

Structure and modus operandi of Nigerian criminal networks

Literature Review

Centre of Expertise
on Human Trafficking
& Migrant Smuggling



- Background study for data analysis
- Overview of applied coercive measures
- Classification: open publication

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Literature Review

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The Centre of Expertise on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (EMM) is a partnership between the Netherlands Police, the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee, the Netherlands Labour Authority, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service, and the Public Prosecution Service.

Signs of and criminal investigations into human trafficking and migrant smuggling converge at the EMM, where they are translated into operational, tactical, and strategic products, based on which the partner organizations can apply their powers under criminal and/or public law.

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Summary

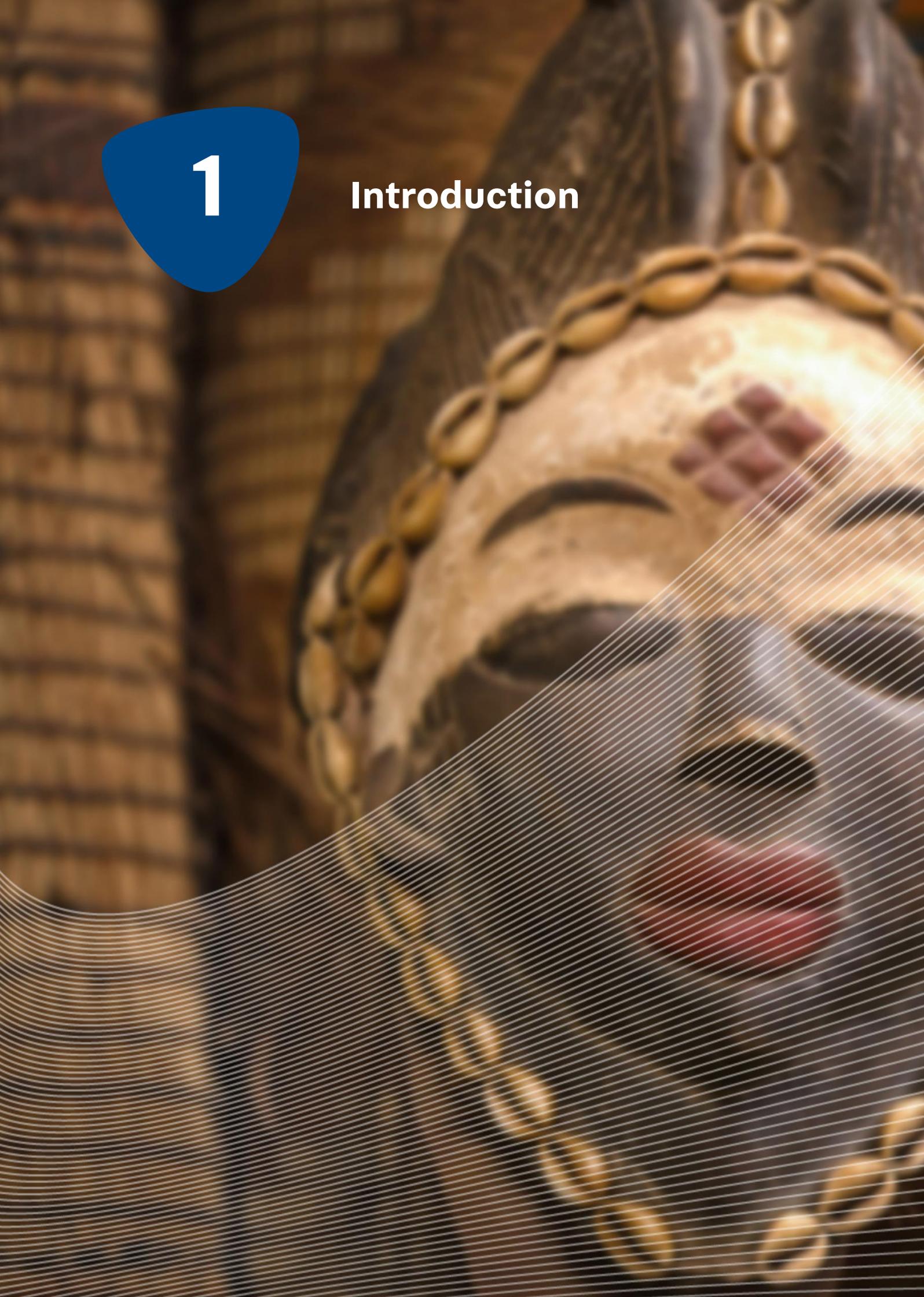
In 2019, Nigerian nationals formed the largest, and in 2020 the second largest, group of victims of human trafficking. At the same time, the Netherlands observed an increase in the number of asylum applications, reports of victims of human trafficking, and Nigerians who left reception centres with unknown destination. To gain more insight into possible human trafficking and migrant smuggling in relation to the Nigerians who have left reception centres with unknown destination, the EMM conducted a data analysis. As the data analysis provides little insight into the structure and modi operandi of Nigerian criminal networks, the EMM also conducted this complementary literature study.

This literature study shows that Nigerian criminal networks generally operate in cells, which can vary from relatively small familial networks to big, hierarchical networks. Furthermore, they are capable of quickly moving their victims from one location to another and adapt their modi operandi to their environment. In these networks, so-called madams and confraternities play a central role. Madams, who were usually sexually exploited in the past themselves, now oversee the sexual exploitation of new girls and women. Confraternities, Nigerian university cults such as Black Axe, are connected to sexual, criminal and labour exploitation of men and women. Madams and cults are known to work together.

The literature predominantly provides insight into the way in which Nigerian women from Edo State are exploited in Europe. The criminal networks generally have representatives in Nigeria and in Europe, but also make use of accomplices during the victims' organized and dangerous journey to Europe. The recruiters usually lure the women and (to a lesser extent) men to Europe by using Nigerian push factors and European pull factors. However, in recent years it has increasingly become clear that Nigerian girls and women can also contact human traffickers themselves in the hope of improving their own socio-economic status. Although these women and girls usually know they will end up in the sex industry, they often don't know about the debt bondage and the amount of violence they will have to endure. The Nigerian criminal networks may also use voodoo priests, Christian pastors, document forgers and lawyers, as well as victims' motherhood or pregnancy to strengthen their dependency on their traffickers. Dependence, fear and socio-cultural pressure fuel victims' distrust of the authorities, making them reluctant to report. The use of coercion against Nigerian men in Europe is less well-described in the literature. Nigerian men often pay their smugglers in advance, but are also vulnerable to extortion en route and, due to inequality of opportunity, also to exploitation. This literature study argues that, because of the complexity of this group of victims, it is important to improve the approach to potential victims, strengthen international cooperation and pay attention to criminal exploitation in relation to drug crime.

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1

Introduction

1. Introduction

In June 2020, the United States Department of State (USDOS) identified Nigerian victims of human trafficking in 36 countries in North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe, including the Netherlands. According to the official country report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (2021), female victims from the south of Nigeria who are being exploited in the sex industry are the largest group of Nigerian human trafficking victims in Europe. The literature mainly refers to Italy as country of destination for Nigerian human trafficking victims. In Italy, Nigerian women are forced to work in prostitution, either in the streets or behind closed doors (The Guardian, 2018). Nigerian asylum seekers, including pregnant women, are also being used to commit petty theft or work as a drugs couriers in Italy. This has become clear from an increase in pregnant Nigerian women who died after a swallowed drugs pellet burst inside of them. In recent years, there also seems to be an increase in the number of male Nigerians and male Nigerian minors who are being exploited in the Southern European agricultural sector (EUAA, 2021). Since 2019, Recht in Zicht [Right in Sight], the legal aid for human trafficking victims project of the Dutch branch of the Salvation Army (2022), has observed an increase in the number of male clients who have become victims of human trafficking.

In 2019, it was for the first time that persons with Nigerian nationality, rather than Dutch nationals, formed the largest group of human trafficking victims in the Netherlands (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, 2020). In 2020, Nigerian nationals also registered high, namely in second place (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, 2021). In recent years, there has been much attention from Dutch media and politics for the rising number of asylum applications of Nigerian nationals in the Netherlands, the rising number of B8/3 official reports on human trafficking, and the rising number of reports of Nigerians who left Dutch asylum centres with unknown destination. The EMM took this as a reason to conduct a data analysis of Nigerian asylum seekers who left with unknown destination in relation to human trafficking and migrant smuggling.¹ The data analysis provides little insight into the structure and modus operandi of Nigerian criminal networks. As this information emerges from scientific research, reports by national and international organisations, media reports and documentaries, the EMM conducted this literature study to complement the data analysis.

¹ In July 2022, the EMM published a factsheet, detailing the findings obtained from the data analysis.

Contents

In order to better understand the issue of Nigerian human trafficking in the Netherlands, the next chapter will describe the social, economic and cultural context of Nigeria. In Chapter 3, the structure of Nigerian criminal networks will be described, followed by their modus operandi in Chapter 4. Our conclusions are set out in Chapter 5, followed by a discussion and interpretation of the findings in Chapter 6.



2

Social, economic and cultural factors in Nigeria

2. Social, economic and cultural factors in Nigeria

Nigeria, a country with a population of over 200 million and many ethnic groups, languages and cultures, is currently a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking. In Nigeria, human trafficking mainly takes the form of sexual exploitation and domestic work, and to a lesser extent organ trafficking (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). In recent years, so-called baby factories have emerged in various states. In these ‘factories’, women are being held and their babies are sold or used in sacrificial rites (Huntley, 2013). In June 2022, dozens of girls were rescued from a baby factory (ANP, 2022). Since the nineties, Nigerian human trafficking activities have grown significantly, resulting in 36 countries having identified Nigerian victims in the year 2020 (USDOS, 2020). At the same time, there is an increase in migrant smuggling and migration from sub-Saharan countries to Europe (UNODC, 2011). To fully understand these problems, the Nigerian context should be understood first. For this reason, the current chapter will include the push and pull factors that impact human trafficking and migrant smuggling. In particular, we will focus on Edo State in Southern Nigeria, since the majority of Nigerian human trafficking victims in Europe come from Edo State.

2.1 Internal safety issues

The population in Nigeria’s northern geopolitical zones mainly consists of Muslims, while the South is mainly populated by Christians and people practicing African religions or voodoo, a syncretic religion that combines Catholicism with indigenous African religions. The variety of religions contributes to the instability of the living environment in Nigeria. For example, terrorist organisation Boko Haram – which fights for an Islamic state in Western Africa – is involved in the recruitment of child soldiers and sexual abuse of young children (Adisa, 2019). They also regularly use children to commit suicide attacks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Among their most brutal attacks were the kidnapping of over 200 Christian girls from the town of Chibok in April 2014 and, more recently, the stoning and burning of Deborah Samuel Yakubu in Sokoto, as reported by Open Doors (2022). Allegedly, she used blasphemous language in a WhatsApp group. Furthermore, there are tensions in Northern Nigeria between the Muslim Fulani shepherds and the Christian farmers due to both parties claiming the same parts of the country as a result of the limited availability of water and land in this area. The north-west of Nigeria has a lot of gang-related violence and abductions for ransom. In the Niger Delta, the violence is caused by an oil conflict.² The South-South Zone, however, also has had to deal with excessive violence from so-called ‘university cults’, like Black Axe, in recent years.³ Moreover, there is a lot of gender-related

² Niger Delta consists of the Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States.

³ The Neo-Black Movement in Africa, from which the Black Axe originated, started as an anti-colonial movement at universities in Nigeria and soon gained much support under young men due to its message.

violence in Nigeria. In 2020, all states declared a national emergency due to the extreme increase of rapes in the country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

As a result of these push factors, there were over 2.9 million displaced persons in Nigeria in February 2021, and over three hundred thousand Nigerian refugees in neighbouring countries Chad, Niger and Cameroon, according to the UN. Multiple women and children became victims of human trafficking in camps for displaced persons (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Their future is uncertain. Fatima, one of the victims of Boko Haram, told her story in an ARTE documentary (2022): after she had fled from Boko Haram, she had to participate in a deradicalisation programme for a month to prove that she was not an infiltrating terrorist, and when she wanted to return home, her brothers and sisters repudiated her and called her the wife of Boko Haram. *“I cannot return home, Fatima says. On my own I might be able to, but I have a son too, and my family does not want to see him. They look at him with horror and contempt. They only see him as a child of Boko Haram. If he acts silly when playing with other children, they say his behaviour is like that because he belongs to Boko Haram”.*

2.2 Corruption and distrust

Since Nigeria’s independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, it has experienced eight coups, five of which were successful. The distrust towards the government was fed by the divide and rule policy of the British rulers, who ruled by creating divisions between the various ethnicities, and is strengthened by the corruption and nepotism of Nigerian government officials (Bergman, 2016). In Nigeria, corruption is integrated into all levels of society, including corrupt embassy employees and border officials who accept payments from human traffickers (Europol, 2018). This is confirmed by a recent newspaper article on a criminal investigation in the United Kingdom into a Nigerian senator allegedly involved in organ trafficking (Algemeen Dagblad, 2022). The population still has little to no faith in bodies of the federal government (UNODC, 2019). According to Van Dijk et al. (2000), many ethnic and/or religious groups and even an entire state in southern Nigeria have more affinity with customary law. Edo, in the South-South Zone, still contains a kingdom, preceded over by its own king, called the *Oba*. This traditional ruler is supported by paramount chiefs, who govern a region or several villages, and village heads, who play an important role in their communities, for instance in settling conflicts and solemnising marriages. For this reason, the traditional monarchy and its accompanying rulers hold high symbolic value for many people in Edo State (Van Dijk et al., 2000).

2.3 Poverty and gender inequality

Despite the wealth of raw materials found in Nigeria – including oil – around 87 million Nigerians lived in extreme poverty in 2018 (CNN, 2018). The drilling for and transport of oil is mainly done via

above-ground pipes. Leakages due to corrosion and sabotage have a major impact on the environment and the quality of life. The pollution has created more poverty, health problems and a decrease in the average life expectancy. Furthermore, it has made it nearly impossible for Nigerian fishermen to provide for their own livelihood, as was shown in a report by Dutch TV programme Zembra (2022). It is mainly the elite and multinationals that profit from the oil reserves. This, combined with the high unemployment rate, increases the vulnerability of the Nigerian population (Iyanda and Nwogwugwo, 2016). The circumstances are most threatening to the future of Nigerian women. Nigeria is a patriarchal society with many polygamous families. In these forms of cohabitation, women are often viewed and treated as men's possessions, and the birth of children is seen as a purpose in itself. The woman who gives birth to the oldest son of the family, is held in the highest regard, as her son will inherit the land and all possessions. In families that practice one of the traditional African religions, the oldest son also inherits his father's spiritual and ritual functions. In general, women who do not give birth to the oldest son, women who remain unmarried, are of a certain age, do not have children, are widowed or are not circumcised are more vulnerable. Women also have less opportunities in education and in the labour and housing markets. They are more often illiterate and financially dependent on their husband. Moreover, marriage increasingly offers women less economic certainty (Van Dijk et al., 2000). Western influences have caused the number of divorces and the rate of monogamous marriages to rise. The number of Nigerian women fleeing a forced marriage or Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is on the rise too. For these reasons, poverty especially affects women (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

2.4 Socio-cultural norms and religion

As described, most Nigerian victims of human trafficking in Europe come from the southern state of Edo. Edo State is a status-oriented society that is strongly focused on consumerism. Money and material possessions increase social status, including the status of women (Myria, 2018). The lack of opportunities combined with the focus on status make that many Nigerians feel forced to find alternative means of income. To many Nigerians, life in Europe appears to be a way out. Moreover, migrants can continue to support their relatives in Nigeria by use of remittances (money transfers). Currently, Nigeria is the largest recipient of foreign money transfers of all Sub-Saharan countries. Most transfers are received in Benin City, the capital of Edo State (Ohonba and Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2019).

Nowadays, working in the sex industry seems to have less impact on the social status of Nigerian women from Edo State than in the past, as more value seems to be attached to the financial advantages of sex work than the negative impact on social status. However, an important

condition is that the activities are conducted ‘elsewhere’.⁴ In recent years, it has become clear that many women from Edo society have gone to Europe to work in the sex industry, leaving more or less voluntarily, sometimes encouraged or forced by relatives and sometimes with the help of migrant smugglers (Myria, 2018). According to Myria, this specific pull factor makes it hard to fight sexual trafficking in Edo. *“Even if the parents know very well that their daughter will initially be exploited, they hold onto the hope that one day, she will be able to ‘buy her freedom’ and independently earn ‘a fortune’ by prostituting herself in Europe. And, of course, she will send the money to her family left behind in Nigeria”* (Myria, 2018, p. 79).

According to Osezua (2016), the practice of transferring money to the country of origin has even changed the traditional family structure in Benin City. She argues that as a result of these money transfers, young women from this city are nowadays held in higher esteem than their male relatives. However, when a woman is unable to send enough money home, she may be considered a ‘failure’ in Nigeria and be stigmatised for having worked in prostitution (Myria, 2018). This stigmatisation makes women vulnerable to new attempts at exploiting them. A source even told the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) that 80 to 90% of the women who are deported back to Edo by the authorities, again become victims of human trafficking.

In addition to relatives, traditional religious authorities in Nigeria also encourage men and women to immigrate to Europe, and do not shy away from using voodoo rituals to help realise their objectives. In the study by Hynes et al. (2019, p. 16) the role of pastors came to the fore, responding to the desire of Nigerians to build a better life in Europe: *“Pastors, most of these churches the pastor will be prophesying, ‘I have seen somebody is going to travel, somebody is going to be blessed’ and then ‘say amen’ and they will say amen. And them too they will tell the girl, ‘I have vision for you, your star is not in Nigeria, it’s there.”* A study by the UNODC conducted in 2011 showed that there are even pastors in Nigeria whose own daughters work in the sex industry in Italy. These pastors create a spiritual connection between health, success, wealth and religion, which is partly to blame for this phenomenon, according to CKM (2021). However, the culture may also be a limiting factor in recognising and acknowledging various forms of exploitation. For example, in Ireland young Nigerian women were exploited as household slaves, but, for them, their circumstances were no different from their cultural norm. They had expected to marry young, often in an arranged marriage, and were not or barely aware that they were vulnerable to exploitation (European Commission, 2015). Because of their hope for a better life, they are willing to make sacrifices. Spiritual support remains necessary, but the religion that they have surrendered

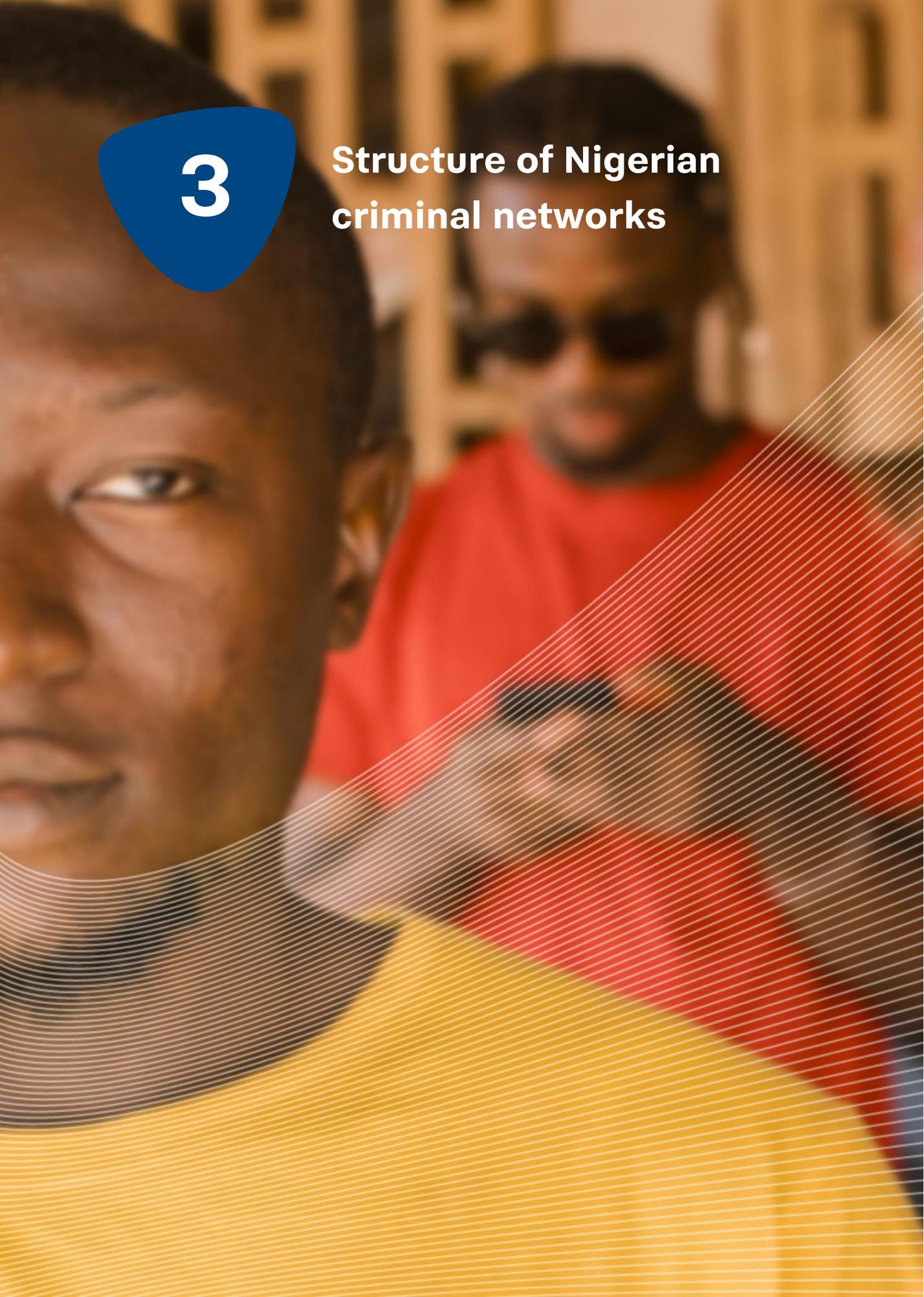
⁴ In Edo society it has always been possible for women to occasionally use their bodies in exchange for money or gifts. Such sexual services are not seen as prostitution, but as a way to improve their social status, as sociologist and Nigeria expert Mariia Shaidrova indicated during the *State of the Art* conference in 2021.

themselves to, under the influence of these pastors, does not provide such support. The pastors are focused on keeping and expanding their own wealth and do not shy away from ruining young Nigerian women's lives to accomplish this.



3

**Structure of Nigerian
criminal networks**



3. The structure of Nigerian criminal networks

Nigerian criminal networks involved in human trafficking and in migrant smuggling to Europe generally operate in cell structures and are formed on the basis of ethnicity. According to CCARHT (2017), the size of these networks varies from relatively small networks consisting of family members, friends and persons belonging to the same tribe to large, hierarchical networks with international branches. The networks can be divided based on their types, namely networks that so-called *madams* are part of, and networks that members of confraternities or university cults are part of. The different alliances also create differences in network structure, according to EUAA (2021).

3.1 Madams

Madam is a term used for women of Nigerian origin who often were victims of sexual exploitation in the past and now exploit Nigerian women themselves (Leman and Janssens, 2013). The first madams appeared in Europe at the end of the oil crisis in the eighties. In the past, many Nigerians, mainly from Edo State, travelled to Europe to buy material objects to sell on in Nigeria. This became harder during the oil crisis, so many chose to stay in Italy and make money, for instance by harvesting tomatoes or potatoes. The women who stayed in Italy soon found out that they could earn more in the sex industry, because of the local demand for foreign women. The women who held key positions there, started to work as recruiters after they returned to Nigeria, recruiting girls and women to work abroad as prostitutes (Brammah, 2013). There are no indications that these madams also sexually exploit men (EUAA, 2021).

The main task of a madam is maximising the yield of human trafficking victims. A madam is usually surrounded by a group of accomplices who work for her and each have their own specific role within the criminal network. *“[The madam] gives orders to subordinates, coordinates the human trafficking, manages the prostitutes, and controls the finances. The network she leads can vary from a small group (one or two members) to a sizable, internationally operating organization”* (Siegel & De Blank, 2010, p. 443). For instance, a madam may use so-called *trolleys*, or travel guides, who accompany the victims on their journey to Europe, bribe officials at the borders and use coercive measures to keep the victims under control. Moreover, madams may make use of voodoo priests, Christian pastors, persons who can falsify documents, lawyers who draw up binding agreements between the madam and her victims, and managers of connection houses. Connection houses are located along smuggling routes. Victims may stay there for some time during their journey, and be exploited (Europol, 2018). Madams can also make use of contacts who

work at Nigerian embassies. This makes the position of victims extra precarious when they call on consular assistance (Myria, 2018).

Currently, madams often work in pairs, with one of them operating in Europe and the other staying in Nigeria, though madams have also been seen in Libya (Europol, 2018). The madams in Nigeria recruit women and girls. The madams in Europe may travel to Nigeria from time to time to recruit victims, but they mostly use representatives so it will be harder to establish a link between them and the victims (Myria, 2018).

In Belgium in 2018, a madam known as Mama Leather was convicted. She was part of a large Nigerian familial network that was involved in sexual exploitation, creating over 30 victims, including minors. The network had contacts in Nigeria, Niger, Libya, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Denmark and Sweden, all of whom played a facilitating role in their operational activities. As leader of the international network, Mama Leather coordinated the orders, and the girls' recruitment and transport from Nigeria to Belgium. She worked together with her sisters, two other Nigerian madams. Madam B. was active in Brussels and Spain and was later surrendered to Spain. Her sister, madam L., operated in Brussels and Germany and was surrendered to Belgium. The network's counterpart in Nigeria was not a madam but their brother J. Tapped phone conversations revealed that Mama Leather regularly paid bribes to various corrupt Nigerian embassy officials in Brussels (Myria, 2020).

According to EUAA (2021), in some European countries, including the Netherlands, so-called *Ladies clubs* are active. These clubs are said to be made up entirely of madams. It has been suggested that these clubs were set up to strengthen the network of madams, but this cannot be proven. Myria (2018) states that madams exchange their victims internationally, while keeping control over them. The madams are said to have copied this method from Bulgarian networks. The money earned by human traffickers through the exploitation of their victims, is transferred to Nigeria. Myria (2018) reports that part of the money earned in Belgium is transferred to Nigeria via the so-called 'Black Western Union' system, which avoids formal money transactions. Please note that this system is not linked to the well-known US Western Union company. In the case of 'Black Western Union', the networks make use of African food shops in Belgium. The money is transferred via these shops to Benin City.

3.2 Confraternities

Confraternities, or university cults, emerged during colonial times as a form of intellectual resistance against British conventions and influences. Their objective was to eliminate the tribal, ethnic, religious and socio-economic barriers of campus and train African leaders who were proud of their roots and the Nigerian way of living. In time, these cults transformed into the current criminal organisations *“embroiled in secrecy, loyalty and ritual, but with nothing other than crime and money as an inherent goal”* (Bergman, 2016, p. 21). When politicians started to hire the groups to intimidate their rivals, concerns arose about the high organisational level of these confraternities. To control and dominate them, the political leaders started to use the same divide and rule policies as the British had used during colonisation (Bergman, 2016). Nowadays, the confraternities are involved in drugs smuggling, fraud, human trafficking and other crimes (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

The cults have been modelled after paramilitary groups and have their own insignias, arms and code language. Graduated Black Axe members – the most-feared confraternity – are called ‘Lords’. The regions in which they operate are called ‘zones’, and the ‘Council of Elders’ takes care of miscellaneous matters. Black Axe members can be recognised by their clothing, cult colours and symbols, i.e. high yellow socks, black beret, white dress shirt, crossed axe and machete, and cuffed hands with a broken chain. Black Axe leaders are located in Nigeria, but representatives of the group have also been observed in the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany. In the US and Canada they already gained a foothold some time ago. In Canada, Black Axe made sure that one of the Lords was given a high position at a shipping company, and that another could enter the civil service top (De Telegraaf, 2021). In Sicily it is becoming increasingly clear that this criminal network is operating with permission of the Cosa Nostra mafia organisation. This mafia organisation delegates its criminal activities to the Nigerian networks and collects part of the profits. There is also evidence that Black Axe is involved in drugs trafficking and human trafficking. In April 2021, several members of this group were arrested in Italy (De Telegraaf, 2021).

Bestenbreur (2020) does not see any indications that Black Axe is also involved in human trafficking in the Netherlands. Black Axe is said to have a relatively small presence in the Netherlands that mainly consists of middle-aged Nigerians who have lived in the Netherlands for years. About a third of them has antecedents. These antecedents and other data show that they were mostly involved in crimes such as fraud, swindling and document forgery. Bestenbreur’s study also revealed that a number of the Black Axe members in the Netherlands are registered as having Sudanese nationality. It is likely that they are using fake names and identities in the Netherlands.

There are many more confraternities besides Black Axe, for example Cult, Supreme Eiyé, the Pirates and Sea Dogs, and there are organisations consisting of women, such as the Jezebels and the Amazonas (Bergman, 2016). It is not possible to provide an overview of the Nigerian cults that are currently active in the Netherlands or internationally. However, there is evidence that human trafficking is also part of the revenue model of various Nigerian cults. In 2018, Europol reported that the Spanish *Guardia Civil* and the British *National Crime Agency* together with the NAPTIP⁵ had dismantled a large Nigerian criminal network linked to the Supreme Eiyé Cult (SEC). This network was active in multiple European countries; 89 people were arrested and 39 victims of sexual exploitation were identified. There are no indications that confraternities also sexually exploit men.⁶

3.3 The relationship between madams and confraternities

In relation to the madam networks, little is known about the role and structure of confraternities in the commission of human trafficking. However, the cooperation between madams and cults is becoming increasingly clear. Madams employ cult members for activities similar to those of travel guides, and often start sexual relationships with cult members (EUAA, 2021). No consensus has been reached in the literature about whether confraternities really have a steering role in human trafficking activities, but in Southern Italy, this does seem to be the case. According to Europol (2020), Nigerian cults in Southern Italy are in charge of street prostitution by Nigerian women, drug-related criminal exploitation of Nigerian men and women, and labour exploitation of Nigerian men in the countryside. According to the BBC (2016), a university cult is also said to be in charge of a criminal network in the United Kingdom. Madams are said to be part of this network, but have to give part of the money made by the victims of sexual exploitation to the local cult leaders via the informal *hawala*⁷ system. EUAA (2021) reports that more research is needed to support this claim.

3.4 Organised relocation

The structure of the networks allows for quick relocation throughout Europe. For example, an accomplice of Mama Leather's had picked up three girls in Italy and was seen the same day near a prostitution area in Brussels. When victims were on the radar of local authorities, the accomplices were able to quickly travel to Sweden, for example, to relocate them, or to move victims back to Italy to work in street prostitution if they were not making enough money (Myria, 2020). For years,

⁵ The Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) is responsible for the shelter, protection and reintegration of (potential) victims of human trafficking and for the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators in Nigeria. The agency works closely together with investigation services in Europe.

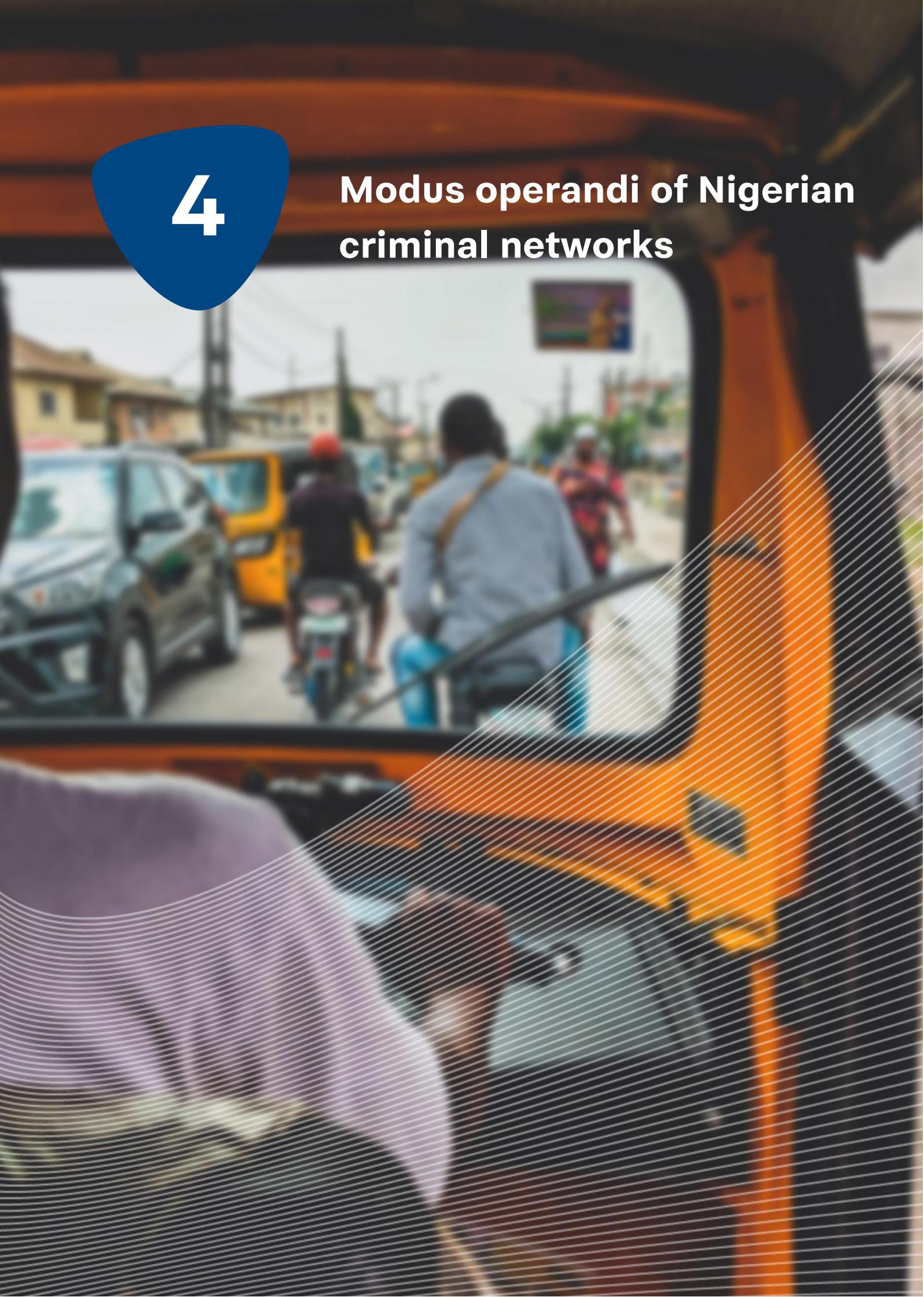
⁶ However, data analysis by EMM shows that Nigerian men did report having been sexually exploited. Often, these men report having been forced to have sex with other men. This type of exploitation often happened outside the Netherlands.

⁷The term *hawala* is historically associated with the method of transferring money that has been used for centuries and at a large scale in Southern Asia and was closely connected to the traditional trade routes in the Middle-East and parts of East-Africa. It worked as a closed system within groups who were connected through family ties, tribes or ethnicity.

the phone has been the Nigerian criminal networks' most important aid in locating and relocating victims. Generally speaking, criminal networks instruct Nigerians to call a phone number once they arrive at a refugee camp or asylum seekers reception centre in Europe, so they can be picked up and taken to their final destination (Europol, 2018). An investigation conducted by the Migrant Smuggling Unit of the Zwolle Interregional Crime Squad already confirmed this: *“The girls (...) carry phone numbers, either written on pieces of paper or on the inside of their clothing. Once they have been placed in a reception centre, they call these numbers and are picked up”* (Van Dijk et al. 2000, p. 1). Through the years, small modifications have been made to this method as a result of the cat-and-mouse game with the authorities. An investigator told De Jong (2015) that when the phones of Nigerians are seized, they will have a new phone within a day. Europol (2018) says that Nigerian human traffickers tend to use different SIM cards in different countries. Mama Leather's network used WhatsApp as much as possible to avoid wiretapping (Myria, 2020).

4

Modus operandi of Nigerian criminal networks



4. Modus operandi of Nigerian criminal networks

According to EUAA (2021), there is no consensus on the modus operandi (MO) of Nigerian criminal networks, probably because different networks have different MOs. Moreover, the MO may differ for men and women and per type of exploitation. Considering that most of the research conducted centred on the MOs of criminal networks involved in sexual exploitation of Nigerian women in Europe, this will be the focus of this chapter. We will describe how Nigerian criminal networks recruit victims, put them into a position of dependence, bring them to Europe and relocate them within Europe.

4.1 Recruitment in Nigeria

Recruitment is done by madams, cult members, former victims, relatives of victims and clergy members, and happens in the street, online, on social media and through WhatsApp. In many cases, recruiters entice girls and women (and to a lesser extent men) under false pretences to go to Europe. In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that Nigerian girls and women sometimes approach human traffickers more or less voluntarily, as they hope to increase their and their family's socio-economic status by working in Europe (Europol, 2018; EUAA, 2021). At the moment, this seems to be the most effective strategy for Nigerian women and their families to improve their financial situation. *“What they did abroad was no longer relevant but the end now justifies the means”* (Iziengbe, 2017, p. 19). In Edo society, traffickers and smugglers are often acquaintances of the family and are not considered criminals. *“A madam is often seen as a caretaker”*, said Mariia Shaidrova during the SOTA conference held in March 2021. By listening to successful madams, there is a chance that the victim may also become a madam one day.

4.2 The route to Europe

In most cases, Nigerian men pay their facilitators in advance. In other words, they are mainly smuggled to Europe, rather than trafficked (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). As a result of extortion and lack of opportunities in Europe, they may still end up being exploited. According to EUAA (2021), male asylum seekers from Nigeria often come into contact with criminal networks in asylum seekers reception centres in southern Italy. Minors, too, are mainly smuggled to Europe, but still often end up being exploited when they cannot pay for their journey in advance (EUAA, 2021). In only a few cases, women from Edo State leave their country of origin without the help of human traffickers. These women save up beforehand or work during the journey, which allows them to pay the smuggler (Europol, 2018). According to Europol, the Nigerian women's journeys to Europe, which can take several weeks or months, are often planned. Nigerian networks make use of existing logistic structures and work together with local human smugglers. During the journey, victims are transferred from group to group. In the 90's, airplanes were the most popular

means for criminal networks to transport their victims. The networks made use of false passports and visas (via Schiphol Airport, Paris, etc.). The Koolvis-Kluivingsbos criminal investigation also showed that Schiphol Airport was being used as an entrance into the Schengen area. According to various sources, air travel and false documentation are still being used in some cases (Europol, 2018; BBC, 2016; Myria, 2018), but since the fight on terrorism has been intensified, most networks prefer to use routes over land. Currently, most victims of human trafficking enter Europe via Niger and Libya. They travel to Italy in boats. Sine Plambech⁸ told the EUAA (2021) that since 2017, it has become harder to bring Nigerian women to Europe, due to Libya's instability. For this reason, the Middle-East is more often seen as the best destination for the sexual exploitation of Nigerian women. In 2019 the western Mediterranean route was also used by Nigerian criminal networks, albeit to a lesser extent (EUAA, 2021).

In practice, it is hard to differentiate between women who were smuggled and women who were trafficked, as extortion may also happen during the journey, increasing the women's vulnerability. Migrants are often sold from one criminal network to the next, requiring them to pay a ransom several times before they regain their freedom or are allowed to make the crossing to Europe. In general, migrants are faced with a lot of violence during the journey. Europol (2018) indicates that Nigerian migrants label Libya, and more specifically Sabha and Tripoli, as the most dangerous places on the journey. Both men and women may become victims of torture, rape, sexual violence or murder during their journeys to the coast of Libya. Migrants may also be left behind during the journey: *"The journey took weeks," says Sarah (...). One of the girls kept asking for water. The men did not like it so they threw her out in the desert in Libya. They left her and we continued the journey. They told the boss on the phone that she was killed by terrorists. We were not human beings. We were animals"* (BBC, 2016). Finally, women are sexually exploited during their journey. There are so-called stopover houses in Libya that are fully managed by Nigerian criminal networks. African women are detained here for some time and forced to work as prostitutes (Europol, 2018).

In many cases, the women are accompanied by a travel guide on (part of) the dangerous journey to Europe (Europol, 2018). He may also be the father of the (unborn) children of one or several victims (Pascoal, 2017). Despite the women often being victimized by these men, they are sometimes willing to enter into a relationship with them to avoid a negative impact on their journey or because they took a voodoo oath with regard to these men. Furthermore, entering into such relationships may improve the victims' chances of becoming a madam in the future (Myria, 2018). After the victims have repaid their human traffickers, work as a madam provides them with the opportunity to make money for themselves and provide for their relatives in Nigeria. Moreover, this

⁸ Sine Plambech is an anthropologist who specialises in migration, human smuggling and trafficking, and the sex industry.

work often is the only option to secure an income for these women, who are in Europe illegally and do not have any other work experience or networks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

4.3 Coercive measures

EUAA (2021) claims that Nigerian victims are often unwilling to make incriminating statements about their human traffickers. In this section, we will focus on the various means that Nigerian human traffickers employ to keep control over their victims. In respect to Nigerian human trafficking, the literature mainly provides insight into the relationship of Nigerian girls and women with their madam and her accomplices.

4.3.1 Abuse of vulnerable positions

In 2015, according to EUAA many of the women who were sexually exploited in Europe were between 17 and 28 years old, illiterate and without a proper education. They were dealing with unstable family situations and had financial problems, though they belonged to the Nigerian lower middle class. According to EUAA (2021), this profile has not changed in recent years.

[Gladys] left Nigeria after an aunt's friend offered her a job in a hair salon in the faraway city of Turin, Italy. Her trafficker kept her locked up in a Libyan brothel, she says, denying her food and drink until she agreed to service clients. In the end, she sold her virginity for a plastic jug of water. Finally arriving in southern Italy on a smuggler's boat, she called the aunt's friend, who said the job was still waiting. She even offered a place to stay. But when Gladys arrived in Turin, the woman's warm phone demeanor disappeared. Gladys owed \$22,530 for the trip, she was told, and would have to work it off walking the streets as a prostitute. *"I went to her house for help, thinking I would find comfort in a fellow Nigerian,"* says Gladys bitterly. *"Instead, she wanted to use me."* Gladys had no money, no papers and no place to stay. She had no choice but to do what the woman demanded (Time, 2019).

Most of the women come from Edo State. According to Europol (2018), recruiters often take advantage of the vulnerability of the victims. The recruiters make use of both personal vulnerabilities and the Nigerian push factors that were discussed in Chapter 2. Families who cannot support their children, orphans and children from conflict areas are their main target groups (Europol, 2018). Less is known about the profile of Nigerian male victims in Europe, but it is clear that recruiters make use of the lack of opportunities for Nigerian men in Europe.

4.3.2 Deception

In addition to victims more or less willingly approaching human traffickers, human traffickers tend to entice victims with European pull factors. Young Nigerian women are told an idyllic tale about

their future life in Europe, for instance that they can get good jobs as hairdressers, babysitters, waitresses or shop assistants, or are being offered a ‘free’ trip to Europe (Europol, 2018). There are also cases of minor Nigerian boys who are enticed to go to Europe to have a career at a professional football club (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). The text field below illustrates the false pretences under which 22-year-old Gladys from South-West Nigeria was brought into street prostitution in Italy.

4.3.3 Debt

Some of the Nigerian girls and women from Edo State know they will end up working in the sex industry, but they are not always aware of the long duration of their exploitation, nor of the fact that they are bound by a debt after arriving in Europe (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). As described, most women, unlike the men, use ‘sponsors’ to journey to Europe. Compared to the costs made for their journeys, the victims often have to pay back a disproportionately large debt. Myria (2018) reports that the debt is on average between 35,000 and 65,000 euro. Furthermore, in some cases victims do not know how much money they have actually repaid. As a result, human traffickers continue to control them even after they have paid off the initial debt. As a means of exerting pressure, human traffickers in Nigeria sometimes even enter into formal agreements with the victim’s family members with family possessions serving as security for the debt (Siegel, 2007). A study by the Dutch Salvation Army (2022) showed that Nigerian men also need to repay either their own or their fathers’ debts.

4.3.4 Voodoo

The most notorious coercive measure of Nigerian criminal networks is voodoo, or *juju*, as Nigerians call it. When using this method, human traffickers abuse the religious and spiritual beliefs of their female victims. Before the girls and women travel to Europe with the help of sponsors, they first need to swear an oath of obedience to the criminal network under the watchful eye of a voodoo priest. When entering into such agreements, a package may be made containing bodily materials such as fingernails, hair and menstrual blood. Victims who escaped exploitive situations and were brought back to Nigeria, revealed that their oath of obedience contained promises to pay back debts, never to report to the police and never to talk to anyone about the nature of their journey (Kara, 2017). The victims believe that any violation of their oath will make spirits retaliate against them or their relatives (Myria, 2018). This method allows human traffickers to control their victims remotely. There are no indications that men also swear oaths of obedience to their human traffickers.

In March 2018, the influence of voodoo seemed to decrease as a result of a controversial speech by the Oba of Benin City in Edo State, in which this traditional leader, together with five hundred

voodoo priests, nullified the juju oaths (Myria, 2018). Various sources informed the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) that this had a positive effect on victims of human trafficking from Edo State, whether they lived in or outside of Nigeria. However, the influence of the Oba of Benin is limited to Edo State and some sources told the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that human traffickers are now recruiting victims and enlisting voodoo priests outside of Benin City/Edo.

4.3.5 Threats and violence

On top of the fear of spiritual retaliation when breaking the oath, both male and female victims fear physical retaliation and violence by the human traffickers. When victims do not make enough money, want to escape their exploitive circumstances, or return to Nigeria before their debt is repaid, they and their relatives may face anything from threats to fatal violence from accomplices of the madams or cults. Before their journey to Europe, victims are often not aware of the physical violence that will be used to control them and prevent them from contacting the authorities (EUAA, 2021). As described above, 80 to 90% of women who are forced to return to Edo State by the authorities before they have repaid their debt will become victims of human trafficking again (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).⁹ Since the speech by the Oba, as described above, the number of physical threats seems to have increased.

4.3.6 Motherhood and pregnancy

Criminal networks also started using motherhood as a coercive measure to exploit Nigerian women in Europe. As described, motherhood is of great importance to women in Nigerian society, but when a woman has become the victim of human trafficking, her motherhood will increase her vulnerability, which in turn strengthens her subjection to the criminal network. Furthermore, it is often impossible to combine motherhood with prostitution. As a result, children are left to their own devices, drugged to keep them asleep, or present while their mother is working (Pascoal, 2017). Pascoal says that in some cases, human traffickers force mothers to give up their children. By ‘caring’ for the children of victims, criminal networks can continue to exploit and control their victims. Moreover, threats are often made to hurt the child or have it adopted.¹⁰

Generally speaking, it seems that falling pregnant to a human trafficker increases the relationship of dependence. It happens sometimes that a travel guide is the father of the (unborn) children of multiple victims (Pascoal, 2017). Yet, a pregnancy can also prove limiting to labour productivity in the case of sexual exploitation. If a woman arrives in the first months of her pregnancy but after the window for a legal abortion has passed, the European madam may force her to undergo an abortion in the home of the madam or a doctor, making use of voodoo rituals (Pascoal, 2017). EUAA (2021) reports that in some cases, for example if pregnancy is involved, madams in Europe may

⁹ It should be noted that stigmatisation in Nigerian society can also play an important part in this.

¹⁰ According to Pascoal (2017) motherhood may also give Nigerian women the strength to distance themselves from human traffickers.

sell a victim to a madam in Libya. In Libya, victims may then be forced to end the pregnancy and work in a brothel. Mama Leather's network also made use of abortion. Mama Leather spoke to her brother J. – the key figure in Nigeria – about a girl who was in a boat to Italy but nearly drowned and was returned to Libya. *"If she is pregnant, then it will be terminated as soon as she arrives [in Libya]"*, said J. (Myria, 2020, p. 59). Furthermore, one of the victims of this network reported that one of the persons who collected the girls from Italian asylum seekers' centres received extra money to pay the smuggler in Tripoli for performing forced abortions on pregnant girls (Myria, 2020). Pascoal (2017) states that, if a victim arrives in Italy pregnant and nearly due, her madam can increase her debt with thousands of euros because of her lack of labour productivity. Finally, as described, in Italy multiple cases are known of pregnant Nigerian women used as drug mules.

4.3.7 Illegality and abuse of residency procedures

Without a residence permit, people are more vulnerable to exploitation. By guiding victims in applying for residency procedures, networks can abuse residence status, or keep victims in illegality to strengthen the relationship of dependence. In the early 1990s, Nigerians could obtain a European residence permit relatively easily. At that time, Nigerian networks experienced few impediments to transporting Nigerians to the Netherlands and other European countries. However, when Nigeria was labelled a 'safe' country in the late nineties, these activities became more difficult. Madams increasingly started to traffic minor girls to the Netherlands, as unaccompanied minor aliens (UMAs) were at first still given shelter in reception centres. Soon, the authorities noticed that many of these UMAs left the centres with unknown destination shortly after having applied for asylum. In an investigation by the Human Trafficking Unit of the Zwolle Interregional Crime Squad in the late nineties, it also came to the fore that several Nigerians who had reported human trafficking had eventually disappeared from reception centres. Some of them were later found working in window prostitution in Antwerp (Van Dijk, 2000).

Several years later, in 2005 and 2006, there was again a high influx of Nigerians into the Netherlands. From this group too, many Nigerian girls left regular reception centres and special reception centres for victims of human trafficking with unknown destination. Because they left with unknown destination, it was never established whether these girls were actually minors. The Koolvis-Kluivingsbos investigation revealed that the Netherlands was being used as transit country for human trafficking purposes, with Schiphol Airport serving as the entry point into the Schengen area. Criminal networks ordered Nigerians to get rid of their documents and request asylum at Schiphol Airport to obtain a temporary residence status. In some cases, potential UMAs

were told to lay claim to the then existing B9 Scheme¹¹ for victims of human trafficking and to its related reception facilities.

De Jong (2015) confirmed this MO in her study into the nature and scale of West-African human trafficking in the Netherlands. The statements of possible victims made in 2012 and 2013 seem to suggest that the stories told by these asylum seekers and victims had been rehearsed. A criminal investigator said to the author: *“How is it possible that a girl arrives at Schiphol Airport and says: ‘I’m a refugee, I am a minor, I want the B8’, while she cannot read or write? At that moment you know, this is not abuse [of immigration law procedures] by this girl, which is simply impossible. What I see, is that it’s mainly criminal organisations who abuse it. B8 is being used to enter the country”* (De Jong, 2015, p. 25). There were also women who reported human trafficking after their asylum application had been denied, changing their stories to such an extent that exploitation fit the timeline.

In 2020, there was a lot of attention for pregnant Nigerian women who left reception centres with unknown destination. Many of these women had also laid claim to the B8/3 scheme. According to Migration Sociologist Mariia Shaidrova, this can be explained by rumours that had been spread among Nigerian migrants in Italy that in some European countries chances of a successful asylum application and social security increased in case of pregnancy. She told EUAA (2021) that these women probably left the reception centres because their pregnancy or the birth of their child did not result in better protection.

Literature about other European countries confirms that obtaining a residence permit can be a well-thought-out strategy of Nigerian criminal networks. In Mama Leather’s network, victims being trafficked from Italy to Belgium were first dropped off at an asylum seekers’ centre in Lille to start their asylum application. This MO was confirmed in a wiretapped conversation, in which Mama Leather said to her assistant A.: *“The girls will return soon, because they have the ‘French documents’”* (Myria, 2020, p. 59). Moreover, this strategy allowed the network to profit from the benefits received by asylum seekers.

Once UMAs and victims of human trafficking started being placed in protected reception centres, Nigerian criminal networks again changed their MO. Europol (2018) reports that Nigerian minors commonly travel without documents and may be instructed to pretend to be adults and lie about

¹¹ When the Dutch Modern Migration Policy Act came into effect on 1 June 2013, the Aliens Act Implementation Guidelines were renumbered and the Scheme for victims and witness reporters of human trafficking was laid down in Chapter B8, Section 3 (B8/3 Vc). Until 1 August 2019, Dublin claims were nullified by B8/3 reports. A Dublin claim means that an asylum application was made earlier in another EU member state, making that EU member state responsible for processing the application for asylum. After a substantive amendment in August 2019, official reports by Dublin claimants no longer ‘automatically’ result in a B8/3 permit.

their stories, so they will be placed in a reception centre for adult asylum seekers. After all, human traffickers can much more easily pick them up from these centres.¹² A victim may also be ordered to pretend to be the wife of her travel guide or, if a child is present, to be a family. Inturissi (2021, p. 64) illustrates this as follows in her thesis: *“I remember this striking case: a couple arrives in a Sicilian port and is identified as a family, she [trafficked Nigerian girl] is pregnant [...] and a minor. She calmly tells me: “the baby is unfortunately the result of violence, I do not even know this man. I do know that he is a very violent person, he told me that I must declare myself his wife” [...] Imagine how many alleged family units were transferred to reception centres without being doubted.”*

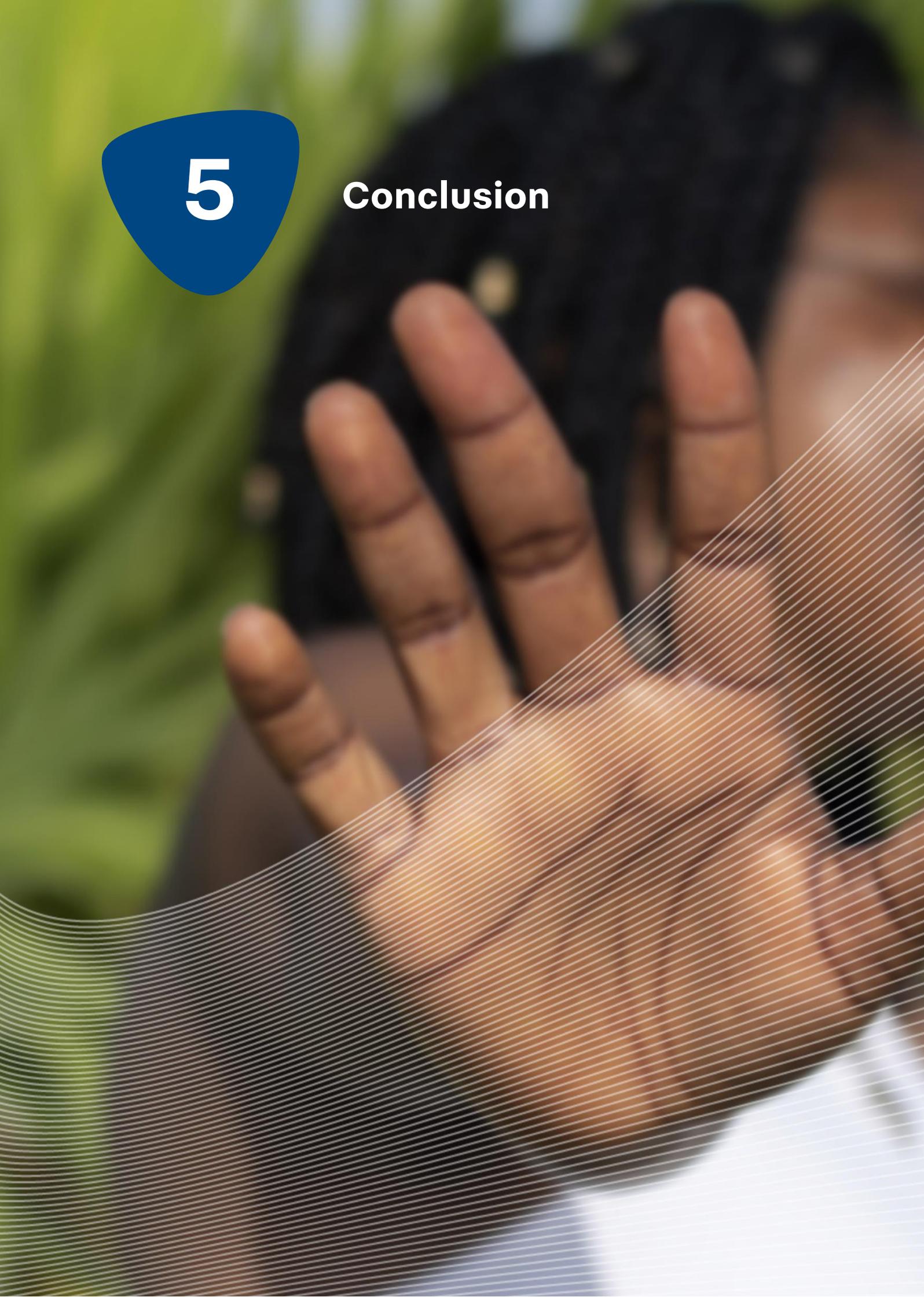
Finally, Pascoal (2017) states that women travelling from Morocco to Spain may be forced to become pregnant several times, so their children can be given to other women, as in Spain pregnant women and women with small children are generally given shelter by the Red Cross rather than put into closed reception centres for illegal immigrants. The Spanish police found that of a hundred Nigerian women, a quarter was not related to the children with whom they travelled (Pascoal, 2017). An increase in pregnant Nigerian women and women with children has also been observed in France, but Pascoal states that contrary to Spain, women with children are not entitled to a residence permit on French territory, as the children are the responsibility of the state.

¹² The data analysis by the EMM revealed that no indications of human trafficking of Nigerian minors were observed in the Netherlands.



5

Conclusion



5. Conclusion

This literature study shows that Nigerian criminal networks involved in human trafficking and migrant smuggling to Europe generally operate in cell structures, and that the size of these networks varies from relatively small family networks to large networks with a hierarchical structure. They continuously adapt their MOs to current circumstances, so they can generate as much profit as possible. The networks tend to have representatives in Nigeria and Europe, but also make use of accomplices on the organised journey to Europe. In Nigeria, they employ voodoo priests, Christian priests, persons who can forge documents and lawyers who draw up the binding agreements between the human trafficker and the victim. The networks' structure allows them to quickly transport victims from one location to the next, both on the way to and within Europe. In doing so, the criminal networks also make use of residency procedures. The networks of madams in Europe are mainly involved in the sexual exploitation of Nigerian women, whereas the confraternities are involved in sexual, criminal and labour exploitation of Nigerian men and women. There are no indications of large-scale sexual exploitation of Nigerian men in Europe.

The literature mainly provides insight into the way in which Nigerian women are being exploited by their madam and her accomplices. Nigerian women are being recruited by madams, relatives of madams, cult members, former victims, relatives of victims and clergy members. Recruiters make use of Nigerian push factors and European pull factors to entice the girls and women to go to Europe. In some cases they use false pretences, but in recent years it has become increasingly clear that Nigerian girls and women also more or less voluntarily approach human traffickers themselves to better their and their family's socio-economic status. In most cases, these women know that they will be working in the sex industry, but are unaware that they will incur an exorbitant debt and that they or their relatives may suffer extreme violence. Most victims are unwilling to make incriminating statements about their human traffickers due to their relationship of dependence with them, their distrust of the authorities, the possibility to become a madam themselves, and their fear of physical and spiritual retribution.

The majority of women from Southern Nigeria who are in Europe illegally have been exploited in some way on their journey to or in Europe. Less is known about the exploitation of Nigerian men in Europe. Unlike Nigerian women, Nigerian men usually pay their migrant smugglers beforehand. However, due to extortion in Niger and Libya, and due to a lack of opportunities in Europe, they may still find themselves being exploited. For this reason, they may also be confronted with violence and be bound to debts. Nigerian men are to a lesser extent being lured to Europe under false pretences. There are no indications that Nigerian men are being controlled by means of voodoo oaths.



6

Discussion

6. Discussion

This chapter offers a more in-depth exploration of the most interesting findings from this literature study by the EMM into Nigerian human trafficking and migrant smuggling. In this chapter, we argue the importance of improving contact with potential victims, especially pregnant Nigerian women, strengthening international cooperation, and paying more attention to criminal exploitation in relation to drugs offences.

6.1 Contact with potential victims

This literature study revealed that victims are generally unwilling to make incriminating statements about their human traffickers due to the coercive measures exercised against them, their distrust of the authorities, and socio-cultural pressure from Nigeria. Nevertheless, many women from Southern Nigeria who are in Europe illegally are exploited in some way. For this reason, it is important to enhance knowledge and competencies in approaching potential victims with cultural sensitivity, as was also recommended by CKM (2021). By extension, Myria (2018) argues the importance of quickly winning the victims' trust. After all, the networks are able to easily relocate their victims within Europe.

Based on the above insights, the EMM has identified opportunities to evaluate the interviewing protocol that was developed in response to the Koolvis-Kluivingsbos investigation. According to this protocol, potential victims can only make an official report once they have had an intake interview with the police, a conversation with an experiential expert and a conversation with clergy member, for the 2008 investigation showed that a conversation with a Christian minister could help remove victims' fears of spiritual retribution and had a positive effect on their willingness to report the crime.¹³ A 2020 jurisprudence study by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service in relation to the Koolvis investigation confirms the advantages of this protocol, but also shows that – due to a lack of clear instructions – mistakes are made regularly in the implementation of the protocol. That conversations with clergy members can still have positive effects was demonstrated by the fact that in January 2022 a victim in Italy overcame her fear of reporting her human traffickers after having had a conversation with a clergy member (The Guardian, 2022).

6.2 Pregnant Nigerian women

In the contact with potential victims, special attention should be paid to pregnant Nigerian women. A Spanish police investigation showed that in 25 percent of the cases studied, children with whom Nigerian women were travelling were not related to them and that women had been forced to

¹³ People from Southern Nigeria often have a dual belief system, in which traditional religious and spiritual beliefs coexist with Christian beliefs. This minister was not contacted within the framework of the investigation, but purely to improve the support of potential victims.

become pregnant multiple times on their journey from Morocco to Spain so their children could be given to other women. Criminal networks can also force Nigerian women to end their pregnancies, as pregnancy lowers their labour productivity in the case of sexual exploitation (Pascoal, 2017). In the Netherlands too, there are concerns for the wellbeing of pregnant Nigerian women. In addition to obtaining a residence permit through false acknowledgement, as was the case in Spain, there may be cases of forced surrogacy and giving up children for illegal adoptions. Finally, the Dutch Salvation Army (2022) points to a custom in Nigeria in which uncircumcised women are circumcised after all in their seventh month of pregnancy, as it is believed that the baby may otherwise become blind during birth. It is important to educate pregnant Nigerian women about the dangers and risks connected to their pregnancies.

6.3 International approach

Regardless of the contact, victims often stay fearful of retribution and the risk of being victimised again. For this reason, international cooperation is vital in tackling human trafficking. In Nigeria, for example, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP, 2022) presented a new approach to fighting human trafficking. NAPTIP is responsible for sheltering, protecting and reintegrating (potential) victims of human trafficking, and for investigating, prosecuting and bringing to justice the perpetrators in Nigeria. In this context, NAPTIP works closely together with investigation services in Europe and is involved in prevention activities. NAPTIP also focuses on coordinating and enforcing legislation on human trafficking and improving national and international cooperation. The Edo State Task Force Against Human Trafficking (ETAHT) is another organisation that works together with European countries in the fight against human trafficking and for sheltering and reintegration of human trafficking victims from Edo State. Generally speaking, Nigerians have little trust in Nigerian governmental organisations, however. For this reason, the UNODC (2019) argues that traditional leaders should become more involved in fighting corruption. The speech given by the Oba in March 2018, which came about in part as a result of interference from NAPTIP, had a positive effect, despite many criminals adapting their MOs in response to it.

6.4 Criminal exploitation

In its directive, the EU points to the many forms of criminal exploitation, giving special attention to drugs trafficking.¹⁴ In this discussion we also point out the issue of criminal exploitation of Nigerian asylum seekers. In the introduction, we referred to the commission of petty theft and forced drugs courier activities in Italy. The EMM data analysis shows that criminal exploitation is mainly linked to Nigerian men, but the literature study shows that Nigerian women are being criminally exploited

¹⁴ Directive 2011/36/EU.

too. For example, an increase has been observed in the number of pregnant Nigerian women who died as a result of a swallowed cocaine pellet that burst. Both the data analysis and the literature suggest that criminal exploitation mainly happens abroad, but Nigerians in the Netherlands can run the risk of being criminally exploited for drugs trafficking purposes too. Earlier this year, the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee reported having arrested three drugs swallows with Nigerian nationality. They held residence permits for Spain, Italy and other countries and were arrested at Eindhoven Airport when travelling to Spain.



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