

KIDNAP+ RANSOM INSIGHT

GLOBAL SUMMARY

FOCUS
ARTICLE

THE ARMED CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA AND
ITS REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

January

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY

This issue of Constellis' Kidnap for Ransom Insight Report covers global kidnapping incidents and trends for the months of November and December 2021, as well as January 2022. The information is derived from multi-source analysis of kidnap for ransom activity, and provides the outcome or resolution of the events where known. The report covers current kidnap for ransom hotspots at regional, national and provincial levels, with a particular focus on areas where kidnap for ransom activity is increasing.

Statistical analysis of data for November and December 2021 is included on page 13, which displays kidnap for ransom trends by region, victims by nationality and employment sector, as well as identifying the Top 10 countries for the kidnapping of foreign nationals over the reporting period. Additionally, statistical information for the period of January – December 2021 can be found on page 17.

The Global Piracy Update gives an overview of the piracy threat by region, providing trend analysis for November and December 2021, as well as sample cases over these months, to illustrate identified trends.

The Cybersecurity section examines current issues affecting companies and individuals in the realm of IT security. 2021 was a record-breaking year in terms of the frequency and economic impact of cyber-attacks, costing global economies an estimated USD 6 trillion. Ransomware again emerged as the top cyber threat, though other major threat types also contributed to the spiralling cyber security crisis. This issue's cybersecurity article explores the cyber trends observed over 2021, and provides an insight into what steps governments and international bodies are taking to mitigate threats.

Our Focus Article explores the armed conflict in Ethiopia; touching on its origins, the beginning of the confrontation between rebels and the federal government, and the most recent developments in the crisis. The report also delves into the impact of the conflict on regional stability and assesses possible outcomes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOBAL OVERVIEW	03
Americas	03
Europe	05
Middle East.....	07
Africa	09
Asia.....	11
STATISTICS	13
GLOBAL PIRACY UPDATE	21
CYBERSECURITY	24
FOCUS ARTICLE.....	26
ABOUT CONSTELLIS	29

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

AMERICAS

Over November-December 2021, Constellis recorded the kidnapping of 46 foreign nationals in the Americas, denoting a 37% decrease on the previous reporting period. This was once again linked to a decrease in reporting of mass abductions of migrants, especially in Mexico. However, this is assessed to be a result of underreporting, rather than a reflection of the situation on the ground. According to Mexican NGOs, the kidnapping of migrants in the country has become a substantial source of income for organised criminals groups. Victims have remarked that many migrants are targeted after being sent to Mexico by US authorities while awaiting the resolution of their asylum cases. Ransom demands have also increased notably in the last couple of years, now ranging from USD 5,000 to USD 10,000, with the highest sums demanded from those with relatives in the US. While most victims continue to be Central Americans, a growing number of Haitian victims have been noted in recent months, reflecting the humanitarian crisis in the Caribbean country. Meanwhile, in Haiti, the October 2021 abduction of 17 North American missionaries brought renewed attention to the kidnapping crisis engulfing the Island-nation, in which foreign nationals have become a prime target. According to local reports, at least 55 foreigners were abducted in the country in 2021.

CASES:

- ▶ On 14 November, Nicaraguan political dissident Ana Gabriela Nicaragua López was kidnapped alongside her husband and son soon after crossing the southern Mexican border in Tabasco, while on her way to seek political asylum in the US. According to Nicaraguan NGOs supporting her, the kidnapers were human smugglers linked to the Cartel de Juárez. The family was released on 18 November, following a payment of USD 5,000.
- ▶ A group of Haitian migrants reported that two of their compatriots had been missing since 9 January 2022 and were thought to have been kidnapped. The couple went missing after departing the city of Acayucan towards Veracruz City, where they intended to legalise their stay in Mexico. The migrants claim that many more similar cases have taken place in the area, and believe that they are being carried out by, or with knowledge of, members of the local security forces.
- ▶ On 13 January 2022, Cuban doctor Daymara Pérez was kidnapped in Haiti by armed men who boarded the bus she was travelling on in the Port-au-Prince area of Martissant. Eyewitnesses said she was the only person to be taken among all the passengers.

According to media reports, the kidnapers initially demanded a ransom of USD 1 million for her release, which was eventually negotiated down to USD 100,000. Though USD 10,000 was paid, Perez was not released immediately. She was eventually released in unclear circumstances ten days after the original payment was made. Also in January, two other kidnapped Cuban expatriates were released after spending 17 days in captivity. The Cuban nationals had been kidnapped on 18 December while on their way to the immigration office in Port-au-Prince. After these two incidents, the Cuban government, citing a general increase in insecurity across the country, decided on 19 January to temporarily reduce its medical team in Haiti, with the initial repatriation of 78 Cuban doctors.



Haitians queuing outside the National Institute of Migration in Veracruz City to legalise their stay in Mexico. (Photo: MasNoticias.mx)

Many South American countries have recorded visible increases in kidnapping rates, particularly Chile and Brazil. Chile has typically enjoyed one of the lowest crime levels in the region, being thus considered one of the safest and most stable countries in South America. However, crime rates began to rise in 2020, with kidnapping – once unheard of – now being reported on a more regular basis. While many attribute this trend to foreign elements, a number of local groups have also been identified behind a number of incidents. A feature of recent kidnappings in the country has been the high levels of associated violence, with many victims being severely injured or even murdered. Meanwhile, in Brazil, kidnapping has long been a common feature of the country's crime profile. However, a marked increase in short term abductions has been noted since the government launched the instant money transfer app Pix, in November 2020. Police in São Paulo, where these crimes are more generalised, have identified that gangs involved in other crimes are increasingly migrating to express kidnapping after discovering how easy it is for victims to transfer large amounts of money via Pix. In order to combat this trend, banks in Brazil have made a petition for Pix to change its regulations, including a reduction of transfer limits, and to allow banks to stop large transfers when these do not match the spending habits of users.

CASES:

- ▶ On 31 December, a Colombian national reported to police that he had been kidnapped along with a Venezuelan friend by a group of “six foreigners” the previous day in the capital, Santiago, after entering Chile illegally. The Colombian claimed they were taken to a farm in the locality of Rancagua, from where he managed to escape after 10 hours. He was hiding not far from the farm when he heard gunfire. During investigations, the bullet-riddled body of the Venezuelan hostage was found.
- ▶ A 67-year-old Chilean shop owner was kidnapped on 6 January near a market he frequented on a daily basis in the city of Iquique, Tarapacá region. The kidnapers demanded CLP 50 million (USD 60,000) from his family, which had to be paid in person on the Bolivian side of the border, in the locality of Colchane. The shop owner was killed the next day after his family was unable to pay the ransom. His body was found in a deserted area between Iquique and Alto Hospicio. Three Venezuelan nationals, part of a larger syndicate, have so far been arrested, including a former member of the Venezuelan police. The authorities attribute this gang with a number of violent crimes in the area, including the burglary and confinement of professional football player Álvaro Ramos and his family on 11 January.
- ▶ A kidnapped French expatriate was rescued, and his two kidnapers were arrested in Morumbi, south of São Paulo, on 14 January. The foreigner was stopped in his luxury car at traffic lights when another vehicle hit him from the rear. As he got out to see the damage, the two armed men forced him back into his car. While he was driven around the area, the criminals ordered him

to make money transfers via Pix. However, his phone was out of battery, leading the criminals to take the Frenchman to a property in Paraisópolis, where they charged his phone, with the intention of finalising the transactions. A local resident noticed the suspicious activity in the area and called the police.

- ▶ A Korean man was shot in São Paulo while trying to escape a kidnapping attempt on 17 January. The foreign businessman was ambushed by two armed men when he arrived for a date with a woman whom he had met on a dating app. He tried to escape but was shot multiple times, one of the bullets hitting him in the head. The man later died in hospital.



Korean national Kim Shin died during a kidnapping attempt in Sao Paulo, Brazil. (Photo: Globo)

EUROPE

Over the last two months of 2021, Europe reverted to its usual low level of reported kidnappings of foreign citizens, only accounting for 1.8% of all the incidents recorded by Constellis. Over these months, unlike the previous reporting period, no mass abductions of migrants were recorded – explaining the downturn in activity. Still, three out of this period’s five victims were migrants, evidencing the ongoing ripple effects of human smuggling in the region. Indeed, illegal migration, and thus all of its criminal by-products, will continue to be a focal point for European authorities, especially as more countries tighten migratory conditions and renege on their refugee quotas, seeking a total overhaul of the system. Kidnappings linked to drug trafficking activities continued to be a feature of crime reporting in the region, particularly in Southern Europe, where these groups are more active. According to Europol, this activity accounts for a fifth of all profits from organised crime in Europe, with a notable surge having been observed in the last two years, leading the region to replace the US as the main market for cocaine. Moreover, European authorities have found that there is a close connection between drug trafficking and human smuggling/trafficking, as these utilise the same routes and are often carried out by the same groups, looking to diversify their business for larger profits.

CASES:

- ▶ In late November, the Spanish Civil Guard launched a search operation in the town of Vecindario, Gran Canaria, to locate an individual of Maghrebi origin who was accused of having illegally detained two compatriots. The victims were rescued by police on 26 November, after they received a report regarding cries for help coming from a property occupied by squatters. After their rescue, the victims said they had been lured to the property by the suspect, who had offered accommodation, food, and transport to mainland Spain for a fee. However, once there, the man did not provide these services and instead held them against their will, demanding EUR 400 euros from each of them for their release.
- ▶ Three individuals, including two minors, were arrested by Greek police on 5 December for having kidnapped a foreign migrant for ransom. The hostage was also released during the operation. The victim was abducted while on the Kavala-Thessaloniki national road after having entered the country illegally. He was then taken to the area of Perea, Thessaloniki, where he was assaulted. The group reportedly demanded EUR 2,000 for the man’s release.
- ▶ On 19 November, four suspects were prosecuted and imprisoned in France for the abduction of a Toulouse teenager in July. The incident was linked to a EUR 8,000 drugs-related debt that the young man had with a drug dealer. The victim said he was lured out by his ex-

girlfriend on 7 July. When he arrived at the meeting, a group of men bundled him into the boot of a car and took him to a forest. He was held there for two days, during which he was beaten, tortured, and raped, to force his relatives to pay off the debt. The kidnapers include the man’s ex-girlfriend and a Parisian drug dealer.

- ▶ In January 2022, prosecutors in Santander, northern Spain, requested prison sentences of over 10 years for two Moroccan nationals accused of having kidnapped a German man who owed them EUR 600 for the purchase of drugs. In addition to the payment of fines, given the level violence involved in the kidnapping, the authorities also requested that the accused pay EUR 3,000 to the victim in damages.



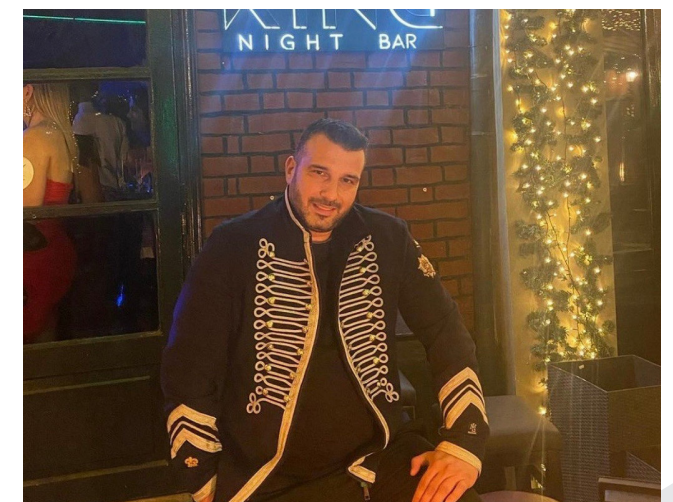
Room where two Maghrebis were held for ransom by a compatriot in Gran Canaria, Spain. (Photo: Canarias7.es)

Kidnapping in Europe remains comparatively infrequent in comparison to other regions of the world. While affecting individuals across multiple sectors, businesspeople and their dependants remain the key targets for organised criminal groups. However, a majority of reported events conclude with the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators. The effectiveness of European security forces, as well as the high prosecution rates, are the main factors leading to the relatively low rates of this crime.

CASES:

- ▶ George Kyparissis, the owner of an auto parts company and a luxury gym, was kidnapped by five armed men in the early hours of 29 December in Attica, Greece, while driving back home after a night out. The incident was reported by a friend of the victim, with whom he was speaking on the phone at the moment of the attack. The kidnapers later contacted the businessman’s brother, demanding EUR 2 million as ransom after providing proof of life in the form of a photograph of the victim. They also made veiled threats, warning his family against contacting the police. The authorities believe that the perpetrators are members of a well-organised gang based in western Attica, possibly linked to the Roma mafia. It is also assessed that Kyparissis was targeted as he held a high profile on social media, flaunting his wealth and lavish lifestyle on a regular basis. The businessman remains in captivity at the time of writing, making it the fourth longest kidnapping in Greece.
- ▶ On 6 January, two French nationals were arrested after a shoot-out with French police in the locality of Pontarlier, near the Swiss border. The men were suspects in the abduction of the owner of a watchmaking company and his wife earlier the same day in Switzerland. The couple were taken from their home and later transferred to their factory, located in the Swiss commune of Le Locle. Whilst there, two company employees were also held hostage. Under threat, the criminals forced the owner to hand over containers of precious metals used in watch production. The owner was however able to activate a silent alarm, which triggered a large-scale police operation. Probably warned by accomplices waiting outside the factory, the criminals fled, but were arrested in French territory after a warning was issued by the Swiss police. The gang is linked to a similar incident in early November 2021, when the men took the director of a watchmaking company hostage in Bassecourt, Switzerland, and forced him to give up the company’s precious metals. On that occasion, the criminals also fled to France.

- ▶ In late December, three individuals were sentenced to 30 years in prison for the kidnap and torture of a man over a seven-hour period in Manchester, England, on 27 December 2020. The victim suffered multiple stab wounds, a dislocated shoulder, a burn on his stomach, and a broken jaw. The man was abducted during the sale of a Rolex watch he had advertised on social media. The criminals contacted the man’s relatives and demanded GBP 100,000, threatening to kill him if the money was not paid within 30 minutes. After negotiations, which were being monitored by the police, the criminals agreed on a payment of GBP 20,000. Two of the kidnapers were arrested when they showed up to collect the money. The police later found the car where the victim was being held by the third suspect, who managed to escape. He was later arrested in January 2020.



Kidnapped Greek businessman George Kyparissis. (Photo: Mononews)

MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East maintained consistent kidnapping levels from the previous reporting period, with the same number of foreign victims recorded (33). Two mass abductions of refugees were recorded in Syria by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF or QSD), a US-backed Kurdish militia effectively exerting control in the northeast of the country, and which has on numerous occasions been blamed for human rights abuses. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, by the end of 2021, the QSD was believed to be holding 12,000 individuals, including children, in prison, and between 2,000 to 4,000 foreigners from about 50 countries, suspected of affiliation with the Islamic State (IS). The UK-based NGO said that in the first half of 2021 alone, the SDF was accused of having arbitrarily detained 369 individuals, many of them foreign nationals. Instances of mass arrests are expected to increase in the short-term following the 20 January complex attack on a prison in Al-Hassakeh by IS, hosting approximately 3,500 IS detainees, including senior figures and children. The operation, believed to have been part of a larger coordinated offensive that included an attack on a military base in Iraq, is deemed the group's most significant and deadliest in Syria since losing most of its Syrian territory in 2019. These events demonstrate that IS still poses a considerable threat in the region and have invigorated concerns regarding the group's potential resurgence.

CASES:

- ▶ On 21 November, QSD launched a security operation in the Al-Hole refugee camp in Al-Hassakeh, during which 14 Iraqi refugees were detained. Another mass arrest was recorded in the same camp on 15 December. Among the detainees were 14 women, most of them French citizens.
- ▶ On 23 December, three Iranian engineers were arbitrarily detained along with their driver by members of the Kurdish Internal Security Forces (AI-Asayish), at a checkpoint whilst en route to Al-Qamishly Airport from Al-Hassakeh city. The engineers are employees of an Iranian company who had been working on a project for the construction of desalination stations in Al-Hassakeh city. The incident caused tension in the area and allegedly triggered deployments of Iran-backed Shiite militias in the Raqqa countryside, particularly the Liwa Fatemiyoun militia and the Iraqi Hezbollah. Checkpoints were also erected to obstruct the passing of commercial trucks heading towards Kurdish-controlled areas. It was reported that Russian authorities were mediating for the release of the arrested Iranian nationals. The fate of the engineers is currently unknown.
- ▶ On 29 December, Iraqi authorities confirmed the death of a police officer, two weeks after his kidnapping by IS militants. The death was published by the group

the previous day on its Telegram channel, where they uploaded photos of the beheaded victim. Colonel Yasser Al-Jourani was kidnapped in mid-December while he was hunting with two friends in Hamrin, eastern Iraq. One of the colonel's hunting companions was found shot dead and the second seriously injured after being tortured. He later succumbed to his injuries.



A flag and bags belonging to IS fighters arrested by QSD forces after the attack on Ghuwayran prison, in Al-Hassakeh, north-east Syria. (Photo: The Guardian)

Violent crimes have increased in Lebanon due to the collapsing economy, a lack of security presence, and the general availability of illegal weapons. According to a report by Beirut-based research firm Information International, using data of the Lebanese Directorate of Internal Security Forces, murders increased 101% in the first ten months of 2021, compared to the same period in 2019, while other crimes increased over 200%. Kidnapping remains a significant threat in the country, particularly in the Bekaa region, a well-known hub for organised criminal groups. A high threat is also present in the border areas with Syria, where militant groups are active and may conduct transborder abductions. Politically-motivated arrests, by both government and Hezbollah forces, have also become common and have targeted foreign nationals in the past. As Lebanon continues to face major economic and political challenges, with the government failing to enact the needed reforms, hopes for improvement in 2022 are limited. This will continue to have a disruptive effect on domestic security and that of the region.

CASES:

- ▶ On 5 December, Lebanese authorities rescued an engineer who was kidnapped the previous day by a Syrian gang near his home in the central city of Aley. The kidnapers reportedly demanded a USD 2 million ransom, to be paid within 48 hours. The victim was held at a house in the town of Souk Al-Gharb, where he was allegedly tortured.
- ▶ On 8 December, Lebanese authorities freed freelance American journalist Nada Homsy, who was detained in Beirut on 16 November. The release came just hours after two international human rights groups criticised her arbitrary detention and called for her release. Homsy claimed that her arrest was part of an intimidation campaign used by the Lebanese security agencies against foreign journalists. The true reasons for her arrest remain unknown.
- ▶ A Syrian national, who was kidnapped by human smugglers in Hermel, in the Bekaa region, was released on 25 January, after four days in captivity. The release took place after his family apparently paid USD 2,000 dollars in ransom. According to local reports, the man had contacted the smugglers because he wanted them to help his son cross the border illegally. The smugglers kidnapped both father and son, but subsequently released the latter, so he could gather the ransom.
- ▶ The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has led to a considerable threat of kidnapping against local nationals in Israel by terror groups such as Hamas or in the context of the animosity between Arabs and Israelis. For example, on 3 December, three Palestinians were arrested for the kidnapping of a Jewish settler from his home in the Arab community of Jaljulya. The victim was found severely wounded at a property in the city of Nahariya, whilst

being guarded by the three arrested suspects. While valuables were stolen during the invasion of the victim's home, it is believed that the main motivation behind the attack was to evict the man from the area.

- ▶ Top Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh warned on 2 January that the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the group's militant faction, will kidnap more Israelis if a prisoner exchange agreement is not reached with Israel. Hamas is demanding the release of six Palestinian prisoners who had escaped from the maximum-security Gilboa Prison in September before being recaptured. The group claims to be holding two living Israelis — Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed — in addition to the remains of two Israeli soldiers — Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul.



Members of Lebanon's Hezbollah taking part in Ashura commemorations in a southern Beirut suburb. (Photo: Council on Foreign Relations)

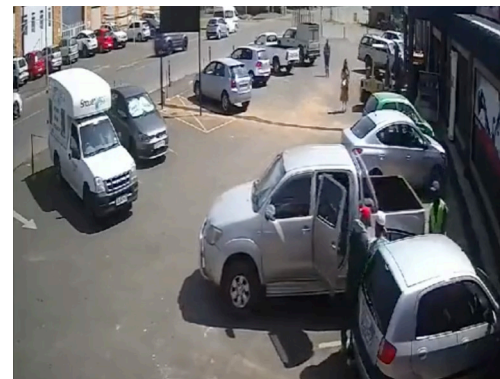
AFRICA

After recording a decrease of 19%, Africa fell to second place in the Constellis kidnapping ranking. This reduction was mainly due to less reporting of mass abductions of migrants in South Africa. However, the country continued to record the highest number of foreign victims in the region, evidencing the prevalent high threat. According to local reports, kidnappings in South Africa increased over 60% in 2021 as it became widespread among all sectors of society. High-profile abductions are normally carried out by well organised, professional gangs, which carefully plan and execute their attacks, and study their victims ahead of time, knowing how much they are able to pay. It is believed that many of these gangs are based in Mozambique or have important links there, where the kidnapping problem follows a very similar trend and modus operandi. In most of these cases, victims are released following a ransom payment, thus perpetuating the kidnapping phenomenon. In both countries, there are increasing allegations that members of the security forces and local private security businesses are involved in this criminal activity, either directly, or indirectly by covering for these gangs. Members of the security forces have also been accused of extorting families to take action during incidents.

CASES:

- ▶ Tahseen Mateen Kardame, a religious leader and son of a businessman of South Asian origin, was rescued from a house in the town of Kattlehong, Gauteng province, on 30 November. Fifteen mobile phones, three firearms, including a semi-automatic rifle, a shotgun and a pistol, as well as ammunition, were seized from the property. No ransom was reportedly paid prior to the hostage's rescue. Five South Africans, including a convicted criminal and a traffic police officer, were arrested in connection with the crime. Kardame was kidnapped outside one of his father's hardware shops in Benoni on 12 November. A video showing the abduction was widely circulated on social media. The amount originally demanded by the kidnappers is unknown.
- ▶ An 11-year-old girl was kidnapped outside her school in Johannesburg's Mayfair area on 17 November, while waiting in line for COVID screening. She was taken at gunpoint by three men armed with AK47 rifles. According to eyewitnesses, the kidnappers knew their target and called her by name. The identity of the girl has not been made public, but it is reported that she is the daughter of wealthy foreign nationals who own a hotel and several other businesses in the area. On 5 January, local media reported that the girl had been 'found' south of Johannesburg. The release of the girl followed the arrest of a suspect in Mozambique on 31 December. Another two suspects were arrested the same month in South Africa.

- ▶ A citizen of Indian origin was kidnapped on the morning of 22 December on one of the main avenues in the Mozambican capital, Maputo. The victim was taken by a group of three armed individuals after visiting a construction site on Avenida 24 de Julho. Though the authorities did not name the victim, local media have suggested he could be Ibrahim Versailles, a businessman in the construction sector. This was the 14th high-profile kidnapping in Mozambique in 2021, and second in December.



Abduction of Tahseen Mateen Kardame, recorded by CCTV camera. (Photo: Wired2News)

A clear deterioration of security conditions has been recently noted in some areas of the DRC, particularly in the provinces of North and South Kivu, Ituri, and the Kasais, where the threat posed by militant groups is highest. Many Western governments are now advising against all travel there. Armed groups in these areas have attacked both military and civilian targets; ambush attacks, which in the past would only involve armed robberies, have now more regularly included kidnapping, indicating that this activity has become an important source of revenue for these groups. Of concern have been claims that these attacks may be taking place with the involvement, or at least acquiescence, of security forces in the area. Humanitarian aid workers and other NGO personnel have been a regular target for these groups, while foreign nationals are specifically targeted due to their perceived value. Moreover, militants often use extreme and indiscriminate violence during their attacks. Of further concern is that the state of siege, implemented in Ituri and North Kivu in May 2021, remains, as violence attributed to these various armed groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), has persisted.

CASES:

- ▶ A Congolese army spokesman announced on 25 November that two Chinese nationals, as well as a Ugandan and a Congolese, had been killed and an unknown number of other people kidnapped in an attack by CODECO militias on the living quarters of a mining camp in the east of the country. Among the kidnap victims were five Chinese citizens. The attack took place on 24 November in Itendey, Ituri province. A local community leader said that the kidnappers took the victims to the Besse forest and demanded a ransom of USD 2 million for their release. According to local sources, photos showing the hostages in a rebel camp circulated on social networks prior to the militants issuing their demand. This was the second attack on a Chinese mining operation in a week in the DRC's east, triggering the Chinese government to order its nationals to leave the area. It is unclear if the victims remain in captivity.
- ▶ The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) confirmed that two of its staff members had been abducted in eastern DRC on 30 November. One of the victims was a local national, while the other was a foreigner of unspecified nationality. The kidnapping occurred as the two staff members were travelling in a two-vehicle convoy from Goma to Sake, in North Kivu, where they are running a water supply project. The hostages were released in unknown circumstances on 11 December.
- ▶ In Nigeria, kidnappings targeting Chinese nationals have continued to be reported on a regular basis. On 5 January, bandits kidnapped seven Chinese workers from the Zungeru Hydro Power Dam project in Wushishi Local Government Area of Niger State. Another Chinese

worker and a local colleague were injured during the assault, and two security guards were killed. The group was attacked whilst working on a transmission line tower in Gussase village. Reportedly, a police tactical team in charge of the facility engaged the attackers and managed to rescue four of the kidnapped expatriates, whilst the other three were taken away. Two local staff died in the attack. It is understood that the hostages remain in captivity at the time of writing.



Chinese staff at the Zungeru Dam project. (Photo: Skyscraper City blog)

ASIA

In a 180-degree shift, Asia passed from being the region with the lowest number of foreign kidnap victims in the September-October period to the one with the highest number in November-December. The increase was however linked to the abduction of a very large group of migrants in Cambodia. While atypical for the number of victims, this incident aligned with existing trends of Chinese criminality in the country and others in the region, such as the Philippines. Chinese criminal syndicates have been identified running sweatshops engaged in scams, gambling, and other illegal activities online. The gangs that run these operations lure people, primarily from China but increasingly from other countries in the region, with promises of high-paying jobs. Upon arrival, they are enslaved and forced, under threat of violence, to carry out the aforementioned undertakings. In some cases, victims are also demanded to pay fees for lodging and food, and if they do not pay, are sold to other gangs. Victims may also be required to pay money for their release from service. In evidence of the magnitude of the problem, the Cambodian government has had to transform low-budget hotels into safe houses to lodge people rescued from these groups, as many cannot be sent back to their countries due to COVID-19 restrictions. While hundreds of victims have been rescued, authorities estimate that thousands remain captive in guarded properties across the country. China has called on the authorities of Cambodia and the Philippines to take more effective action and has created joint law enforcement units to face the issue.

CASES:

- ▶ On 17 November, Cambodian police announced that they had rescued 63 Thai nationals who had been held for ransom by Chinese gangs. Three of the victims were rescued in early November in the border town of Klong Luek, in the eastern province of Sa Kaeo. The women said they had been lured to the border city of Poipet, with promises of work in online sales. Once there, the women were detained by their employer, who demanded a ransom of TBH 10,000 (USD 300) for each of them. The women were threatened with the possibility of being sold to a gang in China, and were forced to work in online gambling until the money was sent by their families. Their relatives in Thailand did not pay, and instead contacted the Cambodian police. The other 60 victims were rescued in similar circumstances on 15 November.
- ▶ On 24 December, the Chinese manager of the Golden Sands Hotel and Casino in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, suffered a kidnap attempt. The incident took place when two Chinese suspects, pretending to be jobseekers, went to meet the manager at the hotel for an interview. As the men were trying to take the manager away, they were spotted by the hotel security guards and staff, who intervened. During the scuffle,

one of the suspects pulled out his pistol and fired, injuring one Chinese security guard. The two suspects fled, but were found and arrested the next day, at a hotel in Ong village, Prey Nob district.

- ▶ A Malaysian national was on his way to a job interview at a hotel in Pasay City, Philippines, when he was forced into a van outside the hotel, on 4 December. The man said the incident took place after he responded to an advertisement for a job with a Chinese company based in the Philippines. The 'employers' had asked him to meet them at the hotel, from where he was kidnapped by two Chinese men and a Filipino. The kidnapers demanded PHP 500,000 (about USD 10,000) to let him go. The victim managed to escape the next day. No arrests have been made.



Golden Sands casino in Sihanoukville, Cambodia. (Photo: Bloomberg)

In the words of the UN Secretary General António Guterres, Afghanistan is 'hanging by a thread'. Sanctions and mistrust by the global banking system have contributed towards the worsening economic situation in the country and restrictions on international aid. However, at a time when the Taliban is fighting for international recognition as the legitimate government, they have continued to create an environment of intimidation and 'iron fist' law enforcement, with little regard for human rights. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to receive credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances, detentions and other violations, targeting political opponents, civil society representatives, and anyone expressing dissent. This threat also extends to foreign nationals, who may be used as pawns for political leverage. Similarly, the Chinese government has continued its crackdown against dissidence, both in Hong Kong and mainland China. Many foreign nationals have been arrested under China's National Security Law, leading many countries, including Canada, to issue travel warnings as a result of the arbitrary enforcement of local laws.

CASES:

- ▶ On 18 December, British national Grant Bailey was apprehended at gunpoint by Taliban police in Kabul during a security crackdown, hours before he was due to leave the country. It is currently unclear why he was arrested or where he is currently located, though local sources believe he is being held in one of Kabul's prison complexes. A spokesperson for the UK government said they are working on the case, but remotely, as all embassy staff left the country in August. Bailey is said to have just returned to Afghanistan in September, despite the poor security situation. The reasons behind his return are unclear; some media sources describe him as an aid worker for a non-governmental organisation (NGO), others claim he is a security contractor.
- ▶ Denise Ho, a popular Canadian singer and prominent pro-democracy activist, was arrested by the Hong Kong national security police at her home, early on 29 December. On the same day, over 200 police officers raided the offices of Hong Kong pro-democracy media outlet Stand News—where Ho was once a board member—and arrested several other directors and journalists for 'conspiracy to publish seditious materials'. In a statement, the Hong Kong government said they had all been arrested on the basis of the Territory's National Security Law. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly acknowledged Ho's arrest and said that Canadian officials were 'engaged and stand ready to provide assistance on the ground'.

- ▶ In a rare incident, on 12 December, authorities in Kyrgyzstan announced that four suspects, including a police official, had been detained for their alleged involvement in the kidnapping for ransom of a Turkish businessman. The group reportedly stopped the victim at Manas International Airport, near the capital, Bishkek, on his arrival on 1 December. The victim was taken to the police station at the airport, where he was stripped of his belongings, blindfolded, and then taken to an unknown property. The businessman was held captive for five days and a ransom of USD 3 million was demanded for his release. According to Kirghiz police, the kidnapping was organised by the victim's business partner.

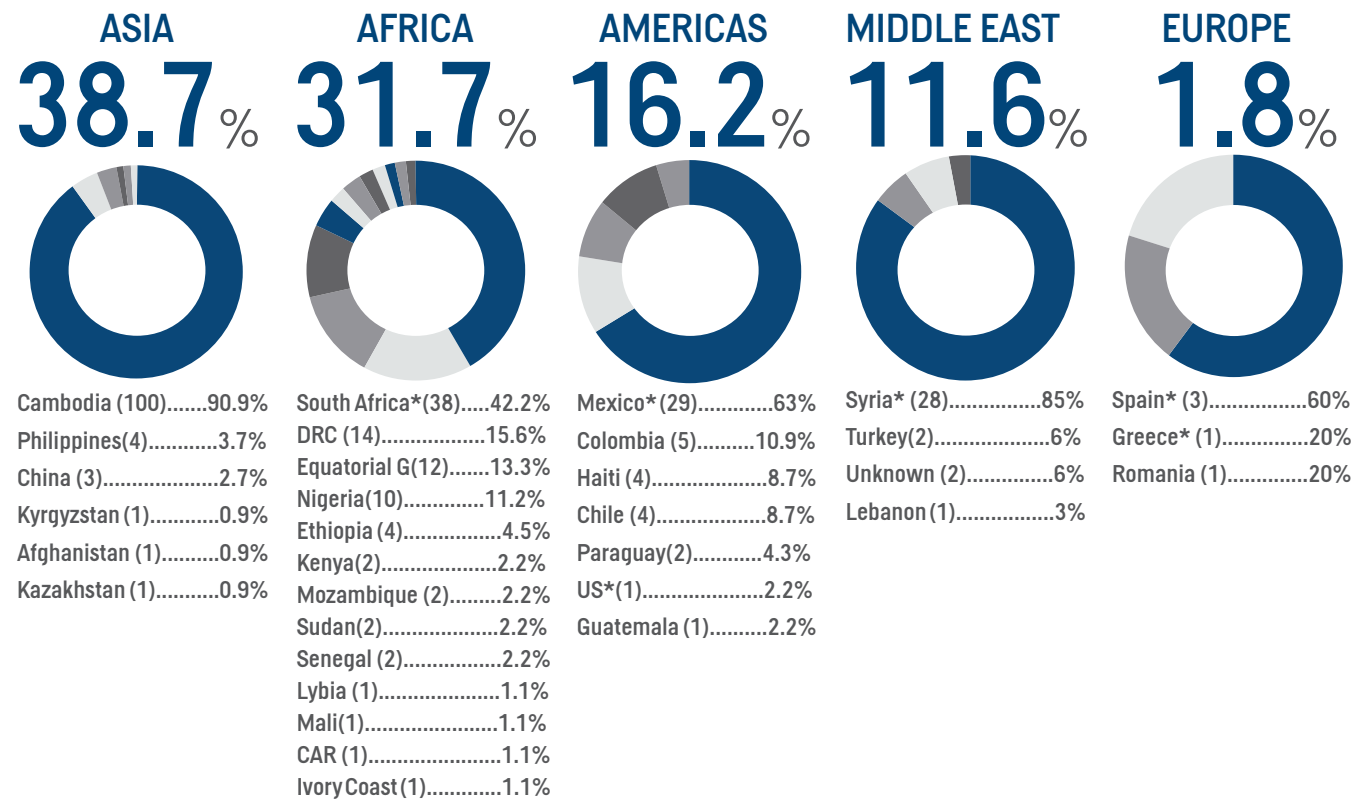
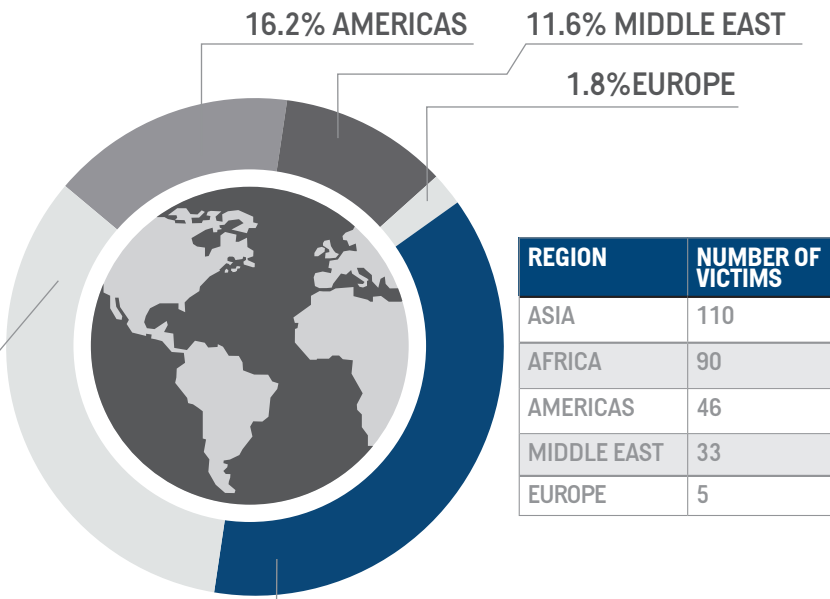


Canadian activist Denise Ho being escorted by police in Hong Kong in 2014. (Photo: The Japan Times)

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

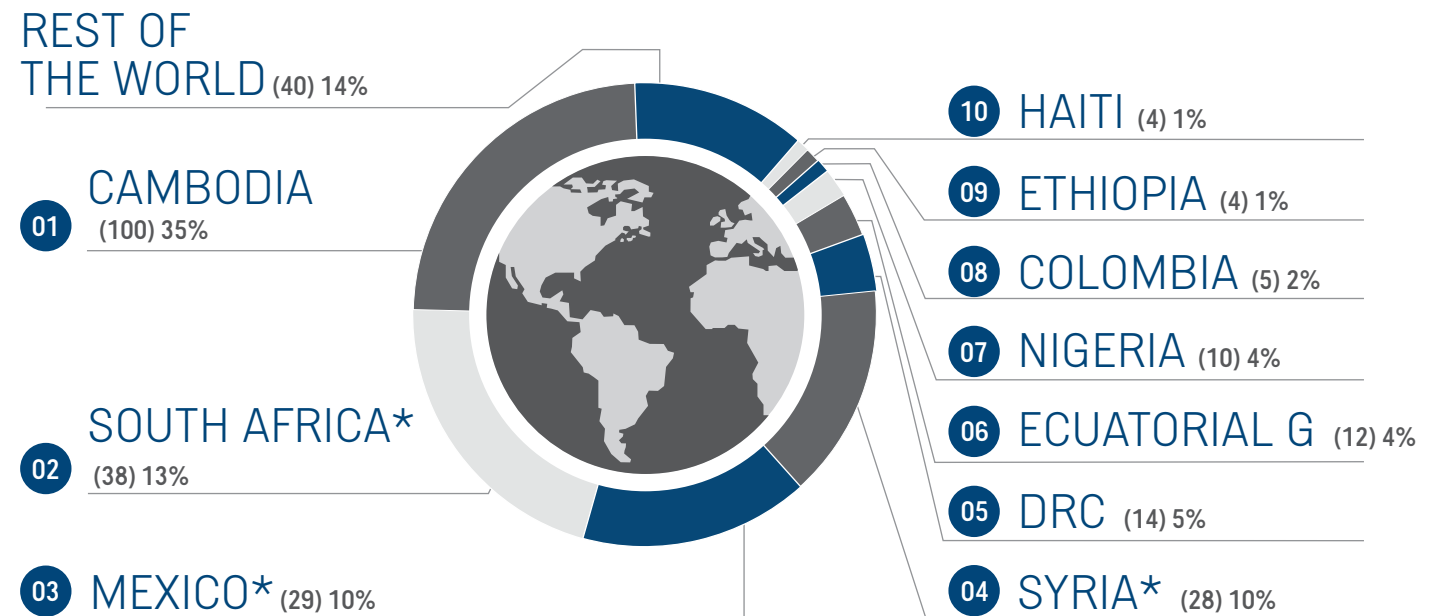
Global AND Regional GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF VICTIMS

Statistics for November-December 2021 are drawn from Constellis' record of 284 kidnapped foreign nationals. Over September-October, Constellis recorded a total of 245 foreigners kidnapped across the world.

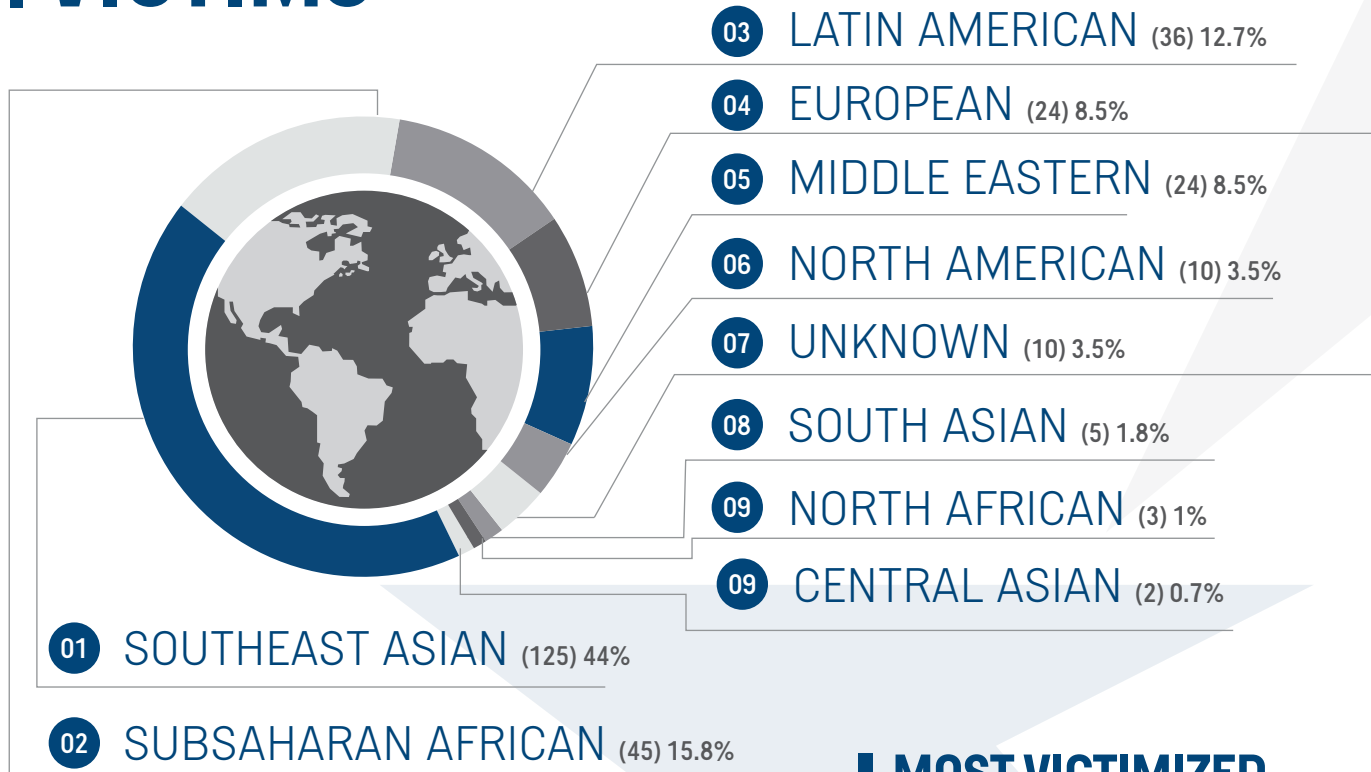


(Number of Victims)
* Including Migrants

TOP 10 COUNTRIES FOR THE KIDNAPPING OF FOREIGN CITIZENS IN NOV - DEC 2021



ORIGINS OF VICTIMS



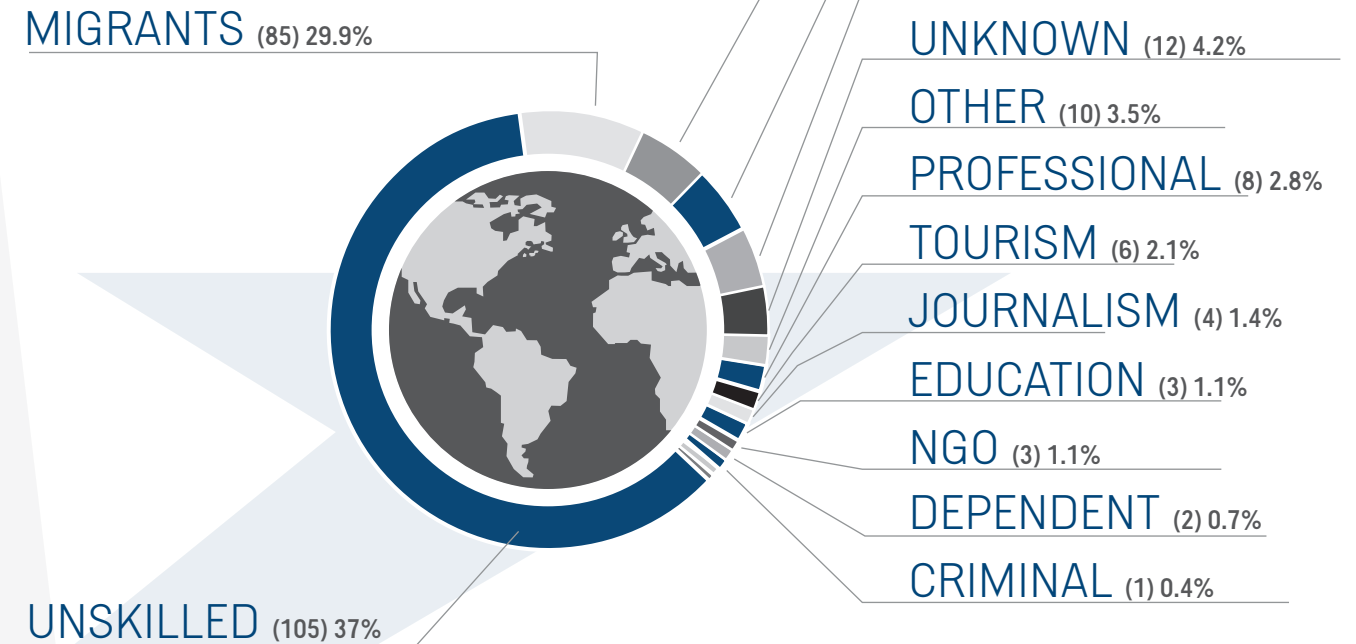
MOST VICTIMIZED SINGLE NATIONALITY

- 01 Thai
- 02 Ethiopian
- 03 Chinese
- 04 Iraqi
- 05 Guatemalan
- 06 French
- 07 American
- 08 Nicaraguan
- 09 Venezuelan
- 10 Filipino

MOST VICTIMIZED ORIGIN BY REGION

REGION	ORIGIN
Africa	Subsaharan Africans
Americas	Latin Americans
Asia	Southeast Asians
Europe	North Africans
Middle East	Middle Eastern

VICTIMS BY SECTOR



MOST VICTIMIZED SECTOR BY REGION

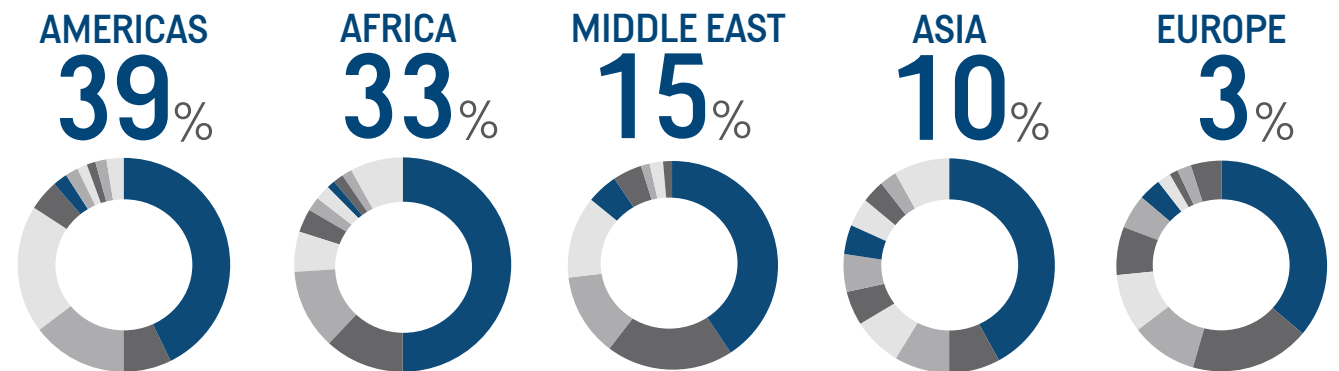
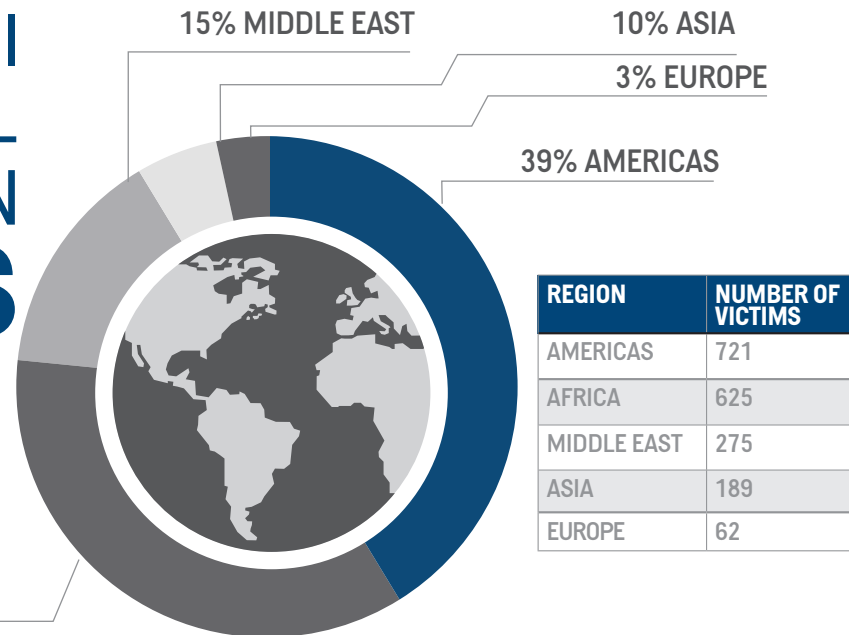
REGION	OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR
Africa	Migrants
Americas	Migrants
Asia	Unskilled
Europe	Migrants
Middle East	Migrants

DISCLAIMER: These statistics herein presented are the result of a compilation of kidnapping incidents involving foreign nationals only, which have been reported in the media and other open sources. The information contained and its results are therefore partial as result of the incomplete nature of open-source material. Thus, this report should be taken only as a reference of general trends, taking its limitations into consideration.

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

Global AND Regional GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF VICTIMS

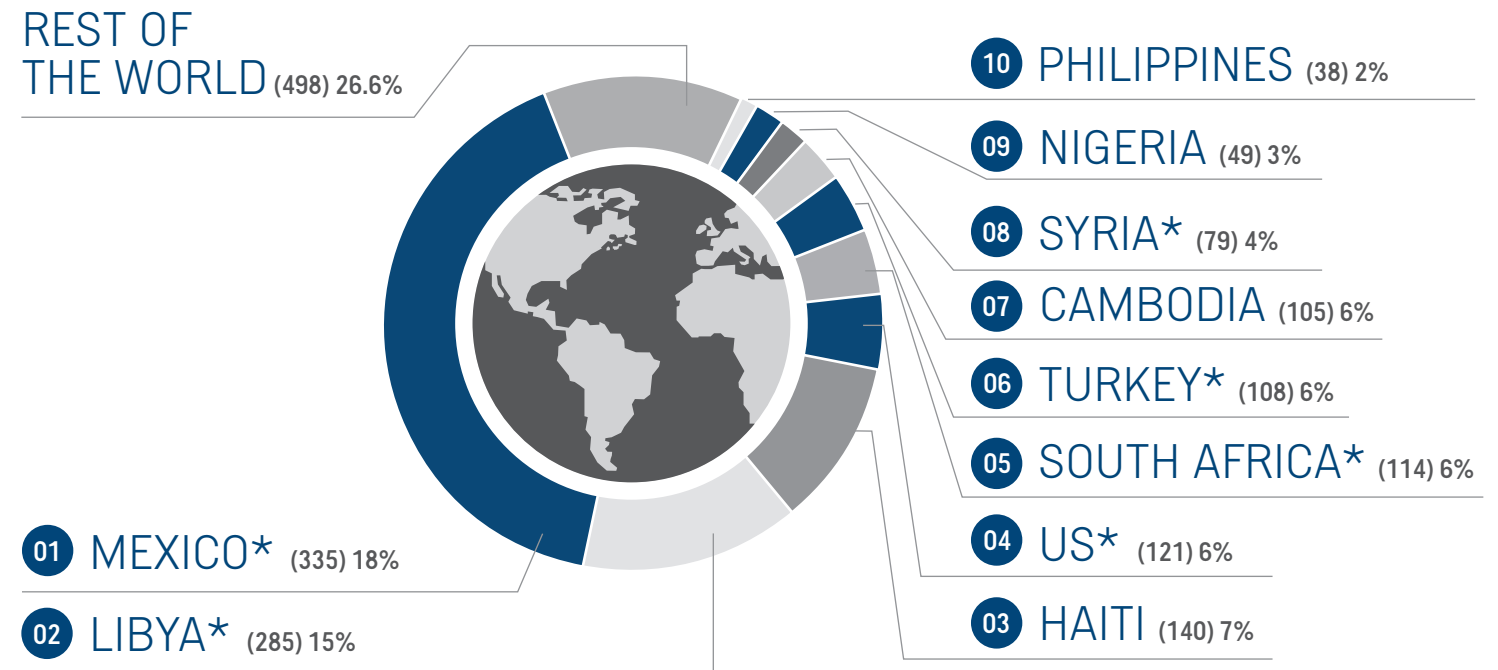
Statistics for 2021 are drawn from Constellis' record of 1,872 foreign nationals kidnapped worldwide. In 2020, Constellis registered a total of 1,193 foreigners abducted across the world.



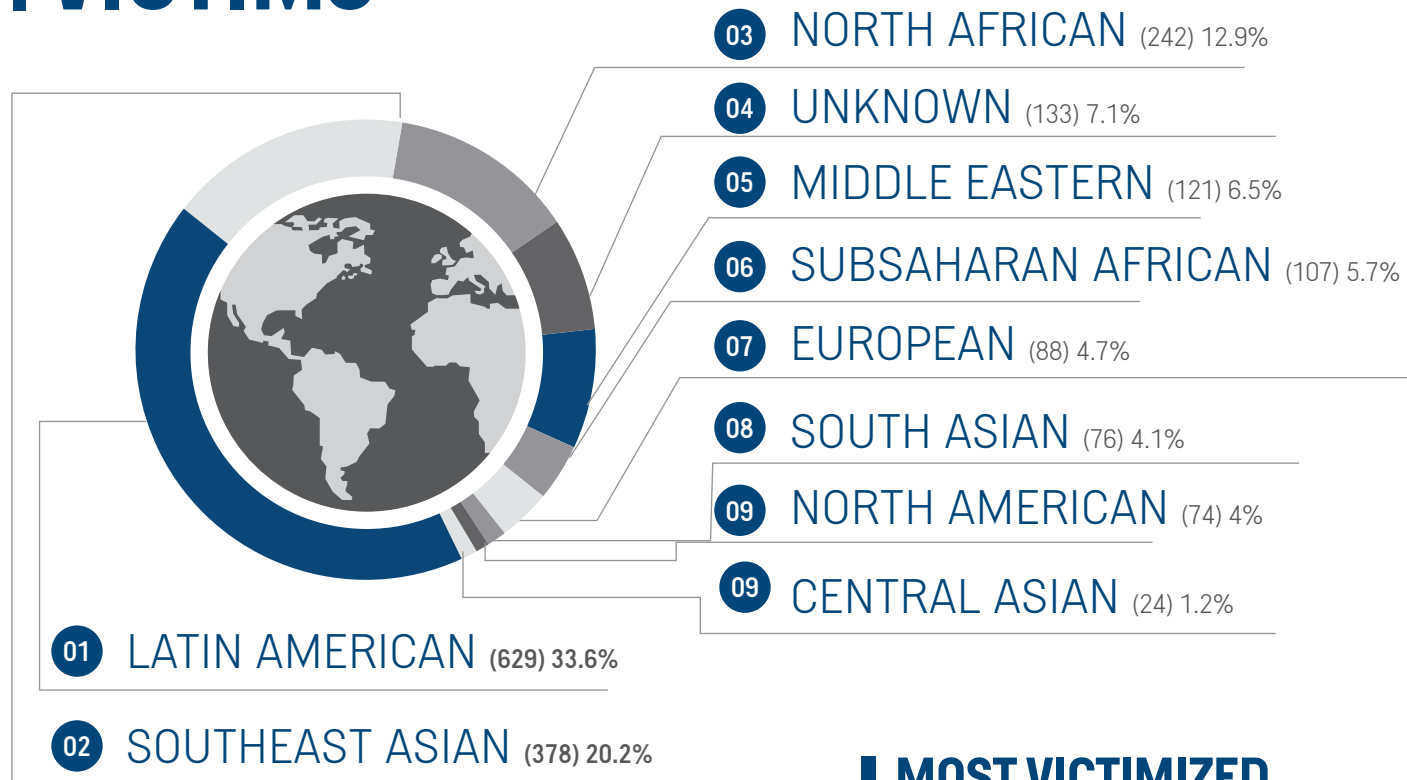
Region	Country	Number of Victims	Percentage
AMERICAS	Mexico*	335	46.5%
	Haiti	140	19.4%
	US*	121	16.8%
	Chile*	38	5.3%
	Colombia*	19	2.7%
	Venezuela	14	1.9%
	Brazil*	10	1.4%
	Paraguay*	9	1.2%
	Bolivia	6	0.8%
	Uruguay*	6	0.8%
AFRICA	Libya*	285	45.6%
	SouthAfrica*	114	18.2%
	Nigeria	49	7.8%
	Sao Tome	26	4.2%
	Benin	20	3.2%
	DRC	19	3.1%
	Equatorial G	15	2.4%
	Ethiopia	12	1.9%
	Mali	12	1.9%
	Mozambique	12	1.9%
MIDDLE EAST	Turkey*	108	39.3%
	Syria*	79	28.7%
	UAE	36	13.1%
	Iran	23	8.4%
	Iraq	11	4%
	Lebanon	7	2.6%
	Israel	2	0.7%
	Qatar	2	0.7%
	Yemen	2	0.7%
	Saudi Arabia	2	0.7%
ASIA	Cambodia	105	55.6%
	Philippines	38	20.1%
	China	11	5.8%
	Myanmar	8	4.2%
	Afghanistan	4	2.1%
	Malaysia	4	2.1%
	Pakistan	4	2.1%
	Thailand	3	1.6%
	India*	2	1.1%
	Kyrgyzstan	2	1.1%
EUROPE	Greece*	21	33.9%
	Spain*	14	22.6%
	Ukraine	6	9.7%
	Russia	5	8.1%
	Belarus	4	6.5%
	France	2	3.2%
	Malta	2	3.2%
	Belgium	1	1.6%
	Cyprus	1	1.6%
	Georgia	1	1.6%

(Number of Victims) * Including Migrants

TOP 10 COUNTRIES FOR THE KIDNAPPING OF FOREIGN CITIZENS JAN - DEC 2021



ORIGINS OF VICTIMS



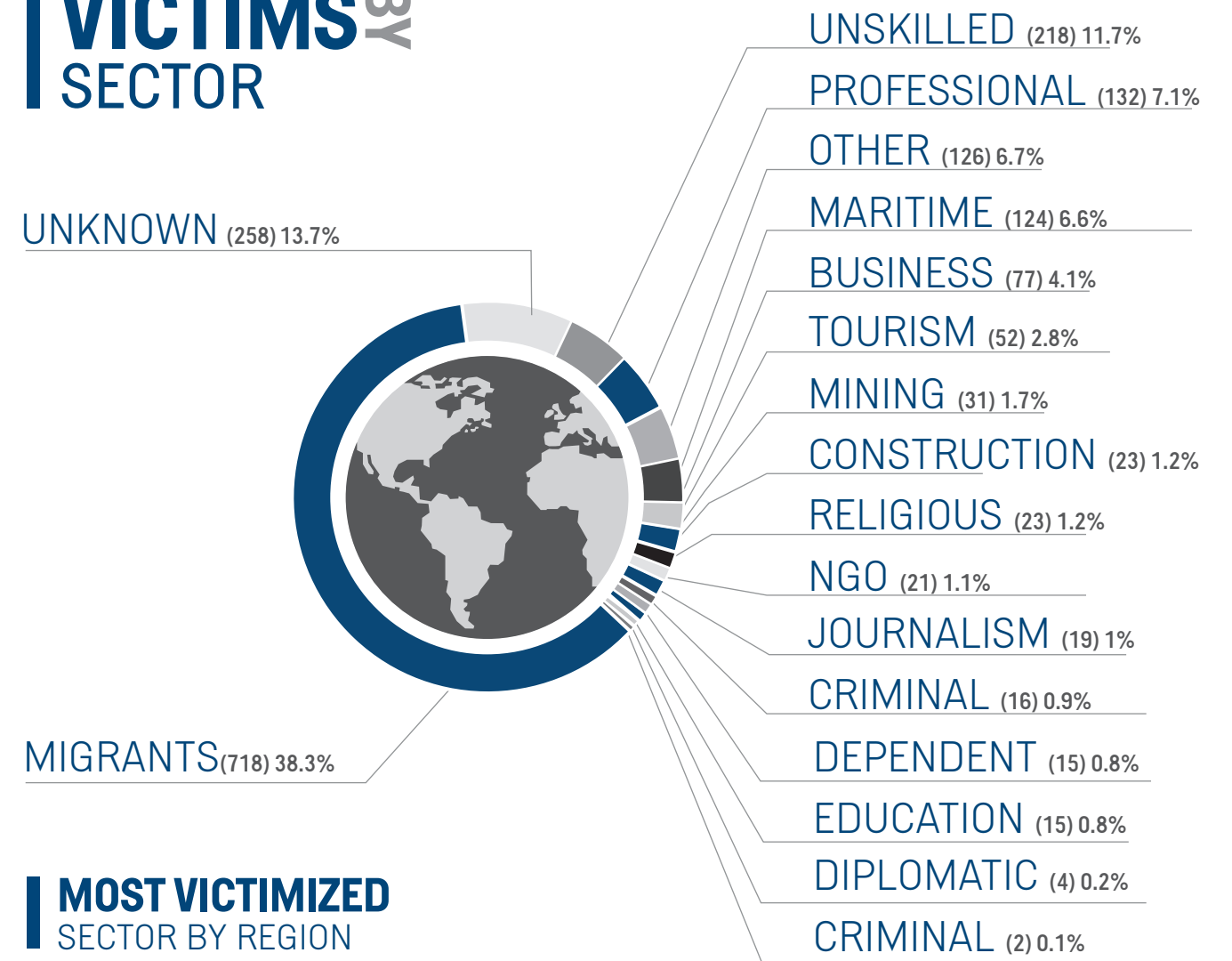
MOST VICTIMIZED SINGLE NATIONALITY

- 01 Chinese
- 02 Egyptian
- 03 Honduran
- 04 Thai
- 05 Ethiopian
- 06 Dominican
- 07 Venezuelan
- 08 Iraqi
- 09 Salvadorean
- 10 American

MOST VICTIMIZED ORIGIN BY REGION

REGION	ORIGIN
Africa	North Africans
Americas	Latin Americans
Asia	Southeast Asians
Europe	Europeans
Middle East	Southeast Asians

VICTIMS BY SECTOR



MOST VICTIMIZED SECTOR BY REGION

REGION	OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR
Africa	Migrants
Americas	Migrants
Asia	Unskilled
Europe	Migrants
Middle East	Professional

DISCLAIMER: These statistics herein presented are the result of a compilation of kidnapping incidents involving foreign nationals only, which have been reported in the media and other open sources. The information contained and its results are therefore partial as result of the incomplete nature of open-source material. Thus, this report should be taken only as a reference of general trends, taking its limitations into consideration.

GLOBAL PIRACY UPDATE

During November and December 2021, Constellis recorded 53 maritime events, indicating a 7% reduction compared to the previous two months. The decline was mostly attributed to a decrease in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), which over the reporting period recorded only 17 incidents (32% of all events). Meanwhile, Asia accounted for the majority of piracy attacks, with 49% of recorded incidents, though most of them comprised low-level thefts. Overall, in 2021, piracy decreased by 17% compared to 2020, with the most notable reduction having taken place in the GoG, due to increased efforts to prevent pirate attacks by both GoG coastal states and international actors. Although the increase in operations in the region has so far proven to be successful, it is still too early to assess whether this is a solution that will lead to a decline in piracy in the long run. By contrast, piracy incidents in Asia appear to be on the rise from previous years. Low-level thefts are anticipated to persist, particularly in the Singapore Straits, due to a lack of maritime patrols.

There were at least seven piracy incidents reported in the Americas during November and December, all of which comprised criminal boardings. Three of them were successful robberies, while the rest were attempted thefts. Notably, piracy attacks in South America increased by 20% in 2021, with an evident increase in violent attacks. Most incidents were recorded in Mexico, Haiti, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, the latter observing a more than two-fold increase in the number of attacks. Though most events remain armed robberies, two vessels were fired upon and a number of crew were held hostage in the course of the year. Incidents in the region are anticipated to continue to grow in number, given the worsening economic and security landscape.

One of the main concerns for shipping in the Middle East continues to be the tit-for-tat 'shadow war' between Israel and Iran. Limpet mines, drone and missile attacks, as well as hijackings, have been among common tactics utilised by Iranian forces against Israeli and allied interests. This reporting period, concerns grew after Israel's defence ministry said in late November that they had identified two drone bases in southern Iran, said to be used to launch armed drones against maritime targets in the Gulf of Oman.

Moreover, in late December, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) fired 16 surface-to-surface ballistic missiles as part of military drills meant to serve as a warning to Israel. Further compounding the situation in the region, a top naval IRGC officer claimed that nine service sailors had been killed during clashes with the US Navy; the timings or the location of the said clashes were not specified. Over the past year in the Strait of Hormuz, there have been multiple close approaches by IRGC attack boats against US Navy ships, which have responded with flares and warning shots, although neither side has ever reported a fatality in the confrontations. Though activity in the context of these conflicts has typically only affected vessels linked to the warring parties, commercial vessels are at potential risk.

The Gulf of Aden (GoA) observed only three maritime incidents over November-December 2021, two less than the previous reporting period. Albeit no kidnappings were reported, there was at least one suspicious approach. This took place off the coast of Yemen, on 1 November, when four boats carrying more than ten armed Somalis approached an unidentified Iranian tanker. The incident comes only two weeks after Iran reported another

approach by suspected Somali pirates on two of its oil tankers in the GoA. While piracy in the region has declined significantly over the last decade, these incidents indicate that Somali pirates continue to possess some capability and intent to carry out attacks. The current political, social, and economic instability, in addition to the worsening security situation inland, provide all the ingredients for this threat to continue and even grow. Moreover, it was announced on 3 December that the Somali government had only given authorisation for international naval forces to continue fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia for three more months, citing the absence of piracy attacks in the last four years. The imminent end of international operations off Somali waters could embolden pirates to renew activities in the near future.

Meanwhile, in the Red Sea, the Arab coalition thwarted two explosive attacks on 8 November and 23 December. Both incidents involved the use of explosive-laden boats, which were destroyed off the western coast of Yemen. The boats were probably placed by the Houthis, targeting Saudi vessels passing through the area. The increasing use of limpet mines and WBIEDs by the rebel group continues to pose a serious threat to commercial vessels passing through the region. Of note are concerns of further instability in the region, which increased when Houthi rebels hijacked a UAE vessel on 2 January. Such incidents could result in further hostile activity between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition, which could pose a threat to commercial vessels passing through Yemeni waters.

Despite the reduction in pirate activity in the GoG, there is an ongoing high threat to commercial vessels, as evidenced by the three kidnapping incidents recorded over November-December, which resulted in the abduction of 17 crew members. The overall reduction in pirate activity over 2021 is explained by an increase in maritime cooperation between various coastal states and international actors, which has also brought a significant presence of international navies to secure the region. This, along with Nigeria's 'Deep Blue' project, which has integrated Nigerian maritime security response for more effective protection of its waterways and infrastructure. Though it is too early to determine if this is a long-term trend, GoG states remain optimistic that piracy in the region will be kept suppressed during the upcoming peak season, which lasts until April. To achieve this goal, on 11 November, Nigeria, Ghana, Angola, Cameroon, Benin, and Ivory Coast adopted the Yaoundé Code of Conduct

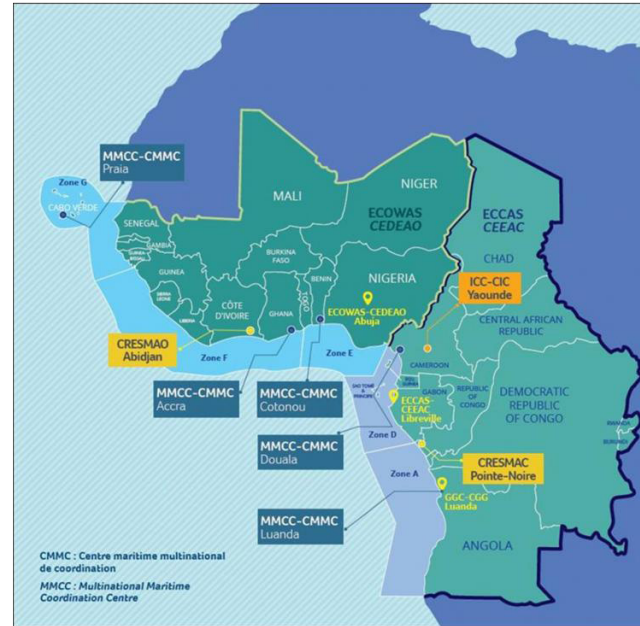
(YCC), providing a comprehensive regional maritime security framework. While this is another positive step, there remain a number of other issues which need to be addressed, such as the lack of a legal framework to prosecute pirates and the establishment of a maritime court for speedy dispensation of justice. The necessity for these was most recently evident in late November, when the Danish Navy set free three pirates they had apprehended on 24 November, as they were not able to prosecute them nor find a suitable court. Furthermore, there remains concern over piracy returning to the region when foreign navies eventually withdraw. Another emerging issue has been the displacement of the threat inland and towards inner waters as a result of the pirates' current limited capacity to operate offshore due to increased security in the region's waters.

Asia saw an increase of 25% in maritime crime, with 26 events recorded by Constellis over November and December. Out of the total, 88% were successful criminal boardings, of which half comprised low-profile thefts. As per pre-established trends, most activity took place in the Singapore Straits, particularly in the eastbound lane of the traffic separation scheme (TSS). In 2021, Constellis recorded at least 119 incidents in Asia, a marginal increase on the number of events reported in 2020 (7%). Maritime experts however fear that such incidents could continue to rise if no action is taken. Several low-level attacks have been recorded off the coasts of India and Bangladesh, typically targeting local fishing vessels or ships at anchorage. Pirates in the area may, however, venture into targeting larger vessels for greater profit, as evidenced on 15 December in Cox's Bazar. Given the enduring economic instability in the area, similar incidents cannot be discounted from taking place in the coming months. Meanwhile, tensions in the South China Sea remain a cause for concern, with incursions and skirmishes reported regularly. Though the threat of outward armed conflict remains limited, military activity in the area presents a substantial collateral risk to commercial shipping. As China has recently stepped up its pressure on Taiwan, activity by the US and its allies is expected to increase in the coming months, furthering the risk of future confrontations. In the Sulu-Celebes Seas and waters off Eastern Sabah, no abductions of crew have been reported since January 2020. However, a number of Abu Sayyaf Group leaders remain active, and as such the threat of abduction remains high.

CASES:

- ▶ On 2 January, the Houthis hijacked a commercial UAE-flagged landing craft ship, while on its way to the Saudi port of Jizan from Socotra Island. The Saudi-led coalition said the ship transported medical equipment, while the Houthis claimed the vessel had illegally entered Yemeni waters and was carrying out 'acts targeting the security and stability of the Yemeni people'. The rebels also published images purportedly showing the vessel's arms cargo. The vessel had 11 crew on board, including seven Indian nationals, all of whom remain in captivity at the time of writing.
- ▶ On 30 December, a Chinese fishing vessel came under pirate attack in Equatorial Guinea's Mbini area. The vessel was reportedly approached by a speedboat containing an unknown number of perpetrators. Six crew members were kidnapped, including the captain, while another is understood to have been killed. While the nationalities of the victims were not specified, it was reported that the vessel's crew comprised Ghanaian and Malian nationals. This was the third attack offshore from Equatorial Guinea in December 2021 and the 11th kidnapping incident in GoG that year.
- ▶ Four people armed with guns and knives boarded bulk carrier Lesedi Queen at Haiti's Port-Au-Prince Port on 11 December. Armed guards on board opened fire after spotting the assailants, prompting a gunfight. Two of the pirates died, while the rest managed to escape.

- ▶ On 15 December, the Bangladesh Coast Guard arrested 43 people during a piracy attack, targeting chemical oil tanker MV LADINDA 37 nautical miles from Cox's Bazar lighthouse. Two engine-driven boats were also seized from the pirates.



Map of the Yaoundé architecture. (Photo: European Union External Action Service)



(Photo: legaldesire.com)

2021 CYBER SECURITY OVERVIEW

The year 2021 saw an increase in cyber threats and associated costs across the board. Researchers revealed that corporate networks faced 50% more attacks per week over the course of the year when compared to 2020. Cyberattacks peaked toward the end of 2021, with 925 incidents registered per organisation, per week, globally. The most prevalent attack types included cryptojacking, supply chain attacks, and DDoS, though once again, ransomware was by far the most utilised malware by hackers. The financial impact also ballooned. The overall costs to remedy a ransomware attack more than doubled, from USD 761,106 in 2020, to USD 1.85 million in 2021. Meanwhile, the average cost of a data breach rose from USD 3.86 million to USD 4.24 million. The total cost of cyber-crime to global economies over 2021 is estimated to be in the region of USD 6 trillion.

Something else that characterised 2021 was the growth in high-profile attacks on critical infrastructure, underlining the disruption a cyberattack can bring on the physical world. A prime example of this was the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack in May 2021, which caused significant fuel disruptions in the eastern US. The top five industries affected over the year included education/research, government/military, communications, internet/managed service providers, and healthcare. While the majority of targeted organisations in 2020 and 2021 were located in Africa, the most significant growth in attacks

was observed in Europe and North America, which recorded 68% and 61% increases respectively.

Ransomware again emerged as the greatest cyber security threat over 2021. It has been estimated, that in the final few months of the year, at least one out of every 60 organisations worldwide was impacted by ransomware each week. Though double extortion attacks first arose in 2020, in which threat actors not only lock out networks but also threaten to leak exfiltrated data, such threats increased significantly in 2021. In 2020, only 8.7% of ransomware attacks involved double extortion techniques, while over 2021 this was the preferred methodology, observed in 81% of incidents over the first half of the year alone. Moreover, an evolution of this threat type surfaced in 2021; 'triple extortion ransomware', whereby ransom demands are also extended to a victim's clients or suppliers. It is assessed that part of the reason for these skyrocketing figures is the proliferation of ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) and hackers-for-hire. Analysts have estimated that as result of such services, there was a 935% increase in the number of organisations that had their data stolen and exposed on leak sites in 2021.

Running into its second year, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to shape the cyber security landscape in 2021. This led to increasing digitisation amongst number of and organisations, resulting in a greater businesses

FOCUS ARTICLE

THE ARMED CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA AND ITS REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS BY GABRIELA PIMPIREVA

This led to increasing digitisation amongst businesses and organisations, resulting in a greater number of facilities being brought online, as well as a growing reliance on cloud IT services. At the same time, much of the workforce that was forced to work from home has continued to work remotely, typifying the great shift in working practices for a lot of businesses. These developments in turn provided a greater surface area for hackers to exploit and target, thereby contributing to the spike in cyberattacks observed over the past year. On top of this, cybercriminals continued targeting the medical sector, already strained due to the pandemic, stealing vaccine data and holding hospitals to ransom. A noteworthy example was the ransomware attack against the Health Service Executive in Ireland in May 2021, which temporarily disrupted the country's healthcare system and cost millions of euros to rectify.

Another major trend observed over the year were supply chain attacks, which resulted in significant breaches to organisations. In this type of attack, cybercriminals target weak links in a supply chain, for example, within commercial software platforms and managed service providers. While not a new threat, two of the most serious intrusions on record emanated from such attacks in late 2020 and early 2021. These were the Microsoft Exchange Servers exploits, compromising at least 30,000 organisations in the US alone, and the SolarWinds attack, which led to the infection of numerous US government agencies. Both events are believed to have originated from state-backed hackers in China and Russia respectively. Given the magnitude and cascading impact of these supply chain attacks, the Biden administration introduced an Executive Order in late February 2021 to strengthen the US's supply chains. This requires software manufacturers and distributors to be fully aware of the contents of their products, particularly when they incorporate more vulnerable open-source software.

The year 2021 not only saw developments in the cyber domain, but also in how organisations and government agencies dealt with cyber incidents, both from a legal and enforcement perspective. For instance, new types of legal action were observed in the aftermath of attacks. A class-action lawsuit was launched against SolarWinds in January by the company's shareholders, who claimed that critical cyber security information was withheld from them in the lead up to the breach.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack, the US Department of Justice announced it had recovered USD 2.3 million of the USD 4 million ransom paid to the DarkSide hackers for a decryption key. This was the first time a cryptocurrency ransom payment had been seized, laying the framework for other actions to be taken against crypto exchanges and currencies facilitating cybercrime. A number of governments have meanwhile brought in legislation to prevent/deter the payment of ransoms, also making moves to disrupt and take legal action against state-sponsored threat actors.

Cryptocurrencies as a whole came under increased scrutiny over 2021, as over USD 7.7 billion in cryptocurrency was stolen from exchanges and cryptocurrency websites, representing an 81% increase from 2020. While the market swelled last year, such levels of online fraud and theft bring into question the security of the various associated platforms, as well as the credibility of digital currency as a whole. The largest cryptocurrency theft to date occurred in August 2021, when hackers stole USD 610 million from crypto community members of the blockchain site Poly Network. Further to this, approximately USD 200 million was stolen from each of the platforms PancakeBunny and Bitmart, in May and December 2021 respectively.

Into 2022, ransomware will inevitably continue to proliferate given how lucrative it has proved to be for cyber criminals. With RaaS and hackers-for-hire on the rise, less tech-savvy criminals will also increasingly seek to diversify their revenue streams – exacerbating this already-colossal phenomenon. Meanwhile, most sophisticated ransomware actors are becoming more aggressive and proving capable of bypassing even the most secure and up-to-date defences, painting a grim picture for the coming year. Further compounding the issue will be added threats from state-backed hacking and cyber espionage, as well as the ever-growing exposure linked to increased reliance on cloud computing and IoT devices. With governments and cyber security providers seemingly unable to keep pace, all records are again expected to be broken by the end of the year. To limit the devastating economic impact of these attacks, regulators and lawmakers will do their utmost to introduce further legislation targeting threat actors and to block or deter the payment of ransoms.



TPLF fighters outside Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray region. (Photo: The New York Times)

Once deemed to be one of Africa's greatest success stories, both politically and economically, Ethiopia is today engulfed in a bloody conflict between the federal government and various rebel movements. The fighting has left more than 20 million people in need of aid, with many fearing the ripple effect on neighbouring countries and Africa's stability as a whole.

While issues of ethnic self-determinism and civil unrest have long formed part of the country's domestic political setting, Ethiopia was considered one of the most prosperous states on the African continent due to its expanding economy from the mid-1990s to 2015. Despite doing relatively well financially and being

regarded as a success with enormous and untapped economic potential, the country remained as one of the poorest countries in the world. Moreover, state institutions remained under control of the Tigray minority. The premature death of Tigrayan Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2012 led to calls for government reform and a move towards a more inclusive society. This, as well as ongoing ethnic conflict, led millions of Ethiopians to stage mass anti-government protests between 2016 and 2018, accusing the Tigray-led government of corruption, persecution of opponents, and human rights violations. The anti-government movement succeeded in 2018, with the formation of a new government headed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, an Oromo,

who consolidated power by creating the Prosperity Party (PP), grouping all the main ethnic-based political parties into one. However, some parties refused to join the PP, including the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), who objected to moving the country away from its federal system of ethnically-based region states to a centralised government.

Abiy's initial endeavours appeared successful, even winning him a Nobel Peace Prize for achieving peace with Eritrea on 9 July 2018, ending two decades of violent border disputes. However, despite his efforts to unite Ethiopia's different ethnicities, strong divisions remained. Tensions reached a turning point in September 2020, when he decided to postpone federal and regional elections due to the coronavirus pandemic. The TPLF went ahead and ran elections in the Tigray region regardless, in defiance of federal authority, claiming the delay was unconstitutional. For its part, the federal government ruled the Tigray election illegal and it was thus not recognised. The armed conflict began when forces loyal to the TPLF attacked a military base in Tigray on 4 November 2020, prompting the government to deploy troops to the region. While at first government forces seemed in control of the situation after taking command of Tigray's capital, Mekelle, the TPLF endured. By the end of June 2021, TPLF soldiers had managed to retake Mekelle, later pushing towards the neighbouring Amhara and Afar regions, despite the fact that the Ethiopian military received support from Eritrean troops. Simultaneously, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), based in the southern Oromia region, along with seven other smaller rebel groups, decided to ally with the TPLF, eventually forming an opposition alliance named the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces (UFEFCF).

The new alliance threatened to take the capital and oust Abiy from power, prompting the mobilisation of federal forces in Addis Ababa. With concerns of an impending attack on the capital mounting, in November 2021 the Prime Minister declared a state of emergency and called on Addis residents to prepare to protect their neighbourhoods from rebel intruders. At the same time, the TPLF took control of the cities of Dessie and Kombolcha, located approximately 250km north of Addis Ababa, in the country's Amhara region. The OLA also claimed to have successfully advanced

towards the capital, pushing from the south. With the conflict escalating, both the US and the UK issued evacuation calls to their citizens in mid-November, advising people to leave Ethiopia while commercial flights were still available.

As of January 2022, tensions in the country remain elevated. In December 2021, the TPLF withdrew to Tigray as a result of large-scale government operations that included drone strikes, which reportedly killed dozens of civilians. Despite falling back, the TPLF has continued to demonstrate its ability to conduct offensives. For instance, on 25 January 2022, the group captured the towns of Megalle and Abala in the Afar region, also cutting off humanitarian aid routes in the area. Meanwhile, amid reported human rights violations by the Abiy government, several countries have imposed sanctions on Ethiopia and its leaders, including the US, which in January 2022 decided to exclude the country from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Furthermore, sanctions were also imposed in late 2021 on Eritrea by the US and some European countries for its involvement in the Ethiopian conflict. There have been numerous calls by the international community, especially from within the European Union and the US, for a ceasefire and talks between the rebel alliance and the federal government.

While some speculate that the threat to seize control of the capital was merely a tactic to force Abiy into negotiations or to step down, others believe that an UFEFCF advance on Addis Ababa remains plausible. One thing is certain: fighting in the capital, which is home to the African Union (AU) headquarters and various international delegations, is an outcome many Ethiopians and international stakeholders do not wish to witness. Further escalation of the conflict could also have serious implications for regional security. If fighting takes place in the capital, Ethiopian troops that form part of the joint AU-UN mission fighting Islamist militants in Somalia could be forced to withdraw and return to Addis Ababa, hampering counter-terrorism efforts. Washington is especially concerned, given that the Ethiopian military plays a significant role in the fight against al-Shabaab, possessing better trained and equipped forces than their Somali counterparts. In this scenario, militant actors could feasibly take advantage of the security vacuum to gain territory and expand their influence, leading to further regional instability.

Developments in Ethiopia also have serious repercussions for neighbouring Kenya and Sudan, with the influx of refugees being of particular concern. Increased migration into Sudan could further worsen relations with Ethiopia, which are already precarious as a result of the border dispute over the Fashaga area. It is also worth noting that Sudan sought to take advantage of the Ethiopian conflict by moving into this disputed area, while Ethiopian forces were distracted by fighting in the north. Furthermore, Ethiopia has accused Sudan of supporting the TPLF. In particular, the Ethiopian government claims that Sudan assisted the rebels in an attempted attack on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which lies east of the border with Sudan. Sudanese officials have denied the accusations. As a result of the strained relationship, in August 2021, Ethiopia rejected Sudan's mediation in the Tigray crisis, arguing that it was a 'biased party'. Kenya has also attempted to play a mediation role to deescalate the conflict, fearing that an escalation in fighting will directly impact Kenya's national security. Uganda too has attempted to mediate, with President Yoweri Museveni calling East African bloc leaders to a meeting to discuss regional developments in November 2021.

Although many believe that a peace deal between the rebel alliance and the Abiy regime has the best chance of success, it is unclear if the TPLF will agree to sit at the negotiating table. Meanwhile, some regional

powers are opposed to a peace deal with the rebels, particularly Eritrea, whose leaders have hinted they are against Ethiopian reconciliation, given its long-standing dispute with the TPLF. Despite this, after having come under intense international scrutiny, in January 2022 the Ethiopian government offered an olive branch by releasing several high-profile political prisoners, including TPLF leaders, thus paving the way for peace talks. However, some government critics called the move a publicity stunt, as it came soon after the government launched an air attack that killed at least 56 internally displaced people near the Eritrean border. One certainty, however, is that a protracted civil war in the second-most populous country in Africa is the least favourable outcome for all, especially for the people of Ethiopia, who are already experiencing famine, displacement and increasing levels of violence. Yet, to move forward peacefully, Ethiopian leaders will need to address the country's deep-rooted structural problems and find a way to accommodate competing ideological perspectives. This could also include agreeing on a division of power between the centre and the regions, despite Abiy's efforts to unite the different ethnic groups. Moreover, in order to agree on a vision for consensual governance, the federal government will have to lift the designations of the TPLF and OLA as terrorist groups, while in return, the groups must acknowledge the legitimacy of federal jurisdiction, something they are not yet prepared to do.



Aftermath of a government airstrike in Mekele, on 20 October 2021. (Photo: The Hindu)

ABOUT CONSTELLIS

Constellis is a leading provider of risk management, humanitarian, social intelligence, training and operational support services to government and commercial clients throughout the world. Operating in over 45 countries, Constellis' 20,000 employees bring unparalleled dedication and passion for creating a safer world by upholding the highest standards of compliance, quality, and integrity.

Constellis' forward thinking services span a broad range of synergistic solutions, from the boardroom to the project site, encompassing risk governance, organisational resilience, business continuity management, crisis management, travel security, global tracking, training, protective security, life support, logistics and specialist support such as K9 services and UAV systems.

At Constellis, our number one mission is to secure success for our customers. Constellis combines the legacy capabilities and experience of ACADEMI, Triple Canopy, Centerra, Olive Group, OmniPlex, AMK9, Edinburgh International, Strategic Social and all of their affiliates. The consolidation of companies under the Constellis name allows our clients to rely on one single partner and project experience that spans the globe.

For more information about Constellis, please visit our website at: www.constellis.com

Constellis' intelligence analysts and security consultants produce bespoke political and security reports, threat assessments and security risk assessments to inform decisions and to protect people and assets across the world.

CONTACT

For more information on this report please contact:

BEATRIZ SANCHEZ-GARRIDO
Information Analysis Manager
beatriz.sanchez-garrido@constellis.com

Crisis Response Emergency Numbers:

24/7 EMERGENCY HOTLINE
+1 844 345 5877
crs@constellis.com

GENERAL INQUIRIES
+1 252 435 0747
crisisresponseinfo@constellis.com

For all inquiries on Constellis' advisory & consulting services please contact:

MARK ALLISON
Vice President, Crisis & Risk Services
Mobile: +44 7791 495 057
mark.allison@constellis.com

THE INFORMATION IN THIS REPORT IS PROVIDED "AS IS" WITHOUT ANY WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, OR NON-INFRINGEMENT. CONSTELLIS, MAKES NO REPRESENTATION OR WARRANTY THAT THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS REPORT WILL BE TIMELY OR ERROR-FREE. IN NO EVENT SHALL CONSTELLIS BE LIABLE FOR ANY DAMAGES WHATSOEVER, INCLUDING ANY DIRECT, INDIRECT, SPECIAL, CONSEQUENTIAL OR ANY OTHER DAMAGES, ARISING OUT OF OR IN CONNECTION WITH THE USE OF OR RELIANCE ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE WITHIN THIS REPORT. IN USING THIS INFORMATION, YOU ARE USING IT AT YOUR OWN RISK AND AGREE TO THE LIMITATIONS AND DISCLAIMERS PROVIDED HERE.

 www.constellis.com

DISCLAIMER: IN NO EVENT SHALL OLIVE GROUP BE LIABLE FOR ANY DAMAGES WHATSOEVER, INCLUDING ANY DIRECT, INDIRECT, SPECIAL, CONSEQUENTIAL OR ANY OTHER DAMAGES, ARISING OUT OF OR IN CONNECTION WITH THE USE OF OR RELIANCE ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE WITHIN THIS REPORT. IN USING THIS INFORMATION, YOU AGREE TO THE LIMITATIONS AND DISCLAIMERS PROVIDED HERE.