

# MIGRANT SMUGGLING TO MOROCCO AND THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants

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This StoryMap is based on field research conducted in seven cities and towns across Morocco in early 2020 in the framework of the first phase of [Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants \(GLO.ACT\)](#), a joint EU and UNODC initiative implemented in partnership with the [International Organisation for Migration \(IOM\)](#) and the [United Nations Children’s Fund \(UNICEF\)](#). Eighty-three in-depth interviews were conducted with people on the move from West, Central and North Africa, and with Moroccans who intended to migrate; and 14 interviews were conducted with key informants from Government and civil society. The findings have been triangulated and updated with academic literature, statistics, and specialized sources. The national authorities of Morocco and Spain were also consulted in the framework of the research activities and provided information and data on counter-smuggling responses.

## Context

### Migrant smuggling

A number of historical and emerging mobility patterns characterize Morocco’s migration profile. During the period of French and Spanish rule, many Europeans moved to and settled in Morocco,<sup>1</sup> with increasing numbers moving to the Kingdom during the economic boom that

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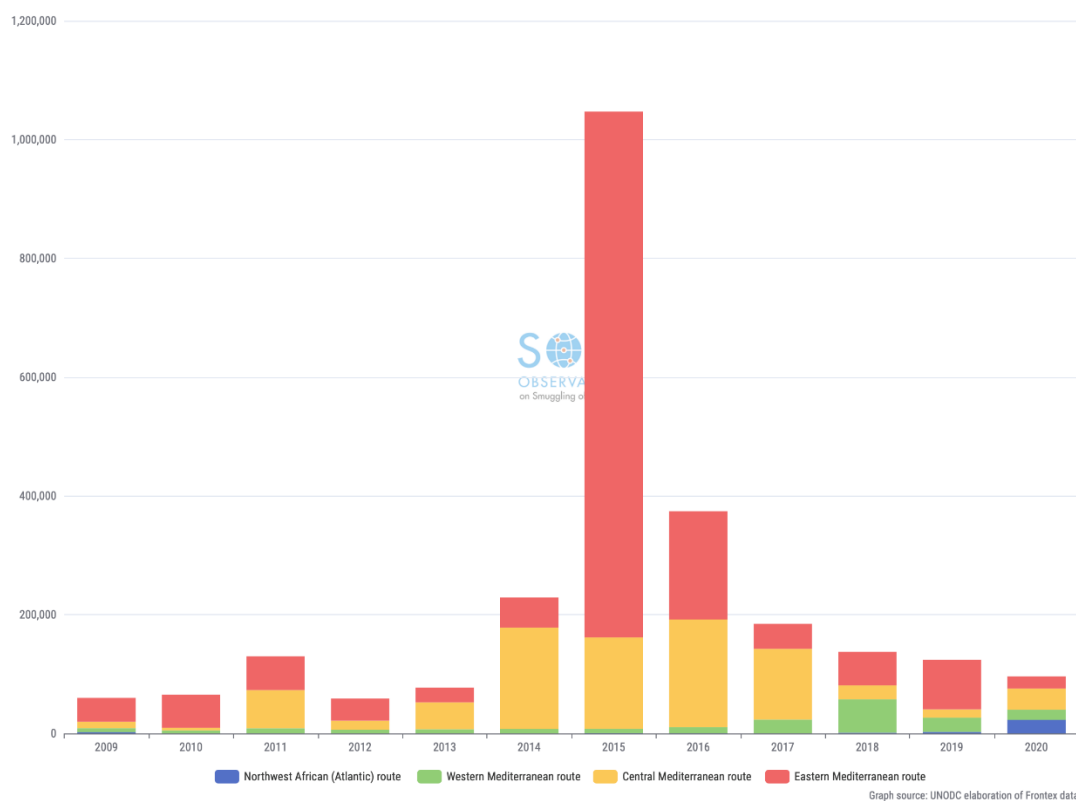
<sup>1</sup> De Haas, H. (2005). Morocco’s migration transition. MDR Working paper n 3; Gross-Wyrtzen, L. and L. Gazzotti (2020). Telling histories of the present: postcolonial perspectives on Morocco’s ‘radically new’ migration policy.

followed Moroccan independence in 1956.<sup>2</sup> Moroccans also emigrated north to Spain, France and other European countries during this period.<sup>3</sup>

The influence of these mobility patterns is still visible today; most Moroccans move to Europe through existing regular migration pathways. Similarly, regular migration to Morocco from West and Central Africa is facilitated by bilateral agreements that allow nationals of Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Niger and Senegal to enter the country without a visa. Nationals of Guinea, Mali and Republic of Congo have the possibility to apply for an electronic visa.<sup>4</sup>

People from West and Central Africa who are unable to comply with regulations for regular travel may attempt to reach Morocco irregularly. Smugglers often facilitate these irregular crossings of the border between Algeria and Morocco, as well as irregular border crossings earlier on in their journeys. Those West and Central Africans who intend to continue the journey to reach Europe usually travel to the Northern coast of Morocco and attempt to cross irregularly into Spain – many with the assistance of a smuggler - at the different land and sea border crossing points, along with Moroccans and Algerians.

Number of people who arrived irregularly to Europe by sea, by route, 2009-2020



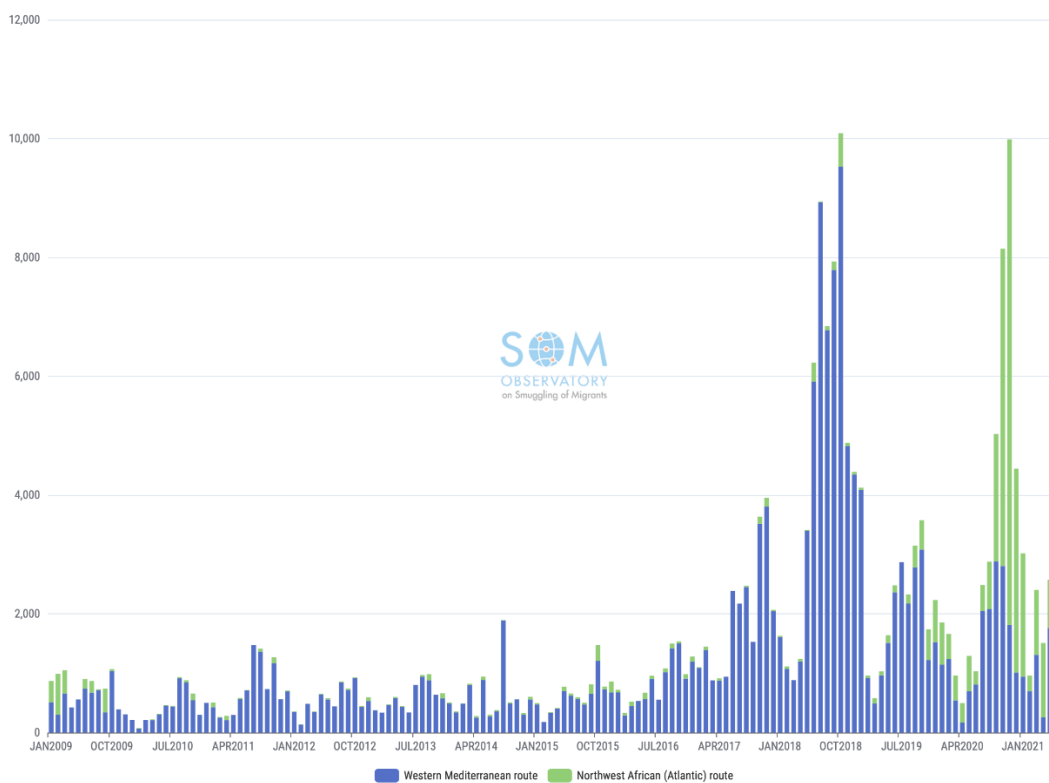
<sup>2</sup> De Haas, H. (2005). Morocco's migration transition. MDR Working paper n 3; Gross-Wyrtzen, L. and L. Gazzotti (2020). Telling histories of the present: postcolonial perspectives on Morocco's 'radically new' migration policy.

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2018). *Liste des pays dont les ressortissants sont dispensés du visa d'entrée au Maroc*. Consulat. Retrieved from: [www.consulat.ma/fr/liste-des-pays-dont-les-ressortissants-sont-dispenses-du-visa-dentree-au-maroc](http://www.consulat.ma/fr/liste-des-pays-dont-les-ressortissants-sont-dispenses-du-visa-dentree-au-maroc).

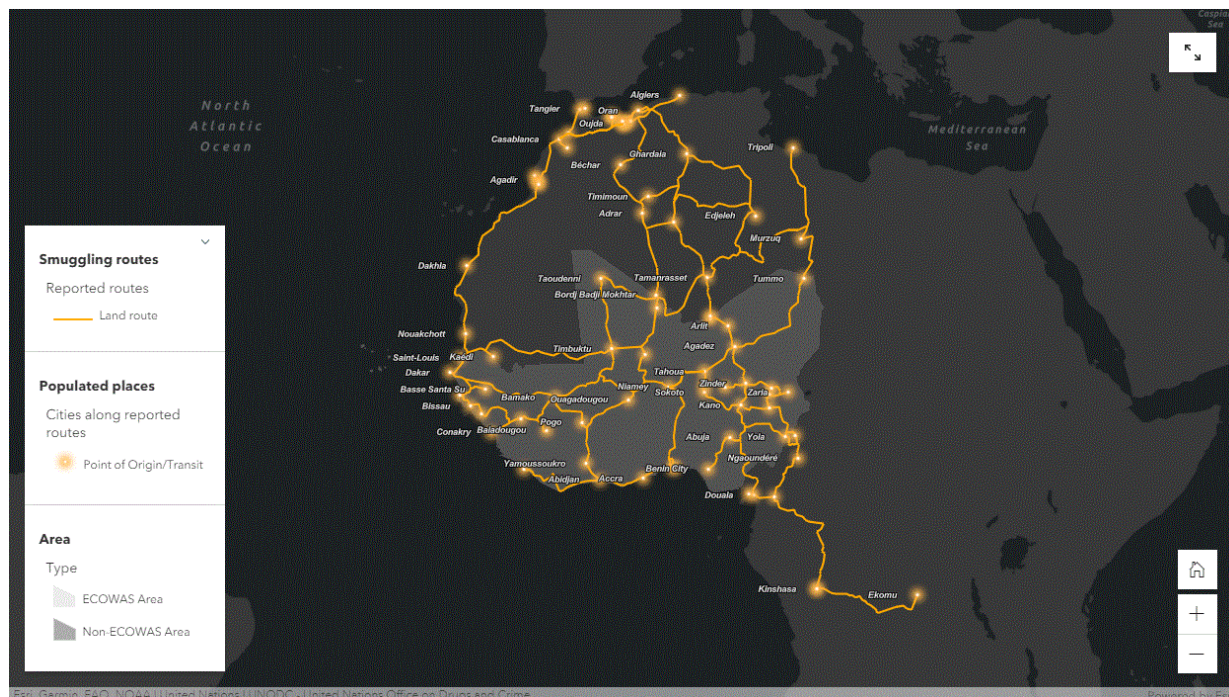
The Western Mediterranean route, which comprises the sea routes connecting Morocco and Algeria to mainland Spain and irregular crossings of the land borders between Morocco and Spain, was used by over 56,000 people in 2018. This was the peak year for this route; the numbers then decreased to 23,900 in 2019; and to 16,300 in 2021 as of end October (Frontex data, excludes the Canary Islands). In 2020, an increased number of people attempted to cross irregularly from the Northwest African coast to the Spanish Canary Islands, a route that had not been used by significant numbers of people since the mid-2000s, and which will be the subject of a future Observatory StoryMap.

Number of people detected crossing irregularly into Spain from the Western Mediterranean and Northwest African routes



This StoryMap analyses smuggling of migrants to Morocco and on the Western Mediterranean route, based on the experiences of people on the move, [smugglers and facilitators](#) in West and North Africa, and the counter-smuggling response of Moroccan and Spanish authorities.

## Observatory interviewees' journeys from West Africa to Morocco



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. This map provides an overview of the journeys of 41 people interviewed for the Observatory research who provided details of their routes. Roads are indicative of approximate routes only, and do not depict tracking of refugees' and migrants' journeys. Due to the small size of the sample, the routes do not reflect the relative frequency of use. Sources: UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants, UN Geospatial, OpenStreetMap, ESRI World Roads and ESRI World Cities.

## Smuggling demand

### Who uses smugglers?

#### Smuggling to Morocco

The Observatory's research indicates that people on the move who use [smugglers or facilitators](#) to reach Morocco by land mostly originate from francophone countries in West and Central Africa, as well as from Algeria.<sup>5</sup> According to the Moroccan Ministry of Interior, smuggled migrants intercepted by authorities are usually from Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali and Cameroon.<sup>6</sup> The Moroccan authorities report noticing little or no change in the nationalities of smuggled migrants and refugees intercepted during the last five years.<sup>7</sup> While no official statistics are available on the nationalities, age and gender of people smuggled to Morocco, the Moroccan authorities mostly intercepted young men, aged 18-35 years, but they also recorded increasing proportions of women and children.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Moroccan authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2021).

<sup>7</sup> Moroccan authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2021).

<sup>8</sup> Moroccan authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2021).



People moving irregularly from West and Central Africa to Morocco do so to seek safety from conflict, persecution, harmful practices (e.g. FGM, forced marriage) and other issues,<sup>9</sup> and in search of better economic opportunities, according to the Observatory's interviewees in Morocco.<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of Interior of Morocco confirms that smuggled people whom they intercepted are mostly from a very disadvantaged socio-economic context.<sup>11</sup>

Many people from West and Central Africa who arrive irregularly aim to find a job, and regularize their stay whenever possible. In some cases, if people have tried and failed to enter Spain, they may reconsider Morocco for long-term residence.<sup>12</sup>

The vast majority (90 per cent) of the 74 people on the move from West, Central and North Africa interviewed for the Observatory's research in Morocco got in contact with a [smuggler or facilitator](#) while already *en route*.<sup>13</sup> As the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) free movement zone facilitates mobility within West Africa, many West Africans arrange the first parts of their trips independently and regularly. In these cases, they make contact with [smugglers or facilitators](#) among migrant communities encountered along the way, or through "[coaxers/coxeurs](#)" - individuals, often also West Africans, who approach recent arrivals at bus stations and motor parks in West Africa and direct them towards their desired service (accommodation, transportation, etc.).<sup>14</sup> A much smaller proportion of West and Central Africans interviewed in Morocco for the Observatory contacted [smugglers or facilitators](#) in their country of origin (10 per cent), engaging in a longer and more detailed preparation phase before departure.<sup>15</sup>

However, recent studies indicate that the proportion of people using smugglers and facilitators within the ECOWAS sub-region has increased in recent years, particularly since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a survey conducted by the [Mixed Migration Centre](#) in partnership with the [UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#), 106 out of 126 people (84 per cent) surveyed in Niger in the first quarter of 2021 used a smuggler or facilitator<sup>16</sup> at

<sup>9</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Moroccan authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>16</sup> MMC "uses a broad interpretation of the terms 'smuggler' and 'smuggling', one which encompasses various activities — paid for or otherwise compensated by refugees and migrants — that facilitate irregular migration. These include irregularly crossing international borders and internal checkpoints, as well as providing documents, transportation, and accommodation. This approach reflects refugees' and migrants' perceptions of smuggling and the facilitation of irregular movement. [Their] interpretation is deliberately broader than the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants definition. However, this does not imply that MMC considers all activities it includes in its broad understanding of smuggling to be criminal offences. MMC prefers to use the term 'human smuggling' instead of 'migrant smuggling' as smuggling involves both refugees and migrants." The Observatory uses the word 'smuggler' when it can reasonably be assumed that the crime of migrant smuggling is constituted, as per Article 3 of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, while the word 'facilitator' is used whenever the elements of (a) irregular entry and/or (b) financial or material benefit, could reasonably be assumed not to be in evidence. [www.unodc.org/res/som/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/res/som/index.html).

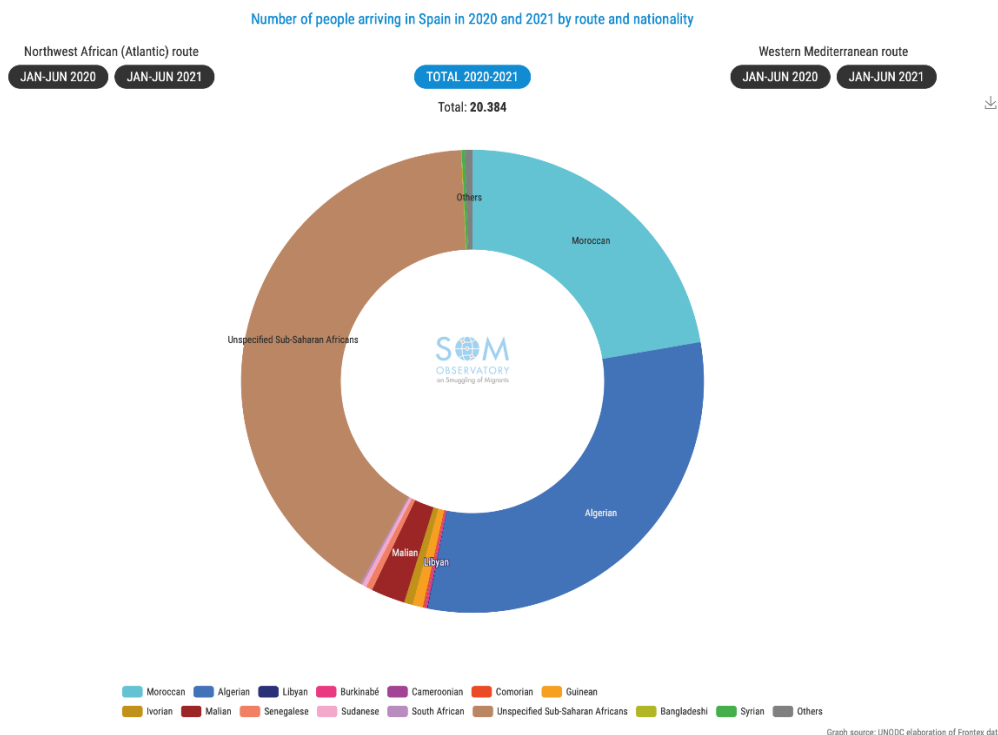
some point during their journey, and 50 out of 87 people (57 per cent) surveyed in Mali had done so.<sup>17</sup>

Those who are best prepared obtain information from relatives and friends already residing in Europe, who then direct them to their local contact. It is not always clear whether these contacts are community members acting without a profit motive or for financial or material gain, independent migrant smugglers, or active members of a [transnational organised crime group](#) dedicated to smuggling of migrants, and this merits further investigation.

### Irregular movements to Spain

People who arrive along the Western Mediterranean route to Spain from Morocco are mostly North Africans – Algerians and, to a lesser extent, Moroccans.<sup>18</sup> Around one-tenth of people arriving in Spain during January to October 2021, along the Western Mediterranean route, were West and Central Africans (Malians, Guineans, Ivoirians, Senegalese and Cameroonians).<sup>19</sup>

West Africans face the most significant obstacles in migrating regularly to European countries.<sup>20</sup> Moroccans and Algerians also face significant challenges in obtaining a visa to travel regularly to the [Schengen area](#), often despite presenting all the documentation required and incurring significant costs at local embassies.<sup>21</sup> Irregular – and often smuggler-facilitated – migration is therefore one of the few alternatives available to travel to the EU.<sup>22</sup>



<sup>17</sup> MMC (2021). Use of smugglers and facilitators in West Africa, 4Mi snapshot.

<sup>18</sup> UNODC elaboration of FRONTEX data.

<sup>19</sup> UNODC elaboration of FRONTEX data.

<sup>20</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2020). Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean trends, risks, development and governance.

<sup>21</sup> Sanchez, G., K. Arrouche, M. Capasso, A. Dimitriadi & A. Fakhry (2021). Beyond Networks, Militias and Tribes: Rethinking EU Counter-smuggling Policy and Response, Euromesco Policy Study, N.19.

<sup>22</sup> Sanchez, G., K. Arrouche, M. Capasso, A. Dimitriadi & A. Fakhry (2021). Beyond Networks, Militias and Tribes: Rethinking EU Counter-smuggling Policy and Response, Euromesco Policy Study, N.19.

Some people from West and Central Africa transit through Morocco with the intention of reaching Europe, while others decide to travel onwards to Europe only after spending some time in the country.<sup>23</sup> However, a significant proportion travel to Morocco with the intention of remaining there. West and Central African interviewees in Morocco for the Observatory's research cited Morocco, Spain and France as their top three intended countries of destination.<sup>24</sup>

## Journeys

### Where does the journey go?

This section provides an overview of migrant smuggling routes by land and air to Morocco, and presents findings on smuggling by land and sea from Morocco to Spain along the [Western Mediterranean route](#). An analysis of smuggling by sea from the Northwest African coast to Spain (Canary Islands) along the [Northwest African \(Atlantic\) route](#) will be presented in a subsequent dedicated Observatory StoryMap.

### Land routes to Morocco

The majority of West, Central and North Africans who enter Morocco irregularly do so by land across the Algerian border.<sup>25</sup> The route through Mauritania to Morocco is almost solely used by Senegalese people travelling regularly under provisions for visa-free entry to Mauritania and Morocco, and who seldom use [smugglers or facilitators](#).<sup>26</sup>

Two main land routes converge at the Northern border between Morocco and Algeria.<sup>27</sup>

The first route passes through Mali and is largely used by francophone West and Central Africans.<sup>28</sup> Most of them are [ECOWAS](#) citizens and therefore enter Mali regularly. Until 2013, the border between Mali and Algeria was open and Malians were allowed to enter Algeria without a visa. A few cases of provision of fraudulent Malian documents to people from other West African countries were reported during this period.<sup>29</sup> Since then, the deterioration of the security situation in Northern Mali and refusals of entry at the Malian-Algerian borders have exacerbated people's dependence on migrant smugglers in order to enter Algeria.<sup>30</sup>

On arrival in Bamako or Gao, Mali, West and Central Africans get in touch with [smugglers and facilitators](#) providing transportation and accommodation services across Northern Mali. Many [smugglers and facilitators](#) transport their clients as far as the southern towns and cities of Algeria (such as Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Timiaouine, Tin Zaoutine or Tamanrasset). Others drop

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<sup>23</sup> Mbarek Naama (2017). Sub-Saharan Irregular Migrants in Morocco and the Exceptional Regularisation Programme in 2014. PhD Thesis.

<sup>24</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc" by Altai Consulting in January and February 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Mbarek Naama (2017). Sub-Saharan Irregular Migrants in Morocco in the Exceptional Regularisation Programme in 2014. PhD Thesis.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019).

<sup>30</sup> Algerian law no. 09 01 of 2009 and 08-11 of 2008.

them off before reaching these urban centres, at the sand berm constructed in 2013 along parts of the border between Mali and Algeria, often by night. Passengers then cross the berm by foot, hoping to find the next transporter on the other side, without being intercepted by Algerian border guards.<sup>31</sup> According to IOM, most people crossing to Algeria from Kidal in Northeast Mali in April 2021 had as their intended final destinations Algeria, Italy, Morocco and Spain.<sup>32</sup>

The second route connects Northwest Niger to Southern Algeria. It is relatively more commonly used by Nigerians and Cameroonians, compared to the Malian route, as it is the closest point of entry for people departing from Nigeria or Cameroon.<sup>33</sup> In this case, most people arriving from Kano in Northern Nigeria have already used [smugglers and/or facilitators](#), who bring them directly to Southern Algeria, or connect them with a local actor working on this route. For travellers coming from other routes, a number of local transporters, often local Malians, Nigeriens or Algerians, facilitate travel along this leg of the journey, bringing passengers from Agadez and Arlit in Niger to the Niger border town of Assamakka, and In Guezzam on the Algerian side.<sup>34</sup> A sand berm has also been constructed along parts of Algeria's border with Niger.

Once in Southern Algeria, and especially in the towns of Bordj Badji Mokhtar and Tin Zaoutine and the city of Tamanrasset, people who have travelled through Mali and Niger often stop in search of accommodation, possibilities for income generation, or both. Those who move northwards towards the Northwest Algerian border with Morocco generally hitchhike or use public transport, abandoning the specific dynamics of migrant smuggling. A few may use the services of intermediaries in order to avoid detection by police and security forces.<sup>35</sup>

Experiences at the Northern border between Algeria and Morocco vary widely, though most people pay drivers, referred to as "[taxi mafia](#)", on both sides to be brought to and picked up from the borders, attempting the border crossing itself independently. On arrival in Oujda, Morocco, across the border from Maghnia in Algeria, they stay just the time needed to acquire the physical and financial resources to go south, if they want to stay in Morocco, or northwest to the Moroccan coast, if they want to reach Europe.

Agadir, Casablanca and Rabat along the Western Moroccan coast, and Khouribga, inland from Casablanca, are typical destinations for recently arrived migrants who intend to settle in Morocco. Instances of smuggling of migrants are less common among those intending to stay in Morocco, though dynamics related to trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging and forced criminality are more prominent.

On the northern coast of Morocco, Nador, just south of Melilla, and Tangiers, act as the gateways to land and sea routes to Europe. People typically reach these cities with the intention of travelling to Spain or France. They reside informally in the forests around Nador and on the peripheries of the city of Tangiers, trying to avoid being detected by the Moroccan

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<sup>31</sup> Farrah, Raouf (2020). Algeria's migration dilemma, migration and human smuggling in southern Algeria. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime.

<sup>32</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) (2021). Flow Monitoring Report. Mali. 1 – 31 May 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.



authorities. In these precarious conditions, people are often exposed to abuses and exploitative practices (see section on [Risks](#)).



### Land and sea routes to Europe

In order to travel to Spain from Morocco, North, West and Central Africans often organize sea crossings independently, either across the Gibraltar Strait or Alboran Sea (Western Mediterranean Sea), along the Moroccan shores to Ceuta and Melilla, or along the Northwest African route to the Canary Islands, Spain.<sup>36</sup> People use [smugglers or facilitators](#) when the crossing requires higher organizational capacity, such as for longer sea journeys or highly patrolled maritime areas.<sup>37</sup>

In Nador, Morocco, a small proportion of refugees and migrants use smuggling services in order to cross the sea to Melilla or mainland Spain.<sup>38</sup> Most self-organize and try to make their way by relying on information provided by “[chairmen](#)”. The term “chairman” refers to a West or Central African, always an adult man, who is responsible for collecting contributions – a form of community tax - from compatriots who reside in “[ghettos](#)” in North Africa. Because of his role as a first point of contact for newly arrived residents, a chairman may in some cases also act as head of a community, a smuggler or a facilitator of mobility.

Between 2015 and 2019, a gradually increasing number of people attempted the crossing at the land and sea borders between Morocco and Ceuta and Melilla. The numbers decreased again in 2020-2021, largely due to the closing of the border crossing points (6,216 people arrived irregularly in 2019; 1,769 in 2020).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Gobierno de Espana (2021). Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2020. Available at:

The limited migrant smuggling activities detected at the land border crossing points of the two towns are cases of provision of fraudulent documentation or smugglers hiding migrants and refugees in vehicles.<sup>40</sup> In such cases, the Spanish authorities report that the heads of the organizations are based in Morocco, while the driver is usually a Moroccan person in economic need or with a mental, behavioural or neurological disorder (including disorders due to substance use and addictive behaviours)<sup>41</sup> forced or deceived into committing the crime, suggesting the possibility of trafficking for forced criminal activities.

The port city of Tangiers on the northern coast of Morocco is one of the main departure points for irregular sea crossings, as well as regular traffic, along the Western Mediterranean route. People use [smugglers or facilitators](#) in order to cross the highly patrolled sea routes to mainland Spain.<sup>42</sup> Since the early 2010s, the sea route from Tangiers to Tarifa on the southern coast of Spain has been used by people attempting to cross irregularly into Spain. Many Syrians, Moroccans, and Guineans depart from the coast around Tangiers in small dinghies and other makeshift vessels.

In the city of Tangiers itself, smuggling of migrants is built on precarious alliances between [chairmen](#) from migrant and refugee communities and Moroccan [taxi-mafia](#) and boat providers. Violence and fraud perpetrated by these [smugglers and facilitators](#) against migrants and refugees have increased since early 2020, according to key informants for the Observatory research, following the intensification of police controls and the travel and movement restrictions imposed as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Air routes to Morocco and Europe

People arriving in Morocco by air with forged or fraudulent documents overstay their visa and remain in the country, hoping to regularize their stay at a later stage. Others intend to attempt irregular border crossings to Spain and so head northwards to Nador and Tangiers. Smuggling by air is described by interviewees for the Observatory's research in Morocco as a separate operation, with no significant connections to smuggling by land and sea.

In 2019, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex indicated Casablanca Mohammed V International Airport as one of the airports of origin of people who entered the [Schengen area](#) with forged or fraudulent documents.<sup>43</sup> The European Union's law enforcement agency Europol also reported a case involving a migrant smuggling organisation selling forged documents for US\$8,000-9,000 in Rabat, Morocco, with connections in Spain and Gibraltar.<sup>44</sup>

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[www.dsn.gob.es/es/documento/informe-anual-seguridad-nacional-2020](http://www.dsn.gob.es/es/documento/informe-anual-seguridad-nacional-2020).

<sup>40</sup> Spanish authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2019).

<sup>41</sup> The International Classification (ICD-11) of the World Health Organization defines 'Mental, behavioural and neurodevelopmental disorders' as syndromes characterised by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes that underlie mental and behavioural functioning. These disturbances are usually associated with distress or impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. See: [www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/](http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/).

<sup>42</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Frontex (2020). Risk Analysis Report 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Europol (2021). European Migrant Smuggling Centre - 5th Annual Report, Publications Office of the European Union.

## Smugglers

### Who are the smugglers?

#### Smuggling by land

##### Fragmented organisations

Small groups of loosely connected people or individual smugglers and facilitators assist people in travelling irregularly by land to Morocco.<sup>45</sup> These fragmented organisations depend on opportunistic relationships and transactions among several individuals who can navigate local geographies and social relations.<sup>46</sup> These individuals are mostly active only at specific border crossing points and include people acting as transporters, accommodation providers, labour intermediaries and employers, who enter into sporadic agreements with other actors, depending on each client's requirements, the risk of detection, and available connections.<sup>47</sup> These smugglers' and facilitators' business is based on their social capital, comprising contacts and relationships forged by ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties.

[Smugglers and facilitators](#) active in Morocco and Algeria work in various different legal and illegal sectors, as migrant smuggling and travel facilitation seldom provide sufficient revenue.<sup>48</sup> Smugglers and facilitators active in this area are mostly described as men, although in a few cases women and children also play these roles.<sup>49</sup> Far from being a defining element of one's identity, acting as a [smuggler or facilitator](#) seems to be rather a temporary role assumed vis-a-vis the community, which can bring prestige and additional revenues, and offer support to other community members.<sup>50</sup>

##### Chairmen

Smugglers and facilitators contact people on the move at bus stations or motor parks, especially in Niger, Mali and Nigeria, or through [chairmen](#) in "[ghettos](#)" - areas of cities and towns in Morocco and Algeria where many West and Central Africans reside.<sup>51</sup> West and Central African people enter the urban space in Morocco and Algeria by gathering in peripheral areas and organising in communities based on their nationalities and/or ethnic and language commonalities.<sup>52</sup>

West and Central Africans are brought to [ghettos](#) by [smugglers or facilitators](#), or seek them out independently upon referral by other community members.<sup>53</sup> Informal group accommodation (or "*foyer*" in French) in ghettos is often owned or run by West and Central

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<sup>45</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

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<sup>47</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Richter, Line (2019). Doing bizness, Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb. Focaa—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 85 (2019): 26–36.

<sup>49</sup> Richter, Line (2019). Doing bizness, Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb. Focaa—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 85 (2019): 26–36.

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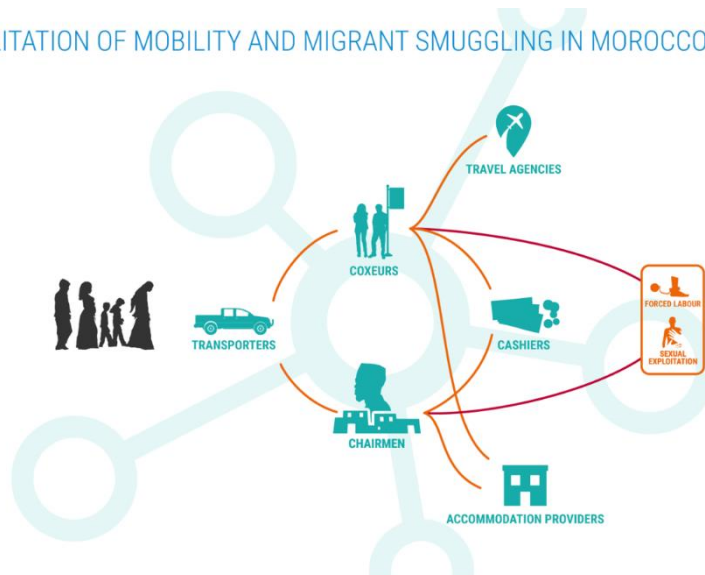
<sup>53</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

African women.<sup>54</sup> A [ghetto](#) can comprise an apartment, a building or a whole district, and present a social structure of self-organization that offers familiarity, support and protection to residents on the basis of ethnic and linguistic ties.<sup>55</sup> The community living in a “ghetto” designate a “[chairman](#)” or “[thiaman](#)”, typically a male member of the community who is charged with collecting a form of community tax from the people residing in the [ghetto](#), upon arrival.<sup>56</sup>

As the [chairmen’s](#) role naturally makes them the first point of contact with newcomers, they often act as facilitators of mobility or direct recent arrivals to someone who can provide the requested service.<sup>57</sup> In these settings, if smuggling of migrants is committed, it “*is tied into the everyday lives of those who are on the move, and involves social relations founded on traditions of brokering and hosting, and established mobility trajectories*”.<sup>58</sup>

[Smugglers and facilitators](#) are hence often themselves people who have travelled onwards before or who have changed their minds *en route* and decided to stay.<sup>59</sup> [Chairmen](#) may take advantage of their privileged position and enter into opportunistic transactions with

#### FACILITATION OF MOBILITY AND MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN MOROCCO



associates from different ethnic backgrounds, without constituting a corporative enterprise. They refer refugees and migrants on to the next group facilitating movement in the region, and/or intermediate temporary workers for farms, mines, or

domestic work. Some of these referrals, if carried out in exchange for a fee or other material benefit, present elements of trafficking in persons (see section on [Risks](#)).

Within Morocco, Casablanca-based [chairmen](#) have acquired a higher level of seniority and income, allowing them to lead larger networks of lower-level [chairmen](#) active in Oujda and Nador in the North.

<sup>54</sup> Sanchez, G., K. Arrouche, M. Capasso, A. Dimitriadi & A. Fakhry (2021). Beyond Networks, Militias and Tribes: Rethinking EU Counter-smuggling Policy and Response, Euromesco Policy Study, N.19.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Richter, Line (2019). Doing bizness, Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb. Focaa—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 85 (2019): 26–36.

<sup>57</sup> Richter, Line (2019). Doing bizness, Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb. Focaa—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 85 (2019): 26–36.

<sup>58</sup> Richter, Line (2019). Doing bizness, Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb. Focaa—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 85 (2019): 26–36.

<sup>59</sup> Sanchez, G. and L. Achilli (2020). Stranded: the impacts of COVID-19 on irregular migration and migrant smuggling.



## Drivers

Unlike coaxers or [chairmen](#), who are typically of a similar ethnic background to the client, drivers tend to be locals.<sup>60</sup> They tend to be nationals of the country in which they operate.

Difficult economic conditions in Niger, Mali and Algeria have led some drivers and transporters to shift their activity from trade and tourism to the facilitation of migrants' and refugees' journeys to the Algerian-Libyan border, to the mines of Northern Mali and Niger, or to Southern Algeria.<sup>61</sup>

At the border between Algeria and Morocco, [taxi-mafia](#) and [chairmen](#) facilitate people's movement to Oujda on the Moroccan side and their temporary residence in the town.

## Collusion with armed groups

In Mali, armed groups active in the north profit indirectly by exerting territorial control, though they are not directly involved in migrant smuggling.<sup>62</sup> While profits from migrant smuggling are not high enough to provide a significant financial contribution to their campaigns, extorting fees from migrants' convoys is a systematic practice.<sup>63</sup>

Testimonies of kidnapping, torture, extortion, and trafficking in persons perpetrated against people in transit in these areas are increasingly documented and often involve non-state actors (see section on Risks below).<sup>64</sup>

## Transnational organised crime

Only 10 per cent of interviewees for the Observatory's research in Morocco who provided relevant details (eight out of 80) were smuggled by [transnational organized criminal groups](#) from their country of origin to Morocco, based on their description of the facilitators. While this figure is likely to underrepresent the involvement of [transnational organized criminal groups](#) in migrant smuggling along these routes, as people travelling with their assistance are usually less likely to speak to researchers, and smuggled people may not have sufficient information to determine the nature of their smugglers, academic and grey literature converge on qualifying the role of such groups in the facilitation of irregular movement in West and North Africa as marginal.<sup>65</sup>

A relatively larger proportion of the few women interviewed had relied on more organized transnational groups.<sup>66</sup> Many Cameroonian women used a [smuggler or facilitator](#) whom they met either before departure or in Kano in Northern Nigeria.<sup>67</sup> They were then transferred from

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<sup>60</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Sanchez, G., K. Arrouche, M. Capasso, A. Dimitriadi & A. Fakhry (2021). Beyond Networks, Militias and Tribes: Rethinking EU Counter-smuggling Policy and Response, Euromesco Policy Study, N.19. and Brachet, J. (2018). "Manufacturing Smugglers: From Irregular to Clandestine Mobility in the Sahara". The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 676(1), 16–35.

<sup>62</sup> Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019).

<sup>63</sup> Sanchez, G. and L. Achilli (2020). Stranded: the impacts of COVID-19 on irregular migration and migrant smuggling.

<sup>64</sup> Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019).

<sup>65</sup> Mixed Migration Centre (2019). Des acteurs aux multiples rôles : L'évolution du rôle des passeurs dans l'industrie de la migration en Afrique de l'Ouest. Mixed Migration Centre.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study "Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final" by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

agent to agent all the way to Morocco, often staying for a period in the ghettos of Southern Algeria along the way. They are frequently victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, perpetrated by smugglers, facilitators, or heads of ghettos.<sup>68</sup>

### Smuggling by sea from Morocco

Although the number of people making irregular journeys increased during 2018-2021, migrant smuggling along the Western Mediterranean route seems less prevalent compared to the Eastern or Central Mediterranean routes. Irregular sea crossings are often a community-based activity, sometimes involving entire families.<sup>69</sup> People gather in Nador, Morocco, or the surrounding areas, and self-organise their crossings as a group, often with the external help of [chairmen](#) or other members of the [ghettos](#), with or without a financial or material benefit for the chairmen and others.<sup>70</sup>

Investigations conducted by the Spanish and Moroccan police identified loosely associated transnational organized criminal groups involved in smuggling of migrants from Morocco to Spain (see section below on [Counter-Smuggling Responses](#)). These groups include Moroccan and Spanish members in charge of coordination, logistics, surveillance, information gathering and transportation. Other investigations targeted a group of Moroccans (of unknown gender and age) suspected of smuggling of migrants by sea from Morocco to Spain on sea scooters.<sup>71</sup>

## Fees

### How much does smuggling cost?

The profits to be made from migrant smuggling on these routes appear limited.<sup>72</sup> Many individual smugglers are paid only for a specific segment of the journey and must combine smuggling services with other illicit or licit sources of income in order to make a living.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, when the smuggling is a “full package” arrangement, a significant percentage of the fee paid is distributed among different members of a smuggling group to cover running costs and other expenses. Reported fees do not indicate high profits being made, but rather the limited financial sums involved.<sup>74</sup>

Interviewees for the Observatory research in Morocco who had travelled through Mali reported paying between US\$450 and 900. However, the systematic reporting of practices of sexual

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<sup>68</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>69</sup> Sanchez, G., K. Arrouche, M. Capasso, A. Dimitriadi & A. Fakhry (2021). Beyond Networks, Militias and Tribes: Rethinking EU Counter-smuggling Policy and Response, Euromesco Policy Study, N.19.

<sup>70</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Europol (2021), European Migrant Smuggling Centre 5th Annual Report. Europol; Infomigrants (2021). Spain: Migrant smugglers arrested in Melilla. 8 February 2021. ARAB NEWS. Police arrest 26 for smuggling Algerians into Spain. 10 September 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>73</sup> UNODC (2011). The role of organized crime in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa to the European Union.

<sup>74</sup> UNODC (2011). The role of organized crime in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa to the European Union; Richter, Line (2019). Doing business, Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb. Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 85 (2019): 26–36.

exploitation and forced labour in Algeria suggests that the cost to some clients may far exceed the monetary payment (see section on Risks). In-kind compensations, salary deductions and other services may significantly add to the initial monetary fee paid.<sup>75</sup>

As many scholars have pointed out, migrant smuggling should not always be viewed as solely profit-driven, as it is often community-based and its costs and rewards may also be measured in terms of interpersonal obligations.<sup>76</sup>

Travelling from Kano (Northern Nigeria) to Tamanrasset (Southern Algeria) costs US\$750-900 for a “full package”, or US\$17-170 per leg on a step-by-step journey. Crossing from Niger to Algeria, for instance, was reported by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime as costing around US\$45 per person.<sup>77</sup>

As is the case on the Central Mediterranean route (see Observatory [Research](#) on the Central Mediterranean route), the sea crossing is almost always paid separately. Some sources refer to the Western Mediterranean crossing as the most expensive sea route, with fees averaging around US\$2,800 per person.<sup>78</sup> Similar figures were reported by the Spanish authorities, with variations according to the number of attempts included in the fee. The authorities also confirmed that smuggled people who are assigned the role of navigating the boat, holding the phone or monitoring GPS locations during the crossing may receive a discount, as a compensation for their more active involvement. In addition, the gender, nationality, age and socioeconomic context of each migrant or refugee has a role in determining the fee,<sup>79</sup> as also set out in the Research on the Central Mediterranean route.

In “Operation Iceberg,” Spanish and British law enforcement, supported by Europol, arrested a group suspected of providing fraudulent documentation to Moroccans to obtain British visas. They charged US\$9,000-10,000 per client, comprising around US\$8,000-9,000 for facilitating the issuing of a visa by the UK Embassy in Rabat, US\$560-800 for the crossing from Gibraltar to the Southern Spanish coast and US\$112-225 for drivers and other actors.<sup>80</sup>

Smuggling fees are almost always paid upfront for irregular crossings by land into Morocco and Algeria, which suggests weak negotiating power among migrants and refugees, who rapidly lose control over their journeys.<sup>81</sup> On the Western Mediterranean route, however, the Spanish authorities identified cases of migrants and refugees paying in two instalments, with

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<sup>75</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Maher, Stephanie. 2018. “Out of West Africa: Human smuggling as a social enterprise.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 676 (1): 36–56; Belloni, Milena, and Xolani Tshabalala (2021). “On the Key Distinction between Trafficking and Smuggling. Views and implications from the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa”. UNODC FORUM ON CRIME AND SOCIETY Special issue: Smuggling of migrants. Volume 10, Numbers 1 and 2, 2019. Vienna: UNODC.

<sup>77</sup> Farrah, Raouf (2020). Algeria’s migration dilemma, migration and human smuggling in southern Algeria. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime.

<sup>78</sup> Luyten K. and S. B. Smialowski (2021). Understanding EU action against migrant smuggling.

<sup>79</sup> See also: UNODC (2021). *Abused and Neglected: A Gender Perspective on Aggravated Smuggling Offences and Response*. Available at: [www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated\\_SOM\\_and\\_Gender.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> Royal Gibraltar Police. Joint RGP Policia Nacional Operation dismantles Migrant Smuggling Organised Crime Group. 12 January 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

friends or family instructed to release the full payment only upon their safe arrival at their intended final destination.

Key informants for the Observatory research in Morocco report that the cost of the journey to Spain has increased, as border controls in Morocco have been scaled up as of 2019 (see [Counter-smuggling responses](#)). Smuggling fees have also reportedly increased in West and North Africa since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>82</sup>

The amount of pre-departure savings that interviewees mention also provides an indication of the wide variety of experiences along these routes. For the 30 interviewees for the Observatory's research in Morocco who provided this information, savings used for the trip ranged from a minimum of US\$83 to a maximum of US\$3,385. Those who saved more than US\$1,125 (four people) had spent between two and nine years preparing for the journey. Savings are then mostly used to cover the initial costs of the journey, or the first legs. If they are unable to pay, people are exploited in construction, domestic work, agriculture, or prostitution along the route until they can pay.<sup>83</sup>

## Risks

### What are the risks when using smuggling services?



#### Loss of life during the journey

Crossing the desert from West Africa into Algeria is dangerous. People get lost while crossing the sand berms on foot, and others fall from overloaded pick-ups and 4x4s due to lack of sleep or dehydration. IOM search and rescue operations in the Nigerien desert identified twice as many people in 2020 as in 2019.<sup>84</sup>

During the first half of 2021, an estimated 40 people died while attempting the land crossing from Morocco to Ceuta and Melilla.<sup>85</sup> These are much higher figures compared to the one person reported in 2020, and the seven people identified in 2019. Among those who died in 2021, five people were identified as Moroccans who lost their lives trying to swim to Ceuta. In the first half of 2021, 47 people died on the sea route between Northern Morocco and the Spanish mainland.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> MMC (2020). Impact of COVID 19 on migrant smuggling. COVID-19 Global Thematic Update #1 – 1 September 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Farrah, Raouf (2020). Algeria's migration dilemma, migration and human smuggling in southern Algeria. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime.

<sup>84</sup> IOM (2021). West and Central Africa — A Region on the Move: Mobility Trends in West and Central Africa (January — December 2020).

<sup>85</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) GMDAC (2021). Migrant deaths on maritime routes to Europe in 2021 (January to June).

<sup>86</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) GMDAC (2021). Migrant deaths on maritime routes to Europe in 2021 (January to June).



## Trafficking in persons, kidnapping, deprivation of liberty, sale of a person, inhuman and degrading treatment, and torture

Robbery and kidnapping along land smuggling routes connecting West and North Africa are systematic.<sup>87</sup> A study conducted in Oujda (Northeast Morocco) estimated that around 75 per cent of the people on the move interviewed had been subjected to extortion, robbery and/or kidnapping during the journey. Abductions and kidnapping for ransom are often linked with the presence of militias and armed groups in Northern Mali.<sup>88</sup>



Instances of trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour are also widely reported in Algeria, along with accounts of sale of a person.<sup>89</sup> People first experience exploitation and abuses in Southern Algeria (Tamanrasset, Bordj Badji Mokhtar, and Tin Zaoutine), with men and boys being mostly subjected to forced labour in the construction sector, and women and girls to sexual exploitation.<sup>90</sup>

Exploitation in Algeria and Morocco commonly starts once the transporter introduces migrants and refugees to a [chairman](#).<sup>91</sup> In some cases, victims are sold by the transporter to the [chairman](#), who in turn hands them over to the exploiter, against the payment of a fee.<sup>92</sup> This practice is built upon the privilege and power enjoyed by [chairmen](#), and abuse of the situation of vulnerability of recently arrived migrants and refugees. Many women are victims of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation in these settings, often representing the only option for income generation.<sup>93</sup>

In Nador, Morocco, cases of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation have been increasingly reported by a local NGO, mostly affecting women in transit.<sup>94</sup> In Oran, Algeria, victims of sexual exploitation are forced to repay up to US\$2,250 for the smuggling fee, suggesting that prices may be inflated in order to coerce trafficking victims through debt bondage.<sup>95</sup>



The Moroccan coastal cities of Agadir, Casablanca and Rabat, as well as the city of Khouribga inland from Casablanca, are typical destinations for recently arrived migrants who want to settle in Morocco. Instances of smuggling of migrants are hence less common, while dynamics

<sup>87</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>88</sup>Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019).

<sup>89</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>92</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>93</sup> Sanchez, G., K. Arrouche, M. Capasso, A. Dimitriadi & A. Fakhry (2021). Beyond Networks, Militias and Tribes: Rethinking EU Counter-smuggling Policy and Response, Euromesco Policy Study, N.19.

<sup>94</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

related to trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, and forced criminality are more prominent.<sup>96</sup>

People may also be stranded in the desert due to closed borders, COVID-19 prevention measures, depleted resources, fear of arrest and deportation and xenophobic violence.<sup>97</sup> Being stranded increases dependence on smugglers and facilitators for revenue generation.<sup>98</sup> In recent years, UN entities reported a number of cases of migrants recruited for labour exploitation in mines or by armed groups, after refuelling at the border between Mali and Algeria.<sup>99</sup>

## Violence and corruption



Violence, robbery and abuses by police officers and other actors at border checkpoints are also systematically reported by migrants across all ages, genders, and smuggling routes.<sup>100</sup> These instances are especially recurrent in the accounts of people who cross through Algeria. Several scholars have analyzed how racism is central to the way people experience border enforcement in North Africa, and violence and abuse of power perpetrated by police officers is often determined by racialized

profiles.<sup>101</sup>

## Counter-Smuggling responses

### Morocco

Morocco acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2002 and to its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish on Trafficking in Persons in 2011. The Kingdom has neither signed nor ratified the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. A number of bilateral agreements with Spain and France since 2012 shape the framework of counter-smuggling cooperation. Morocco has acceded to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Protocol.

Moroccan migration law (Law 02-03 of 2003) criminalizes irregular entry and smuggling of migrants. The law sets out severe sanctions for offenders, and protection against deportation for some categories of smuggled migrants, such as pregnant women, children, refugees and

<sup>96</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>97</sup> MMC (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants on the move in North and West Africa.

<sup>98</sup> MMC (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants on the move in North and West Africa.

<sup>99</sup> Letter dated 8 August 2018 from the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali addressed to the President of the Security Council.

<sup>100</sup> Interviews conducted within the framework of the study “Etude sur le trafic illicite de migrants au Maroc, Rapport final” by Altai Consulting in April January and February 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Sanchez, G., K. Arrouche, M. Capasso, A. Dimitriadi & A. Fakhry. (2021). Beyond Networks, Militias and Tribes: Rethinking EU Counter-smuggling Policy and Response, Euromesco Policy Study, N.19.

asylum applicants.<sup>102</sup> The President of the Public Ministry (King's General Prosecutor) has the responsibility for ensuring that these guarantees are upheld and that smuggled migrants' rights are protected, in terms of access to justice, healthcare, and diplomatic services. In 2014, Morocco adopted the National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum, which led to the proposal of three new laws. The law on human trafficking has since been adopted, while the draft laws on migration and asylum are still under discussion.

Law 27-14 of 2016 sets out penalties for perpetrators of trafficking in persons. Under this law, a national inter-ministerial commission was set up in 2018. This law also provides protection measures for vulnerable people, particularly refugees and asylum applicants.

The Moroccan Ministry of Interior coordinates the counter-smuggling and border management response. As part of this strategy, border patrolling, interception at sea and search and rescue operations have increased since 2019. Key informants interviewed for the Observatory's research in early 2020 suggest that the decline in the number of people arriving irregularly to Spain in 2019 may be due to increased border patrols, including interceptions at sea and search and rescue operations, deployed by the Moroccan authorities along land and sea borders. According to the Moroccan Ministry of Interior, 10,316 people were intercepted and rescued off the Northern coasts of Morocco in 2020.<sup>103</sup>

In 2019, the Moroccan authorities investigated more than 60 migrant smuggling groups and uncovered 3,000 fraudulent documents.<sup>104</sup> In the same year, around 27,000 people with irregular immigration status were arrested,<sup>105</sup> representing between 10 and 30 per cent of the Moroccan prison population in 2018.<sup>106</sup> In 2020, 3,196 people were prosecuted for smuggling of migrants in Morocco, and 307 for trafficking in persons.<sup>107</sup>

## Spain

Spain, the main country of arrival for people smuggled from Morocco, ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, and against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air in 2002. As a Member State of the EU, Spain is also covered by the EU's framework on counter-smuggling, including Directive 2002/90/EC of 28 November 2002 defining the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and residence and Council Framework Decision of 28 November 2002 on the strengthening of the penal framework to prevent the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and residence (these two instruments are commonly referred to as the Facilitators Package).

The Spanish Criminal Code, Article 318bis, criminalizes the "facilitation of illegal immigration" and domesticates the EU Facilitation Directive. The purpose of "financial or material benefit" is not required to constitute the crime – unlike in the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol - but is rather considered an aggravating circumstance. Involuntary manslaughter and trafficking in persons are the two offences most frequently reported as committed concurrently with smuggling of migrants in the Spanish jurisdiction.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Moroccan authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2021).

<sup>103</sup> Moroccan authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2021).

<sup>104</sup> Frontex (2020). Risk Analysis for 2020.

<sup>105</sup> Frontex (2020). Risk Analysis for 2020.

<sup>106</sup> UNODC Data Portal, Persons held in Prisons.

<sup>107</sup> Moroccan authorities' written responses to Observatory questionnaire (2021).

<sup>108</sup> Eurojust (2016). Spanish Jurisprudence on Illegal Immigrant Smuggling, Analysis, March 2016.

The Spanish counter-smuggling response is coordinated by the Ministry of Interior – with responsibility for border management and immigration management – and is based on the involvement of several law enforcement authorities such as the Guardia Civil, the Intelligence Centre for Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime (CITCO) and the Policía Nacional.

Between 2020 and 2021, the Spanish authorities arrested and investigated more than 140 people for smuggling of migrants from the Northern coast of Morocco to the Spanish mainland and across the land borders between Morocco and Spain.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Europol (2021). European Migrant Smuggling Centre 5th Annual Report. Europol; Infomigrants (2021). Spain: Migrant smugglers arrested in Melilla. 8 February 2021; Arab News. Police arrest 26 for smuggling Algerians into Spain. 10 September 2021.

*Note: All websites accessed 5 October 2021.*



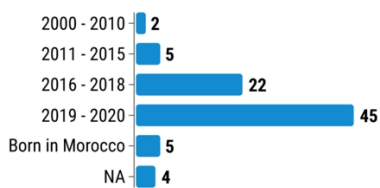
## Methodology

### Overview of the Methodology

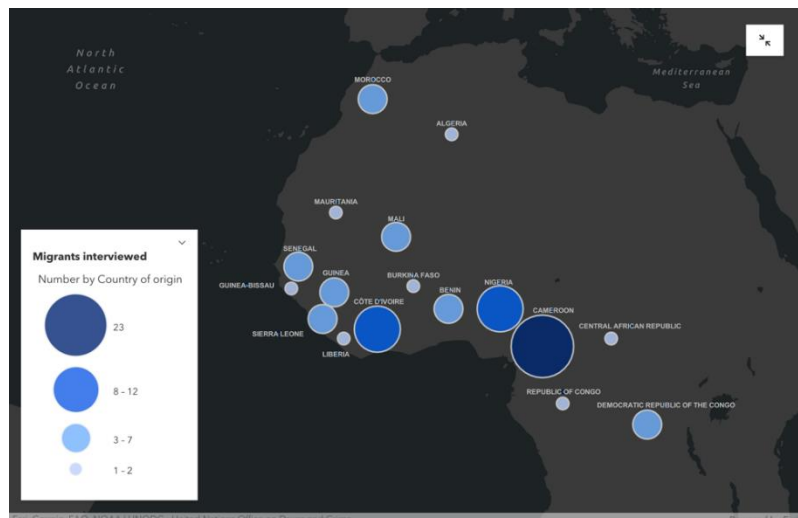
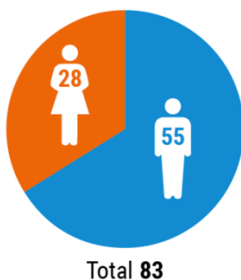
This StoryMap is based on field research conducted in Morocco in January and February 2020 by [Altai Consulting](#) in the framework of first phase of [Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants \(GLO.ACT\)](#), a joint EU and UNODC initiative that was implemented in partnership with the [International Organisation for Migration \(IOM\)](#) and the [United Nations Children’s Fund \(UNICEF\)](#). The primary data collected included 74 in-depth interviews with people on the move from West, Central and North Africa who had recently arrived in Morocco and were adults at the time of the interview, as well as interviews with nine Moroccans intending to migrate and 14 key informants from Government and civil society. Due to certain biases inherent in the sampling strategy, a disproportionate number of Nigerians and Cameroonians were interviewed, relative to other groups of people on the move. The findings from the interviews have been analyzed, triangulated and updated with existing literature and statistics.

### Respondents interviewed in Morocco, by country of origin, gender and year of arrival

Number of interviewees from West and Central Africa, by year of arrival in Morocco (Total 74)



Total number of interviewees by gender (Total 83)



## Terms used

- **Chairman:** this term refers to a West or Central African, always an adult man, who is responsible for collecting contributions – a form of community tax - from people who reside in a “ghetto”. Chairmen may in some cases also act as head of a community, a smuggler or a facilitator of mobility.
- **Coaxers/Coaxeurs:** single individuals, usually West or Central Africans, who approach recently arrived people at bus stations or motor parks in West and Central Africa and direct them towards the desired service (accommodation, transportation etc.).
- **ECOWAS Free Movement Region:** the Free Movement Protocols of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provide for citizens of ECOWAS Member States to enter another country within the sub-region and remain for up to 90 days, provided that they have a valid travel document and an international health certificate. The 15 ECOWAS Member States are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea (Bissau), Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Mauritania was previously a member of ECOWAS, but withdrew in 2000 and is currently an Associate Member.
- **Facilitator:** the word “*facilitator*” is used here whenever the elements of (a) irregular entry or (b) financial or material benefit, could reasonably be assumed not to be in evidence according to the primary or secondary sources used.
- **Ghetto:** group accommodation for West and Central Africans in Morocco and Algeria - it can refer to a district, a building or an apartment.
- **Northwest African (Atlantic) route:** includes the sea journeys from West and North African countries such as Guinea, Senegal, The Gambia, Mauritania and Morocco to the Spanish Canary Islands.
- **Organized criminal group:** “*a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences,*” according to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
- **Schengen area:** consists of 26 countries that have agreed to allow people and goods to pass freely across their borders without passport or other controls: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.
- **Smuggler:** the word “*smuggler*” is used throughout when it can reasonably be assumed that the crime of migrant smuggling is constituted, as per Article 3 of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol.
- **Smuggling of Migrants:** “*the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident*” (Art. 3 of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol).
- **Taxi mafia:** term used to refer to Moroccan drivers who transport migrants across the Algerian border to Oujda (Morocco), or transport them in-country and to sea crossing departure points.
- **Thiaman:** derived from the English ‘Chairman’.
- **Western Mediterranean route:** includes the sea journeys from Morocco and the western coast of Algeria to the Spanish mainland and the Balearic Islands as well as the land crossing from Morocco to Ceuta and Melilla.