



Everyone's prey:
Kidnapping and extortionate
detention in mixed migration

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Key findings

Global overview

- Kidnapping and illegal detention are part of a pattern of severe violations faced by refugees and migrants on the move along all major mixed migration routes.
- Smugglers play a dominant role. 4Mi data indicates that, on average across the seven migrations routes covered, smugglers are consistently the most common perpetrators of kidnapping, followed by security forces.
- State officials are sometimes involved in practices that are a form of “extortionate detention”, where detention exceeds the officials’ jurisdiction, occurs without due process of law, is often prolonged, and where release is dependent on unofficial financial payment.
- The main dangers occur when transiting “fragile” countries that have problems with corruption, capacity and political will in relation to implementing the rule of law.

Regional focus: the Horn of Africa

- Of three routes originating in East Africa, the Eastern route to Yemen and the Gulf States carries the highest risk of violent abuse, including kidnapping for ransom at the hands of smugglers, criminal gangs, human traffickers and state actors who operate with widespread impunity.
- Despite a recent decline in the number of victims of kidnapping on the Northern route through Libya and Egypt to Israel / Europe, the level of violence and the sums demanded as ransoms are still high.
- The Southern route, toward South Africa, has the lowest prevalence of kidnapping and the lowest levels of violence.
- Impunity is widespread for perpetrators along all three routes, who see refugees and migrants using irregular pathways as easy prey for financial or sexual exploitation.

1. Introduction

It is increasingly evident that criminal acts of kidnapping for ransom, including detention by state actors who demand payment before releasing detainees (referred to as “extortionate detention” in this paper), is deeply embedded in the mixed migration phenomenon.¹

The Mixed Migration Centre’s 4Mi project² gathers hundreds of interviews with refugees and migrants on the move every month and has developed extensive data sets across several migratory routes. This data indicates that kidnapping and extortionate detention have become a normalised part of the criminal exploitation of refugees and migrants on the move.

Because extortion and violence frequently accompany what is ostensibly legitimate detention for violations of immigration laws, many refugees and migrants who have been detained see little distinction between the phenomenon and kidnapping for ransom by criminal elements.

This Briefing Paper draws on published research and 4Mi primary data to deliver, in the first section, some general and global observations and case studies. The second part of the paper offers a deeper exploration of experiences from the Horn of Africa, using interviews with and surveys of refugees and migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia to illustrate the role of kidnapping and extortionate detention in mixed migration flows along three routes out of the region. These routes were chosen not only because 4Mi has significant data on the nationalities moving along them but also because these nationalities are especially affected by kidnapping and detention and associated violence, trauma and exploitation.

Other issues discussed in this paper include how social media is both a boon and a menace to those on the move; the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators; and how the distinction between migrant smuggling and human trafficking is blurred by these types of crime and exploitation.

1 According to the [MMC](#), “mixed migration” refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers.

2 Since 2014, the [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative \(4Mi\)](#) has been developing a unique network of field monitors situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs. It aims to offer a regular, standardized, quantitative and globalized, system of collecting primary data on mixed migration flows. See [here](#) for details of 4Mi methodology.

The smuggling/trafficking question

“What in the eyes of the migrant was smuggling was actually human trafficking from the very beginning.”³

As the phenomenon of mixed migration has been thrust into the media limelight and to the top of political agendas in recent years, so too has the discussion around the blurred lines between trafficking and smuggling.⁴ Aside from the continued misuse by the media and politicians of the terms “trafficking” and “traffickers” in situations that involve smuggling or smugglers, never is the fluidity of the two terms more apparent than in cases of kidnapping and detention.

In relation to the treatment of Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis from the Horn of Africa, in many cases, “what in the eyes of the migrant was smuggling of migrants was actually human trafficking from the very beginning”.⁵

The key distinctions between the two terms are rooted in five themes: consent, intent, source of profits, who the victims are, and transnationality.⁶ Repeatedly, existing literature as well as 4Mi data and interviews reveal situations where smugglers become captors. **Consent** thus becomes coercion; **intent** to offer border-crossing services becomes intent to kidnap and detain for ransom; the source of the smugglers’ **profits** shifts from payment for services rendered at a pre-agreed price to

extortion; and the **victim** of the criminal act shifts from the state to the person on the move. The so-called victimless crime⁷ now becomes one with multiple victims facing deprivation of liberty and exposure to extreme brutality and forms of physical harm including sexual violence and starvation. As well as carrying a risk of death, such acts result in long-term trauma (psychological and physical) and create multiple secondary victims in the form of those who suffer stress and fear at having family or community members kidnapped, and/or experience impoverishment as they sell land, property and possessions to pay ransoms.

Most victims of kidnapping and extortionate detention are eventually released and continue to move towards their goal – often using smugglers again. In some cases, refugees and migrants report being kidnapped on multiple occasions. If someone experiences a crime in Sudan, for example, there is no reason why they would be immune from further violations in Libya. Or if kidnapped on Yemen’s shores they can be detained or kidnapped again further up the coast road towards the Saudi border.

Increasingly, the evidence points to smugglers themselves systematically detaining their clients for ransom along certain routes or colluding with those that do. Some maritime smugglers operating off the coast of the Horn of Africa are reportedly paid⁸ to deliver victims to traffickers waiting for them with

3 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018](#) (p.42)

4 Carling, J. Gallagher, A. & Horwood, C. (2015) [Beyond Definitions: Global migration and the smuggling–trafficking nexus](#) Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat; see also: Kook, K. (2016) [Human Smugglers Roundtable: Parsing Smuggling From Trafficking](#) Allegra Lab

5 UNODC (2018) op cit.

6 While smuggling, by legal definition, is always transnational in nature, human trafficking does not necessarily entail the crossing of national borders. See: UNODC – [Migrant smuggling](#) and UNODC – [Human trafficking](#)

7 RMMS East Africa and Yemen (2017) [Human Smuggling – no victimless crime: voices from those on the move](#)

8 Research and Evidence Facility (2017) [Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: a Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen](#) (p. 77).

guns and trucks on the shores of Yemen. In Ethiopia and Somalia, smugglers often offer “leave now and pay later”⁹ deals to lure clients to leave with them into the desert, where they then kidnap them and extort large sums from relatives of their captives. Increasingly, the level of intent to exploit and extort appears to be evident right from the start of the relationship between the smuggler and the smuggled.

In some cases involving refugees and migrants from the Horn who fall victim to kidnapping or detention in Sudan, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, perpetrators are protected by a cloak of impunity, achieved through collusion with state officials.¹⁰ In more extreme cases, the officials are the perpetrators. Kidnapping and extortionate detention is a low-risk/high-return activity carried out by people living in some of the poorest countries of the world against some of the poorest and most vulnerable people of the world, such as the 4Mi respondents quoted here:

“I was kidnapped and forced to work for smugglers for 5 months.”

35-year-old Ethiopian woman Interviewed in Cairo¹¹

“The human right violations in Ethiopia and Sudan are dangerous, especially around the border of both countries. The smugglers and border guards are imprisoning migrants in order to get payment. They are raping female migrants, including 15- and 16-year-old children. They also kidnap the children for ransom money.”

Ethiopian man interviewed in Cairo¹²

9 Research and Evidence Facility (2017) [Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: a Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen](#) (p. 7).

10 Human Rights Watch (2014a) [“I Wanted to Lie Down and Die” Trafficking and Torture of Eritreans in Sudan and Egypt](#).

11 4Mi interview conducted January 5, 2018

12 4Mi interview conducted February 5, 2018

2. Global overview

Kidnapping and extortionate detention are part of a pattern of severe violations facing refugees and migrants on the move. In its inaugural *Global Study on Smuggling 2018* the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that, “smuggling of migrants is a deadly crime. Every year, thousands of migrants are killed as a result of smuggling activities. Mass killings, systematic torture, sexual violence, exploitation and kidnapping of smuggled migrants for extortion are recorded along many of the smuggling routes.”¹³

A March 2019 Time magazine article quotes a 2016 IOM report, stating that, “7 out of 10 migrants crossing from North Africa to Europe had experienced exploitation of some kind or another, including kidnapping for ransom, forced labour, illegal detention and sexual violence”.¹⁴ Another study, based on interviews with 500 refugees and migrants in Europe, found that “kidnappings were common, although it was often unclear whether the perpetrators were ‘bandits’, militia organisations or even the military of that particular country. The vast majority of the experiences of violence, exploitation and death of people occurred in Libya [...] Experiences of being kidnapped, arbitrarily arrested, held up at gunpoint or not paid for a day’s work were described by almost all of our interviewees.”¹⁵

State officials are sometimes involved in practices that are a form of kidnapping (“extortionate detention” in this paper), and which exceed their jurisdiction, such as detention (in some cases prolonged) without due process, where release is dependent on unofficial

financial payment. Particularly for women and girls, the “payment” for release may be made through sex. “In some cases, corrupt officials seeking easy profits have carried out such detention in cooperation with smugglers. There is evidence that migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have been locked up in detention centres, suffered various forms of abuse and sometimes torture.”¹⁶ Additionally, in some cases state officials work directly with criminal groups by selling migrants to them, resulting in violent extortion as well as trafficking.

“The violations in Ethiopia and Sudan were more than in Egypt. The security agents of both Ethiopia and Sudan are working with the smugglers and attack the migrant for money. Also, we were kidnapped and prisoned because of money.”

35-year-old Ethiopian woman interviewed in Cairo¹⁷

Data is relatively scarce, and this area of mixed migration and international crime is under-researched. This may be partly due the fact that some analysts and commentators prefer to view smuggling as a victimless crime against the state and prefer to de-emphasize the criminal and harmful aspects of smuggling (that also include detention, commonly). Instead they promote the fact that smugglers offer important services to refugees and migrants that have few alternative options to move. These analysts often minimise or avoid addressing the issue of violence and death caused directly by smugglers.¹⁸

13 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018](#) (p.32)

14 Baker, A. (2019) [‘It Was As if We Weren’t Human.’ Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants](#). Time Magazine

15 Crawley, H., Düvell, F., Jones, K., McMahon, S. & Sigona, N. (2016) [Destination Europe? Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015](#) MEDMIG (p. 33)

16 As quoted in UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018](#) (p.42) . and citing Malakooti, A. (2015) [Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots](#) Altai Consulting (for IOM). See also: European Commission (2015) [A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries](#); Frouws, B. and Horwood, C. (2017) [Smuggled south. An updated overview of mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to southern Africa with specific focus on protection risks, human smuggling and trafficking](#) Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat

17 4Mi interview conducted October 29, 2017

18 Horwood, C., Forin, R. & Frouws, B. (2018) [Both angels and demons? – The role and nature of migrant smugglers](#) Mixed Migration Centre

Global prevalence

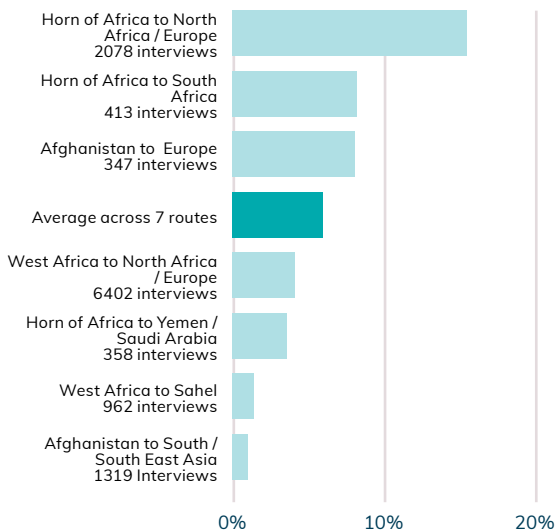
Of more than 14,000 refugees and migrants interviewed by 4Mi along seven migratory routes from May 2017 to January 2019, an average (across all routes) of 6.8 percent reported to have been kidnapped and 14.3 percent reported to have been detained. When adjusted according to the different number of interviews that took place along different

routes the averages are 5.7 percent (kidnapped) and 10.9 percent (detained).¹⁹ With an estimated 2.5 million people on the move across the world using smugglers in 2016,²⁰ this data suggests that as many as 170,000 migrants and refugees may have been kidnapped that year (not including those detained in kidnapping-like situations), albeit with wide variations of incidence between migration routes.

Graphic 1: Reports of kidnapping and detention along seven migratory routes in response to 4Mi questionnaires.

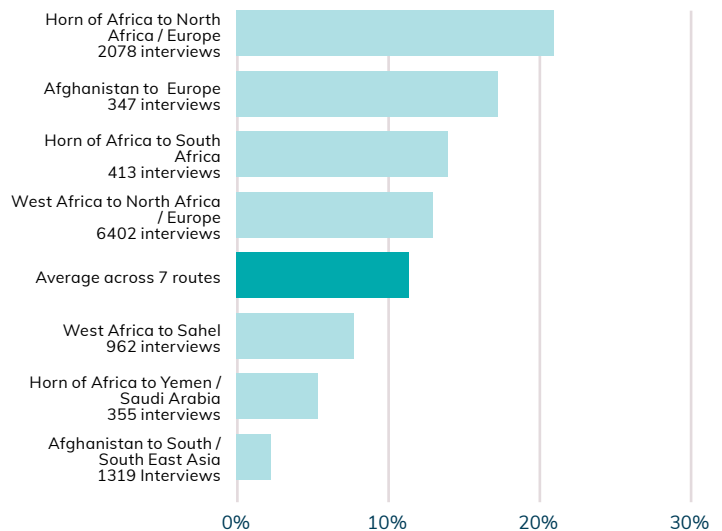
Did you get kidnapped along the way?

Percentage answering "yes"
11,879 interviews between May 2017 and Jan 2019



Did you get detained along the way?

Percentage answering "yes"
11,879 interviews between May 2017 and Jan 2019



Note: Afghans travelling to South East Asia interviewed by 4Mi predominantly used air transport and were subjected to far lower levels of every type of violation including kidnapping and detention for extortion. Those on the Yemen/Saudi Arabia route were only interviewed at locations before entering Yemen.

4Mi data indicates that, on average across the seven migration routes covered, the most common perpetrators of kidnapping are consistently smugglers (40 percent), with the security forces not far behind (27 percent).

The data also illustrates wide regional variations regarding the most common perpetrators of

kidnapping. The difference is striking between the Horn of Africa to North Africa/Europe route – where in most cases smugglers are reported to be responsible for kidnapping (81 percent) – and the West Africa to Sahel route, within the ECOWAS free movement area, where security forces are mostly blamed for kidnapping (68 percent).

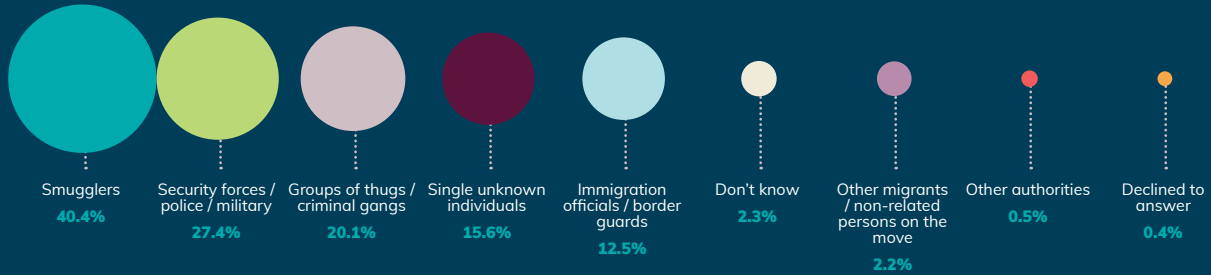
19 The higher scale of kidnapping and detention facing nationals from the Horn of Africa is immediately evident and will be explored in Section 2

20 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018](#) (p.5)

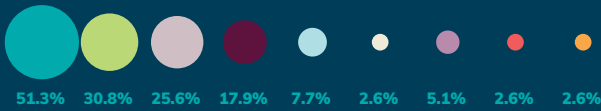
Graphic 2: Perpetrators of kidnapping as reported to 4Mi in different regions.

Who was responsible for the kidnapping?

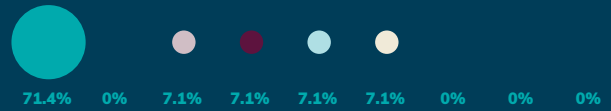
Average across 7 routes



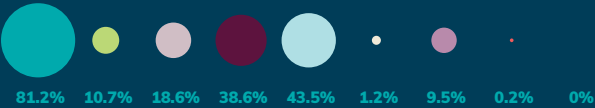
Afghanistan to Europe (39 incidents)



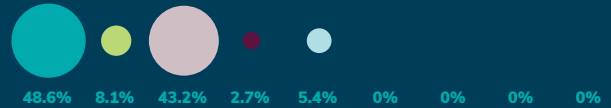
Afghanistan to South / South East Asia (14 incidents)



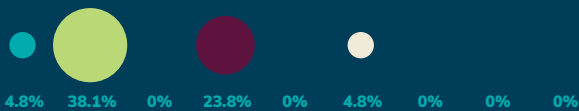
Horn of Africa to North Africa / Europe (515 incidents)



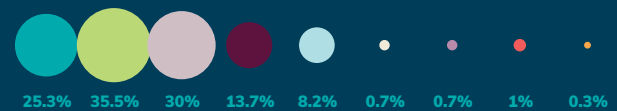
Horn of Africa to South Africa (37 incidents)



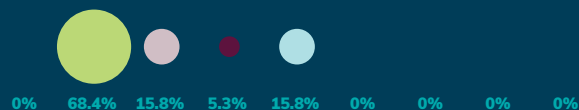
Horn of Africa to Yemen / Saudi Arabia (21 incidents)



West Africa to North Africa / Europe (293 incidents)



West Africa to Sahel (19 incidents)



Case Study: Thailand & Malaysia

“Military, police and politicians were either directly involved or were paid to look the other way”²¹

Smuggling flows in the Mekong subregion – which includes Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand – often involve border communities and feature Thailand as the main country of destination.²² Migrants and refugees are smuggled from most countries within the subregion. Most are migrant workers but some are people fleeing persecution. Malaysia is also a destination country for migrants from within the region, mainly from Indonesia, the Philippines and Bangladesh, as well as asylum seekers from Myanmar.²³

There is little recent data on migrant smuggling in this region. In 2013, UNODC estimated that more than 660,000 irregular migrants enter Thailand each year from neighbouring countries and, based on field research, that more than 80 percent of them (approximately 550,000 people) use the assistance of smugglers.²⁴

Most smuggled migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar transit through Thailand on their way to Malaysia.²⁵ They reach Thailand by land, sea or air, and many pass through Bangkok. Another common transit point is the southern city of Songkhla, where migrants may have to wait some time for smugglers to organise the onward journey. They cross the land border into Malaysia by driving through dense forest.

Many human right abuses and fatalities, primarily attributed to smugglers, have been reported along both sea and land routes. In 2015 large numbers of people in mixed migratory flows perished at sea when they were abandoned by smugglers.²⁶ Although it is likely that migrant deaths as a result of kidnapping largely go unrecorded, mass killings of migrants have been reportedly linked to kidnapping and forced detention involving smugglers, traffickers and state officials and politicians.²⁷

In 2015, mass graves containing the remains of almost 200 migrants were discovered in the region, first in Thailand, and then in Malaysia. The subsequent investigation that took more than two years – full of intrigue and risk for witnesses and investigators²⁸ – exposed a lucrative business that had been running for some years involving dozens of state officials and some senior military and police personnel, in collusion with smugglers and traffickers. Court presentations described it as a multi-million-dollar network running migrants through southern Thailand and on to Malaysia.²⁹ Migrants and refugees were kidnapped and detained for ransom in remote forest locations. Violence and starvation were used to force families to pay for their release. It is suspected that those who failed to pay were killed.

UNHCR estimates that between 2012 and 2015 some 170,000 refugees and migrants left Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat.³⁰ These movements are believed to have been greatly facilitated by migrant smugglers and to have followed the routes described above. There is a high likelihood that hundreds, if

21 Lewis, S. (2015) [Mass graves of suspected trafficking victims found in Malaysia](#) The Guardian

22 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018](#) (p.35)

23 IOM (2019) [Country Profile. Malaysia.](#)

24 UNODC (2013)

25 UNODC (2015) [Migrant Smuggling in Asia](#)

26 UNHCR (2015) [Abandoned at sea](#)

27 Hui Yee, T. (2017) [Thai army general gets 27 years jail for human trafficking](#) Associated Press The Straits Times; Dokson, T. (2015) [Thai officials among more than 100 charged with human trafficking](#) Associated Press

28 McKirdy, E., Olarn, K. (2015) [Thai human trafficking investigator seeks asylum in Australia](#) CNN

29 AFP (2017) [Verdict due in major Thai human trafficking trial](#) New Straits Times

30 UNHCR (2016) [Mixed Maritime Movements in South-East Asia](#)

not thousands, of migrants and refugees were forcibly detained or kidnapped before the camps were exposed. Others may have been kidnapped and sold to traffickers who sold their victims into forced labour, frequently in the fishing industry.³¹

Eventually, in 2017, more than 100 people, including a Thai general and various state officials, were convicted in Thailand in a landmark case.³²

In late May 2015, Malaysian authorities said they had found more than 20 camps with more than 100 bodies in mass graves, pointing to a network of detention camps along the forested border area between the Malaysia and Thailand.³³ “[...]The only way these kinds of camps could operate was with the support of military, police and politicians, who were either directly involved or were paid to look the other way,” Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch’s Asia division, told the Guardian.³⁴

Case Study: Mexico

“[...] one of the most systematically underreported large-scale human rights violations in the Western Hemisphere”³⁵

Each year, hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and migrants travel through and from Mexico mainly to access the United States. While millions have successfully entered the US, millions

have also been deported – with many subsequently trying to return. Some analysts have argued that an “epidemic of kidnapping” in Mexico has been shaped in part by US immigration policies and is linked to the impact of the war on drugs.³⁶ In recent years, the main countries of origin of those attempting the journey have changed from Mexico to other Central American states – most fleeing gang violence and poverty.³⁷

The journeys and violations have been well documented for many years, as has the role of smugglers, human traffickers and other criminal gangs.³⁸ Thousands of asylum seekers and migrants passing through Mexico from Central and South America are kidnapped for ransom every year. Some were recently reportedly kidnapped from the much-publicised migrant caravan of November 2018.³⁹ According to one writer, “crimes against Central American migrants in Mexico – including kidnapping, rape, and murder – are among of the most systematically underreported large-scale human rights violations in the Western Hemisphere.”⁴⁰ Typically, rape and violence characterise captivity.⁴¹ The practice has been going on for at least two decades and, in the case of Mexican nationals, occurs on a scale that is second only to kidnapping cases in Syria, overwhelming Mexican authorities.⁴²

31 Stoakes, E., Kelly, C. & Kelly, A. (2015) [Revealed: how the Thai fishing industry trafficks, imprisons and enslaves](#) The Guardian.

32 Hui Yee, T. (2017) op cit.

33 Lewis, S. (2015) op cit. The Guardian; Reuters (2015) [Malaysia finds mass graves of 25 suspected human trafficking victims](#); Lih Yi, B. (2015) [Cages, watchtower and 37 graves: inside an abandoned migrant camp in Malaysia](#) The Guardian.

34 Lewis, S. (2015) op cit.

35 Leutert, S. (2016) [The Migrant Kidnapping Epidemic Next Door](#) Lawfare Blog

36 Slack, J. (2015) [Captive bodies: migrant kidnapping and deportation in Mexico](#) Royal Geographical Society/IBG

37 European Parliament (2018) [Migration from Central America](#); Hiskey, J.T., Córdova, A., Orcés, D. & Malone, M. F. (2016) [Understanding the Central American Refugee Crisis](#) American Immigration Council

38 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2013) [Human Rights of Migrants and Other Persons in the Context of Human Mobility In Mexico](#); Shetty, S. (undated) [Most Dangerous Journey: What Central American Migrants Face When they try to Cross the Border](#) Amnesty International; Yates, C., Leutert, S. (2018) [Migrant Kidnapping in Mexico: Regional Differences](#) Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law

39 Osborne, S. (2018) [Around 100 migrant caravan members have been kidnapped by human traffickers. Mexican officials warn](#) Independent

40 Leutert, S. (2016) op cit.

41 Dimmitt Gnam, A. (2013) [Mexico's Missed Opportunities to Protect Irregular Women Transmigrants: Applying a Gender Lens to Migration Law Reform](#) Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal

42 Saez, A. (2018) [Mexico unable to cope with kidnapping epidemic](#) Deutsche Welle

In 2013, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) estimated that of the 200,000 to 400,000 migrants who made their way through Mexico each year, approximately 20,000 were kidnapped.⁴³ This figure presents continuity with a report issued by the commission three years earlier, which recorded the kidnapping of more than 11,000 migrants over the course of six months. That report was based on the testimony of 178 kidnap victims from Honduras (44 percent), El Salvador (16 percent), Guatemala (11 percent) and Mexico itself (10 percent).⁴⁴ Nearly 16 percent of the testimonies came from women, who are particularly vulnerable when travelling through Mexico.⁴⁵ A majority (approximately 65 percent) of all kidnappings happened in southeast Mexico and about 11 percent of those interviewed reported that state officials "colluded with the kidnappers during the kidnapping incidents".⁴⁶ This is a phenomenon that has been widely reported in studies.⁴⁷

Migrant kidnapping in Mexico is normally associated with gangs linked to drug cartels known for their violence, such as the Zetas.⁴⁸ Sexual abuse, torture and killings are commonly reported, with some estimates claiming that 60 to 80 percent of all female migrants journeying through Mexico are raped and some forced into prostitution through trafficking.⁴⁹

In 2009, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants observed that "impunity for human rights abuses against migrants [in Mexico] is rampant. With the pervasiveness of corruption at all levels of government and the close relationship that many authorities have with gang networks, incidences of extortion, rape and assault of migrants continue."⁵⁰ A major report in 2013 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights was highly critical of judicial and executive failings, including the collusion and engagement of state officials in kidnapping and detention for ransom.⁵¹ However, state authorities also fight to reduce kidnapping and release victims with some limited success.⁵²

More recent reports suggest the risk of kidnapping is on the rise, with more people from the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) on the move through territory where drug cartels and criminal gangs hold great sway.⁵³ Due to the longstanding, "normalised" nature of the passage for asylum seekers and migrants through and from Mexico and the high numbers involved, Mexico arguably has the most extensive migrant kidnapping and extortion problem globally.

43 Quoted in Fleury, A. (2016) [Fleeing to Mexico for Safety: The Perilous Journey for Migrant Women](#) United Nations University

44 Castillo, M. (2011) [Report: Thousands of migrants kidnapped in Mexico](#) CNN

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ref. studies and reports listed in these footnotes.

48 For example: Lakhani, N. (2017) [Mexican kidnappers pile misery on to Central Americans fleeing violence](#) The Guardian; see also: Bonello, D.

(2018) [100 people 'kidnapped' from migrant caravan by drug cartels in Mexico](#) The Telegraph

49 Dimmitt Gnam, A. (2013) [Mexico's Missed Opportunities To Protect Irregular Women Transmigrants: Applying A Gender Lens To Migration Law Reform](#) Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal Association

50 Bustamante, J. (2009) [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants](#) UN Human Rights Council

51 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2013) [Human Rights of Migrants and Other Persons in the context of Human Mobility In Mexico](#)

52 Linthicum, K. (2019) [Mexico launching search for migrants pulled off bus by gunmen near the U.S. border](#) Los Angeles Times; Deutsche Welle (2018) [Mexican police rescue kidnapped Central American migrants](#); Esposito, A. (2019) [Mexico rescues 34 Central Americans from home in violent Tamaulipas state](#) Reuters

53 LaSusa, M. (2016) [Mexico Migrant Kidnappings on the Rise?](#) InSight Crime; Yates, C., Leutert, S. (2018) [Migrant Kidnapping in Mexico: Regional Differences](#) Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law

Case Study: Europe

“Do you know how much we earn off migrants?
Drugs are less profitable.”⁵⁴

While clear-cut examples of migrant kidnapping for ransom are far less common or systematic in Europe than in transit countries, this paper makes a case study of the continent because incidents do occasionally occur there (albeit with less impunity) and because the rights of migrants and refugees in destinations such as Europe are often violated not only by criminals but also by immigration policies that often include detention.

When organised crime infiltrates an economy, activities like detention or controlling people for profit in trafficking-like situations can take place in broad daylight. According to one recent report about Italy, this can affect thousands of people, especially Nigerian women.⁵⁵ The activities of mafia groups in Italy (and particularly Sicily) offer a multi-layered example of different forms of extortion, corruption, detention and smuggling/trafficking in Europe.⁵⁶ One wiretapped mafia boss was heard telling his brother that migrants were more profitable than drug trafficking.⁵⁷ Investigation reports and media articles have outlined how mafia organisations have for many years profited from partnerships with Egyptian smugglers. In 2011, one Egyptian involved allegedly kidnapped six child migrants in Sicily, called their families and made them listen to their offspring’s screams as a way to extort money.⁵⁸ From 2014, criminal groups started profiting from

another side of the migrant “crisis” by winning lucrative EU and government contracts to run reception camps for migrants and asylum seekers.⁵⁹ Paid a daily rate based on the number of migrants housed, they were incentivised to overcrowd facilities, undersupply services, and keep people in the camps for months or years, in what amounted to detention-for-profit where migrants are confined to camps, or “a massive holding pen from where criminals take orders for human traffic.”⁶⁰ There are also reports of mafia groups forcing sub-Saharan African asylum seekers and migrants to deal drugs and engage in prostitution on their behalf and preventing them from travelling onward and settling elsewhere in Europe.⁶¹ Other reports highlight the plight of child migrants working in fields in Sicily instead of going to school. Many of the thousands of unaccompanied child migrants who have gone missing in Europe in recent years are thought to have ended up exploited by traffickers who often made the children believe that they would smuggle them to relatives in other countries.⁶²

In 2019, a gang was arrested in Spain for allegedly kidnapping migrant children for ransom from shelter homes.⁶³ Less than a year earlier in the same country, a gang of Moroccan extortionists was arrested for allegedly kidnapping fellow Moroccans for ransom.⁶⁴ In May 2018, 22 migrants were rescued from kidnapers in Northern Greece.⁶⁵ Similar cases – of deprivation of liberty, trafficking, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation and extortion – involving transiting refugees and migrants, including children, have been reported

54 Townsend, M. (2016) [Child migrants in Sicily must overcome one last obstacle – the mafia](#) The Guardian

55 Baker, A. (2019) [‘It Was As if We Weren’t Human.’ Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants.](#) Time Magazine

56 Tondo, L. (2016) [How the Mafia Make Millions Out of the Plight of Migrants](#) Time Magazine

57 Townsend, M. (2016) *op cit.*

58 Tondo, L. (2016) *op cit.*

59 AFP (2014) [Mafia ‘cashes in’ on Sicily’s migrant influx](#); Ide, E. (2015) [Italy’s biggest migrant centre: EU model or refugee ghetto?](#) Yahoo News

60 Townsend, M. (2016) *op cit.*

61 Ford, H. (2017) [The Real Migrant Crime Wave: Mafia Exploitation of Migrants in Sicily](#) Refugees Deeply

62 MacGregor, M. (2018) [Europe’s lost migrant children](#) InfoMigrants

63 Rippin, T. (2019) [Gang arrested for allegedly kidnapping migrant children for ransoms from shelter homes in Spain](#) Euro Weekly News

64 BBC (2018) [Gang ransomed migrants in Spain – police](#)

65 Ekathimerini (2018) [Thessaloniki police arrest suspect kidnapping migrants for ransom](#)

in Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Germany and Italy.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, the migration policies of various European states, notably as implemented in the “hotspots” in Greece and Italy, have been described as “unlawful under international human rights law” and responsible for “deprivation of liberty.”⁶⁷ Other countries where detention of asylum seekers and migrants is practiced in ways that have raised similar legal concerns include the Czech Republic, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Slovenia.⁶⁸ Such practices present ethical dilemmas for policy makers and societies that are supposed to uphold non-discrimination and human rights and are signatories to international treaties. One academic summed up the EU’s attitude to migrants arriving across the Mediterranean with the blunt assertion that “member states are holding migrants hostage while playing pass-the-parcel with their fates. It’s a strategy that is as cruel as it is deliberate”.⁶⁹

On several occasions, Italy has denied access to its ports to search and rescue ships.⁷⁰ In one well-publicised – if far from isolated – case, Italy’s decision in August 2018 not to allow 177 migrants to disembark on its shores from an Italian coast guard vessel led Sicilian prosecutors to place Interior Minister Matteo Salvini under investigation for allegedly kidnapping the migrants, who, in what has become a common occurrence, had been confined to the vessel for more than a week.⁷¹ (Although the Italian senate later blocked the criminal case, in April 2019, Salvini, together with Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio and another minister, was placed under investigation for false imprisonment over a similar case of migrant detention.⁷²) Some critics have framed such practices as the “politics of exhaustion”, where asylum seekers and migrants and those that assist them are ground down by obstruction, detention, delays and the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance.⁷³

66 Healy, C. (2019) [The Strength to Carry On - Resilience and Vulnerability to Trafficking and Other Abuses among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe](#) International Centre for Migration Policy Development

67 Majcher, I. (2018) [The EU Hotspot Approach: Blurred Lines between Restriction on and Deprivation of Liberty \(PART III\)](#). University of Oxford Faculty of Law Border Criminalities Blog

68 Ibid.

69 Tazzioli, M. (2019) [When rescue is capture: kidnapping and dividing migrants in the Mediterranean](#) OpenDemocracy

70 BBC (2018) [Italy's Matteo Salvini shuts ports to migrant rescue ship](#)

71 Tondo, L. (2019) [Court in Italy rules Matteo Salvini should be tried for kidnapping](#) The Guardian

72 Tondo, L. (2019) [Italy's PM and three government ministers face kidnap inquiry](#) The Guardian

73 Ansem de Vries, L., Welander, M. (2016) [Refugees, displacement, and the European 'politics of exhaustion'](#) Open Democracy; Ansem de Vries, L., Welander, M. (2016) [Refugees, displacement, and the European 'politics of exhaustion'](#) Open Democracy. Although beyond the scope of this discussion paper, a similar case could be made for the restrictive policies used to manage, deport, detain and deter irregular migration in the US at its border with Mexico

Extortion and mobile telephony/social media

“When I was in Sabratha [Libya] the gangsters kidnapped me from our home in the night... They demanded 700 Libyan dinars [US\$500]. The next morning, they beat us severely and used electric shocks. They gave us a mobile telephone and kept us for two days without food and water. I contacted my brother in Sudan to help me and I told him our situation. He told the rest of the family that I was held hostage and needed money to be released. They transferred the money after one week and the kidnappers let me go. This type of thing was happening repeatedly to migrants in Sabratha.”

23-year-old Eritrean man interviewed in Libya⁷⁴

Smartphones and social media networks are used in various ways in the context of irregular migration and migrant smuggling. They both empower and endanger those on the move.

Refugees and migrants often use social media platforms as “consumer forums” to research smugglers and the journey they are planning to undertake.⁷⁵ They also “publish feedback about smugglers and their services, exposing cases where

smugglers failed, cheated or treated migrants badly” as well as information about routes and prices.⁷⁶ In some cases, social media is used to raise the alarm over incidents of detention. At the same time, the online publication of positive images of destination countries can act as a form of peer pressure for those remaining in the country of origin.⁷⁷ Generally, the main platforms used are Facebook, Viber, Skype and WhatsApp.⁷⁸ Governments have also used online messaging to deter migrants, while the European Union and Interpol, inter alia, have considered using online platforms to advise, warn and deter movement and reduce risk.⁷⁹

The use of social media as the central source of information and feedback should not be exaggerated, as some studies show that certain regions and nationalities rely on it more than others. On average, less than 10 percent of Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis reported in 2016 that they relied on social media as their main source of information.⁸⁰ “...Eritreans and Somalis are among the poorest, and their journeys are usually the slowest and toughest, with little help from internet resources”.⁸¹ Interviews by 4Mi in West Africa showed higher usage of social media before and during migration. Some 35 percent of 2,535 refugees and migrants interviewed in this region reported using social media as their main source of information while on the move.⁸²

74 4Mi interview conducted May 12, 2017

75 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018](#) (p.44)

76 UNODC (2018) op cit.

77 Frouws, B., Phillips, M., Hassan, A. & Twigt, M. (2016) [Getting to Europe the 'WhatsApp' way - The use of ICT in contemporary mixed migration flows to Europe](#) Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat

78 UNODC (2018) op cit.

79 Frouws, B., Phillips, M., Hassan, A. & Twigt, M. (2016) op cit.

80 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018](#)

81 Cheesman, M. (2016) [Mapping refugee media journeys: on smartphones and social networks](#) Open Migration.

82 MMC (2019) [MMC West Africa 4Mi Snapshot March 2019](#)

There is a darker side to the role of mobile technology and social media in mixed migration flows: smugglers often incorporate deception into the online promotion of their services, and, when smuggling turns into kidnapping, they use it to extract ransoms, sometimes sending live footage of torture and rape to their captives' relatives to encourage speedy payment.⁸³

Mobile telephony – so useful for those on the move to communicate with each other, families, the diaspora (as well as their smugglers) – is also used by kidnapers to conduct criminal financial transactions, via informal telephone banking, commercial mobile money transfer networks, *hawala*, Western Union etc.

Mobile technology and its penetration into the most remote and marginal communities, including in the Horn of Africa, has thus turned out to be an unforeseen tool of misery and suffering. Considering the very low socio-economic profiles of almost all refugees and migrants from the Horn, without direct communication with a kidnapped person's family and contacts, the extortionists (criminals, smugglers or state officials) would gain little to no profit from kidnapping. Modern communications are key to this form of criminality, which directly affects not only those on the move, but also their families and communities, who are often forced to sell property, possessions and livestock, and even to take out loans to secure the release of those kidnapped.

3. Kidnapping and extortionate detention of people travelling in mixed migration flows from the Horn of Africa

Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali nationals comprise the overwhelming majority of people in mixed migration flows within and out of the Horn of Africa.⁸⁴ This section is structured around the three main routes they take out of the region, toward North Africa and Europe, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and Southern Africa. According to 4Mi surveys and interviews, economic and security concerns are primary drivers of their movement. Over recent years, a combination of personal aspirations, endemic poverty, lack of opportunities, political oppression and fear of insecurity or denial of freedoms has prompted an estimated 125,000–135,000 men, women and children from the Horn to move out of the region in mixed migration flows every year.⁸⁵

Refugees and migrants in these flows are susceptible to kidnapping for ransom and extortionate detention, especially in Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Egypt and the Sahara Desert. Travelling to popular destinations such as Europe, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia requires many refugees and migrants to transit countries that are fragile in terms of economy, rule of law, institutional capacity, democracy and peace. For others, problems occur at destination countries such as Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Sudan and Yemen. Some of these countries are in the lowest quartile of human development indices, have deep problems with corruption, and capacity and political will in relation to implementing the rule of law.

83 Elbagir, N., Razek, R., Sirgany, S. & Tawfeeq, M. (2018) [First they were burned and whipped, then their families were sent the videos](#) CNN

84 IOM (2018) [IOM Trend Analysis: Most Horn of Africa Migrants Move within Region](#)

85 Every year, an average of 90,000 people travel from the Horn to Yemen/Saudi Arabia (source: continuous monitoring of arrivals in Yemen, as reported in RMMS monthly summaries and research reports published since 2011); 15,000 take the southern route towards South Africa (Frouws, B. and Horwood, C. op. cit.); and 20,000 travel via Sudan and/or Egypt towards Libya with an aim to cross the Mediterranean (source: [UNHCR Operational Portal-Mediterranean situation](#)). Many in the latter group fail to reach Europe, and can be found in urban centres or refugee camps in the Horn region or in transit countries, where they are still vulnerable to kidnapping and detention. Estimates for the numbers leaving Eritrea are hard to verify and have varied greatly between 1,000 and 6,000 per month. In 2018, after relations between Asmara and Addis Ababa suddenly thawed and their common border officially re-opened, 15,000 Eritreans crossed it within a two-week period (European Commission (2018) [Ethiopia – Eritrean Refugee Influx \(DG ECHO, UNHCR, NRC\) \(ECHO Daily Flash of 26 September 2018\)](#))

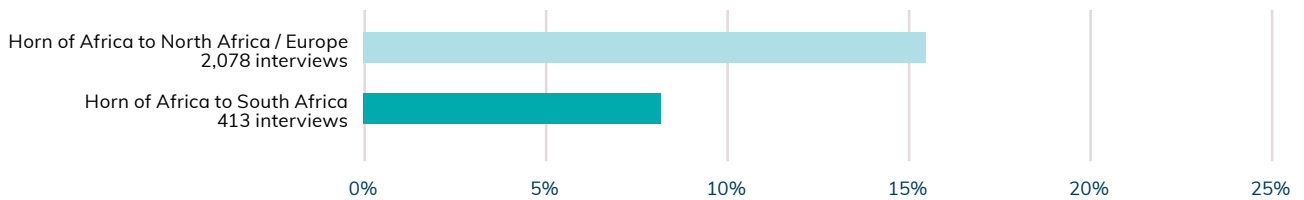
Criminal gangs, smugglers and traffickers in these states operate with a high level of impunity, in many cases colluding with corrupt state officials. Geopolitical, security and economic factors alter over time, affecting the location and prevalence of violations; for example, as reports of kidnapping and brutality in the Egyptian Sinai have fallen, they have risen in Libya.

Graph 3 below offers an overview of the prevalence of kidnapping and detention on two of the three routes out of the Horn of Africa.⁸⁶ On both routes, more than half the ransoms paid by kidnapping victims were paid with the help of relatives. That many respondents identify state officials as perpetrators of kidnapping underlines the common lack of a distinction between the perception of detention and kidnapping.

Graphic 3: Prevalence of kidnapping and detention.

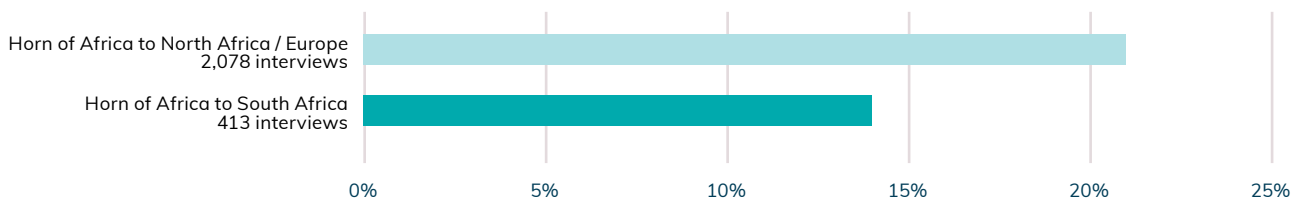
Did you get kidnapped along the way?

Percentage answering "yes". Interviews between May 2017 and Jan 2019



Did you get detained along the way?

Percentage answering "yes". Interviews between May 2017 and Jan 2019



86 4Mi data for the route to Yemen and Saudi Arabia is incomplete because of the limited access to refugees and migrants there. Interviews with those using this route take place in Djibouti and Somaliland and therefore only cover kidnapping and detention experienced in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somaliland prior to crossing the Bab-el-Mandeb or Gulf of Aden to Yemen. 4Mi is a work in progress and it is hoped that in the future a fuller picture of this route can be offered.

1) The Northern route

The Northern route refers to movement from the Horn of Africa through Sudan towards Egypt, Libya and, for some, onwards to Europe. This route is primarily used by nationals from Eritrea and Somalia, and to a lesser extent Ethiopia. The number of people from the Horn of Africa arriving in Europe has been decreasing, from over 30,000 in 2016, to over 10,000 in 2017 and less than 4,000 in 2018.⁸⁷

Eritreans made up the second largest national group of new arrivals in Italy in 2018, even though their numbers have dropped steadily from approximately 21,000 in 2016, 7,000 in 2017, and 3,320 in 2018, when they accounted for almost 15 percent of all new arrivals.⁸⁸

Comparatively speaking, surveyed refugees and migrants who moved in mixed migration flows on the Northern route reported highest levels of criminal activity as well as a broad range of actors involved in abuse and exploitation. Graphic 3 above shows that almost one in seven 4Mi respondents reported being kidnapped along this route. More than 77 percent of those kidnapped on this route secured their release with a ransom, which in 72 percent of cases was paid with contributions from friends and/or relatives.

Thousands of Eritreans are stranded or have had their journey curtailed and reside informally in Sudan, Egypt and Libya. Others have been registered and reside in refugee camps or as urban refugees in Ethiopia and Sudan.⁸⁹ Many Eritreans have been kidnapped or stuck in detention camps in Libya for several weeks, months and in some cases years.

Based on 4Mi data and interviews undertaken during 2017 and 2018, the following chart illustrates the geographical distribution of incidents of kidnapping and detention along this route.

Table 1: Horn of Africa to North Africa/Europe

Country where incidents were reported	Percentage of incidents reported
Sudan	44.2%
Egypt	22.6%
Libya	18.9%
Ethiopia	13.6%
Other	0.8%

A relevant finding here is that while the kidnapping and detention of refugees and migrants in Libya have been very well publicised, those travelling on this route reported a greater number of incidents elsewhere, in Sudan and Egypt.

Who are the perpetrators?

As the graphic below illustrates, the vast majority (81.2 percent) of refugees and migrants who reported being kidnapped on this route attributed the crime to smugglers. This suggests that some smugglers working this route are conducting human trafficking-like activities, kidnapping their “clients” to augment their smuggling fees with ransom payments.

⁸⁷ [UNHCR Operational Portal-Mediterranean situation](#)

⁸⁸ Ibid.

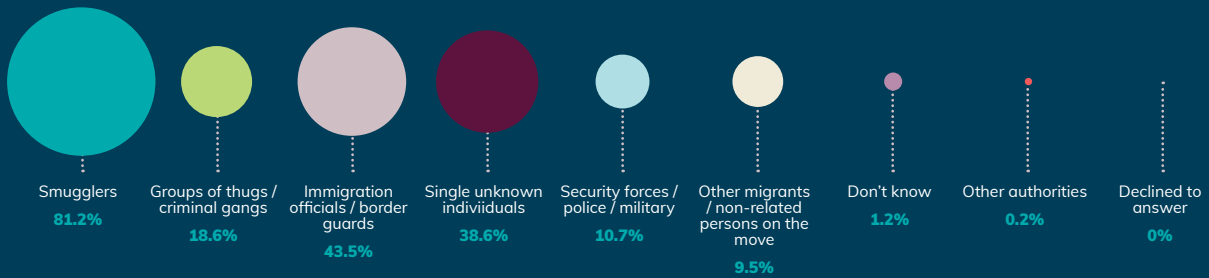
⁸⁹ [Siegfried, K. \(2016\) Sudan and Eritrea crackdown on migrants amid reports of EU incentives The New Humanitarian](#); Jeffrey, J. (2017) [The Eritreans fleeing to Ethiopia](#) Al Jazeera

Horn of Africa to North Africa / Europe Route

Graphic 4: Who kidnaps migrants?

Who kidnapped you?

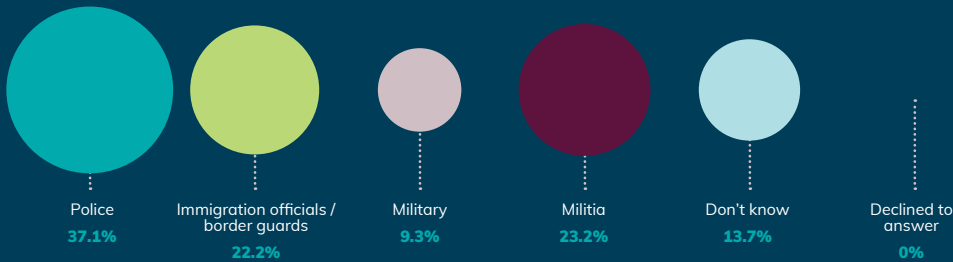
Horn of Africa to North Africa / Europe (515 incidents - source: 4Mi Survey)



Graphic 5: Who are the detainers?

Which of the following detained you? (Multi-select)

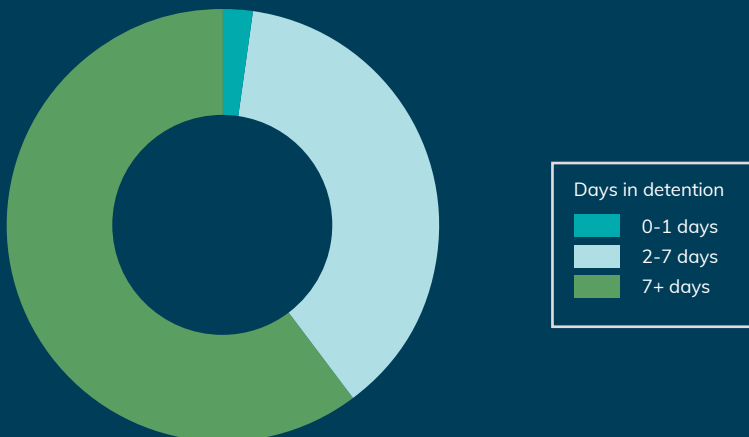
Horn of Africa to North Africa / Europe (483 incidents - source: 4Mi Survey)



Graphic 6: Length of detention

Days detained

Horn of Africa to North Africa / Europe (483 incidents - source: 4Mi Survey)



The second most frequently cited group of alleged perpetrators of kidnapping was immigration officials and border guards (43.5 percent). If these state actors were ostensibly acting in an official capacity, this illustrates how little difference there often is in the eyes of victims between detention and kidnapping. The line is further blurred by the fact that almost one in four of the respondents who

reported being detained on the Northern route identified their detainers as militias (see Graphic 5) who demanded payment prior to release. Of those who reported being detained on this route, 63 percent said this was because of their irregular movement, more than 20 percent said they were being held for ransom, and 17 percent said they were never told why they were detained.

Egypt and Sudan

“It has become like an everyday thing that we don’t report on any more. For those that go to Sudan, it’s almost impossible to arrive safely without being kidnapped.”⁹⁰

In the early 2000s, before Libya became the country presenting the highest risk to those in mixed flows, refugees and migrants in Egypt and Sudan reported experiences of kidnapping for ransom and extortionate detention. Such abuses continue to be reported in 2019.⁹¹

For Eritreans fleeing their country to avoid conscription into indefinite national service and political repression, movements through Sudan and Egypt into Israel have been particularly dangerous.⁹² Between 2009 and 2011, some 60,000 Eritreans made this journey and in late 2014 as many as 5,000 Eritreans were leaving their country every month.⁹³ As well as Israel, their desired destinations included Egypt itself and Libya, to work there or, for some, as a gateway to Europe, where they knew many countries would grant them refugee status.

This exodus made for easy prey and rich pickings for criminals: between 2007 and 2013, some 30,000 Eritreans were abducted in eastern Sudan, often in the vicinity of UN-run refugee camps, with many taken to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula – others to warehouses near the eastern Sudanese city of Kassala – to be subjected to torture and ransom demands of up to US\$50,000 that resulted in at least \$600m being extorted from families and others at home or in the diaspora.⁹⁴ Relatives were reported to have sold their possessions, including houses and land, to meet ransom demands, which were higher for those with relatives in the global north. A number of those kidnapped did not survive their ordeals: some died after ransoms were paid, others were shot while trying to escape their captors, others still were shot by Israeli border guards.⁹⁵

90 Hayden, S. (2018) [Captured, raped, ransomed: the kidnapers preying on Eritrean refugees](#) The Guardian

91 MacGregor, M. (2019) [No choice: Migrants kidnapped for ransom](#) Info Migrants

92 BBC (2015) [Eritrea conscription still indefinite, says Amnesty](#); Human Rights Watch (2018) [Human Rights Watch Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Eritrea](#)

93 Greenwood, P. (2012) [Eritrean regime cashes in on arms and human trafficking, says UN report](#) The Guardian; UNHCR (2014) [Sharp increase in number of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe, Ethiopia and Sudan](#)

94 Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. & Rijken, C. (2012) [Human Trafficking in the Sinai: Refugees between Life and Death](#) Human Trafficking Search; Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. & Rijken (2014) [The Human Trafficking Cycle: Sinai and Beyond](#) Wolf Legal Publishers

95 Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. & Rijken, C. (2014) op. cit.; See also: Reuters (2010) [Egypt police kill Eritrean woman at Israeli border](#)

Detailing the methods of kidnapers, Human Rights Watch reported:

A common technique traffickers use is to hold a mobile phone line open to their hostages' relatives as they physically abuse their victims. The relatives hear the screams and the kidnapers demand the ransom for the victims' release. Many Eritreans have told [...] of their experiences of rape, burning, mutilation and deformation of limbs, electric shocks, and other forms of violence.⁹⁶

Some Eritrean and Sudanese security officers worked with kidnapping gangs, some of whose members were themselves smugglers, or in close collusion with smugglers.⁹⁷ Instances were reported in which army officers would “hand victims over to traffickers in police stations, turn a blind eye at checkpoints, and return escaped trafficking victims to traffickers.”⁹⁸

In 2014, Human Rights Watch urged the Sudanese government to “specifically investigate senior police officials responsible for collusion with traffickers in the town of Kassala and in the surrounding area, including the use of police stations to hand over Eritreans to traffickers.”⁹⁹

Despite the practice coming to an end in the Sinai,¹⁰⁰ Eritrean asylum seekers taking new routes (since Israel's fence of 2013 effectively prevents any irregular access) still face the same dangers in other areas of Sudan and in Libya.¹⁰¹

Egyptian authorities continue to detain and deport irregular migrants and asylum seekers in large numbers in a wide variety of detention centres, prisons, police posts and even military centres.¹⁰² Despite anecdotal evidence that state officials accept bribes and rob migrants and refugees, it is not clear whether extortionate detention by state officials is systemic. From late 2018, reports began to emerge of migrants selling their organs in Egypt to pay for their passage to Europe, and of the outright theft of such organs.¹⁰³

The EU, which is currently supporting Sudan and other African countries in a bid to stem migration to Europe, has been accused of being complicit in creating an environment that enables violations against refugees and migrants to continue.¹⁰⁴ Critics say EU funds exacerbate the mistreatment of refugees because Sudanese authorities believe the EU's primary concern is to stop movement rather than protect the vulnerable.¹⁰⁵ Around 1,000 migrants have reportedly been arrested in Sudan every year since 2012, a task the government has largely delegated to the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), some of whose personnel used to serve in the janjawid militia involved in counter-insurgency operations in Darfur.¹⁰⁶ The EU has denied that any of its funding reaches the RSF.¹⁰⁷

96 Human Rights Watch (2014a) op cit.

97 Van Reisen, M., Estefanos, M. & Rijken, C. (2012 & 2014) op cit.

98 Human Rights Watch (2014a) op cit.

99 Ibid.

100 It was only as a side effect of enhanced military operations against terrorist networks in the Sinai, unrelated to the extortion business, that the camps there stopped operating in September 2014, see Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (Undated) [Sinai Torture Camps](#)

101 Tsurkov, E. (2015) [The New Torture Camps for Eritrean Asylum-Seekers](#) Hotline for Refugees and Migrants

102 Global Detention Project (2018) [Immigration Detention in Egypt](#)

103 Columb, S. (2019) [Organ trafficking in Egypt: 'They locked me in and took my kidney'](#) The Guardian; Baraaz, T. (2018) [Illegal Organ Harvesting Is Rampant in Egypt, and Refugees Are the Main Target](#) Haaretz

104 Baldo, S. (2017) [Border Control from Hell: How the EU's migration partnership legitimizes Sudan's "militia state"](#) The Enough Project

105 Kingsley, P. (2018) [By Stifling Migration, Sudan's Feared Secret Police Aid Europe](#) The New York Times

106 Tubiana, J., Warin, C. & Saeneen, G. (2018) [Multilateral Damage - The impact of EU migration policies on central Saharan routes](#) Clingendael

107 European Parliament (2017) [Parliamentary questions](#)

4Mi respondents provided the following first-hand accounts of the dangers faced by refugees and migrants in Sudan and Egypt:¹⁰⁸

“The human rights violations on my way from Ethiopia to Egypt were very bad and very difficult to describe. I don't have enough words to explain what I have seen and experienced myself. I was raped, and my 16-year-old daughter was also raped. The smugglers are very dangerous and don't care about humanity. They also kidnapped my daughter and I had to pay money to get her back. It was very bad.”

32-year-old Ethiopian woman

“I received a lot of abuse on my way to Sudan and Egypt. The smugglers kidnapped my 12-year-old boy. After I paid money they brought him back but there were others that remained kidnapped in the Sahara desert and we have not received any information about them.”

38-year-old Ethiopian woman

“On the Ethiopia-Sudan border, smugglers and border guards are abusing migrants. The Ethiopian border guards are highly violating the free movement of citizens all over the country and asking money after they arrest migrants. The same situation happens in Sudan. The Sudanese border guards arrested all the migrants who were with me and asked for money, and after 10 days when we paid we were released from prison.”

37-year-old Ethiopian man

“The Sudanese smugglers and border guards kidnapped the small age children and transferred them to the Sinai desert to traffickers where the Egyptians held the children and returned them back to their family only after the family paid money.”

62-year-old Ethiopian man

“The Ethiopian and Sudanese government officials affected the migrants' right to move in different ways. The smugglers are working with police officers in both countries for their personal benefit. The police, border guards and smugglers are raping female migrants, including children of 14 and 15 years. And they also beat the male migrants if they refuse to make payments. From my group, two were raped and kidnapped in the Sahara desert of Sudan.”

28-year-old Ethiopian woman in Cairo

“There is a human right violation all the way from Ethiopia to Egypt. The smugglers and police offices are working together for their personal benefits. They abused us migrants by raping women and beating the women's husbands or anyone else to tried to intervene.”

30-year-old Ethiopian woman

“What I have seen in the Sahara Desert of Sudan and Egypt very shocked me. The Sudanese smugglers kidnapped my children and handed them over to human traffickers. After one day I paid money and got back my children, but two other kidnapped children disappeared.”

36-year-old Ethiopian man

108 4Mi interviews conducted in Cairo between late 2017 and early 2018

Libya

“They are selling people like fish, they are marketing people like clothes...”¹⁰⁹

Abduction, kidnapping and arbitrary detention of refugees and migrants are rights violations that have been reported in Libya and are probably the most well-publicised examples in the world today.

According to a report published in 2017, “Libya is plagued by an epidemic of kidnappings and nobody is spared. Everyone is a potential target; the only distinction is in the money the kidnappers expect to get from different categories of people [...] Sub-Saharan African migrants are especially vulnerable to kidnapping because of the desert crossing and the greater risks they take due to their limited resources.”¹¹⁰

Many refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa and West Africa will have already experienced detention and kidnapping before they arrive in Libya, but the scale of the risk further increases when they get there.¹¹¹

Once brought into Libya by smugglers, many refugees and migrants end up confined in government detention centres while others are kidnapped, often to be sold from one criminal group to another. One Sudanese man reported, “They kidnap people at gunpoint, and then demand that the families pay ransom. They threaten to kill the abductees if the ransom is not paid.”¹¹²

The Global Detention Project summarised the array of predators active in Libya thus:

“This is a system of coercion and exploitation that can combine prison guards, DCIM [Department for Combatting Illegal Immigration] officials, smugglers and traffickers, as well as corrupt coastguard officials. Sometimes DCIM centres release migrants in order to refer them to smuggling/trafficking networks with whom they cooperate, and in some cases, smugglers negotiate the release of immigration detainees purely so that they can force them to pay for a sea crossing to Italy. Because immigration detention is arbitrary and indefinite, for many the ‘only hope of release from refugee and migrant detention centres is through escaping, buying their way out or being sold on to people smugglers.’”¹¹³

Many who are held in official detention centres are taken there after having been “rescued” offshore by the Libyan Coast Guard.¹¹⁴ While nominally run by the Interior Ministry, in practice these centres are controlled by armed groups.¹¹⁵

In December 2018 the UN released a major report describing human rights violations committed by a range of state officials, armed groups, smugglers and traffickers against refugees and migrants in Libya.¹¹⁶ Covering a 20-month period (from early 2017 to August 2018) it reiterated what numerous previous media reports and human rights agencies

109 D’Agostino, L., & Tutton, M. (2018) [Vulnerable migrants targeted by traffickers: Why people risk slavery to reach Europe](#) CNN

110 Micallef, M. (2017) [The Human Conveyor Belt: trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya](#) The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (p. 34)

111 Baker, A. (2019) [Inside the Modern Slave Trade Trapping African Migrants](#) Time Magazine, or see also Kihl, L. (2019) [«Tu paies ou on te prend un rein». Les migrants dans l'enfer libyen](#) Le Soir+

112 Dabanga (2016) [Sudanese in Libya subject to kidnapping for ransom](#)

113 Global Detention Project (2018) [Immigration Detention in Libya: “A Human Rights Crisis”](#)

114 Laessing U., & Elumami, A. (2018) [Libyan coast guard says it has intercepted 15,000 migrants in 2018](#) Reuters

115 Global Detention Project (2018) op cit.

116 United Nations Support Mission in Libya & Office of the High Commissioner for Human Right (2018) [Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya](#)

had highlighted for at least seven years, since the Gadhafi regime collapsed in Libya in 2011.¹¹⁷

UN staff visited 11 detention centres where thousands of migrants and refugees were being held and documented torture, ill-treatment, forced labour, and rape by guards. The report found that the overwhelming majority of women and late-teenage girls reported having been gang raped by smugglers or traffickers. Migrants held in the centres are systematically subjected to “starvation and severe beatings, burned with hot metal objects, electrocuted and subjected to other forms of ill-treatment with the aim of extorting money from their families through a complex system of money transfers.”¹¹⁸

The report added: “countless migrants and refugees lost their lives during captivity by smugglers, after being shot, tortured to death, or simply left to die from starvation or medical neglect [...] Across Libya, unidentified bodies of migrants and refugees bearing gunshot wounds, torture marks and burns are frequently uncovered in rubbish bins, dry river beds, farms and the desert.”¹¹⁹

Lawlessness in Libya facilitates a wide array of such illicit activities, leaving migrants and refugees at the mercy of predators who view them as commodities to be exploited and extorted. In the words of one migrant from Nigeria, abductors in Libya are “selling people like fish, marketing people like clothes.”¹²⁰

In April 2019, reports emerged of a new kind of abuse of refugees and migrants held in DCIM detention centres in and around Tripoli: forced recruitment by militias amid a deteriorating security situation that saw some detainees being shot at or caught in crossfire.¹²¹

Between 8,000 and 10,000 men, women and children (including infants) were being held in official detention centres in Libya in 2018, according to Human Rights Watch, with others held in unofficial centres run by gangs or militia groups.¹²² (In March 2019, UNHCR put the number at 5,700, “of whom 4,100 may have international protection needs”.¹²³) Almost 20 percent of those who reached Europe by sea from Libya in the first nine months of 2018 were children under the age of 18.¹²⁴ Children are also not exempt from abuses: Human Rights Watch documented allegations of rape and beatings of children by guards and smugglers.

Many who enter Libya immediately face a series of short- or long-term detentions by smugglers who prevent them from moving on until payments are made, often with the threat of violence.¹²⁵ This cycle is often repeated for those picked up by the Libyan Coast Guard while attempting to reach Europe. Since early 2017, around 30,000 migrants returned to Libya by the Coast Guard have been placed in detention centres, where they are denied due process, access to lawyers or consular services.¹²⁶ Some argue that the policies of the European Union (and some EU member states) and its support of

117 Recent examples include: D’Agostino, L. (2018) [‘They use black men as slaves’: Migrants tell of brutality in Libya](#) CNN; Amnesty International (2015) [‘Libya is Full of Cruelty’ Stories of Abduction, Sexual Violence and Abuse from Migrants and Refugees](#); FIDH, Migreurop & Justice Without Borders for Migrants (2012) [Libya: The Hounding of Migrants Must Stop](#); Karasapan, O. (2017) [The tragedy of migrants in Libya](#) Brookings; Amnesty International (2015) [Libya: wave of abductions, torture and gang rape is driving Mediterranean migrant exodus – new report](#)

118 United Nations Support Mission in Libya & Office of the High Commissioner for Human Right (2018) [Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya](#) (p. 5-6)

119 United Nations Support Mission in Libya & Office of the High Commissioner for Human Right (2018) [Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya](#) (p. 6)

120 D’Agostino, L., & Tutton, M. (2018) op cit.

121 Hayden, S. (2019) [Fear and despair engulf refugees in Libya’s ‘market of human beings’](#) The Guardian; Hayden, S. (2019) [Libya: Detained refugees shot as clashes near Tripoli continue](#) Al Jazeera; MSF (2019) [Detained refugees trapped, Libyan families flee, as fighting worsens in Tripoli](#)

122 Human Rights Watch (2019) [No Escape from Hell: EU Policies Contribute to Abuse of Migrants in Libya](#)

123 UNHCR (2019) [Refugees protest conditions in Libyan detention as resettlement solutions falter](#)

124 Human Rights Watch (2019) [No Escape from Hell: EU Policies Contribute to Abuse of Migrants in Libya](#)

125 Kazeem, Y. (2018) [The harrowing, step-by-step story of a migrant’s journey to Europe](#) Quartz

126 UN News (2018) [UN report sheds light on ‘unimaginable horrors’ faced by migrants and refugees in Libya, and beyond](#)

the Libyan government and Coast Guard directly implicate it in the detentions, abuse and deaths.¹²⁷

Since the summer of 2017, changes in Libya's security dynamics, which have seen many armed groups switch from direct involvement in the smuggling industry to join anti-smuggling efforts, has created a "paradigm shift" that has left migrants "at risk of abuse as smugglers avoid law enforcement and increasingly seek to extract profits through extortion, ransom and forced labour."¹²⁸

"After the sea route was closed by the Libyan government in Sabratha, we had to stay for more than three months in Sabratha waiting for the sea route to be opened. One night they pushed us onto a boat at midnight to reach Italy but after two hours the sea gangs caught us. A first I was worried because I thought it was the government, but they were gangs that only needed money to release us. After one week of beatings and no food or water I managed to transfer the amount of money requested by kidnappers. I saw migrants were denied food for more than a week in Sabratha. If you don't have money in the smugglers warehouse it was impossible to survive with life because they beat you and tortured you till you transfer your money. Most of the smugglers they took drugs. After they took drugs they would beat, rape and kill migrants."

26-year-old Ethiopian interviewed in Tripoli¹²⁹

2) The Eastern route

The Eastern route refers to movement of refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa towards Yemen and the Gulf states. It is primarily used by nationals from Ethiopia (on average 80 to 90 percent of flows) and Somalia. Annual arrivals in Yemen have been between 75,000 and 150,000 since 2011.¹³⁰ This route is thus by far the busiest of the three out of the Horn of Africa. It also carries the highest risk of violent abuse, including kidnapping for ransom, especially in Yemen, at the hands of smugglers, criminal gangs, human traffickers and state actors

who operate with impunity.¹³¹ Ransoms are paid to secure the release of kidnap victims along this route. A deepening armed conflict in Yemen and several mass deportations from leading destination state Saudi Arabia have had little effect on the flow from the Horn on this route, which reached a peak in 2018.¹³²

The great majority of the (mostly Oromo¹³³) Ethiopians on the Eastern route travel to seek work in Saudi Arabia and/or to flee political oppression in

127 Miles, T., Scherer, S. (2017) [EU Support of Libyan coast guard "inhuman": U.N. rights chief](#) Reuters; Jeannerod, B. (2019) [France Gifts Boats to Abusive Libyan Coast Guard - French Assistance Could Lead to Gross Rights Violations](#) Human Rights Watch; Deutsche Welle (2018) [Italy gives Libya ships, equipment as more migrants reported lost](#)

128 Micallef, M. Horsley, R. & Bish, A. (2019) [The Human Conveyor Belt Broken – assessing the collapse of the human-smuggling industry in Libya and the central Sahel](#) Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime/Clingendael; see also: Hayden, S. (2019) [The Families of Migrants Held Hostage Are Using Facebook to Raise Money for Smugglers' Ransoms](#) Time Magazine

129 4Mi interview conducted December 20, 2017

130 Mixed Migration Centre [monthly summaries](#); Wilson-Smith, H. (2019) [On the Move in a War Zone: Mixed Migration Flows to and through Yemen](#) Migration Policy Institute

131 Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2012) [Desperate choices: Conditions, risks & protection failure affecting Ethiopian migrants in Yemen](#)

132 Leon, M. (2019) [Yemen Received More Migrants in 2018 than Europe](#) UN Dispatch

133 Wilson-Smith, H. (2019) [On the Move in a War Zone: Mixed Migration Flows to and through Yemen](#), Migration Policy Institute

Ethiopia. Unlike the Somali refugees and migrants on this route, few Ethiopians claim asylum in Yemen and remain there: less than three percent of the 280,000 refugees in Yemen are Ethiopian and almost all the rest are Somali nationals. When Ethiopian men do sometimes work in Yemen it is normally to pay smuggler fees for onward travel. Many women, on the other hand, seek domestic work in Yemen, despite the high risks of abuse and abduction.¹³⁴ In recent years, Ethiopians in particular have

experienced severe rights violations as they travel out of Ethiopia (by vehicle or/and foot) and as they pass through Somaliland, Puntland or Djibouti to coastal points of departure across the Gulf of Aden.¹³⁵ Beatings, robbery, rape and killings have been common experiences in transit countries, as well as incidents of detention and kidnapping. Smugglers have also been known to throw their “clients” into the sea off the coast of Yemen if they see officials on the shore during their approach.¹³⁶

Yemen

The greatest risk of kidnapping and extortionate detention for refugees and migrants on the Eastern route occurs in Yemen itself, where at times up to 75 percent of those on the move have been kidnapped for ransom on arrival, often with the collusion or active participation of state officials.¹³⁷ The main perpetrators are smugglers, human traffickers and criminal gangs. It was once common practice for maritime smugglers to communicate with gangs who were waiting on Yemen’s shores with trucks to abduct the arriving refugees and migrants.

Victims of these abuses have recounted incidents of murder, robbery, confinement, starvation, brutal beatings and rape of men, as well as women.¹³⁹ Other rights violations in Yemen include *refoulement*/forced deportation and the prevention of asylum applications.¹⁴⁰ Thousands of Ethiopian and Somali women and girls have been separated from men on arrival and are often not heard from again. They are presumed to have been sold by smugglers and officials to human traffickers who exploit them or sell them on to others.¹⁴¹

With US\$300 often cited as a typical ransom demand for those kidnapped on the coast, this is a business that generates many millions of dollars every year.¹³⁸ It is not uncommon for refugees and migrants to be kidnapped for ransom more than once on their journey through Yemen.

134 Githuka, W. (2014) [Abused & Abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen](#) Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
135 Frouws, B. (2013) [Migrant Smuggling in the Horn of Africa & Yemen: The political economy and protection risks](#) Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat

136 See, for example: IOM (2017) [Up to 50 Somali, Ethiopian Migrants Deliberately Drowned by Smugglers off Yemen](#); Keath, L. & Al-Haj, H. (2008) [150 migrants thrown in shark-infested waters](#)

137 Tinti, P. (2017) [Yemen Country Statement: Addressing Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking in East Africa](#) Expertise France/Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat; Frouws, B. (2015) [Behind Bars: The detention of migrants in and from the East & Horn of Africa](#) Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat; Finn, T. (2012) [Migrant hunting, smuggling on Yemen-Saudi border](#) Reuters; Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2016) [Regional mixed migration summary for January 2016](#); Human Rights Watch (2014b) [Yemen's Torture Camps: Abuse of Migrants by Human Traffickers in a Climate of Impunity](#)

138 Hakim, Y. (2013) [Ethiopian migrants tell of torture and rape in Yemen](#) BBC. Ransoms tend to be higher, and violence more brutal, in the torture camps close to the Saudi border – see: Human Rights Watch (2014b) op cit.

139 Human Rights Watch (2018) [Yemen: Detained African Migrants Tortured, Raped](#)

140 Human Rights Watch (2009) [Hostile Shores: Abuse and Refoulement of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Yemen](#)

141 Githuka, W. (2014) op cit.

The type and severity of abuse of refugees and migrants in Yemen varies over time and by location. The types of facilities involved include government-run detention centres and torture camps set up close to the Saudi border. Occasionally, Yemeni authorities have interrupted the impunity with which this criminality generally takes place and shed light on its extreme violence. Some of the many hundreds

of captives freed by Yemeni authorities in the north of the country in 2013, for example, “had been held for months and displayed signs of torture and other physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Some had their fingernails pulled out or their tongues partially cut off. Others had been severely beaten.”¹⁴²

3) The Southern route

The Southern route refers to movement from the Horn of Africa through a range of Southern African countries towards South Africa. It is primarily used by nationals of Ethiopia (80 percent) and Somalia (20 percent). It is estimated that, annually, between 13,000 and 20,000 people take the route, which has been active for at least 15 years.¹⁴³

Smuggling is the primary criminal enterprise affecting irregular movement on this route, notably on journeys through Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The smuggling economy on the Southern route has an estimated annual value of between US\$40 million and US\$50 million. Human trafficking is uncommon, although some migrants report incidents of kidnapping for ransom, sexual and labour exploitation, and extortionate detention by state officials.¹⁴⁴

A little over eight percent of the 4Mi respondents interviewed along this route and in South Africa itself in 2017 and 2018 reported having been kidnapped during their journeys, either by smugglers (in almost half of all cases) by criminal gangs or other “thugs” (See Graphic 7 below). Of those kidnapped, 95 percent said they had to pay to

be released (with friends or relatives contributing to ransom payments in 29 percent of cases) and that coercion and threats were used to prevent them from leaving. If the eight percent is representative of all those travelling on the Southern route, then up to 1,600 refugees and migrants are kidnapped on it every year. By contrast, a survey conducted in 2009 revealed no reports by refugees and migrants of kidnapping for ransom on the Southern route, although it presented some evidence of extortionate detention by officials.¹⁴⁵ Although there appears to be less violence associated with kidnapping on the Southern route than on other routes, “it is clear that within the smuggling economy [on the Southern route] migrants are viewed as commodities”.¹⁴⁶

Fourteen percent of 4Mi respondents said they had been detained en route or in South Africa, for the most part by police (70 percent of cases) and/or by border guards (25 percent.) Almost all (93 percent) of those detained on this route said they understood this was due to having crossed a border irregularly. Numerous anecdotal reports cited from those on the move in various reports and human rights studies as well as 4Mi itself, mention that payment to corrupt officials is often required to secure release, but that,

142 Mediciens Sans Frontieres (2013) [Yemen: Migrants Abused, Tortured by Smugglers](#)

143 Horwood, C. (2009) [In Pursuit of the Southern Dream: Victims of Necessity](#) IOM; Frouws, B., Horwood, C. (2017) [Smuggled South: An updated overview of mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to southern Africa with specific focus on protection risks, human smuggling and trafficking](#) Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat

144 Redvers, L. (2012) [A Somali migrant's perilous journey to South Africa](#) BBC

145 Horwood, C. (2009) op cit.

146 Frouws, B., Horwood, C. (2017) op cit.

as with kidnapping, less violence is involved than on other routes out of the Horn of Africa.

The following charts show who 4Mi respondents said was responsible for kidnapping incidents on the Southern route in 2017 and 2018; the geographical distribution of kidnapping and detention incidents; the different types detainers; and the duration of detention.

Horn of Africa to South Africa Route

Graphic 7: Who perpetrated the kidnapping?

Who was responsible for the kidnapping?

Horn of Africa to South Africa (37 incidents - source: 4Mi Survey)

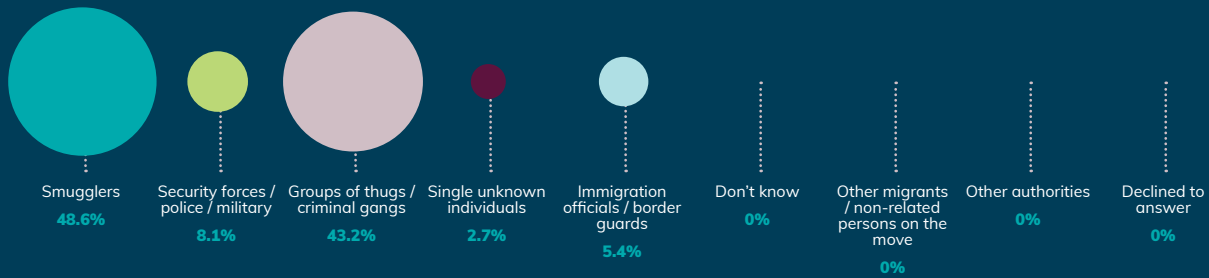


Table 2: Where kidnapping and detention took place

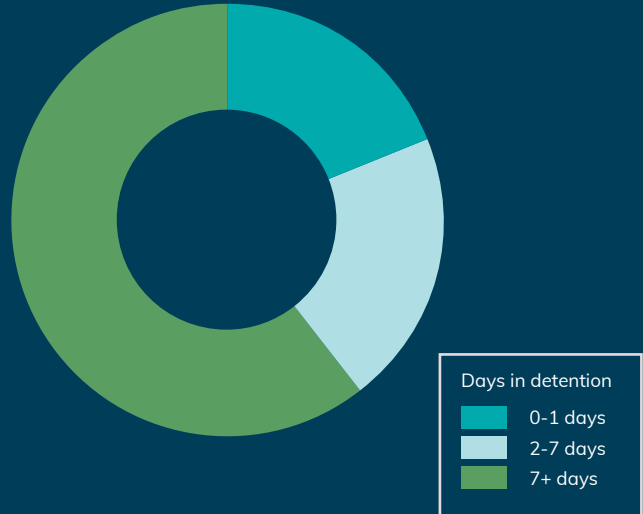
Country where incidents were reported	Percentage of incidents reported
Zimbabwe	24.3%
Mozambique	21.6%
Tanzania	18.9%
South Africa	13.5%
Kenya	8.1%
Ethiopia	5.4%

Graphic 8: Duration of detention

Days detained

Horn of Africa to South Africa

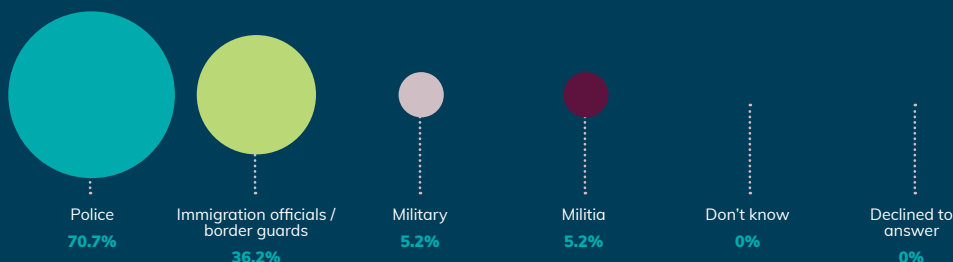
(58 incidents - source: 4Mi Survey)



Graphic 9: The detainers

Which of the following detained you? (Multi-select)

Horn of Africa to South Africa (58 incidents - source: 4Mi Survey)



4Mi respondents provided the following first-hand accounts of the dangers faced by refugees and migrants on the Southern route:¹⁴⁷

“I was kidnapped for about 10 days in Beitbridge [the border crossing to South Africa] along with about 20 other people from different countries.”

41-year-old Ethiopian woman

“I was held in prison in Malawi. The situation in the prison was horrifying. Most of the prisoners there were sick and hungry. I can't forget what I have seen in that prison.”

28-year-old Somali national

“When you are crossing borders of other countries the experienced smugglers hand over the migrants to cheap and inexperienced ad hoc smugglers in order to cross the border. These cheap smugglers are ruthless and drunks. They beat migrants extremely to extort money.”

21-year-old Somali man

147 4Mi interviews conducted in South Africa in late 2017 and early 2018

4. Conclusion

Kidnapping for ransom and extortionate detention are risks faced – to widely varying degrees – by refugees and migrants on all three routes out of the Horn of Africa. Available recent 4Mi data shows that the risks are highest on the Northern route when compared to the Southern route, but historically and continuing today the highest prevalence of kidnapping and abduction remains the Eastern route to Yemen and the Gulf States. Despite the absence of 4Mi monitors on the ground in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, years of monitoring the situation and various studies conducted by MMC (and RMMS earlier) has established the extent of risk and exposure to kidnapping, often brutal in nature, faced by migrants in Yemen.¹⁴⁸

Overall, smugglers play a dominant role in the kidnapping and detention business, but state officials are also active. For many refugees and migrants there is an overlap, or a lack of perceived distinction, between criminal kidnappers and state officials who carry out extortionate detention. In all cases and all routes impunity is endemic for perpetrators who see refugees and migrants using irregular pathways as easy prey and as a seemingly unending flow of potential victims ripe for financial and/or sexual exploitation.

A recent survey of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean suggested these were global challenges, with the most common incidents witnessed or experienced across all routes being arbitrary arrest/detention, extortion, kidnapping and physical abuse.¹⁴⁹ The researchers further found:

“... there was a general feeling of chaos and lawlessness on all the routes taken by respondents. Incidents took place, not only at check-points, prisons, and compounds, but also at markets, streets, camps, places of employment, and in transport vehicles. This means that, irrespective of which route was taken, or the duration of the journey, respondents faced a continuum of violence and exploitation from beginning to end, at the hands of smugglers, government officials, gangs, insurgent groups, and abusive citizens.”¹⁵⁰

This final quote echoes the title of this paper and describes well the fact that in relation to extortion, kidnapping and detention, today’s refugees and migrants moving in mixed irregular flows are everyone’s prey.

148 Reports and studies can be sourced from the Mixed Migration Centre website. www.mixedmigration.org

149 XChange Research on Migration [Central Mediterranean Survey: Mapping Migration Routes & Incidents](#)

150 Ibid.



The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa, Europe, Middle East, North Africa & West Africa) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

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