

## Risk Factors of Smuggling of Migrants

**Summary of risk factors:** *Political factors; Demographic factors; Socioeconomic factors; Environmental factors*

**Aim:** To assist analysts with the identification of risk factors for the production of risk terrain maps. Specifically, this brief provides an annotated review of the factors related to smuggling of migrants and the settings and times for which some factors may be most relevant. This information should be especially useful to help choose a time period for creating risk terrain maps (i.e., Step<sup>i</sup> 3), to identify aggravating and mitigating risk factors to include in your risk terrain model (i.e., Steps 5 and 6), and to inform the operationalization of your risk factors to risk map layers (i.e., Step 7).

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### The Problem of Smuggling of Migrants

Concern about the migration of people isn't something new but as the number of migrants is increasing due to the global migration pressures (i.e., regional wars, political chaos, social disorder, economic pressures, oppressive governments, population growth, environmental conditions) or easier travel options and globalization of trade, nations are giving much more emphasis to laws and practices which control the movement of people across borders. As a non-striking response individuals are seeking illegal ways to cross national borders without complying with the necessary requirements for legal entry into the related countries in expense of their freedoms and even their lives.

Statistics concerning smuggling of migrants are unreliable because of the covert nature of the activity and ambiguous conceptualization. In reality no one is sure about the exact number of foreign nationals entering U.S. illegally but on average U.S. border agents arrest 1 million undocumented migrants each year who try to cross the southern border (Zhang 2007).

According to Time magazine's estimate each year around 3 million undocumented migrants enter U.S. which is equal to 60 flights every day for a year (Barlet and Steele 2004).<sup>ii</sup> But although U.S. is the primary destination for migrant smuggling, Western countries, Australia, and in the light of

recent studies Asia Pacific Region are also experiencing the flow of undocumented migration. According to a recent study by Andreas Schloenhardt, Australia and Singapore are also considered as nations of immigrants. The writer argues that the populations of China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand have changed drastically following the arrival and then departure of foreign workers. And also Countries of South Pacific (Fiji, New Caledonia, and Papua New Guinea) have decreased in population as a result of the trade in indentured laborers and gained new citizens through the policies of colonial powers (Schloenhardt 2003).

According to recent studies most current migrant smuggling activities originate from countries in Asia, Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe and they move to the destination countries in Western Europe, Australia and North America and this general movement can be classified into 4 major routes in terms of destination, origin and transit countries (Zhang 2007):

1. From North Africa through Spain and Portugal to Western Europe.
2. From Asia through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan to Russia and from there via Ukraine, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, to Western Europe and North America.
3. Middle East to Asia to Oceania, with Australia as the number one destination.
4. In general to North America.

**Operational definition:** According to IOM's definition the following five criteria should be met for an action to be considered as migrant smuggling (Schloenhardt 2003):

- Crossing of an **international** border
- **Illegal** departure/transit, entry or stay
- A **voluntary** migratory movement
- A **smuggler** or **smuggler organization** involved in the movement of migrant
- A smuggler **profiting** from the movement of migrant.

As can be understood from this classification the illegal crossing of international borders is a must for migrant smuggling. "Trafficking in persons" and "human smuggling" can often be used as synonyms but their distinction is also crucial to identify the status of the individual as a victim of "trafficking" or illegal immigrant.

Trafficking contains an element of force, fraud or coercion; the persons trafficked are enslaved victims with limited movement and/or isolation; the act of trafficking need not involve the actual movement of the victim and; the victims must be involved in labor/services or commercial sexual acts. On the other hand in smuggling the person being smuggled is generally cooperating; there is no actual or implied force; persons are free to leave, change jobs etc.; smuggling facilitates the illegal entry of person(s) from one country to another; smuggling always crosses an international border.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Aggravating/Mitigating Risk Factors Based on a Review of Empirical Literature**

In the literature of international migration the push factors of migration are defined as the factors that force the migrants to leave or arouse the feeling for departure whereas the pulling factors are defined as the factors in countries abroad that are perceived beneficial by the migrants. The important point here is that these factors can be real or just the perceptions of migrants like misleading dreams of a better life in the destination country. In general these pushing and pulling factors can be grouped under four headings as political, demographic, socioeconomic and environmental factors (Schloenhardt 2003).

- **Political factors:** In general there can be different political factors specific to each country that can lead people to migrate undocumented to destination countries but generally political or religious conflicts leading to persecution or exile of certain groups and

individuals, repression regimes, war and military conflicts are the most encountered political factors. Until 1975 illegal immigration was an unknown issue for Australia but with the fall of Saigon and the events of 1989, a large number of people escaping the destructive effects of war (Vietnam) and repressive political regime (the Chinese student Revolt) fled to Australia using illegal channels hoping for a refugee status. The term "boat-people" was first introduced to the literature with the escape of people from Vietnam by sea, using small and overcrowded vessels.

- **Demographic factors:** Especially in developing countries the rapid population growth articulated with the decreasing national economy (resulting in a high level of unemployment), political factors or environmental degradation lead people to migrate using illegal ways. China, despite its one-child policy which was implemented in the 1980's provide a good example for the effect of rapid population growth as a pushing factor for migrant smuggling.

- **Socioeconomic factors:** Socioeconomic factors can both act as pushing and pulling factors depending on the system's offers to citizens in terms of wage, employment, welfare and living standards. In other words while low wages, high unemployment or poor welfare benefits can be a pushing factor from an origin country, high living standards or labor demand can be a pulling factor to a destination country. But despite the domination of economic factors in the current case of U.S. in general migrant smuggling on socioeconomic factors can be divided into two subgroups as survival migration and opportunity seeking migration. In the former one survival migrants emigrate as a result of necessity or duress. The reason for this migration is situations like famine, widespread unemployment articulated with political instability or environmental disasters. Though the reference to "unemployment" resembles the category of opportunity seeking migration, here the decision to migrate undocumented is the only way to *survive and secure the lives of their families*, so it's an issue that goes beyond the matter of personal convenience. Thus survival migrants can take any risk to escape the starvation or unemployment in their origin countries. This point should be kept in mind to understand the current undocumented migrants' calculation of risks and benefits and to adapt new responses to the problem of smuggling of migrants by land knowing undocumented migrants'

determination to cross the border despite the restrictive immigration policies and border enforcements abroad.

- **Environmental Factors:** Studying the impact of environmental factors on the migration decision is a newly emerged analysis field. In many countries with the increase in industrialization and population environmental issues (i.e. overuse of land, desertification, deforestation, pollution) have emerged. Adding to that natural disasters and natural fluctuations contribute to a large extent to people's migration decisions.

## References & Recommended (Publically Available)

### Readings

**Schloenhardt, A. (2003).** *Migrant Smuggling: Illegal Migration and Organized Crime in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers

**UNODC (2004)** *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto*. Available at:  
<http://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>

**UNODC (2010)** *Toolkit to Combat Smuggling of Migrants*. Available at:  
[http://www.unodc.org/documents/humantrafficking/SOM\\_Toolkit\\_E-book\\_english\\_Combined.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/humantrafficking/SOM_Toolkit_E-book_english_Combined.pdf)

**Zhang, S., X. (2007).** *Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings*. Connecticut: Praeger Publishers.

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> For steps of risk terrain map production, download the RTM Manual at [www.riskterrainmodeling.com](http://www.riskterrainmodeling.com)

<sup>ii</sup> See [http://www.barlettandsteele.com/journalism/time\\_border\\_1.php](http://www.barlettandsteele.com/journalism/time_border_1.php)

<sup>iii</sup> See <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/fs/49768.htm>