

## *Chapter 6*

# **Connecting Shores: Migration and Human Security in the Atlantic Basin**

*Susana Ferreira*

Human mobility has become a defining feature of this new millennium. It has become increasingly more complex, with varying geographies and motivations. More people than ever are on the move, in a scenario of large displacements stemming from wars and transnational conflicts, social and political instability and environmental and climatic changes, often within a context of deprivation of human security.

Most international migration takes place within legal channels. Irregular migration, however, is often associated with insecurities and public concerns about this phenomenon. During this last decade we have seen a substantial increase in forced displacement, within and across national borders, in different regions of the globe. Against this backdrop a whole set of challenges emerge, particularly regarding the safeguarding of the individual's human rights and dignity.

Geography is a fundamental axiom of migration as it shapes the different patterns of human mobility and involves the movement between numerous origins and destinations. Migration channels create a set of interconnections and spatial linkages that are designed by people on the move. Within this set we will adopt a geographic perspective to approach the phenomenon of migration in the Atlantic Basin, which includes a complex web of migration patterns and trends across and between three different continents—Europe, Africa and America (here divided as Latin America and Caribbean—LAC—and North America).

The Atlantic Ocean has a central role in the geography of international migration. It is an area of exchanges, linking distant regions and connecting its shores through trade and cultural relations, going all the way back to the Portuguese and Spanish discoveries and the Atlantic slave trade.

The period between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> was one of intense emigration across the Atlantic by Europeans, known as the 'Age of

Mass Migration’.<sup>1</sup> Ever since, the geography of migration in this basin has changed dramatically and nowadays the majority of flows take place at the South-South and South-North level, but to a lesser extent at a West-East or East-West level.<sup>2</sup>

For many of the individuals on the move nowadays, migration is their own approach to safeguard their human security, it is a survival strategy. Nevertheless, it might come along with other threats to their personal security. What are the main threats to human security connected to migration in the Atlantic basin? Through the analysis of migration across the Atlantic region, specifically of three critical hotspots identified, this chapter will assess the different regional realities and the main challenges to human security emerging, offering an innovative comparative analysis of migratory flows in this large region, through the lenses of human security.

The hotspot analysis facilitates the identification and prioritization of critical points with significant sustainability challenges, which enables the focus on priority issues such as a humanitarian crisis or conflicts.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, three critical unrest points in terms of human mobility have been identified in the Atlantic Basin and a comparative analysis has been adopted, through the evaluation of different phenomena by similar features, to assess the main human security challenges arising in such contexts. Furthermore, this approach also aims to facilitate the sharing of the learning between different experiences as a means of prioritizing a humanitarian dimension in migration policies and strategies.

The research is based on the analysis of primary sources—databases and reports by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Population Department, Amnesty International, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Reliefweb—as well as on a review of the state of the art of academic works. However, while carrying out the research some methodological obstacles showed up, particularly regarding the compilation of data about the Venezuela crisis, given the difficulties for international agencies to gather data on the ground and also given the fact that this is a too recent event.

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1. Keeling, D. “Transatlantic shipping cartels and migration between Europe and America, 1880-1914”. In *Essays in Economic & Business History*, 17, 195.
  2. United Nations, *International Migration Report 2017*. New York, 2017, 5. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017.pdf>.
  3. United Nations Environment Program, *Hotspot Analysis. An overarching methodological framework and guidance for product and sector level application*. United Nations Environment Program, 2017.

The chapter is structured in three sections. The first one will look at the nexus between migration and human security, which provides a framework for the research; the second will focus on three critical migratory hotspots—Central America, Venezuela and the Mediterranean—through an analysis of the main trends in these migratory corridors; and the third one will make an assessment of the main challenges to human security in a context of irregular migration based on the study made in the previous section.

### The Nexus Between Migration and Human Security

The individual gained momentum in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, becoming a subject of security, as human life turned into a referent object.<sup>4</sup> In a time of international migration crisis, with critical hotspots for migration and forced displacement throughout the world, the preservation of individuals' life and dignity and the safeguarding of their human rights is often at risk.

Since international migration questions state capacities to manage migratory flows, the strategies adopted by states are increasingly more focused on contention and deterrence. In a VUCA<sup>5</sup> (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) world, with increasingly complex transnational threats that present unique challenges to the international system, the feeling of insecurity arises, bringing population movements into the spotlight. Such threats are more severe to specific vulnerable populations such as forced migrants, irregular migrants, women and children.<sup>6</sup>

Human security can be roughly understood as individuals' 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear', which include the preservation of people's livelihoods (including dimensions such as economic, food, environmental or personal).<sup>7</sup> The human security framework emphasizes the protection of individuals from violence and respect for fundamental rights.

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4. Buzan, Barry; Waever, Ole & De Wilde, Jaap, *Security: a new framework for analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.

5. The acronym VUCA originated in the US military (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014, 1).

6. Vietti, Francesca & Scribner, Todd, "Human Insecurity: Understanding International Migration from a Human Security Perspective". In *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 1, 1, 2013, 26.

7. Gómez, Oscar A. & Des Gasper, "Human Security. A Thematic Guidance Note for Regional and National Human Development Report Teams". United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report Office, 2013, 1-2 [Consulted at: 25 March 2019]. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/human\\_security\\_guidance\\_note\\_r-nhdrs.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/human_security_guidance_note_r-nhdrs.pdf).

Thus, human security focuses on the survival, livelihood and dignity of individuals, acknowledging the interconnections between peace, development and human rights.<sup>8</sup>

The human security paradigm goes beyond a traditionally state-centric approach to security and encompasses the security of individuals and communities. Nonetheless, a comprehensive approach to the contemporary transnational threats entails the interconnection between both frameworks—state and human security. Thus, states should ensure the safeguard of the rights of all individuals in their territory, regardless of their status, protecting them from violations to their personal dignity and safety.<sup>9</sup>

Within a broad conceptualization, threats to human security range from deprivation of human rights, terrorism, drugs, pollution, among others.<sup>10</sup> Its consequences have repercussions not only on the individual but beyond borders, within a logic of ‘freedom from want’. Yet, a narrow approach focuses on violent threats to the individual, within the paradigm of ‘freedom from fear’.<sup>11</sup> As stressed by Bilgic, “(...) life under fear is not a life. It is reductive and restrictive, and makes an individual susceptible to hate, distrust, paranoia, and suspicion”, which requires a comprehensive approach to human security.<sup>12</sup>

Des Gasper and Sinatti<sup>13</sup> offer a comprehensive conceptualization of the intersection between migration studies and the human security approach, which includes the linkages between deprivation and vulnerability; the interaction between several separate domains; a psychological analysis of individuals’ social security considerations and the role of human actors and evolution of migrant communities. In the end, it highlights the added value a human security framework brings to the exploration of the different dimensions of migration.

Irregular migration is frequently regarded as an element of insecurity, as migrants’ irregular arrival to a certain territory might pose a direct or urgent

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8. UNIDO, *UNIDO’s Contribution to Human Security*. Vienna: United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2015, 5.

9. Ferreira, Susana, *Human Security and Migration in Europe’s Southern Borders*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 33. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-77947-8

10. *Ibid*, 34.

11. Xavier, Ana Isabel, *A União Europeia, Actor de Segurança Humana. O Futuro Da Segurança*. Lisboa: Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologia, 2013, 59.

12. Bilgic, Ali, *A Human Security Perspective on Migration: A Compass in the Perfect Storm*. International Institute of Social Studies, 2018, 1.

13. Des Gasper & Sinatti, Giulia, “Investigating Migration within a Human Security Framework”. In *Revista de Migración y Desarrollo*, 2016.

challenge to state's internal security. A securitarian approach to migration can be framed within four different axes: socio-economic, relating migration with unemployment, increase in informal economies and the crisis of the welfare state; securitarian, relating with the loss of the control narrative that links questions of sovereignty, borders and internal and external security; identitarian, where migrants are considered a threat to host societies for their national identity; and, political, resorting to anti-immigration and racist discourses to acquire political benefits.<sup>14</sup> Paradoxically, irregular migration comprises a myriad of threats to migrants' human security given their vulnerable situation, as will be assessed throughout this chapter.<sup>15</sup>

Irregular flows are often correlated with trafficking and smuggling of people. Migrants often engage in 'survival crimes', jeopardizing their own human security, by resorting to smuggling in an attempt to reach a safe harbor and survive. Human smuggling networks are service providers, who facilitate migrants' crossing throughout a route. Nevertheless, abuses might take place sometimes, such as deprivation from water or food, bad transportation or accommodation conditions, harassment or rape, or in extreme cases leading to coercion and enslaving migrants.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, human smuggling and human trafficking are often interconnected, within a continuum that goes from deception to complete coercion.<sup>17</sup> Trafficking in human beings involves coercion and different forms of exploitation, violating human dignity and fundamental rights.<sup>18</sup>

Both traffickers and smugglers are known to use (excessive violence) against their victims to exert power and control. All this raises human rights concerns. Therefore, human rights should be at the core of the human security concept, as this body of rights aims "(...) to make human beings secure in freedom, in dignity, with equality, through the protection of their basic human rights".<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, those are two distinct concepts. On the one

14. Ceyhan, A & Tsoukala, A., "The securitization of migration in western societies: Ambivalent discourses and policies". In *Alternatives*, 27, 2002, p.24. DOI: 10.1177/03043754020270S103.

15. Ferreira, Susana, *Human Security and Migration in Europe's Southern Borders*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 33. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-77947-8.

16. *Ibid*, 45.

17. Aronowitz, Alexis A., "Smuggling and trafficking in human beings: The phenomenon, the markets that drive it and the organizations that promote it". In *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 9, pp. 163–195, 2001, 166.

18. Vietti, Francesca & Scribner, Todd, "Human Insecurity: Understanding International Migration from a Human Security Perspective". In *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 1, 1, 2013, 27.

19. Ramcharan, Bertrand, *Human rights and human security*, M. Nijhoff Publishers, 2002, 40.

hand, human rights consists in a defined legal framework comprised by declarations and international treaties; on the other hand, human security has a broader scope, including a wide set of threats.<sup>20</sup>

All in all, the paradigm of human security offers an invitation to rethink the security of individuals, addressing cross-cutting challenges to survival from a bottom-up approach. The adoption of this concept advances the multidimensional causes and consequences of such complex flows, calling for integrated multilevel actions (local, national and regional).

### Migration hotspots across the Atlantic Basin

Migration is a global phenomenon that affects every single region on the globe. It has undergone significant changes in recent years. Population movements in the Atlantic Basin are motivated by different forces, from economic reasons and prosperity to conflicts, inequalities and insecurity that have highly contributed to the important shifts in migration patterns over the last three decades.

On both sides of the Atlantic the size and scope of forced migration and irregular flows are extraordinary, and migration has emerged as a central but contentious issue for regional stability. By the end of this second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, three migration crisis hotspots can be identified in both sides of the Atlantic: the Central American caravans; the Venezuela humanitarian crisis; and the so-called European migration crisis.

Central American migration has received increased public attention with Trump's administration enforcing a 'zero-tolerance' policy at its southern border, raising walls, separating families and deterring irregular migration. Further south, Venezuela's political and social instability is turning into a humanitarian crisis with growing displacements to neighboring countries, which might affect regional (in)stability. Across the Atlantic, the number of irregular migrants crossing the Mediterranean has decreased drastically since reaching its peak in 2015, with new significant changes in the routes moving westward to Morocco.

These are mostly mixed migration flows, encompassing forced and voluntary movements of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as

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20. Figueira, Rickson Rios, "Tensões e distensões entre a segurança do estado-nação e os direitos humanos: segurança humana e migrações internacionais sob o olhar da teoria dos direitos fundamentais de Robert Alexy". In *Revista de Direitos Humanos Em Perspectiva*, 1, 2, 2015, 100. DOI: 10.21902.

victims of human trafficking and internally displaced persons. While the management of these flows is one of the greatest challenges states currently face, it also places serious concerns regarding the protection of migrants' human rights and the safeguarding of their human security. As these migration crisis mount, questions regarding migrants' human security arise.

### *Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean*

The predominant trend in Central America is northward migration. Mexico is no longer only the main country of origin but plays a prominent role as transit country for migrants travelling to the US (United States).<sup>21</sup> New and diversified flows throughout the region have emerged in the last decades, particularly composed by irregular migrants. Albeit not being a recent phenomenon, migration flows from the 'Northern Triangle'—the region of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador—to the US have acquired a new humanitarian dimension, with thousands of people fleeing violence. The pervasive violence in those countries has led to a dramatic humanitarian crisis.<sup>22</sup>

Given the complexity and magnitude of human mobility in this region and its dynamic and transnational character, the capacity of protection by transit and destination countries is still very limited. Migrants from the Northern Triangle countries display special 'risk profiles', such as individuals persecuted by gangs (*maras*) or victims and witnesses of gang crimes. However, only a small portion of those individuals in need of protection are recognized as refugees or are subject to some sort of additional protection.<sup>23</sup>

These flows gained greater visibility with the 'Migrant Caravan' in 2018. In October 2018, a group of migrants left Honduras and others have joined them throughout the route, estimated in 7,000 when they reached Mexico, including minors. These caravans have been organized during the last decade although no other has had this dimension and visibility, motivated by migrants own conviction and despair.<sup>24</sup>

21. IOM, *World Migration Report 2018*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2017, 76.

22. Amnistía Internacional, *¿Hogar dulce hogar? El papel de Honduras, Guatemala y El Salvador en la creciente crisis de refugiados*. London: Amnistía Internacional, 2016, 6.

23. *Ibid.*, 5.

24. Ramírez Gallegos, Jacques, "De la era de la migración al siglo de la seguridad: el surgimiento de 'políticas de control con rostro (in)humano'". In *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios de Seguridad*, 23, 2018, 10–28. DOI: 10.17141/urvio.23.2018.3745.

The caravans of migrants are organized group mobilizations that aim to ensure protection throughout the journey to make it safer. These mobilizations involve the participation of migrants themselves and in some cases their relatives and aim to provide protection to make the trip a little more safely. This way, when walking in a moderately organized group, migrants do not need to resort to the services of human smugglers (known as *coyotes* in Mexico) and are not subject to the violence of smuggling industry. It is important to stress that people resort to this migration strategy because of insecurity in transit countries, particularly in Mexico.<sup>25</sup>

In El Salvador and Honduras, violence is the key factor behind these flows. According to Amnesty International, the expanding violence in territories controlled by gangs affects the right of people to life, their physical integrity, access to education and even their freedom to movement.<sup>26</sup> In Guatemala, the increasing inequalities are the main driver of human mobility.

Women and children are the most vulnerable groups to the different forms of violence and political instability in the Northern Triangle. Gender-based crimes often go unpunished and the region registers one of the highest femicide rates in the world, which creates a constant feeling of insecurity among women.<sup>27</sup>

One of the critical dimensions of this phenomenon are the unaccompanied minors (boys and girls) travelling and crossing the border alone. Children escaping poverty and violence at home, separated from their families, who risk their lives in this dangerous route to get to the US. In 2014, the US Border Patrol detained nearly 70,000 unaccompanied children and in 2016 almost 60,000, the majority of them coming from the Northern Triangle (80%) and the others from Mexico (20%).<sup>28</sup>

A study from the Congressional Research Service (Kandel et al., 2014) has pointed out that 75 -80% of unaccompanied minors are victims of human trafficking, as they resort to smugglers throughout the journey who

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25. Martínez Hernández-Mejía, Iliana, “Reflexiones sobre la caravana migrante”. In *Análisis Plural*, 1<sup>st</sup> semester, 2018, 232–248.

26. Amnistía Internacional, *¿Hogar dulce hogar? El papel de Honduras, Guatemala y El Salvador en la creciente crisis de refugiados*. London: Amnistía Internacional, 2016, 5.

27. Ibid.

28. Ataiants, Janna, Cohen, Chari, Riley, Amy Henderson, Lieberman, Jamile Tellez, Reidy, Mary Clare, & Chilton, Mariana, “Unaccompanied Children at the United States Border, a Human Rights Crisis that can be Addressed with Policy Change”. In *Journal Immigrant Minor Health*, 20, 4, 2018. DOI: 10.1007/s10903-017-0577-5, 1000–1010.

later coerce them into forced labor or prostitution. This reveals the vulnerability of these children and their exposure to numerous forms of trauma.

The progressively restrictive immigration policies implemented by the Trump administration have placed the world's attention on the migration system comprised by Central America-Mexico-United States and Canada. Nevertheless, Trump's threats to finish the wall along the border between Mexico and the US and denying refugee status to those in need of protection seem to have had the contrary effect in international public opinion, strengthening solidarity among civil society.<sup>29</sup>

The deterrent policies adopted by the White House have three main axes: 1) massive illegal expulsions of asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border; 2) thousands of illegal separation of families; and, 3) increasingly arbitrary and indefinite detention of asylum-seekers. These practices have been condemned by Amnesty International for the extreme suffering they inflict on families and the inhuman and degrading treatment asylum seekers receive.<sup>30</sup>

Mexico plays a more and more crucial role in the management of these migratory flows, both as country of transit and because migrants are often stranded in Mexico with no possibilities to go back to their countries of origin or continue forward. The crossing through Mexico is increasingly more dangerous, in a context of instability and violence leaving migrants in a situation of greater vulnerability. In this sense, Martínez Hernández-Mejía highlights that “[t]he Mexican government has not clearly implemented a policy that has a vision of human security (...). On the contrary, it privileges its national security (...) since it does not seek to protect the human rights of people in transit but, instead, arrests and expels them from Mexican territory”.<sup>31</sup>

Given all the difficulties in the routes along this migratory corridor, the smuggling business model has become a highly profitable industry, which has learned how to play with the growing instability of the region. The ‘coyotes’ have acquired relevance with the strengthening of surveillance in the US southern border, adapting their strategies to the different cir-

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29. Martínez Hernández-Mejía, Iliana, “Reflexiones sobre la caravana migrante”. In *Análisis Plural*, 1<sup>st</sup> semester, 2018, 235.

30. Amnistía Internacional, *Estados Unidos: “Tú no tienes ningún derecho aquí”*. London: Amnistía Internacional, 2018a.

31. Martínez Hernández-Mejía, Iliana, “Reflexiones sobre la caravana migrante”. In *Análisis Plural*, 1<sup>st</sup> semester, 2018, 237.

cumstances, which might involve “(...) predatory practices ranging from demands for bribes to mass kidnapping and extortion”.<sup>32</sup>

### *Venezuela and South America*

Political and social instability in Venezuela has led to a serious deterioration of the population’s living conditions, which prompted a humanitarian emergency with over three million refugees by the end of 2018.<sup>33</sup> Representing already one of the largest forced displacements in the Southern Hemisphere, this crisis affects its neighboring countries as well as regional stability in South America.

The deep gap created by hyperinflation, shortage of food, water and medicine, along with growing violence among the population are driving millions of Venezuelans out of the country. During 2018, an estimated average of 5,000 people per day left the country in search of protection or a better life. The countries in the region have demonstrated an incredible solidarity granting protection to those migrants. Colombia alone hosts the largest number of refugees and migrants, with over 1.1 million. Overall, Latin America and the Caribbean countries host an estimated 2.7 million Venezuelans, while the rest are spread across other regions (mostly Europe).<sup>34</sup>

Violence has taken over the country, with rising criminality rates. Sharpening poverty has led to new forms of crime, with new actors: young men living in poverty, stealing basic goods, as food has become scarce. With over 81.4 violent deaths per hundred thousand inhabitants, Venezuela is currently the most violent country in Latin America.<sup>35</sup> These dramatic levels of violence question the security of the population in Venezuela, endangering their life and integrity. Under the presidency of Maduro, the state was not able to guarantee the right to life in a context of extreme violence.<sup>36</sup> Nowadays, in a scenario of uncertainty and discussed leadership,

32. IOM, *World Migration Report 2018*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2017, 76.

33. UNHCR, “Number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela reaches 3 million”. In UNHCR Press Releases, 8 November, 2018 [Consulted at: 20 February 2019]. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2018/11/5be4192b4/number-refugees-migrants-venezuela-reaches-3-million.html>.

34. IOM and UNHCR, “Venezuelan Outflow Continues Unabated, Stands Now at 3.4 Million”. *Reliefweb Updates*, Geneva, 22 February, 2019.

35. Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, *Informe Anual de Violencia 2018*. Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, 2018 [Consulted at: 25 February 2019]. Available at: <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/ovv-lacso-informe-anual-de-violencia-2018/>

36. Amnistía Internacional, *Esto no es vida. Seguridad ciudadana y derecho a la vida en Venezuela*. London: Amnistía Internacional, 2018b, 5.

with so many international pressures and interests, the situation remains volatile.

Given the recent events and the unpredictability of the evolution of the political situation, it is difficult to anticipate the development of these flows. Yet, it can be expected that this flow of people will persist, although migration routes might shift if restrictive migration policies are implemented in the region.<sup>37</sup>

### *European migration crisis*

The Mediterranean is the world's deadliest migration corridor. Irregular migration is a present and future reality, but with shifting dynamics and geographies. Migratory pressure in this region has intensified during the last half of this decade, reaching its peak in 2015 with over 1.8 million illegal detections in the EU's southern and eastern borders.<sup>38</sup> Ever since, there have been geographic changes in the routes while the intensity of the flows decreased significantly.

Three main migratory routes cross the Mediterranean: the Western Mediterranean (crossing from Morocco to Spain), the Central Mediterranean (from Libya to Italy and Malta) and the Eastern Mediterranean (from Turkey to Greece). Variations across these routes depend on various external factors that range from conditions in the countries of origin and transit to the mechanisms and strategies implemented by the EU to manage these flows. Therefore, during the last four years, there have been shifts in the routes, although the Central Mediterranean has been the prevailing one. Nonetheless, in 2018 there was a dramatic drop in this route, while the western Mediterranean registered a significant increase and became the main route into Europe.<sup>39</sup>

As the number of departures from Morocco records an intense increase, Spain registers greater migratory pressure. The majority of the migrants travelling across this route come from sub-Saharan countries, although the number of Moroccan nationals is on the rise.<sup>40</sup>

The migratory pressure in Africa, with very young age structures and large income inequalities continues to boost economic migration and

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37. IFRC, *Emergency Appeal Operation Update. Americas: Population Movement*. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2019.

38. FRONTEX, *Risk Analysis for 2019*. Warsaw: Frontex, 2019, 41. DOI: 10.2819/224322.

39. *Ibid.*, 6.

40. *Ibid.*

South-North mobility, particularly from sub-Saharan countries. Furthermore, the existence of few legal immigration channels to the EU combined with these large income inequalities between origin and destination countries to diversify the causes of irregular flows beyond that of security.<sup>41</sup>

Conflict and violence within and in surrounding subregions have contributed to displacement in Central and North Africa. Furthermore, conflicts in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, particularly in Syria where the civil war continues to destabilize the region and force outward migration, have a huge impact in human mobility across the African continent. Moreover, people smugglers have taken advantage of this situation of insecurity to facilitate migrant journeys, particularly in the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea.

As an important hub of transit movements, the African continent, in particular the North African subregion, encounters several protection challenges related with irregular migration to Europe.<sup>42</sup> The routes to Europe across Africa are long, harsh and dangerous. Migrants might come from countries such as Somalia or Nigeria and have to overcome several geographical obstacles, being the riskier parts of the journey the crossing of the Sahara desert and the crossing by boat of the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, migrants need to resort to ‘intermediaries’ who facilitate and arrange their journeys.

Along these routes, migrants are vulnerable to serious human rights violations, which might include “(...) deaths at sea, in the desert and in other transit locations; missing migrants, exploitation, physical and emotional abuse, trafficking, smuggling, sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary detention, forced labor, ransom demands and extortion; and other human rights violations”.<sup>44</sup>

Following repeated tragedies in the Mediterranean in the first semester of 2015, the European Commission adopted the European Agenda on Mi-

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41. Ferreira, Susana, “Migratory Crisis in the Mediterranean: Managing Irregular Flows”. In *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 5, 1, 2016. DOI: 10.5334/sta.441, 2.

42. IOM, *World Migration Report 2018*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2017, 72.

43. Lutterbeck, Drew, “A View from the Ground: Human Security Threats to Irregular Migrants across the Mediterranean”. In O. Grech & M. Wohlfeld (Eds.), *Migration in the Mediterranean: human rights, security and development perspectives*. Msida: Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, 2014, 125.

44. IOM, *World Migration Report 2018*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2017, 72.

gration in May and adopted a set of urgent actions to face the crisis. One of the goals was also to give a comprehensive framework to those issues by presenting a new set of medium-term measures.<sup>45</sup> However, the EU's answer so far, has mostly been one of a deterrence-based approach, predominantly grounded on the dimensions of border management.<sup>46</sup>

### Understanding threats to human security in the context of irregular migration

Each migrant lives a different story, one of adventures and risks, crossing deserts and seas or countries in conflict dominated by chaos, but not all of them survive to tell it. The reality of irregular migration is a harsh one, as migrants encounter extreme adversities due to the increasingly dangerous routes taken, risking their own lives.

Figure 1 highlights the three migratory hotspots in the Atlantic Basin previously analyzed and the main challenges to human security in the countries of origin and transit. The most problematic areas are the Gulf of Guinea and Central America with mounting instability and increasing levels of violence. The situation in Venezuela, albeit dramatic, is still too recent and not much reliable data is available.

Through the analysis of these three migratory crisis in the Atlantic Basin we have identified three main sources of threats to human security throughout migrants' journeys across Africa to Europe, and across the American continent: the extreme travel conditions, the insecurity in transit countries, and the mistreatment at the hands of smugglers.<sup>47</sup>

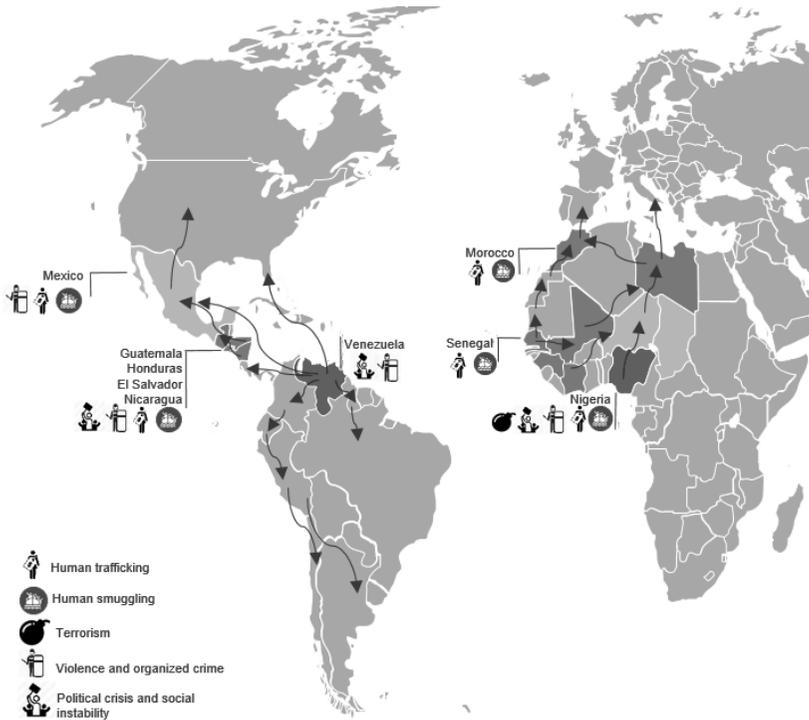
Regarding travel conditions, it is important to start by stressing that migratory routes are often long ones, therefore the journeys might take several months or even years, as the vicissitudes of the journey might make them even longer than originally planned. The most difficult part of the routes are the journeys across a desert or a sea. The trip across the Sahara desert

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45. Ferreira, Susana, "Migratory Crisis in the Mediterranean: Managing Irregular Flows". In *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 5, 1, 2016. DOI: 10.5334/sta.441, 4.

46. Ferreira, Susana, *Human Security and Migration in Europe's Southern Borders*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 193. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-77947-8.

47. Lutterbeck, Drew, "A View from the Ground: Human Security Threats to Irregular Migrants across the Mediterranean". In O. Grech & M. Wohlfeld (Eds.), *Migration in the Mediterranean: human rights, security and development perspectives*. Msida: Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, 2014, 124.

**Figure 1. Human Security Threats in the Three Atlantic Hotspots**

Source: Author's own elaboration

or in Arizona (US) is a dangerous one due to the severe climatic conditions but also because of the lack of provisions such as water or food.<sup>48</sup> Here migrants are abandoned to their fate by smugglers and many perish along the way.

The crossing of a sea (the Mediterranean, the Caribbean or even the Atlantic Ocean) is a life-threatening journey. The risks of travelling across the sea include the danger of drowning and the exposure to severe weather conditions during sailing. Furthermore, the unseaworthy conditions of vessels, with migrants travelling in overcrowded boats, with limited supplies and insufficient lifejackets triggers situations of high distress. All in all, these crossings have a set of risks that directly affect migration as

48. Ibid, 127.

migrants are exposed to the dangers of the sea and deserts and completely unprotected.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these hazards, migrants continue to risk their lives in such dangerous journeys often pushed by structural factors in the countries of origin.<sup>50</sup> Those who perish in the desert are often left unaccounted and easily forgotten, while deaths in the Mediterranean Sea have gained growing visibility. Nevertheless, as smugglers adapt to strategies implemented by states, the crossings become increasingly more dangerous and the means of transportation increasingly more precarious, putting the right to life at risk.

As highlighted in the previous section, the majority of these routes cross along countries with ‘structural violence’. Irregular migrants travelling along those routes are exposed to different hazards in a context of social vulnerability, given their migratory status. The violence perpetrated against migrants includes kidnapping or sexual violence, added to stigmatization and discrimination.<sup>51</sup> Organized criminal groups and drug cartels target migrants travelling across these countries, abducting them and imprisoning them. In November 2018, news on the migrant caravan reported that at least 100 members of the group had gone missing, “(...) suspected of having fallen prey to criminal gangs, who abduct migrants in order to extort their family members”.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, women and girls are particularly exposed to physical, sexual and psychological abuses.

The market for providers of irregular migration services has established itself in the different regions, adapting to the specificities of each route. Human smugglers exploit migrants’ lack of legal opportunities and their willingness to take risks. These profit-seeking criminals treat migrants as mere commodities, transporting them in suffocating containers or vans, in unseaworthy vessels, leaving them to drown at sea or perish in the desert.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, many people end up being stripped of their money and aban-

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49. Jumbert, Maria Gabrielsen, “Control or rescue at sea? Aims and limits of border surveillance technologies in the Mediterranean Sea”. In *Disasters*, 2018, 4. DOI: 10.1111/disa.12286.

50. Servan-Mori, E., Leyva-Flores, R., Infante Xibille, C., Torres-Pereda, P., & Garcia-Cerde, R. (2014). “Migrants suffering violence while in transit through Mexico: Factors associated with the decision to continue or turn back”. In *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health*, (16), 53–59.

51. *Ibid.*, 54.

52. Bonello, Deborah, “100 people “kidnapped” from migrant caravan by drug cartels in Mexico”. In *The Telegraph*, Mexico City, 6 November, 2018.

53. UNODC, *Smuggling of migrants: the harsh search for a better life*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019. [Consulted at: 28 February 2019]. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/migrant-smuggling.html>

done in the desert or along the way never reaching their final destination. Corruption has become a key element in the provision of facilitating services to irregular migration. Border officials, police, military and diplomatic agents may also be involved in providing documentation of facilitating the crossing.<sup>54</sup>

As destination countries adopt increasingly more restrictive immigration policies and enhance controls at the border, migrants and refugees seek riskier routes endangering their own lives. On the one hand, the shielding of the frontier, in an attempt to create ‘hermetic borders’, produces an inventive and adaptable underground business arranged by smugglers, often connected with criminal networks, which makes the journeys more dangerous for migrants.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the strengthening of border controls might also lead to the creation of borderlands as places of detention and immobility, with growing abuses by the authorities who control these border crossings.

Talking about irregular migration includes addressing the security and safety of migrants throughout the entire migratory process, as they are exposed to various threats to their human security. But, in the end, it is important to consider that human mobility is also a form of human security, it is a survival strategy for those who decide to move to another country.

## Conclusion

Today’s insecure world faces intense human mobility flows around the globe, which highlight the interconnection between migration (in particular, irregular migration) and human security. The three crises addressed in the Atlantic Basin are complex and varied, involving numerous forms of human insecurity and present great challenges to policy-making in migration management. In this sense, the human security approach to irregular migration provides a strong framework to support comprehensive responses and actions to the challenges arising from these flows. It offers a people-centered focus and a more holistic perspective, based on the importance of people’s dignity.

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54. OHCHR, *Situation of migrants in transit*. Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d., 9.

55. Danish Institute For International Studies, *Europe and the refugee situation. Human security implications*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017, p. 6.

Despite the different geographies of the flows we have identified three main sources of threats to human security, which are common to all routes: the extreme travel conditions, the insecurity in transit countries, and the mistreatment at the hands of smugglers. This calls for integrated actions from the international community on these topics. Furthermore, each region has its own specificities and challenges and those should be addressed with all stakeholders involved in the migratory process.

Connecting shores involves the creation of synergies between countries of origin, transit and destination, to promote responses grounded on the particularities of each region. This requires the participation of all different actors, from governments, to the private sector and local communities, guaranteeing that no one is left behind.

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