Social Media Monitoring

May 18, 2017

(ALL INFORMATION IN THIS PRESENTATION IS GLEANED FROM PUBLIC SOURCES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS)
Overview

The project went through three phases:

- UNHCR - March 2016 until December 2016;
- EASO/UNHCR - January to April 2017;
- EASO - May 2017 onward.
EASO intended to:

- Provide Member States, JHA Agencies, EU Institutions, UNHCR and different Departments within EASO with updated information and important inputs on:
  - Pre departure information (early warning);
  - Smugglers and human trafficking networks;
  - Country of Origin Information (COI);
  - Asylum seekers and migrants on the move;
  - Asylum seekers and migrants in Europe (reception condition and secondary migration);

- Contribute to the development of information campaigns;

- Continue the current project and develop it further.

All while keeping in mind that EASO is NOT a law-enforcement agency.
Methodology

The monitoring is conducted on a qualitative research basis: i.e. monitoring social media platforms and sharing findings through weekly reports (2 reports: one for Arabic speaking communities and the other for Dari/Pashto communities).

A more analytical report will start to be published on a monthly basis as of this month (May 2017) containing highlights, comparisons and trends.

The project is expanding and will include additional language groups.

A focus on supplementing qualitative research with quantitative one through acquiring relevant ICT tools.
Content of the weekly reports:

- Smuggling offers and business with documents
- COI: Country of Origin Information
- Secondary Migration (mainly for Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan)
- Transit Countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Libya, etc.)
- Member States Information
- Black Humour
- Various information (related to findings): e.g. missing people and general trends.
Arabic Speaking Communities
Pre-departure

- Arabic speakers rely mainly on their communities as a source of information (word of mouth or Facebook inquiring).
- Smugglers are present on social media platforms (mainly on Facebook) to promote their business (either through own pages or by posting on other pages).
- The first contact with the smuggler is done on Facebook and then changes to other platforms.
Example of private communication (publicly posted)
Observations
‘Marketing’ techniques used by smugglers

1- The use of religious language to give the impression of piety which is highly perceived in the culture.
‘Marketing’ techniques used by smugglers

2- Posting videos / photos taken by migrants / refugees during the trip and after landing to prove their credibility.
'Marketing' techniques used by smugglers

3- Comprehensive advertisements offering many choices and options to potential clients.
‘Marketing’ techniques used by smugglers

4- Use of images of fancy boats and vehicles to give a misleadingly positive impression about the trip

Sometimes they post photos of the real boat to reassure their potential clients
‘Marketing’ techniques used by smugglers

5- disseminating false information about the legal options of asylum seekers in Greece in response to the recurring warnings of Members of the community

“Asylum seekers in Greece can still apply for Relocation despite the EU-Turkey, and this is Guaranteed by the Dublin Regulation”
Money is always kept at an insurance office/agency and the payment is effected only upon arrival
Smugglers encourage refugees in Turkey by offering different trips:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Price – Week 1</th>
<th>Price – Week 2</th>
<th>Price – Week 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey (Antakya)</td>
<td>Greek Islands</td>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>1000 USD</td>
<td>1650 USD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>800 USD</td>
<td>300 USD</td>
<td>450 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Yacht</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6000 USD</td>
<td>6000 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>4800 USD</td>
<td>4500 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td>2700 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Boat (25-35 passengers)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Trucks/buses</td>
<td>900 Euro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Road trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1700 Euro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq (Erbil)</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>Flight</td>
<td>4000 USD</td>
<td>6500 USD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Flight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9500 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq (Erbil)</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Flight</td>
<td>6500 USD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Business with Documents

Document dealers offer a wide variety of documents (some stolen and some fake):
- EU passports and IDs
- Syrian and Iraqi documents (from passports to university diplomas)
- Recently, passports of Gulf countries (Kuwaiti and Emirati)

- Observations:
  • Prices are rarely mentioned in public and potential clients are asked to privately contact the dealer.
  • If they decide to return to their countries (illegally), some refugees would sell their documents (one offer: German residence permit for 650 USD).
Latest Findings
Turkey – Greece Route

- Offers for boat trips to the Greek Islands continue, so do the arrivals on the islands. The prices are relatively cheap (around 250 USD per person).

- Due to the situation on the islands (the EU-Turkey statement), smugglers offer road trips from Istanbul to Thessaloniki for higher prices (around 1000 USD per person).
Increasing offers for sea trips from Turkey to Italy with different boat ‘classes’ and a variety of prices (e.g. 4500 – 8000 USD)
Other routes to Europe, Canada, and Turkey

- Increasing offers for flights from Iraq (Northern Iraq in particular) to EU Member States (e.g. to Sweden 8000 USD – to GB 17000 USD, another offer to EU for 6500 USD – to Canada 15000 USD)

- A new route might be starting from Lebanon to Turkey (mainly for Syrians especially after Turkey imposing visas on Syrians)

- Offers for sea trips from Libya to Italy being published on smuggling pages and groups usually targeting Syrians and Iraqis

- Increasing offers of Schengen visas issued in Iraq and Jordan
Intra-European routes

In general, offers for secondary movement between EU Member States have decreased especially after the news coming from Hungary and Bulgaria of unfavourable conditions. Attempts to leave Greece and Italy by plane continue.

There is a tendency among the Syrian asylum seekers in Greece to wait until they are granted asylum and then try to apply for asylum in other EU Member States (at the risk of being returned to Greece according to the Dublin Regulation).
On 21/04/2017, 53 migrants and refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq were arrested while trying to cross the Danube bridge to reach Romania coming from Bulgaria. And on the next day 111 migrants and refugees mainly from Iran, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India were arrested while attempting to reach Hungary coming from Romania. The migrants were hiding in a truck container when the border police found them.

Syrian families left the island of Samos illegally to travel to the mainland. They were arrested upon trying to leave illegally to Italy from Kalamata.
Afghans: Use of social media

- Pashto/Dari speaking communities who live in the rural areas are mostly informed via radio (battery operated);
- Those who live in the urban areas (big cities), they have access to social media. However, for both categories, primary source of information about Europe, is the smugglers’ discourse;
- Smugglers are widely present on social media platforms for promoting updated offers for Europe.
By explaining that they have 26 years of experience in illegal migration to Europe, Afghan and Iranian smugglers operate within an organized network.
First step: Crossing the Iranian border
Stolen EU passports on sale
Facial similarity tool

Similarity Overall 91.0%
Falsification of documents
FALSE PROMISES OF SMUGGLERS

Smugglers are using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn to promote visas for various countries:
Findings
Smugglers: Engaging the community

Opinion poll: Which country do you choose?
On Instagram, smugglers call upon users to participate in their weekly opinion poll by comparing two EU countries as the best destination. They explain that each Monday their company “MyZima” is asking clients to choose between two EU countries. Through this game, they try to engage more people and encourage them to leave for Europe. This week they compared Greece and Hungary. More people chose Greece.
Smugglers’ private communication tools

Smugglers are using WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Imo and Pinngle to communicate privately with potential clients.
Community members warn individuals not to believe the discourse of smugglers who lure people by making them believe that European borders are open and push people to leave Afghanistan for Europe via Iran and Turkey.

They explain that apart from the EU borders being completely closed, recognition rate for Afghan asylum seekers is low.

Several other individuals explained that coming to Europe is not worth it. They repeatedly warned their compatriots not to believe smugglers and emphasising them that the borders are closed.
Findings

Women sexually abused during the journey to Europe

Users posted an article explaining that smugglers sexually exploit women if they cannot pay the cost of their journey to Europe. Comments: Several individuals explained that they were eyewitnesses as women and children were taken hostage, raped or killed.
Smugglers’ prices from Afghanistan to Turkey increased in 2017 mostly due to the rumors about the building of a wall at the borders between Iran and Turkey.
On the other hand, smugglers continue decreasing prices from Turkey to EU countries since the Balkan route is closed. Smugglers explain that “only legal borders are closed and their agents can find new routes to Europe”.

Prices: Turkey – EUROPE

![Graph showing prices decline from February to May 2017.](chart.png)
Smugglers inform potential clients that the Turkish authorities are building walls at the Iranian border to prevent Afghan refugee influx. Smugglers push people to rely only on their illegal service to cross borders.
Smugglers’ false message and reality on the move
It is reported that:

- insecurity is rising in Afghanistan (increasing number of suicide attacks and criminalities);
- 1 Million refugees will return to Afghanistan from Pakistan due to the political and military tensions between the two countries;
- The situation of Afghan refugees in Iran is getting critical due to the lack of human security;
- Turkey decided to build a wall at its border with Iran to prevent the influx, however, smugglers continue encouraging people to reach Europe through their illegal service.
Social Media Monitoring

Thank You

Amr Wazaz
Communications Officer – Social Media Monitoring
Amr.Wazaz@easo.Europa.eu
+356 99 80 41 48