

Walking with the Caravan: Central American Exodus of 2018

Luigi Achilli, Marie Curie Fellow
Global Governance Programme, EUI

Along with the photographer Livia Radwanski, Luigi Achilli travelled with the migrant caravan from Mexico City to Sonora in November 2018. This exhibition wants to capture part of this experience. During this time, Luigi conducted open-ended interviews with migrants from the caravan during the journey to Tijuana and sought to shadow the migrants' experience.

Luigi's fieldwork with the migrant caravan is carried out within the broader framework of his Marie Curie research project "MAPS – Migrants and People Smugglers", funded by the European Commission. Between April 2015 and June 2017, Luigi conducted field research in the Eastern Mediterranean corridor among Syrian refugees and smugglers. Here, he learnt how human smuggling carries a particular set of social and moral signifiers among both migrants and smugglers. Most smugglers operated by helping members of their immediate circles to reach the destination that would have been otherwise precluded to them through legal channels. They did it for money, of course; yet, deception and exploitation seemed to be less common than popular accounts suggest. As a matter of fact, human smuggling was rooted in patterns of cooperation and support. Where exploitation occurred among migrants and asylum seekers, this was more often the consequence of their protracted condition of deprivation and irregularity than the precise criminal intents of mafia-like organisations. The experience along the Eastern Mediterranean corridor has given space to a larger question: are the smuggling dynamics at work in the area unique? MAPS expands Luigi's previous work among Syrian migrants and smugglers by conducting a comparative study – of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Central American smuggling corridors. Having concluded his research in the Eastern Mediterranean corridor, Luigi is now conducting research on the American route in order to compare these two separate smuggling contexts and identify similarities and differences in the organisational structures of smuggling networks, the smuggler-migrant relationship, and the profile of the facilitators. In so doing, MAPS aims to obtain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of smuggling and the actors involved by bringing more attention to smugglers-migrants' social interactions, local economies, and their shared moral worlds.