

Seminar “Migrant Trafficking and Human Smuggling”

London, 18 February 2005

University College London / MRU, University of Bristol

**João Peixoto**

SOCIUS, Institute of Economics and Business Administration (ISEG), Technical University of Lisbon (jpeixoto@iseg.utl.pt)

**“Migrant trafficking and human smuggling: the situation in Portugal” \***

Smuggling and trafficking of migrants is a relatively new phenomenon in Portugal. Foreign immigration, in itself, has begun in significant numbers in the late 1970s. Only in the late 1980s frequent situations of irregular and illegal migration occurred, and only in the late 1990s smuggling and/or trafficking became a major concern of the general population and public authorities. It was particularly the most recent waves of foreign immigration to the country, namely the one coming from Eastern Europe and the “second wave” of Brazilian immigration, that became involved with those irregular forms of channelling migrants. Research about these new waves of migration is still scarce. For a majority of reasons, research about forms of smuggling and/or trafficking related to them is still rarer, due to the irregular and illegal status displayed by these phenomena.

In this paper, some of the main results of a project about migrants’ trafficking in Portugal will be presented. The project, entitled “The migrants trafficking in Portugal: sociological, juridical and political perspectives”, was funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and the High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME) and carried between January and December 2004. The paper will firstly deal with the main conceptual questions involved in the issue. The theoretical

---

\* A first and extended version of this paper was presented at the 2nd Conference of the EAPS Working Group on International Migration in Europe, “International Migration In Europe: New Trends, New Methods of Analysis”, Rome, Italy, 25-27 November 2004. This version will be published in the proceedings of the meeting.

difference between trafficking and smuggling of migrants will be the axis of the discussion. Secondly, some of the research project aims and methodology will be presented, since they inevitably constrained the empirical evidence produced. Thirdly, some of the projects' main results will be presented. Attention will be mainly focussed on forms of smuggling and trafficking of migrant labour to Portugal since the late 1990s. The main characteristics of the smuggling and/or trafficking networks will be described, together with some of the victims' characteristics. Fourthly, the results will be discussed, given its main theoretical implications. The issues under consideration in the last section will be the inter-linking between forms of trafficking, smuggling and "normal" migration; the causes of these phenomena; and the dynamic interaction existing between agents in those fields.

The main conclusions are the following. Firstly, smuggling and trafficking do not appear as clear-cut and distinct phenomenon. Instead, they mix between each other and with "regular" labour migrations. The argument is that it is mainly the context that creates harsher forms of trafficking, instead of smooth paths of labour migration. Secondly, causes for smuggling and trafficking are multiple, and relate to all agents involved in migration. Push and pull factors, which may be analysed through micro or macro lens (individuals or societies), melt with institutional regulations to produce concrete ways of channelling irregular migrants. Thirdly, a dynamic interaction between agents is visible. The agents involved are migrants, smugglers and/or traffickers, employers and institutional actors (NGOs and government), all of them active in this field. It is their concrete mode of interaction that will lead to concrete and changeable ways of smuggling and trafficking in a country.