

KIDNAP+ RANSOM INSIGHT

GLOBAL SUMMARY

FOCUS
ARTICLE

**KIDNAP: CRISIS MANAGEMENT
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

Q1 2022
REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY

This issue of Constellis' Kidnap for Ransom Insight Report covers global kidnapping incidents and trends for the months of Q1 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 Q1 2022 is included on page 13, which displays kidnap for ransom trends by region, and 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 12 month period from Q2 2021 to Q1 2022 can be found on page 17.

The Global Piracy and Maritime Security Update gives an overview of piracy and other maritime security threats in selected regions, providing trend analysis for Q1 2022, as well as sample cases over these months, to illustrate identified trends.

This Focus Article explores crisis management preparedness and response to kidnapping incidents. As today's crises tend to be more complex, organisations must ensure that they are prepared to respond effectively. Investing in preparedness activity, such as crisis management training and creating a comprehensive crisis management plan, is essential to employers, not only in order to fulfil 'duty of care' owed to staff, but also to limit potential harm to their organisations.

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GLOBAL OVERVIEW

AMERICAS

Over Q1 2022, Constellis recorded the kidnapping of 53 foreign nationals in the Americas, nearly half that seen in Q4 2021. This decrease was mainly explained by a notable reduction of foreign victims in Haiti. This however should be interpreted as a result of the reduced presence of foreign workers in the country, as many organisations have suspended activities due to ongoing insecurity. Indeed, Haiti remains the most dangerous and fragile country in the Americas. Since the assassination of President Moïse, the political, economic and security crises in the country remain acute, with no prospects of improvement in the short to medium term. In particular, kidnappings remain on the increase. According to the local NGO Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights, at least 225 kidnappings have been registered in Haiti over Q1 2022, an escalation of 58% on the same period in 2021. The organisation also reports that ransom demands are increasing and hostages are now spending more time in captivity. As a result, mass, violent, civil unrest has become more common in recent months, demanding that the caretaker government of Ariel Henry does more to address gang violence and the relentless kidnappings.

CASES:

- ▶ On 6 February, Evangelical Pastor Lochard Rémy was kidnapped by members of the '400 Mawozo' gang in Tabarre, Port-au-Prince, while on his way to officiate at his church. According to local media, the gang demanded USD 2 million for his release. Rémy was released 22 days later, allegedly following three ransom payments. The amount and origin of the funds were not ascertained. Lochard Rémy was the latest in a series of abductions targeting church leaders in the city over the past year. Among the victims was also Pasteur Mathieu Chérine, who was killed resisting a kidnapping attempt on 21 January in Delmas.



Haitians protesting the increasing insecurity in Port-au-Prince, on 29 March 2022. (Photo: France24)

Mexico once again led the statistics for kidnappings of foreigners in the Americas. The great majority of victims remain Central American migrants on their way to the US. According to a recent study by a Salvadorian newspaper utilising data collected by Mexican and international organisations, about 20,000 migrants are kidnapped yearly in Mexico. It has been estimated that this activity garners around USD 250 million dollars a year for Mexican gangs, many of which are linked to larger cartels, such as Los Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel. A number of American tourists travelling by road through northern corridors have also fallen prey to these groups.

- ▶ On 13 February, the Mexican Army rescued 15 people from a safe house of the Cartel del Noroeste (CDN - a splinter of Los Zetas) in the border city of Nuevo Laredo, following joint investigations by the Mexican authorities

and the FBI, initiated on 8 February. The victims comprised an American national, 12 Mexicans, and two Hondurans. No criminals were reportedly found at the location during the raid. The circumstances of the kidnapping of the American citizen are unclear.

Previously, on 3 November 2021, two other American nationals were kidnapped in the same area by suspected CDN members while on their way to a meeting. The two women and their driver were forced to stop their vehicle after being shot at by cartel members in an SUV. Though they tried to escape,

they were intercepted, physically assaulted, and taken away. One of the women and the driver allegedly managed to jump out of the vehicle and escape soon after. The other victim remains missing. According to the survivors, the assailants accused them of being members of a rival cartel.

Over the last few years, the tri-border area between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, has become a prominent international hub for organised crime, including smuggling, trafficking in drugs and arms, money laundering, as well as kidnapping. Brazilian gangs have found in Paraguay a new safe heaven, corrupting government officials and creating alliances with local groups, including the militant Paraguayan People's Army (EPP) and even indigenous communities. In particular, Brazil's most powerful gang, the First Capital Command (PCC), has made remarkable inroads in the country, controlling much of the border between Paraguay and Brazil. In this context, kidnappings have seen a notable upsurge in the region, with businesspeople, particularly those in the agricultural sector, as the main targets.

CASES:

- ▶ On 11 February, Brazilian farmer Carmo Valdecir Costa and his family were kidnapped by three armed men who invaded their farm in a rural locality of Paraguay's Capitán Bado, near the border with Brazil. The group was released after seven hours in captivity, following a ransom payment made by their relatives. Though the amount paid is unknown, it was reported that one of the relatives had withdrawn USD 150,000 from a local bank that day. The family did not report the incident to the police.
- ▶ The wife of Jonas Pinheiro, the owner of a construction business in the Paraguayan border city of Pedro Juan Caballero, was kidnapped on the Brazilian side of the border, in the city of Ponta Porã, on 5 February. It is believed that after the abduction the criminals crossed the border into Paraguay with the victim. According to local media, the kidnapers demanded BRL 5 million (almost USD 1.1 million) for the release of Celia Donizete de Moraes. The woman regained her freedom 30 hours later, under unknown circumstances. According to Brazilian authorities, no ransom payment took place. A woman was arrested the same day in Mato Grosso do Sul, for her suspected participation in the abduction. The authorities believe the mastermind is a man residing in Capitán Bado, Paraguay.
- ▶ The body of Kazakh businessman Mikhael Vasilievich was found dismembered at a vacant lot in the locality of Ypané, on the outskirts of the Paraguayan capital, Asunción, on 13 February. The foreigner, locally known as 'the Russian', was kidnapped by two Bolivian men from his business in the city of Emboscada, on 3 February. According to investigations, the victim was taken to a rented property in the city of San Antonio, where he was killed the next day. The suspects were arrested on 11 February in the city of Luque, as they tried to fly out of the country. One of the men confessed to the crime and told the police where to find the body. The reason behind the abduction was an outstanding debt that Vasilievich had with a third person who hired the Bolivians to carry out the deed. The mastermind has not been identified.
- ▶ On 30 March, Argentinian police detained seven men in La Quiaca, accused of kidnapping a Bolivian man, on 18 March. The incident was reported to the authorities after the victim's father received videos of his son being tortured by the kidnapers, who demanded USD 50,000 for his release. Investigations revealed that the victim worked as a drug mule for the suspects and that the abduction was linked to this activity. The victim remained missing until 12 April, when he was found by Interpol personnel at a property in Bolivia, where he was hiding after his abduction. It is unclear how the man reached Bolivia.

EUROPE

Europe observed a decrease of 35% in the number of foreign victims recorded, in comparison to the last quarter of 2021. This is explained by an absence of reports of mass abductions of migrants at entry points on the continent, such as Greece or Spain, where these incidents are normally documented. This quarter, reporting was dominated by incidents taking place in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Since their invasion of the country on 24 February, Russian forces have been allegedly using kidnapping and detention as a tool of war, aimed at intimidating the population. Politicians, journalists and activists have been the main targets, as well as their close relations. However, the abduction of other ordinary citizens has also been reported. At least 36 cases of civilian detentions were verified by the UN by 25 March, with families often denied any information about the fate of those being held. According to separate statements by the Ukrainian authorities, as of 6 April at least 14 Ukrainian mayors have been detained by Russian forces since the start of the invasion, while over 2,000 children have been reported kidnapped (as of 25 March). Additionally, a number of foreign nationals have been arrested in neighbouring countries, accused of spying for Russia.

CASES:

- ▶ On 22 March, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on social media that Russian forces had detained three Israeli-Ukrainian dual citizens in Melitopol. She identified the victims as Tetyana Kumok and her parents, Vira and Mykhailo Kumok, who were allegedly kidnapped on 21 March. The three were part of a larger group of abductees including a number of local journalists. According to subsequent reporting, the Kumoks were released on the afternoon of 22 March. Tetyana Kumok said they were freed after they were made to sign a form promising that they would not take part in any future protests against the Russian invasion. She was allegedly told by her captors that they had been arrested for 'making too much noise in the city'. Though they were not harmed, the soldiers kept their phones.
- ▶ Mozambican businessman Álvaro Cossa, who had been living in Ukraine for over 30 years, was kidnapped by unidentified people in Kyiv while on his way to a supermarket on 9 March. The Mozambican diplomatic authorities confirmed the incident the same day, saying that they were in contact with the victim's family, as well as with Ukrainian and Russian authorities. Two days later, Cossa's relatives announced that the businessman had been released and was in good health. No details about the circumstances of his abduction and release were made public. The motives for the abduction remain unknown.

- ▶ On 27 February, Spanish journalist Pablo González was arrested in Przemysl, Poland, near the border with Ukraine, on suspicion of conducting intelligence activities for Russia. González's wife said she was told by Spanish authorities that Pablo had been detained on suspicion of working against Ukrainian interests and would be held in custody for up to three months while investigations are ongoing. She however believes that he was arrested for being an 'inconvenient' journalist. She also claimed that her husband has not had access to legal assistance. This was confirmed by the family's lawyer, who also said the journalist is being held in Rzeszow prison, accused of espionage. Meanwhile, the Polish authorities claimed that the suspect had carried out operations for Russia, travelling in Europe and elsewhere under the cover of his profession. Allegedly, González was planning to go to Ukraine at the time of his detention.



A convoy of Russian armoured vehicles moving along a highway in Crimea in January 2022 (Photo: Daily Sabah)

Elsewhere in Europe, incidents relating to criminal activities, particularly drug trafficking, continued to be reported, in many instances involving foreign victims. Events such as high-profile kidnappings, express kidnappings and hostage situations, were also recorded. However, these remain limited in number, in comparison to other regions of the world.

CASES:

- ▶ On 28 January, a young foreign man showed up at a police station in Zaragoza, Spain, to report he had been kidnapped, extorted and threatened for two days. He named three individuals accompanying him as the perpetrators. Reportedly, the victim made the criminals believe that his ID was being renewed at the station and he needed to retrieve it. The police arrested the alleged kidnapers - two Spanish adults and a Romanian minor - on the spot. The authorities suspect that the incident was linked to a drugs debt, involving the Latin American gangs 'Black Panthers' and 'Don't Play', which had recently been involved in knife clashes in the Aragón capital. It is unclear if the victim is also a gang member.
- ▶ On 22 February, a five-hour hostage situation was reported at an Apple store located in Amsterdam's Leidseplein area. A man carrying a handgun and an automatic rifle, and wearing what appeared to be an explosive vest, entered the shop and held one of the patrons, a British national, at gunpoint. Threatening to kill the man, the attacker managed to get hold of the other 70 people present at the establishment. He then demanded EUR 200 million in different cryptocurrencies to free the hostages. After three hours, the man agreed to release all but the initial hostage. Two hours later, the victim managed to escape while the assailant unlocked the doors to get a drink. As the criminal tried to retrieve the hostage, the assailant was subdued by the authorities. The police are currently investigating whether the man acted alone or had any accomplices.
- ▶ On 13 March, a young man was kidnapped by six individuals from his home in Limoges, France. The men were reportedly looking for his brother, who allegedly owed them a large sum of money for a drugs consignment. As he did not know his brother's whereabouts, the group took the young man hostage and held him at a forest in Beaune-les-Mines. Soon after the young man's mother reported the incident, the police found his location and arrested the six kidnapers. The victim reported that the criminals had forced him to withdraw EUR 900 from an ATM before taking him to the forest. There, he was threatened with bodily harm if his brother did not pay his debt.
- ▶ On 10 March, three local nationals were remanded in custody for the abduction of businessman Georgios Kyparissis in Attica, Greece, in December 2021. Among the arrested was the ringleader of the group, who reportedly targeted the businessman by monitoring his social media. Kyparissis was held for 65 days and was released on 4 March at a deserted area of Tatoi after his family allegedly paid a ransom of EUR 800,000. The perpetrators were arrested by Greek police the next day and part of the ransom was recovered.



Hostage-taker (left) holding a British man captive inside an Apple store in Amsterdam (Photo: South China Morning Post)

MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East observed nearly 50% less foreign kidnap victims in the first quarter of 2022. In this instance, the decrease was mostly related to a lesser number of reported unlawful detentions of Iraqi refugees at camps in north-eastern Syria. It is unclear whether the Kurdish militias in control of the area instead focused on alleged local terror suspects or this was due to under-reporting. This reporting period, developments in Yemen took centre-stage, with a number of foreign nationals kidnapped by suspected Al-Qaeda militants in the country. Such a situation has not been observed since at least 2014, when alleged Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants attempted to abduct two American nationals from a barbershop in Sanaa. While AQAP initially benefited from the political and security vacuum created by the civil war in the country, the group was eventually reduced to a few pockets of territory in southern and central Yemen. This was the result of successful counter-terrorism operations carried out by the Arab Coalition in partnership with the US and local tribal forces, alongside major clashes with the competing unit of the Islamic State in the country. However, an increase in AQAP activity has been observed over the past year due to various factors, including a notable decrease in US airstrikes, which reduced from a high in 2015-2018, to a dozen over the next two years, and only two in 2021. The withdrawal of UAE forces and the ongoing political instability in southern Yemen, as well as the current focus of the warring parties on the Marib front, have also been key contributing factors to the group's attempted revival.

CASES:

- ▶ On 11 February, five UN staff members were kidnapped in the southern Yemeni governorate of Abyan while returning to the port city of Aden, having conducted a field mission. The UN confirmed the incident but declined to comment. Yemeni officials said the kidnapped group comprised four Yemenis and a foreign national. Though the foreign victim was not named by official sources, international media identified him as Bangladeshi national AKM Sufiul Anam, who worked for the UN as a security officer. While no group has claimed the attack, Yemeni media reported that AQAP is suspected of being behind the abduction. Tribal leaders are said to be negotiating with the abductors to secure the workers' release. However, tribal mediation has reportedly not been successful as the group is demanding a USD 5 million ransom and the release of a number of militants imprisoned by the Yemeni government.
- ▶ An armed group kidnapped two foreign Médecines Sans Frontières (MSF) workers, a German national and a Mexican, in the government-controlled Hadramaut governorate, on 5 March. MSF confirmed the incident, saying they had lost contact

with some staff, without providing further details. According to a local security source, the aid workers were ambushed at a fake checkpoint when travelling in Khoushem Al-Ain. No group has claimed the abduction, though Yemeni security forces have claimed that the gunmen are linked to AQAP. After this incident, MSF announced the closure of some of its humanitarian activities in Marib.



AQAP militants in Aden, Yemen. (Photo: The Defense Post)

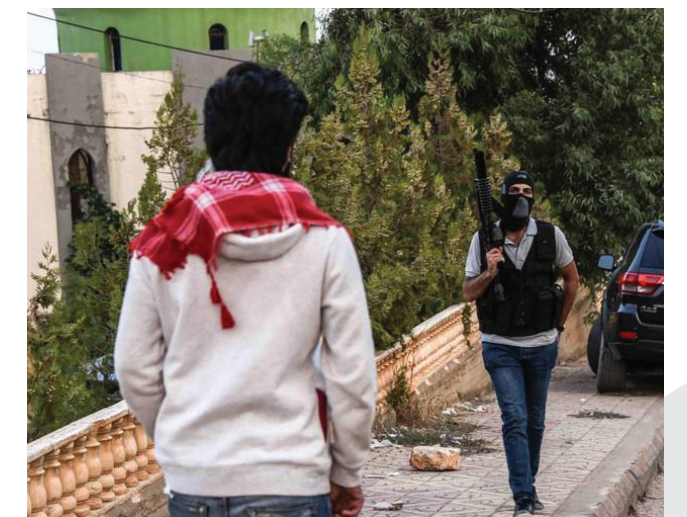
- ▶ On 23 February 2022, unidentified gunmen kidnapped a UN employee of British citizenship while he was working at the Kharaz Refugee Camp, in Lahij province, Yemen. The abductors reportedly demanded a ransom in digital currency.

Lebanon's Bekaa region endures as a hotspot for kidnapping in the Middle East. In particular, the city of Baalbek is a well-known hub for organised criminal gangs, given its proximity to the porous Syrian border and a lack of government control over the territory. There, authority is exerted by local tribes, who also dominate the criminal landscape. As such, tribal violence is also common, often observed in cycles. Indiscriminate shootings, targeted killings and kidnappings are usual features of this violence. These clans also have a significant presence on the Syrian side of the border, meaning that violence frequently spills over. The situation in the area is said to be steadily deteriorating, as an increasing number of criminals are reportedly settling there. This not only augmenting pressure on the authorities, but is also creating tensions among the established clans.

CASES:

- ▶ Syrian expatriates continue to be a common target for kidnap gangs in Western Lebanon. In a recent example, on 1 March, a Syrian man was abducted in front of his business in the Al-Massiya neighbourhood of the city of Baalbek, in the Bekaa Valley. Local security forces have opened an investigation to determine the circumstances of the incident.
- ▶ On 16 April, an Egyptian TV production crew filming a Ramadan series in the Bekaa region was attacked on the Rayak-Baalbek highway in Taybeh district. Initial reports suggested that a number of people, including Egyptian actor Ahmed Saadani, had been kidnapped. It was however later clarified that only one person, an Egyptian accountant, had been taken. The man was rescued in an army raid on a property in the Al-Sharawneh area of the city of Baalbek, later the same day. One suspected kidnapper was arrested in the operation and a number of his associates are being sought. According to some local media, the gang had been monitoring the accountant throughout the crew's time in the area, given that he was known to carry money for the crew's expenses. Other sources claimed that the actual targets of the kidnappers were Egyptian actors Menna Shalaby and Iham Shaheen, who have a very high profile across the Arab world, and for whom large ransoms could be potentially obtained.
- ▶ Though the rate of kidnapping in Turkey is moderate, incidents involving migrants are not uncommon, given the country's significance as a bridge between Asia and Europe. On 23 February, Turkish police rescued five individuals who were held against their will for a week by an Afghan gang in the Arnavutkoy area of Istanbul.

The victims comprised two local nationals and three Syrians, who had been abducted while seeking to be smuggled into Italy. No arrests were made as the criminals had already fled, leaving the hostages tied up at the safe house. The gang, consisting of nine people, reportedly tortured the hostages and demanded a ransom of EUR 6,000 from their families. The incident was reported on 21 February by the brother of one of the victims, after receiving a ransom call from the kidnappers.



A member of the Chamas clan responding to gun fire at a clan meeting in Baalbek, Lebanon. (Photo: The National)

AFRICA

Africa maintained levels of kidnapping consistent with the previous quarter. Accounting for 48% of the total number of foreign victims recorded globally this reporting period, the region ascended to the top of Constellis' ranking. In continuation of a trend observed since the second half of 2021, South Africa was the top kidnapping hotspot on the continent. There, businesspeople of South Asian origin continued to be the main targets of organised criminal gangs, many of which are believed to originate or have links in Mozambique. Moreover, reports of abductions of migrants by smugglers are increasing, with incidents often comprising dozens of victims at a time. Pakistani gangs have been identified as being behind the majority of such incidents. The kidnapping of migrants is also a common feature in northern Africa, particularly in Libya, where extremely high levels of violence against victims has been extensively documented.

CASES:

- ▶ A Bangladeshi shop owner was kidnapped outside his business in the Cape Town area of Kalksteentfontein, on 5 January. A CCTV camera recorded the moment when the expatriate businessman was accosted by the criminals while walking towards his car. Though the man tried to fight back, a second group of kidnapers is seen arriving to help subdue him. Soon after the abduction, his family was contacted by the gang, who demanded ZAR 300,000 (approx. USD 19,000) as ransom. After negotiations, a sum of ZAR 100,000 (approx. USD 6,000) was agreed and paid the next day. However, the hostage was not released, with the kidnapers insisting for a full payment of their initial demand. The incident was then reported to the authorities. The police located and rescued the victim, also arresting four of his captors, on 7 January.
- ▶ Forty-five kidnapped Ethiopian migrants were rescued by South African police from a house in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng province, on 8 February. Six suspects were also arrested during the operation. It is reported that while the authorities were raiding the property, one of the suspects tried to bribe the officers with a bag containing nearly ZAR 330,000 (approx. USD 21,000) in cash to avoid arrest. Among the arrested was a police officer and his mother, who rented the property to the kidnapers.
- ▶ On 10 April, militias of the Brigade 444 of the Government of National Unity freed a group of 195 migrants who had been held for ransom by a criminal gang in Bani Walid city, central Libya.

The Brigade said that the leader of the gang was apprehended, along with eight other gang members of different nationalities. The freed group, comprising Egyptian, Sudanese, Nigerien, Nigerian, Eritrean, and Ethiopian nationals, were reportedly tortured, starved and raped by the criminals while in captivity.

- ▶ A total of 61 Nigerian migrants were rescued in Niger after being abducted while on their way to Libya. One of the victims said her pastor had convinced to make the journey to Libya, promising her a job there. After crossing into Niger, they were taken by the human smugglers to a property in the desert, where they were held against their will. The hostages were however spotted by police on patrol, who rescued them on 13 March.



Group of 50 Somali, Ethiopian and Eritrean nationals at a Libyan detention centre after their rescue from kidnappers. (Photo: Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor)

According to recent data on militant activity in the Sahel, Burkina Faso has now overtaken Mali as the epicentre of the Islamist insurgency, with the number of violent events more than doubling in 2021, compared to the previous year. Violence in the country has largely been driven by Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (JNIM) activity. Though the group largely focuses its activities against security forces in the region, it also conducts violence against civilians, including kidnapping. The majority of JNIM kidnap victims are local nationals; however, foreigners are known to be highly desirable targets for the group. This quarter, the kidnapping of at least six foreign nationals has been attributed to JNIM, while another such instance was recorded in April. The group has been most active in recent months in the Center-North region of Burkina Faso, as well as East, Centre-East, and Boucle du Mouhoun. JNIM however continues to exert influence in Niger, gradually advancing towards Niamey, despite successive large-scale operations conducted by Nigerien and Burkinabé troops over the second half of 2021. The group has also reported large advances in Mali by virtue of the ongoing political upheaval and withdrawal of foreign forces. Continued political instability across the region is likely to keep translating into further gains for the group, which is also expanding towards coastal West African states as a result.

CASES:

- ▶ American missionary Suellen Tennyson was kidnapped by a group of ten unidentified gunmen from a nunnery in the town of Yalgo, Namentenga province, on the night of 5 April. The assailants reportedly burst into the convent, ransacked the living quarters, and after only taking the 83-year-old American nun, vandalised the property and burned equipment, including vehicles. Though no group has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, the incident has been attributed to JNIM. It is reported that Sister Suellen and her colleagues had been warned several times on the risk of remaining in the area due to high levels of militant activity, but had nonetheless refused to depart.
- ▶ Two Chinese mine workers, who were kidnapped in Niger almost nine months ago, were released in neighbouring Burkina Faso. A local security source said that the two Chinese hostages had been released in February, without providing the exact date or any other detail. The foreign mine workers were kidnapped on 6 June 2021 in Mbanga, a village in the Tillaberi region of southwestern Niger, near the border with Burkina Faso. At the time of the abduction, the governor of Tillaberi said that the Chinese company had a license to explore for gold and had already received warnings from armed groups to leave the area. The identity of the abductors was not made public.
- ▶ Nigerian gunmen, who carried out a major attack on a train in Kaduna, Nigeria, on 28 March, released on 11 April a new video of the hostages they took during the assault. The video, which was published on social media channels, shows about 20 people sitting in a forested area.

One of the hostages appears to be from Southeast Asia and another appears to be Caucasian. Behind the captives are men standing in a line, holding weapons. Though the video's authenticity has not been verified, a hostage who has now been released also appears in the video. No group has claimed responsibility for the train attack, and though the area is mostly known for the activity of bandits, local authorities have attributed it to jihadists. Several analysts and security sources believe that fighters from the Al Qaeda-affiliated jihadist group Ansaru cooperated with bandits to stage the assault, and that the group is seeking the release of detained militants in exchange for the hostages.



Still of a video released by JNIM in 2018 to promote its operations in the Sahel. (Photo: Long War Journal)

ASIA

With a number of kidnap victims similar to the last quarter of 2021, Asia was again second in the ranking, accounting for 26% of all recorded hostages in Q1 2022. Cambodia once more registered the highest figures in the region. Violent crime in the Southeast Asian country has increased significantly since 2020, including murders, kidnappings and other weapons-based delinquency. Of particular concern has been the deterioration of security in the province of Preah Sihanouk - Cambodia's foreign trade hub -, which has mainly been associated with the proliferation of Chinese criminal syndicates. Posing as investors to benefit from bilateral agreements in the context of China's 'Belt and Road' initiative, they have established a number of illegal enterprises in the country, such as online casinos and online fraud operations. These activities are closely interlinked to an additional set of crimes, including human trafficking, indentured servitude, kidnapping, and extortion. Individuals kidnapped by these gangs primarily comprise debtors and individuals duped into travelling to the country with promises of high paying jobs. Though victims were typically Chinese nationals, citizens from other developing Asian countries are increasingly being targeted. Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Pakistan, among other countries in the region, have issued warnings to citizens looking to travel for work to the country.

CASES:

- ▶ On 26 February, Cambodian authorities working in coordination with the Indonesian Embassy rescued 44 Indonesians who had been held captive by an online gambling syndicate in Kandal province's Koh Thom district. About 30 of the victims claimed they had been sold by their previous employer, who had brought them to work in Sihanoukville, Preah Sihanouk province. They had been lured with promises of lucrative salaries, as well as free boarding and accommodation. However, upon arrival, they were not paid and forced to work over 12 hours a day swindling people online. They were reportedly threatened to be sold to human traffickers if they did not defraud a certain number of victims on a daily basis. In order to leave the company, the workers were demanded to pay USD 3,000 to 5,000.
- ▶ A Chinese man who was kidnapped and used as a 'blood slave' by a Chinese gang in Sihanoukville, managed to escape and report his situation to Cambodian police on 12 February. The victim said he was lured to China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region by a fake job advertisement in June 2021. When he showed up for the interview, he was abducted and taken to Sihanoukville via Vietnam.
- ▶ The man was then sold to another gang for USD 18,500. The second gang allegedly demanded a ransom after he refused to participate in their fraud schemes. After finding out that the man had no relatives, the gang decided to use him to procure blood that would later be sold online. The man was reportedly in very poor health at the moment of his escape as a result of his ordeal.
- ▶ On 24 January, a young Chinese man acting on a scammer's instructions isolated himself in a hotel room in Singapore and recorded videos of himself looking like a kidnap victim. It is understood that he complied because he was threatened by the criminals, who had claimed to be Chinese authorities. The police were contacted on 28 January, after his family received the videos and a ransom demand. The 'hostage' was found safe at the hotel eight hours later. Investigations revealed that the victim had been threatened several times since November 2021. According to the media, over SGD 560,000 (approx.USD 407,000) were transferred in total to the scammers throughout that period.

Kazakhstan had been one of the most stable countries in Central Asia until the beginning of 2022, when mass, violent protests swept the country, triggered by an increase in the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The unrest, which began in the western region of Mangystau on 2 January, escalated rapidly into a violent nationwide anti-government movement. In response, the authorities declared a state of emergency on 5 January and blocked access to internet and social media platforms across the country. This was followed by an alleged 'shoot-to-kill' order given to state security forces against demonstrators and the arrival of Russian forces to help quell the unrest, which the regime labelled as terrorism and an attempted coup d'état. According to official sources, some 227 people died in the unrest, most of them in Almaty, the epicentre of the turmoil. Thousands were detained, including foreign nationals, many of whom were allegedly tortured and forced to declare they had been paid to participate in the rioting. The violence was effectively suppressed by 9 January.

CASES:

- ▶ Some 8,000 people, including a number of foreigners, were detained in Kazakhstan amid violent riots across the country, the press service of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said on 9 January. According to local sources, over 160 foreign citizens were among those detained. One of the arrested foreigners was identified as Kyrgyz musician Vikram Ruzakhunov. After his arrest, some Kazakh media outlets showed video footage in which a clearly beaten Ruzakhunov confessed to taking part in the Almaty riots. On 9 January, the Kyrgyz government sent a diplomatic note to Kazakhstan regarding Ruzakhunov's detention on charges of terrorism. The Kyrgyz authorities said this was unjustified, claiming the victim most likely found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time, while working in Almaty. Ruzakhunov was released the next day. When asked about his ordeal, the musician said he was released after giving a false statement on camera. Ruzakhunov reportedly had to undergo surgery for injuries suffered during his detention.
- ▶ On 22 February, the Uzbek Embassy in Kazakhstan officially requested detailed information from the Kazakh authorities regarding over a dozen Uzbek nationals held in custody over the January unrest. The embassy also requested meetings with the 14 detainees. The request followed information released by Kazakh Ombudswoman Elvira Azimova, who said that 14 Uzbeks, two Kyrgyz, and two Russians had been among those arrested during the anti-government protests.
- ▶ Politically-motivated arrests of foreign nationals are not uncommon in China. In one of the most recent incidents, a Japanese diplomat was temporarily detained in Beijing on 21 February, while on legitimate official business. The Japanese authorities summoned the chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo the next day, to lodge a protest and demand that China issue an apology and guarantee no future occurrences of what constituted a violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. However, the Chinese authorities reportedly refused, instead issuing a statement saying that the diplomat had been investigated and questioned in accordance with Chinese law after 'acting inappropriately', without elaborating. This incident followed reports the previous week that a Japanese national has been held in detention in Shanghai since December 2021, over unspecified law violations.

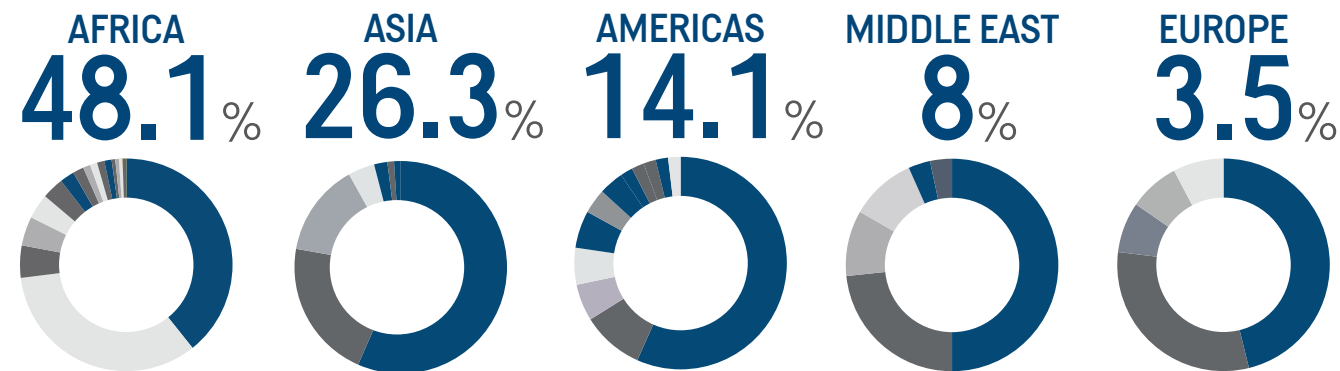
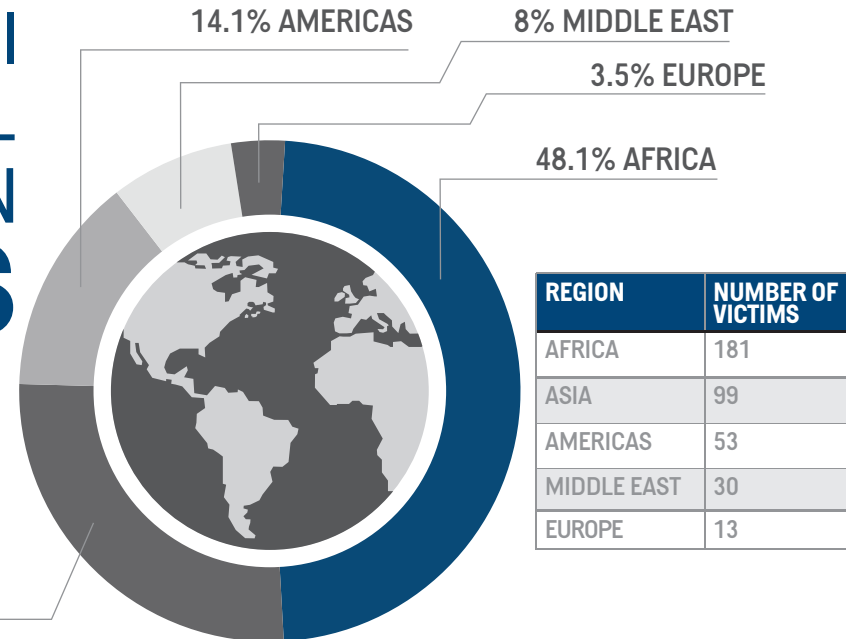


Aftermath of rioting in Almaty on 5 January 2022. (Photo: Bloomberg)

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

Global AND Regional GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF VICTIMS

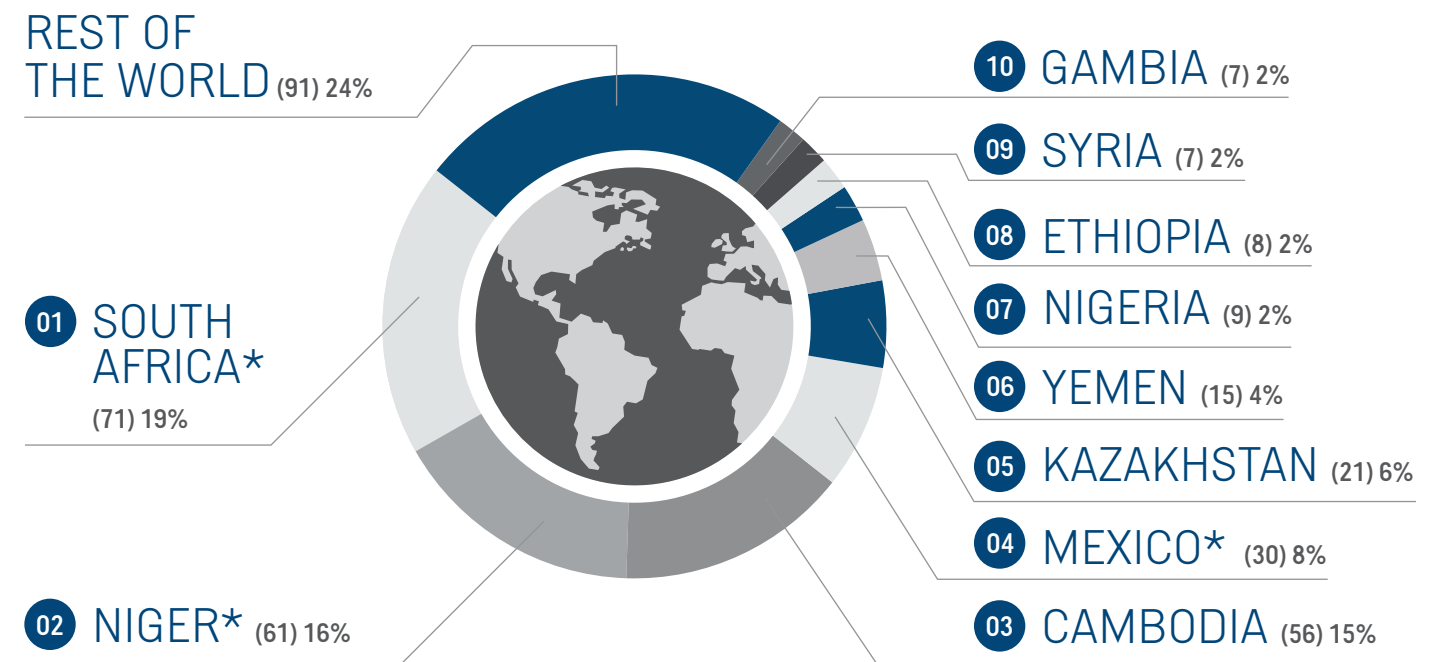
Statistics for Q1 2022 are drawn from Constellis' record of 376 foreign nationals kidnapped worldwide. In Q4 2021, Constellis registered a total of 474 foreigners abducted across the world.



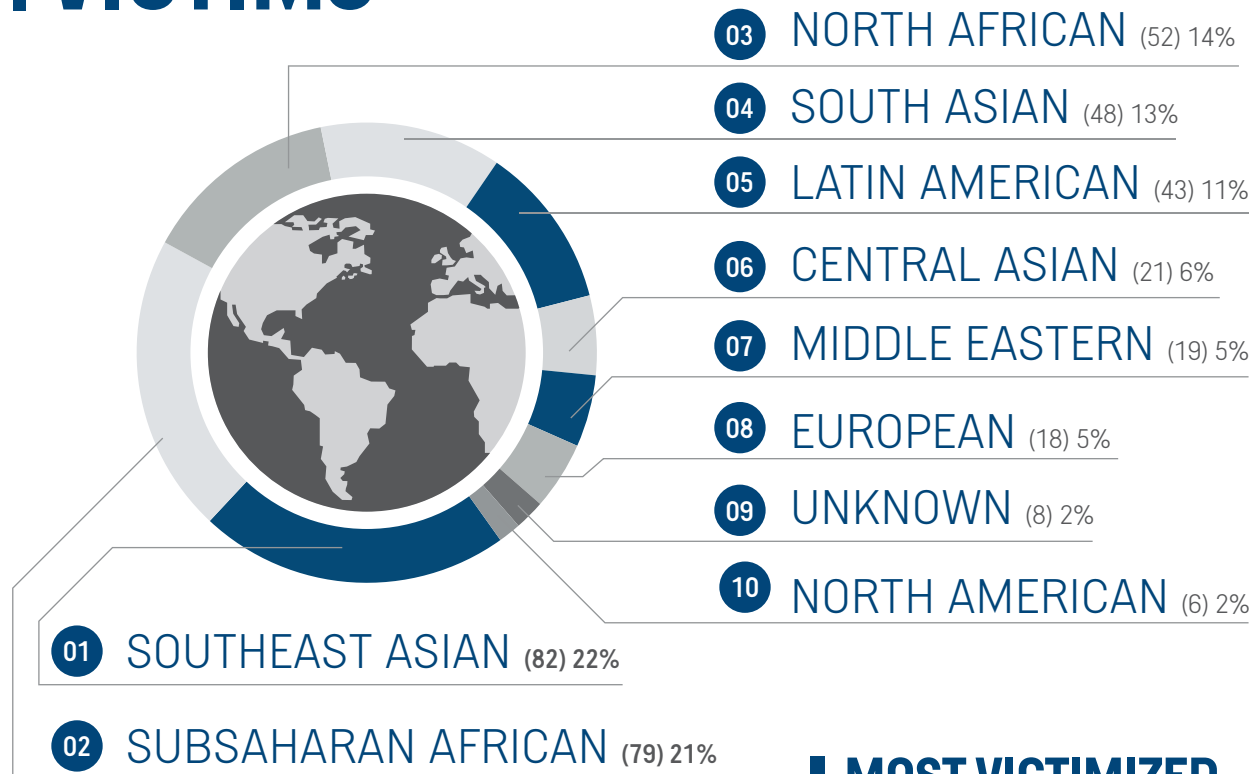
Region	Country	Percentage	
AFRICA	South Africa*(71)	39.2%	
	Niger*(61)	33.7%	
	Nigeria(9)	4.9%	
	Ethiopia(8)	4.4%	
	Gambia(7)	3.8%	
	Burkina Faso(6)	3.3%	
	CAR(4)	2.2%	
	Cameroon(3)	1.7%	
	Egypt(2)	1.1%	
	Libya*(2)	1.1%	
	Mali(2)	1.1%	
	Mozambique(2)	1.1%	
	DRC(1)	0.6%	
	Liberia(1)	0.6%	
	Madagascar(1)	0.6%	
	South Sudan(1)	0.6%	
	ASIA	Cambodia(56)	57%
Kazakhstan(21)		21%	
Philippines(14)		14%	
Afghanistan(4)		4%	
China(2)		2%	
Malaysia(1)		1%	
Singapore(1)		1%	
AMERICAS		Mexico*(30)	56.6%
		Paraguay(5)	9.5%
		Brazil(3)	5.6%
	Chile(3)	5.6%	
	Haiti(3)	5.6%	
	Argentina(2)	3.8%	
	Peru(2)	3.8%	
	Canada(1)	1.9%	
	Colombia(1)	1.9%	
	Ecuador(1)	1.9%	
Guatemala*(1)	1.9%		
Venezuela(1)	1.9%		
MIDDLE EAST	Yemen(15)	50%	
	Syria*(7)	23%	
	Lebanon*(3)	10%	
	Turkey*(3)	10%	
	Iraq(1)	3%	
UAE(1)	3%		
EUROPE	Ukraine(6)	46%	
	Spain*(4)	31%	
	Netherlands(1)	8%	
	Poland(1)	8%	
	Russia(1)	8%	

(Number of Victims) * Including Migrants

TOP 10 COUNTRIES FOR THE KIDNAPPING OF FOREIGN CITIZENS IN Q1 2022



ORIGINS OF VICTIMS



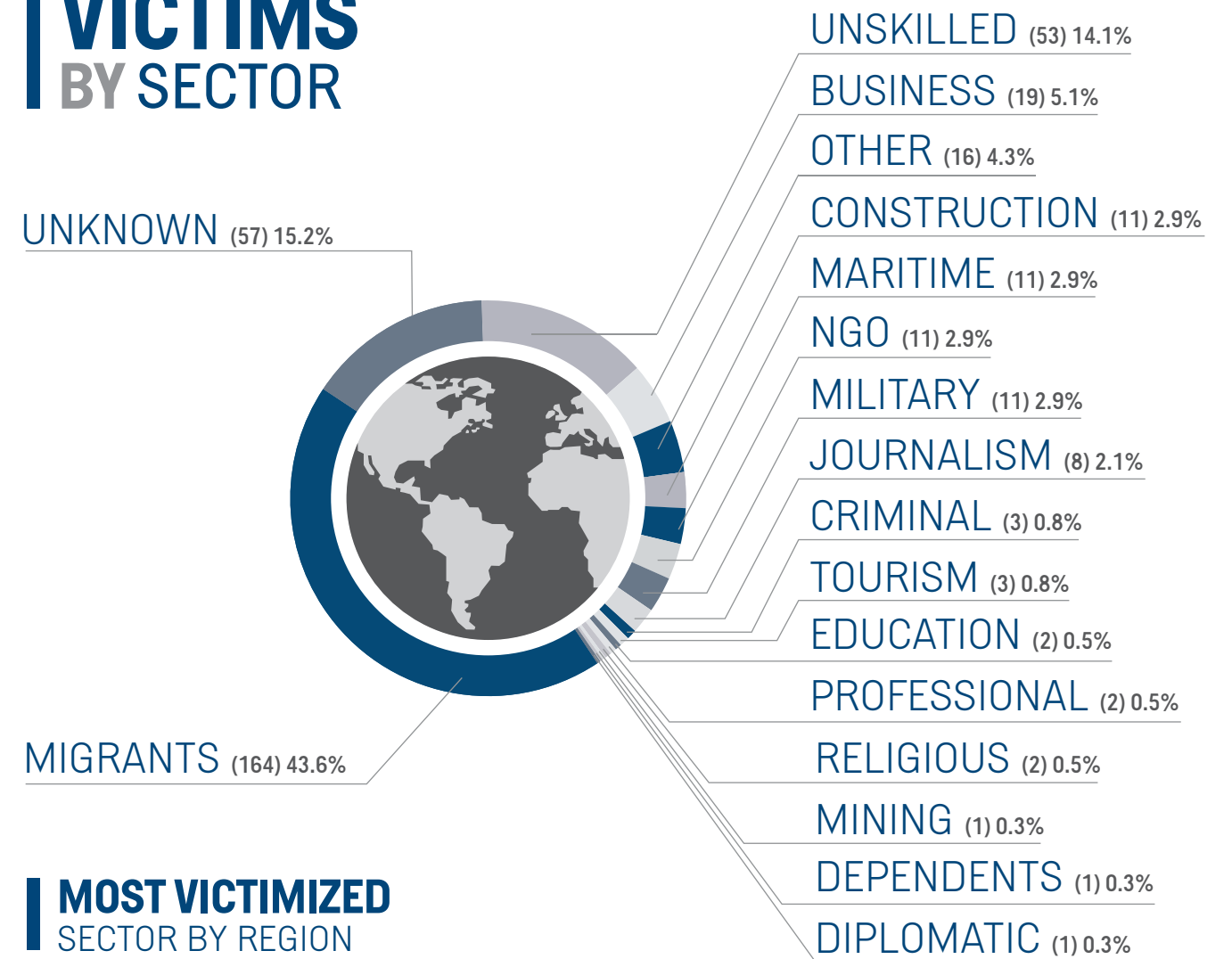
MOST VICTIMIZED SINGLE NATIONALITY

- 01 Nigerian
- 02 Ethiopian
- 03 Indonesian
- 04 Chinese
- 05 Bangladeshi
- 06 Indian
- 07 Uzbek
- 08 Nicaraguan
- 09 Honduran
- 10 Senegalese

MOST VICTIMIZED ORIGIN BY REGION

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

VICTIMS BY SECTOR



MOST VICTIMIZED SECTOR BY REGION

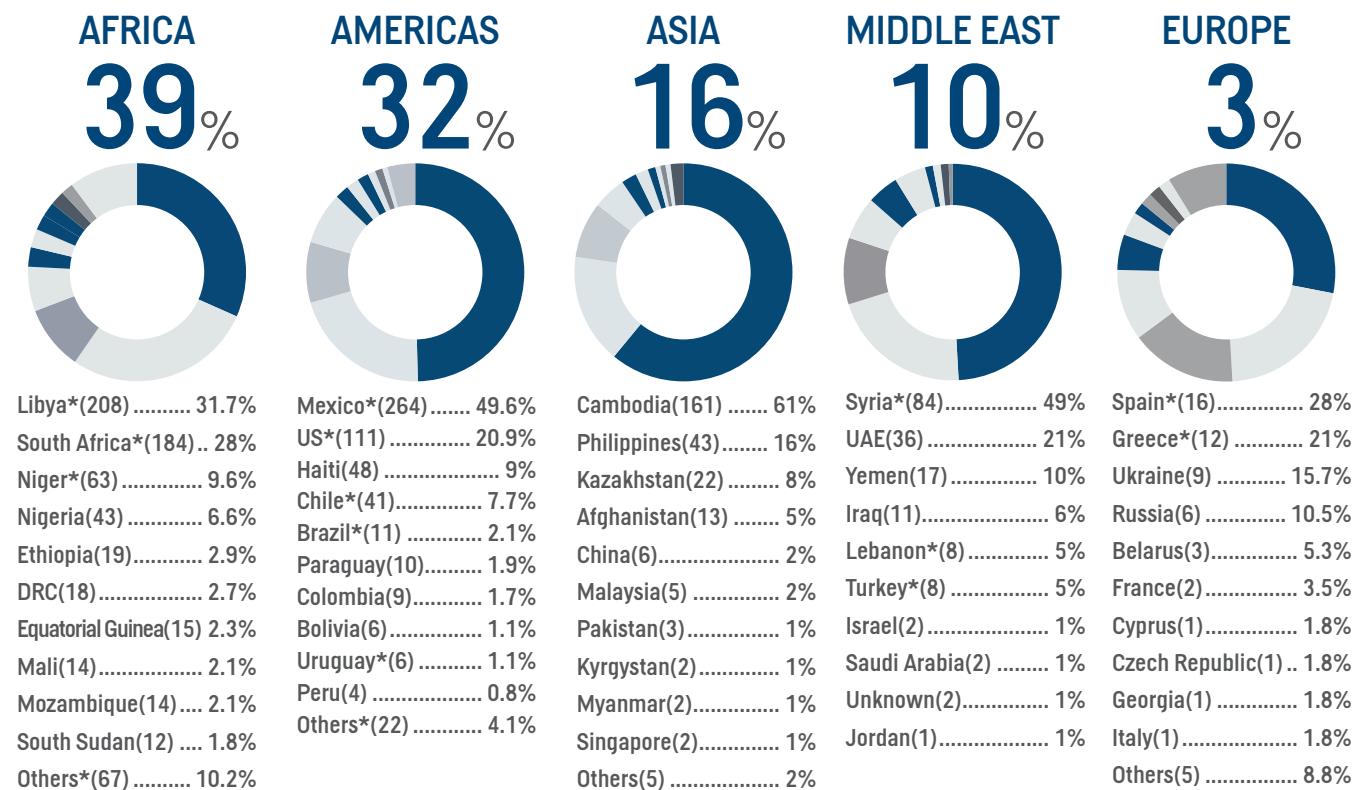
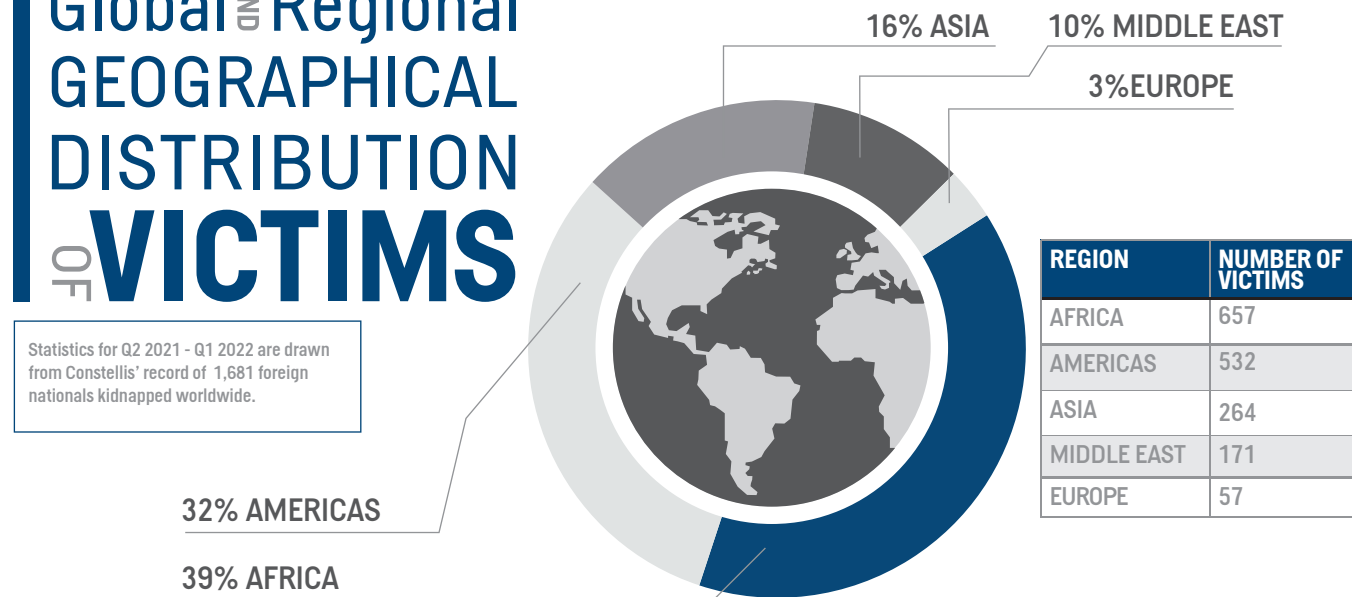
REGION	OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR
Africa	Migrants
Americas	Migrants
Asia	Unskilled
Europe	Journalism
Middle East	Migrants

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

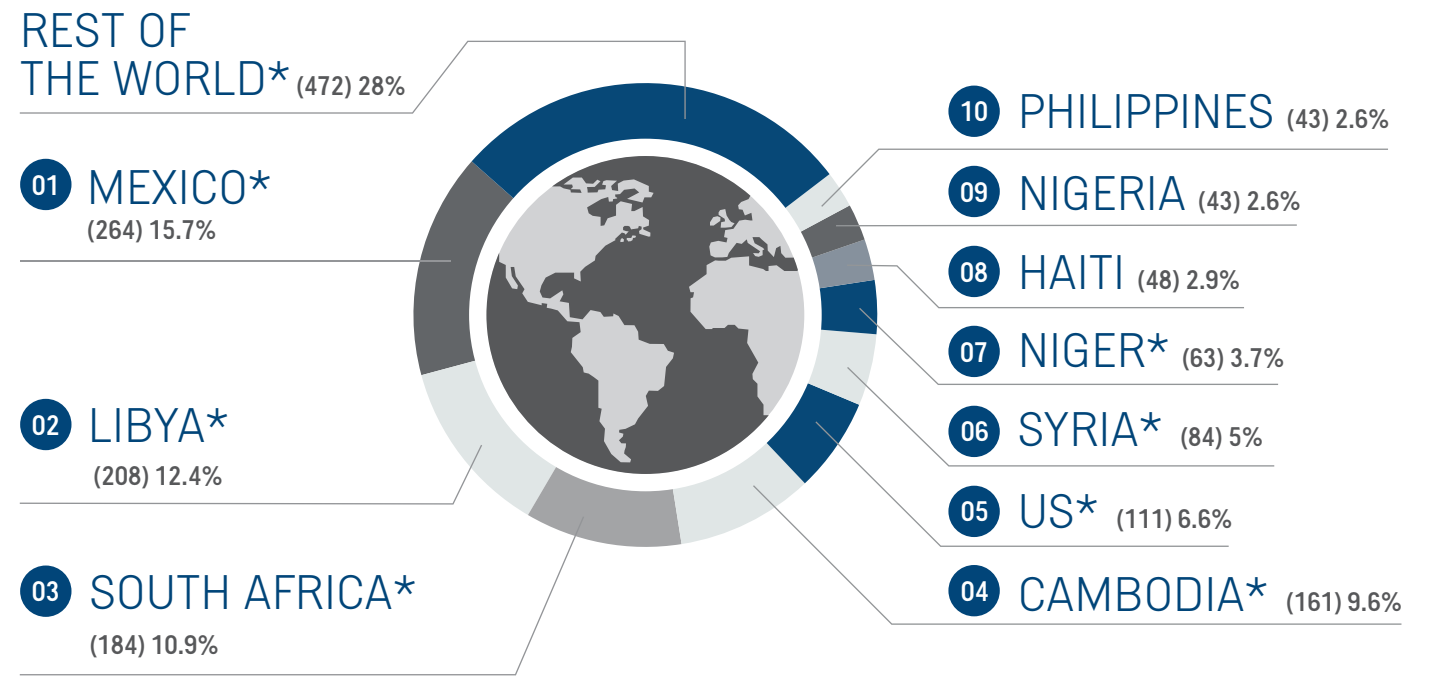
Global AND Regional GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF VICTIMS

Statistics for Q2 2021 - Q1 2022 are drawn from Constellis' record of 1,681 foreign nationals kidnapped worldwide.



(Number of Victims)
* Including Migrants

TOP 10 COUNTRIES FOR THE KIDNAPPING OF FOREIGN CITIZENS IN Q2 2021 - Q1 2022





Between January and March 2022, Constellis recorded 95 maritime incidents, an increase of 12% on the number registered during the last quarter of 2021. The majority of events took place in Asia (44% of the total), with most attacks in the region comprising low-level thefts. The Gulf of Aden (GoA) also reported an increase, with at least five suspicious approaches taking place over Q1 2022. On the other hand, piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) declined. No maritime kidnapping incidents were recorded in the region over this reporting period.

The Black Sea has emerged as a new threat hotspot as a result of the Ukrainian conflict. In evidence of the risk in the area, at least 12 civilian vessels have been attacked between 24 February and the end of March. One of the affected vessels was the Bangladeshi bulker BANGLAR SAMRIDDHI, which was struck by a Russian missile on 2 March while anchored at Olvia port. In addition to damage to the vessel's superstructure, one crew member was killed in the attack. The following day, the Panamanian flagged cargo vessel HELT sank after striking a sea mine off Odesa. Before the incident, the HELT and its crew had reportedly been taken hostage by Russian forces and used as shields against Ukrainian defences. At least eight other commercial vessels were said to have been similarly hijacked by the beginning of March.

After this series of events, the NATO Shipping Centre issued warnings of a high risk to civilian shipping in the north-western part of the Black Sea, and dozens of crew were evacuated from their vessels by the Ukrainian military, private companies and consulates. Though Russia announced on 24 March that a humanitarian corridor would be created for the exit of foreign ships from Ukrainian ports, vowing also to refrain from attacking merchant ships in transit, vessels are nonetheless encouraged to stay in close contact with maritime authorities and keep clear of any warships and military craft in the area. In this context, several international shipping companies have suspended their operations in both the Azov Sea and Black Sea, due to the high risk of collateral damage and the sizeable increase in insurance premiums.

Ten maritime incidents were reported in the GoA during the first quarter of 2022, an increase from the six registered in Q4 2021. Five of the events this reporting period comprised suspicious approaches, all likely to have been attempted robberies. Four of them took place off the coast of Yemen, while the other was reported off the coast of Oman. In view of the lull in Somali piracy since 2012 and the Somali government's opposition to the presence of international forces within Somalia's territorial waters, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) confirmed that it will not extend the UNSC Resolution 2608, which allowed the international fighting of piracy in the GoA. In line with this, Operation Atalanta, which was launched by the EU in 2008, was suspended. In an attempt to close the security gap created by the departure of international forces, Somalia inaugurated on 7 April a high-tech maritime facility in Mogadishu to boost security along its coastline. Nonetheless, piracy in the area could easily resurge in the absence of international navies and as the structural problems that gave birth to it endure. Meanwhile, risks to international shipping and trade persist in the Red Sea as a result of the ongoing conflict between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition. Demonstrative of this, at least two explosive-laden boats launched by the Houthis were destroyed by the Saudi-led coalition in the Southern Red Sea, on 20 February and 1 March, respectively. Of note, the warring parties agreed to a two-month truce on 2 April. However, should the truce fail to hold, the Houthis will likely renew their operations against the coalition, including those in the maritime domain.

Only 12 maritime incidents were reported in the GoG between January and March 2022, compared to the 28 recorded in the last quarter of 2021. All but one comprised successful boardings, most of which resulted in robberies. Although piracy incidents have decreased following the increase in maritime patrols in 2021, reports of armed robberies within ports and anchorages are increasingly being received, particularly in Angola and Ghana. Of further concern, pirates are growing increasingly violent when boarding vessels. Moreover, despite an absence of abductions of crews this quarter, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) continues to caution shipping companies on the ongoing risk in the region, as pirates still possess the capability and capacity to carry out abductions.

Overall, a decline in incident rates will not translate into a reduction in threat levels as long as the key components that drive piracy remain unaltered. As such, there is a need for sustained multilateral efforts to ensure the safety of seafarers in the region. This especially as none of the navies of West African coastal countries, with the partial exception of Nigeria, are capable of properly responding to pirate attacks, according to a recent EU report. In line with this, the EU proposed in January a two-year extension of the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) pilot programme, which will include deployments of Danish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish warships to the region. If approved, piracy in the GoG is likely to remain suppressed in the short to medium term.

The number of maritime incidents reported in Asia in Q1 2022 remained largely consistent with the last quarter of 2021. Of the 42 registered events, 97% comprised criminal boardings, of which more than half were successful robberies. While most boardings comprised low-level thefts, in several cases, pirates were armed with knives and threatened the crew. As per already-established trends, most incidents occurred in the eastbound lane of the Singapore Strait, where a wide range of vessels were targeted, including bulkers and tankers. Meanwhile, joint maritime security activities between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as effective domestic anti-terror operations, have continued to succeed, resulting in the continued absence of kidnapping incidents by Islamist militants in the Sulu-Celebes Seas since January 2020. Meanwhile, concerns have been expressed that Russia's unilateral invasion of Ukraine could embolden China to attack Taiwan. While the likelihood of such an action is widely debated, more Asian states are said to be preparing to defend their territory in such a scenario.

CASES:

- ▶ Japanese bulk carrier NAMURA QUEEN was hit by a Russian missile on 25 February at the outer Anchorage of Yizhniy Port, Ukraine. The incident resulted in severe damage to the vessel's structure and serious injuries to two crew members.
- ▶ Six armed men boarded the product tanker SPOB GRAHA DUA SATU on 6 January, when it was anchored off Morosi, Indonesia. The pirates forced the crew to take it to a specified position before locking them in the mess room. The assailants stole valuables and cash before fleeing.
- ▶ On 24 January, a number of armed men hijacked the product tanker MT B OCEAN 54nm SSW of Abidjan, Ivory Coast. It is reported that the pirates navigated the tanker using their own GPS system after switching off all communication and navigation equipment. The crew was held hostage while the group stole the vessel's valuables and cargo before fleeing the following evening.



Images shared by the Ukrainian navy, allegedly depicting the destruction of a Russian landing ship docked at Berdyansk, Ukraine. (Photo: South China Morning Post)

FOCUS ARTICLE

KIDNAP: CRISIS MANAGEMENT PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

An important part of the 'duty of care' owed to staff by employers, is to ensure that they are prepared to respond effectively to any security contingency. This is particularly true for those organisations working in high-threat environments. For example, according to data by the Aid Worker Security Database, between January and December 2021, there were at least 252 major attacks impacting 447 aid workers worldwide, with 26% of them being the victim of kidnapping. As such, it is imperative to be well prepared for this kind of incident. Preparations should cover all potential victims, such as international staff, local staff, consultants and partners. Being prepared means more than simply having a crisis management team trained and ready to respond. It means that:

- ▶ You, as an organisation, have assessed the situation and accept certain risks, such as kidnap.
- ▶ Your staff (and, to some extent, your partners and consultants) understand and individually accept the risks¹, and are prepared, trained and supported to work in such a context.
- ▶ Should a kidnap occur, the organisation ought to be able to respond rapidly and appropriately.

Organisational aspects of crisis management planning for a kidnap

Once the organisation is certain that it is meeting its duty of care in doing what it can reasonably do to warn staff of the risks and to provide adequate support to

them, the organisation should consider its own policy in the event of a kidnap occurring. If not already in place, the organisation should prepare a Crisis Management Plan (CMP), as well as establish and prepare a Crisis Management Team (CMT). A vital part of crisis management preparation is not just organisational, but conceptual. In other words, the CMT needs to have a realistic understanding of the sort of dilemmas with which they may be confronted in responding to a kidnap – ideally, well before such an incident occurs.

Crisis Management Plan (CMP)

It is wise to have a written CMP. The plan should be reviewed and exercised frequently, and 'owned' by all parts of the organisation. Some likely elements of the plan are:

1. An objective and a strategy

In terms of a kidnap, it is likely that the objective will be the safe and speedy release of the victim(s). This however may be qualified, for example "while not increasing the risk of further kidnaps" or "without making financial concessions to the kidnappers."

2. CMT organisation - roles and responsibilities should be defined in the plan

- ▶ All members should be middle management and senior level staff who could be in no way implicated or involved in the incident.

¹ Your staff should, as part of their contract, accept in written form that they are prepared to work in a country, or an area, where there is the risk of kidnap.

- ▶ An absolute prerequisite is that a CMT must combine knowledge with authority. In other words, the CMT must know all the details of the case, and have the authority to take the necessary decisions. A likely cause for confusion is to have a CMT that understands the situation well, but does not have the authority to act. Conversely, it is equally dangerous to have people outside the CMT (this could include staff in Head Office) intervening to take the decisions without a thorough, beginning-to-end knowledge of the situation and background.

- ▶ Authority should be clearly delegated to the CMT. Notwithstanding, there are fundamental decisions that senior management outside of the CMT may have to reserve authority over, for example, sanctioning decisions such as an armed rescue.

3. CMT structure should be outlined

- ▶ The team should be of a manageable size, with the integrity of all members continuously upheld.
- ▶ A CMT should have a chairperson, a coordinator, and usually a representative from human resources (HR), the operations department, media/public relations, legal, administration/finance and security team/security focal point.
- ▶ The ability of the people in the CMT to handle the unique pressures and challenges of a crisis is paramount so CMT members should be chosen with care and trained beforehand.
- ▶ It is important to designate and train 'deputies', in case the original members are not available when needed.
- ▶ In a kidnap case, the CMT may choose to use the services of an external consultant to act as an adviser to the CMT.
- ▶ It may be advisable to have both a HQ based CMT where all major decisions are taken and a local Incident Management Team. The IMT will be closer to the situation, able to take some decisions based on their delegated authority from the CMT and capable of handling all local matters. The HQ-based CMT, while listening carefully to

the IMT's advice and suggestions and using its local knowledge fully, should always be the final strategic decision-maker.

4. External communications and family liaison

- ▶ The need for confidentiality of information should be clearly understood by all CMT members.
- ▶ The CMP should include contact details of all relevant stakeholders, and provide clear procedures for who should be notified, and how, in the event of an incident. For example, the CMP should contain contact details of relevant external agencies, diplomatic, governmental, police and security forces, hospitals, insurance companies, etc.
- ▶ Timely information and appropriate help needs to be provided to the families of victims. It is important to have people trained and prepared to support families.
- ▶ It is vital from the start to define the media strategy, identify a spokesperson, and to control carefully the flow of information.
- ▶ The plan should also provide practical details of where the CMT should meet and the resources available, especially communication facilities.
- ▶ It is important that a log is kept from the start, detailing what actions were taken, by whom and why. This is an important legal document, but it is also invariably useful as a source of record, particularly on longer cases.

5. First steps

The CMP should contain guidance for possible first steps in the initial 24 – 48 hours of a kidnap.

6. Time

Kidnaps sometimes last a long time. The CMP should take into account the need for the organisation to continue to work effectively while managing the response.

Conceptual aspects of crisis management planning for a kidnap

Kidnaps can confront organisations with some acute dilemmas. It is thus best to identify these and if possible, resolve them, before a kidnap actually occurs. This is best achieved by running a simulated kidnap exercise that exposes decision-makers and the CMT (including deputies) to likely scenarios. Some common dilemmas are:

- ▶ Whether to sanction an armed rescue attempt or a ransom payment.
- ▶ Whether to support family or others who may want to provide financial concessions, if your organisation will not.
- ▶ Whether to keep host government authorities fully informed of your decisions and activities, even if you think they (or parts of them) may be corrupt.

- ▶ Policy regarding other individuals (partners or consultants, for instance, or colleagues from other organisations) held with your personnel.
- ▶ Your policy on collaboration with your own, or the victims' own, governments and / or supporters.

Today's crises tend to be more complex, with a range of contributing factors that pose significant challenges to organisations' traditional response mechanisms. In this context, every organisation will eventually face a crisis situation, and as such, investing in preparedness training and creating a comprehensive crisis management strategy is essential. Organisations that are prepared to respond to a crisis have a much higher chance of containing the problem before it causes extensive, or even permanent, damage.

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.

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CONTACT



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.



For more information on this report please contact:

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

Crisis Response Emergency Numbers:

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

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

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