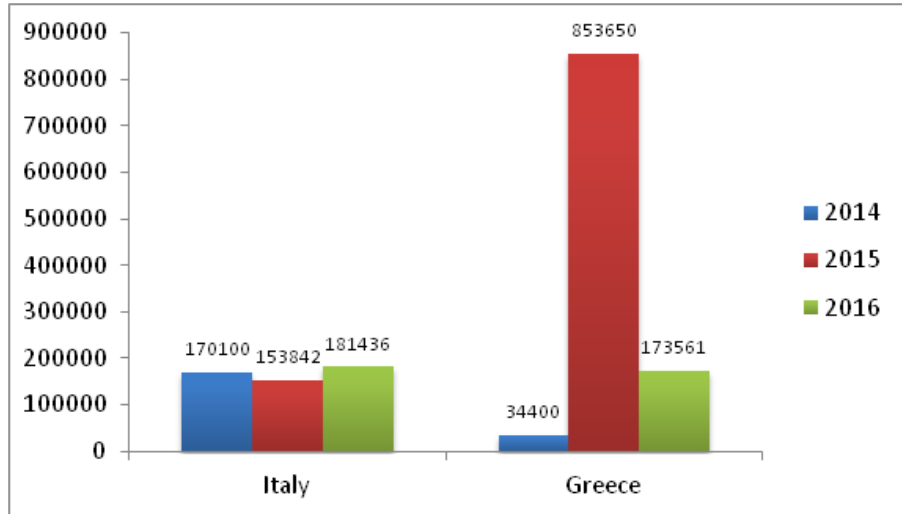
According to Frontex’s (2014) classification there are three main smuggling routes in the Mediterranean basin:

- (a) The Western Mediterranean route, from North Africa and the Western African coast to the Iberian Peninsula;
- (b) The Central Mediterranean route, from parts of Africa to Italy and Malta; and
- (c) The Eastern Mediterranean route, from the Middle East and Turkey targeting Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria both by sea and by land near Evros River (Frontex 2013, 2014).

In comparison to 2015, while the numbers have started to go down after EU-Turkey statement of March 18th 2016, as Icduygu and Akcapar (2016) acknowledge, in 2015 and in the early 2016, the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey has become one of the most active corridors for irregular migration and migrant smuggling.

Figure 1: Total arrivals to Greece and Italy by sea 2014-2016

Source: IOM (2017)



Located on the west coast of Turkey and just a few miles away from the Greek islands of Chios and Lesvos, Izmir is considered a “migrant transit hub” and a “migrant smuggling hotspot” where irregular migration and human smugglers abound.

This research therefore focuses on migrant smuggling in the Aegean region, with particular reference to the city of Izmir on the Eastern Mediterranean route, which is one of the exit zones for crossing by boat (Icduygu and Karacay, 2011; IOM 2016). Being one of the last exit points from Turkey to enter the EU, Izmir has been intensively used as a route for irregular crossings by those chancing the Aegean Sea to enter Greece. Located on the west coast of Turkey and just a few miles away from the Greek islands of Chios and Lesvos, Izmir is considered a “migrant transit hub” (Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016) and a “migrant smuggling hotspot” (Europol, 2016) where irregular migration and human smugglers abound.

Figure 2: Migrant arrivals from Turkey to Greece between January-August 2015

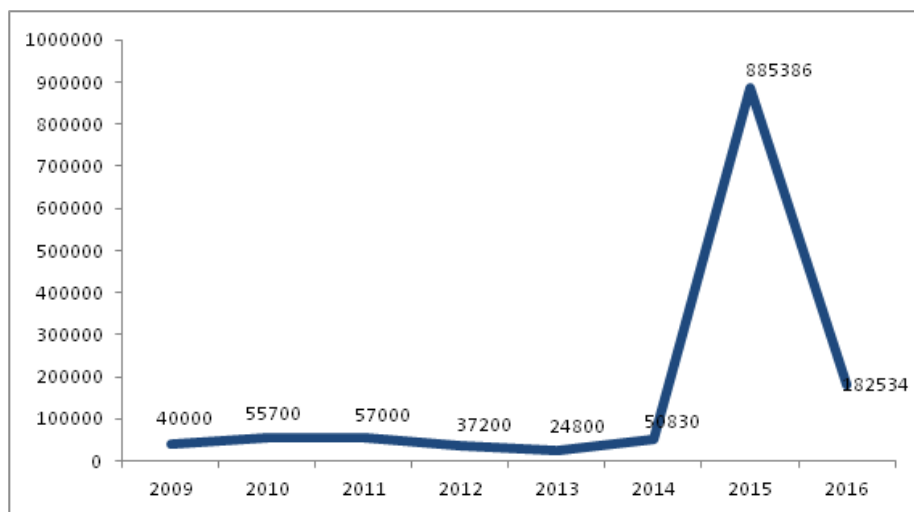
Source: UNHCR, 2015



Over the course of 2015, the number of refugees and irregular migrants using the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece rose significantly. Frontex reported the number arriving in the EU

via this route to be in the region of 885,386 migrants. This represents a record high and is 17 times greater than the number of crossings recorded for 2014, which totaled 50,830 (Frontex, 2017).

Figure 3. Illegal border crossings on the Eastern Mediterranean route in numbers



Source: Frontex (2017)

The highest number of crossings reportedly happened between Turkey and the Greek islands to the east of the Aegean Sea (Frontex, 2016). In 2015, the total number of arrivals on the island of Chios reached 120,727 (UNHCR, 2015b). That same year, Lesbos logged 510,592 new arrivals, constituting 59% of total arrivals in Greece (UNHCR, 2015c). During this same period, Izmir witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers attempting to reach the Greek islands by using unsafe boats and dinghies, and most of them had engaged the services of migrant smugglers. Since then, Izmir has become widely known among migrants and refugees as a transit city with enabling factors that facilitate smuggling services. As one interviewee notes, “Everybody in Iraq knows very well that you can easily reach Greece from Izmir”. Accordingly, this study also aims to reflect the different dynamics at play in the city of Izmir by investigating the actors engaged in smuggling, as well as the business model and policy limitations.

Izmir has become widely known among migrants and refugees as a transit city with enabling factors that facilitate smuggling services

1.3 Research Method

The research is based on qualitative data analysis acquired from semi-structured interviews conducted with the following group of state and non-state actors in İzmir:

- 1) 46 migrants (including refugees)¹; 42 of whom² were in transit and the remaining four were settled³ in Izmir;
- 2) Five non-state actors including two hotel managers in Kahramanlar and three small-business owners (restaurant, car park and bakery) in Basmane – intentionally or unintentionally – engaged in processes and procedures regarding irregular migration and the smuggling business;
- 3) A group of state actors/policy makers/practitioners who are in charge of operations in combating migrant smuggling from three different key policy institutions (Ministry of Interior Izmir

¹ It should be noted that although the term “migrant” is used for all the participants of this group, the group also includes asylum seekers and refugees as well. However, since the legislation differs in many countries in terms of granting these protection statuses and it requires a special status determination process, this study uses the term “migrant” for all the interviewees of this group without making any legal status classification.

² It should be noted that although the boundaries between transit and settled migrants are blurred, the categorisation in this research concerning transit migrants is based on whether the migrant defined his/her intention to move forward to Europe or any other country and stay in Izmir temporarily.

³ In this research, the categorization for settled migrants is used for the ones who have been living in Izmir for the past three years with no intention of continuing on to Europe and confirmed their decision to stay in Izmir.

There is a general understanding that transit irregular migrants and asylum seekers are more directly engaged with smuggling. However, settled migrants also require special attention in order to understand whether emerging or existing social migrant networks have become a direct or indirect actor in smuggling or whether there is an emerging alliance between these networks and the smugglers

The interviews were conducted between December 2016 and April 2017. Migrant interviews were carried out in Izmir's districts of Kadifekale, Basmane, Kahramanlar, Çeşme and Buca, where irregular migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and also actors engaged in smuggling are particularly located. Some of the interviews were conducted in restaurants and cafeterias while others took place in the homes of the migrants. There is a general understanding that transit irregular migrants and asylum seekers are more directly engaged with smuggling. However, settled migrants also require special attention in order to understand whether emerging or existing social migrant networks have become a direct or indirect actor in smuggling or whether there is an emerging alliance between these networks and the smugglers. A significant number of settled migrants also has up-to-date knowledge on how smuggling functions in their region. Four of the 46 migrant interviews were, therefore, conducted among settled Syrian and Iraqi migrants.

As regards the interviews with migrants, three different sets of interview guidelines were used for three different categories of migrants, which are highlighted as follows:

- (a) migrants who had engaged the services of a smuggler at least once during their journey (91%);
- (b) migrants who had not contacted any smuggler and who decided to make the journey alone (9%); and
- (c) Syrians who decided to settle in Izmir and who knew about the smuggling business in Izmir.

The interviews aimed to examine how migrants perceived the smugglers; their interaction with smugglers and smuggling practices; personal accounts of their journey; how they found the smugglers; how they decided on their destination; which route to take; whether the smugglers had had an impact on their decision; and how they identify the business model of smugglers.

Hotel managers and small-scale business owners are interviewed in order to gain a more complete picture of the smuggling business and the engagement of local and non-state actors directly or indirectly in smuggling services, in the Izmir region. All five are located where migrant-smuggling is intensively taking place, in Kahramanlar and Basmane. Questions for these respondents centred on identifying the smuggling context such as the roles of certain local actors and their involvement in smuggling networks.

With regards to the state and policy making actors, the interviews were conducted in the format of group interviews and participated by mainly the practitioners active in the field. These interviews not only provided information on the specific characteristics of irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the Aegean region, but also the challenges encountered at practitioner level as result of broader national and international policy implications.

Concerning some limitations of the research, various factors such as the impact of the EU-Turkey statement of 18 March 2016; the closure of the Western Balkan route (from Turkey to Greece, then on to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, to reach Hungary or Croatia) and the Turkish-Syrian border; and the onset of winter weather conditions, meant that researchers experienced some difficulty in reaching sufficient numbers of transit migrants to interview. Another reason was that transit migrants could not be easily reached as they were no longer staying in hotels or in the city's

parks or mosques as they were in 2015 and 2016. Additionally, while Syrians live in specific parts of Izmir, it is difficult to contact migrants of other nationalities such as Afghans, Iraqis and Eritreans. The reason for this is that they are not as numerous as the Syrian population; they do not live in settled communities in Izmir yet; they avoid controls as they are not granted international protection status or might be irregular economic migrant and thus have the fear of being deported. Therefore, they are not very visible or contactable in public areas.

However, this timely data also provides an opportunity to examine, in particular, the impact of the EU-Turkey statement on the changing dynamics between migrants and smugglers, as well as reflect on migrants' decisions about their journey. Thus, the research questioned whether the interviewed migrants knew about the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016 and the issue of migrants being readmitted from Greece back to Turkey. And, if so, whether this had had an impact on their decisions on which routes they would take; the timing of their journeys; or the smuggling practices in the Aegean region.

Accordingly, the research goes beyond the transnational crime aspects of smuggling to focus on the experiences and perceptions of both migrants smuggled in the Aegean region and the local actors engaged in migrant smuggling practices such as hotel managers or small business owners. Through small-scale qualitative analysis, the research is not intended to provide general conclusions and does not claim to be representative but rather present a real-time overview of migration movements and smuggling practices taking place in Izmir for the specific period December 2016 to April 2017.

1.4 Demographic and Socio-Economic profile of the migrant respondents

Concerning the countries of origin of the 46 migrants interviewed, 28 of them were from Syria, 6 from Pakistan, 5 from Afghanistan, 3 from Eritrea, 3 from Iraq and 1 from Egypt. Concerning the gender distribution, 32 of the total migrant respondents were male whereas 14 were female.

Figure 4. Nationality of Respondents

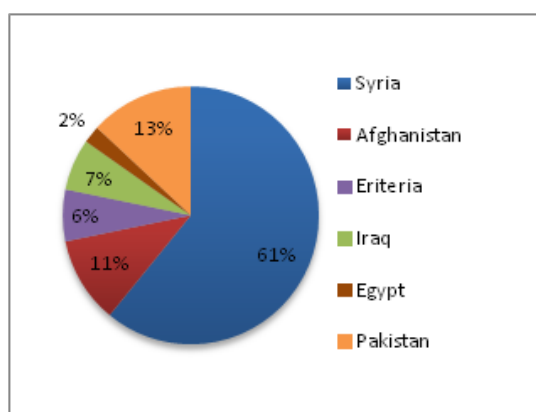
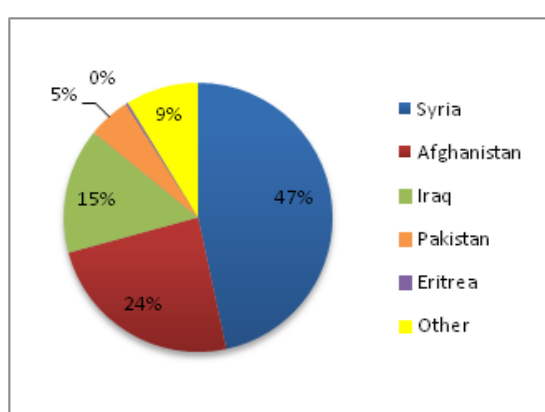


Figure 5. Nationalities of arrivals in Greece (January-December 2016) ⁴



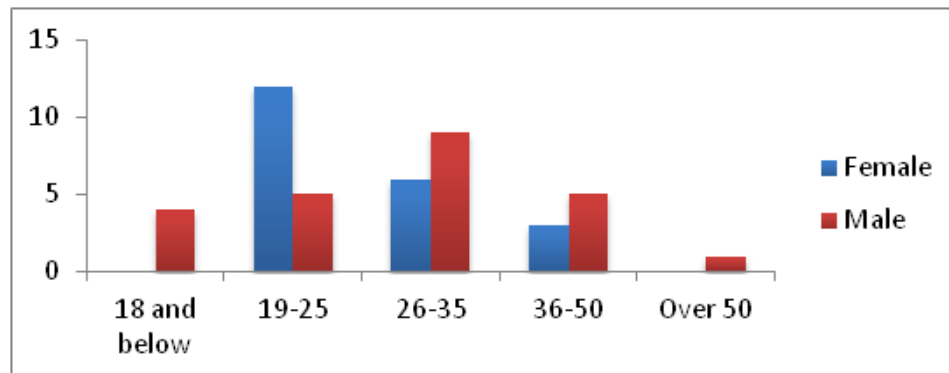
According to UNHCR data, 47% of the 173,450 refugees and migrants arriving by sea to Greece between January and December 2016 were Syrian nationals. Aside from Syrians, a large number of those arriving in Greece were also from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. Although the study is not intended to be representative, the nationalities of those interviewed roughly matched those arriving in Greece by sea, with the top three being Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi.

The majority of respondents had primary school level education or less (63%) whereas 37% had been

⁴ Data used from UNHCR Report which is based on the reporting of Hellenic Coast Guard and Police <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53447>

to secondary school or had a university degree or higher. The majority was married with at least three children, while 41% were single. Their length of stay in Izmir varies from three days to five years.

Figure 6. Distribution in Age Groups and Gender



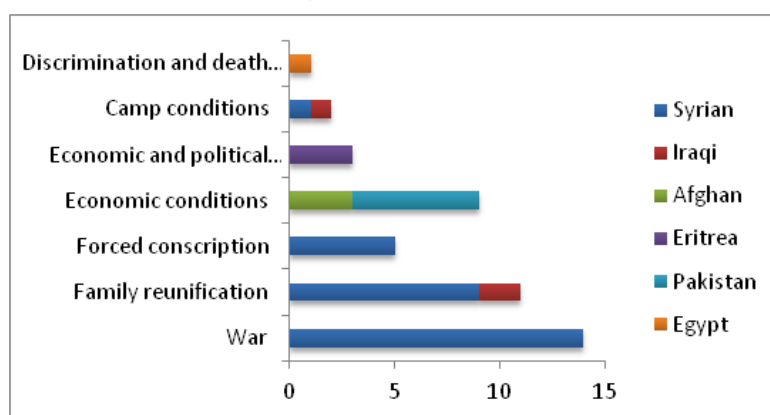
In terms of age and gender, the research points to a high number of males aged between 18 and 29, while females tended to be between 26 and 35, reflecting the fact that those heading to Europe tend to be quite young. Females were mostly on the move to be reunited with their families. The profiles of respondents in the research sample broadly reflect the nationalities and demographic characteristics of the wider trends.

2. Key Findings

2.1 Decision to Leave Origin

While factors leading to migration to Turkey are complex, half of the Syrian respondents said they were forced to leave their home country due to war. Five Syrians stated forced conscription into the army as the major factor underlying their decision to leave. The remaining nine Syrians referred to family reunification. The Iraqis interviewed also mentioned their main reason to migrate as family reunification and one of them mentioned the bad and challenging camp conditions in Iraq. Almost all Afghan and Pakistani nationals stated their reason for departure as seeking better economic conditions. Eritreans cited the struggling economy and political problems and the fact that they see no future for themselves back home.

Figure 7. Decision to Leave Home Country



Respondents were also asked to state their main motivation for coming to Izmir so as to understand why they chose the city as their destination or transit stop. This question also aims to shed light on the extent to which the cities *en route* are determined by migrant smugglers. Accordingly, 30% of transit migrants interviewed stated that their reason for coming to Izmir was because they have relatives and friends living in the city. All of the Eritreans, Pakistanis and three Afghan respondents mentioned that they had been directed to Izmir by the smuggler once they reached to Istanbul. Three respondents, including one coming from Egypt, noted they came to Izmir because they thought smuggling practices were easy to access. Other reasons listed included applying for family reunification in Izmir; saving some money while working unregistered; and being referred to Izmir as a transit city by friends and relatives who had made it to Europe in recent years. These findings highlight the increasingly significant role of the newly emerged migrant networks, especially Syrian ones, which reside in Izmir. Such networks serve as one of the agents of migrant smuggling by providing temporary shelter and assistance to the transit irregular migrants.

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2.2 Decision on Destination Countries

Germany was cited as the preferred destination country for 18 out of 42 transit migrants. While Italy followed Germany; the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden were joint third as most popular destinations. Five Pakistanis stated Italy as their final destination. Some respondents just mentioned their destination as "Europe" or as "any country in Europe" without specifying a particular destination country. All respondents, except of four Pakistanis, mentioned that they decided their destination themselves, depending on the experiences of relatives or friends who had reached those countries. Some also relied on existing long-lasting networks established in these countries by relatives years before. Only four Pakistani nationals referred to smugglers who convinced them to head for Italy as a country with better job opportunities and where it was easier to get work permits. One Pakistani national, referred to his two uncles living in Italy as his main reason for heading there.

2.3 Categorising Transit Migrants: A new group of migrants on the move for family reunification

The interviewees and the information they have provided suggest that transit migrants in Izmir can be classified into three distinct categories:

- a) Transit migrants who have been in Izmir for a few days or months (less than a year) and who intend to head for the Greek islands or Italy or who had attempted, but failed, to reach the Greek islands;

- b) Transit migrants who have been stranded in Turkey for more than a year due to closed borders, policy restrictions or lack of money to pay for the smuggler;
- c) Transit migrants who have submitted their asylum or family reunification application and are awaiting in Izmir.

The suggestion to classify transit migrants in these three categories is important for developing border policies, asylum practices, countering migrant smuggling and broader migration management policies. Turkey is associated with a mixed flow of migrants, consisting of including refugees, economic migrants, asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, stateless and other categories of migrants which makes migrant smuggling more complicated in the region (Icduygu and Akcapar, 2016). Migrants might use smugglers for entry to or exit from Turkey while they are in transit. The factors that lead migrants to decide to leave Turkey and continue their journey onward, to an extent, is related legislation and policy restrictions concerning their status, both influential in shaping their interaction with and decision to use smuggling services. A Syrian "refugee" who is not granted refugee status in Turkey but granted temporary protection and applied for family reunification might also be regarded as a transit migrant⁵. However, his/her interaction with a smuggler in comparison with an economic migrant who is transiting through Turkey will be different in terms of the processes they go through and the main factors that lead them to migrate.

In this context, Izmir serves as a transit hub for migrants for short and longer periods. Some migrants who are decisive and who have planned their entire journey from the beginning only spent a few days or, at the most, a few months in Izmir before attempting to reach the Greek islands. Others spent more than a year there due to, for example, a lack of money to pay the smuggler; closed borders; policy restrictions such as being unable to get visa, lack of relevant documents and fulfill difficult conditions requested during visa application, long waiting process for family reunification. This second group can be regarded as "stranded migrants" in Izmir.

The findings of this research point to a new group of transit migrants in Izmir comprising twelve Syrians and Iraqi respondents waiting for the outcome of their applications for family reunification. This new wave of transit migrants seeking to be reunited with family members, who had successfully reached Europe in recent years, seems to be a rising trend. A female Syrian respondent remarked, "As a family, we decided my husband would go first to Europe, set up a new life there and then I would follow him with our children. We debated on what to do and who to send first. This was the strategy we decided".

2.4 Deciding to Engage with Migrant Smugglers

The research findings shows that 91% of respondents had contacted a smuggler at least once at some stage of their journey either to enter or leave Turkey. Only four of the respondents stated that they did not need to rely on smugglers as they entered Turkey legally with their identity and travel documents and decided on their journey, including the route, by themselves. Almost all of the irregular migrants who contacted a smuggler did so at the point of departure from their home country.

Most respondents pointed to a lack of alternative, safe and legal ways pushing them to engage with smugglers. Those transit migrants who had submitted applications for family reunification in Turkey or to be resettled in a third country as refugee had decided to wait a while in Izmir. Some of them men-
⁵ Turkey maintains its "geographical limitation" with regard to the Geneva Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol, and thus it does not grant "refugee" status to the ones from non-European countries.

This new wave of transit migrants seeking to be reunited with family members, who had successfully reached Europe in recent years, seems to be a rising trend

Most respondents pointed to a lack of alternative, safe and legal ways pushing them to engage with smugglers

tioned that if they did not receive a positive response enabling them to continue their journey through legal ways, they would leave for Europe with a smuggler. A Syrian respondent remarked, “I applied for refugee status for Canada. If this is not approved, I will try to make it to Finland by illegal means”. Similarly, another Syrian respondent said, “I submitted my application to go to Europe through the legal channels. I gave myself a deadline. I will wait until April 2017 and if there is still no response, even if the borders are closed, together with my family we will try to continue by using smugglers”. An Iraqi respondent explained, “I tried through the legal channels. Actually, I entered Turkey with my passport from Iraq and I had a visa for Belgium but it has now expired. My parents are in Belgium and I applied to the Belgium Consulate in Istanbul but they asked me to bring documents from Iraq, which is, of course, not possible for me. I have no choice but to try to continue. I came to Izmir one and a half months ago from Istanbul and have already contacted a smuggler”.

Some respondents felt that using a smuggler has become a normal and integral part of the migration journey. A Syrian respondent, who has been living in Izmir for three years and working as unregistered in the shoe manufacturing industry to save money to pay a smuggler, stated, “I have never tried the legal channels, like all normal people I will reach Europe by using a smuggler”.

All of the respondents reported that it is easy to find and contact smugglers as they are embedded in extended migrant social networks or local communities en route. To quote a Syrian respondent who tried to apply for a German visa but failed, “We do not need to look for them, they find us. If you have a bag, they come to contact you.” Or as another interviewee stated, “When you take a short walk in Basmane, they quickly contact you”. In deciding which smuggler to go with, it is mostly dependent on a referral from friends, the personal network or a relative who has successfully reached Europe by engaging a particular smuggler. Notably, this was the case for more than half of those interviewed transit migrants as they reported that they had found the smuggler through their connections including friends, relatives or neighbours. The interviewed group challenged the general assumption that migrants find smugglers via social media as only a Syrian respondent mentioned social media, namely Facebook, as a source of information for finding smugglers. This means most of the interviewed migrants have chosen their smugglers on the basis of smugglers’ reputation and trust. This refers to the idea of smuggling as a service based industry where completion is also high (Bilger, Hofmann, Jandl, 2006).

Respondents also mentioned that smugglers are easy to find and readily available in places such as Basmane in Izmir or Zeytinburnu and Aksaray in Istanbul where irregular transit migrants congregate or pass through. Several respondents mentioned Basmane, which is fast becoming a new migrant smuggling hub and where it is possible to find a smuggler easily. Some respondents reported that smugglers visit certain *kahveler* (coffee houses) and hotels located in these transit hubs. One respondent stated that smugglers often stay in the same hotels where irregular migrants are. Another respondent observed, referring to the situation last year, “Smugglers were lined up like matchsticks in Basmane, you just said you want to go and you go. Now, all the routes are closed and nobody is able to go”.

Since it is easy to find smugglers and many people have successfully reached Europe by using them, migrants are more likely to try illegal channels as the wider migrant smuggling networks aid and even encourage irregular migration. Although one of the Syrian respondent, for example, has the right to apply to be reunited with her family she stated that, “From the beginning, I have always thought about going to Germany by engaging a smuggler, but now the borders are closed. My family told me to try

Some respondents felt that using a smuggler has become a normal and integral part of the migration journey.

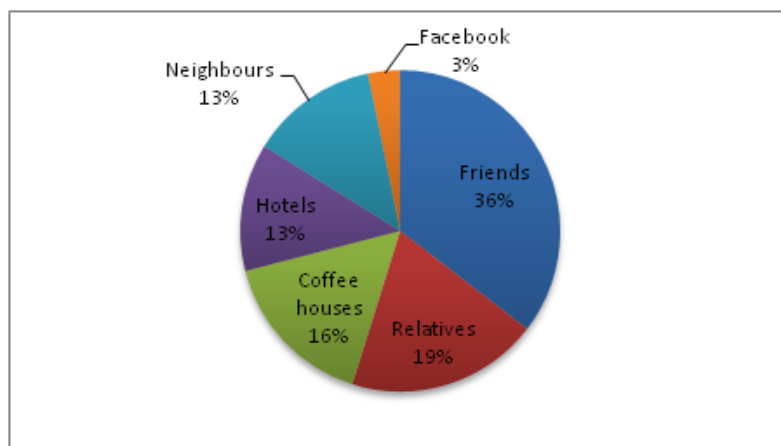
...most of the interviewed migrants have chosen their smugglers on the basis of smugglers’ reputation and trust.

Although one of the Syrian respondent, for example, has the right to apply to be reunited with her family she stated that, “From the beginning, I have always thought about going to Germany by engaging a smuggler, but now the borders are closed. My family told me to try the legal channels. I will now try but if it doesn’t work out, I will try to go with a smuggler

the legal channels. I will now try but if it doesn't work out, I will try to go with a smuggler". On the other hand, some respondents described smugglers as the reason for several deaths in the Aegean Sea and thus they said that they would absolutely not attempt an irregular crossing. A settled Syrian in Izmir said, "Many people have drowned and died due to the smugglers". Similarly, another Syrian who contacted a smuggler two years ago but failed to take the boat stressed, "Smugglers play with the lives of people, they have sent many to their deaths. They force more than 60 people to get on a boat with a capacity of 30 people. They threaten people with guns if they reject to get on the boat". A Syrian respondent, who has already been rescued at sea once, said that he will never try the route via sea again as he is too fearful after his tragic experience. He added that he had applied to be resettled as refugee.

Three Eritreans interviewed mentioned that they had received referrals from friends and relatives in finding a smuggler in Eritrea and one of them stated, "I decided to use the same smuggler as my friend. The smuggler I engaged in Eritrea then gave me the contact details of another smuggler in Turkey. In Turkey, smugglers are mainly Arabic nationals. For each new country I reach, the first smuggler from Eritrea had given me another new number of another smuggler".

Figure 8. Finding Smugglers



Afghan, Pakistani and Eritrean nationals directly mentioned Istanbul as their transit stop before their onward journeys to Izmir. Districts of Zeytinburnu, Bayrampaşa, and Aksaray were mentioned as areas where people can easily find smugglers, by asking around in coffee houses. They are then directed to other smugglers in Izmir. The research reveals that the Aegean coast is divided up among different smugglers with each smuggler owning a "point". This means that exit points on the coast belong to a smuggler who knows the area well, operates the smuggling activity in connection with his network of actors and receives the profit from that "point". Both the police and coast guards interviewed for this research noted that some smugglers are known as "point owners" which means that they organise all the irregular crossings in that region as a business. As a university graduate Syrian respondent who contacted a smuggler states, "Smugglers have their own points. You have to contact the smuggler at the point relating to the route you want to take." The wording of "departing from the point" and "being taken to the point" is used by most of the transit respondents. Testimonies of some Afghans, Pakistanis and Eritreans reveal that smugglers in Izmir have started to operate within international smuggling networks comprising longer-distance routes and greater connectivity, thus enabling migration on a massive scale.

The Aegean coast is divided up among different smugglers with each smuggler owning a point

2.5 Deciding on the route

This research investigated the various routes and ways of migrant smuggling to and from Izmir in order to shed light on the decisions taken by the migrants as result of their interaction with the smugglers. In response to the question: “Who decided the migration route?”, all respondents who had contacted a smuggler, except a few of them, mentioned that the route to be taken to the destination country was decided by the smuggler. To quote a Syrian respondent who relied on a smuggler to reach Turkey’s city of Kilis from Aleppo, “We chose the smuggler, not the route”. The Pakistanis interviewed, who had resorted to using different smugglers, mentioned that their destination country of Italy was not their choice but was suggested by the smuggler. A Pakistani respondent who has been stranded in a “safe house”⁶ in Istanbul for five months said, “The smuggler in Pakistan convinced me to go to Italy. He said I could earn a lot of money there and the paperwork such as work permits was easier to obtain”. Another Pakistani who came to Turkey nine months ago irregularly said that although he had no intention of going to Europe preferring to stay and work in Turkey, the smuggler who was working in the same factory as him in Istanbul persuaded him to go to Italy. He said, “The smuggler did not even ask for any money but told me I could pay him later when I found a job in Italy”. Similarly, another Pakistani mentioned the smuggler had suggested to him to go first to Italy and then to Germany where the camps in both countries are very comfortable and the conditions good.

The research showed that Syrians use smugglers not only for irregular border crossings and entry into Turkey, but also to find safe routes inside Syria in order to escape war and violence. Six of the Syrian respondents, although they have passports and entered Turkey legally, said they had used smugglers in order to reach the Turkish border safely from their home cities. A Syrian respondent who resorted to a smuggler in Syria to reach Turkey stated, “Smugglers determine the safe route not the border entrance”. In the Syrians’ case, smugglers were also used for their expert knowledge on points of departure, which directions to navigate in order to escape danger in the country and reach the Turkish border.

Data reveals that migrants made multiple stops in different countries and cities before reaching Izmir. This also involves engaging different smugglers, the majority of whom are connected to each other via an international network. The Eritreans, Afghans and Pakistanis interviewed were involved in more complex, longer distance migration journeys and smuggler experience compared to Syrians and Iraqis. Afghans and Pakistanis said they had entered Turkey through Iran, then travelled on to Van or Doğu Beyazıt as directed by the smuggler and then to Istanbul. The whole journey, including the purchase of bus tickets and a few nights stay at some insalubrious places in Van and Doğu Beyazıt, was managed completely by the smuggler. In addition, three Afghans, all Pakistanis, except only one, and all three Eritreans came to Izmir after stopping for a while in Istanbul as this is where the smugglers had guided them. The other two Afghans and one Pakistani referred to their friends’ experience, stating that they had successfully reached the island of Chios from Izmir last year. Only one of the Afghan respondents, who has a university degree in political science, said he had decided on the route from Afghanistan alone and had reached Istanbul by entering Turkey irregularly. However, he added that he had then contacted a smuggler to reach Greece and it was the smuggler who told him to go to Izmir, and managed his hotel stay in Izmir.

Eritreans chose the Aegean route via Turkey, despite being longer, because it is not as dangerous as

⁶ Four of the interviewed Pakistanis who had stayed in “safe houses” in Istanbul described the houses as places that had been rented or offered by the smugglers as part of their service in order to accommodate migrants secretly until they are taken to the exit point to leave Turkey.

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The research showed that Syrians use smugglers not only for irregular border crossings and entry into Turkey, but also to find safe routes inside Syria in order to escape war and violence

The danger associated with certain routes reflects complex smuggler strategies and demonstrates the role of transnational connectivity in smuggling, in this case, of Eritreans.

taking the Central Mediterranean route via Libya. The danger associated with certain routes reflects complex smuggler strategies and demonstrates the role of transnational connectivity in smuggling, in this case, of Eritreans.

2.6 Actors on the smuggling spectrum

Based on their experiences, respondents reported a diversity of actors involved in smuggling practices. This wide spectrum of actors mentioned by the respondents acknowledges Icduygu and Akcapar’s (2016, 138) point that migrant smuggling networks in Turkey involve different actors doing diverse jobs. It involves a complex network of interactions between the actors operating both at local and international level. On the listed smuggling spectrum (below) these actors could be described as follows:

- a) **Organiser/coordinator⁷:** According to three respondents, “organisers” are reportedly never in direct contact with the migrant but they own and coordinate everything from the top. Organiser has overall responsibility for the smuggling operation. Respondents say that “smugglers” are employed by the organisers. Migrants communicate with and pay the fee to the smugglers.
- b) **Smuggler:** Almost all respondents who engaged with smuggling activity mentioned “smugglers” as the person with whom they or their family have contacted and made the payment. All six Pakistani nationals interviewed used the word “agent” as for smugglers.
- c) **Dealer/facilitator/middle person/recruiter:** While some of the respondents used the words “smuggler” and “recruiter” interchangeably, in general dealer/facilitator/middle person or recruiters are indicated as other actors in addition to smugglers. Their main tasks are defined as to work for smugglers and to recruit/find migrants/customers in return for some commission on the fee. Thus, recruiters advertise the services and help to establish contact between smugglers and migrants. They can also be migrants themselves who are offered free service by the smuggler in return for finding sufficient number of migrants for the smuggler.
- d) **Watchman:** Three respondents mentioned “watchman” and described them as people keeping an eye out at the exit point for the smuggler to avoid controls and operations of the police or gendarme forces.
- e) **Owner of the “custody/deposit office”:** Five respondents describe some places and informal offices where the fee is kept to be paid to the smuggler. The owners of these offices are mentioned to be owners of legitimate businesses but having collaborated with the smugglers. Migrants deposit their fee in a locked safe in these offices to be released for the smuggler in return for the migrant’s safe arrival to the destination.
- f) **Hotel managers/owners:** Some respondents indicated hotel managers or owners among the actors in smuggling business. They described their role as to collaborate with the specific smugglers and provide accommodation for especially larger group of migrants. The interviews with hotel managers revealed that some of the hotel managers work with smugglers

⁷ Europol (2016) uses the term “leader of the network” as for the organiser who is responsible for the overall coordination within the network.

as part of their usual business and treat the smugglers as tourism agencies who provide them customers on regular basis.

- g) **“Safe house” leaders, house keepers:** Four of the Pakistanis who had stayed in “safe houses” in Istanbul described the houses as places that had been rented or offered by the smugglers as part of their service. They reported between 150 and 200 smuggled migrants hidden together in such houses located mainly in Istanbul. Safe house leaders or house guards who bring the smuggled migrants food and basic provisions, while ensuring they do not go outside, are also described as actors involved in the smuggling business.
- h) **Small business owners of cafeterias and restaurants:** Small business owners of, for example, cafeterias and restaurants are not only mentioned as places to serve as “custody/deposit offices” but also to meet smugglers where a Syrian respondent said, “I know some small business owners are also in contact with smugglers who decide on the meeting point for all smuggled people. He knows that we all have to eat and buy things from these shops and the owners definitely know that we are a group belonging to that particular smuggler.
- i) **Boat owner, boat captain**
- j) **Bus company owners**
- k) **Transporters, drivers taking migrants to the designated point**
- l) **House owners where migrants are kept secretly by the smuggler**
- m) **Local communities**
- n) **Life vest sellers**

Referring to the nationalities of the organisers and smugglers involved, one of the respondents said, “We never know the organisers, they are the big bosses and we’re not in contact with them. We just contact the smuggler. Organisers are said to be mostly Turkish nationals”. Another respondent also confirmed that the organisers are Turkish but the smugglers were mainly Syrians. A Syrian university graduate respondent mentioned, “The big boss is Turkish but the middle man is Syrian. His job is to contact Syrians and find customers for the Turkish organiser”. The Aegean Sea is also described as the “Turkish Sea” by organisers in the area, who work with several actors of different nationalities including Syrians and Pakistanis, and more recently Georgians, Ukrainians and Russians who mainly skipper the boats. In 2014, the majority of smugglers arrested by Turkish authorities are Turkish citizens, followed by Syrians (Aksel et al., 2015). According to Turkish Ministry of Justice (2015a), the total number of suspected criminals on migrant smuggling and human trafficking for the opened court cases in 2015 is 7,438. Among this number, 1,263 (17%) of them are foreigners while the rest are Turkish citizens. As also confirmed by the policy practitioners interviewed, it should be highlighted that migrant smuggling in Turkey operates at international level as more diverse nationalities including Afghans, Pakistani, Algerian, Georgian, Ukrainian, Iraqi, Iranian and Moroccan are listed among the apprehended smugglers in 2016.

2.7 How does the smuggling “business” function and what is the impact on migrants’ decision making?

The research indicates that smuggling networks are complicated with routes often divided among smugglers of different countries. Izmir is gradually becoming a region of smugglers connected to international smuggling networks, in addition to the ones functioning on a small-scale, independent and fragmented type of smuggling. As a Pakistani who had been to Turkey only 20 days during the

Izmir is gradually becoming a region of smugglers connected to international smuggling networks, in addition to the ones functioning on a small-scale, independent and fragmented type of smuggling

time of the interview, stated, “I never contacted any other smugglers during my journey as the only smuggler I contacted was in Pakistan. He then arranged other smugglers in Iran and Turkey to guide me. I did not need to contact them. Each time I changed bus, another smuggler who is in contact with the smuggler in Pakistan welcomed me. I did not need to call them they were already there”. Similarly, an Eritrean respondent stated, “Each time I entered a new country the smuggler gave the number of another smuggler. I did not look for any smugglers in Turkey but I was given a number by the smuggler I agreed in Eritrea”.

Another Eritrean respondent briefly summarised two ways in which Eritrean nationals are smuggled into Turkey. In the first instance, they can take a flight to Istanbul after obtaining their visa from the Turkish Consulate in their countries. However, plane tickets are expensive, particularly as they need to buy a return flight in order to apply for a visa. Thus, getting a visa is described as very difficult and costly. Alternatively, they pay a smuggler to help them first reach Sudan, then take a flight from there to any Arab country that does not ask for visas from Sudanese people or to Iran which issues 30-day tourist visas for the Sudanese people upon arrival at Iranian airports. At this stage, the smuggler arranges a Sudanese travel document for the migrant who looks similar to the photo on the passport. Upon entering Iran, they pay the smuggler to enter Turkey and then they take ships from Turkey to Italy or directly to Athens, Greece. If they prefer to land in Greece, the smugglers arrange another European identity or travel document with a similar photo of the migrant for them to continue their journey on to Germany or other EU countries. Therefore, identity and document fraud is a highly prevalent component of the smuggling business.

All three Eritrean respondents described the route via Turkey as the most expensive route but safer than travelling via Libya

All three Eritrean respondents described the route via Turkey as the most expensive route but safer than travelling via Libya. One of the Eritrean respondents who traveled to Turkey over Sudan and then Iran remarked that the risk of being killed or dying on the long and treacherous journey between Sudan and Libya or in the desert is high. He added that, “If you are apprehended while travelling via the Libyan route you could either be killed or have to bribe officials to be set free. On the other hand, getting a visa for Turkey is difficult but you can obtain international protection here or have the opportunity to apply to the UN for refugee status”. The experiences of the Eritreans demonstrate that the extended international network of migrant smuggling fills the gap as difficult visa procedures make Turkey very hard to reach through legal channels. On the other hand, Turkey’s policies on international protection help to make it an attractive route for irregular migrants from Eritrea, who rely heavily on migrant smugglers.

2.7.1 Prices and Payment Model

The fees that smugglers charge for the various routes and services also had an impact on the decisions that migrants took and choices they made about their journey. The fee for the full journey from Eritrea to Italy; from Afghanistan or Pakistan to Italy; or to Greece can start at around 5,000 USD and can reach as much as 8,000 USD. A Syrian respondent, referred to the fact that smugglers are often behind a migrant’s decision to leave, “As soon as war escalated, the number of smugglers increased and prices decreased”.

A Pakistani respondent who stayed in a “safe house” in Istanbul said, “The price varies according to whether the food and accommodation in the safe houses in Istanbul is included in the price or not. If these costs are not included then smugglers charge your family back in Pakistan for every day that you spend in a safe house and they sometimes hold your families to ransom. The conditions in the safe

house in Istanbul were terrible. I don't want to have a similar experience in Greece so I will take the ship to Italy to avoid going via Greece". In response to the question as to why he preferred to avoid going via Greece to Italy, taking the ship there directly instead, the Eritrean interviewee answered, "It would cost me just 5,000 USD to reach Italy from Eritrea via Sudan, Iran and then Turkey. Until now, I have already paid 2,000 USD to the smuggler, which I agreed in Eritrea. I'll now take a ship from here to Italy. If I chose to go to via Greece from here, it would cost me nearly 5,000-7,000 USD just to leave Greece. As the border is closed in Greece, the only possible way to leave the country is if smugglers arrange an original European ID or passport with a photo that looks like you. I cannot afford to pay more for forged documentation".

Concerning the amount of fees charged and the impact on migrants' decisions on their journeys, A Syrian respondent who is stranded in Izmir in the last four year due to lack of sufficient money to pay the smuggler remarked, "Prices for the Greek islands have gone down to 300 Euros from 800 Euros by boat, but I know the remaining part of the route from Greece to Germany, for example, has now increased. So I will work in Izmir to save some money. Smuggler charges vary according to the service they provide, for example if it includes food, accommodation or even life-vests". Two other Syrian respondents had both been working in in Izmir as unregistered for the past four years to save up enough money. Similarly, and Iraqi respondent mentioned he had worked in the construction industry as well as in restaurants in Istanbul during the four years he had spent in Turkey. The research revealed that some migrants are stranded in Izmir and end up working in informal economy to save money to pay smugglers.

Regarding the various methods of payment, some said they had paid the fee in full upfront in return for "whole package" of service; some paid for each part of the journey completed; but the majority had agreed to pay at the end when they safely reached the first EU country. Paying at the end means that if a first attempt to reach a destination e.g. the Greek islands fails, the smuggler will keep on trying until the migrant reaches the targeted destination and they get their money. It is worth pointing out here that Syrians have been granted "temporary protection" status in Turkey⁸. Accordingly, Syrians cannot be detained in removal centers unless they committed a crime, and thus if they are apprehended or rescued at sea while trying to leave Turkey they are set free. Foreigners from other nationalities who are issued administrative detention decision in line with the conditions set in the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) are held in removal centers. Accordingly, they might be returned to their country of origin or a transit country or a third country by virtue of a removal decision⁹. A leave permit shall be issued to persons for whom a period (no less than fifteen days up to thirty days) to leave Turkey is granted. If the administrative detention is no longer considered necessary, those foreigners are set free on the condition to comply with administrative obligations such as to reside at a given address and report to the authorities regularly.

8 According to Regulation No. 29153 on Temporary Protection (2014 Regulation), which was enacted in line with Article 91 of the Law Number 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection, Syrians in Turkey are offered a group-based 'temporary protection'. The regulation applies to all Syrian nationals, refugees as well as stateless persons from Syria seeking international protection, including those without identification documents. It ensures non-refoulement, and grants right to legal stay as well as free basic health care, education and social assistance for registered Syrians.

Due to keeping its geographical limitation to 1951 Geneva Convention, Turkey does not grant refugee status for the asylum applicants from non-European countries of origin. However, this does not mean that Turkey does not undertake its binding protection obligations towards persons from non-European countries of origin and seeking international protection in Turkey. Asylum seekers from non-European countries of origin are able to apply for an individual international protection status and are subject to a status determination procedure conducted by DGMM on the basis of the LFIP. Accordingly, these asylum seekers from non-European countries of origin might be offered the status of "conditional refugee or "subsidiary protection" in Turkey.

9 Exemptions from removal decision are clearly laid down in Article 55 of LFIP. This also refers to the conditions to ensure possible applications for international protection.

Smuggler charges vary according to the service they provide, for example if it includes food, accommodation or even life-vests

The research revealed that some migrants are stranded in Izmir and end up working in informal economy to save money to pay smugglers

Many Syrians and some of the migrants from other nationalities who are set free on the condition to follow some administrative obligations, therefore, decide to make several attempts to leave Turkey continuing to cooperate with their smugglers until they get the service they requested and the smugglers receive their money. Syrians are not alone in making numerous attempts. The Pakistani respondent said that it was his seventh attempt to reach the Greek islands and that he had also tried to board a ship to Italy. All attempts had failed. Once he had to go back to Istanbul from Çanakkale as the boat he was on started to let in water. Another time he was apprehended but then promised to leave the country by his own means so he was set free.

How the money is paid also varied and included leaving money with:

- a) family members or a trusted person back in their country of origin¹⁰;
- b) a trusted person, friend or relative in a transit country; or
- c) a custody/deposit office, for which they would give the password of the safe to the smuggler on safe arrival in their destination country.

A Syrian who has applied for family reunification in Germany and planning to contact a smuggler if she is not able to get approval for Germany mentioned, “If we had travelled over land via Bulgaria, the smuggler would have travelled together with us and then on entering the country they would be paid. However, in this region (Izmir), we heard that you need to leave the money with a third person”. Another Syrian who submitted his asylum application in Turkey to be resettled in a third country mentioned that in Izmir some smugglers asked for payment right at the exit point, before they board the boat. A settled Syrian respondent said, “If you don’t have any relatives or friends to leave the fee with, then you can leave the money for the smuggler at a custody office. These offices charge a 10% commission on the total amount that you agreed with the smuggler. All Syrians know these popular offices in Basmane”. These payment methods are also confirmed during interviews with a hotel manager, restaurant owner and the Turkish police officer. The latter had been involved in counter-smuggling operations on some custody/deposit offices in Izmir.

Changes in prices charged by smugglers depend a lot on policy developments (e.g. increased border controls or border closures). Such changes also seemed to have a direct impact on the decisions of migrants. A Syrian respondent noted, “If we reach Europe nobody can send us back. So I will certainly go to Europe. I tried travelling over land to Bulgaria, which was expensive but safer. My children were in one truck that successfully entered Bulgaria but I was in another that was apprehended. Now, I’ll try going by sea because it’s cheaper. I also know that the price for taking those dangerous rubber boats has decreased but the safer jet boats has also increased”. Supporting his statements another Syrian respondent mentioned, “Prices increased because it is no longer dinghies but fast boats being used. The prices for going via land have also increased these days”.

2.7.2 Diverted routes

The research reveals that Italy is becoming the top destination preferred by migrants or the route for reaching other EU countries, replacing Greece. Targeting Italy is not a new route, however both the

10 This has been observed mostly with the Pakistani and Afghan cases as the families back on country of origin were notably involved in the migration process and payment to smugglers. Besides, in some cases such as seen with two Pakistani respondents, families find and manage all the details with the smuggler. These cases reflect the idea that, “families consider the cost of irregular migration as an investment in future earnings” (OECD, 2015). In other words, these families consider the money they pay to the smuggler as an investment that will be returned to them through the remittances sent by their children and relatives if they safely reach Europe.

smuggling prices and the smugglers’ guidance have had an impact on this recent switch of routes. Migrants mentioned that although prices between Turkey and the Greek islands had dropped from 800-1,000 USD to nearly 300-500 USD (with rubber dinghies), the route through Greece to Germany and other EU destination countries had become more expensive.

Border closures or increased controls had an impact on migrants’ decisions and typically lead smugglers to come up with new ways of making money. Some respondents were aware that borders in Greece had closed. One Syrian respondent said, “In previous years we were able to choose our destination countries and move on without waiting within one or two weeks. But now we have to wait for up to several months in camps in Greece”. Another one remarked, “I am no longer thinking of relying on a smuggler to go to the Greek islands because my cousin reached Greece one month ago and he is still in a camp there. I prefer to wait in Turkey rather than be held for a long time in a camp in Greece”. A Pakistani respondent said that he was not even aware of the route via Greece as the smuggler had not told him it existed, instead he had only offered him the possibility to go directly to Italy”.

Referring to the Turkish-Syrian border closure, some respondents from Syria mentioned that they had reached Turkey by travelling via Iraq. As a Syrian respondent who is waiting for her family reunification application in Izmir states, “The smuggler told us to travel to Iraq first because the Syrian border with Turkey was closed. I did not know the border was closed”.

2.7.3 Changing mode of travel: Ships, jet boats replace rubber dinghies

Supporting the testimonials of many migrants, policy practitioners also confirmed that large ships, merchant vessels, jet boats, fiber boats and private yachts have started to replace rubber dinghies as the modes of transport used by smugglers in the Aegean Sea. In addition to Istanbul, the cities of Antalya, and Mersin on the Mediterranean have increasingly been used as not new but diverted routes for migrant smuggling in recent years. Such routes rely on the use of large vessels and merchant ships. Some of the migrant respondents and interviewed practitioners emphasized that these cities had become departure points or ports for migrants waiting to board a ship. These ships stall in international waters and smugglers arrange smaller boats for migrants to get on board. The ships tend to head straight for Italy and migrants are charged between 5,000 and 8,000 USD.

Large ships, merchant vessels, jet boats, fiber boats and private yachts have started to replace rubber dinghies as the modes of transport used by smugglers in the Aegean Sea

During the stakeholder interviews, the Turkish Coast Guard and Turkish National Police Department pointed to an increasing number of Georgian, Ukrainian and Russian nationals skippering yachts engaged in smuggling activities in the Aegean Sea. This requires a strengthened cooperation and coordination among the countries harboring irregular sea crossing routes since the ships depart not only from Turkey but many other of these countries.

2.7.4 Changing places of temporary accommodation: Houses replacing hotels

Unlike in previous years, the smugglers now tend to provide accommodation for migrants in rented houses, in their own houses, or migrants stay at the houses of their friends or relatives, rather than hotels. The main reason is that it costs less both for smugglers and the migrants, but it is also safer in terms of avoiding police controls and operations. Emergence of such a trend is also confirmed during the stakeholder interviews with the Turkish National Police Department of Anti-Smuggling and Organized Crime. Police officers participating in counter-migrant smuggling operations in Izmir confirmed

The smugglers now tend to provide accommodation for migrants in rented houses, in their own houses, or migrants stay at the houses of their friends or relatives, rather than hotels

This new trend is increasingly involving settled migrants in smuggling operations, either intentionally or unintentionally

The Syrian social network in Izmir, which has grown considerably in the last three to four years, not only hosts transit Syrians but is also a reliable source of information for finding “good and trustworthy” smugglers.

We are never involved in criminal acts. We only accept customers with passports or identity documents. We know some trustworthy smugglers and we only accept the people they bring. Hotels around here trust their own smugglers to do their job properly. If you are looking for a place to stay without documents you should go to hotels in Basmane, but in Kahramanlar everything is legal”. Some hotel staff were indirectly or unwittingly involved in smuggling operations. They perceive smuggling as “business” and they treat smugglers as if they were travel agents

this: “Smugglers are renting or using their own houses or those of friends to put up migrants temporarily, while waiting for the best moment (weather conditions, police and gendarme controls) to start their journey by sea. There are many houses used for this purpose mainly in the districts of Buca and Karabaglar. Some of them also produce fraudulent passports and identity documents for the migrants to be used for temporary hotel accommodation”.

This new trend is increasingly involving settled migrants in smuggling operations, either intentionally or unintentionally. Some of the transit migrants interviewed in this research were staying in temporary accommodation with their relatives or friends who had decided to settle in Izmir. An Iraqi respondent who has been living in Izmir for three years and has no intention of going to Europe said: “We hosted some of our relatives temporarily in our house last year before they left for Greece. Our house is not very big, so if others do come we can only host one or two people. In Kadifekale, many people particularly Syrians host their relatives and friends temporarily. They also agree to keep and hand over money to smugglers if their relative or friend reaches Greece”. The Syrian social network in Izmir, which has grown considerably in the last three to four years, not only hosts transit Syrians but is also a reliable source of information for finding “good and trustworthy” smugglers. They are reference points for migrants to find and choose a smuggler. As of June 2017, according to DGMM statistics, Izmir ranks eighth in Turkey in terms of 111,482 registered Syrians (DGMM, 2017a).

One hotel manager interviewed in Kahramanlar said that in 2015 they had made a lot of money from hosting migrants. However, he added that this was no longer the case as the number of migrants had dropped and smugglers were also using houses to accommodate migrants temporarily or they stayed with relatives and friends in Izmir. At another hotel, the receptionist (a Syrian national) interviewed in the district of Kahramanlar noted, “We are never involved in criminal acts. We only accept customers with passports or identity documents. We know some trustworthy smugglers and we only accept the people they bring. Hotels around here trust their own smugglers to do their job properly. If you are looking for a place to stay without documents you should go to hotels in Basmane, but in Kahramanlar everything is legal”. This interview demonstrated that some hotel staff were indirectly or unwittingly involved in smuggling operations. They perceive smuggling as “business” and they treat smugglers as if they were travel agents. Another hotel manager, located in Basmane, said that the turnover rate was very high in 2015 as many Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi customers were staying in hotels in Basmane for between one and five days for less than 10 Euros per day. He explained that those who had failed in their attempt to cross the sea came back to the same hotel and tried again, following the advice of their smugglers. He continued, “Now, we have fewer migrant customers. They find friends and relatives mainly in Kadifekale, Buca and stay with them longer. It has become more difficult in the recent years, 2016 and 2017, to reach the Greek islands so they need to wait longer and that costs more in a hotel. In 2015, Basmane was a crowded place, with lots of migrants arriving daily. People were sleeping on the pavement as all hotels in the area were full, but they passed through Izmir quickly. Now, fewer people are coming”.

2.7.5 Using mobile phones and its impact on the smuggling practices

The research also revealed that, for the specific group of migrants interviewed, they did not rely on mobile phones to help them find a smuggler nor to trace their routes during the journey. But they used their smart mobile phones to communicate with the smuggler concerning the details of their journeys. Rather than talking on telephone, migrants tended to prefer other means of communication (e.g. the Internet). Buying a phone card requires some form of identification while the Internet is easy to access

without and is the preferred option to avoid security controls. An Afghan respondent noted that he just used "Messenger" application to communicate with the smuggler.

Both Syrians and Afghans remarked that smugglers had banned the use of mobile phones during the journey to the Turkish border in order to avoid army detection. One respondent stated that he did not use his phone during his journey from Syria to Turkey but he used his smart phone to check the wind and wave situation, while he was on the boat to Greece. Similarly, another respondent noted when he was trying to cross the Turkish-Bulgarian border irregularly, he was left alone in the forest by the smuggler and he could only find his way by using the GPS function on his phone.

As noted by Khalaf (2016), this research also demonstrated that mobile phones, in general, are used to link migrants to their families and friends. Some respondents stated that they used their mobile phones only to inform family and friends that they had arrived safely. Confirmation of safe arrival is important as it allows the family member, friend or the trusted person to release the money to be paid to the smuggler.

Relatives and trusted friends have mainly been the ones to provide information about certain smugglers rather than social media sources, according to this research. In addition, among the specific respondent group it was their relatives and friends who had helped them decide on their whole journey.

Using mobile applications rather than direct phone communication in smuggling activities is a cause for great concern for police officers and presents them with new challenges in combatting migrant smuggling. Mobile applications, which provide fast and secure communication, make it difficult to trace suspected criminals. For the smugglers, it makes organising their activities easier, enabling them to inform customers quickly; avoid security controls at the borders; share information fast; and also manage payment in secret.

On the other hand, mobile applications make it very difficult for the authorities not only to trace communication but also to obtain evidence of criminal acts, particularly as Turkey's laws on cyber crime are not yet fully developed. Personal phone calls of suspected migrant smugglers can be recorded in line with the conditions set out in Turkey's Penal Code, Article 135. However, there is no legislation covering cyber security meaning that any information obtained from, for example, screen shots of conversations on mobile applications cannot be used as evidence of a criminal act.

2.8 Perception of migrants about smugglers

This research examined how migrants perceived their smugglers in order to better understand the interactions between the two groups. One striking finding of this research is that a significant number of respondents (28%) do not acknowledge smugglers as criminals and the majority of respondents categorized them as either "good guys" or "bad guys". An Afghan respondent explained, "They help us, they take the money they deserve. If he does not cheat me, then he's not a criminal". Twenty years old Pakistani respondent described the smugglers as: "doing their 'business' and serving migrants in return for money". When one of the Pakistanis who had entered Turkey one month ago is asked why he believes the smuggler is a "good guy", he responded, "He is good because he kept his promise. I was able to leave Iran within a maximum of ten days. He told me I would spend a maximum of 20 days in Turkey and now he is arranging my boat". Similarly, a Syrian respondent described "good

A significant number of respondents (28%) do not acknowledge smugglers as criminals and the majority of respondents categorized them as either "good guys" or "bad guys"

smugglers” as those who did a “professional” job. He said, “Good smugglers are the ones who carry out their tasks and who do not lie to people or try to cheat them. The good ones offer you food, treat you like a human and never resort to violence. They keep their promises about the maximum people on board the boat. If you are not able to reach your destination they do not take money from you, they give you another chance until you arrive safely at your destination”. Respondents described the good smugglers as “helping people to escape danger at home or en route”, or those who “do not lie about the maximum people on board of the boat”, or who “do not put your life at risk”, and those who “help you to arrive safely at your destination”. The Egyptian respondent even described smugglers as desperate Syrian people looking for ways to earn money, otherwise they would not put themselves through this risky business. Another Syrian respondent mentioned, “They are very good people, they save all the people from all these miserable situations”. Two respondents who resorted to using smugglers while trying to enter Turkey from Syria described them as “people who put their lives at risk”. One of them said, “A smuggler had sacrificed himself in order to divert attention from soldiers at the border. He was arrested and while the soldiers were dealing with him we were able to sneak across the border”. The other one, who is a university graduate and who had paid 1,300 USD mentioned that: “The smuggler walked all the way with us for three hours under very difficult conditions. We were shot at on the way. It was very dangerous. He put his own life at risk”. Religious beliefs were an important indicator for one Pakistani respondent. He mentioned that he trusted his smuggler because he is “a good Muslim man”. More specifically he said, “The smuggler in Pakistan is a good Muslim man, he never lies. So, I paid him his money up front. The smuggler here is not a good man, he doesn’t keep his promises and treats people inhumanely. If I fail to reach Italy, I am sure I can get my money back from the smuggler in Pakistan”.

“Bad smugglers” are mostly described as those who cheat people or who do not manage to get people safely to their destinations.

“Bad smugglers” are mostly described as those who cheat people or who do not manage to get people safely to their destinations. A Pakistani national who has been stranded in Turkey for seven months and who stayed in a safe house in Istanbul for a long period of that time referred to his smugglers as “brutal” as they had failed to keep their promise while also treating people appallingly. An Afghan respondent, a university graduate who decided to embark on his journey from Afghanistan to Izmir alone, called all smugglers liars and criminals. Similarly, two other respondents said, “They are criminals, they do this job just for the money”. A Syrian, described smugglers as victimising desperate migrants because they know these people have no choice but to use their services. Some respondents strongly accused smugglers of leaving people to die. A Syrian interviewee, who has applied for family reunification and has been stranded in Turkey for the past three and half years said, “ISIS kills people by cutting their heads off, smugglers kill people at sea”. Another one used the word “horrible” to describe smugglers and said, “If there had been a legal and safe way, we would not be forced to use smugglers”.

2.9 Impact of the EU-Turkey statement on smuggling practices and migrants’ decision making

The research questioned migrant interviewees whether they knew or had heard about the EU-Turkey statement and, if so, whether this had affected their decision in choosing their route or the timing of their journey. In asking this question, the research intended to better understand the possible impact of broader national and international policy implications on smuggling and the reflections on migrant’s decisions.

Interestingly, 63% of the respondents mentioned they had not heard about the arrangement and had no

idea about it. None of them referred to any information provided about it by the smugglers. Some of the respondents were aware, however, that the borders had closed and that they had to wait in Greece but they had no idea about the arrangement that returned migrants from Greece back to Turkey. Some thought they knew what it meant. An Egyptian respondent said, "Yes, I know the agreement. Turkey will open the borders soon for refugees". Whereas one Syrian respondent referred to the statement as a way to "... provide Syrians with money to improve our conditions. My sister is in a camp on a Greek island. It is like a prison".

Those who said they knew about the statement were all Syrians and Iraqis who added that it had not affected their decisions because they knew they would not be sent back to Turkey or Syria. All the respondents who knew about the statement and had applied for family reunification said they knew that Syrian nationals applying for family reunification could not be sent back. One of them said, "I do not think that anyone who reaches Europe can be sent back. I know borders are closed because of this agreement, but I also know no one can send Syrians back to Syria because war is still going on there". Another one mentioned, "The agreement is just on paper. There is nothing about sending people back. Syrians and Iraqis are not being returned". An Iraqi respondent said, "I heard about the agreement but nobody I know has been sent back to Turkey. I have several friends who reached Chios and they quickly applied for UN refugee status there. My wife and four daughters are already in Germany, now I need to get to Chios first".

The research supports the fact that following border closures and migrants being stranded for several months in camps in Greece, demand for smugglers to reach the Greek islands across the Aegean has dropped significantly. As a result, confirmed by several respondents, prices have also plummeted from 800-1,000 USD at the height of crossings to between 300 and 500 USD recently. Closure of the Western Balkan route seemed to have had an impact on migrants' decisions of which route to take and mostly affected Syrians who had no family in Europe or migrants and refugees of other nationalities. Those Syrians still intending to reach Greece had generally applied to family reunification and therefore did not need to travel via the Balkan route.

According to this small-scale research, the impact that the EU-Turkey statement has had on smuggling practices and migrants is threefold. It has:

- 1) changed the fee that smugglers charge (reducing prices via the Aegean Sea by dinghy but increasing prices to travel from Greece onwards to the EU);
- 2) changed the mode of transport and routes from dinghies to larger vessels and ships heading to Italy; and
- 3) increased the number of stranded migrants and refugees in Turkey who are exploited by smugglers.

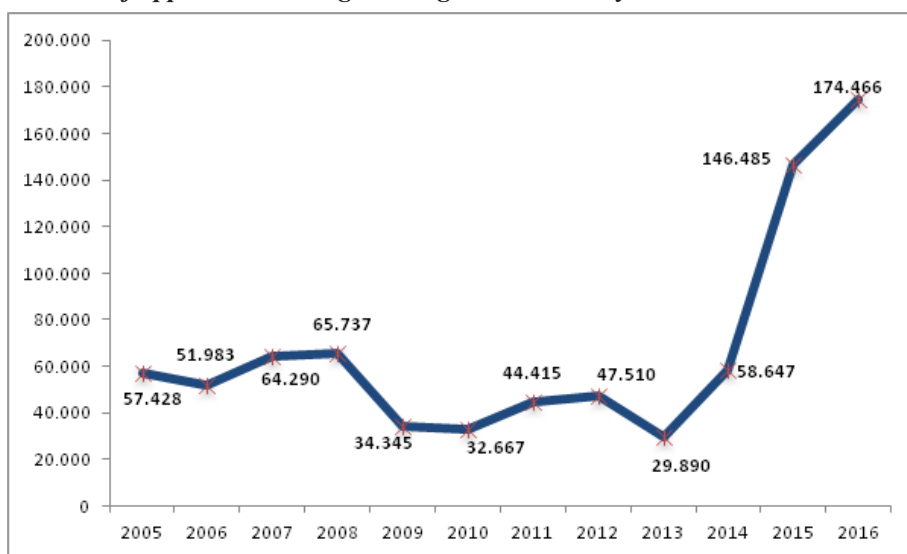
Concerning this last point, the research revealed that exploitation of migrants by the smugglers sometimes leading to human trafficking. Some of the Pakistani and Afghans interviewed were stranded in Turkey and left at the hands of unscrupulous smugglers staying in "safe houses" in Istanbul. Since the route has been diverted towards Italy, it has become more difficult to cross the Aegean Sea. Due to increased border controls and irregular migrants of mostly Afghan and Pakistani origin being returned from the Greek islands to Turkey, smugglers are no longer able to organise frequent crossings in small rubber dinghies as they had previously done. Instead, they now wait longer periods for large ships, keeping 200-300 people at a time in the same house. A Pakistani respondent explained how they had been treated in these houses by saying, "There were 200 of us staying in the same small house in Istanbul. The longer you stay, the more money the smugglers ask for food and accommodation from

families back in Pakistan. If you try to leave the house without paying, they ask for ransom from the families to set people free. Each time the smuggler comes and says the ‘game is starting’,¹¹ a group of 60-70 people leaves the house and are taken to the departure point. If your attempt fails, you have to call the smuggler again and ask their help to return to the safe house as you have nowhere else to go”. Another Pakistani was afraid of being kidnapped by smugglers in Istanbul, so he decided to come to Izmir. Pakistani respondents confirmed that kidnapping Pakistani migrants and asking ransom from their families is on the increase. The “safe houses” mentioned were coordinated by Turkish citizens of Pakistani origin.

2.10 Prospects and challenges for the policy-makers and practitioners in the field

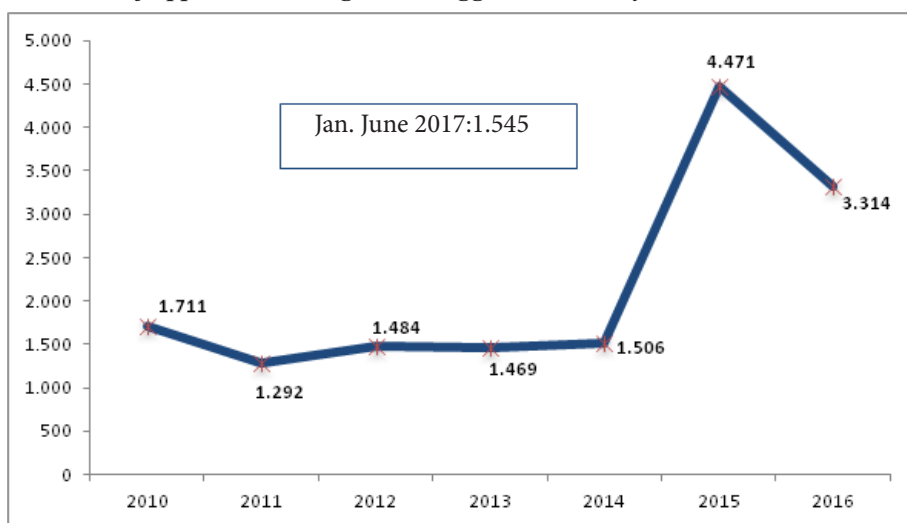
In the last decade, Turkey has progressed and undertaken some significant legal, administrative and operational steps in controlling irregular migration and combatting migrant smuggling.

Figure 9. Number of apprehended irregular migrants in Turkey



Source: DGMM, 2017b

Figure 10. Number of apprehended migrant smugglers in Turkey



Source: DGMM, 2017c

¹¹ All Pakistani respondents used the phrase “game starting”, which is used by the smugglers to mean it is time to leave the house, and go to the departure point to start the operation.

In terms of legislative context, in 2003, Turkey ratified and transposed the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants and by adopting the UN Palermo Protocols, Turkey accepted the broader definitions of human smuggling and trafficking. The EU membership process and, more specifically, EU *acquis* on migration related issues has also facilitated in the harmonisation of Turkey's own legislation. Accordingly, a series of counter migrant smuggling and trafficking measures, including heavy penalties for crimes committed, have been introduced.

The enactment of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013 set a new legal and institutional framework based on a humanitarian approach for migration and asylum management. Enhanced police and judicial cooperation, engagement of the newly established civilian authority of migration management, DGMM, and several rescue operations by the Turkish Coast Guard have all contributed to the continuing progress Turkey is making in its efforts to combat migrant smuggling. However, the unprecedented influx of migration to Turkey as well as a fast developing, very mobile smuggling sector, are a huge burden on the Turkish authorities trying to deal with both the migration issues and the high number of smuggling activities.

Concerning policy actors, Ministry of Interior Directorate General Migration Management, Coast Guard, General Directorate of Security (Turkish police) and General Command of Gendarmerie are some of the key institutions in combatting migrant smuggling. They undertake anti-smuggling operations and handle the apprehended smugglers to law enforcement authorities and DGMM. The Department of Anti-Smuggling and Organized Crime (KOM) is a specialized unit within the infrastructure of the Turkish National Police) and focuses specifically on criminal organisations, including migrant smuggling organisations.

The interviews conducted with policy makers and practitioners from the field demonstrated that broader international and national policies induce specific divergent challenges at the regional level in combatting migrant smuggling. For instance, since the Syrians are granted temporary protection in Turkey, until they travel to the last exit point of Turkey on the west coast and attempt an irregular exit, they cannot be stopped or detained on their route. Even when they are apprehended attempting to leave irregularly they are then set free. This process continues as a never-ending cycle until the migrant reaches their target destination. This research points out that, not only Syrians, but almost all migrants heading irregularly to Europe are able to travel freely throughout Turkey if they are able to avoid road controls. Besides, smugglers provide the migrants with forged travel documents (including temporary residence permits, residence permits etc.) and they can again easily travel until Aegean coastline with these documents (Aksel et al., 2015). This puts an excessive workload on the police and gendarme forces working in Aegean region, who are responsible for controlling the geographically difficult and longest sea border of Turkey (2,800 kilometers); an area that serves as the most attractive clandestine route for the largest mass movement of people across Europe in recent times. According to the report of General Directorate of Security (2016) in 2015, Izmir ranks first among 20 provinces in terms of the number of migrant smuggling and organised crime cases. Accordingly, it is reported that 1,502 have taken place in Izmir. Adana with 1,030 cases ranks second while follows it with 1,030 cases.

The interviewed Turkish police officers who are specifically working on cases of human smuggling mentioned that, while they are conducting several operations to arrest organisers of smuggling, they are also running several operations off the Aegean coast to stop irregular exits. This poses an additional challenge as all large-scale of apprehensions of irregular migrants are, of course, also subject

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to clear administrative and judicial procedures governing detention. In line with the laws, regulations and international standards, administrative detention procedures involve taking finger prints; getting doctor reports; managing translation services; questioning the identity of those apprehended; taking measures to protect the most vulnerable among them; providing them with the basic needs of food and health care before they are handed over to the DGMM. The frequent and large number of apprehensions put an added strain on the authorities in the area, and on the already stretched resources. Thus, the procedure after apprehensions sometimes takes more time and effort than planning and conducting operations. The following map demonstrates the number of apprehended irregular migrants in 2016 on province base data. It also confirms that Izmir and all cities on the Aegean coastline conducted the highest number of apprehensions that takes place during illegal exits.

Figure 11. Number of apprehended irregular migrants in 2016 in Turkey- Province based data



The procedural tasks involved in processing such high numbers makes it harder for the allocated staff to carry out their main task of cracking down on the migrant smuggler networks. Beyond apprehending smugglers, facilitators or anyone identified as having an operational role in smuggling, the limited resources could be devoted more efficiently to larger operations targeting organisers.

Officers say that sometimes they apprehend the same person several times in the same week. Each time the person gives a different identity and then attempts to exit again irregularly by using smuggling services

It should also be noted that one of the most common challenges for all practitioners in the field, including the law enforcement officers (police, gendarme, coast guard) and the civilian authority of DGMM, is that all of these institutions are working at full capacity in terms of staff and the operations they conduct. They work under demanding and difficult conditions, often having to face the traumatic experiences of migrants who are rescued at sea, while others may have died. They need to be supported by increased personnel and also staff support systems. In addition to these, the procedural tasks involved in processing such high numbers makes it harder for the allocated staff to carry out their main task of cracking down on the migrant smuggler networks. Beyond apprehending smugglers, facilitators or anyone identified as having an operational role in smuggling, the limited resources could be devoted more efficiently to larger operations targeting organisers.

Another challenge is that migrants often give false information such as wrong nationality and age so as to avoid being sent back to their countries of origin. Officers say that sometimes they apprehend the same person several times in the same week. Each time the person gives a different identity and then attempts to exit again irregularly by using smuggling services. Smugglers are referred to as one of the main sources of information for migrants. Policy practitioners explained that smugglers quickly change their strategy and business offers in response to policy changes. They follow all the news, upcoming decisions and legislation on migration issues and are updated faster than everyone else so they can direct the migrants accordingly. An Afghan respondent, who had one failed attempt of crossing

by sea, said the smuggler he had used had given the phone number of the Turkish Coast Guard to the boat's skipper (another Iranian migrant) so they could be rescued in case there was a problem at sea. Another Afghan respondent said, "The smuggler told me that if I can speak Arabic and if I am apprehended by the police then I should say I'm Syrian. Then I would be granted safety and would not be sent back. Unfortunately, I don't speak Arabic". Seventeen year old Pakistani noted, "The smuggler told me if I am apprehended by police in Turkey or Italy they would let me go because I'm young. Or in the worst case they would put me in a camp for short while. But he also said camps in Italy and Germany have very good conditions". Another Pakistani told that, "The smuggler informed me that if I am apprehended by police in Iran they would most probably let me go. He said Turkish police do not deport people". An Eritrean respondent mentioned, "The smuggler told me that if I'm apprehended in Turkey, the police will let me go because they can't send us back since Eritrea has no Embassy in Turkey".

While Turkish police and gendarmerie work hard to combat smuggling, prevent people from taking dangerous boats and detect irregular exits by land, the Turkish Coast Guard devotes itself to search and rescue operations in the Aegean Sea. Through its operations called "Operation Safe-Med" (covers the region of East Mediterranean) and "Operation Aegean Hope" (covers the region of Aegean Sea), the Turkish Coast Guard has rescued a total of 57,121 migrants at the sea since 2015 (Interview with Turkish Coast Guard Officials, 2017). Between 2015 and 2016, the Turkish Coast Guard rescued a total of 128,741 migrants and refugees during its operations in all seas around Turkey (Turkish Coast Guard, 2017). However, these figures only include those rescued by the Coast Guard. Actual numbers of migrants and asylum seekers leaving Turkey by sea are in fact much higher than this. In the same period, 308 migrant smugglers were arrested following operations carried out by the Turkish Coast Guard.

Another significant policy implication – the controversial EU-Turkey statement – seemed to have a remarkable effect on reducing the number of irregular crossings in the Aegean Sea. Irregular arrivals have reportedly dropped by 97%, with the number of lives lost at sea also decreasing from 1,145 at the height in 2015 to 80 in 2017 (European Commission, 2017). While policy practitioners acknowledged the impact of the EU-Turkey statement in reducing these figures, they underlined the fact that the business model of smugglers has changed. Different routes were now being used, prices had changed and the large merchant ships were replacing rubber dinghies as the preferred mode of transport. In addition to these, the smuggling in the Aegean regions, which was previously functioning in a fragmented manner and connected to informal organisations and individuals at the local level, is starting to be structured as part of trans-national networks. Border closures and reinforced border controls have diverted smugglers to organize their activities from origin to destination rather than offering short travel routes which is less demanded by the migrants as a result of policy changes at international and national level.

3. Policy implications and future prospects

This report, and the findings within, is aimed at policymakers, researchers, academics and practitioners working on the complex issue of migrant smuggling. This small-scale field research in the city of Izmir, where migrant smuggling is intense, provides some insight and understanding on the interaction between smugglers and migrants and the implications on migrants' decisions about their journey. The research also reflects on the criminal activities of smuggling versus the "good guy" perception in the minds of beneficiaries, who believe they are helped to safety, escaping danger, conflict or persecution in their home countries. Finally, it highlights the complex nature of migrant-centric decision

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making by providing a local perspective from the field.

Since this study did not evaluate the full range of policy elements, it is not intended to make fully informed policy recommendations. However, based on evidence acquired from the field research, the report highlights the following future policy prospects to strengthen the efforts on combatting migrant smuggling in Turkey in general and in the Aegean region in particular.

3.1 Reducing demand for smuggling

Turkey is a country where complex dynamics between irregular migration and migrant smuggling are taking place. Irregular migration towards Europe via Turkey and also to Turkey as a destination country persists at high levels and is nothing new. However, in recent years the country has experienced a considerable increase in the numbers arriving as well as the international attention on the matter. Migrant smuggling is also prevalent with large numbers of irregular migrants mainly from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Eritrea, who mostly resort to using smugglers either for entering or leaving Turkey.

Policies should therefore aim to reduce the demand for smugglers. As the research points out, one of the most common reasons why migrants need to use smugglers is the lack of safe and legal routes. While some migrants mentioned that they attempted, but failed to get visas, some were awaiting results of their applications for family reunification and resettlement in a third country as refugee. Interestingly, some migrants never thought about applying for a visa because they believed they would not be eligible for one. Contacting a smuggler was therefore considered a normal and integral part of their migration journey.

Increased border controls eventually discourage and prevent the attempts of irregular crossings to an extent, as well as reduce the profits of smugglers for a while. However, it does not decrease demand for smugglers

Increased border controls eventually discourage and prevent the attempts of irregular crossings to an extent, as well as reduce the profits of smugglers for a while. However, it does not decrease demand for smugglers. The research demonstrated that these efforts simply divert the routes, price and mode of travel offered by the smugglers. On the other hand, offering legal labour migration channels and issuing work permits do not always drive down irregular migration, especially in countries where an informal labour market persists not only for migrants but also for the locals.

Curbing demand from asylum-seekers and refugees for smugglers is the only effective policy that can ensure more people get international protection quickly and safely. Resettlement in a third country should be offered with increased and fair quotas. Moreover, increasing awareness and support for resettlement and family reunification programmes might prevent migrants and refugees to rely on smugglers. IOM's family assistance programme which offers support to Syrian families in Turkey and Lebanon to apply for a German family reunion visa is one of the good practices. Needless to say, these efforts require the support and initiatives of policy makers to make such programmes more available and accessible through facilitated procedures as well.

3.2 Contribution of practitioners to policy

Tackling the crime of smuggling has become a top priority of policy makers in Turkey. The research confirmed that the EU-Turkey statement of 2016 has helped to increase attention and concrete attempts, particularly of the local government authorities in the Aegean region, to combat irregular migration and smuggling. However, it should be noted that international and national policies in the broader context might induce divergent and complex repercussions at the local level. As seen with the

EU-Turkey statement, while trying to prevent irregular migration, this might lead smuggling networks to become much more professional and structured on a transnational scale. The research showed that smuggling activities in Izmir, which were structured as less connected informal organisations and individuals, have become more connected to a broader international network as routes were diverted and are changing the business model. Thus, practitioners in the field also need to contribute to policy with their specific experience unique to the region and the field in which they work.

As one of the good practices, the Turkish Coast Guard has successfully presented proposals to increase penalties for migrant smugglers and, in doing so, it has achieved change in the legislation in Turkey. As another example, coast guard has actively contributed to the project on “Implementation of the Strategy Document and National Action Plan on Irregular Migration with a Focus on Mixed Flows” and has shared its field experience to be reflected at policy making and implementation level. Similarly, institutions involved in migration management and the practice from the field should contribute more to the evolution of legislation and policy formulation as they are the main source of information concerning the divergent prospects and challenges in the field.

3.3 Cooperation with transit countries

Tackling migrant smuggling not only requires cooperation with origin and destination countries but also the policies and countering activities in transit countries. The research revealed that, for the longer and more complex journeys offering full package deals,¹² money is paid to the smuggler on the condition of the migrant’s safe arrival at the destination. In this case, policies that cause migrants to be stranded in transit countries increase not only the risk of them being smuggled but also the possibility of human trafficking as smugglers are not able to get their money. Cooperation between origin and destination countries must therefore involve transit countries, their challenges, restrictions and their requirements.

3.4 Enhancing technical assistance programmes and strengthening institutional capacity building

Turkish authorities, including gendarmerie, police, DGGM officials, and the coast guard, enhanced their inter-institutional cooperation by meeting regularly to share data and intelligence, while also discussing the many challenges in the field. Institutions involved in policy and implementation have also started to publish regular and updated data and statistics, which are available publicly. Such practice should be broadened in order to formulate better policy and also to feed the policy-orientated academic research, which is highly lacking in the field.

The Turkish Coast Guard mentioned that they have successfully benefited from a series of technical assistance and international cooperation programmes, as well as EU-supported twinning projects, on border management and irregular migration in the last decade¹³. Cooperation with the International Organization for Migration also enhanced the skills and capacities of staff working in migration related institutions in combatting human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Those projects and international cooperation need to be strengthened and the sustainability of political will is a necessity to maintain and improve existing cooperation. The need for more personnel and technical equipment to deal with the migration issue has been noted during almost all stakeholder interviews.

¹² Migrant agrees to pay a large sum in their country of origin to a smuggler who arranges several services in different countries of transit until the migrant achieves to reach the targeted destination.

¹³ In 2016, EU has committed €20 million under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) to enhance the capacity of the Turkish Coast Guard in order to carry out search and rescue operations. The project aims to strengthen the operational capacity of the coast guard, fund search and rescue boats and other specialised life-saving equipment and enhance the training of the staff (European Commission, 2016).

It should be noted that international and national policies in the broader context might induce divergent and complex repercussions at the local level. As seen with the EU-Turkey statement, while trying to prevent irregular migration, this might lead smuggling networks to become much more professional and structured on a transnational scale.

3.5 Aiming to reduce smuggler profits

Sanctions and penalties for the crime of migrant smuggling have increased in Turkey in the last decade. According to Turkey's national legislation, attempts to undertake a migrant smuggling operation is sanctioned as a crime fully committed. Article 79 of Turkey's Penal Code stipulate penalties of three to eight years of imprisonment and 10.000 days judicial fines to migrant smugglers. The penalty to be imposed shall be increased by a half to two-third where it: a) constitutes a danger to the lives of the victims, b) subjects the victims to degrading treatment. The penalty to be imposed shall also be increased by half if the crime is committed by perpetrators acting as an organization. Thus, the continued practice of smuggling demonstrates that deciding on heavy sanctions in court cases also requires a thorough examination of the organisational aspects of the cases in order to increase the penalties charged.

Targeting to reduce the profits of smugglers, the criminal penalties should be accompanied by confiscation of all assets used and financial gain acquired by the migrant smugglers.

The decree-law 690 published in the Turkey's official gazette on April 29, 2017 added a new article to the LFIP which enables enabling confiscation of the means of transport used by migrant smugglers. Targeting to reduce the profits of smugglers, the criminal penalties should be accompanied by confiscation of all assets used and financial gain acquired by the migrant smugglers. Regarding the transnational aspect of the crime, financial investigations against smugglers should be strengthened through greater international cooperation. This is particularly so in the case of tracking suspicious transactions engaged in smuggling and money laundering activities.

It should also be noted that, the number of court decision concluded with conviction concerning the crime of migrant smuggling and human trafficking has increased in the recent years. According to the statistics of Turkish Republic Ministry of Justice, 71,4% of the total decisions issued in 2015 on migrant smuggling and human trafficking are sentenced to conviction.

Table 1. Decisions given on migrant smuggling and human trafficking in 2015

Conviction	Acquittal	Lack of jurisdiction/ rejection of venue, joint cases	Suspension of the pronouncement of the judgement	No ruling is necessary	Other decisions
4,985 (%71,4)	1,147 (%16,4)	463 (%6,6)	81 (%1,2)	37 (%0,5)	271 (%3,9)
Total decisions					6,984

Source: Ministry of Justice, 2015b

The research indicated that smuggling networks operate in complex ways in Turkey and beyond, with different actors assuming different roles in the Aegean region. As also suggested by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2015), engaging with migrants to identify smugglers and other actors involved, while providing them with special visas or temporary permits in return, could discourage smugglers as well as decrease their profits and destroy their business model. Smugglers get their primary business from referrals by those who have successfully completed their journey, and they use this to build the trust of new clients. Transit irregular migrants and refugees and also

migrant social networks in Turkey should be further examined in order to follow the fast evolving business models and connections used by smugglers. Migrant-smuggler relations should also be further assessed to enhance understanding of smuggling activities and the possible strategies that could be developed to counter them.

Finally, it should be noted that Turkey's migration and asylum management system, access to international protection as well as border and visa regulations, border policies, resettlement to third countries, integration policies in Turkey, citizenship policies for foreigners and broader counter migration policies will all have a direct impact on regional implications and changing dynamics of both irregular migration and smuggling operations.

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Stakeholder Interviews

Interview with Turkish Ministry of Interior Provincial Directorate General of Migration Management, Izmir, February 2, 2017 and March 15, 2017

Interview with Ministry of Interior General Directorate of Security, Department of Anti-Smuggling and Organized Crime, Izmir

Interview with Turkish Coast Guard, Ankara, March 10, 2017

Annex I- Research Design and Data Collection (Methodological Approach)

The interview guidelines for the migrants (including refugees) were divided into three main categories involving different sets of questions:

- 1) demographic information and socio-economic profile of the migrant (age, gender, nationality, level of education and employment);
- 2) migratory trajectory (decision to leave home country, the way they entered Turkey, routes travelled, reason for coming to Izmir and time spent in Turkey); and
- 3) migrants’ perception of smugglers and the smuggling “business”, and their experience with smugglers.

The semi-structured interviews involved open-ended questions as the research aims to understand this dynamic, rapidly evolving and spontaneous process not only through existing literature, but also by gathering new empirical data acquired from the interviews. In asking specific questions, the primary aim was to hear from respondents, drawing on their own experience and words, what they think is important concerning these topics. Researchers continued to carry out interviews until a saturation point was reached or, in other words, until the gathered information started to repeat itself.

Each interview took between 30 and 40 minutes. All interviews were held in the native languages of the respondents. Thus, the researchers were accompanied by Syrian, Afghan, Pakistani and Eritrean translators who also acted as “gatekeepers”¹⁴ and moreover “cultural mediators” of the research. They not only located the relevant group of migrant respondents but also helped to access certain districts where migrants were living, which would otherwise have been difficult for the researchers to enter by themselves. Given the highly sensitive and criminal nature of the interviewed topic for the migrants themselves, the translators were also able to establish trust among the respondents, who distrusted the researchers and were hesitant to share information in the initial stages of the interview. In addition, being of the same nationality as most of the respondents (except Iraqi interviewees for whom a Syrian translator was employed), the translators could reduce any uneven power relations existing between researcher and migrant.

However, it should also be noted that language was also a restriction for the research as the mother tongue of the migrant interviewees was not that of the researcher. While translators were able to help in this respect by also acting as “gatekeepers”, relying on translations brought with it its own challenges. For example, translators had the difficult task of finding the equivalent meanings and vocabulary in Turkish, and it is possible that some information stated by the respondent may have been skipped during translation or interpreted differently to a minor extent. Given these various factors, completing all the interviews, therefore, took longer than had been originally planned.

While interviewees were chosen at random, the “snowball effect”, in which one respondent then referred researchers on to another, was also used. Given the sensitive nature of this topic, recording was avoided in order to put respondents more at ease. Once they had obtained the interviewee’s consent, researchers noted down their responses, while also maintaining and securing ethics, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality.

¹⁴ “Gatekeeper” is a term used in social analysis to refer to a person who has a key role in ensuring researchers gain access to potential participants and sites to undertake the research.

Annex II- List of interviewed migrants (including refugees)

Respondent #	Nationality	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Destination Country	Transit/Settled	Contacted smuggler	Duration spent in Turkey	Entered Turkey	Family reunification
1	Afgan	M	19	Single	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	2 years	Irregular	No
2	Afgan	M	45	Married	University	Norway	Transit	No	3 months	Irregular	No
3	Afghan	M	18	Married	Primary school	Any country in Europe	Transit	Yes	2 years	Irregular	No
4	Afghan	M	23	Single	Primary school	Europe	Transit	Yes	2 years	Irregular	No
4	Afghan	M	25	Single	Primary school	Europe	Transit	Yes	2 years	Irregular	No
5	Egypt	M	42	Married	University	Anywhere in Europe	Transit	No	1 year	Regular	Yes
6	Eriterea	F	23	Single	High school	Europe	Transit	Yes	2 months	Irregular	No
7	Eriterea	M	21	Single	High school	Germany or Sweden	Transit	Yes	4 months	Irregular	No
8	Eriterea	M	21	Single	High school	Germany	Transit	Yes	3 weeks	Irregular	No
9	Iraqi	F	42	Married	Primary school	Turkey	Settled	Yes	3 years	Irregular	No
10	Iraqi	M	50	Married	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	1 week	Regular	Yes
11	Iraqi	M	19	Single	Primary school	Belgium	Transit	Yes	4 years	Regular	Yes
12	Pakistan	M	20	Single	High school	Italy	Transit	Yes	20 days	Irregular	No
13	Pakistan	M	40	Married	Primary school	Italy	Transit	Yes	7 months	Irregular	No
14	Pakistan	M	31	Married	Primary school	Italy	Transit	Yes	3 months	Irregular	No
15	Pakistan	M	24	Single	Primary school	Italy	Transit	Yes	5 months	Irregular	No
16	Pakistan	M	17	Single	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	1 month	Irregular	No
17	Pakistan	M	18	Single	Primary school	Italy	Transit	Yes	8-9 months	Irregular	No
18	Syria	F	30	Married	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	5 months	Irregular	Yes
19	Syria	F	28	Married	Primary school	Finland	Transit	No	5 years	Regular	Yes
20	Syria	F	34	Married	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	4 years	Regular	No
21	Syria	F	36	Married	Primary school	Turkey	Settled	Yes	3 years	Irregular	No
22	Syria	F	29	Married	University	Germany	Transit	Yes	3 days	Regular	Yes
23	Syria	F	26	Married	Primary school	Europe	Transit	Yes	4 years	Irregular	No
24	Syria	F	23	Married	High school	Germany	Transit	Yes	5 years	Regular	No
25	Syria	M	24	Single	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	4 years	Irregular	No
26	Syria	M	30	Married	Primary school	Anywhere in Europe	Transit	Yes	3 years	Irregular	No

27	Syria	M	50	Married	Graduate school	Europe	Transit	Yes	5 years	Regular	Yes
28	Syria	M	60	Married	Graduate school	Sweedeen	Transit	Yes	3,5 years	Irregular	Yes
29	Syria	F	26	Married	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	1 month	Irregular	Yes
30	Syria	F	24	Married	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	10 months	Irregular	Yes
31	Syria	F	20	Married	High school	Germany	Transit	Yes	7 months	Irregular	Yes
32	Syria	F	22	Married	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	3 months	Irregular	Yes
33	Syria	M	30	Single	University	Germany	Transit	Yes	8 months	Regular	No
35	Syria	M	24	Single	University	Netherlands or France	Transit	Yes	3 years	Regular	No
36	Syria	M	29	Single	High school	Norway	Transit	Yes	4 years	Irregular	No
37	Syria	M	17	Single	Primary school	Any country in Europe	Transit	Yes	3 years	Irregular	No
38	Syria	M	30	Married	Primary school	Canada, Australia	Transit	Yes	4 years	Irregular	No
39	Syria	M	24	Married	Primary school	Finland	Transit	Yes	5 years	Irregular	No
40	Syria	M	30	Married	Primary school	Finland or Sweeden	Transit	Yes	4 years	Irregular	
41	Syria	M	35	Married	University	Netherlands	Transit	Yes	2,5 years	Irregular	No
42	Syria	M	23	Single	University	Germany	Transit	Yes	10 days	Irregular	No
43	Syria	M	29	Single	Primary school	Germany	Transit	Yes	1 week	Irregular	No
44	Syria	M	24	Single	Primary school	Germany or Netherlands	Transit	Yes	2 years	Irregular	No
45	Syria	M	31	Divorced	High school	Turkey	Settled	Yes	3 years	Irregular	No
46	Syria	F	38	Married	Primary school	Turkey	Settled	No	4 years	Regular	No

