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Social Capital and Transnational Human Smuggling: What is the Impact of Counter-Smuggling Policies?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The defining characteristic of the transnational market for human smuggling is the agentive choice by migrants to purchase services in order to facilitate their transportation across state borders. This broad definition includes a large variety of transactions between migrants and actors performing distinct roles, based on the nuances of diverse local dynamics. This analytical report applies a critical lens to the impact of counter-smuggling policies, in order to enable governments to set better-informed policy priorities. It is important that policymakers do not approach regulating human smuggling exclusively through the lenses of criminality, security, and law enforcement. Although human smuggling services are purchased through informal markets that infringe on national laws, these informal markets share many characteristics with other legal economic activities. A narrow focus on the criminal nature of the human smuggling industry would problematically draw policymakers' attention away from understanding how the laws and regulations that they enact influence the lived experiences of migrants. By expanding this focus, this analytical report aims to provide government actors with a tool for understanding the nuances of the human smuggling market and the full effects of potential counter-smuggling policies.

A growing body of scholarship offers deeper insight into the disorganized and highly human interactions and transactions involved in irregular migration journeys. Rather than overemphasizing the role of transnational organized crime in human smuggling, this emerging field of research examines the role of interpersonal relationships and community knowledge in facilitating migration journeys and ameliorating potential risks. Broadly referred to as 'social capital,' information shared through diaspora communities about the reputation of smuggling service providers acts a regulatory mechanism in the absence of official government oversight. Individuals' access to social capital is changeable and can fluctuate as the result of counter-smuggling policies, among other factors. Understanding the role of social capital in the market for human smuggling will allow government actors to design migration management policies that more effectively safeguard migrants' wellbeing.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE MARKET FOR HUMAN SMUGGLING SERVICES

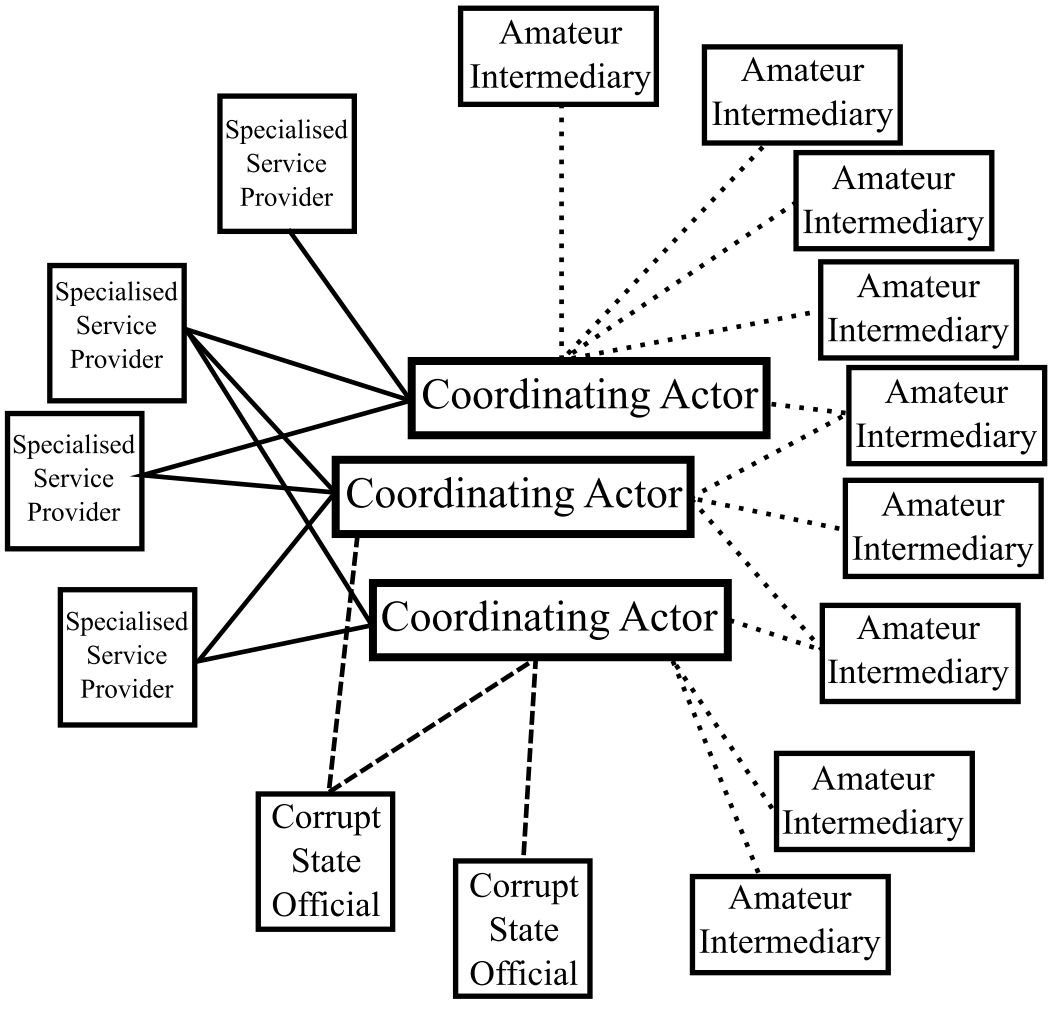
The Structure and Organisation of Actors in the Market for Human Smuggling

The market for human smuggling arises from a disparity between the volume of legal and easily accessible routes of migration and the demand to migrate, thereby creating an informal market. There is no single type of service provider in this market, with wide variation in the type of actors present, but evidence indicates a division of labour in the roles carried out by different actors facilitating smuggling services.[1] Much like customers in legal economic markets, migrants purchase a commodity: expertise in crossing national borders undetected. Different actors in the informal market for human smuggling offer different types of services at different prices, resulting in a matching process between the customer and the service provider.[2] Individuals select to utilise smuggling services for multiple reasons. Among others, purchasing smuggling services can expedite migrants' departure from precarious situations, and can additionally include ancillary services such as food, accommodations, forged documents, and support finding employment upon arrival.[3] When purchasing services on the informal market for human smuggling, migrants exercise agency in determining which of the available service providers best meets their needs.

The market for human smuggling predominantly exhibits social organisation. This implies a lack of implicit linkage between actors in the market and large-scale criminal organisations. Furthermore, the social atmosphere of the market contrasts with depictions of smugglers as either apathetic or predatory actors. Instead, some smugglers have non-monetary incentives to provide their services, such as a desire to help family members and members of their community.[4] Migrants in need of smuggling services often take an active role in seeking out service providers and can rely on the recommendations of their families, friends, and communities.[5] This reliance on social communities to gain access to the smuggling market creates an environment in which service providers often divide according to kinship, community, ethnic, religious, and geographic lines.[6] **Yet, above all these distinctions, social relations are the primary organising factor.**[7] The socially organised character of the smuggling industry contrasts with political and media depictions of smugglers as explicitly amoral. Smuggling service providers respond to a need from their communities and are often locally perceived to be providers of necessary services, rather than criminal actors.[8] Moreover, the social organisation of human smuggling creates location-specific groups of service providers whose modus operandi, structure, and sophistication corresponds to the local political economy and level of border enforcement in the region in which they operate.[9] The high level of local stratification is supported by data from distinct regions across the globe, and directly contradicts narratives of hierarchically organised transnational crime syndicates dominating the human smuggling market.[10] Instead, **the market for human smuggling is composed of ad hoc relationships between actors in specific localities responding to the needs of their community members.**

Due to the localised nature of service providers and their geographic stratification, the market for human smuggling should be understood as horizontally organised, opposed to hierarchically. **The market is composed of numerous small groups of actors, sometimes collaborating and sometimes competing, seeking to earn a profit by moving people across borders undetected.**[11] These groups of actors range in size and level of sophistication, but most should be understood as *networks* of loosely connected independent actors carrying out individual roles in the larger smuggling operation, rather than as organised crime syndicates with a strict pyramid structure.[12] Evidence from across the Balkan region, Western Asia, North Africa, and Eastern Mediterranean indicates that **the networks** facilitating irregular migration **typically lack central structure,** and are organised based on a division of labour between actors involved.[13] Actors' linkages are not limited to one network facilitating human smuggling, as illustrated by **Figure 1**.

Figure 1 – The Horizontal Network Organisation of the Market for Human Smuggling

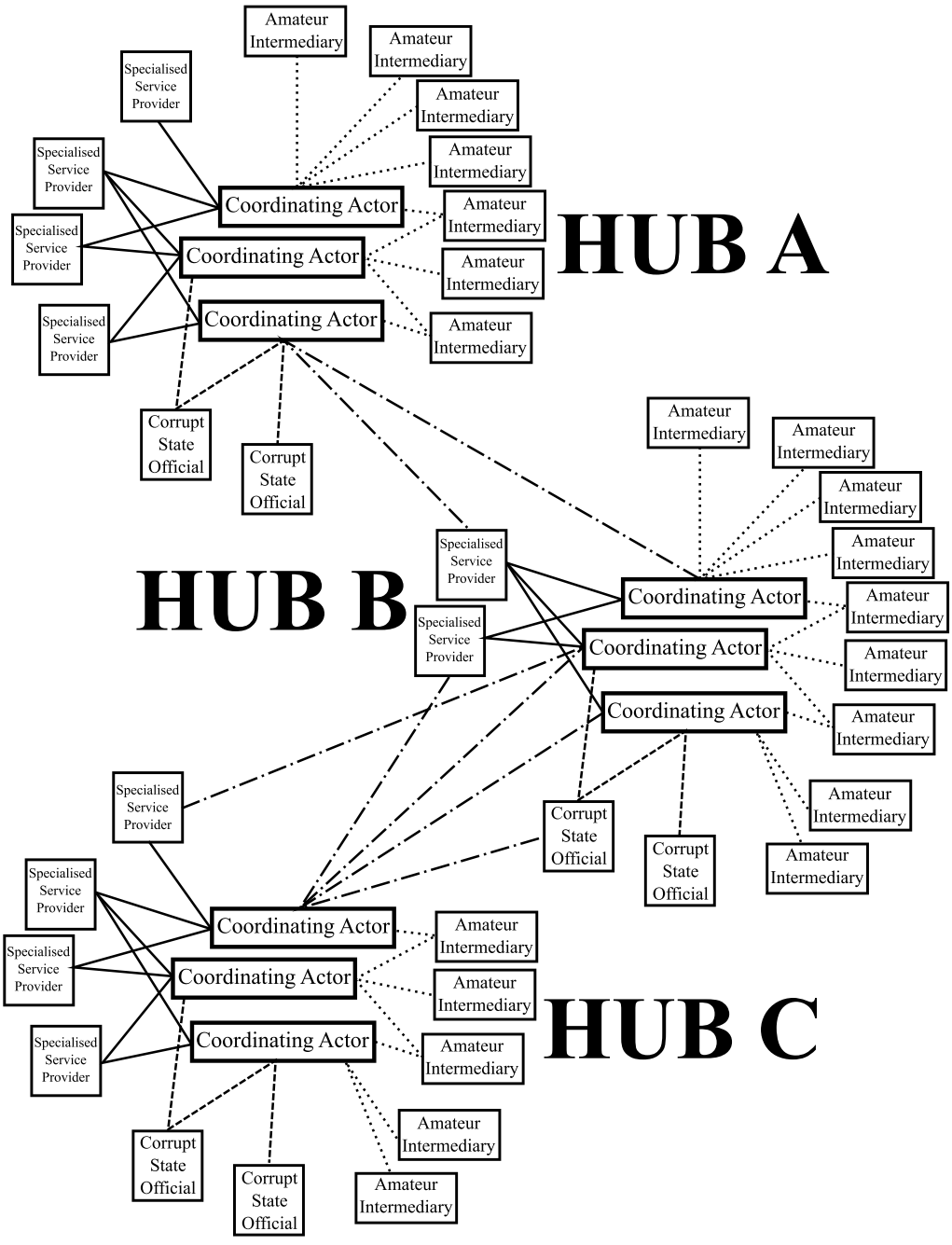


Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

This division of labour occurs based on function and convenience rather than explicit subordination, with different actors within networks coordinating distinct necessary elements. Networks' horizontal structure results from their reliance on social connections between different actors involved, with many actors connected to multiple networks, but rarely connected to all of those involved in a specific network. Actors connected to a greater number of fellow service providers across a larger geographic area can operate in a coordinating role and leverage their high level of connection to reap a higher profit, yet this represents a distinct minority of all actors in the market.[14] Some migrants will work with smuggling networks as intermediaries to connect them with customers seeking services from their own ethnic or kinship communities in order to finance their voyages, blurring the line between migrant and smuggler.[15] Actors' level of involvement can vary, with some networks utilising specialised service providers only as needed, such as document forgers.[16] Many of those providing specific services limit their operations to a certain geographic region, but may be connected to multiple smuggling networks simultaneously.[17] Corrupt state officials can also serve as service providers in different localities, playing a key role in enabling some smuggling networks operation.[18] The linkages between actors in a network are not uniform, with differing strengths and frequencies of contact based on individuals' unique interpersonal relationships.

The ad hoc nature of the connections between actors in smuggling networks enables actors to rapidly react to changes in the enforcement landscape and to continue operating even if some of their connections are cut off.[19] This ability is present in both low-level actors, due to their potential to connect with multiple networks, and high-level actors, due to their large number of connections to service providers. **There is no cohesive and singular market for human smuggling**, with overlapping linkages between different geographic regions, and various distinct actors operating in each location, as illustrated by **Figure 2**.

Figure 2 – The Lack of Hierarchy in the Transnational Organisation of Human Smuggling



Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Access to migration-specific physical (e.g. vehicles) and social capital (e.g. knowledge) shapes migrants' selection of route and mode of transit, service providers' participation in the market for human smuggling, and the modus operandi of actors in the market. Access to liquidity and financial capital enables migrants to be more selective about which smuggling service providers they employ, and greater financial resources often correlates with more successful migration journeys.[20] Yet, migration-specific physical capital, such as physical fitness and access to means of transportation, can also modify migrants' need for smuggling service providers. Furthermore, previous migration experience or access to information about migration routes and service providers constitutes a form of migration-specific social capital influencing their decisions when planning journeys and purchasing smuggling services.[21] The basic forms of physical capital such as vehicles and basic forms of social capital such as local geographic familiarity are in abundance, lowering the barriers to entry in the market for human smuggling. The market is often perceived by local populations to be profitable, and legitimate economic actors with relevant skills or vehicles may enter the market for a short period of

time in order to earn a profit, due to changes in either their primary economic sector or changes in the demand for smuggling services.[22] The horizontal nature of the smuggling market is well prepared to adapt to actors' entry and exit into the market and to react quickly to changes in nations' border enforcement tactics.[23] **Border enforcement strategies often result from the incorrect belief that effective counter-smuggling policies can entirely prevent irregular migration.**[24] In actuality, the **horizontal structure and ad hoc nature of linkages in the smuggling industry enables it to open new routes and adapt more rapidly than policymakers,** as illustrated by examples from Turkey, the Western Balkans, and Niger.[25]

The idea of concrete and predefined migration routes is a myth. Instead, general trends in migration routes emerge when analysed across a broader geographic area, but great variation exists in the exact paths used within that area. For example, despite frequent references to the monolithic 'Balkan route' of migration in media reporting and political statements, the 'route' is actually the sum of numerous crisscrossing paths spanning the region. Myriad paths extend from Greece and Turkey through Albania, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria, stretching northwards across Romania, Serbia, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999), Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, before reaching Hungary and Croatia.[26] Migrants and smuggling service providers leverage this diversity in paths to circumvent changing border enforcement policies by diverting to a feasible alternative. This diversion of paths can occur on different scales, spanning local, national, and continental levels. Illustrating shifts within localities, numerous crossing points between Greece and Macedonia emerged in 2014.[27] Within nations, paths shifted rapidly between Edirne and Çanakkale in Turkey and between those towards Hungary and Croatia in Serbia.[28] On a continental scale, paths shifted to avoid new obstacles in the Balkan Peninsula in 2015 to stretch across Russia towards Norway.[29]

The changing location of migration paths stems from the flexible operating model of smuggling service providers, which **fluidly react to changes in the demand for their services and the obstacles that they seek to overcome** at national boundaries. Neither migration routes nor smuggling service providers are perfectly interchangeable. Thus, as the factors shaping the market change, the low barriers to entry enable new actors to offer distinct services or routes that they think will yield a profit, creating an environment in which each individual service provider controls a very small portion of the entire smuggling market.[30] The heterogeneous nature of smuggling services and routes further allows migrants to arbitrage prices in a matching process to find a provider that meets their needs.[31] Furthermore, the differentiation of services provided and the high demand in the market often dissuades service providers from operating in antagonistic competition with one another, and, in some cases, even promotes collaboration.[32] In a market free of political influence, this cooperation is not limited to low-level actors, with research indicating that even high-level actors will cooperate in order to accommodate high demand and coordinate longer journeys.[33] The forms of competition and cooperation in the market for human smuggling reflect context-specific dynamics and cannot be generalised.

The Role of Reputation and Social Capital in the Market for Human Smuggling

The complex webs of distinct migration paths intersect at key points known as hub cities, which serve as the glue that binds together larger trends in migration. These cities are typically located in close proximity to political borders or geographic obstacles, serving as a collection point for both smuggling service providers and migrants seeking to purchase services. 'Hub city' has no precise definition beyond an area where migrants and those offering migration-related service gather. The term can refer to disparate localities, including but not limited to: urban metropolises such as Athens, Belgrade, Istanbul, and Milan; cities in close proximity to important crossings such as Bodrum, Edirne, and Izmir; and intermediary points of arrival such as Chios, Kos, Lesbos, Samos, and Van.[34] In the European context, hub cities also feature in internal migration between EU Member States.[35]

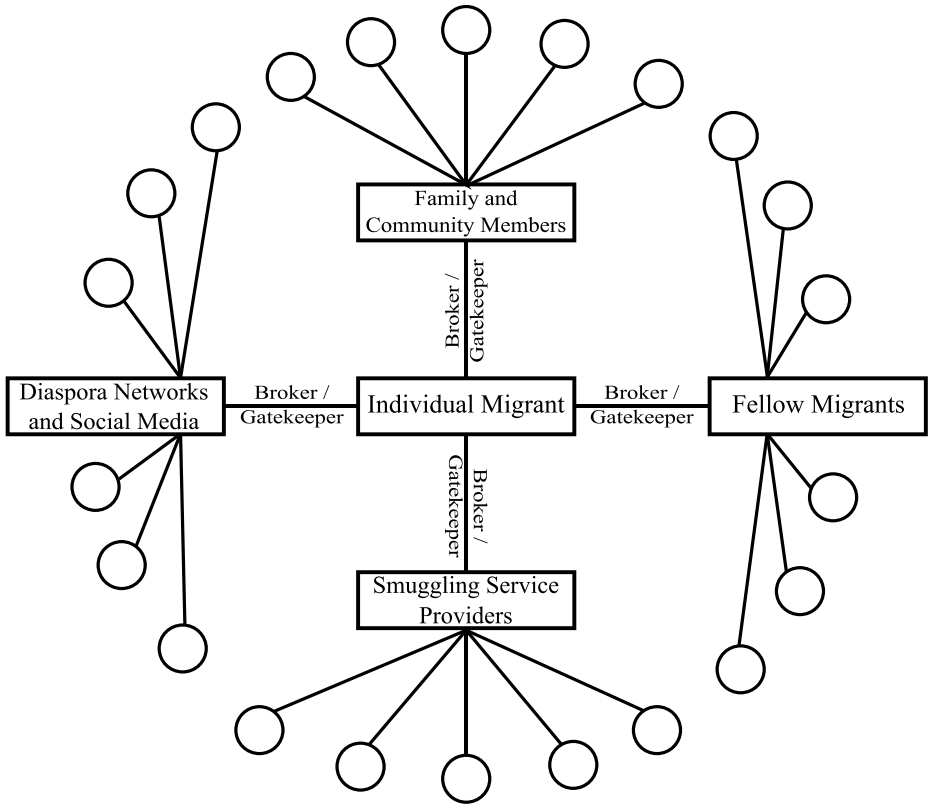
The horizontal organisation of the smuggling industry is enabled by a higher concentration of different varieties of service providers in hub cities, and the ability of these serves providers to adapt and outlast changes in migration routes confers hub cities with greater staying power.[36] The concentration of actors in hub cities also confers a boon to the local economy and allows migrants to pause and work in order to fund further segments of their journeys.[37] Importantly, hub cities serve as a key location for migrants to accrue social capital and gather information about the path ahead and the reputation of potential smuggling service providers, thereby helping to ameliorate the risks intrinsic to irregular migration.[38] **Social capital constitutes all of the knowledge, information resources and relationships available to a certain group.**[39] Social capital disseminates through relatives, acquaintances, and communities, implying network organisation, with the potential

for individuals to act as both brokers and gatekeepers for social capital networks.[40] **Hub cities serve as crucial spaces of knowledge where members of existing social capital networks act as information brokers for new arrivals.**

The social capital that migrants gather counteracts the distinct information asymmetry that characterises the market for human smuggling. This information asymmetry places smuggling service providers in positions of power, as many migrants consider them one of the most reliable sources of information concerning potential migration routes.[41] Yet, due to the plurality of service providers in the market, individual actors in markets characterised by information asymmetry will endeavour to provide their customers with confidence that they are not lying about their promised services.[42] Although service providers will provide guarantees in some instances, this confidence primarily stems from social capital about the reputation of smuggling service providers.[43] The ability of migrants to access information about actors' reputations is contingent upon their social proximity to the smuggling service providers.[44]

Migrants' social capital originates from a constellation of sources. If an individual comes from a community with a history of migration experience, family members and kinship networks often provide a foundation of social capital.[45] Information from a single trustworthy source can influence migrants' decisions more significantly than numerous less-trusted sources.[46] The recent expansion of social media enabled migrants to access social capital generated by entire diaspora communities at the touch of a fingertip, helping migrants to avoid potentially dangerous situations.[47] The proliferation of low-cost smartphones and replaceable SIM cards further enables migrants to amass social capital from digital platforms such as Facebook, Skype, Telegram, Viber, and WhatsApp.[48] While these sources do not replace the pre-existing sources of social capital such as personal relationships, social media radically enhances the scale of transnational diaspora networks and the ability for information to disseminate through them. Yet, **the role of social capital to entirely eliminate information asymmetry and insecurity should not be overplayed; information gathered through social capital is often incomplete, and in some cases even inaccurate.** This ranges from incorrect directions and descriptions of labour opportunities to cases in which acquaintances charge migrants high prices for questionably beneficial legal assistance filing asylum claims.[49] Furthermore, migrants' access to social capital is variable, with the access of migrants from rural peripheries, less populated areas, or areas with less migration experience seriously diminished.[50] Thus, while the extent of migrants' social capital derives from their access to multiple networks of information, the role played by brokers and gatekeepers to each distinct network modifies the information available to them, as illustrated by **Figure 3.**

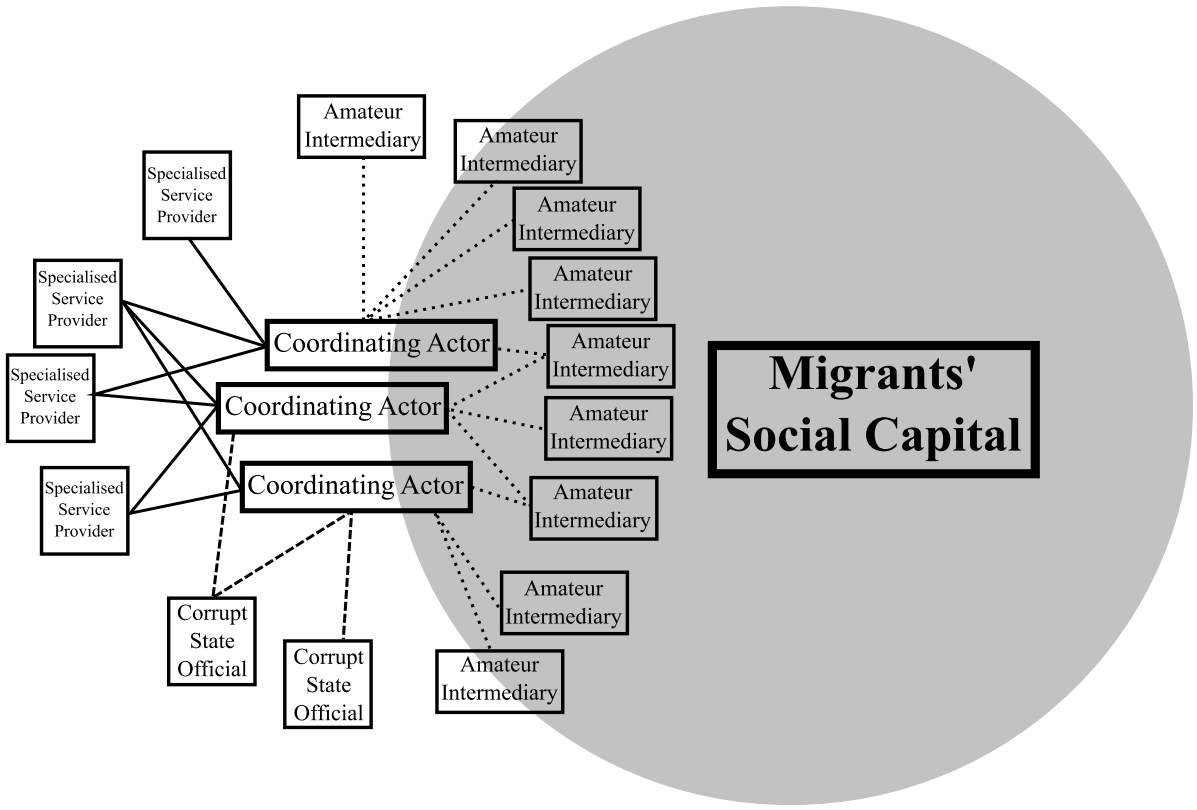
Figure 3 – The Landscape of Social Capital Sources



Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Due to the way in which social capital influences migrants' selection of service providers, maintaining a positive reputation often shapes the profit-making strategies of smuggling service providers. **A smuggling service provider's reputation is one of the most important criteria influencing migrants' selection, with some even prioritizing a provider with a positive reputation over alternative lower-cost options.**[51] Smuggling service providers recognise that maintaining a good reputation is integral to maintaining their profitability and often prioritise protecting their reputation.[52] The power of reputation can even extend beyond individual actors, with a reputation of abuse by certain actors potentially negatively impacting other service providers in the same market.[53] In order to avoid generating a negative reputation that will spread through diaspora social networks, smuggling service providers can offer migrants reduced prices if they fail to deliver the expected services.[54] In an effort to protect social relationships and capitalise on the demand from certain communities, smuggling service providers can also provide some migrants with higher quality services and expedited departures to generate a positive reputation.[55] This reliance on reputation also functions to discourage actions that may attempt to exploit the information asymmetry in the market to yield a higher profit.[56] **Figure 4** illustrates the way in which migrants' social capital grants access to the human smuggling market and informs their selection between available service providers. **Crucially, the role of social capital in the market for human smuggling is not static, with counter-smuggling policies influencing its relevance and applicability.**

Figure 4 – Social Capital and the Market for Human Smuggling



Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

THE IMPACT OF COUNTER-SMUGGLING POLICIES ON THE MARKET FOR HUMAN SMUGGLING

Taking Stock of Contemporary Counter-Smuggling Policies

The counter-smuggling policy options currently implemented primarily rely on the misguided belief that there is a direct causal relationship between increased border enforcement and a reduced volume of human smuggling. Such narratives often assume that national security services exert a level of coherence and efficacy that they consistently fail to demonstrate.[57] Securitizing counter-smuggling policies do not exist in a vacuum; instead, such policies catalyse coevolution in the market for human smuggling. Thus, when making policy decisions based on budgetary constraints, it is important to understand the full implications of securitised counter-smuggling strategies.

In 2015, nations in the broader European region prioritised physical barriers to prevent human smuggling and irregular migration, resulting in the simultaneous construction of the largest number of European border walls in recent history. In sum, walls were erected on the borders of Hungary and Croatia, Hungary and Serbia, North Macedonia and Greece, Austria and Slovenia, Slovenia and Croatia, the United Kingdom and France in Calais, and Latvia and Russia.[58] In the years since, further walls were built in Norway, Estonia, Lithuania, and Bulgaria, and the construction of a new barrier along Greece's Evros River continued in early 2021.[59] These policies do not eliminate the market for human smuggling, but do influence its local dynamics and can cause smuggling activities to expand.[60] The mandate of the European Border and Coastguard Agency (Frontex, hereafter) was expanded in 2016 to create a permanent reserve of border guards and vehicles, which will reach 10,000 border guards by 2027.[61]

At sea, policy priorities shifted away from Search and Rescue (SAR) operations with Frontex Operation Triton in 2014 due to the belief that such activities served as a pull factor for migration, despite evidence that a lack of SAR does not deter migration and instead only increases migration mortality rates.[62] Counter-smuggling strategies in Operation Triton's successor, Operation Sophia, prioritised seizing and destroying smugglers' vessels, using the previous counter-piracy Operation Atlanta in Somalia as a template.[63]

Implementing securitizing counter-smuggling strategies mistakenly assumes that what is effective against human trafficking, terrorism, and drug smuggling will prove equally effective against the decentralised and socially organised market for human smuggling. The incorporation of EUROPOL's European Migrant Smuggling Centre into the European Serious Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC) and its collaboration with the European Counter-Terrorism Centre demonstrates this misunderstanding.[64] Further illustrating this point, the United Kingdom created the 'Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce' in 2016 as a counter-smuggling strategy.[65] Frontex's Operation Themis, implemented to replace Operation Triton in 2018, continues to conflate irregular migration with transnational organised crime and terrorism.[66]

These counter-smuggling tactics result from the misperception that the convergence of different sectors of the transnational 'illicit' informal economy is inevitable and that their organisation and operation is analogous.[67] **Such policies fail to recognise the role played by the state in catalysing change in the market for human smuggling and in supporting actors' consolidation of market control.**[68] The analytical and rhetorical **linkage constructed between terrorism and human smuggling can deprioritise the development of effective legal protection mechanisms for migrants within the EU** and can set a malign example for third nations to follow.[69] The distinctions constructed between 'legal' and 'illegal' asylum seekers in both the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement and the proposed UK asylum reforms demonstrate the far-reaching impact of counter-smuggling policies based on such analytical errors.[70] Finally, initiatives that conflate removing terrorist and human smuggling content from social media can impede migrants' ability to access the protective benefits of social capital.[71] These counter-smuggling tactics misunderstand the role of social media as a driver of migration, rather than a tool to inform preordained migration journeys.[72]

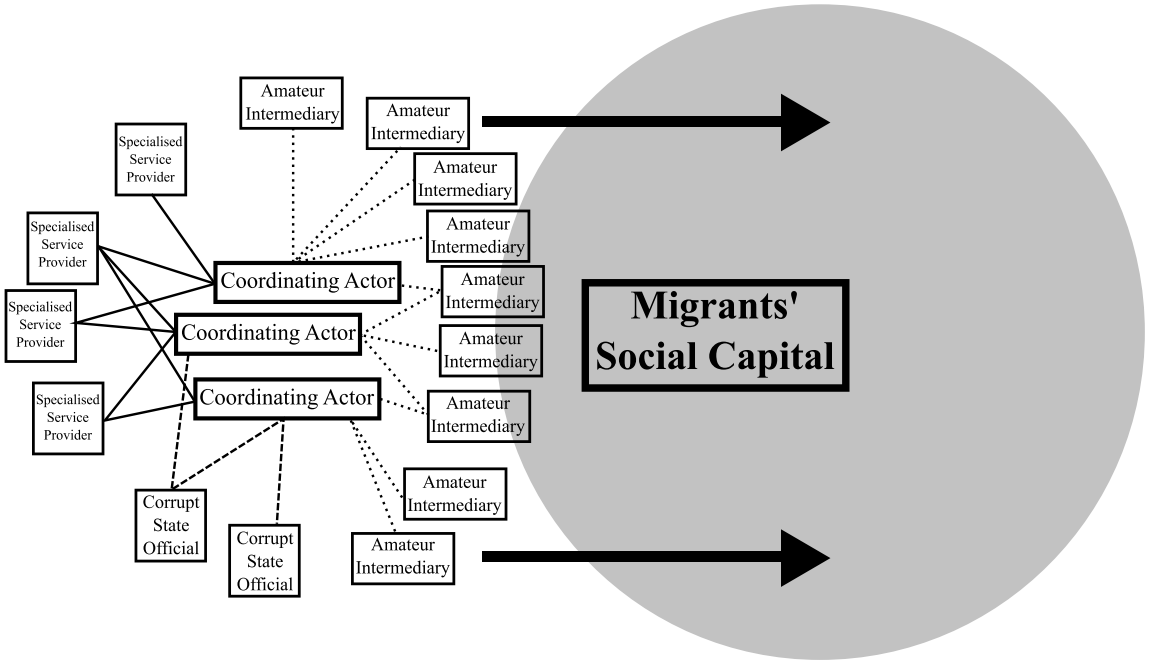
Diversion and Social Capital

Akin to the inaccurate belief that greater enforcement directly correlates to lower smuggling rates, contemporary policy options often rely on the assumption that contributing to higher smuggling service prices will force the market to shrink. In many instances, higher levels of border enforcement and greater risk of

apprehension will contribute to higher operating costs for smuggling service providers, but these higher costs pass directly onto migrants in the form of higher prices charged.[73]

The horizontal organisation of the market for human smuggling and flexible market entry and exit enables the industry to react to enforcement and continue to operate, indicating that policies intending to fully eliminate the market will achieve little success; still, it is important to analyse the incidental effects of such policies on the market. When facing heightened enforcement, evidence across the Western Balkan region, Niger, and Libya consistently illustrates that the prices charged to migrants increased in tandem.[74] Data from labour market matching models indicates that migrant selection reacts to changes to the price of smuggling services, meaning that **greater enforcement will also compel migrants to divert to alternative routes.**[75] This diversion can occur on both the macro and micro scale, either due to a diversification of paths within the same geographic area or to new regions entirely. A wealth of evidence from across the Sahel, Northern Africa, Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Balkan regions supports that migrants often divert onto more remote and unfamiliar paths.[76] Indeed, by diverting migration routes and smuggling activities away from previous hub cities, securitised border enforcement policies can diminish migrants' access to the protective benefits of social capital and impede humanitarian monitors from detecting potential abuse.[77] **Figure 5** illustrates the way in which diversion decreases migrants' social proximity to smuggling service providers, reducing migrants' applicable social capital.

Figure 5 – The Influence of Migrants' Diversion onto Unfamiliar Routes on Social Proximity



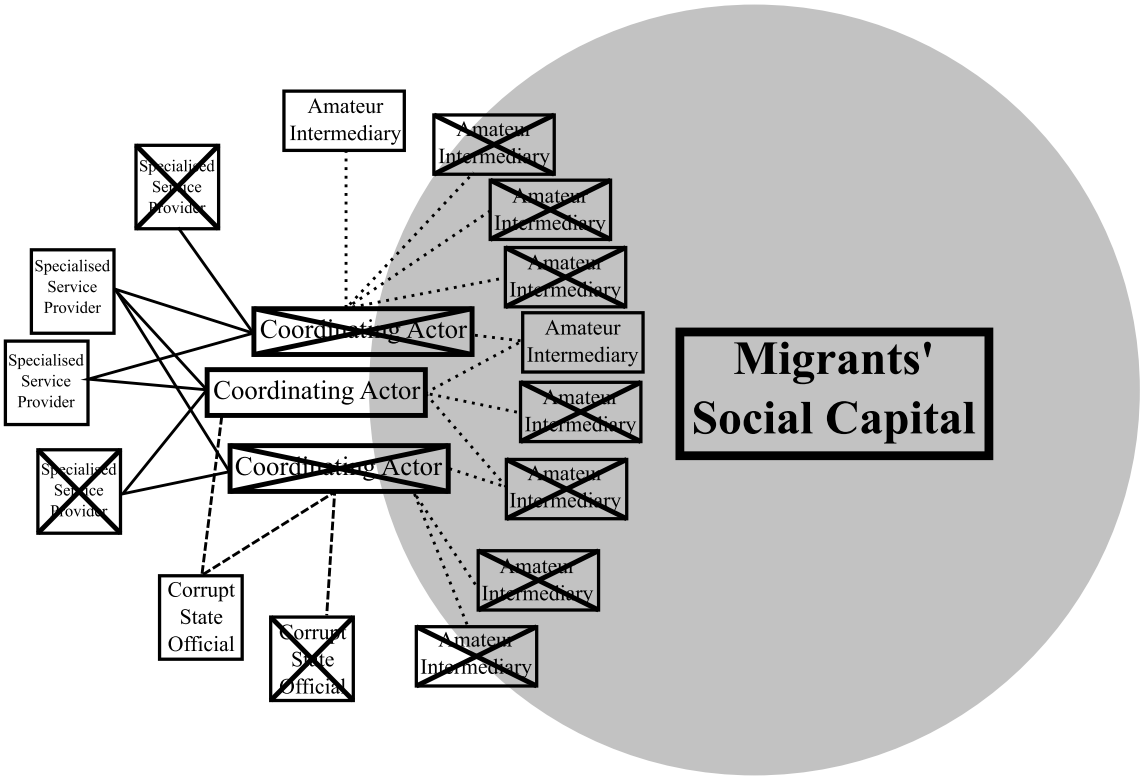
Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Market Control and Social Capital

While the exact effects of higher enforcement on human smuggling are context-specific and vary based on multiple dynamics shaping the market, several examples support that greater enforcement activity can contribute to the consolidation of market control into the hands of a small number of actors. The disruption of the smuggling market and diversion of routes due to greater security activities also negatively impacts the business of ancillary service providers in the local economy.[78] Higher operating costs also more significantly affect amateur actors in the market for human smuggling, such as part-time service providers and intermediaries, due to their lower profit margins, and may cause them to exit the market.[79] Counter-smuggling policies often affect these small-scale actors disproportionately due to the higher visibility of their work, yet such activity will neither impact highly connected actors as severely nor prevent aggregate smuggling activities.[80] In some contexts, greater enforcement activity can also catalyse a professionalization of the market, with examples of violent competition arising between actors that further upending contributes to a consolidation of market control.[81] In areas where the market for human smuggling traditionally operated as a cottage industry with

close social proximity between service providers and migrants, **a consolidation of market control can reduce the need for service providers to rely on their reputation to maintain profitability.**[82] **This strips away the protective benefits of migrants' social capital,** as illustrated by **Figure 6**. Thus, the securitization of migration can crowd out small-scale actors and reduce service providers' reliance on maintaining a positive reputation.

Figure 6 – The Influence of Actors' Market Exit on Social Capital



Conceptual visualization. Author's own elaboration.

Changes to the market composition and the role of reputation can further alter the modus operandi of actors in the market for human smuggling. While abuse and exploitation are not inherent to the system, actors can leverage information asymmetry to reap a greater profit when facing reduced competition or relying less on their reputation.[83] Exploitation is not limited to organised crime syndicates, and can occur even within the same ethnic or kinship group when securitised counter-smuggling policies place additional strain on service providers.[84] Diversion onto more distant routes and increasing smuggling service prices can elevate the precarity of liquidity-constrained migrants by leading to higher rates of debt-financed migration.[85] The greater reliance on smuggling service providers involved in such arrangements, in addition to the greater market control of large-scale actors, can further contribute to an increased risk of human trafficking or becoming stranded en route.[86] Dangerously, escalating securitization and actors' reduced reliance on social capital can shift their operating strategies to use kidnapping and extortion to extract profits from migrants.[87]

Securitization, Corruption, and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets

The heightened involvement of security actors opens greater potential for corrupt officials and border guards to operate state-sponsored protection rackets. Such situations arise when actors use the power of their position to selectively enforce laws for their own financial benefits.[88] Migrants often are the ones who pay the bribes that state-sponsored protection rackets rely upon, rather than smuggling service providers, and this contributes to a steep increase in the cost of migration journeys.[89] Smuggling service providers can use connections established with corrupt state security personal to further consolidate their market control by compelling security personal to use their authority to prosecute competing smuggling service providers.[90] While one promising policy to combat exploitative human smuggling actors is community-led interventions, the integration of corrupt security service members into the smuggling industry impedes the potential of such policies.[91]

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

When implementing counter-smuggling policies, national governments naturally face budgetary constraints. The following criteria create clear guidelines of ways in which national governments can set effective priorities to ensure that the budgetary resources that they devote to counter-smuggling policies accurately reflect the nature of the market for human smuggling services. These guidelines promote policies that simultaneously prioritise the safety of migrants while avoiding enacting negative change on the structure and modus operandi of actors in the market.

1. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to counter the market for human smuggling services, and no direct causality between greater securitization and reduced human smuggling activity. Any strategy implemented must be context-specific and reflect the unique dynamics of the local political economy. ***This is only possible if evidence from in-depth ethnographic data collection informs policy decisions***.

2. There is no single 'business model' of the market for human smuggling due to actors' demonstrated ability to fluidly adapt, implying that it is impossible for counter-smuggling policies to 'break the business model' of human smuggling without recognizing the underlying reasons for the market's existence. This involves ***opening accessible and affordable paths of legal migration.***

3. Counter-smuggling policies must ***avoid relying on the assumption that strategies that proved effective against drug smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism will be equally effective against human smuggling service providers.***

4. ***Resources devoted to countering human smuggling activities must avoid targeting low-level actors,*** for these actors' lack of significant connection to the market will render such strategies ineffectual. The social organisation of human smuggling and multiple motivations of service providers furthers indicates that criminalizing low-level actors will be counterproductive. Instead, national governments can effectively deter low-level actors from entering the market for human smuggling by expanding legal migration pathways and by expediting migrants' labour market integration.

5. ***Destroying migration-specific capital, such as vehicles, will not succeed in closing the market***. Not only can the operating practices of service providers react to circumvent such policies, but also the costs associated with such counter-smuggling policies can influence the consolidation of market control, placing migrants at elevated risk.

6. Counter-smuggling policies should not impede migrants' access to social capital. The sharing of social capital can protect migrants from exploitation and even force abusive actors to exit the market. Instead, national governments in the Prague Process region should explore ways in which they can ***support the dissemination of social capital so that migrants can access a larger base of knowledge when making decisions***, reducing the power utilised by some smuggling service providers to profit off migrants' information asymmetry.

7. Counter-smuggling strategies are most effective when ***focusing on the actors in the market who abuse migrants.*** The agentive role taken by migrants in organising their journeys indicates that blanket policies targeting all actors, irrespective of their role and conduct, waste valuable state resources.

8. The Prague Process can support the development of mechanisms that enable irregular migrants to ***report abusive smuggling service providers to enforcement authorities without fear of negative repercussions for their status***, such as deportation. Such mechanisms would provide an important source of data to inform the effective use of counter-smuggling budgetary resources.

9. Given the ways in which securitised counter-smuggling policies can result in the proliferation of state-sponsored protection rackets, the Prague Process can further support the development of transnational mechanisms to enable migrants to ***report abuse by members of the state security services*** without fear of negative repercussions.

10. National ***asylum policies must not use migrants' illicit mode of entry or irregular status as grounds to deny their access to humanitarian protection systems*** in an effort counteract smuggling activities. Irregular migration does not exist within the scope of international refugee law, and placing additional barriers to humanitarian protection does not address the underlying causes of the market for human smuggling.

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