Human Smuggling as a Transnational Service Industry
Evidence from Austria

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Abstract

This paper presents a new approach to the understanding of human smuggling processes. Based on insights gained through in-depth interviews with forty-six smuggled migrants in Austria as well as a broad range of other sources, the authors explain how the phenomenon of human smuggling can be understood as a transnational service industry linking service providers (human smugglers) with their clients (smuggled migrants). The paper explores how certain aspects of this peculiar service industry, in particular the nature of incomplete information prevalent in the market, lead to a variety of risk-reduction strategies pursued by smuggled migrants, who put a high premium on a "good reputation" and "trustworthiness" of human smugglers. These factors, together with other distinctive features of this specific market, render human smuggling structurally distinct from other criminal activities such as trafficking in human beings or the smuggling of illicit goods and call for new approaches in tackling the challenge.

Key Words

Human smuggling, social organization, reputation, trust, information, migration industry

Introduction

It is commonly accepted today that during the 1990s the phenomenon of organized human smuggling, i.e. the facilitation of illegal entry to states for profit, has grown enormously across Europe. Numerous newspaper articles, TV documentaries, police reports and even parliamentary inquiries have thrown glimpses of light on the harsh realities of a business that is likely to be generating billions of dollars of profit on a worldwide scale.[1] Increasingly, human smuggling has been linked to organized crime, threats to the sovereignty and the internal security of states and the exploitation of human beings in desperate situations.[2] It is against this background that the fight against illegal migration, human smuggling and trafficking has been accorded a high priority for law enforcement in Europe and beyond.[3]

This article will look at human smuggling from a novel perspective. Drawing on insights gained from in-depth interviews with forty-six smuggled migrants as well as a broad range of other available sources, the phenomenon of human smuggling is conceptualized as a transnational service industry that is structurally distinct from other transnational illegal activities often associated with it, such as trafficking in human beings or the smuggling of goods (e.g. illicit drugs or weapons).[4]

When looking at the structure and dynamics of human smuggling, one needs, first of all, a good working definition of the research subject. The definition of human smuggling and trafficking applied by the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its two supplementary protocols dealing with the subjects of human smuggling and trafficking in human beings, respectively, provide a useful starting point.[5]

Thus, Article 2 of the "Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air" states that

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[1] A rough estimate places the profits generated through human smuggling activities to the EU-25 alone at some USD 4 billion. For sources and methods used in this estimation, see Jandl (2003).

[2] It is worth remembering that this was not always so. Throughout the Cold War, where communist countries prohibited the exit of their nationals at gunpoint, the facilitation of a flight to the West, beyond the so-called "Iron Curtain", was widely regarded as a noble cause and both migrants and smugglers were welcomed in the "free world". It is not unlikely that this positive reputation of human smugglers in many border regions of Europe has facilitated their transformation into pure (illegal) business operations.

[3] See, for example, the Council Framework Decision of 28 November 2002 on the strengthening of the penal framework to prevent the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and residence (2002/946/JHA).

[4] Our research results form part of the work of the multi-year European Collaborative Research Project on "Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Migrants. Types, Origins and Dynamics in a Comparative and Interdisciplinary Perspective", carried out from 2002 to 2005 in collaboration with five European migration research institutes on the initiative of the European Science Foundation (ESF) and with financial support of the Austrian Science Foundation (FWF).

[5] The Convention was signed on 15 December 2000 by a total of 124 countries. The full text of the Convention and the Protocols can be downloaded at
http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/index.htm (24.3.2004).

"Smuggling of Migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident." [6]

On the other hand, Article 3 of the "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children" states:

"Trafficking in Persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs." [7]

According to these definitions, the concepts of "human smuggling" and "trafficking in human beings" are thus substantially different. "Human smuggling" means helping with an illegal border crossing and illegal entry and, therefore, always has a transnational element. This is not necessarily the case with "trafficking in human beings", where the key defining element is the exploitative purpose and which can involve cases where no borders are crossed or, in cases where borders are crossed, where entry takes place legally as well as illegally. In the absence of exploitation smuggled migrants are, therefore, not in the same situation as victims of trafficking, which in turn has legal and practical consequences on the treatment of each group by law enforcement authorities. These differences in the legal, conceptual as well as practical meanings of the term "trafficking in human beings" as opposed to "human smuggling" also have a profound impact on the design of the research set-up suitable to each of these subject areas and it should be noted that our field research was limited to the phenomenon of human smuggling alone. [8]

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[6] Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, United Nations 2000. This Protocol entered into force on 28 January 2004, on the ninetieth day after the date of the deposit of the fortieth instrument of ratification.

[7] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, United Nations 2000. This Protocol entered into force on 25 December 2003, on the ninetieth day after the date of the deposit of the he fortieth instrument of ratification. In view of the difficulties of covering the wide range of types and manifestations of phenomena to be subsumed under the term "trafficking" the Protocol only sets minimum standards to be exceeded and supplemented by Member States according to their own needs and intentions.

[8] Our focus on human smuggling rather than trafficking in human beings does not deny that at times these two categories may also overlap. However, in all our contacts with smuggled migrants we encountered only one such case that had a discernable trafficking element in it, hardly enough to make valid generalisations. The very difficulty of identifying clear-cut cases of trafficking in human beings is, of course, also a matter of great concern to the police. In 2003, a total of 169 cases of trafficking in women had been notified to the Austrian police, which was more than double the number of 2002 (Source: Wiener Zeitung, 11 March 2004, p.10). This contrasts starkly with the thousands of human smuggling cases identified annually by the police (see Republik Österreich, various years). Moreover, the deplorable situation of the victims of human trafficking (working predominantly as sex workers on the street, in private apartments or in bars) does not

Background: Human Smuggling to Austria

The findings of the article are mainly based on interviews with migrants who came into contact with human smugglers in at least one stage of their journey to Austria. All interviewees where thus either based in Austria or were transiting through Austria. The Austrian case can be considered fairly typical for human smuggling across land borders in Central Europe, yet it also contains some specificities. With the breakdown of the "Iron Curtain" in 1989 and the post-communist transformations in the 1990s leading to increased irregular migration to Western European countries, human smuggling became an increasingly recognised phenomenon in Austria. Due to its historical ties and its geographical position, the country represents an important stage for human smuggling processes along the land routes passing through Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Europe. In the years prior to the 5th Enlargement of the European Union in 2004 Austria functioned as an important entry point into the European Union for irregular migrants entering the Union from the East. Over the next few years, until their full accession to the Schengen Area, Austria will still share an external Schengen-border with four of the 10 new EU Member States.

In the following section, a brief overview of indicators on human smuggling to and through Austria is presented as a background.

Making viable statements about the quantitative extent of irregular migration or even human smuggling is inherently problematic as, by its very nature, it concerns undocumented and unobservable events.[9] Due to their hidden nature, irregular migration and human smuggling cannot be measured precisely. Statements on the quantitative extent of such phenomena are based on the availability of statistics on observed events, which are usually collected for administrative purposes (e.g. by the police and border guards) and are necessarily incomplete. Existing estimates are based on the extrapolation of data coming from sources like border apprehension figures, asylum applications or data on regularizations Though these data do not allow for an exact measurement of the size of irregular migration in and to a country, "they can be analyzed for trends" in this respect (Heckmann, 2004: 1107). Nevertheless, in recent years the collection of statistics by the Austrian Federal Criminal Police on apprehensions of "illegal migrants", smuggled migrants and human smugglers has made steady improvements. With all necessary qualifications, these statistics do provide some valuable insights about the extent, structure and temporal development of human smuggling in Austria.

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lend itself easily to the research setup chosen for this study (especially migrant interviews), raising difficult questions of access to trafficking victims, security, psychological stress etc.

[9] Note that the terms "illegal migration" and "irregular migration" are often used interchangeably. Strictly speaking, however, "illegal migration" refers to the illegal crossing of borders only, while "irregular migration" covers a wider area of irregularities in the status of migrants (e.g. illegal residence after the expiry of visas – "visa overstayers").

Between 1993 and 1999 the overall number of "illegal migrants" apprehended in Austria went up by 1,800% in total, from 2,097 to 39,863. [10] These numbers include both migrants apprehended for illegal border crossing and migrants apprehended for illegal residence in the country (including so-called "visa-overstayers"). During the same period, apprehensions of human smugglers went up by 740%, from 351 in 1993 to 2,949 in 1999. Since 2000, the statistics collected by the Austrian Federal Criminal Police (see Republik Österreich, 2002/2003/2004) further distinguish between illegal migrants, whose entry to Austria can be directly connected to human smuggling activities ("smuggled persons") and those who have illegally crossed the border on their own accord or who have been apprehended for illegal residence within the country ("illegal entry/stay"; see Table 1).

Table 1: Smugglers, Smuggled Persons and Illegal Migrants in Austria*					
	2000	2001	2002	2003	% change 2000-2003
Smugglers	2.564	2.294	1.230	1.025	-60%
Smuggled Persons	10.926	15.508	19.627	18.533	70%
Illegal Entry/Stay**	32.240	30.857	27.579	25.568	-21%
Total	45.730	48.659	48.436	45.126	-1%

* All apprehensions in country and at border

** Illegal entry/stay includes migrants apprehended for illegal border crossing or "visa overstaying"

Source: Republik Österreich (2002/2003/2004)

These figures provide further evidence of increasing smuggling activities to Austria (70% increase of apprehended smuggled migrants between 2000 and 2003), while at the same time changes in the strategy of smuggling operations led to fewer apprehensions of human smugglers (-60%). Basically, in reaction to stepped-up enforcement efforts in recent years, human smugglers increasingly try to avoid crossing the border themselves. The new *modus operandi* involves operations in the vicinity of borders for delivering and collecting migrants at certain meeting points, while the borders are crossed by the migrants alone or in groups acting on the directions of their smugglers.[11]

In 2003, the Austrian Federal Criminal Police for the first time provided statistics on points of entry for smuggled migrants. While these statistics are necessarily unreliable and incomplete (in 40% of all cases the entry point remained undetermined), the figures do show that the bulk of all smuggled migrants entered Austria via external Schengen-borders, mainly Slovakia (26%) and the Czech Republic (20%). Relatively few entered via Hungary (10%), Italy (3%) and less than 1 % via Germany, Slovenia and Switzerland,

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[10] It is likely that part of the increase in apprehension figures during the 1990s can be attributed to increased enforcement measures (moderate increases in the number of border guards, modernization of surveillance equipment, improved detection methods) and to improved data-collection methods within the Ministry of Interior.

[11] According to the statistics from the Federal Criminal Police, in 2003, 41% of apprehended smuggled migrants crossed the border single and a further 41% crossed the border in groups of up to 5 persons. 12% crossed in groups between 5 and 10 persons, 6% in groups between 10 and 30 and less than 1% in groups larger than 30 persons. See Republik Österreich (2004), p. 26.

respectively. Almost half (47%) of all apprehended smuggled migrants to Austria crossed the green border on foot, while only a minority came to Austria via plane (15%), by car (9%) or with another means of transport (Republik Österreich, 2004: 27f).

Looking at the most important nationalities of smuggled persons apprehended in Austria it becomes evident that these are closely linked to the country's geographic position and the prevailing smuggling routes leading from Eastern and Southern Europe to the West. Over the past half-decade the most important countries of origin of apprehended smuggled migrants in Austria have included Afghanistan, Armenia, Bangladesh, China (PR), Georgia, India, Iran, Iraq, Moldova, Pakistan, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia-Montenegro, Turkey and Ukraine.

The internationally observed trend towards a feminization of international migration in recent years has been reflected in irregular migration patterns to Austria as well, though the majority of migrants smuggled to Austria still comprise men. In 2003, 74% of apprehended smuggled persons were male, 26% female. Smuggled migrants are comparatively young, with 44% of persons being between 19 and 30 years old (Republik Österreich, 2004: 28).

Experts widely agree that Austria has to be perceived as a transit country rather than a country of destination for irregular migrants coming to Western Europe and heading to other Member States of the European Union as final destinations. Regarding the main entry points, border apprehension figures from Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic by and large confirm the main trends sketched above (Futo and Jandl, 2004). Regarding on-migration, border apprehension figures from Germany indicate that Austria has become by far the most important entry point for illegal border crossing into Germany (Bundesministerium des Inneren, 2004:110).

Conceptualizing human smuggling as a service industry

Contrary to the portrayal of human smuggling as a distinct form of "organised crime" in most media reports, our research indicates that the market for human smuggling services is in most cases not dominated by overarching mafia-like criminal structures, that have monopolized all smuggling activities from the source to the destination country. Rather, in many regions there exists a complex market for highly differentiated smuggling services offered by a multitude of providers that potential migrants can choose from.

The evidence collected from migrant interviews, echoed in many interviews with police and legal experts, indicates that there is often intense rivalry between smugglers competing for the same pool of clients. This competition mainly takes place on the horizontal level, i.e. between smugglers operating out of a common "smuggling hub" or along the same stages of smuggling routes, as when smugglers try to force competitors out of the market by denouncing them to the border guards. At the same time, interaction with other smuggling operators on the vertical level, i.e. the preceding or subsequent stages of a smuggling route, is more likely to involve cooperation than competition, for

example in ensuring a constant flow of new customers from source countries or in passing on or directing one's own clients to new contact points further down the line.

The presence of a great number of "suppliers" (smugglers) and "customers" or "clients" of smuggling services (smuggled migrants) in market-like conditions leads us to characterize human smuggling as a transnational service industry.[12] This does not mean, however, that the business of human smuggling can be understood as a fully competitive service industry, in the economic sense of the term. In fact, while the forces of supply and demand are the basic parameters in this as in any other "industry", the human smuggling industry is governed by a number of peculiarities. One major characteristic is, of course, that human smuggling is an illegal activity, in most countries defined as a crime that is punishable by up to several years of imprisonment. This fact alone accounts for much of what characterises the structures and processes of the human smuggling industry, for example the high level of secrecy involved in smuggling operations, the "sealing-off" of different levels of operators within the business (whether within integrated or between separate organizations) and the minimum flow of information between smugglers and smuggled migrants (e.g. on identities, locations, time schedules, modus operandi, etc.) that is designed to leave clients in the dark as much as possible. [13]

From the migrants' perspective, it is this last point, which is especially troublesome and at the same time the most interesting one in terms of its effects on the structure of the smuggling industry. For a theoretical framework to analyse its effects, we will first borrow some concepts from economic theory.

A market with imperfect information

In much of economic theory a basic assumption made in the analysis of consumer-, producer- and market behaviour is that of perfect information of all actors involved. However, when that assumption is relaxed and situations where economic actors possess only imperfect information on goods and markets are explicitly examined, several interesting implications on market behaviour follow. In a seminal paper, published already in 1970, economist George Akerlof laid the foundations for all subsequent analyses of market behaviour under imperfect information. In his paper, Akerlof (1970) examines the market for used cars by way of a theoretical model. With this model he is able to show that if there are "good" and "bad" (so-called "lemon") cars in the used car market and buyers cannot accurately distinguish between them due to imperfect information (but sellers can), this would ultimately drive down the price of *all* used cars to the point where sellers of "good" used cars would withdraw from the market and only "bad" used cars would be sold for a lower price.[14] The general conclusion for markets

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[12] Our concept of human smuggling as a service industry is different from the classic model offered by Salt and Stein. In our view, this model, which conceives the subject as an "international business, involving the trading and systematic movement of people as 'commodities'", might be more applicable to trafficking in human beings rather than to human smuggling. See: Salt and Stein (1997).

[13] On these and other characteristic features of human smuggling, see, for example: Müller-Schneider, T. (2000) and Alt, J. (2001).

[14] Assume that sellers of bad cars (in slang, the latter are called "lemon", i.e. cars that are prone to frequent failures and breakdowns) would be willing to part with their cars for € 1,000, while sellers of good cars

under conditions of imperfect information is, that if too many low-quality items (that cannot be accurately assessed) are offered for sale it makes it difficult for owners of high-quality items to sell their products for an acceptable price.

The same phenomenon (which has become known in economic theory as "adverse selection") can also be observed in many other market situations.[15] The resulting "market failure" is, however, not the end of the story. Suppliers (and states) have devised all sorts of ingenious ways to overcome market failures due to externalities. In the used-car market, for example, the owners of the "good" used cars have an incentive to "signal" the quality of their car to potential buyers, in a way that the owners of the bad cars cannot do. One sensible signal that can convey that information is the offer of a warranty. Only the owners of the "good" cars can afford to offer such a warranty, while it would be too expensive for the owners of the "lemons" to offer it.[16]

These observations on markets under imperfect information are strikingly similar to our findings from primary research on the human smuggling industry. For various reasons (but primarily because smugglers want to conceal their activities from law enforcement authorities) potential clients have only imperfect information on the "quality" of the services they are about to buy from smugglers. This is advantageous for smugglers for several reasons: they have a lower risk of denunciation to the police, they can intimidate their clients and thereby gain better control over them during the journey and they can charge higher prices to the unaware even if their services are of the same or lower "quality" than that offered by others.[17] On the other hand, this situation of incomplete ("asymmetric") information also has a drawback for the smugglers. Just like in the "market for lemons" referred to above, it creates the problem for them of how to convince potential clients that one's own product (in this case, the smuggling services) is superior to that of others on offer and therefore merits a higher price (smuggling fee). The answer comes in several parts as smugglers, too, have devised various ways to "signal" their trustworthiness to potential clients.

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would be willing to sell their cars only for € 2,000. Buyers, in turn, would be willing to pay € 2,400 for a good car but only € 1,200 for a "lemon". But what happens if buyers cannot distinguish the quality of the car before buying? Under these circumstances, buyers might simply guess the average quality of all the cars and base their offer on the expected value of any car: If they think that there are 50% "good" and 50% "bad" cars in the market, they would offer ½ € 1,200 + ½ € 2,400 = € 1,800 for any car. The problem is, that at this price only the owners of the lemons would be willing to sell their cars and no "good" cars would be sold. But if this is the case, and buyers could be certain only to buy lemons, then they would be willing to pay only up to € 1,200 for any used car (which would be a lemon anyway). In fact, the market for "good" used cars has broken down! This illustration is taken from Varian (1987), pp. 582-599. A more formal model of this and other market failures due to imperfect information can be found in Varian (1992), pp. 440-472.

[15] For example, if health insurers cannot determine the level of risks of their clients, but those taking out health insurance can, the insurers can get stuck with a concentration of "bad risks".

[16] Similarly, in health insurance governments have legislated compulsory health insurance for all to prevent the "adverse selection" of insurance risks.

[17] In economic theory this is referred to as "price discrimination". It allows higher profits to be made by exploiting differences among customers' willingness or ability to pay.

Dealing with imperfect information

One, comparatively straightforward and easy to implement way to reduce the risks for the clients in choosing a smuggler is in adapting the method of payment for smuggling services to the perils of the journey. For example, smugglers may ask for only part of the payment up-front, with the rest due at the end of the journey. A more sophisticated method of payment can involve the transfer of the whole smuggling fee to a caretakers account, who releases the money step-by-step to the smugglers as certain stages of the journey are completed.

A second, and now increasingly commonly used way of "correcting the market failure" resulting from asymmetric information on the smuggling market is for the smugglers to offer "guaranteed smuggling" services. Particular arrangements can differ and may involve only the guarantee of a second or third trial, in case the first smuggling attempt fails or it may involve a "full-coverage" guarantee of smuggling until the clients have effectively reached their destination. By offering this type of "insurance" or "warranty" to the client (which, after all, involves potentially high costs for the smuggler in case the smuggling is unsuccessful) high-quality smugglers presumably can signal to their potential clients that their services are of higher value than those of others and that they therefore merit higher smuggling fees.

A third, and probably the most important instrument at the disposal of smugglers to convince their potential clients of their quality and trustworthiness is the build-up of reputation and trust. In a market-type situation gaining the trust of potential customers depends as much on one's appearance and behaviour towards the client than on a good reputation among other clients. However, in this particular, illegal, market reputation is hard to advertise and mostly depends on stories of successful smuggling from others. In fact, given the trade-off between the risks of conveying any type of information on their activities to the outside world and the necessity to "advertise" their services, ear-to-ear propaganda through migrants' networks is the only way for smugglers to successfully build up reputation and, hence, gain a competitive advantage over other smugglers.

Research methods and interview technique

The general research methods used in our research project on human smuggling include a thorough analysis of the available literature as well as legal and administrative documents, a comprehensive analysis of Austrian media reports for the period 1996 to 2003, the analysis of dozens of court files involving charges of human smuggling activities as well as 22 semi-structured „expert interviews" with knowledgeable individuals from a variety of backgrounds.[18] In order to obtain a reconstruction of social

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[18] For the period between 1996 and 2003 a total of 96 articles of regional and national Austrian newspapers, on trials against individuals engaging in human smuggling activities were analysed. 12 court files of trials against individuals engaging in human smuggling activities were reviewed. 22 expert interviews with officials in law enforcement, the border police, the criminal police, judges, prosecutors but also

events from an inside perspective, however, the main findings of our research are based on the insights gained from interviews with 46 migrants who had used the services of human smugglers for at least one stage in their migration projects. In order to identify all relevant aspects that are deemed relevant by respondents themselves, *narrative interviews* were carried out. This research technique is characterised by face-to-face encounters between the researcher and his or her respondents but, in contrast to other face-to-face interviews that follow a pre-determined structure, allow respondents to put their own emphasis on particular aspects they want to highlight. The goal is the examination of specific events and how these are negotiated and interpreted by persons who are themselves part of the (social) context in question.[19] Indeed, the usefulness of reconstructing parts of biographies by applying this specific research technique has been demonstrated in several studies within social science research.

The method is based on the underlying supposition that life-stories told are always specific to the narrator's experience, life worlds and its interpretations. By the use of this method, the narrators should be encouraged to depict whatever comes to their minds with regard to the topic of interest. The narrators are in a position to stress and highlight selected facts of vital importance from their point of view and portray them appropriately. As the stories told are specific to the narrators' experiences and life worlds, the interviews carried out reflect not only information on the individual him/herself or purely factual information on a process but they reconstruct specific social events from the informant's perspective and put them into sequence. This is supported by a setting in which the narrative is structured by the respondents themselves. Thus, personal experiences introduce new aspects to the research topic and shed light on aspects that would otherwise have been neglected. Finally, very specific implications can emerge as the narration at the same time accounts for motives, plans, time, place, points of orientation, strategies, abilities etc.

Most interviews were carried out in the respondent's first language. The written or taped records were then translated into German or English. All interviews were carried out by persons who have had previous experience with the interview technique or had been specifically trained on it. Due to the very nature of touching upon illegal or semi-legal activities, research involving smuggled persons raises a number of delicate issues. Smuggled migrants, who run the risk of being interviewed by officials (police, medical doctors, etc.) at any time, might be biased in an interview situation and therefore might choose to provide information of only limited use. Therefore, and in line with accepted standards of research ethics, anonymity and confidentiality were protected throughout the entire interview process – from the moment the person was contacted through the time when details of a case were made public. In addition, all interviews were carried out in a

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representatives of migrant NGOs, who come into contact with irregular and smuggled migrants, were conducted.

[19] During the interpretation and analysis phase of our research, particular care was taken to disentangle subjective interpretations of reality from factual indications on the structures and processes involved in order to minimize biases inherent to this type of research method and sample composition. See also: Bilger, V. and van Liempt, I., (2005): Conducting research among smuggled migrants in the Netherlands and Austria. Methodological reflections, in: Migraciones, Special Edition on Qualitative Research Methods, December 2005, forthcoming.

private surrounding and were strictly based on the voluntary participation of the respondents. Interviews were carried out either in single-person-settings or within very small groups, consisting of at most three persons. The time frame for each interview was scheduled between one and three hours whereby some individuals were interviewed several times when necessary.

Altogether 46 Persons were interviewed of which 38 were male and 8 were female including 3 families. Narrators originated from at least 22 countries altogether (see Table 2). The countries selected where either geographically distant from Austria and/or countries where visas were required, as in these cases it seemed more likely that migrants would have to fall back on smuggling services at least at some point during their journeys. Most interviewed persons left their home countries at some time between 1999 and 2004. Arrival in Austria covers the same time frame. Most of the persons interviewed were aged between 18 and 30 when leaving their country. Only two were older than 30 and six had supposedly left their countries as minors. More than half of the respondents in our study firmly stated that their educational level was clearly above average (university career, college degree, secondary school etc.) or described their social background as sophisticated.[20] The majority of the migrants interviewed were unmarried at the time of their travel. Only some of those older than 30 were married. Most women were traveling alone and were either divorced or unmarried.

During their residence in Austria the majority of interviewed persons were in one or the other way related to the asylum system.

Table 2: Composition of interview sample by nationality and gender

		Male	Female	Total
Middle East	Afghanistan	3		3
	Iran	2	1	3
	Iraq	6	1	7
	Pakistan	1		1
	Turkey	6		6
Subtotal		*18*	*2*	*20*
Far East	China	1		1
	Nepal	1		1
Subtotal		*2*		*2*
West Africa	Benin	1		1
	Gambia	1		1
	Guinea	1		1
	Sierra Leone	1		1
	Togo	1	1	2

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[20] Both international research studies and interviews with experts in Austria indicate that irregular migrants rather comprise individuals with middle and lower upper-class background than members of the lower class of the population in countries of origin. (See: Elwert, G.,(2002), Unternehmerische Illegale. Ziel und Organisation eines unterschätzten Typs illegaler Einwanderer, in: IMIS Beiträge Heft 19/2002, HG: Vorstand des Instituts für Migrationsforschung und Interkulturelle Studien (IMIS) an der Universität Osnabrück, Osnabrück 2002, p. 12

Subtotal		5	1	6
Northern and	Algeria	1		1
Eastern Africa	No specification	2		2
	Eritrea	2		2
	Ethiopia		2	2
	Somalia	1	1	2
	Sudan	2		2
Central Africa	DR Congo	1		1
Subtotal		9	3	12
Other regions	Russian Federation	1	1	2
	Georgia	1		1
	Kosovo	2		2
	Moldova		1	1
Subtotal		4	2	6
TOTAL		**38**	**8**	**46**

Mobilization and preparation

Irregular migrants who opt for the assistance of professional smugglers face a number of constraints when choosing their final destination (Robinson and Segrott 2002: 4). Such "natural barriers" comprise the high costs involved and the fact that smugglers have to surmount several countermeasures imposed by states, as well as the general limitations regarding the accessibility of destinations, or the insufficient and precarious nature of relevant information. Migrant networks as well as professional smugglers can help to reduce existing information deficits to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the findings of our research suggest that migrants' prospects to accomplish their goals when entering the "smuggling market" will always suffer from imperfect information, no matter how well they prepare their migration project. This concerns not so much the prices to be paid but above all the "quality" of the products sold in the market. From a migrant's perspective the "quality" of a smuggling operation mainly refers to the connection between enlisting the services of smugglers and the certainty of reaching a certain destination as agreed.

Endowment with capital and the role of credit

The high costs related to human smuggling form a major influencing factor, both regarding the migrants' position in the smuggling process as well as their prospects of benefiting from the migration project once in a country of destination. Research on the international level as well as evidence collected in the course of our own research suggest comparatively high price levels regarding smuggling operations with a rising tendency. Though figures always refer to negotiable black market prices and therefore cannot be precisely pinned down, quoted sums take on dimensions that lead to the assumption that the overwhelming majority of migrants would not be able to raise them on their own. Moreover, costs vary widely depending on such factors as means of transport used, the level of "guarantees" included, additional services such as forged documents provided,

and on whether the whole journey is to be organised by one provider and without any breaks or is to be carried out in stages. Whatever the precise prices to be paid actually amount up to, it is very common that smuggled migrants either need to sell property in order to raise the necessary amount of money or that they have to rely on the use of credit in one form or another, which seems to be the case for the better part of clients. A typical experience is contained in the story of an Iraqi respondent:

"I had found some friends who also wished to go to Europe. Together we made the preparations like, food, equipment, etc. Everybody had sold something to get the travel money together. My small house which I had inherited from my parents was sold for 2,500$ and I could save 400$ from my salary. Although my calculations were made according to the experiences of other friends, later I had to borrow 600$ from my friends." (male respondent, Iraq).

There are different forms of credit allocation and dept-settling schemes in use. Money is borrowed from relatives, friends or loan sharks but occasionally the procuring of money also involves regular bank credits. Especially in cases where the total price for the journey has to be paid in advance smuggled migrants may be exposed to great pressure to somehow make enough money to settle the debt with their creditors or their friends or relatives, who had lent them the money. Naturally, repaying becomes a lot easier when creditors just lend money and do not charge interest, which is mainly the case with relatives. But even then, migrants rather over-estimate their prospective income in the countries of destination. In reality, possible earnings frequently do not live up to the high hopes held and periods of repayment are longer than expected.

The role of networks

From the migrants' perspective the choice of a preferred destination of a smuggling operation is primarily determined by the desire to reach a country that is considered to offer favourable conditions in order to fulfil their underlying migration goals. To identify and access such countries, migrants depend to a large extent on assistance provided by others both regarding the organisation of the journey as well as their stay in the country of destination. In reality, it proves to be very difficult for migrants to obtain reliable information regarding major aspects of their journey by themselves when preparing their movement. The use of "migrant network's information" is one way to compensate for the lack of certainty and reliable information and to "reach relatively good and safe decisions" in this respect (see also Pedersen et al., 2004:2). Massey et al. (1996: 198) define migrant networks as "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin". Such networks can contribute to reducing the "social, economic, and emotional costs" to be born by individual migrants (Light et al., 2004: 1). Perhaps more important in the case of human smuggling, are the networks connecting professional providers of smuggling operations, who offer the necessary services to those travelling irregularly.

The role of migrant networks and the refugee community

Migrant networks (relatives, friends as well as other migrants encountered en route) play an important role in two main respects. First, they can be a source of crucial and relatively reliable if often vague information. And second, it is these networks that are, more than anything else, expected to provide the necessary support in all matters of insertion (e.g. accommodation, income opportunities, health care etc.), which becomes even more important for migrants when residing in a country undocumented (see also Jordan and Düvell, 2002:150). Therefore the existence of such migrant networks constitutes an important criterion for the selection of a specific country of destination, although some variation in the "intensity" of such networks can be observed. They may, for example, provide concrete help either with the travel and the integration at the destination or they may only provide rather vague information of a general nature. But even in the absence of a well-established supportive migrant network, the mere fact that a relative or friend, who could serve as point of contact, is residing in a particular country can serve as a selection criterion for a destination country. A woman from Togo summed up her decision making as follows:

"I have to admit that during this time I knew Austria only by its name. My desired destination was France. But then one of my friends asked me if I didn't want to go to Austria. I had my doubts because I knew nobody there and could not speak the language. But this friend promised me that he had friends in Austria who could help me out after my arrival. So then I decided to go to Austria." (female respondent, Togo)

Interviews conducted with migrants in the course of our research revealed that it were mainly those nationalities with strong transnational family ties, where relatives already had built a new life for themselves or where a significant ethnic or linguistic community had formed in Austria, who had looked upon Austria as their desired country of destination from the outset. This was, for instance, the case for interviewees from the former Yugoslavia, especially Kosovo-Albanians, and Turkish Kurds.

"I always had Austria in mind because I had relatives there as well as friends who talked about the country when they came home for their holidays. Therefore Austria was not an unknown country for me and I never really thought about going somewhere else. Only in case it had not worked out with Austria I would have gone to the Netherlands where my aunt lives."(male respondent, Kosovo)

Still, the fact that potential (irregular) migrants can rely on information provided by migrant networks does not automatically mean that their general state of knowledge on important aspects of their journey proves to be sufficient. In reality, gathering information is often limited to rather loose contacts or casual conversations on the telephone with rumours and circulating "hearsay information" playing a significant role in the decision-making process. At the same time it is clear that imperfect information cannot be solely regarded as the result of malfunctioning or otherwise deficient information flows. To a certain extent, the quality of the available information will always be precarious – a direct result of the uncertain nature of irregular migration and

human smuggling itself. Because the consequences of migrating irregularly cannot be fully predicted by the individual, no matter how much information might have been collected in terms of quantity and quality, it still might prove to be insufficient in the end.

There is also much evidence on systematic information bias, for example, when overly optimistic images of destination countries are communicated to aspiring migrants. Such images contribute much to shaping the general perceptions of overall living conditions in possible countries of destination. Relatives, friends and co-nationals with migration experience might serve as "role models" and often provide "success stories" by drawing a picture of themselves being truly successful in the new environment, while at the same time concealing the hardships they are encountering.

"Migrants from Africa have a distorted impression of the West. They only see success stories of relatives currently living in Europe or having lived there. They see their neighbour who suddenly can afford to buy a house after his daughter went to Europe. No one really asks then how the money was made" (NGO expert on African communities in Austria)

Such success stories, backed up by the display of lavish material goods, add to the sometimes unrealistic expectations concerning job opportunities and potential earnings, social benefits, housing, or the obstacles to be overcome in order to gain a legal status among those who consider migrating to the West. Especially regarding the conditions and opportunities in employment, imperfect or outdated information can cause the complete failure of the initial migration strategy for those migrants who then find themselves with no access to the legal labour market and whose job opportunities are limited to specific economic sectors of the black labour market.

The role of smuggling networks

The characterisation of migration networks as "autonomous social structures" becoming institutionally stable and continuously "feeding the very migrations that produced them" (Light, I., 2004) can be applied to the networks of professional smugglers as well. It is well understood today that "the function of smugglers is increasingly being transformed from one of facilitation – simply responding to demand – to one of recruitment and control" (Koser, 2001:64). The evidence collected in our own research, too, demonstrates that smugglers play an active role not only by organising smuggling operations but also by vigorously advertising their services to potential clients and by channelling migration flows from areas of origin through transit countries to countries of destination. What has been less well understood is the role played by human smugglers in controlling and providing information to their clients.

Whereas the imperfect nature of the information communicated through migrant networks can be considered as both an inevitable consequence of the unpredictability of irregular migration processes as well as the result of the specific and limited ways of communicating, the deliberate holding back of information and the outright provision of

misinformation is in many cases an important part of the strategies of human smugglers as such.

The deception of clients often already starts when the initial contact is made, for instance when "tour operators" promise to take care of all aspects of the journey including the necessary paperwork, travel documents and work permits. Consequently migrants might be firmly convinced that documents bought prior to the journey or provided by the smuggling organisations would enable them to work "legally" in their chosen country of destination. In reality, however, we encountered cases where these documents proved to be completely worthless. In one example the selling of Austrian registration forms (freely available from any magistrate in Austria as well as from the internet) were sold as "valid" travel visas in African countries.

On the other hand, migrants are usually better informed about the legal situation, especially with regard to the Austrian asylum legislation. Information on legislative and administrative changes is communicated quickly by smugglers and smuggling strategies are adapted accordingly within a few days. A typical example illustrates the point: When the Federal Asylum Review board ruled that Austrian authorities were not entitled to remove migrants to the Slovak Republic and Hungary on grounds of the safe third country regulation anymore, entering the asylum procedure in Austria became an option again for specific nationalities.[21] Accordingly, irregular migrants immediately started to contact Austrian authorities after crossing the border, instead of trying to avoid such contacts as they had done before.

Thus, while professional smugglers give very specific information about legal aspects, on how to deal with authorities and on specific points of contact at certain stages, they usually keep their clients in the dark about other important aspects of the smuggling operation. From the smugglers' point of view this strategy has two main advantages: First, it makes clients more dependent on the support of the smugglers with whom the initial contact was made. It prevents them from contacting other providers during the journey, who might offer better conditions, or from organising certain stages of the journey themselves. It also assures discipline. Second, and even more important from the smugglers' point of view, keeping migrants uninformed helps to keep operations undercover.

Smugglers play a key role in channelling migration by directing migration towards or away from particular transit and destination countries. On the one hand, this is a result of smugglers' attempts to utilise favourable conditions that some countries might offer, for instance gaps in border control mechanisms or specific characteristics of the asylum system. On the other hand, the channelling might arise from the simple fact that providers themselves are limited in their possibilities to organise the journey to destinations migrants might prefer. The offers that smugglers make correspond to their capabilities, praising transit or destination countries in their reach as "the best place to go", rather than simply catering to the wishes of migrants. Especially when migrants are already on their

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[21] Several problems regarding asylum procedures in Hungary and Slovakia were identified, which have since then been rectified. See: Republic of Austria (2002), p. 20

way and find themselves cut off from alternative information sources, smugglers are in a strong position to actively shape migrants' perceptions and decisions. The example of an Iraqi interviewee reveals how limited the actual choices for migrants en route can be:

"We met him (N.B. a relative "somehow involved in smuggling") and he told us, that the route to Bulgaria was open and that it would be a child's play to get there. He had already found a smuggler who could bring us there for 500$. And so it was." (male respondent, Iraq).

A significant part of interviewed migrants told us that they got "stranded" in Austria, a country they did not have in mind in the first place, because the smugglers had directed them. On the other hand, such channelling might also result from the fact that many migrants have no specific country as their next or final destination in mind, but rather think of a "European area" in general and therefore turn to those smugglers who can apparently offer the best deal for certain destinations. A Nepalese explained his reasoning:

"It did not really matter to me which European country I would be going to, as I did not know too much about these countries anyway. I decided for Italy because friends of mine told me about an Indian smuggler who would organise travels solely to this country." (male respondent, Nepal).

Recruitment and Advertisement

When asked about the motivation to use the services of smugglers the overwhelming majority of interviewed migrants perceived smugglers' services as being the most promising and "professional" way to reach a certain destination or to cross state borders clandestinely. Making contact with a smuggler was described as "very easy" or "not difficult at all". Migrants contacted smugglers either at strategic places with a reputation for such services or in the immediate surroundings to such places (e.g. in railway stations, bazaars, coffee-shops, etc.). In most cases migrants undertook initial (land) journeys to one of the major "hubs" (city, harbour, refugee camp, etc.) in order to contact a smuggler. Indeed, it is this very feature of travelling via established "hubs" that turned out to be the only constant in the manifold routes taken by migrants from diverse origins. This is in stark contrast to police investigations as well as research studies, who often focus on the identification of prevailing smuggling routes. At the same time the important function of "hubs" which are connected by these routes is often disregarded. The term „hub" is used because from an analytical perspective these strategic places have a particular function with regard to human smuggling that goes beyond them solely being "focal points". Carrying out smuggling operations on a large scale requires the existence of "hubs" which allow for "collecting" and "re-grouping" large numbers of (smuggled) migrants and for organising the "passing on" of these migrants from one smuggling organisation to another. Since related operations on a large scale cannot be kept fully secret, the existence of a "friendly environment" is a pre-requisite for the evolvement of such "hubs", e.g. due to some sort of "tolerance" or a lack of effective control on part of the authorities. By and by, the "hubs" obtain a certain reputation for providing the necessary

infrastructure and services to support irregular migration processes, ranging from accommodation to forged documents, job opportunities, information exchange and contacts both between smugglers and migrants or newly arrived migrants and migrants already residing there. Subsequently "hubs" develop into important centres of attraction for irregular migrants who have organised earlier stages of their journeys themselves but for the onward journeys intend to rely on the services of a smuggler or to change to a new "service provider" at a given stage of the process. It is these major "hubs" and the opportunities they offer that, more than anything else, define the itineraries of smuggled migrants. In a nutshell, it is the hubs that shape the routes.

Such well-known "hubs" are located for instance on the East-West-Route from the Middle East through the Balkans, Eastern or Southern Europe and/or the Eastern Mediterranean, with focal points like Dubai, Damascus, Istanbul, Kiev or Moscow. According to migrants' experiences in such hubs smugglers openly advertise their services and actively look out for potential clients. So-called "recruiters" or "intermediaries" were portrayed as directly approaching potential clients at strategic places, as described by an Algerian man:

"It was not difficult at all to get in contact with smugglers. They recognize you by your appearance. When you walk around certain areas or sit in a specific coffee bar they would come up to you and introduce themselves. I got to know several smugglers this way and learned about their offers. I only had to choose the offer I thought was best..." (male respondent, Algeria).

In this context also the strategic value of refugee camps was mentioned several times. When being asked why he and his "travel companions" went straight to a refugee camp in Sofia after a long trip hidden in a lorry, an Iraqi respondent stated the following:

"We went there to get information and to meet 'intermediaries'. I do not exactly know how the smugglers organize themselves. I only know that there are many asylum seekers in the camps who do not want to travel further on immediately. Therefore they work as 'recruiters" or 'intermediaries' in the camp. It's these people who can provide you with information regarding contacts with smugglers or guides, meeting places or departure times." (male respondent, Iraq).

In some cases "recruiters" and "intermediaries" were completely unknown to migrants, while in other cases they were portrayed as "acquaintances", "friends", "friends of friends", or just individuals from the "refugee community" who collaborate with the "professionals" for a certain period of time in order to make some additional money with the intention of financing their own onward journey:

"One of my acquaintances had been working as an intermediary for a smuggler who was engaged in smuggling to Lebanon. The travel to Lebanon costs 200$ and I heard from my acquaintance that he would get 25$ for a positive recruitment."(female respondent, Ethiopia).

Though migrants were in the position to obtain different offers and to choose among these, once they had reached a major smuggling hub, most narrators still relied on the services of smugglers specifically recommended by relatives or trustworthy friends who had had some relevant experience themselves. In a typical statement, one Iraqi respondent, who had taken the opportunity to flee to Iran when he was posted as a soldier close to the border, recounts how the reputation of a smuggler can be the decisive selection criterion in a complex market situation:

"Together with three comrades I just crossed the border. The whole area was teeming with smugglers and one only had to pick. But we directly went to the smuggler whose name and contact details I already had from home."(male respondent, Iraq)

Organizational structures

Our respondents clearly differentiated between small-scale self-employed smugglers and larger smuggling networks. Small-scale self-employed smugglers were portrayed as individuals engaging in human smuggling activities on an occasional basis, restricted to short-distance operations or single border crossings. They would usually not employ other collaborators, but take care of all aspects of the actual operations themselves, and in some cases be even the ones to accompany the migrants personally across the border(s). Larger smuggling networks, on the other hand, were presented as being hierarchically structured and operating on the basis of a sophisticated division of labour. The following types of positions within the larger structures were described by respondents: "organisers" or "smugglers", "intermediaries", "recruiters", "guides", "spotters", "drivers", "messengers" and "external collaborators".

The "organiser" or "smuggler" was described as the person with the overall responsibility for the smuggling operation. His position could thus be compared with the role of a manager in an enterprise. The "organiser" was characterised as the person who can establish all necessary contacts in all areas relevant to the operation. He functions as "employer" of all other individuals participating in a particular smuggling operation on the providers' side. He is responsible for organising all necessary resources and equipment, such as required personnel, accommodation facilities, or means of transport. The "organiser" controls the whole process and can at any time arrange for a change of personnel, routes, modes of transport, or accommodation at intermediate stopovers, if this is deemed necessary:

"The 'organiser' is in charge of preparing the travel and has many contacts. In case of unforeseen circumstances or problems that might occur on the way, he interferes, but only through his contacts. (female respondent, Ethiopia)"

All respondents emphasised that they never got in contact with the "organiser" personally but only with individuals characterised as "intermediaries". According to migrants' experiences "intermediaries" represent the organisational level below the "organisers". The "intermediary" is responsible for the actual implementation of a smuggling operation. He acts as a mediator between the "organiser" and all other individuals being

involved in an operation both on the providers' and the clients' side. In many cases the intermediary was described as an individual not completely unknown to the migrant, but rather as a recommended "contact", an "acquaintance", a "friend" or even a "confidant". The "intermediary" is the first responsible contact person for clients throughout a smuggling operation. In case of unforeseen problems or the outright failure of a travel strategy the "intermediary" is the person to be contacted. The "intermediary" can take corrective measures, re-direct travel routes or assure additional border crossing attempts, if this was agreed upon in the initial contract. An Eritrean respondent recalled such an event. His group was let down by their guides during the border crossing and found themselves lost somewhere in the border area of Turkey and Bulgaria. The migrants took matters into their own hands by accepting the offer of a Taxi driver to take them to Sofia against the payment of 150$ each. As they had left all their money with the "intermediary" they were not able to pay for this improvised transport themselves:

"We agreed that he (N.B. the Taxi driver) should bring us to Sofia for 150$ each. We did not have that much money. We therefore called the intermediary in Istanbul, as he was still responsible for our travel. He gave us the mobile number of one of his people in Sofia, who should come up for our Taxi expenses." (male respondent, Eritrea)

In some interviews so called "recruiters" appeared as an independent category distinct from the "intermediaries". "Recruiters" would limit their activities to advertising services and establishing contacts between smugglers, intermediaries and clients. Not being bound to a specific smuggler or being affiliated with a certain nationality, "recruiters" were portrayed as persons (often migrants themselves) who would engage in the smuggling process only in this specific function to make some additional money and without having any further responsibilities.

The "guides" were depicted as being responsible for executing the operational parts of smuggling operations, that is, for guiding and accompanying clients en route in one or more countries and for carrying out border crossings. "Guides" were described as superseding one another, handing over clients from "guide" to "guide" after reaching particular stages like in a "relay race". Police evidence suggests that the "guides" normally comprise young men from border regions who have the necessary local know-how on the one hand and, often due to a lack of economic opportunities, the willingness to engage in human smuggling on the other hand. They might be hired for the job rather spontaneously among the "local scene". Still, they seem to have only fairly loose ties to existing "criminal subcultures", rather than actually being genuine "criminals" with a substantive criminal track record. In countries of origin as well as in transit countries there seems to be a considerable pool of individuals who are willing to take over the job of a "guide". One could consider this potential as constituting a major structural precondition for the smooth functioning of the human smuggling market in general. It is the guides who run the highest risk of being apprehended, because they are the ones to carry out actual trans-border movements. But since they can be replaced quite easily and their knowledge with regard to the higher organisational levels is fairly limited, their loss does not really have a sustained weakening effect on the organisational or network structure.

Nevertheless, the "guides" play a pivotal role in the course of a smuggling operation, since it is their success or failure, which determines the overall "performance" of a "smuggler". When reflecting their relationship with the "guides", respondents pictured their own position as being largely dependent on them. Due to their (transitory) position of power "guides" are the ones who have to be trusted beforehand and they are the ones to be blamed first in case of an unsuccessful border crossing. Consequently smuggled migrants' positive and negative emotions are mainly with the "guides". Depending on their behaviour towards their clients, the characterisations of "guides" ranged from picturing them as rather neutral individuals merely carrying out their business to describing them as "mistreating", "letting down" or otherwise "exploiting" their clients. At the same time migrants were quite sober in their assessment that the principal interest of "smugglers" and "guides" lies in the successful completion of a border crossing operation and not necessarily in the humane treatment of their clients. Sometimes respondents were even quite forgiving and assumed that "smugglers" might not always be fully informed about the way the hired "guides" treat their clients or that they simply did not care too much about that.

"I don't believe that all "smugglers" or "guides" are that invidious as the ones that were guiding us to Turkey. Usually the boss does not know about every action the "guides" might take or how they treat us" (male respondent, Iraq)

In the final analysis, and despite much anecdotal evidence about abuse and abandonment of smuggled migrants, the maltreatment of clients should not be assessed as being the rule. The simple logic of the smuggling market, full of imperfect information, in which elements such as reputation and trust assume such an outstanding importance suggests otherwise. If smugglers what to successfully stay in business in the medium or long term it comes down to the market choices of the smuggled migrants, who time and again confirmed that in the long run the systematic maltreatment of clients would seriously harm the smugglers' reputation on which their business crucially depends.

"Spotters", "drivers" or "messengers" were portrayed as individuals performing such occasional jobs under the direction of the supervising "guides". In addition, smuggling operations can also involve "external collaborators", such as "cooperating officials", border police, soldiers, conductors, taxi drivers, private house owners etc. who are normally paid directly after the completion of their job. These individuals were described as having close personal ties with either the "organiser", the "intermediary " or the "guide" providing small services at single stages for a small share of the profits.

Human Smuggling in stages: Prices, risk and information

The degree of personal risk that migrants have to bear during a smuggling operation varies in accordance with the price they are able - or willing - to pay. Attempts to reduce the amount of risk involved normally result in higher costs for the migrants. Air and sea journeys leading directly from the country of origin to the country of destination are safer, more convenient and of shorter duration, but naturally a lot more expensive than

the longer, more exhausting and more dangerous journeys via land routes. According to our findings the latter may include several stopovers entailing multiplied risks of detection, clandestine travel by foot, car, lorry or train. When having to opt for the land routes migrants are much more likely to find themselves in dangerous, in many cases even life-threatening situations, for instance when being transported across borders hidden in containers, under ceiling linings in trains, or between goods in trucks without sufficient air supply, in the freezing cold or in extreme heat.

From the 46 individuals that have been interviewed in the course of this study, only 7 stated that they had initially been in the position to come up with the money for a direct journey from the country of origin to their desired destination - although not all of the 7 really arrived there. All other interviewees had to organise their journey in stages, engaging different smugglers for each step. Many respondents had been on the move for several months, some of them even for years, before reaching Austria. Some of these migrants could be described as still being in a state of transiting, since they had not considered Austria as their final destination in the beginning. The actual routes taken, and the countries transited on that route, were very much depended on the available financial means as the following example shows:

"I contacted a smuggler whose number I got through acquaintances in Syria. I actually wanted to go to Hungary, but the travel was too expensive therefore I decided to go to Romania. I had friends there, who had told me that it would be easy to work there. Besides the asylum procedures would not be too complicated" (male respondent, Iraq).

In most cases it was the lack of financial means that forced migrants to pursue a stage-by-stage approach. Often they could only afford to pay for transport to the next stage. After arriving there they then had to find a way to make enough money for the onward journey while at the same time having to survive on the spot. Consequently, such "stopovers" often turned out to take a lot longer than originally expected. In the narratives of our informants a frequently recurring theme was also the influence of unforeseen events. An Afghan man, for example, stated that he had initially planned to interrupt his journey in Istanbul in order to earn enough money for his onward journey. Just before leaving for the next stage he lost all his money (for undisclosed reasons) and therefore had to stay and work in Istanbul for another 8 months to make up for the loss.

Despite such hazards of the journey, interviewed migrants assured us that they knew about the high risks involved prior to their journey. Especially in highly frequented smuggling hubs information regarding risk and security on specific routes is communicated quickly among migrants, as well as information on alternative itineraries that might be more promising. Such information comprises alternative means of transport, the risks of getting detected, detained or deported and the reliability of smugglers. Since migrants knew that the consequences of a wrong choice regarding routes or smugglers might be far-reaching, if not even deadly, they very carefully considered their decisions and tried to adapt their strategies according to the information they had gathered. A Kosovo-Albanian man acknowledged that he had even changed his mind once and had returned home in order to better prepare his journey, after learning on

the way about the high risks involved in clandestinely crossing the Hungarian-Austrian border:

"At this time many people from Kosovo were waiting in Hungary to move on to Western Europe. Many stories on smugglers circulated, how they take the money and leave their clients behind afterwards – even whole families with their children. These people got stranded in a foreign country without having any money, some of them even in detention, ready for deportation. All of this really made quite an impression on us. We were not very familiar with finding a good and reliable smuggler. After one week my friend could not bear the situation anymore and decided to take the bus back home. I followed him, as it would have been far too difficult to organize everything on my own" (male respondent, Kosovo).

Migrants might even return to an earlier stage of their journey when they think that they would be able to contact more reliable smugglers there. An Sudanese man, who had already transited Syria to reach Lebanon and was planning to move on to Western Europe, returned to Syria because he thought that he would find more reliable smugglers there than in Lebanon:

"I found a smuggler who could bring me to Turkey for 350$. One has to know, that the Turkey route is very dangerous and you hear a lot about incidents at the Turkish border. Therefore it was very important to me, that the smuggler knew what he was doing." (male respondent, Sudan)

As smuggling services are not standardised products, it can take quite exhaustive negotiations between smugglers and prospective clients to put the latter into the position to really obtain the best offer both regarding prices and services. As mentioned above in many cases the safest and most promising offers also entailed the highest costs:

"My brother lives in Germany. I had to negotiate quite some time with the smugglers until I knew about the safest route to get there. The safest route proved to be the most expensive one. But for me arriving safely was the only thing that really counted. All in all I had to pay 5.000 €" (male respondent, Turkey).

When assessing the cost effectiveness of available services, migrants tried to weigh up costs against risks. In some cases, however, the most expensive option was not necessarily the most promising one. A high price could also result from the risks involved for the smugglers themselves, which they then tried to pass on to clients by charging higher prices. In exceptional cases, therefore, migrants would choose the cheaper offer to be on the safe side, even if they also could have afforded the more expensive one. An Eritrean man, who had to choose between three options when leaving Istanbul, described his reasoning:

"I had three options. The first one was to take a boat to Italy, the second option was to take a boat to Greece and the third option was to go by foot to Bulgaria. The boat to Italy would have cost 1,400$, the one to Greece 1,000$, the land route to Bulgaria 500$. I

decided for Bulgaria. Not only because it was cheaper but also because it is less risky. The boats that go to Italy or Greece are very old and therefore the journey is very dangerous." (male respondent, Eritrea)

Risk, reputation and trust

The above examples provide a good illustration of some of the reasoning behind migrants' decisions for or against a particular smuggler, focusing especially on their considerations of risks and expenses. But even more important than actual dangers or prices to be paid was the one overall decisive factor when choosing a smuggler - his "good reputation". Since other possibilities to thoroughly assess the quality of offered services prior to the journey were fairly limited, migrants had to gain trust in the smugglers' ability to perform a good job. Reputation and trust have to be seen as constituent elements of the human smuggling industry as a whole. Thus, migrants often stated that one could usually rely on the organisers' "word of honour". On the other hand, defrauding clients has to be assessed as the exception rather than the rule. The consequential loss of reputation would be tantamount to an organiser's "economic suicide" in a very short while. Being trustworthy is the economic foundation for a smuggler and building up a good reputation represents the most effective promotion measure for smugglers. A Somali described this as follows:

"During my time in the camp I tried to form a clear picture of the intermediary and the smuggler. Everything works by trust and everybody knows that the reputation is very important for a smuggler when he wants to stay in the business." (male respondent, Somalia)

An indicator for a "good reputation" might be the smugglers' "success rate" confirmed by other migrants or other trustworthy individuals. An Iraqi man, who was assisted by smugglers when travelling from Iraq to Turkey, had paid the price of 500$ in advance without knowing the exact route or other details of the journey. Still, since the smuggler had been recommended by an "experienced" neighbour of his, he had built up trust in him:

"The route he suggested was new to me and we did not know that it can also be taken to Turkey. The smuggler did not inform us about the exact way we where about to go. But we trusted the smuggler, as he had already brought many people to Turkey." (male respondent, Iraq)

During stopovers in well-established smuggling hubs or in refugee camps migrants tried to gather as much information as possible in order to form an accurate impression of the market situation. Here again, it was mainly the advice of the migrant community future clients based their decisions on:

"We were brought to a camp outside of Sofia where we stayed for two weeks. During this time I met an Iraqi who advertised the services of a smuggler he was working for as an

intermediary. In the camp I heard about the smuggler's good reputation." (male respondent, Iran)

If smugglers "under-performed" in the opinion of their clients - for instance, when they failed to carry out the border-crossing operation successfully - migrants simply changed to another provider. When this happens repeatedly and is communicated among the migrant community, the smuggler's reputation is bound to suffer.

"After the first try had failed (to bring the group from Turkey to Bulgaria) the organizer had promised us another travel. The same group was brought to the border. Under way the guide got the information about a police control. So he dropped us on the highway (...) but never came back (...). The third time we could not leave Istanbul because controls were taking place already there. After this we decided to not use this smuggler's services anymore but simply to change the provider." (female respondent, Ethiopia)

Despite such failures, the fact that due to the characteristics of the smuggling market, organisers have strong incentives to meet their promises gives migrants some security with regard to the actual delivery of services. When being asked whether he did not have any concerns about their guide letting them down during the smuggling operation, a Sudanese stated:

"Look, I did not worry about the guide. If he leaves us behind, this can severely damage his reputation on the market." (male respondent, Sudan)

Interestingly enough it was rather small-scale, self-employed and independently working smugglers who were perceived as being the most reliable ones and therefore the preferred choice of some interviewed migrants. Since these smugglers are most likely to be affected by any failure themselves (for instance, when they personally accompany their clients during the border crossing) they are often assessed as taking fewer risks than organizers operating on a larger scale, who can afford to lose an "easy-to-replace-guide" without great difficulty.

"For our fourth try we managed to find a smuggler through an acquaintance. He told us, that this smuggler was not as rich as the others. Therefore he accompanies his groups himself and consequently his operations are more successful and less risky." (female respondent, Ethiopia)

Since having a good reputation is crucial for a smuggler's economic success, many smugglers do not simply rely on the quality of their products, such as a generally known success rate, but offer a variety of warranties when concluding a contract. Such warranties normally refer to some kind of "insurance" given by the smugglers to their clients that they will finally reach their destination. The smugglers would take over the organisational responsibility as well as the financial risk for any "accidents" (i.e. apprehensions by authorities) along the route. If migrants are apprehended, the price they initially have paid does not go to waste. For the next try migrants are taken "for free" (Içduygu and Toktas, 2002: 42). In our own research interviewed migrants confirmed that

such "guarantees" concerning the "safe arrival in the country of destination" have become a widespread phenomenon. As an economic instrument for uncertain commercial relationships such "guarantees" serve a dual purpose. They allow providers to charge higher prices for their services while at the same time reducing the risks for their clients. They also act as a strong "signal" to potential clients that a particular provider is trustworthy and offers high-quality services. Several specific forms of provider-client relationships have evolved and could be described as the first beginnings of an "informal commercial law" in the area of human smuggling (including warranties, guarantees, fidelity clauses etc.). In our interviews respondents described several different types of guarantees and warranties. For example, smugglers might offer several tries in case of failure. An Eritrean man benefited from such a warranty after his initial border-crossing from Turkey to Greece had failed and he had returned to Istanbul:

"Back in Istanbul the smuggler apologized for the failed travel and promised another try." (male respondent, Eritrea)

In other cases smugglers promised to pay back the money in case of failure:

"There are smugglers who have a very good reputation, since they already have arranged many successful travels. If an operation fails they would give you back the money or reject payment" (male respondent, Iraq).

In some cases it was agreed that payment only had to be made upon save arrival in the destination, in other cases only half of the agreed total price was to be paid in advance and the other half only upon safe arrival.

"I had found a smuggler who was willing to bring me to Beirut for 150$. I did not have the full sum, but only half of it. Therefore I gave him 75$ before departure. The remaining rest was paid by my friends in Lebanon after I arrived there." (male respondent, Eritrea)

In order to further reduce the risks for the client, money is often deposited with confidants or middlemen and only released after clients have actually reached the country of destination or a certain stage of the journey. In a typical arrangement, upon safe arrival at the destination the client communicates a previously agreed code, by the use of which the smuggler can receive his payment from the middlemen. A variant of this form of risk reduction is to agree on payment for accomplished stages only, even when the initial plan is to use the services of one smuggler for the whole journey.

"We agreed with the smuggler on 1.050$ for the whole journey from Istanbul to Sofia. In the end we only paid 450$. It turned out that the guide could bring us only to the border and not the whole way to Sofia, so we did not pay for it. Anyway, he did not lose any money. We had agreed to split payment in accordance with the route" (male respondent, Algeria).

Conclusions

What are the implications of the preceding analysis? In our opinion there are several points that merit particular attention. In this article we have described how the peculiar characteristics of the market for human smuggling services put a high premium on a "good reputation" of smugglers. But this reputation comes at a risk for the smugglers: They can never completely give away information on their identity, lest the police will easily disrupt their activities. Thus there is a need to contact clients via middlemen or "recruiters", who are themselves only partly informed on the structures of the smuggling operation. These middlemen may be part of a larger smuggling organization or they may be working independently in establishing contacts between clients and smugglers. In both cases, smugglers intend to reduce their risk of exposure either by keeping the lower levels of their organization in the dark or by "outsourcing" some tasks of the smuggling operation as a whole.

While such tactics make it harder for law enforcement officials to uncover the "deeper layers" of smuggling organizations, there will always remain a considerable degree of risk to the organization due to the requirement to convey at least a minimum amount of information to potential clients. Thus, if a smuggler wants to "signal" that his services are of good quality and that he enjoys a good reputation, it is ultimately necessary for him that he can be identified and distinguished from other smugglers.

The fact that reputation and trust in the smuggler-client relationship are such important elements in the human smuggling industry, distinguishes smuggling from other illegal activities – and particularly from trafficking in human beings and smuggling of goods. As mentioned, trafficking in human beings involves the exploitation of migrants, which in turn makes it difficult, if not impossible, for traffickers to rely on their "reputation" for gaining the trust of their victims. Thus, traffickers need other ways of luring their victims into their fold. Evidence from studies into the trafficking of human beings has shown that trafficking often involves "friends" or even relatives, who already *have* the trust of the later victims. Thus, traffickers often "buy" the trust of their victims by paying trusted middlemen and by offering "free" transport, while the profits are made through the later exploitation of the trafficking victims. This is not the case in human smuggling processes, where the initiative usually comes from the smuggled migrants and the profits accrue only for the illegal crossing of borders. The traffickers and the smugglers are thus in largely separate businesses. One involves the recruitment, transport, control and exploitation of human beings, who were tricked or sold into this situation; the other involves only the contacting and transport of willing migrants. The first is mainly demand-driven, the second largely supply-driven.

Finally, the findings of this study indicate that migrants have a number of possibilities at their disposal to reduce the risks connected with their engagement in human smuggling. A general conclusion to be drawn is that the commonly held view of smuggled migrants being fully at the mercy of their smugglers in many cases does not correspond to reality. Information on prices and quality of services is communicated rather quickly among migrant communities and helps to assure a certain market transparency. For purely

economic reasons, smugglers rely heavily on their reputation. Therefore, it is mostly in their interest to successfully process smuggling operations and not to deceive their clients even if the price has been paid in advance. Still, investing time in information gathering, carefully selecting smugglers, thoroughly negotiating contracts and guarantees, and last but not least paying high prices cannot rule out every risk that the clandestine nature of human smuggling brings about. Migrants are very well aware of the fact that in the end it's them who have to bear the risk.

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