استغلال المهاجرين أثناء تنقُّلهم عبر دول العبور: تهريب البشر والاتجار بهم في السودان قبل اندلاع حرب 2023

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة ظاهرة استغلال البشر عبر الطرق الرئيسة للهجرة في السودان، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على المهاجرين من شرق أفريقيا وغربها في اتجاههم إلى أوروبا أو دول الشرق الأوسط الأخرى، وذلك من خلال دراسة حالات السيطرة القسرية على الأفراد لأغراض تشمل التشغيل القسري والاستغلال الجنسي. تطرح الورقة أربعة أسئلة محورية حول الأخطار المتصلة بطرق الهجرة الأكثر استخدامًا، والعوامل التي تُسهم في تعرُّض المهاجرين للاستغلال، وصور الاستغلال المختلفة، وهوية الجناة ودوافعهم. وتوائم الورقة بين مراجعة الأدبيات والعمل الميداني الذي أُجري في مواقع متعددة بين عامي 2017 و2024، وتتبع أسلوب البحث النوعي، مستخلصةً النتائج من مقابلات فردية وجلسات نقاش لمجموعات بؤرية مع مهاجرين وأطراف أساسية معنية بالظاهرة. تُظهر النتائج أن السودان يُمثِّل حلقة وصل في منظومة الهجرة العالمية، إذ يقوم بدور بلد منشأ وعبور ووجهة في آنٍ واحد. ويواجه المهاجرون—وأغلبهم فقراء ويفتقرون إلى الوثائق القانونية—الاستغلال الناجم عن ضعف الحوكمة، ونقص المعلومات، والثغرات القانونية، والهشاشة البنيوية. وتستفيد شبكات التهريب والاتجار بالبشر من ضعف الرقابة الحدودية والروابط القَبَلية العابرة للحدود لاستدامة أنشطتها وتحقيق مكاسبها. كما يُجبر المهاجرون على العمل في قطاعات غير مستقرة ومنخفضة الأجور، ويتعرَّضون لسوء المعاملة في ظل غياب آليات الحماية. وتبقى الاستجابات الدولية غير كافية، مع تفاقم الإخفاقات المؤسسية في السودان في إدارة ملف الهجرة وحماية الفئات المهمَّشة.

الكلمات الدالة: السودان؛ مهاجر؛ هجرة؛ استغلال؛ تهريب؛ اتجار بالبشر.

Exploiting Migrants in Transit: Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Sudan Before the 2023 War

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Abstract

This paper investigates human exploitation—referring to situations where individuals are forcibly controlled for purposes like forced labour and sexual abuse—along main migrant routes in Sudan, particularly among migrants from East and West Africa en route to Europe or other Middle Eastern countries. It addresses four key questions about the risks associated with common migrant routes, the factors contributing to migrants' vulnerability to exploitation, the specific forms of exploitation, and the identity and motivations of perpetrators. Combining literature review with multi-sited fieldwork conducted from 2017 to 2024, the paper utilises a qualitative approach, extracting findings from single-participant and focus group interviews with migrants and key stakeholders. The principal findings reveal Sudan as a main node in global migratory circuits, functioning concurrently as a country of origin, transit, and destination. Migrants—mostly poor and lacking legal documents—are susceptible to exploitation, driven by governance failures, dis/misinformation, legal inadequacies, and structural precarity. Profit-seeking smuggling and trafficking networks capitalise on weak border controls and transnational tribal ties to sustain their activities. Migrants work in unstable, low-wage sectors and suffer abuse with little to no protection. International interventions remain insufficient, compounded by institutional failures in Sudan to manage migration and protect marginalised groups.

Keywords: Sudan; migrant; migration; exploitation; smuggling; trafficking

1. Introduction:

The worsening economic and living conditions in many African countries—marked by widespread poverty, insecurity, soaring youth unemployment, and growing hopelessness about domestic job prospects—have fostered an environment conducive to the expansion of illicit activities. The allure of financial gains has contributed to the proliferation of arms, drug and human smuggling, as well as human exploitation. Human exploitation refers to situations where individuals are forcibly controlled for purposes like forced labour, sexual abuse, and organ trade. Victims are often unable to resist or escape due to physical threats, psychological pressure, financial dependency, or other factors—some may not even realise they are being exploited. The desire for a better life, fuelled by remittances and the success stories of migrants shared on social media, drives many young people to seek opportunities abroad. Families, particularly those seeking economic improvement, often encourage their young male members to migrate. In some instances, these individuals, leveraging local knowledge and networks, enter the business of human smuggling and trafficking, facilitating illegal migration for profit, further entrenching the cycle of exploitation.

Sudan has become a central transit hub for human smuggling and exploitation. By 2015, it hosted around 460,000 migrants, a number that decreased to approximately 400,000 by 2020 (UNHCR, November 2023, p. 1) (Jourdain, Griesmer, & Bertini, 2022, p. 4). Before the outbreak of war in 2023, it was home to 16 refugee camps across various states, including nine in Gedaref and Kassala,[1] four in Al-Jazira and Sinnar, and three in West Darfur, housing about 85,347 registered refugees. A significant portion of these refugees, about 64,413, resided in eastern Sudan's camps, while 2,298 were in central Sudan, and 18,636 in the west. Additionally, an estimated 150,000 refugees lived in urban areas, often having fled from camps through paid smuggling operations.[2] As inferred from the data above, the migrant population in Sudan saw a slight decrease from 2015 to 2020, and a sharp decline followed 2020, likely due to worsening political, economic, and security conditions.

[1] These camps are Umm Qarqour, Abouda, Al-Faw 5, Awad Al-Saeed, Fath Al-Rahman, Khashm Al-Qirbah, Wad Sharifi, and Shagarab.

[2] These figures on refugee distribution across Sudan's regions were obtained from the office of the Assistant Commissioner for Refugees—Red Sea State, 2017.

Migration to Sudan is marked by a considerable influx of minors under 16 from neighbouring countries, with illegal migrants outnumbering legal ones and a notable proportion of females among them (Elmagboul, Dauod, & Tawaldi, 2017, p. 20). Sudan's porous borders position it as a key transit country for migrants heading to Europe or other Middle Eastern countries. It functions also as both a migrant-sending and receiving point, with migration often facilitated by clandestine networks where migrant brokers collaborate with smugglers and traffickers in countries like Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya and Egypt. However, migrants in Sudan face extreme vulnerabilities, frequently falling victim to various forms of exploitation in sectors such as gold mining, domestic servitude, agriculture, and prostitution. For example, a 2014 Human Rights Watch report highlights the abduction of hundreds of primarily Eritrean migrants in eastern Sudan since 2010, who were smuggled to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and subjected to torture until their families paid ransoms (Abdel Ati, 2017, p. 1).

The current paper examines human exploitation along migrant pathways in Sudan, focusing on migrants from East and West African countries, with an emphasis on main hotspots in Sudan's East, Centre, and West. Highlighting the exploitation that occurs during recruitment and throughout the journey to transit points and final destinations, it addresses four over-arching questions: What are the risks associated with common migrant routes? What factors contribute to migrants' vulnerability to exploitation? What specific forms of exploitation do migrants experience? Who are the perpetrators of migrant exploitation, and what are their motivations?

The dynamics of cross-border migration in Sudan remain understudied, representing a significant research gap. Collectively, the reviewed literature sheds light on selected dimensions of migration and vulnerability in Sudan, concentrating on specific regions and groups, yet notable gaps have been left uncovered. Abdel Ati (2017) examines human smuggling and trafficking networks in Eastern Sudan, mapping key routes and identifying involved actors. Elmagboul et al. (2017) highlight the exploitation of Ethiopian female domestic workers in Khartoum. Jamie (2013) offers a framework for understanding post-2008 female labour migration, foregrounding economic drivers. Jourdain et al. (2022) investigate the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 for migrant populations in Eastern Sudan. The studies collectively reveal gaps, including limited geographic coverage, absence of intersectional analysis ((like race, gender, class, etc.), less emphasis on root causes, and lack of in-depth structural or policy

analysis—calling for state-level, filed-based, root-cause-oriented, and intersectionality-informed investigations. This paper aims at addressing these identified gaps.

The present paper employs a qualitative research design. It combines a desk review of relevant literature[1] with multi-sited field research conducted from 2017 to 2024. The secondary data sources included previous research, government documents, court cases, and reports from both local and international organisations. The fieldwork, which included visits to the Red Sea, Kassala, Khartoum, and North Darfur states, involved single-participant and focus group interviews conducted with migrants and key stakeholders, including academic staff in social sciences and officials from the Anti-Smuggling Department at Sudanese Customs. Administrative staff from the Commission for Refugees, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the family and child protection units of the Child Welfare Council were also interviewed. Additionally, formal interviews were held with judges from courts in Darfur, Kassala, and Red Sea states, as well as the directors and deputy directors of the Passports and Immigration Department in the same regions.

Guides tailored for single-participant and focus group interviews focussed on central aspects of migration and exploitation across Sudan, with particular attention to principal migration routes, geographic zones and routes linked to exploitative practices, potential risks, and the history of smuggling and trafficking. Both interview guides addressed the functions and institutional capacities of refugee camps, migrant national identities, directional flows of migration, route choices, agents facilitating movement, and perpetrator demographics and motivational factors. They also covered procedures followed by security actors in victim assistance and the leading entities involved in tackling exploitation. Exclusive to the single-participant interview guide were questions concerning demographic determinants of risk, factors that heighten or mitigate vulnerability, the engagement of

[1] Spanning 25 years since 2000 and concentrating on the last decade, the referenced works (journal articles, working papers, reports, and documents) are assumed to furnish a solid, cross-regional, and multidisciplinary analytical foundation, including up-to-date conceptual definitions, theoretical leads, and previous empirical studies. Core themes include migration patterns, forms and factors of migrant worker exploitation, and legal/policy issues across Europe, South and Southeast Asia, East Africa, Oceania, and North America. Collectively, these works are relevant to our study on "exploiting migrants in transit," offering a migrant-centric, gender- and age-sensitive perspective that is key to linking international structures with region-specific experiences of exploitation.

militant groups, the experiences of migrant children and women, alongside the patterns, drivers, and impacts of exploitation.

To ensure valid and reliable findings, multisource data were triangulated: single-participant interviews contributed rich personal narratives, focus group interviews illuminated group-level dynamics and experiences, and secondary sources elaborated on historical and contextual dimensions. Data from interviews were compared on a continual basis during the fieldwork to detect patterns of similarity or difference in individual and group views, which were then checked against secondary sources to evaluate the alignment of emergent patterns with theoretical and empirical facts.

The paper begins with some theoretical and conceptual ideas, providing the necessary lens to analyse the dynamics of migrant exploitation. Then, there is a historical overview of the evolution of smuggling and trafficking activities in Sudan, highlighting the factors that have influenced the current trends. After reviewing efforts to combat human smuggling and trafficking in the country, the major migration routes are identified. Finally, the paper examines the patterns and key locations where migrant exploitation typically occurs.

2. An Overview of Core Concepts & Theories:

2.1 Concepts in Human Exploitation:

Labour exploitation refers to a range of issues, manifesting through wage deductions, control over wages and documents, forced long hours, poor working conditions, abuse, and labour racketeering that entails illegal recruitment and control of workers by intermediaries. It also involves forced labour, which means work obtained through threat of penalty (Boufkhed, Thorogood, Ariti, & Durand, 2024, p. 1).

Researchers address labour exploitation through two lenses. First, the School of Human Rights highlights critical forms of exploitation like slavery and trafficking, spotlighting bodily violence. Second, the School of Social Determinants of Health investigates structural aspects, including uncertain job situations, emphasising mental well-being consequences (Boufkhed, Thorogood, Ariti, & Durand, 2024, p. 2).

The UN *TIP* Protocol defines **human trafficking** as: “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of

abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation" (United Nations, 2000, p. Article 3). A broader definition of human trafficking includes the transportation and subjugation of individuals for financial gain, without necessarily crossing borders. Indicators of trafficking include debt bondage and restricted freedom, usually through withheld identification documents. While exploitation can occur outside trafficking, distinguishing it from legal labour migration is complex, particularly when recruitment is through lawful channels in seemingly legitimate environments (Deckert, Warren, & Britton, 2018, pp. 889, 890, 891-892, 894).

Smuggling involves the illegal transportation of individuals across borders, typically through deception or fraudulent documents, with mutual agreement between smuggler and smuggled (US DOS, 2006, p. 2). In contrast, trafficking involves coercion, deception, or abuse, with victims facing continuous exploitation. While both are profit-driven, smuggling profits arise from facilitating illegal entry, while trafficking profits come from victim exploitation. The distinction blurs when smuggled individuals become trafficking victims due to failure to pay or being sold to traffickers (Abdel Ati, 2017, pp. 7, 8, 9).[1]

2.2 Capitalism, Neocolonialism & the Global Exploitation of Migrant Labour:

Four main theories explain the global migration patterns: (1) Neo-Classical Economic Theory emphasises economic factors like wage differences and employment opportunities as key drivers of cross-border migration, viewing this move as a reasoned attempt to improve the financial well-being. (2) Structural Theory views migration within the global capitalist system, focusing on economic inequalities between high- and low-income countries, where the former exploit low-wage labour from

[1] The blurring of lines between smuggling and trafficking is exemplified in the lived experience of a Sudanese male informant, who was smuggled from Sudan to Saudi Arabia: "*I was contacted by an acquaintance who works as a smuggling broker, offering me free transportation if I could gather eight passengers for the trip. I recruited beggar women from West Africa, and we were taken to a house in Suakin. At 1 a.m., we boarded an overcrowded boat with 65 passengers from various countries. The journey was harsh, with no facilities and very little water (...). Next day evening, we arrived at the Yemeni coast, where a group of Yemenis received us, made us sit on the ground for a while, and then distributed us to houses according to our nationalities. They demanded a ransom of 4,000 Saudi riyals for each of us. Some of us called their families, who sent the required amount, allowing them to be immediately transported to Saudi Arabia. I didn't have the money, so I stayed with them for three months, working in the illegal trade of drugs and khat (Catha edulis) and in construction....*"

the latter by drawing workers into their labour markets. (3) Household Theory centres on family decision-making, especially in less developed countries, where households collectively deploy members abroad for income diversification and financial risk mitigation. (4) Network Theory highlights the importance of social networks in migration, where prior migrants support others—frequently relatives or acquaintances—in navigating and adapting to new environments, thereby perpetuating migration flows (Jamie, 2013, p. 187).

These four theories jointly provide a comprehensive, multi-layered explanation of migration by approaching individual, familial, structural, and social dimensions. Neo-Classical Economic Theory explains initial migration drivers from poor to rich regions, while Structural Theory shows why demand for migrant labour persists in rich nations and how global inequalities prompt migration flows. The Household Theory transfers the focus from individuals to household entities in migration decisions, supplementing the economic rationale with underscoring collective agency and risk reduction. The Network Theory explains how migration becomes self-sustaining through the passage of time. Taken together, these theories could clarify the Sudan's case, explicating not just the underlying causes but also the patterns and persistence of cross-border migration in Sudan and other affected countries by revealing why people migrate, how global inequality frames their options, and why such movements extend over time.

Being a part of the structural approach, the Marxist theory argues that colonialism in modern times relies on the exploitation of migrant labour in the Global North. This implies that this type of exploitation occurs within wealthy nations, eliminating the need for direct investments in poorer countries (Conde, 2023, pp. 21-22, 23, 24, 27).

Labour shortages in industrial capitalist countries have led to increased migration. As a result, in 2016, 40.3 million migrant workers worldwide were victims of exploitation, with 24.9 million in forced labour, 71% of whom were women, while 4.8 million faced sexual exploitation (Gunawan, Ansar, Fathi, Devty, & Irrynta, 2022, pp. 147, 151, 152-153). Globally, there are—at present—169 million migrant workers, primarily in high-income nations, often filling low-skilled, exploitative jobs. They face various human rights violations (Boufkhed, Thorogood, Ariti, & Durand, 2024, p. 2). The prosecution of exploitative employers depends on denunciations by migrants, but those who remain undocumented and in hiding are unlikely to report abuses (Dipoppa, 2024, p. 1).

Recruitment agencies and other non-state actors form part of the global "migration industry," providing services for profit. While states rely on this infrastructure, they struggle to regulate it effectively. The migration industry is fragmented, comprising small businesses, large corporations, and individual brokers, and plays a central role in the exploitation of migrant labour across regions (Larios, Cardona, Henaway, & Soltane, 2020, pp. 141-142).

Migrant vulnerability to exploitation arises from multiple factors, including the withholding of personal documents, precarious working conditions, and housing instability linked to illegal status or employer dependency. Migrant women and unaccompanied minors face heightened risks. Prior trauma, substance dependency, and socio-spatial isolation due to language, cultural, or geographic barriers exacerbate their marginalisation. Undocumented migrants suffer from employment instability. Additional stressors—such as migratory debt, remittance obligations, and protracted asylum processes—intensify their vulnerability (Guidi & Berti, 2023, pp. 4, 9).

2.3 Migrant Labour Exploitation in Global Destination and Source Hubs:

In the USA, tobacco and food production relies heavily on low-wage-accepting migrant workers. These workers, living in overcrowded and substandard housing, suffer from health problems. Threat of deportation, coupled with a lack of legal protections, also leaves them vulnerable to exploitation (Conde, 2023, pp. 21, 22-23, 25, 27). Over the border in Canada, private staffing agencies act as intermediaries, connecting migrant workers with employers, but, largely unregulated by authorities, they exploit workers by leveraging power imbalances, precarious immigration status, and personal connections. This exploitation negatively affects migrants' overall well-being, not just their working conditions (Larios, Cardona, Henaway, & Soltane, 2020, pp. 139, 140-141, 148, 153).

In Italy, illegal recruitment and workplace practices, like precarious contracts and undeclared labour, are widespread (Dipoppa, 2024, pp. 1, 5). Migrants face severe exploitation, including forced labour, minimal wages, and poor living conditions through *Caporalato*[1] (Gunawan, Ansar, Fathi, Devty, & Irrynta, 2022, pp. 146-147, 152). In Turkey, in the same Euro-Mediterranean region, single male

[1] *Caporalato*: an unlawful labour brokerage system across Southern Europe, chiefly within the agricultural sector, wherein informal intermediaries (*Caporali*) systematically exploit vulnerable workers, including migrants, by recruiting them into exploitative employment arrangements, marked by low wages and abuse, in direct contravention of legal employment standards and violation of labour rights.

migrants face stigmatisation, exploitation, and marginalisation, often blamed for societal problems. Their vulnerable legal status amplifies exploitation, with many working without social security, healthcare, or other essential services, while fear of deportation and limited legal rights restrict their mobility (Kızılelmas, 2023, pp. 725, 726-727, 732-733, 739, 743-744).

Migrants in the UK face significant exploitation, often working under unstable conditions marked by inadequate contracts, delayed payments, poor protections, disposability and abuse of power. This results in dehumanisation and sexual, physical, and verbal harassment, beside health and safety risks (Boufkhed, Thorogood, Ariti, & Durand, 2024, pp. 1, 2, 7, 10, 11). In New Zealand, migrant exploitation includes long working hours, unpaid wages, and coercive visa fees. The "tied" visa system restricts migrant workers to specific employers, fostering power imbalances. Employers often use intimidation, deportation threats, or fabricated criminal accusations to control migrant workers (Stringer, Collins, & Michailova, 2022, pp. 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12).

Bangladesh stands as a key source of migrant workers, mainly to the Arab Gulf. Many of these workers face severe exploitation, particularly under the *Kafala*.[1] The recruitment is often exploitative, involving a network of government agencies, licensed agents, and unlicensed brokers. Practices such as high fees, fake contracts, visa trading, and mis/disinformation are common (Azad, 2019, pp. 130, 131, 132-133, 139).

3 Smuggling & Trafficking Through Sudan: A Historical Review:

Illegal migration of West Africans[2] via Sudan to Saudi Arabia, initially driven by religious purposes, began in the 1930s. This migration pattern shifted significantly as Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf countries gained wealth from oil, attracting not only West Africans but also people from East Africa, seeking better economic opportunities. This second-phase migration, organised by smuggling networks, extended across urban centres in Sudan, East and West African countries, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. These networks, often involving cross-border tribes, include layers of multi-role actors of diverse

[1] *Kafala*: a system in most Gulf Arab countries that legally regulates migrant labour by requiring workers to enter, reside, and work under the sponsorship of a citizen or company, which bears full legal responsibility for them during their stay.
[2] These West Africans include Chadians, Nigerians, Nigeriens and Senegalese.

nationalities, such as brokers facilitating migration, transporters using pickup trucks, small boats,[1] large ships (*Sanabek*), receiving agents in destination countries, and officials who are bribed to overlook the operations. Over time, trafficking of persons has become intertwined with arms and drug smuggling, as vessels carrying smuggled weapons and narcotics are also used to transport illegal migrants.

In the 1980s, Sudan's Red Sea region established two refugee camps, Asotriba and Garora, to accommodate Somalis[2] and Eritreans fleeing drought, desertification, and the Eritrea-Ethiopia War.[3] Asotriba, the larger of the two, operated from 1983 to 2006, while Garora was active from 1984 to 1987. When these camps had been closed, refugees in the Red Sea region were compensated financially to settle in urban areas, transitioning from "camp refugees" to "urban refugees" and were required to renew refugee cards and obtain travel permits to move between the different parts of Sudan. Today, refugees in the region fall into three categories: new asylum-seekers, urban refugees, and camp-based refugees. The first two groups primarily reside in urban areas like Port Sudan, Suakin, Sinkat, and Dordaeb, while the third group has mostly disappeared, as the Red Sea region no longer hosts active camps. The only reception facility currently in the region is in Tokar, where migrants are held before being transferred to the Shagarab camp in Kassala state.[4] While services, including food, water, education, medical care, legal support, and security, are provided at the Tokar and Shagarab camps and during transfers, urban refugees in eastern Sudan receive no such support.

The influx of East and West African migrants intensified with the onset of oil production in Sudan. Between 1999 and 2011, as Sudan's oil exports expanded, many migrants arrived with the intention of saving money for further migration to Europe and Arab Gulf countries. While human smuggling and trafficking have long been present in Sudan, these activities notably surged during these twelve years. All Sudan's border areas have been notorious for large-scale operations involving humans. The migrant population included individuals of varying ages and backgrounds, as well as entire families, particularly

[1] These boats, funded by the Sudanese Farmers Bank and distributed to local fishermen to support the development of fishing industry in the Red Sea state, were instead repurposed for illegal migration activities. This shift in use could be attributed to the higher profitability of smuggling compared to fishing.
[2] Somali migrants usually enter Sudan in organised, transient groups, en route to Europe and America, financially supported by relatives abroad, and typically do not stay long in Sudan.
[3] In the early stages, most migrants received at these two camps were Somalis. They were eventually outnumbered by Eritreans.
[4] The Shagarab camp also receives migrants from Ethiopia.

among Nigeriens, Nigerians and Chadians. While Sudanese migrants are typically young males traveling alone, the other African migrants are young men and women from regions bordering Sudan, many hold Sudanese nationality[1] and/or relief cards, using them depending on circumstances.

Migrations from Darfur in western Sudan were primarily directed towards Libya for work, with many also relocating to other Arab countries. Darfur also served as a transit route for migrants from neighbouring countries like Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, who were heading to the Holy Land for Hajj. Emigrations from Darfur to Libya and other countries continued even after the 2003 escalation of armed conflict, which disrupted their traditional pattern. Most emigrants from Darfur were young men, with limited or no formal education. Post-2010, emigration rates rose, with a notable shift toward more educated people, including university graduates. Displaced youth in IDP camps in Darfur were often targeted by migration agents, with some using ration cards to facilitate border crossings and asylum seeking. Female emigrants, typically emigrated with their families, remained few, as migration to Libya was focused on agricultural work, a traditionally male-dominated field. Smugglers, primarily young men, use small pickup trucks to transport migrants from urban centres in Darfur to Libya, often concealing 15-20 individuals in desert locations before transferring them to larger vehicles. Migrants who manage to reach refugee camps in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, or Israel may further seek family reunification with relatives in European countries or wherever else.

Illegal migration is orchestrated within Sudan by various agents, using tribal networks. In both western and eastern Sudan, border tribal groups involved in smuggling leverage their local knowledge, community protection, and connections in neighbouring countries. Youth from these tribes are believed to have pioneered this activity, funding operations with profits from gold mining and trading. Consequently, gold mining, arms and drug smuggling, and human smuggling and trafficking have become interlinked. Besides, armed rebels in Darfur enhance smuggling activity by accepting payments from smugglers and migrants for safe passage. These rebels can move freely across the region without raising suspicion, permitting migrant companionship.

[1] The Sudanese government conferred citizenship on many migrants to garner their backing in the elections. Other migrants managed to secure citizenship via corrupt channels.

4 Regulatory Framework: Counteracting Smuggling and Trafficking in Sudan:

In Sudan, efforts to combat human smuggling and trafficking are coordinated between various entities, including the police, National Security and Intelligence Service, judiciary, Commission for Refugees-Sudan (CRS), and UNHCR. When migrants are apprehended, they are prosecuted under Sudan's immigration and passport laws.[1] Some critics argue that these laws are ineffective, classifying migrants who cross borders illegally as offenders, rather than recognising their potential status as asylum seekers or victims. Local smugglers are penalised with fines or short imprisonment, while foreign smugglers are deported post-trial. Foreign migrants arrested for being smuggled typically face fines and brief imprisonment before deportation, although financial limitations hinder the consistent enforcement of deportation orders. As a result, many migrants are released on personal guarantees. Political interference represents a further factor undermining law enforcement, as seen in political agreements between Yemeni and Sudanese authorities, which have resulted in the overturning of court decisions related to Yemenis involved in smuggling operations.

The responsibility for securing eastern Sudan's coast and territorial waters falls to the maritime security forces and the Anti-Smuggling Department of Sudanese Customs. These forces, operating fleets equipped with specialised modern boats featuring advanced GPS, communication systems, navigation technology, and radars, conduct daily patrols along the 610-mile coastline, from Ras Hadarbah near the Egyptian border to Ras Kassar near the Eritrean border. Their operations focus on areas vulnerable to human, arms, and drug smuggling, with a logistical support provided by Saudi Arabia. They manage smuggling cases, transferring detained individuals—smugglers or migrants—to courts without further investigation. Besides, there is security coordination between Sudan's Kassala state and Eritrea and between Sudan's Gedaref state and Ethiopia regarding smuggling via inland pathways, away from the coastline.

[1] In 2021, Sudan introduced its National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking for the period 2021-2023, aimed at supporting survivors, strengthening law enforcement and aligning Sudanese legislation with international human rights framework (Jourdain, Griesmer, & Bertini, 2022, p. 22).

The UNHCR has proposed three options for urban refugees in Sudan: (1) voluntary repatriation, which is generally unpopular among refugees; (2) third-country resettlement, a limited and uncertain option due to the small number of accepted families and the selective host country approval; and (3) local integration, where refugees are granted Sudanese nationality and live as citizens. However, the Sudanese government sees the third option as potentially burdensome on resources. Despite this official concern, many urban refugees have successfully integrated into certain urban communities. Since 2023, the state of security in Sudan has prompted the postponement of handling new third-country resettlement cases. Many refugees and asylum-seekers have either repatriated or escaped to neighbouring countries (UNHCR, November 2023, p. 4).

In Darfur, control of the border has recently been shared between armed rebel movements in "liberated areas" and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Before that, Sudan's western borders were open to various forms of smuggling. Migrants arrested by the RSF were usually transferred to the Department of Passports and Immigration, then to courts, and ultimately to the Commission for Refugees-Sudan. East African migrants were repeatedly sent back to Khartoum and then Eastern Sudan. West Africans were often granted refugee status and relocated to refugee camps in Central Darfur, including Um Shalaya and Mokjar, where the population was predominantly female. Additionally, in 2016, two camps were established in Aldeien, Eastern Darfur, for South Sudanese migrants, mostly women, though they were not officially classified as refugees.[1]

As noted, the Sudanese government has consistently approached human smuggling and trafficking primarily as a security concern, rather than addressing their economic and human rights consequences. Instead of handing over smuggling and trafficking victims to organizations that could provide them with protection and assistance, the government frequently incarcerates them to await trial for breaching Sudan's immigration laws. As noted also, corruption significantly facilitates illegal migration across Sudan's borders by enabling smugglers to bribe security forces. In some cases, bribes secure information on anti-smuggling operations or result in security forces ignoring smuggling activities.

[1] In October 2017, 7,609 South Sudanese migrants were recorded, though they are not recognised as refugees by the Sudanese government. Similarly, Syrians are treated as residents, not refugees, under Sudanese policy. As a result, migrants from South Sudan and Syria are not entitled to refugee status. Notably, many Syrians were identified among the illegal migrants.

5 Major Migration Routes Across Sudan:

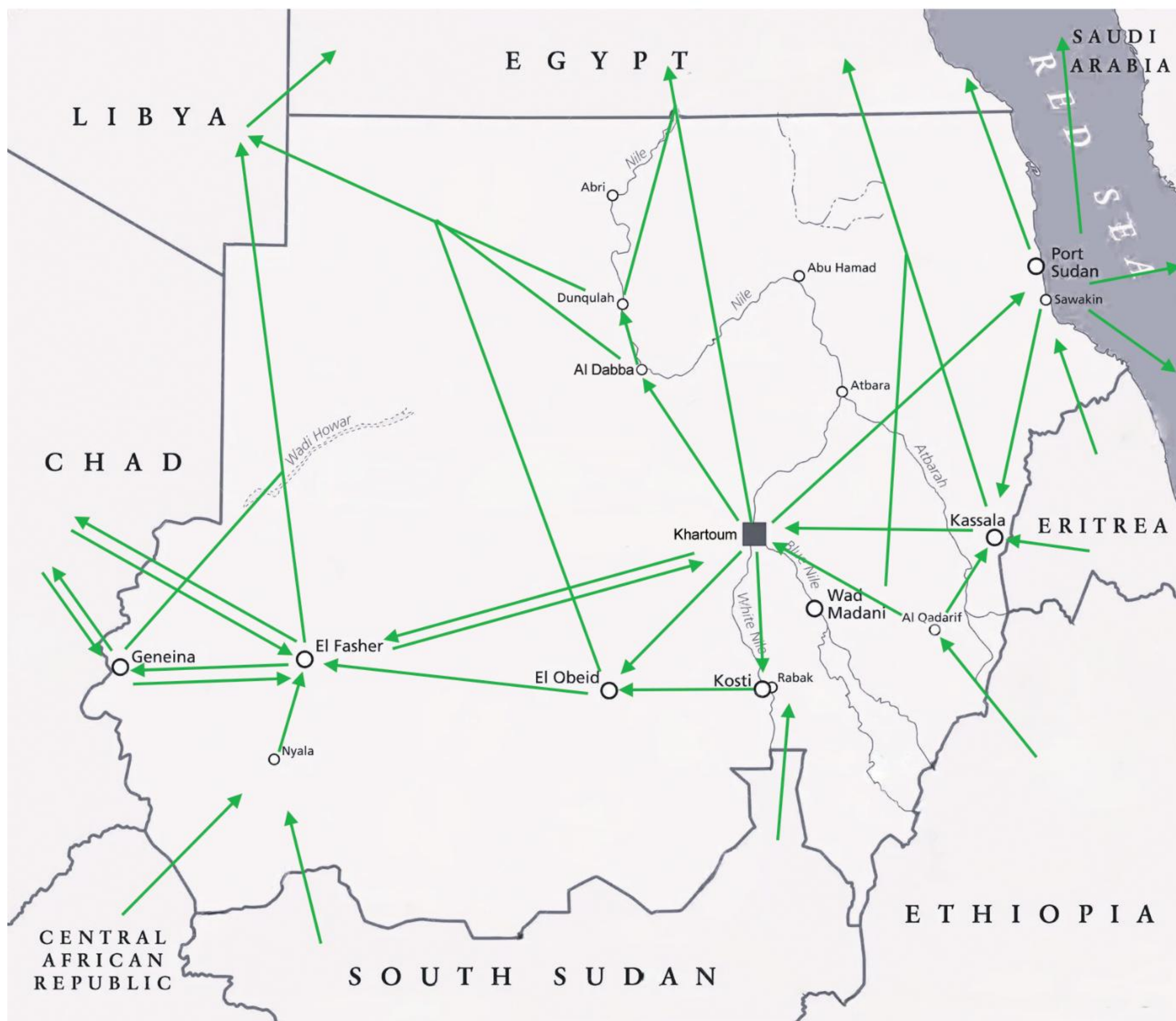
Migration within East Africa follows four primary international routes. The Horn of Africa route connects Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and neighbouring countries. The Eastern route extends from East Africa through Djibouti, Somalia, and Yemen, typically leading to the Arabian Peninsula's oil-rich countries. The Southern route passes through Kenya and Uganda to South Africa, while the Northern route traverses North Africa, reaching Italy and Spain, with a secondary branch extending through Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey (Gorokhov, Agafoshin, & Dmitriev, 2023, p. 51).

The Red Sea region's geographic features, including its lack of natural barriers along coastal and terrestrial borders, the presence of inter-State border tribes, and vast plains, valleys, mountains, and forests (notably south of Suakin), make it a transit point for illegal migration. The region's 750 km-long Red Sea coast, along with extensive land borders (744 km with Ethiopia and 605 km with Eritrea), further facilitate movement. In this region, migrants initially arrive at the Tokar reception camp, established in 2009, where they stay until the population reaches 20-25 individuals. They are then transferred to the Shagarab refugee camp, founded in 1985 in Kassala. Many migrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea seek refuge at Shagarab to obtain relief cards, which they later use to apply for asylum.

Four primary smuggling routes operate through the Red Sea region. The first is a terrestrial route that traverses the desert through Zahateeb, Musmar, Wadi Al-Ushar, Wadi Arab, Nurayit, and Halaib into Egypt, historically favoured by migrants from Al-Butana, Kassala, and Gedaref. The second land route runs from the Sudan-Eritrea border to Khartoum. The third is a sea route to Sinai, then to Israel, Jordan, Lebanon or Syria. The fourth is a sea route to Saudi Arabia or Yemen, with two sub-routes: one to Yemen, followed by land travel to Saudi Arabia via the Najran border, and the other directly to Saudi Arabia through Al-Qunfudhah south of Jeddah. These journeys last 2-3 days and are mostly organised during the summer months, when sea conditions are calmer.

Intensified maritime surveillance and the escalation of armed conflict in Yemen, coupled with heightened insecurity in the surrounding maritime area, have prompted a shift toward land-based smuggling activities away from residential areas and the Red Sea coast, extending through cantonment areas like Al-Butana, Gedaref, and Kassala. Smugglers now follow the above-described northern terrestrial route, crossing into Egypt or continuing into Libya. Additionally, Syrians avoid the Red Sea coast by utilising a land route that enters Egypt through the Sudan-Egypt border, then travels through Sinai to Israel, Jordan, Lebanon or Syria (See Sketch Map No. 1, below).

Sketch Map No. 1: Migrant Routes Across Sudan



*Source: Fieldwork

Several remote, uninhabited islands off the Sudanese coast serve as main points for human smuggling across the Red Sea. These include islands such as Liqaq, Haidoob, Sheikh Ibrahim, Marsa Salah, Qabool, Tagrinyai, Trinktat, Agig, Damat, Salalab, Ragig, the southern Tokar islands, Kultayb, and Abaidah, as well as Dengnab at the northern Red Sea border. Apart from Dengnab, all these islands lie south of Suakin, an area with challenging terrain of small islands, sea bays, forests, valleys, and mountains, which complicates anti-smuggling efforts.

Smuggling operations in eastern Sudan unfold in several stages, beginning with the gathering of migrants in urban areas like Gedaref, Kassala, Gharyah, Khashm Al-Girba, Port Sudan, and Sinkat, a process that takes about a month. Sudanese, Ethiopian, and Eritrean brokers facilitate this process. Migrants—numbering between 35 and 40—are then transported via small trucks driven by members of nomadic border tribes, often with dual nationality. They are taken to Suakin or nearby wilderness camps, where they are detained in guarded areas controlled by armed groups. These areas, often ethnically closed and inaccessible to authorities, ensure secrecy and trust, which are vital to the success of the smuggling operations. As noted, smugglers have increasingly adopted advanced communication devices, such as cellular chandeliers and sophisticated weapons, to enhance their operations. During the Red Sea crossing, migrants are first transported from Suakin or wilderness camps to the islands, which serve as final departure points before reaching Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or Egypt. This phase begins between 1 and 3 am, with migrants crowded into boats operated by Sudanese fishermen, carrying between 15 and 60 passengers depending on the boat size. Once on the islands, migrants often must navigate the water, with their luggage, to reach ships led by Yemeni and Somali fishermen south of Suakin or by Egyptian and Sudanese fishermen north of Mohammad Gol. These ships, unable to approach the islands due to shallow waters, are ill-equipped to carry large numbers of passengers and often lack skilled crews. Upon reaching the opposite shore, migrants are received by members of the smuggling network at remote, uninhabited islands, where they are housed based on nationality. From there, they are smuggled over rugged land routes to their destinations.

Emigration through or from Darfur occurred in two phases: before Gaddafi's death, migrants typically passed through to Egypt and Jordan, with some proceeding to Israel via Sinai. After Gaddafi's death, migration through Libya increased, with many heading to Europe, capitalising on the regional

instability and Libya's extensive Mediterranean coastline.[1] This migration followed two main routes to Libya in both phases. The first route originates in Al Geneina, West Darfur, passing through Attina, Wadi Hawar, Wadi Al-Atroun, Al-Nakheel, Awainat, and Al-Kufra. The second route starts from El Fasher, North Darfur, crossing Wadi Al-Atroun and Al-Nakheel, continuing through Om Alaranib in southern Libya, and reaching Sabha. Both routes converge at Wadi Al-Atroun, with Milleit town serving as a primary assembly point for migrants.

The escalation of Darfur armed conflict in 2003 has intensified the flow of migrants along Sudan's western border, with violence driving illegal migration, often towards Libya, Egypt, Chad, or beyond. Many migrants seek refuge in Israel, Lebanon and Europe via Libya or Egypt, while others use a route through Chad to reach Americas. Members of border tribes, benefiting from dual nationality and shared language, play a key role in facilitating emigration. Some migrants obtain identification papers, either legitimate or counterfeit, from Chad to assist in their journey, often supported by friends and relatives who have previously migrated and obtained refugee status. This conflict, however, created significant risks for migrants and, in response, smugglers from both Sudan and Libya formed agreements, with Sudanese smugglers transporting migrants to designated desert meeting points to connect with Libyan counterparts. To avoid clashes with rebel groups, smugglers adjusted their routes and split transportation fees equally. Over time, they also negotiated with armed rebel groups for safe passage across the border, offering goods and money in exchange for cooperation.

In these processes, Khartoum acts as a central waiting and distribution hub for migrants of different nationalities, facilitating their movement across Sudan. During their stay, migrants, both men and women, engage in various forms of labour, including sex work, hotel employment, catering, tailoring, tea vending, domestic servitude, car maintenance, and driving taxis or rickshaws. Small towns in western and northern Sudan, including Dongola, Al Dabba, Al Obeid, and El Fasher, serve as gathering points before migrants are smuggled into Chad, Libya, or Egypt.

Recently, human smuggling routes in eastern Sudan have shifted from coastal paths to inland routes, driven by changes in migrant destinations, now favouring Egypt, Libya, Israel, and Europe over

[1] Migration across the Mediterranean peaks between May and November when calmer sea waves make small boat journeys to Europe safer.

the Gulf states. As a result, urban centres in Sudan's central, northern, and western regions have replaced eastern hubs as the primary waiting and distribution points for migrants.

6 Patterns & Locations of Migrant Exploitation During Transit Through Sudan:

Among East African migrants, "guides" (*daleel*) play a significant role in the migration process. Upon arriving at the Shagarab camp, these guides avoid registration with authorities, stealthily leaving the camp to return to their home countries. There, they recruit additional migrants, often through misleading portrayals of Sudan as a country brimming with work opportunities, in exchange for financial compensation. In Sudan, immigrant smuggling along the northern and southern Red Sea regions is predominantly controlled by members from the nomadic border tribes, such as the Rashaida, Bani Amer, Bushariyyin, and Ababada. These smugglers charge between $300 and $450 per person for services that include transportation, subsistence, and accommodation.

The cost of smuggling a migrant through the land route from eastern Sudan to Egypt is approximately $3,000, with an additional $2,000 needed to reach Libya. From either Egypt or Libya, a migrant pays around $10,000 for passage across the Mediterranean Sea to southern Europe. For migrants crossing the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia or Yemen, fees for transportation, sustenance, and accommodation range from SR 3,000 to SR 4,000 per person. While most cases of illegal migration begin as human smuggling, based on prior financial agreements,[1] they often transition into human trafficking, with migrants facing detention, ransom demands, sexual exploitation, forced labour, or organ trade.[2] Throughout their journey, migrants endure harsh conditions, lacking necessities like restrooms, and are subjected to hunger and thirst.

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[1] For example, the payment for smuggling can be made in full upfront, in instalments, or partially in advance with the remainder to be paid later, as per the agreement.

[2] For example, lately in Kassala, seven Rashaida smugglers trafficked 48 girls and several boys, detaining them in a forest under harsh treatment. Victims were restrained under armed threat in tight spaces, and their families were extorted for ransom. This incident revealed grave trafficking-related rights violations, extended sexual abuse, and life-threatening harm. Some detainees were tortured with flammable substances or hanged from trees, while others were sold to traffickers for expected organ trade. The ordeal ended with a police raid. The smugglers surrendered and then received death sentences post-trial.

Migrants unable to pay the full smuggling fee at the end of the trip are detained and coerced into contacting their families for funds. In some cases, they are held for months and forced into unpaid labour, such as cultivating *khat* (Catha edulis) or working in construction in Yemen. This unpaid labour is often accompanied by severe violence, including sexual abuse and physical assault.[1] Migrants also face inhumane treatment, including organ trade, with many dying at sea from hunger, thirst, boat fires, drowning, or being thrown overboard.

Smuggling along Sudan's western border is also driven by high profits, around $4,500 for each person, and facilitated by border communities that exploit inter-ethnic relations in creating secure environments. Similarly, Libyans smuggle East and West Africans to Europe, charging approximately $5,000 per person. Upon arrival, Italian traffickers, for instance, purchase migrants for about $8,000 each, exploiting them in agriculture and other sectors. These migrants, usually young and physically capable, are exploited for their labour, with traffickers recouping nearly double the original payment.

Many migrants, particularly Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis, struggle to afford the full cost of their journey. To raise the necessary funds, they often work in agriculture, clubs, restaurants, markets, tea vending or preparing *shisha* (smoking water pipes). Syrians commonly find work in car maintenance in urban areas across Sudan. Migrants who can pay the full fare upfront are quickly transported without facing exploitation, while those unable to do so are at a higher risk of being trafficked.

Human rights violations are rampant during migration to Libya, with migrants encountering risks including abduction, detention, extortion, sexual exploitation, forced labour, ransom demands, and organ trade. Victims may be forced to work in agriculture, gold mining, or desert grazing areas, often without communication means. Exploitation also occurs when smugglers fail to honour agreements to transport migrants to their destinations. Additionally, abductions and detentions by rebel or rival tribal groups often exacerbate the situation, as smugglers from different groups abduct migrants under their control. Ransoms typically range from $5,000 to $8,000, paid through designated ATMs, Thuraya phone numbers, or agents.

The gold mining areas of Jebel Amer in North Darfur, home to around 70,000 male and female migrants from 13 countries, are dominated by informal camps controlled by militias. This region is a

[1] Smugglers use violence, even against those working with them, to enforce a sense of coercion and ensure compliance with their operations.

key site for trafficked migrants coerced into forced labour in Sudan. Intense competition for gold fuels violent rivalries, with militias using force to control resources. Armed rebel groups from Darfur and Chad exploit inter-tribal dynamics to assert control over non-Sudanese populations, framing their actions as protection of ethnic kin. The Jebel Amer camps also host women from Sudan and East and West Africa, who engage in prostitution and drug and alcohol dealings disguised as tea vending. Children aged 10 to 15, including migrants, perform menial tasks like sifting and washing gold for low wages or food. These children endure harsh working conditions in the mining areas, and although rape incidents are rare, the overcrowded, adult-dominated environment poses significant risks to their safety.

The influx of non-Sudanese immigrants into urban areas in Sudan's East, Centre and West has increased the number of petty traders, casual labourers, and beggars, including many children seen in streets and markets. Officials from the Child Protection Units in Al-Fasher, Khartoum and Port Sudan report that most of these children are immigrants, often homeless and separated from their families.

Severe exploitation of migrants, particularly of women, is prevalent in urban centres along Sudan's main migratory routes in the central, northern, eastern, and western regions, which serve as key hubs for migrants in transit. Migrants in these areas, often engaged in low-skilled labour, occupy the lowest rungs of the occupational hierarchy. This makes them vulnerable to various abuses, including rape, sexual assault, non-payment or unfair pay, and verbal or physical harm. Their ability to report such abuses is restricted, as they risk immediate dismissal by employers, leaving them with little recourse to justice or protection. Furthermore, many migrants, especially those with relatives in Europe and North America, are abducted both from within and from outside refugee camps, with the intent of extorting ransom from their families or for organ trade.

Noteworthy, smuggling operations in Sudan surged significantly between 2014 and 2019, coinciding with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). These operations were primarily used to transport large numbers of Muslim jihadist fighters supporting ISIS, particularly from East and West Africa. The smuggling activities generated exceptionally high financial profits for the smugglers. However, unlike typical smuggling networks, these operations did not evolve into human trafficking, likely due to their politico-religious nature, as reported by several informants.

7 Concluding Remarks & Policy and Intervention recommendations:

A mixed theoretical framework drawing on Neo-Classical Economic, Structural, and Network theories could offer a lens through which one could understand the Sudanese case of 'migrants in transit.' This migration pattern results from intersecting push factors in origin countries—such as economic deterioration, environmental degradation, and limited employment opportunities—and pull factors in destination countries, including labour demand, higher wages, and the promise of improved living standards. It manifests a contemporary form of labour exploitation; whereby economically dominant capitalist nations draw on cheap migrant labour to address labour shortages while circumventing the need for direct investment in underdeveloped regions. Social networks are central to this process, providing migrants with shared knowledge and informal support systems that facilitate movement, mitigate risks, and enable access to opportunities, especially in the Global North. These broader global dynamics shape the context and drivers of transit migration in Sudan.

Sudan plays a complex role in this global migration landscape, acting simultaneously as a receiving, transit, and sending hub for migrants from East and West Africa. These migrants—males and females of different ages, typically with limited or no formal education—often travel illegally, alone or with their families. Many carry Sudanese nationality documents alongside their original ones and/or humanitarian relief cards, which they use to ease border crossings and support asylum applications. The networks facilitating their journeys are composed of diverse actors, including smugglers and traffickers from varied backgrounds, nomadic border tribes as well as individuals from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Chad, Libya, and Egypt. These actors, frequently armed young men, rebel groups or paramilitary forces, leverage advanced communication technologies to carry out their operations across borders.

The migration routes through Sudan, shaped by local knowledge and enabled by porous borders, have evolved into conduits for smuggling goods, drugs, migrants, and Muslim jihadist fighters. They feed into broader transcontinental pathways. Their configuration shifts in response to changing politico-economic and security dynamics both within Sudan and beyond. Along these shifting routes—from origins to destinations—numerous exploitation hotspots persist, particularly in gold mining areas, urban centres, and refugee camps. In these hotspots migrants face many risks, including unsafe environments, harsh working conditions, homelessness, drowning, financial hardship, and excessive smuggling fees.

They also experience forced labour, labour racketeering, withheld or underpaid wages, extended working hours, inadequate living conditions, discrimination, abduction, extortion, detention, deprivation of food and water, and a broad spectrum of rights violations (such as physical violence, sexual abuse, and organ trade).

Transit migrants in Sudan are thus deeply entangled in a fragmented yet globally integrated migration industry, wherein transnational clandestine networks enable their movement and, frequently, their exploitation. These networks capitalise on tribal affiliations and cross-border relationships, involving multi-role actors—often dual nationals—who operate as recruiters, brokers, transporters, bribed officials, and employers. Their coordinated activities stretch from source countries through Sudan to final destinations. The principal driving force behind their engagement in smuggling and trafficking is the prospect of rapid and substantial financial profit. In this frame, most migrants work in informal, low-skilled, and labour-intensive sectors like agriculture, desert grazing, construction, gold mining, domestic servitude, prostitution, hospitality, transport, retail, petty trade, car maintenance, drug and alcohol sales, tea vending, begging, and casual labour. The precariousness of these jobs heightens their exposure to exploitation. While smuggling for politico-religious purposes is lucrative, it does not necessarily evolve into human trafficking. Conversely, many labour migrants remain susceptible to trafficking and exploitation.

The exploitation of migrants transiting through Sudan stems from intersecting factors, including mis/disinformation, inadequate or fraudulent employment contracts, and substandard working conditions, compounded by fears of employer retaliation, irregular immigration status, and the threat of deportation. Additional factors include the complicated legal procedures, limited or absent legal protection, lack of access to financial and support services, minimal awareness of labour rights, and a weak rule of law. A recent study of young Ethiopian female domestic workers in Khartoum exemplifies these structural vulnerabilities. These women—poor, illiterate, and undocumented—were employed in insecure, low-wage jobs, rendering them highly susceptible to exploitation. Unrealistic expectations, mis/disinformation, and limited awareness of job opportunities contributed to their vulnerability. Many suffered long working hours, withheld wages, and various forms of violence, including rape, though

none openly reported these abuses, and most lacked access to support services (Elmagboul, Dauod, & Tawaldi, 2017, p. 19).

Underlying all these challenges is an omnipresent failure of institutional governance and international support. In Sudan, weak law enforcement and covert collaboration of security personnel with smugglers and traffickers impede any meaningful regulation of illegal migration or protection of migrants. Financial and political limitations further hinder state capacity to implement effective migration policies. Existing laws criminalise irregular migrants, treating them as security threats and subjecting them to punitive measures rather than offering protection. Moreover, key vulnerable groups—such as Syrians and South Sudanese—are not formally recognised as refugees and thus remain unprotected. International responses, including those by the UNHCR, are often limited, ineffective, and place further strain on already drained local resources. These systemic failures in governance, legal enforcement, and global cooperation underscore the structural conditions that facilitate ongoing exploitation and injustice within Sudan’s migration scenery.

Built on the above, are the following policy and intervention recommendations, including directions for future research:

(1) Promoting legal and institutional systems is pivotal for properly regulating irregular migration. This entails transitioning from punitive deterrence to rights-affirming, humanitarian responses and to migration legislation that safeguards rights, delineates clear legal status mechanisms, and ensures labour protections. Strengthening governmental institutions via tailored investments in training and in equipping immigration and policing actors ensures transparency and adherence to the rule of law. Reinforcing anti-corruption measures is also critical to disrupt collusion between state actors and smuggling/trafficking networks.

(2) Enhancing protection and support for migrants requires deploying multi-service resource centres along principal migration routes and urban hubs, offering legal aid, healthcare, psychosocial assistance, safe shelter, and language support. Labour protection should be reinforced through accessible complaint mechanisms, standardised multilingual contracts, and regulatory oversight in exploitation-prone sectors. Moreover, outreach campaigns leveraging radio, digital platforms, and community networks are vital to raise awareness about rights, smuggling/trafficking risks, and available services.

(3) Combating smuggling and trafficking networks demands robust cross-border collaboration with neighbouring countries to monitor and dismantle transnational criminal operations through regional information-sharing mechanisms and joint task forces. Regulating informal labour brokers through registration, oversight, and penalties is necessary to prevent exploitation. Fostering access to legal labour markets and tracking illicit financial flows, coupled with targeted sanctions, are some measures to disrupt the financial lifeline of smuggling and trafficking networks.

(4) Tackling irregular migration requires addressing its structural root causes through context-specific economic and developmental interventions, including investment in local labour markets. Promoting micro-enterprises and vocational training beyond precarious, low-skilled sectors enhances resilience in migration-prone areas. Additionally, establishing safe migration pathways through bilateral labour agreements with receiving countries ensures protection from exploitation, wage restitution, and fair grievance processes for migrants.

(5) Promoting international engagement in Sudan calls for greater donor investment in protection programs and legal-institutional reforms. Accountability from Global North countries benefiting from migrant labour is critical, particularly in addressing demand-side drivers of exploitation through ethical recruitment and binding labour standards. Continued support for civil society, including migrant-led and local organisations, is essential in monitoring rights violations and advancing responsive advocacy and aid delivery systems.

(6) Improving data collection and analytical research is vital for evidence-based migration policy. This requires systematic tracking of migration pathways, exploitation zones, and demographic trends, supported by centralised databases documenting abuses and needs. Evidence-based research must also inform early warning systems, ensuring responsiveness to dynamic political and security realities.

(7) Future research needs to incorporate longitudinal studies, tracing migrant movements over time to shed light on the residual impacts of transit experiences, beside comparative studies on transit hubs across transnational contexts and migrant populations to spot both overlapping patterns and situational variables.

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