



# **EUMedEA Working Papers**



UNIVERSITÀ  
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di CATANIA

## **The market for migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean and beyond: A socially embedded illegal business and the role of trust**

Anna Paus

Università degli Studi di Milano, Network for the Advancement of  
Social and Political Science [NASP]



JM Chair EU MEDiterranean border crises and European External Action (EUMedEA)  
Project number: 565729-EPP-1-2015-1-IT-EPPJMO-CHAIR

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University of Catania, Via Vittorio Emanuele 49, 95131, Catania, Italy.

**ISSN 2499-2402**

**EUMedEA Online Working Paper Series, 4-2018**

### **Abstract**

With more than 1 million irregular entries into the E.U. in 2015, irregular migration has moved to the centre of the current political and academic debate. Due to governmental inadequacy in dealing with the issue or even as a direct result of increasingly restrictive border control measures and stern immigration policies, the market for the facilitation of irregular migration has grown in size and professionalisation. However, due to sensationalist media accounts, blurred terminology and the general complexity of the migrant smuggling phenomenon, the latter is still widely misperceived and misrepresented. The following paper presents a review and critical discussion of the literature on migrant smuggling into the European Union and more specifically Italy, as a focal point of the debate. It is argued that while migrant smuggling has been studied from various perspectives, an interdisciplinary approach that combines the most important socio-economic theories regarding the phenomenon and involves a mixed research methodology is still fundamentally lacking. Especially the context of migrant smuggling into the Schengen area remains unexplored. It is maintained that the facilitation of irregular migration is best studied as a specific socially embedded illegal market. Analysing an element of this illegal business such as trust between market actors in order to understand its structure and operation can be beneficial for the study of other illegal businesses more generally.

## 1. Introduction

Never before has the topic of irregular migration into the EU and the facilitation of the latter received so much attention in the academic debate (Cheliotis, 2017; Strange, Squire and Lundburg, 2017; Ambrosini, 2018; Sanchez, 2018) and political sphere (Peel and Khan, 2017; Rijnveld, 2017; Morris, 2018). While it is far from being a ‘new’ phenomenon as it has been studied for many years in several different contexts (Brennan, 1984; Salt and Stein, 1997; Reyneri, 1998; Kyle and Koslowski, 2001; Düvell, 2005; Ambrosini, 2013), irregular migration has resurfaced as a topic of heated discussion since more than 1 million ‘irregular entries’<sup>1</sup> into the EU were recorded in 2015 alone (Frontex, 2016). In fact, what is *recent* in regarding irregular migration is the ‘global spread and development of the phenomenon’ (Triandafyllidou, 2018: 214) and the political awareness and sensitivity towards the issue.

Governments, those of the EU in particular, have had major difficulties in managing migration for years (Castles, 2010; Rachman, 2016; Matuszczyk, 2017; Ambrosini, 2018), and this has become visible most recently. This governmental inadequacy of dealing with irregular migration in a formal, state-controlled, efficient and timely manner did of course not reduce the demand created by people who needed or wanted to leave their country of origin, whether for safety, job opportunity, family reunification or other reasons. Therefore, an alternative, informal response to this prevailing demand rapidly emerged and has developed, as official reports maintain (Europol and Interpol, 2016; EMSC, 2017), into a substantial shadow economy: migrant smuggling services.

Migrant smuggling is as old as irregular migration itself (Aronowitz, 2001; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Van Liempt, 2016), but in recent years media have become highly interested in this topic, including numerous sensationalist accounts of the danger, inhumaneness, and profitability of the smuggling business which is allegedly led by transnational organised criminal enterprises (Ryan, 2016; Bulman, 2017; Petrini, 2017). This depiction is reinforced by official reports on human smuggling, such as the Europol and

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<sup>1</sup> These entries regard all undocumented migrants, including refugees.

Interpol report (2016), the Frontex Risk Analysis reports (2016, 2017), and by the establishment of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) in 2016, as well as by the fact that the countering of smuggling is at the top of the European Agenda on Migration (2015).

This overall very negative and criminalising depiction of migrant smuggling has attracted the interest of various scholars, who have approached the topic by looking at it from diverse perspectives, including criminological, sociological, network, economic, political-historical and human rights approaches (Baird and van Liempt, 2016). The criminological approach discusses smuggling as a crime, the network approach highlights the importance of personal networks in the migration course, the economic perspective analyses smuggling as a business and focuses on the importance of profit made through smuggling. The political-historical outlook on smuggling takes into consideration different realities of smuggling in diverse geographical contexts. Each of these views presents important aspects of the migrant smuggling phenomenon. Yet, an interdisciplinary analysis that combines the most important features of the current reality of migrant smuggling is missing. Thus, the aim of this working-paper is to present a comprehensive review and critical discussion of these diverse theoretical approaches.

The main topics of analysis include: confused terminology and public (mis)perception of the phenomenon; the reality of migrant smuggling networks as seen on a spectrum; the economic vs. the sociological discussion of migrant smuggling in the literature and the manner in which the socio-economic approach to the study of this specific illegal market can be expanded. Last but not least, the unintended consequences of law enforcement repression and the (failed) responses to migrant smuggling will be discussed. What becomes apparent from this review is the fact that:

- (i) the reality of migrant smuggling is much more complex than how it is depicted in the public discourse and official reports and increasingly strict border control policies seem to have a direct impact on migrant smuggling
- (ii) the empirical evidence and research into human smuggling in the EU is still very limited and needs to be expanded; existing studies have

focused only on the South of Italy and neglected the reality of smuggling in the North of the country towards other Northern European countries

- (iii) the empirical literature on migrant smuggling lacks an interdisciplinary approach that is founded on mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods, which could present a more well-rounded view of migrant smuggling into the EU.

This review argues that it is vital for sound policy-making regarding migrant smuggling within the EU<sup>2</sup> in general that these key shortcomings are remedied as soon as possible. With the aim of addressing (ii), the specific context of smuggling *within* Italy (and the wider Schengen area) as a focal point of irregular migration debates will build the foundation of this analysis. Italy is exposed due to its geographic position that facilitates uncontrolled entry into the country mainly from North Africa via difficult-to-control sea lanes and a vast total shoreline (Harney, 2006; Monzini, 2007; Zanfrini et al., 2008; Panebianco, 2016).

In relation to (iii), the author proposes that further studies on migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean and within the EU more widely, should use a mixed-methodology type of research, which analyses organised migrant smuggling networks as socially embedded illegal enterprises, therefore combining sociological, economic and criminological concepts in explaining the structure and operation of this specific type of illegal business. This paper presents the notion that a specific element which is vital to the functioning of legal as well as illegal enterprises is present also in the context of migrant smuggling networks and plays a significant role in the success of smuggling operations: trust between smugglers. This study presents an important element of this specific illegal market that might well be applied to the study of other illegal markets more generally (such as drug trafficking or cigarette smuggling that use similar routes and market traits [Antonopolous, 2006; Reuters, 2018]).

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<sup>2</sup> The focus in this paper is on land and sea routes in relation to migrant smuggling. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that irregular migration occurs primarily by people flying into Europe by means of false documentation or simply the overstaying of tourist visas (Triandafyllidou, 2010; Ambrosini; 2018).

## **2. A few terminological questions**

First and foremost, it is essential to define some fundamental terms concerning migrant smuggling that are often misconceived or misapplied in the public discourse. As such a practice can quickly result in misrepresentation of facts, prejudices or even bad policy-making (Achilli, 2018), it is important to obtain terminological clarity.

### *2.1 Irregular migration vs illegal migration*

While there is no universally valid definition of irregular migration, the International Organisation for Migration [IOM] defines it as the ‘movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries’ (IOM Glossary on Migration, 2011). The simplest way to distinguish between irregular and illegal migration is by arguing that people who immigrate illegally into a country do so *unlawfully*, as they do not have the appropriate documents to enter a given country. However, this term is seen as problematic, not only because it suggests that a human being can be ‘illegal’ (which has fuelled many pro-immigration demonstrations, e.g. ‘No one is illegal’ campaigns [Duvell et al., 2008; Dauvergne, 2009; Gambino, 2015; Repubblica, 2017] and hence undermines universally accepted humanitarian and ethical values, but it is also instantly associated with a criminal act (Sciortino, 2004; Paspalanova, 2008). The latter is highly debatable as few irregular migrants are actually criminals, i.e. defining asylum seekers who are ‘undocumented’ while waiting for their regularisation as criminals does not take into account well-founded reasons for leaving their home country (Sciortino, 2004; Dauvergne, 2009). In this respect, the UN general assembly suggested using the term ‘non-documented or irregular migrant workers’ defining those individuals who illegally enter another country in search of work (Paspalanova, 2008). Yet, as Ambrosini (2013) points out, also this definition is problematic seeing as the majority of irregular migrants actually enter the country in a regular manner (e.g. via travel or student visas) but then become “irregular” or “unauthorised” due to the overstaying of the permitted time period. Yet, the latter is less relevant in the case of people being physically smuggled over a country’s border, which is the main focus of the current literature review. Generally, it follows that one should differentiate between illegal immigration, which as an objective term as

it describes an illegal *action*, versus illegal immigrant which is more problematic as it carries with it ethical issues presented above. Yet, as irregular migration explains a wider, more general phenomenon than illegal migration, the current paper adopts the former definition.

## 2.2 *Refugee, asylum seeker, economic migrant*

The UN Convention (1954) defines a refugee as someone who is escaping conflict or persecution and who therefore seeks protection in a different country. According to the Convention's definition a refugee could be prosecuted for reasons such as religion, nationality, race, political opinion or for being a member of a certain social group). An *asylum seeker* on the other hand, is defined as 'someone who has submitted a request for asylum in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status' (IOM, 2011). The important difference between the two terms is that a refugee is (officially) an individual that has already received a positive answer to his or her request for protection, whereas an asylum seeker is still awaiting a decision. Moreover, a refugee is 'enshrined by international law, the other is subject to a country's immigration policies and procedures (IOM, 2011). In fact, administrative access to the initiation of a formal process of asylum seeking differs substantially between geographic regions (i.e. city vs remote rural areas, war zones vs intact communities etc.), thus rendering it virtually impossible for many individuals to enter into the different legally prescribed bureaucratic procedures for asylum seeking in distinct and sometimes even preferred EU member states (Crisp, 2003; Jödecke, 2016; Ambrosini, 2018).

An *economic migrant* on the other hand is 'a person who has left his or her own country and seeks by lawful or unlawful means to make a living for himself or herself (and their family in many cases) in another country' (Mitchell, 2017). The (economic) migrant hence, makes a conscious decision to leave the country for different reasons rather than those mentioned by the Convention's definition. However, this categorisation of people has met much criticism as it is not always easy to distinguish between the reasons for leaving and prioritising one motive over another may result in the victimisation or criminalisation of

people who move due to difficult realities in their countries such as poverty<sup>3</sup>, violence corruption or who are simply pursuing the chance for a better life.

Moreover, asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants often share the same irregular migratory routes and travel facilitating services, which in turn makes the distinction between these three terms less clear (Van Liempt 2007; Koser, 2010; Van Hear, 2009; Triandafyllidou, 2018). The most important/most used routes are the Eastern Mediterranean route<sup>4</sup> and the Central Mediterranean route<sup>5</sup>. However, as borders are tightening, not only at the EU external borders but also at those of cooperating neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Hungary (Sandford, 2017; Baczynska, 2018), there is increased militarised border control and migrant smuggling counter measures are enhanced (Leonard, 2011; Jones and Johnson, 2016; Rizvi, 2017; Achilli, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018), migratory routes are slowly shifting to the Western borders of Europe as well (e.g., Spain, experienced a doubling of irregular border crossings from 2016-2017 [The Economist, 2017; Frontex, 2018]).

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<sup>3</sup> It is to be noted that international migrants are often not part of the poorest sections of the population seeing as the cost of travel is often quite high (De Haas, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> In 2015 the greatest number of irregular migrants used this route to travel to the EU. Departing from origin countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, migrants travel to Greece via Turkey first and from there they decide whether to take one of the three different travel routes: (1) via the Western Balkans (through Croatia for example), (2) via the Eastern Balkans (via Hungary, Bulgaria or Romania) or (3) by sea towards Italy (Europol report, 2015). However, after the EU-Turkey agreement in 2016, irregular border crossings (especially via sea) decreased greatly on the Eastern Mediterranean route (Frontex, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Whereas Italy maintained the second place as EU country with most irregular migrant arrivals in 2015 (compared to Greece with the most arrivals), it moved to first place in 2016. Migrants departing from Northern African countries such as Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia arrive in Southern Italy and from there would make their way to Milan to then reach destinations in Northern Europe such as Switzerland, Austria or Germany or Western countries such as France (Europol report, 2015; EMSC report, 2016). Despite still representing the most heavily travelled route, since 2016 the number of irregular migrants having arrived in Italy has fallen by 34% from 2016-2017 (The Economist, 2017; Frontex, 2018). Often, many migrants departing from North African countries to get to Europe, have actually travelled there first from Central or West-African countries such as Bangladesh, Gambia, Cameroon, Senegal, Eritrea Ivory Coast, etc. Most of these migrants (whether economic migrants or refugees) travel to Niger by bus and then make their way to Libya. Hence, while the travel to and through Niger is often organised without the help of organised smuggling networks, the situation changes at the Libyan border where militias are heavily involved in the smuggling process (Micallef, 2017). Smuggling activities are either taxed by militias or they actually run migrant smuggling networks themselves (Micallef, 2017).



### *2.3 Trafficking vs smuggling*

Trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling are two terms that have frequently been used interchangeably, not only in the public discourse but also in the academic literature. In the past 15 years it has been widely debated in the literature whether to differentiate between the terms or not (Salt and Stein, 1997; Hughes, 2000; Aronowitz, 2001; Savona et al., 2003; Shelley, 2010; Gallagher, 2009; Campana and Varese, 2015). According to the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea (2000) ‘trafficking in persons’ is defined as ‘the recruitment, transportation, and harbouring of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion for the purpose of exploitation’, whereas the smuggling of migrants is defined as ‘the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident’.

Campana and Varese (2015) critically discuss arguments in support of (Salt and Stein, 1997) - and against the synergy or conflation (Shelley, 2010) of both terms and come to the conclusion that while migrant smuggling can turn into trafficking at a certain point, there are still vital differences between both phenomena that need to be highlighted. One of these differences is the commodity involved in both processes. In the case of smuggling, the commodity bargained with is the illegal entry into a country; this commodity is the fruit of the exchange between migrant and smuggler (Campana and Varese, 2015). In contrast, in the case of trafficking, the commodity involved is the ‘control over a human being’. Another distinctive feature is *against whom* the offence was committed. In the case of smuggling, it is an offence against the state’s immigration legislation, whereas trafficking involves an offence against the trafficked person involved (Campana and Varese, 2015).

Moreover, the degree of agency in both phenomena is different (Van Liempt and Doomernik, 2006). The level of agency of a smuggled person is higher than that of a trafficked individual, in fact in the latter it is often completely absent as trafficking involves coercion (Van Liempt and Doomernik, 2006). The trafficked person might be sold by a third party or might choose to trust the traffickers and then ends up being coerced and exploited. A smuggled person

on the other hand, accumulates the information on different smuggling organisations and then makes a choice for one or the other. Both alternatives might of course be undesirable, this depends on how much money the migrant possesses, but it is nonetheless a choice (Campana and Varese, 2015). When smuggling turns into trafficking at a certain stage, the agency of the smuggled or then trafficked person involved changes of course (Campana and Varese, 2015).

Another important difference is the role of exploitation in both cases. Campana and Varese (2015) adopt a definition of exploitation that is contextualised in a workplace scenario, where exploitation is hence defined as ‘the act of treating someone with substantial unfairness in order to benefit from their work’ (Campana and Varese, 2015: 4-5). This unfairness here could be paying people less than minimum wage, having to work under inappropriate conditions etc. In this sense exploitation is closely linked with trafficking as a strong empirical basis demonstrates (Lazaridis, 2001; Allain, 2012; van der Leun and van Schjndel, 2016). Exploitation in trafficking cases, as opposed to smuggling is also sexual in nature and involves humiliation, violence and health risks of various sorts (Salt and Stein, 1997; Gallagher, 2009; Toktas and Selimoglu, 2012).

In the case of smuggling, the situation is more complex. Exploitation in this case happens usually *after* the actual smuggling operation has already been carried out. For example, after having been smuggled into the EU, migrants that are undocumented may have to accept a job that has critical working conditions and is poorly paid; in this case, being forced to work in the informal economy is thus a result of not having documents and not a consequence of the smuggling operation itself (Campana and Varese, 2015). Another instance of potential exploitation might be the debt-bondage situation in which a migrant might find itself in, if he cannot pay for the smuggling service. Yet, it is argued that exploitation is not an integral element of smuggling, but of the debt-bondage (Campana and Varese, 2015). The important difference is that the migrant’s agency to exit an exploitative situation linked to smuggling is higher than that of a migrant who is trafficked.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, in line with

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<sup>6</sup> In the Italian public discourse one often hears the word ‘*traffico dei migranti?*’ (see Caserta, Premoli, 2017; Petrini, 2017). This is confusing, as the term seems to be translatable in English as ‘trafficking’, but it is not. ‘*Traffico?*’ in

Campana and Varese's arguments, this paper argues also for the differentiation between smuggling and trafficking and will focus specifically on smuggling as defined by the UN Convention. It is deemed most vital to maintain such a distinction between the two phenomena especially in the current political climate in which migrants are too easily criminalised and labelled as either victims or perpetrators. The reality of smuggling is much more complex as will be described by the following section.

### **3. Public (mis)perception**

The public perception of migrant smuggling is commonly ill-conceived and misleading (Achilli, 2016; Campana, 2017; Sanchez, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018). It is often dominated by a 'Mr Big' or 'mastermind' rhetoric that puts forward the notion of a small number of powerful, central crime figures, who have monopoly over the whole smuggling market and are comparable to Mafia-like syndicates (Maroukis, 2012; Achilli, 2016; Campana, 2017; Pastore et al., 2006; Sanchez, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018). Yet, how much of this narrative is founded on a robust empirical base still has to be assessed.

The popular account of human smuggling as portrayed by the lay press (Ryan, 2016; Wilkinson, 2016; Greenwood, 2017), is argued to be quite different to the reality of the market for human smuggling, which is in fact much more complex than what the 'mastermind' rhetoric claims. In line with scholars who argue for the latter, such as Campana (2017), Achilli, Sanchez and Zhang (2018), Triandafyllidou (2018) and Maher (2018), this paper attempts to readjust the ill-conceived public narrative to one that is more consistent with what the actual market for smuggling in Europe looks like today.

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the Italian public discourse makes no distinction between smuggling and trafficking. However, a difference is made in the legal sphere: migrant smuggling is dealt with under article 12 paragraph 1, *Testo Unico* on Immigration (law 189 of 2002) which regards 'facilitating illegal immigration' (Savona et. al, 2003). Trafficking in human beings, on the other hand, corresponds to 'tratta di esseri umani'. This paper will focus on the former. The article related to migrant smuggling in the Italian penal code was reformed by the Bossi-Fini law (no.189, 2002) which introduced a range of aggravating circumstances to the crime such as: intention to gain profit from smuggling, participating in this criminal activity with more than three people, facilitating the entry of more than 5 people, providing false or illegally obtained documents, degrading or inhumane treatment of subjects involved, etc. (Savona et al., 2003).

To do so is a fundamentally important task of current research into migrant smuggling, as the existing rhetoric has already conceived highly problematic consequences: ‘accounts that tell stories of poor and desperate individuals deceived by organised crime cartels’ have resulted in the political perception of criminalising irregular migration in which ‘the evil is represented by the smugglers’ and in which the migrants are the victims (Kyle and Koslowski, 2001; Achilli, 2016; Triandafyllidou, 2018). While this rhetoric has surely raised public awareness and policy interest, this narrative inadequately addresses the relations between smugglers and migrants (Achilli, 2016). Both Campana (2017) and Achilli (2016) hence argue that there is a need to understand migrant smuggling and the actors involved in this phenomenon *better* and in all its complexity. This understanding is fundamental to the pursuit of EU policies that are effective in reinforcing EU member states’ control over their borders but also and at the same time, ensuring migrants’ safety and avoiding human rights violations.

A specific notion which is often misperceived is the relationship between smuggler and migrant. In the public discourse (see sensationalist newspaper articles cited above), we often see the image of the ruthless, greedy, violent smuggler who exploits the innocent migrant (Achilli, 2015; Sanchez, 2017, Triandafyllidou, 2018). However, it is vital not to oversimplify the facilitator-traveller relationship as it is more complicated than a simple ‘exploiter and exploited’ scenario because the lines that differentiate one from the other are often blurred.

While there is no fixed demographic ‘smuggler profile’ as facilitators have very diverse backgrounds, empirical evidence shows that the majority of smugglers are male<sup>7</sup>, some were (irregular) migrants themselves once, who often share the nationality or language of their ‘clients’ and often are family members, friends or acquaintances of the smuggled clients (Zhang, 2002; Achilli, 2015; Sanchez, 2017). Importantly, smugglers are also most often marginalised individuals (e.g. low-income workers) (Sanchez, 2017). At most, one might say that facilitators share the general characteristic of being entrepreneurial and prefer working

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<sup>7</sup> This generalisation comes from the statistics of arrested smugglers who are predominantly male. This is important to note as the role of the women in these smuggling networks is sometimes overlooked due to the fact that they are carrying out different and potentially less visible tasks than men (Zhang, Chin and Miller 2007; Sanchez, 2016).

independently (Zhang 2007 and Achilli, 2015 in Sanchez, 2017). These characteristics however seem to suggest that smuggling is simply a job opportunity for individuals with motivation to work but have few alternatives (or do not want to) do so in the legal job market.

The criminalisation of the smuggler figure in the public discourse (Koser, 2010) does not acknowledge the fact that smuggling can be and is in fact also seen as a positive rather than negative activity in many migrant communities (Alpes, 2013; Scott, 2015; Belloni, 2016; Achilli, 2018; Coyne and Nyst, 2017; Maher, 2018). Smugglers often see themselves as people who are meeting the demand of people whose demands cannot be met through legal channels and are seen by irregular migrants (their customers) often as saviours or simply people trying to make a living (Van Liempt and Doornik, 2006; Alpes, 2013; Scott, 2015; Achilli, 2018). Achilli (2018) argues for smuggling to be a ‘moral economy’ to a certain extent in which not only profit matters but smugglers make ethical choices when it comes to the prioritisation of clients and the price that these clients have to pay, e.g. elderly, children, of shared nationality often pay less (also Sanchez, 2016).

The latter is of course only one side of the coin, as in certain contexts the situation is much different and here smugglers are violent, exploitative and only profit-oriented (special reference here is to the situation in Libya) (Colucello and Massey, 2007; Tinti and Reitano, 2017; UNHCR, 2017). However, most research, especially more recent empirical evidence (with an improved robust scientific methodology), shows that trust, cooperation, and strong social ties are more often than not, fundamental elements of the migrant-smuggler relationship (Zhang, 2008; Achilli, 2016; Belloni, 2016; Sanchez, 2017). In fact, Achilli (2016) and Herman (2006) argue that the resilience of such networks is often exactly based on the strength of the relationship between smuggler and migrant.

#### **4. The range of migrant smuggling networks**

Generally, authors agree that there is no empirical base for suggesting that major crime (mafia-type) syndicates are operating in Europe, which universally control

the entire migrant smuggling business (Pastore et. al., 2006; Soudijn and Kleemans, 2009; Zhang, 2008; Achilli, 2016; Tinti and Reitano, 2017; Sanchez, 2017; Mandic, 2017; Campana, 2017, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2018). So what do migrant smuggling networks actually look like?

The market for migrant smuggling has been shaped by the instability and fast changing environment of irregular migratory flows (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Campana, 2017, 2018). The latter has also influenced the structure and traits of networks that are operating in this market. In order to cope with such instability, smuggling networks need to be flexible and easily adaptable in order to survive. Achilli (2016: 3) describes smuggling networks operating in and around the EU as ‘a system of flexible and independent – and largely family- based – organisations that enter into partnerships with one another for short periods’ (see also Pastore et al., 2006).

Research that was carried out in different areas of the Mediterranean in relation to smuggling (Antonopoulos and Winterdyk, 2006; Demir, Sever, Kahya, 2016; Achilli, 2017; Mandic, 2017; Campana, 2018) shows that the phenomenon is characterised by the use of diverse *modus operandi* [MO] which depend on factors such as origin of the smugglers, characteristics of the ‘client’ in question and the type of route taken (Achilli, 2016; Tinti and Reitano, 2017). All different types of smugglers and smuggling networks can be placed on a spectrum that ranges from single-service providers to multi-service providers (Tinti and Reitano, 2017; Achilli, 2016;). It is vital to understand the traits of networks located on each ends of this spectrum so as to be able to prioritise which ones pose the greatest threat and in order to develop effective counter measures.

‘Single-service providers’ of the smuggling market present the following characteristics: they are either individual entrepreneurs or small groups of individuals, who are strongly embedded in the local community (Neske, 2006; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Achilli, 2016; Demir, Sever, Kahya, 2016; Tinti and Reitano, 2017). Having these strong roots in the community makes these single-service providers experts on the organisation of the travel for a certain part of the migrant’s journey and do not have ties to people in the migrant’s country of origin (Neske, 2006; Achilli, 2016). In case of language or cultural differences the actual recruitment of the migrants can happen through

intermediary groups (Achilli, 2016). These single-service providers are usually used by migrants who travel by themselves without facilitation (in a legal manner for most of the journey, e.g. by public transport) and hence, need only to be assisted regarding a *specific* part of their journey (Neske, 2006; Achilli, 2016; Tinti and Reitano, 2017). In contrast to the popular narrative, these small-scale networks, rather than a single overarching crime syndicate, are the ones that are most common in operation when it comes to migrant smuggling (Pastore et al., 2006; Kaizen and Nonneman, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Tinti and Reitano, 2017; Sanchez, 2016; Mandic, 2017; Campana, 2017). It is imperative that the latter is emphasised, especially in the context of a political debate that focuses on combatting organised crime-related migrant smuggling. The type of counter-smuggling measures change according to how these networks are structured and operate and what geographic reach they have.

On the other end of the spectrum of migrant smuggling we find ‘multi-service providers’. These are bigger networks providing many travel services across sea, land, and air and who in comparison to the single-service providers, do have contacts in the migrants’ countries of origin (Neske, 2006; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Tinti and Reitano, 2017). The migrants who are in need of these services cannot legally enter the transit or destination countries. As it is already apparent from the name, the services offered by these networks are multiple and can vary from assisting border crossing or the escape of detention centres, hereby the smuggling process is a ‘stage-to-stage, pre-organised activity’ (Achilli, 2016: 3) which is led by a few *coordinators* who are independent from each other but work together (see also Neske, 2006; Pastore et al., 2006). Smuggling activities get outsourced by these figures to ‘local coordinators’, who are needed due to their strong ties to transit or destination country community and due to their contacts to local smuggling service providers (Neske, 2006; Achilli, 2016). Arguably, these services are also costlier as they involve a higher degree of coordination, sophistication and more contacts (Tinti and Reitano, 2017). However, this also means that the clients buying these services are not at the poorer end of the migrant spectrum.

The literature shows that rigid hierarchies are not a characterising feature of smuggling groups (Zhang, 2008; Pastore et al., 2006; Triandafillydou and Maroukis, 2012; Achilli, 2016; Tinti and Reitano, 2017; Sanchez, 2016;

Campana, 2017, 2018). Instead, research suggests a flexible structure with the absence of long-term agreements between people within the smuggling network and a diversification of roles (Pastore et al., 2006; Tinti and Reitano, 2017; Sanchez, 2016; Achilli, 2017; Campana, 2017, 2018). In most smuggling networks the following roles can be found: manager, recruiter, *porteur*, forgers, enforcers, receivers and drivers (Içduygu and Toktas 2002; Pastore et al., 2006, Demir, Sever, Kahya, 2016; Achilli, 2017). The first three present the most important roles within the network. The ‘manager’ acts as the group coordinator, manages the smuggling network more generally, and oversees the smuggling operations. The ‘recruiter’, who is often of the same ethnic background as the migrants, is responsible for getting in contact with the latter. The ‘porteur’ is in charge of leading the migrants across the actual border (Achilli, 2016). These loose and often relatively small networks are surrounded by more people – often locals – who work as ‘freelancers’ and carry out tasks of lookouts, drivers, providers of accommodation or shelter (Içduygu and Toktas, 2002; UNODC, 2011; Achilli, 2016; Triandafyllidou, 2018).

Thus, while migrant smuggling organisations with transnational reach offering multiple services exist, they are rare and their actual structure and operation stands in stark contrast with the ‘mastermind’ perspective of the public discourse (see above). In fact, Achilli (2016: 3) points out that it would be extremely difficult for one ‘single centralized organization to carry out all services alone along a route which comprises journeys of several thousand kilometres and in a market characterized by high levels of instability and unpredictability’. Yet, certainly, it is these multi-services providing networks who present the greatest threat to national governments, the legal economy and perhaps migrants themselves. Especially, as Triandafyllidou (2018) points out - in line with other scholars (Monzini, 2015; Stone-Cadena and Alvarez-Velasco, 2018) - that through repression measures, such as intensified border control, migrant smuggling networks have become increasingly professionalised. This aspect of the professionalisation and hence evolution of the smuggling business as consequence of specific policy measures is highly interesting and policy relevant, yet remains to be researched empirically.



## **5. Migrant smuggling: Economic vs Sociological perspective**

Generally, analysis of the current migrant smuggling literature suggests two opposing perspectives on this phenomenon: the economic view and the sociological approach on human smuggling. Yet, a thorough analysis which combines these two approaches (theoretically and methodologically) is still lacking. The current paper hence argues for a novel study doing exactly that.

The economic paradigm focuses on migration as a business driven mainly by economic motivations (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012). Key themes that are relevant to this paradigm regard the profit made from smuggling migrants, the modalities of money transfer which smuggling networks and migrants make use of cost-benefit calculation assumptions on the part of the migrant when choosing the right smuggling service (Tamuray, 2007); the fact that smuggling is skewed towards poorer migrants (Friebel and Guriev, 2006) and the impact of globalisation of transport and communication technologies on the professionalisation of smuggling networks (Salt and Stein 1997; Kyle and Koslowski 2001; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis; 2012).

Salt and Stein's (1997) market model sees international migration as a business composed of legitimate and illegitimate markets in which actors pursue profit and commercial gain, smugglers act as important intermediate agents for migration. The authors distinguish between various services offered by smugglers in different phases of the process and they acknowledge that smuggling comprises different stages. Yet, this approach has been criticised: early economic perspectives of smuggling did not distinguish between smuggling and trafficking, no distinction was made between degree of exploitation, and migrants were classified as criminal as they are seen as personally gaining from being smuggled (Koser, 2008). The purely economic version did not address why smuggling persists or how it adapts and why (Baird and Van Liempt, 2015).

Therefore, by analysing migrant smuggling into Austria as a model, Bilger, Hofman and Jandl (2006) have revised the simplistic business model and considered smuggling as 'transnational service industry'. The authors describe a market that is incomplete with imperfect information and outline of risk

reduction techniques. Yet, they present smuggling as well-organised, hierarchically controlled and technologically sophisticated enterprise (Baird and Van Liempt, 2016). However, this portrait of migrant smuggling is at odds with some of the available evidence already discussed above, i.e. there is no empirical evidence of hierarchical governing of smuggling.

The literature not only focuses on profit made on the part of the smugglers who offer their services but also on the part of the migrants' families. In line with this, Koser (2008) examines both, the economic costs but also the profit on the part of families in Afghanistan and Pakistan who sent one of their members illegally to the UK using the services of a smuggling network. The author argues that analysing migrant smuggling from an economic point of view is necessary in order to understand the cost-benefit calculation which a migrant's decision is based on: 'the expected income after the migration, the cost of the smuggling services (and whether it is affordable or not) and the overall equilibrium in terms of information, risks and profits of all the agents involved (smugglers and smuggled migrants)' (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012).

Yet, this purely economic analysis has been heavily criticised as it provides no insight into several important issues that impact greatly on migrant smuggling: for example, it ignores potential trust *vs* fear relations between service provider (smuggler) and customer (migrant); the smuggler's position in the greater migration network; fundamental social and cultural processes that facilitate irregular migration; and fails to convincingly explore that the economic factors that driving migrant smuggling are intimately embedded into a wider array of social relations and the internal social organisation of the specific smuggling networks at play (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis; 2012; Baird and van Liempt, 2016).

Also, the discussion above regarding the complex relationship between smuggler and migrant is a fundamental part of the sociological perspective on smuggling and part of the critique of a merely economic study. Therefore, while the economic approach gives vital insights to the study of migrant smuggling, it has to be acknowledged that economic calculations and elements interact and are affected by social relations.

Regarding the relational aspect between smugglers and migrants, Herman's study (2006) on the irregular migration of sub Saharan and North African migrants to Italy, Spain and the Netherlands deserves special attention. In line with Boyd (1989) and Staring (2001), Herman (2006) argues that social networks made up of familial, friendship and co-ethnic ties are vital when deciding on and planning to migrate. For example, knowing someone who has undertaken the same journey or already lives in the country of destination and can assist with finding the right smuggler or route, an accommodation or a job in the destination country, are vital push factors for migrating and the success of such a process (Herman, 2006). According to Herman (2006), strong rather than weak ties with people in transit or destination country are most important when deciding whether to migrate (Herman, 2006).

Alpes (2013) on the other hand, argues that in the case of people migrating to the UK from Cameroon, the decision to migrate is much more spontaneous and unplanned. Migrants copy what other migrants have done even without sharing strong family or friendships bonds. In line with the latter research and considering the fact that the demand to migrate has been persistent and the supply of smuggling services has increased as a response to this demand (Frontex, 2018), it would be of interest to see in how far weak ties (see Granovetter's 'Strength of weak ties theory', 1973), especially between smugglers and migrants, are sufficient in starting this migration process. Another unexplored aspect regards the nature of ties between smugglers themselves. Are smuggling networks made up of actors bound by ethnic, familial or friendship ties or are people linked by weak ties only? The study proposed by this paper attempts to answer these questions.

These social elements of trust and solidarity within smuggling networks that Herman (2006) and others (Sanchez, 2017; Maher, 2018; Achilli, 2018) are raising, is vital to the study of networks because it underscores the importance of 'non-profit' elements in (migrant) smuggling operations (Baird, Van Liempt, 2016). This notion gives a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of smuggling as not merely economic activity, but one that depends much on social relationships and trust in order to function. Hence, the way in which a socio-economic study of illegal markets can be fruitful is in the analysis of trust relationships and how they emerge between actors of diverse backgrounds

within a market so ridden with uncertainty and unfavourable market conditions (Hübschle, 2015; Granovetter, 2017). One might investigate, according to Granovetter's categories for the different sources of trust (where trust is either based on: (i) rational calculus; (ii) on personal relationships; (iii) belonging to a specific social group; (iv) institutions; (v) based on norms), what type of trust is most significant within migrant smuggling networks.

Moreover, combining the sociological aspect of smuggling with the economic ones is vital as 'migrant facilitation activities should be understood as embedded in local economies, often through the involvement of local travel agents of various sorts' (Triandafyllidou, 2018). Local economic dynamics often support smuggling services. For example, small shop owners selling life jackets, car owners who transported customers, owners of houses/hotels who let people stay for-a-fee (non-taxed), all profit from and drive this parallel economy. In this respect, migrant smuggling has created these type of job opportunities in the first place and, hence, has its own socio-economic dynamic (Triandafyllidou, 2018). Smuggling networks 'operate through a combination of economic motivation and profit as well as social meanings of trust and community in a highly insecure environment that needs to be appraised in all its complexity' (Triandafyllidou, 2018: 3). The interplay between moral obligation, and economic profit and dependence is very tight.

Through the analysis of human smuggling from a socio-economic perspective the social organisation of the smugglers' networks is revealed (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Demir, Sever, Kahya, 2016). While current research has shown that smuggling networks are more than less loosely organised, authors agree that there is still some form of role and function diversification as this literature review has shown as well. Especially the more recent and arguably more robust empirical studies on migrant smuggling show that in actual fact one is faced with complex smuggling *networks* rather than complex smuggling *organisations* (Demir, Sever, Kahya, 2016; Campana, 2018). These smuggling networks are complex also due to the fact that most networks did not simply emerge recently, but are rather born out of 'historical patterns of movement, trade and exchange' (Triandafyllidou, 2018: 6). Yet, the socio-economic analysis of migrant smuggling has been mainly limited to studying the social organisation of smuggling networks. A socio-economic analysis that investigates the social

relations between smugglers and in how far these relations impact the economic transactions within the network is of yet missing. In this respect, the role of trust within smuggling networks, which is an element that has repeatedly surfaced in the literature, would be an interesting and important avenue of a novel socio-economic analysis of migrant smuggling. Whether it is the level of trust that a migrant puts into the smuggler to deliver the service paid for or into the mere reputation of said smuggler or the trust that is the essential basis for the *Hawala* money transfer system, trust seems to play a significant role in this illegal market that is ridden with uncertainty. One constellation that has not been considered in the literature but could enrich our understanding of the supply side greatly, is the trust that smugglers place in other smugglers within their own network. How important is said trust for the success of a specific smuggling operation? What keeps smugglers that have adopted different roles within the network from free-riding (i.e. running away with the money or exposing the criminal network to the authorities)?

The last section of this critical literature review proposes a new study perspective, which takes exactly this element of trust into consideration and systematically combines the economic and social perspective on migrant smuggling by means of a mixed methodological study on the migrant smuggling market in Northern Italy.

## **6.0 Migrant smuggling: A socially-embedded illegal market**

Becker and Wehinger (2012) argue that illegal markets are an important but yet an under-researched field of economic sociology, despite their great economic, political and social significance. The authors distinguish illegal markets from the informal economy which has been researched more extensively from a socio-economic perspective (Portes and Haller, 2005; Agarwala, 2009). The latter can include the exchange of *licit* goods (the circumvention of standards or economic exploitation then makes this market informal) (Becker and Wehinger, 2012). An illegal market however, is defined as ‘a place or situation in which there is constant exchange of goods and services, whose production, marketing and consumption are legally forbidden or severely restricted by the majority of states’ (Arlacchi, 1987). However, as Mayntz (2015) argues, an illegal market constitutes not only one where the production of goods is illegal (e.g., human

smuggling/trafficking, drug trafficking etc.) but also one where the exchange itself is illegal (e.g. organ trafficking, prostitution, etc.). Human or migrant smuggling, in this case, can be defined as a market in which the product itself is illegal, i.e. the ‘entry into a country’ for someone who is undocumented (Campana, 2017).

The important characteristic that defines a market as illegal is the absence of legal protection of property rights usually provided for by the state in legal markets (Beckert and Wehniger, 2012). This creates many challenges for illegal market operators:

- how to reduce uncertainty and risk in the market (i.e. how to assess product quality without formally enforced quality checks; asymmetric distribution of information between consumer and client; no legally enforceable warranties);
- how to protect oneself from (price) competition (e.g. corruption as strategy to avoid or circumvent competition is crucial in this respect);
- how to cooperate and trust business partners and clients/customers within an illegal market characterised by social risks of exchange such as the non-compliance regarding not legally enforceable contracts (Mayntz, 2015).

In illegal markets as compared to legal markets, pre-modern trust devices are therefore adapted to enforce cooperation: personal relationships rather than institutions play a key role; furthermore, reputation, reliability and intermediaries who can vouch for the former two traits are vital elements when it comes to the functioning of an illegal market (Mayntz, 2016).

These illegal market characteristics can be well applied to the study of migrant smuggling networks. For example, there is the issue of ‘information asymmetry’ (i) between smuggler and migrant. The smuggler, having more information about the routes to take and how to cross the border without being uncovered is in stronger position than the migrant, who is confronted with the challenge of information collection and verification regarding the smuggler (Akerlof, 1970; Campana, Varese, 2015). Yet, despite the lack of legal devices there are certain ‘informal mechanisms’ that migrants and smugglers make use of to collect reliable information on each other and their services (Bilger et al., 2006).

For example, migrants actively collect information on the reputation of smugglers from among their acquaintances (Bilger et al., 2006; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Campana and Varese, 2015; Tinti and Reitano, 2017).

The above-mentioned characteristics of illegal markets are important in understanding the economic perspective that few scholars have adopted when analysing human smuggling as an example of such markets. Here, migrants represent the *demand* side of the market (i.e. buying the service of illegal entry into a country) while the smugglers who offer their services for the latter constitute the *supply* side (Van Liempt, 2007; Campana, 2017). Authors following this type of economic analysis agree on certain key characteristics of this particular illegal market.

First of all, the market is heterogeneous in its composition (Tinti and Reitano, 2017; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012). Moreover, it is flexible and highly adaptable to an environment that undergoes constant change (Monzini et al., 2015; Achilli, 2016; Campana, 2017). The market's adaptability presents itself through the varying migratory and smuggling routes which shift in response to increased law enforcement pressure (Monzini et al., 2015). The use of the 'Hawala' banking system, an informal remittance system in which money is passed from one trusted individual to another without the actual transfer of money through official banking systems (Leman and Janssens, 2015), is another example of how adaptable this market is in a context where police investigations become increasingly efficient at tracing money in order to identify a suspected criminal (EMSC 2017). There is also agreement on the fact that this market has no rigid hierarchical structure and that there is an absence of large monopolies by one 'firm' (i.e. criminal enterprise) over another (Pastore et al., 2006; Zhang, 2008; Mandic, 2017). Instead, it is an environment shaped by high competition between different networks or actors, especially due to the fact that barriers of entry to this market, i.e. set up and monitoring costs, are relatively low and skills needed in order to part-take in smuggling are limited (Campana, 2017; EMSC report 2018). Last but not least, the literature suggests that actors within this market do not remain in long-term contracts with each other but actually engage in short-term bonds of employment (Monzini, 2015; Tinti and Reitano, 2017; Achilli, 2016; Campana, 2017).

A fair critique of the public discourse on migrant smuggling that has been posed by Sanchez (2017) is that this market is often described as extremely profitable to the criminal networks involved, even though estimating the actual size and turnover of this market is very difficult. In almost no cases do smugglers keep official records of their clients or profits, different fees are charged to different people (depending on characteristics like age, health, nationality, whether it is a family member or distant acquaintance, distance to be travelled, mode of transport, route, access to state actors or document to be provided, risk calculation factors etc.) (Sanchez, 2017). Moreover, it deserves consideration that not everyone in the smuggling network might receive the same amount of pay as there is a clear diversification of roles within the network (see discussion below); for example, those individuals that are responsible for simple tasks such as guiding or driving migrants from one place to another may only make a fraction of the amount of money earned by individuals who organise documents or intermediaries who have important business, law enforcement or political contacts.

The measurement of the smuggling market size could be enhanced by comparatively analysing different migrant smuggling cases within one jurisdiction and retrieving quantitative data on economic transactions and money flow from case files as well as through qualitative interviews with smugglers who have been imprisoned as a result of the investigation. Qualitative interviews with migrants who suit the 'client' profile of the smuggled migrants in the relevant investigation could also prove valuable in providing information on the service fees paid.

It should be noted that the different analyses of the smuggling market discussed in this paper are based on: quantitative analysis of border crossings, which are used as the unit to describe the smuggling market (since these crossings are almost always made with the help of smugglers [Campana, 2016; Europol, 2016; Frontex, 2018]); but also interviews with FRONTEX operational analysts who have interviewed migrants about their journey to Italy, and most often studies are based on direct interviews with migrants and to a lesser extent also with smugglers (Demir, Sever, Kahya, 2016). However, these studies include almost always either a quantitative analysis *or* a qualitative approach. Exceptions to this is Campana (2018) who presents a mixed methodology for the analysis



of migrant smuggling which displays a more complete and nuanced analysis of the phenomenon at hand. This paper suggests following this example while studying a different aspect of the migrant smuggling business (see *infra*).

## **7. Unintended consequences of repression measures**

Measures that have been implemented to-date in order to tackle migrant smuggling have mostly been restricted to enhancing border control, law enforcement action and adopting increasingly restrictive immigration and asylum policies (Carling, 2017; Ambrosini, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2018). EU governments are set on following security-oriented policy implementation (Gathmann, 2008), as has shown the creation of the European border agency Frontex in 2004 (Achilli, 2016) but also the establishment of the Europol division of the EMSC (European Migrant Smuggling Centre). The EU Agenda hence remains set on preventing irregular migration flows by fighting smuggling networks (Achilli, 2016; Triandafyllidou, 2018).

After an 87% decrease in migrant arrivals from Libya at the border of Italy in July and August 2017, compared to the year before (Wintour, 2017), it might have seemed as though repressive policy measures were working. Yet, the measure that led to this reduction in arrivals included a controversial pact made by Italy's interior minister Minniti with Libyan militia groups to counter migrant smuggling and also the training of Libyan coastguards in preventing ships from leaving the Libyan coast (Orsini and Roos, 2017; Paravacini, 2017; Wintour, 2017; Walsh and Horowitz, 2017). This measure, as argued by the UN and human rights associations (Amnesty International, 2017) resulted in migrants (including refugees) remaining trapped in Libya's infamous and violent detention centres (Mannocchi, 2017; Raghavan, 2017; OHCHR, 2018).

Thus, the currently available evidence suggests that these measures have had little positive effect in tackling the smuggling of migrants. In fact, some authors argue the contrary, namely that said measures had unintended consequences (Carling, 2017; Campana, 2017; Sanchez, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Stone-Cadena and Álvarez Velasco, 2018), e.g. by redirecting immigrant flow through illegal channels' (Achilli, 2017: 137).

Specifically, operations to control sea borders have been proven to be extremely costly and often quite inefficient (Campana, 2017). This was exemplarily demonstrated by the evolution of smuggling across the Eastern Mediterranean corridor, as blocking smuggling networks in one area resulted merely in the re-routing of irregular migration flows elsewhere (Guiraudon and Joppke, 2012; Achilli, 2016). Moreover, tightened border control measures also may have themselves contributed to endangering the lives of migrants as smuggling networks were forced to carry out their services along more dangerous routes (Pécoud and Guchteneire, 2006; Achilli, 2016; Carling, 2017; Sanchez, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018). Also, these border control measures arguably have made migrant smuggling more profitable for smugglers as higher fees can be solicited from increasingly pressurised customers (Gathmann, 2008; Roberts et al., 2010). Most recent literature on smuggling argues that border control policies have led to smuggling networks being able to deliver ‘specialized services to would-be migrants in a systematic and standardized manner’ (Achilli, 2016: 103; see also Triandafyllidou, 2018).

In his paper Carling (2017) presents a taxonomy of strategies for countering migrant smuggling. This taxonomy is divided into strategies that curb supply and strategies that involve tackling the demand side of the market. It is argued, that suppression of supply in the migrant smuggling market can be divided into three strategies: (i) removing suppliers (e.g. dismantling smuggling networks, arresting smugglers); (ii) deterring suppliers (e.g. increasing penalties and the risk of getting involved in smuggling in the first place) and (iii) removing resources needed for migrant smuggling, e.g. vessels, smuggling-advertisement websites or corrupt officials (Carling, 2017).

Yet, most of the relevant literature points to the fact that suppressing the supply of smuggling services is not an effective solution for countering the issue at hand, due to the unintended consequences mentioned previously and it is rather the demand for smuggling services that needs to be tackled (Fargues, Bonfanti, 2014; OECD, 2015; Campana, 2017). It is suggested, that the cause of irregular migration should be tackled, even though it is acknowledged that it is a much harder task (Carling, 2017), since realistically, it is typically beyond the political and economic reach of individual states into which migrant smuggling occurs

(such as Italy). Overall, strategies proposed in the literature remain too general and poorly defined to be of much practical use to policy makers.

Carling presents three different strategies to curb demand for migrant smuggling services: (i) making use of smugglers needless (providing protection closer to home, large-scale relocation of recognised refugees, humanitarian visas for asylum seekers); (ii) making the use of smugglers futile (i.e. by suppressing illegal employment in destination countries, enforcing readmissions agreements and ensuring rapid returns). However, the latter strategy is contested as it often easily infringes on migrant's human rights (DeBono, 2017). Last but not least, Carling (2017) suggests a strategy of (iii) changing the cost-benefit balance for migrants who wish to buy smuggling services (making the cost of being smuggled higher than the perceived outcome, making alternatives to smuggling more attractive). Yet again, especially in the last example, the strategies put forward are not clear enough for practical implementation.

At this point a combination of policy measures would be the most effective solution (OECD, 2015; Carling, 2017). Security measures can only show success if accompanied by other solutions such as: the establishment of more legal channels and the strengthening of present ones for refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. family reunification, university fellowships, training programmes; labour mobility); the granting of humanitarian visas and the creation of humanitarian corridors leading to Europe; the expansion of resettlement programmes (Achilli, 2016; Campana, 2017; Carling, 2017). Generally, scholars argue for a migration policy that views migration in a positive manner and is open to it while at the same time controlling the extent of migratory flows (Leman and Janssens, 2015).

However, arguing for this type of solution is increasingly difficult in the xenophobic climate that has developed in many EU countries (Coluccello and Massey, 2015; Mierina and Korojeva, 2015). The latter makes it even more crucial to raise awareness of the actual nature of migrant smuggling and to change the public discourse on the topic. This paper represents an attempt to achieve the latter goal; the presentation of a new research perspective on migrant smuggling (see *infra*) seeks to enhance the understanding of this specific illegal market and the ways in which to counter it most effectively.

## 8. Conclusion

Overall, this literature review has highlighted the following issues concerning migrant smuggling research: (i) ambiguous terminology around irregular migration creates difficulties in being able to compare diverse research on what appears to be the same phenomenon, (ii) the debate on whether to differentiate between smuggling and trafficking of human beings divides researchers; (iii) most research is either qualitative or quantitative, there is a lack of mixed methodologies, (iv) there is a lack of research involving interdisciplinary approaches to the study of migrant smuggling (of special interest is the nexus between sociological; economic and criminological perspectives), (v) migrant smuggling internal to the EU Schengen zone remains unexplored, (vi) the role of 'trust' *within* migrant smuggling networks as vital part of the functioning of this specific business remains un-researched.

Thus, it is vital for further research on migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean and beyond, to acknowledge these key issues in order to improve the scientific understanding of this specific illegal market. Studies regarding this phenomenon need to clearly define precise elements of the facilitation of irregular migration that are being scrutinised in the research. In line with other authors, it is argued here, that a distinction shall be maintained between trafficking and smuggling of people in further research as the amalgamation of these terms only gives further impetus to a highly criminalising rhetoric concerning migrant smuggling and overlooks elements of social embeddedness such as trust between smuggler and migrant.

The geographic location, as well as the social, political, legal and economic reality in which migrant smuggling occurs has to be acknowledged and the potential impact of said context should be discussed. The latter calls for an interdisciplinary theoretical framework as basis for migrant smuggling research. As this review has demonstrated, migrant smuggling is a phenomenon which is complex, multi-faceted and hence difficult to generalise. An interdisciplinary approach also implies that a mixed method analysis incorporating and applying both quantitative and qualitative research techniques in order to study smuggling networks would be highly beneficial if not required in order to grasp all the elements of the phenomenon. The latter would mean that migrant

smuggling could be looked at both, on a general level and on an individual network level. Tools for measuring the size of the overall smuggling market could be enhanced especially by studying different specific facilitation networks.

This amalgamation of perspectives in the study of migrant smuggling is expected to provide not only a deeper and more comprehensive picture of the issue itself, but is also hoped to build a basis for the study of illegal markets more generally. Moreover, this improved and more robust empirical understanding of the facilitation of irregular migration is hoped to provide a baseline for guidelines regarding preventative policies that are more realistic, human rights-respecting and efficient than those currently adapted.

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