

Jet skis *modus operandi* on the Western Mediterranean route

Over the past few years, the operational situation in the Western Mediterranean indicates that there has been a constant increase in the number of irregular migrant apprehensions, with migrants arriving in Spain from the north coast of Morocco and Algeria. In 2017, of the major routes, the Western Mediterranean Sea was the only route from where a significant increase in the number of detections was reported with 21 632 irregular migrants apprehended, which represents a 150% increase in the number of irregular migrant apprehensions reported by Spain compared with 2016 (8 641 irregular migrants detected).

The *modus operandi* and the route chosen by the migrants to reach Spain from Morocco and Algeria depend mainly on the nationality of the migrant: namely for sub-Saharan, Moroccans or Algerians. Each group has its own connections and routes and it is unusual to have mixed flows of migrants on the boats which are detected off the southern coast of Spain. Moroccan migrants usually try to reach Spain using dinghies, wooden boats or jet-skis, sub-Saharan migrants are detected mainly aboard toy boats and large rubber dinghies, while Algerian migrants mainly use pateras and fibreglass boats.

Smuggling migrants aboard of jet skis is a *modus operandi* specific in the strait of Gibraltar and used exclusively by Moroccans. Mainly young Moroccan males are using this equipment to reach the Spanish shore, most of them with relatives in the European Union, who are paying for their transfer. Although in terms of migratory impact the number of migrants being transferred with this type of asset is relatively low (1-3 migrants, plus the skipper per jet-ski), the number of incidents involving jet skis has sharply increased during the recent years.



Figure 1: Interception of a jet ski with one skipper and two migrants close to Tarifa in August 2017

Moreover, smugglers using jet-skis pose a security risk especially for the swimmers in the water, as they approach the Spanish shore at high speed, in order to disembark the migrants, and leave the same way. The main advantage of this *modus operandi* is the speed, as they can reach the Spanish coast in less than 30 minutes, with very little chances of interception from the maritime assets. The interceptions usually occur during the disembarkation of migrants. In case of detection, the speed and fast mobility of the Jet Ski allows the smugglers to return to Morocco before any patrol boat can reach the area. Moreover, jet skis are involved not only in migrant smuggling, but also in smuggling of hashish.

Therefore using jet-skis for smuggling represents a very lucrative business, as in just one crossing, the skipper can pay for the equipment, in case the jet-ski is bought. The usual price for a brand new three seater ranges between 10 000- 20 000 euro, while the price paid by the migrants is 3 000- 4 000 euro).

However, people smugglers also rent the jet-skis from the rental companies established in the areas frequented by tourists.

The smuggling of migrants aboard jet skis is a *modus operandi* reported only during the summer season, due to the fact that the Moroccan authorities allow the navigation of the jet skis along the Moroccan shore only between 10 July-10 September. In fact, the first incident in 2017 was reported on 10 July, while the last one occurred on 3 September. (in 2017, out of 38 incidents involving jet-skis reported in the framework of JO Indalo 2017, 25 were reported in July, 28 in August and only 1 in September).

It is important to mention that the actual number of these type of assets was much higher, as in one single incident more jet skis were involved, due to the fact that they departed simultaneously from the Moroccan coast. People smugglers used the concomitant departures because, in case of detection, at least some of the jet skis would have managed to reach the Spanish coast, as it was nearly impossible for the Spanish forces to follow all these assets. After the arrival on the Spanish coast, migrants are usually either picked up by some smugglers or they just run away and travel further on their own, while the smuggler turns around quickly and immediately returns to Morocco.

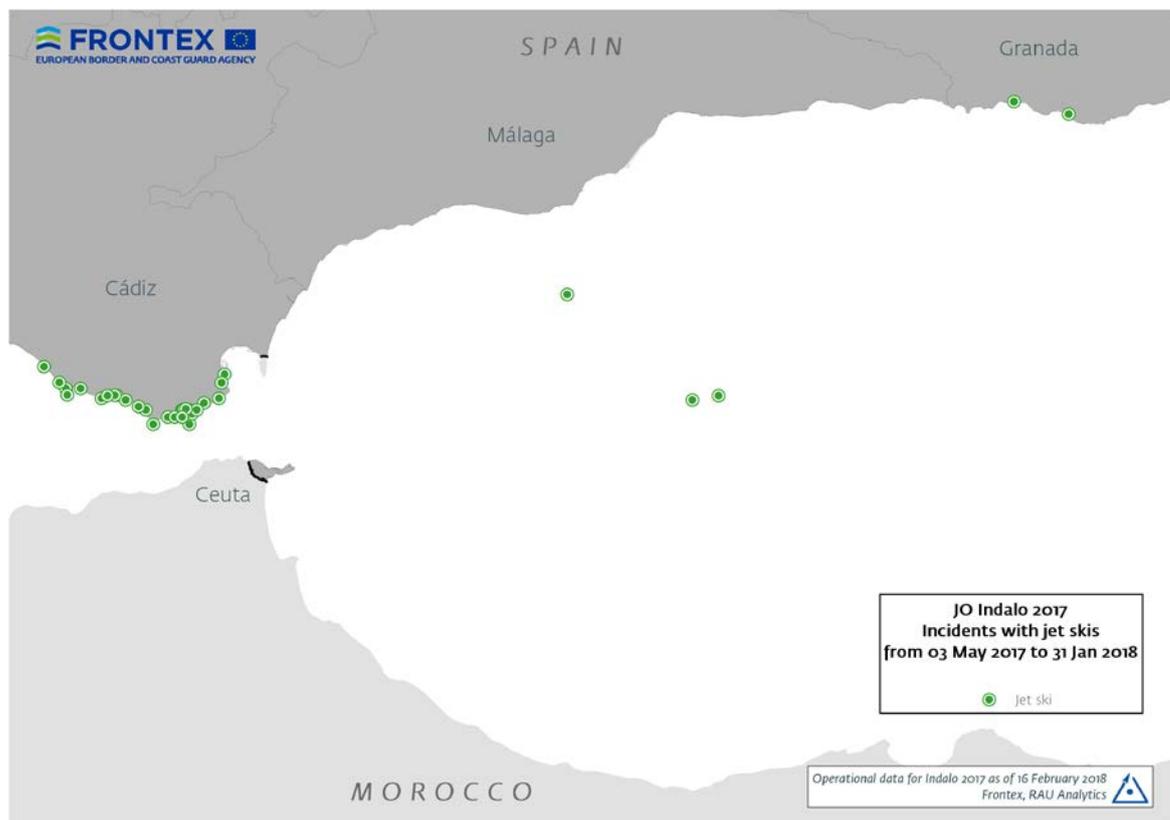


Figure 2: Type of embarkations detected on the southern coast of Spain during the implementation of JO Indalo 2017, involving jet skis in the area of Gibraltar.