

Panel Proposal:
Rethinking migrant smuggling: Narratives, perceptions and policies across routes

Call for Papers

Since the surge in migratory flows from 2014 onwards, the so-called refugee crisis in the Mediterranean and the crisis in the EU border regime have garnered significant attention. This phenomenon symbolizes multifaceted crises and presents a complex political challenge for the EU border control. Thousands of people fleeing conflict, poverty, and instability from regions such as the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia continue to risk their lives on dangerous sea and land routes, despite stringent EU policies aimed at curbing migration. More recently, similar dynamics have emerged across the English Channel and the Atlantic route destined to Canary islands, where increasing numbers of migrants undertake hazardous crossings, prompting intense political debates and restrictive policy responses.

Current policy frameworks largely emphasize migrant smuggling as the primary driver of unauthorized migration, often conflating it with human trafficking. High-profile political statements and legislative measures across the EU focus on dismantling smuggling networks, overlooking the broader root causes of migration, such as armed conflict, economic instability, and political oppression. However, evidence from different countries shows that increasingly restrictive policies as a result of misleading narratives on the role of migrant smugglers in migratory flows lead to the unintended consequence of strengthening rather than dismantling these networks.

By diverting attention from the root causes of migration and disregarding migrant agency, these narratives not only oversimplify a complex, multifaceted phenomenon but also lead to overly simplistic policy responses with the result of producing more sophisticated and professional organisations.

This panel seeks to critically examine the diverse narratives surrounding migrant smuggling and their impact on policy-making, public perception, and migrant experiences. We invite scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and activists to contribute with papers that explore the multifaceted perceptions of migrant smuggling and their consequences for migration management, asylum processes, and border control practices. The panel will be proposed for inclusion in the forthcoming ESC Eurocrim 2025 conference in Athens, September 3-6 and is subjected to further *pre-arranged panel* abstract acceptance.

Key Topics for Submission:

- Comparative analyses of migrant smuggling narratives surrounding the Mediterranean, English Channel, Balkan and Atlantic routes.
- The impact of political discourse on shaping migration policies.
- Migrants' perspectives on smuggling networks and their agency in migration journeys.
- Humanitarian and law enforcement narratives on smuggling practices.
- Policy consequences of conflating smuggling with trafficking.
- Historical, cultural, and policy contexts shaping national responses to sea crossings.
- The role of the media in constructing public perceptions of migrant smuggling.

Submission Guidelines:

- Abstracts should be no more than 250 words.
- Include a title, author(s) name, affiliation, and contact information.
- Submit abstracts via email to: nmontagna@unisa.it by Monday 24th February

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