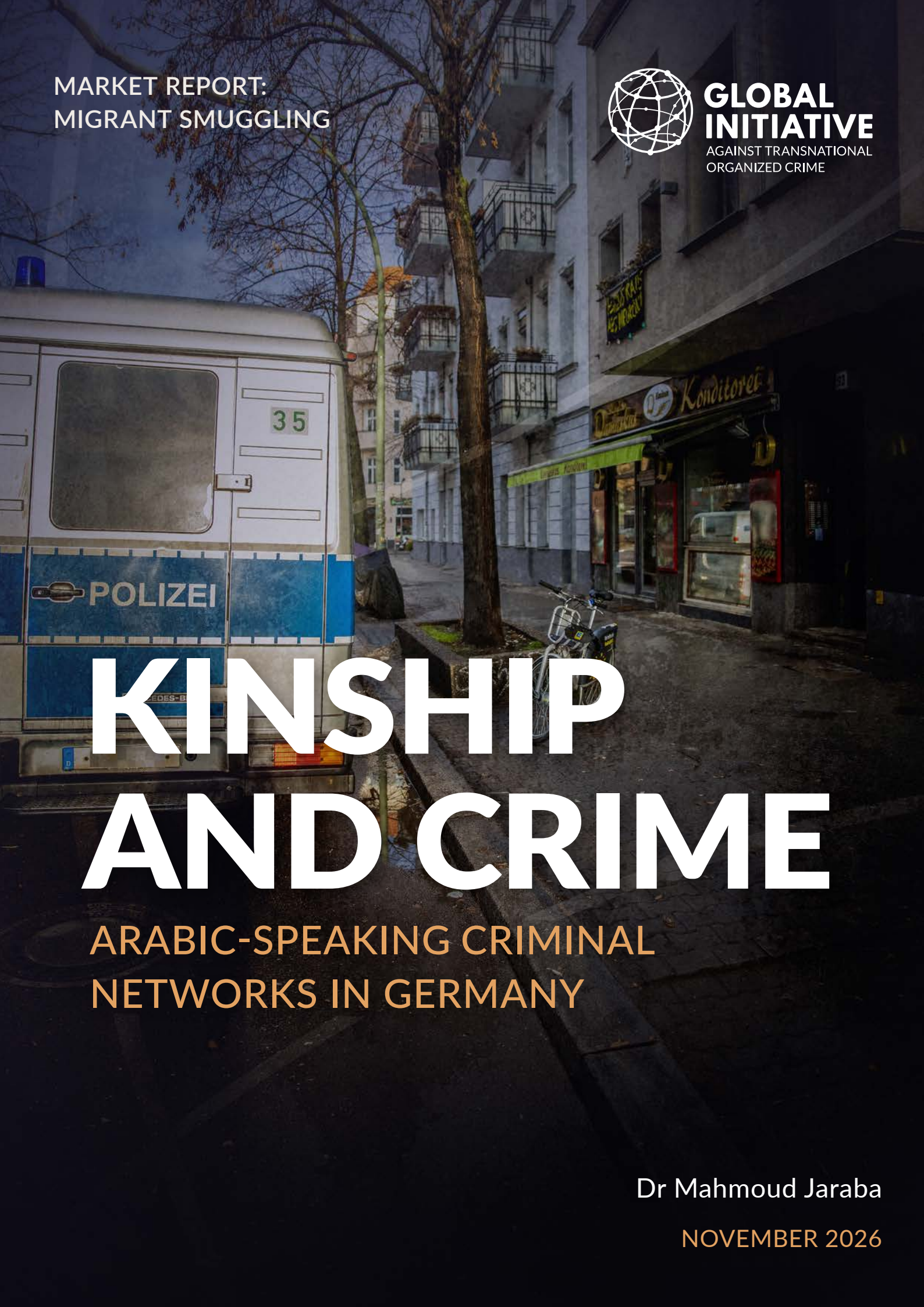

MARKET REPORT:
MIGRANT SMUGGLING

GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

KINSHIP AND CRIME

ARABIC-SPEAKING CRIMINAL NETWORKS IN GERMANY

Dr Mahmoud Jaraba

NOVEMBER 2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND TERMINOLOGY

This report draws on ethnographic research conducted between 2015 and 2026 as well as extensive interviews and conversations. It examines two overlapping fields: established actors associated with Mardin-origin clans, whose activities are often labelled 'clan crime' in Germany, and newer actors within Syrian criminal groups that gained visibility after 2015. The aim is to trace how these actors develop within criminal markets and how their networks link Germany to the Middle East, particularly Türkiye and Syria.

The term 'clan' is used as a practical translation of the Arabic term *'ashira'*, which carries a more specific social meaning in its original context and is discussed in greater detail in this report. Pseudonyms are used for confidential interlocutors, and identifying details have been altered where necessary. Individuals identified in public reporting or official sources are named where relevant.

I am grateful to the interlocutors who shared their experiences and to colleagues for their critical feedback. Any errors are my own.

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Dr Mahmoud Jaraba is a senior researcher at the FAU Research Centre for Islam and Law in Europe (EZIRE), at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. His work examines kinship, migration and crime with a focus on extended families from the Mardin region of Türkiye and newer networks from Syria. Jaraba advises public agencies and civil-society organizations on prevention and bridge-building in stigmatized communities and is the author of numerous books, articles and reports on so-called 'clan crime', gender and social change.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study report forms part of a wider study on Arabic-speaking networks operating in Germany. The overarching report provides the broader conceptual framework on kinship-based networks, criminal markets and transnational linkages.[1] This report is the first of two case studies arising from that study, focusing on human smuggling; the second examines the role of these networks in drug trafficking.[2]

This report examines migrant smuggling between Syria, Türkiye, the Balkan corridor and Germany, focusing on how Syrian kin- and region-based actors operate within smuggling markets, connect to other facilitators along the route, and adapt to recent political, policy and law enforcement changes. The al-Busaraya network (also al-Busraya),[3] a smuggling operation associated with a Syrian kinship-based social group, provides a case study through which to examine these dynamics. Involvement in smuggling is concentrated in specific sub-lineages and peer circles; affiliation with al-Busaraya does not imply participation in crime.

The research shows that al-Busaraya-linked facilitators rely less on formal hierarchy than on kinship, reputation, route knowledge, social-media visibility, encrypted communication and *hawala*-based payment arrangements. Enforcement pressure and the post-Assad transition may also be reshaping smuggling strategies, pushing actors towards smaller groups, more selective recruitment and screening of migrants, longer periods spent in staging locations before onward movement, greater use of fraudulent or misused documents and more compartmentalized coordination.

Methodology

This case study report is based primarily on interviews and fieldwork material concerning the al-Busaraya network collected since June 2023. These interviews were conducted with members of the network and individuals familiar with its activities, including people who had travelled through its smuggling channels, community interlocutors, and actors with knowledge of Syrian smuggling routes between Syria, Türkiye, the Balkan corridor and Germany. To protect the anonymity of interviewees, names have not been used. The analysis is supplemented by online observation, social-media material and selected publicly available reporting, but the core empirical basis remains the interview material.

The evidence is triangulated across fieldwork notes, digital traces and documentary sources, while recognizing that precise figures and attributions are difficult to verify in clandestine markets. The evidence is necessarily partial; further multi-sited research across Syria, Türkiye, the Balkan corridor and EU destination countries would be needed to develop a fuller picture.

Key points

- Role of the network: The al-Busaraya network emerges as a visible and well-connected kin-based actor within the wider Syrian migrant-smuggling economy, rather than as its sole organizer.
- Scope of operations: The network appears to be involved in most stages of migrant smuggling, including contracting, brokerage (connecting migrants with facilitators), transport, staging (preparing migrants for onward travel), hand-off coordination (coordinating transfers of migrants between facilitators) and payment arrangements. In some journeys, they also arrange accommodation, including apartments used while migrants await onward movement. They work with other facilitators for particular stages of the journey.
- Client base: Syrians form the main clientele, but al-Busaraya-linked facilitators may also move other Arabic-speaking or Middle Eastern migrants where trust, routes and payment arrangements permit.
- Digital tools: Public social-media posts and private encrypted messaging channels work together: the first builds credibility and visibility, while the second is used to coordinate routes, payments and handovers.



AL-BUSARAYA NETWORK'S ROLE IN MIGRANT SMUGGLING

This criminal market report traces how smuggling is organized, financed and coordinated between the Middle East and the EU using the al-Busaraya network, a smuggling operation associated with a Syrian kinship-based social group, as a case study of a wider phenomenon. It does not claim that all Syrian migrant smuggling is organized by this network, nor that it controls the entire route from Syria to Germany. Rather, this kin-based network is examined as one particularly visible and well-connected actor operating within a broader, modular smuggling infrastructure.

Geographically, the report follows the chain from Syria into Türkiye and onwards to the EU, with particular attention to the Türkiye–Greece frontier, the Balkan corridor and German locations connected to hubs in Türkiye, Lebanon, Syria as well as to other points along the route.

Demand for migration facilitation

The Syrian war, which began in 2011, displaced millions of people and created substantial demand for cross-border facilitation.[4] As state institutions eroded and border controls weakened, facilitation markets proliferated, including kin-based networks rooted in eastern and southern Syria.[5] By 2015–2016, large-scale Syrian displacement had developed into major movement towards Europe, further increasing demand for facilitation services. In 2015 alone, more than one million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe by sea, approximately half of them from Syria. Many crossed from Türkiye to Greece before continuing through the Balkans towards Austria, Germany, Sweden and other European countries.[6] According to estimates cited by the Council of the European Union, more than 90 per cent of irregular migrants who reach the EU use the services of smugglers at some point during their journeys.[7]

The fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024 marked the end of the war and was followed by the installation of an interim leadership. This affected perceptions of migration and return: Some Syrian refugees expressed greater interest in returning, while others remained hesitant because of concerns about safety and security, housing, economic conditions and access to basic services.[8]



North Rhine-Westphalia: Police officers arrest a man with ties to a kinship network. © Roland Weihrauch/ Picture Alliance via Getty Images

Recent evidence nevertheless suggests that demand for EU-bound smuggling among Syrians is softening, even as flows persist. EU asylum data shows Syrian first-time applications falling from roughly 16 000 in October 2024 to about 3 100 in May 2025, with Syrians dropping from the top to the fourth-largest applicant group that month. Analysts attribute the decline to a mix of factors: uncertainty in post-Assad Syria tempered by hopes of improvement, tighter EU/German controls, and higher costs and risks along key route segments.[9] The decline may indicate lower demand for smuggling services.

Syrian networks became important actors in the facilitation market, providing services at the initial stages of journeys from Syria into Türkiye and onward to Europe. Embedded in local communities and structured through kinship, they used their familiarity with crossing points and border routines[10] to provide logistical services, including assembling migrants, guiding, short-haul transport and safe housing, particularly at the Syria–Türkiye interface and beyond.[11]

Germany's changing migration policy

The large-scale movement of migrants to Europe in 2015–2016 contributed to changes in Germany's migration policy during the Merkel government. Germany initially adopted a comparatively open approach towards Syrian refugees, but from late 2015 onwards introduced measures to restrict arrivals, accelerate asylum procedures and returns, and tighten access to protection.[12]

This shift has accelerated since the new German coalition government took power in May 2025, introducing intensified internal Schengen checks at all land borders, wider use of refusals of entry under Germany's asylum act and increased *Bundespolizei* (Federal Police) deployments.[13] Authorities reported several thousand turn-backs by early August 2025.[14] Courts have, however, limited aspects of the new border measures. Family reunification for people who are allowed to remain in Germany because they cannot safely return to their country has also been suspended for two years, subject to hardship exceptions, further reducing legal routes into the country.[15] These measures remain in force amid ongoing litigation and political debate.[16]

Germany has also tightened its approach to asylum and returns. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) can review whether people granted asylum or other forms of protection can still remain in Germany when conditions in their country of origin change. In the Syrian context, this became more prominent after the fall of Assad. German authorities have prioritized potential returns of convicted offenders and people considered security risks.[17] Berlin has also pursued arrangements with Damascus on returns and readmission, initially focusing on serious criminals and so-called *Gefährder* – people considered by the German authorities to pose a potential threat of serious politically motivated violence.

This policy moved from intention to practice in December 2025, when, for the first time since 2011, Germany deported a convicted Syrian offender to Damascus.[18] In March 2026, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa's visit to Berlin placed reconstruction, voluntary return and deportations on the bilateral agenda.[19] Any broader increase in returns remains subject to individual assessment, including region-specific conditions, political profile, minority status and detention or torture risk.

What is the al-Busaraya network?

The wider al-Busaraya 'clan'[20] is rooted in Syria's eastern Deir ez-Zor region, along the Euphrates river near the Iraqi border, with additional presence in the Raqqa and al-Hasakah provinces. Its long-standing presence in riverside village communities along the Euphrates has given the group deep familiarity with the area. The network draws on this geographical and social base, with interlocutors identifying its deep familiarity with terrain, border routines and logistical conditions of the area as a distinguishing feature.[21] This geographical knowledge, combined with longstanding kinship and social ties, provides the network with relationships and local knowledge that can be mobilized for cross-border smuggling. These kinship ties, rather than formal membership, can also facilitate trust and connections between members and associates, supporting recruitment, coordination and access to trusted contacts across different locations.

Members of the al-Busaraya clan were involved in cross-border movement before the Syrian war. In interviews, a member of the network described pre-2011 activity along the Euphrates corridor and the Syria–Iraq/Türkiye borderlands, including the movement of people and goods across nearby frontiers.[22] Media reporting traces al-Busaraya-linked guiding activities at the Türkiye–Greece border to 2012. It describes these guides as among the first to identify overland routes into Greece across the Evros River, drawing on rowing skills acquired while living along the Euphrates in rural Deir ez-Zor. After 2015, some expanded their activities into wider networks, working with collaborators in Istanbul and Serbia to coordinate by phone successive stages of journeys to Europe.[23] Interview accounts attribute this expansion to facilitators' existing presence and contacts in Türkiye, rising demand, what

interviewees described as weak border controls and substantial smuggling earnings that financed further growth.[24] The network is referred to in German reporting as the 'Al-Sarawi' network.[25]

The al-Busaraya network operates within a wider, modular smuggling economy in which different groups handle different parts of a migrant's journey.[26] Its role includes contracting, brokerage (connecting migrants with facilitators), staging (preparing migrants for onward movement), hand-off coordination (transfers between facilitators) and payment arrangements, while other actors provide transport, documents and accommodation, or facilitate particular border crossings. These actors include Syrian, Turkish, Kurdish, Afghan, Balkan and local European facilitators.[27] For example, in Greece, al-Busaraya-linked networks worked with Greek drivers and Afghan and Bulgarian brokers to arrange transportation and provide accommodation.[28] The network's significance therefore lies less in controlling the entire journey than in its ability to connect different actors and stages of the journey through kinship, reputation, route knowledge and cross-border social ties.

Several Syrian refugees described receiving assistance from affiliated handlers at key stages of their journeys, including one interviewee who travelled with the group in 2022 and spent two months with them en route to Germany and called them 'the strongest group moving migrants into the EU'.[29] Respondents also consistently ranked the al-Busaraya operation as the most capable of the Syrian networks operating in Germany, citing logistics, territorial reach and its ability to navigate border regimes while largely avoiding detection. Interviews depict a transnational network with roles and nodes in Syria, Türkiye, Serbia, Germany and beyond.[30]

This transnational reach extends across Germany, with a strong presence in Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saxony.[31] The network also appears able to mobilize members across Germany and, to some extent, elsewhere in Europe, including in the Netherlands and Belgium.[32] Its clientele is predominantly Syrian, reflecting its social base, language, regional knowledge and networks of trust. However, interviews indicate that its services are not limited to Syrian nationals. Where routes, payment arrangements and trusted intermediaries allow, al-Busaraya-linked facilitators may also move other Arabic-speaking or Middle Eastern clients, including Iraqis, Palestinians, Lebanese and, in some cases, Kurdish or mixed-nationality groups travelling through the same corridors.[33] The network is therefore best understood as Syrian-centred but commercially open to a wider Middle Eastern clientele.

Membership in the al-Busaraya network is maintained through social ties rather than formal identifiers. Members may use different surnames in civil documents, while recognition within the network rests on kin ties[34], shared histories and, at times, markers such as the numeric tag '505'. One interlocutor, known within the network by one name, appears in official records under another.[35] These practices make surname-based checks and registry searches unreliable indicators of network membership and complicate efforts to establish reliable membership figures.

Precise numbers are unavailable. One member of the clan estimated that there are around 1 000 affiliates in Germany and between 3 000 and 5 000 across the EU[36], and two additional informants familiar with the network gave estimates within the same range.[37] These figures are indicative and have not been independently verified.

Marketing and branding

The number '505' is a widely recognized al-Busaraya network marker, appearing on cars, social-media profiles and messaging channels. It can signal affiliation and credibility across cities and borders, even when network members use different surnames. In a fragmented smuggling market, such markers can help reduce uncertainty for potential clients by signalling that a facilitator is connected to a known network.

Al-Busaraya-linked actors also use social media, songs and short videos to promote an image of smuggling as skilled, courageous and high-status work. Content on YouTube,[38] Instagram and TikTok uses terms such as *usud at-tahrib* (lions of smuggling)[39] and *shuyukh at-tahrib* (sheikhs of smuggling),[40] alongside imagery of vehicles, border crossings and routes to Europe. Public social media platforms provide visibility and help to signal credibility, while communication can then move to WhatsApp or Telegram for more direct contact and coordination. The combination of public branding and private communication helps to market the service while reinforcing network identity.



TikTok screenshot from Germany showing an al-Busaraya clan gathering, with the caption 'al-Busaraya Germany'. *Photo supplied*



Social media image used by an al-Busaraya network leader to promote the group's migrant-smuggling activities. The post presents the image as evidence of refugees being transported to their destinations and advertises services in Bulgaria, Serbia, Austria, Türkiye, Greece, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, inviting contact through WhatsApp. *Photo supplied.*

Where the network operates

The al-Busaraya network operates along the Syria–Türkiye–Balkan corridor, with activity extending from Türkiye through the western Balkans and onward to destination countries including Germany, Austria and the Netherlands (see Figure 1).[41] Along this route, the network's role is most visible at points where migrants are assembled, briefed, and handed over to facilitators responsible for the next stage of the journey.[42]



FIGURE 1 Indicative routes through Türkiye and south-eastern Europe towards Germany, described by interviewees as the most common routes used by al-Busaraya-linked networks to facilitate the smuggling of refugees. These networks adapt their routes and smuggling strategies in response to changing security conditions.

They know the border very well – without them, it's almost impossible to cross alone.

Its operational footprint is particularly evident in Serbia, especially in the northern borderlands adjacent to Hungary, where migrants seek to cross into the EU.[43] The network also appears to exercise influence at specific corridors and meeting points used by migrants, especially around camps and known gathering points. One informant, who spent three weeks with the group in Serbia in 2023 before being smuggled to Germany, described them as 'the ones who know the border very well – without them, it's almost impossible to cross alone.' He said he reached Germany only after paying the group €2 000 for safe passage.[44]

Today, al-Busaraya-linked actors operate as nodes within larger, modular smuggling infrastructures spanning Türkiye, Lebanon, Iraq and EU destinations, notably Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. They may subcontract to or partner with other facilitators for maritime legs, forged or borrowed documents, money handling and accommodation, while retaining roles in contracting and brokerage through family ties.

Within Germany, the interviews identify a particularly strong presence in Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia, alongside members and contacts dispersed across the rest of the country. Participants live in different parts of these cities and regions; their connections are not concentrated in a single street or building. Social media and messaging platforms help build and maintain relationships between these geographically dispersed participants. These connections are reinforced through in-person events and

meetings, including weddings and other social occasions that bring people from different locations together at a shared venue.[45] According to the interviews, during a brutal conflict in June 2023[46] with members of a Lebanese clan, al-Busaraya-linked actors mobilized supporters from several locations in Germany, including places approximately 500 kilometres from the site of the conflict, as well as from Belgium and the Netherlands.[47] This account illustrates how social and digital connections can support mobilization across German regions and national borders. These relationships can support recruitment and coordination, but attendance at a gathering or membership of the wider kinship group does not itself demonstrate involvement in smuggling.



TikTok screenshot of a gathering in Serbia, posted 16 July 2023, with the 505 marker and the text 'Al-Busaraya – the rulers of Serbia'. *Photo supplied*

How the network operates: roles, routes and competitive advantage

Interviews with individuals who were smuggled by the al-Busaraya network provide insight into how it operates. One such individual recounted his 2023 journey from Damascus, arranged by a relative through WhatsApp.[48] He was passed between pre-arranged handlers from northern Syria through Türkiye and then along the Balkan route via network-controlled corridors. In Türkiye, he stayed in apartments reportedly owned or rented by members of the network, while his onward journey was arranged. The route through Serbia, Hungary, and Austria was coordinated entirely by al-Busaraya-linked intermediaries, who arranged transport, accommodation and other logistics, including, according to the interviewee, payments to local officials where needed.[49]

Along the way, the informant observed that the network collaborated with other criminal actors to facilitate border crossings. These actors may have included Turkish, Kurdish, and Afghan groups.[50] Payments were made in stages, with each leg of the journey costing between $2 000 and $4 000. In total, the informant paid approximately $9 000 to reach Germany, with the journey taking six weeks in total.[51] His experience illustrates how al-Busaraya-linked intermediaries manage key stages of the

journey, including contracting, staging, hand-offs and payment arrangements, while working with other actors where needed.

The interviewee's account points to the network's competitive advantage: its kinship ties, knowledge of established routes and ability to manage logistics (such as drivers, safe apartments, guides).[52] Al-Busaraya network actors remain active at staging and hand-off points on the Balkan route, while Europe-based members handle initiation of contact, staged payments (including *hawala*) and transport.[53] Together, these capabilities give the network flexibility to coordinate key stages of a journey across different locations.

This geographic flexibility is supported by continuous communication, often through social media and encrypted messaging, which enables rapid mobilization across German cities and international borders.[54] This allows the network to operate across different locations rather than being tied to one neighbourhood or city. It can pause, shift routes or mobilize people quickly, making it more difficult for authorities to identify and disrupt its activities.

Law-enforcement pressure against the Syrian migrant smuggling network[55] has made the group more cautious: arrests in late 2024–2025 and the Traunstein proceedings (see insert), which culminated in a November 2025 judgment, have pushed those organizing the smuggling operations to move fewer people, vet those involved in the operation more carefully and favour lower-visibility legs.

The network may also respond by shifting from large, visible movements to smaller groups, longer waiting periods and more compartmentalized roles. It may rely more heavily on encrypted communication, trusted intermediaries and staged payments. It may also move further into adjacent activities including document misuse, residence-permit fraud, *hawala*-based payment handling, safe housing, transport brokerage and cash-heavy legal or semi-legal businesses.

Al-Busaraya/Al-Sarawi network: judgment in Traunstein, 2025

In November 2025, the Regional Court (*Landgericht*) Traunstein convicted four defendants in proceedings concerning members of the al-Busaraya smuggling network.[56] According to the court, the network was responsible for a large share of migrant smuggling along the Balkan route from Syria to Germany. Its main organizer, who operated largely from Germany, was convicted in ten cases of gang- and commercial migrant smuggling, including six involving life-endangering treatment and one resulting in death. He was also convicted of attempted honour-related murder, extortionate kidnapping, attempted aggravated robbery/extortion and dangerous bodily injury, and received a 12-year prison sentence. At the time of the court's press release on 18 November 2025, the judgment had not yet become legally final. ■



CONCLUSION

The al-Busaraya case shows how migrant smuggling is organized through relationships between individuals operating in different countries. Interviews indicate that al-Busaraya-linked facilitators are involved in initiating contact with migrants, arranging journeys, providing accommodation and coordinating payments. They also work with other facilitators who organize transport and border crossings along particular sections of the route. Their activities are therefore not limited to Syria or the Balkan corridor. Germany has become a major location from which journeys are arranged and financed. The Traunstein case provides an example of this. According to the court, the main organizer operated largely from Germany, commissioning smuggling journeys and arranging payments after migrants had reached their destinations.[57]

The network has also developed a presence in different parts of Germany, particularly Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia. Interviews described members and contacts who live in different cities but maintain regular communication through social media, messaging services and personal meetings. These relationships are not confined to particular streets or neighbourhoods. They can be used to organize activities over considerable distances and to maintain contacts with facilitators in other European countries.

Despite investigations and arrests, there are indications that al-Busaraya network remains active. Interviews conducted in 2025 and 2026 described continuing contacts between participants, while advertisements observed on TikTok in September and October 2026 show that smuggling services are still being promoted.[58] These observations do not establish how many migrants are currently being smuggled or whether the network is operating on the same scale as in previous years. Nevertheless, they suggest that the relationships through which journeys are arranged have not disappeared. Participants may also change routes, reduce the number of migrants travelling together or rely more heavily on trusted intermediaries in response to increased enforcement. The extent of these changes is difficult to assess.

Developments in Syria and changes in European migration policies will also affect the demand for smuggling services. Since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, some Syrians have considered returning, while others remain concerned about security, economic conditions and the lack of basic services. Germany has also strengthened border controls and introduced further restrictions on migration and family reunification. These developments may reduce demand for some routes, but they do not necessarily mean that smuggling activities will come to an end. For people who still wish to reach Europe and have limited access to legal routes, smugglers may remain an option. The

decline in Syrian asylum applications should therefore not be taken as direct evidence that smuggling networks have stopped operating. Even if arrivals in Germany decline, individuals based in Germany may continue to coordinate journeys to other European destinations. Authorities should therefore examine whether changes in migration policy are reducing smuggling activity or changing its routes and organization. This would necessitate investigating recruitment, payment arrangements and the replacement of arrested organizers, alongside figures on arrivals and asylum applications.

The findings also raise a broader concern about the development of these networks in Germany. Smuggling provides participants with contacts, experience and financial resources that may be used beyond individual journeys. Whether al-Busaraya-linked actors will expand into other criminal markets or invest their earnings in legal businesses is not yet established. However, the possibility of such developments makes it critical to examine how these networks use their resources and maintain their activities after arrests. Investigations should therefore address not only individual smuggling cases but also the people, financial arrangements and contacts that allow operations to continue.

Recommendations

The findings of this report point to the need for swifter action against emerging criminal networks in Germany and other European countries. Authorities should not wait until those involved have established control over particular criminal markets, developed a strong criminal presence in certain areas or invested substantial proceeds in legal and semi-legal businesses. Experience with established criminal structures shows why such developments deserve attention at an early stage. Once organizers have accumulated financial resources and developed lasting relationships with other criminal actors, their activities may become more difficult to investigate and disrupt. In the case of al-Busaraya, the priority should be to identify individuals already involved in smuggling and examine whether they are using the resources and contacts developed through these activities to enter other markets.

This requires more sustained investigations into the organization of smuggling activities. Police investigations should establish who is the first point of contact with migrants, who arranges transport and accommodation, how payments are made and which individuals coordinate the different stages of a journey. Particular attention should be given to organizers who operate from Germany while relying on facilitators in other countries. Financial investigations are also important. The use of *hawala* and other payment arrangements can make it difficult to identify who receives and controls smuggling earnings. Authorities should therefore examine financial transactions alongside evidence from communications, interviews and specific smuggling journeys. Where criminal proceeds can be identified, asset confiscation should be pursued in accordance with the law.

Investigating these networks also requires greater investment in personnel with appropriate language skills and knowledge of the social relationships involved. The interviews show that participants may use different surnames, nicknames and symbols to identify themselves and maintain contacts. Understanding regional dialects, kinship relationships and the meaning of particular expressions can help investigators establish connections between individuals without relying solely on official names or family affiliations. Social media should receive particular attention. Platforms such as TikTok are used to promote smuggling services, while messaging applications help participants maintain contacts across different locations. Regular observation of publicly available content can provide information about recruitment and changing activities.

Attention should also be given to the protection of victims and witnesses, and to preventing violent conflicts between criminal actors. The June 2023 confrontations involving members of al-Busaraya and a Lebanese-origin clan show how quickly individuals could be mobilized from different parts of Germany and neighbouring countries. Such incidents show the importance of identifying threats and preparations for violence at an early stage. Victims and witnesses who face intimidation should have access to appropriate protection and confidential means of contacting the authorities. Where evidence indicates that children or young people are being recruited or exploited for criminal activities, child-protection services, schools and social workers should also be involved. Preventing their involvement requires support outside the criminal justice system, alongside investigations into the adults responsible for recruitment or exploitation.

Closer cooperation with other European countries is particularly important. This study indicates that al-Busaraya-linked individuals maintain contacts across Germany and with people in Belgium and the Netherlands. Smuggling journeys also involve facilitators operating in Türkiye, Serbia and other countries along the Balkan route. Investigations conducted in Germany may therefore identify only some of the people involved in an operation. Information on organizers, transport arrangements, financial transactions and communications should be exchanged with the authorities in other countries. Europol and Eurojust can support joint investigations and coordinated prosecutions where appropriate. This cooperation should begin while criminal networks are still developing, rather than only after major operations or violent conflicts have drawn public attention. It should also help establish whether arrests in one country have disrupted smuggling activities or simply led organizers to move their operations elsewhere.

Further research is essential to understand the wider social environments in which these criminal networks emerge and operate, how they develop over time and how their activities change. The al-Busaraya case shows the importance of examining the relationships between kinship structures, migration experiences, local communities and criminal cooperation. Fieldwork, interviews and observation of social-media activity could help establish how individuals become involved in criminal networks, how responsibilities and relationships change across generations and how these networks respond to arrests and law-enforcement pressure. Particular attention should also be given to emerging criminal markets, the possible expansion of existing networks into new activities and the ways in which criminal earnings may be reinvested in other businesses. Understanding these developments within their broader social context would help identify emerging criminal structures, develop more effective prevention and enforcement measures, and assess their longer-term effects.



NOTES

1 See Mahmoud Jaraba, Kinship and crime: Arabic-speaking criminal networks in Germany, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), October 2026, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/kinship-crime-arabic-speaking-criminal-networks-germany/.

2 The second market report covers drug trafficking, GI-TOC (forthcoming 2026).

3 Al-Busaraya is a kinship-based Syrian group, some members of which are involved in migrant smuggling. The term 'al-Busaraya network' is used in this report to refer to the smuggling network associated with these members, rather than to the wider community as a whole.

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