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Economic, Institutional, and Social Drivers of the "Country's Susceptibility to Human Trafficking and Smuggling" A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

The concept of "Countries' Susceptibility to Human Trafficking and Smuggling" refers to the extent to which a country is globally vulnerable at the individual (micro) and governmental (macro) levels. The conceptual framework aims to analyze the dynamic relationships of economic, institutional, and social drivers of these crimes, analyzing the direct and indirect linkages of each driver, as well as the interplay between them through the lens of human trafficking and smuggling. This paper will take up the Southern Mediterranean countries as the subject of analysis divided into three sections: 1) the economic growth pattern driver, with an analysis of the level of equitability over time; 2) the institutional driver, with an analysis of the effectiveness of micro and macro governance behind these crimes; 3) the social driver, including an analysis of social capital and philanthropic environment. The research conclusion and implications of the proposed framework are also discussed.

Keywords: human trafficking and smuggling, susceptibility, institutional driver, equitable growth pattern, macro and micro-governance, philanthropy, social capital

1. Introduction

Human Trafficking and Smuggling (HTS) constitute a significant global criminal enterprise, ranking third after drug and arms smuggling. The persistence of illicit financial flows and money laundering worldwide, which is closely linked to HTS, severely impacts global peace and the economy. In 2016, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that 2016 at least 2.5 million migrants were smuggled, generating illicit financial flows between US$5.5 and US$7 billion. Ironically, this amount is equivalent to the US ($7 billion) or EU ($6 billion) global humanitarian aid expenditures. Given that this amount is a minimum, it represents only a known portion of the crime. In 2023, the estimated number of migrants smuggled into the European Union via the three Mediterranean routes reached approximately

375,000, (Frontex) generating revenues estimated at between US$320 and US$550 million (UNODC, 2023). Irregular migration across the Mediterranean has been exacerbated by geopolitical and socioeconomic dynamics. Despite the EU's strengthening of law enforcement measures, including the establishment of an anti-smuggling canter in 2017, irregular border crossings into the EU increased significantly, from 65,141 in 2010 to 373,643 in 2016(Frontex)

Jiang (2011) explored the causes of Human Trafficking (HT) across countries, suggesting that economic development, political institutions, government policies, and historical and cultural contexts collectively influence HT. A comparative analysis of 64 countries revealed that Protestant traditions, a high misery index, per capita GDP, and membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were associated with a lower risk of HT, whereas higher rates of HTS were associated with greater ethnic and linguistic fragmentation and the presence of more Islamic countries. According to Poonam (2018) and Luz (2013), economic openness is correlated with an increased risk of HT. Key drivers include poverty, war, natural disasters, socio-cultural conflicts, and political conditions.

However, according to numerous studies, institutional quality is a key driver of HT, and effective governance can hinder trafficking activities and enhance the state's legitimacy. Corruption and weak governance facilitate trafficking operations and hinder law enforcement efforts. It is argued that governance effectiveness increases with the legal and procedural knowledge of law enforcement agencies relevant to combating HT. A cautious approach to blanket governance improvements is recommended, emphasizing the importance of local and global dynamics (Amahazion, 2015; Campana, 2020). The effectiveness of prosecuting perpetrators of HT and protecting victims depends on the implementation of appropriate legal frameworks and organizational structures within law enforcement agencies tasked with combating HT, specifically the Public Prosecution Service, police, and border guards ((Łyżwa, 2020). Furthermore, corruption within political and financial spheres worsens this dilemma. Corruption allows criminal organizations to operate with impunity, undermining efforts to combat HT and fostering a culture of exploitation (Stoker 2000).

Several studies have identified economic conditions as the main driver of HTS. Globalization, poverty, inequality, and socio-cultural factors significantly influence the risk of HTS, potentially leading to increased exploitation despite economic growth (Xie et al., 2024; Laczko & Gramegna, 2003; DiRienzo & Das, 2018). Cultural dimensions, such as tradition and economic openness, further influence HTS vulnerability. While some studies suggest that conflict and inequality associated with development may increase vulnerabilities (Brysk & Mehta, 2017), others highlight that conflict and inequality associated with development can exacerbate vulnerabilities (Brysk & Mehta, 2017; Hélène Harroff, 2013). Globalization and neoliberal policies often exacerbate HTS by increasing market interconnectedness and labor demand for illegal migrants, particularly in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. Several studies have indicated that income inequality is a significant factor worsening HTS by creating working conditions that benefit traffickers. Power imbalances also increase the risk of exploitation, fostering precarious migration behaviors (Bauloz and others 2022;

Kowalczyk, 2024; Jiang, 2011).

Studies that focus on the direct relation of the social drivers and HTS, specifically social capital and philanthropy organizations, are extremely rare. Some studies indicate that social capital plays a crucial role in economic development, self-sufficiency, and poverty alleviation (Scuderi et al., 2022; Harhab, 2020; Tran, D. T., 2024; Zakri, 2013; Tanjong, 2019). Philanthropic Organizations POs can mitigate socioeconomic inequalities and promote social welfare and economic development. Furthermore, habitual delinquency and a lack of awareness exacerbate the vulnerability to HTS, which hinders effective prevention strategies. Collaboration between POs, local communities, and social media can enhance awareness, advocacy, and victim protection (Jeff and Allen, 2024; Regani et al., 2023).

As highlighted above, several studies have identified institutional capacity as a key driver of HTS, whereas many others have focused on economic drivers. Few studies have addressed the social driver of HTS. Therefore, a significant research gap remains regarding the interactions between these three drivers from the lens of HTS.

Given the above gaps in HTS research, the present study has the following objectives:

1) To develop a conceptual framework of the "Countries' Susceptibility to Human Trafficking and Smuggling" (CSHTS) which aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the direct and indirect linkages of the economic, institutional, and social drivers of the CSHTS.
2) To identify the inter- linkages “interplay” between the variables of the three drivers.
3) To briefly discuss the research and reform policy implications of the proposed framework.

2. Important concepts related to the Countries' Susceptibility to Human Trafficking and Smuggling" (CSHTS):

2.1 The Concept of the “CSHTS”

The study introduces a concept that refers to the extent to which a country is vulnerable to HTS at the aggregate level: individual (micro) and governmental (macro).

The micro-vulnerability refers to disadvantaged individuals or groups. Arises from various stress and risk factors such as ethnic minorities, diverse gender identities, religion, ethnic, political biases, mental and psychological vulnerability (traffickers often exploit psychological manipulation for control of the victims), in addition to family dynamics and violence. Such factors of risk in certain circumstances lead to a status of social exclusion and solitariness (Pascoal, R.2017, Prior & Harfield, 2012, Shamsudeen 2022)); Furthermore, the multidimensional uncertainty drives young people to be trapped and tricked in HTS, particularly in light of bureaucratic barriers and restrictive migration policies, which create a demand for smuggling services and lead individuals to fall prey to traffickers who falsely promise education or employment opportunities through deceptive agencies, ultimately resorting to violence and coercion (Artadi 2010; Gezie et al., 2018; Lelliott and Miller 2023).

The macro-susceptibility refers to a complex of socio-economic, legal, institutional, and social policies at the governmental level. A high country's susceptibility that aggregates micro and macro vulnerability represents the fertile land where HTS can flourish.

2.2 Trafficking and Smuggling: Distinction and Intersection Aspect

Understanding the distinction and interrelationship between human trafficking (HT) and Human Smuggling (HS) is critical to developing effective anti-trafficking and smuggling policies that address the needs of those affected and prevent further victimization. By recognizing how these crimes overlap, stakeholders can improve their approaches and interventions to support victims and strengthen the legal framework.

The seven keys that distinguish HT from HS are the type of crime, the characteristics of the recruiter and victims, the push factors, the recruiter-victim relationship, the profit, and the services provided to the victim (UNODC, 2018, and Batsyukova, 2012). HT is a crime against individuals characterized by coercion and exploitation, whereas HS refers to the consensual movement of migrants across borders for financial gain. However, identifying the presence of deception or coercion can call into question the classification of undocumented migrants (Moussa, 2012; Graycar, 2017). Trafficking victims largely come from vulnerable populations, unlike HS, which typically involves able-bodied adult migrants seeking to improve their financial situations. Push factors for HS include not only poverty but also personal vulnerabilities such as violence and gender inequality, unlike HT, which is primarily driven by economic factors. HT recruiters exert control over victims through abuse, while HS relies on agreements to accept risk. Profit from HT arises from the exploitation of victims, whereas profit from HS arises from fees paid by migrants establishing payment mechanisms that facilitate the HS operations. Furthermore, the competitive dynamics among smugglers are based primarily on reputation and trust, which contrasts sharply with the protective dynamics of HT (Campana, 2020). Traffickers' assistance to victims of HT is limited due to their coercive circumstances, in contrast to the availability of some support services for HS during transit. However, the intersecting keys of the two crimes are: 1. both smugglers and traffickers target and exploit vulnerable people; 2. Smuggled individuals may subsequently encounter traffickers, falling victim to exploitation during or upon their arrival. Probability of transformation from HS to HT victims depends on gender, destination, and trip duration; 3. Smugglers and traffickers are often interconnected within broader criminal networks. The distinction between consensual and coerced practices is complicated 4. The limited capacity of the legal and policy frameworks to distinguish between smugglers and traffickers impacts victim treatment and support services. Both crimes pose significant human rights challenges; understanding their intersection is critical to developing effective policies and interventions.

3. Conceptual Framework: Linkages and Inter-Linkages of Economic Growth Patterns, Governance, and Social Drivers of Country's Susceptibility to Human Trafficking and Smuggling (CSHTS) (Figure 1)

3.1 The Economic Driver of the CSHTS

3.1.1 Direct Linkage Variables

1) Socio-Economic Barriers Index (SEB): quantifies the extent to which substantial segments

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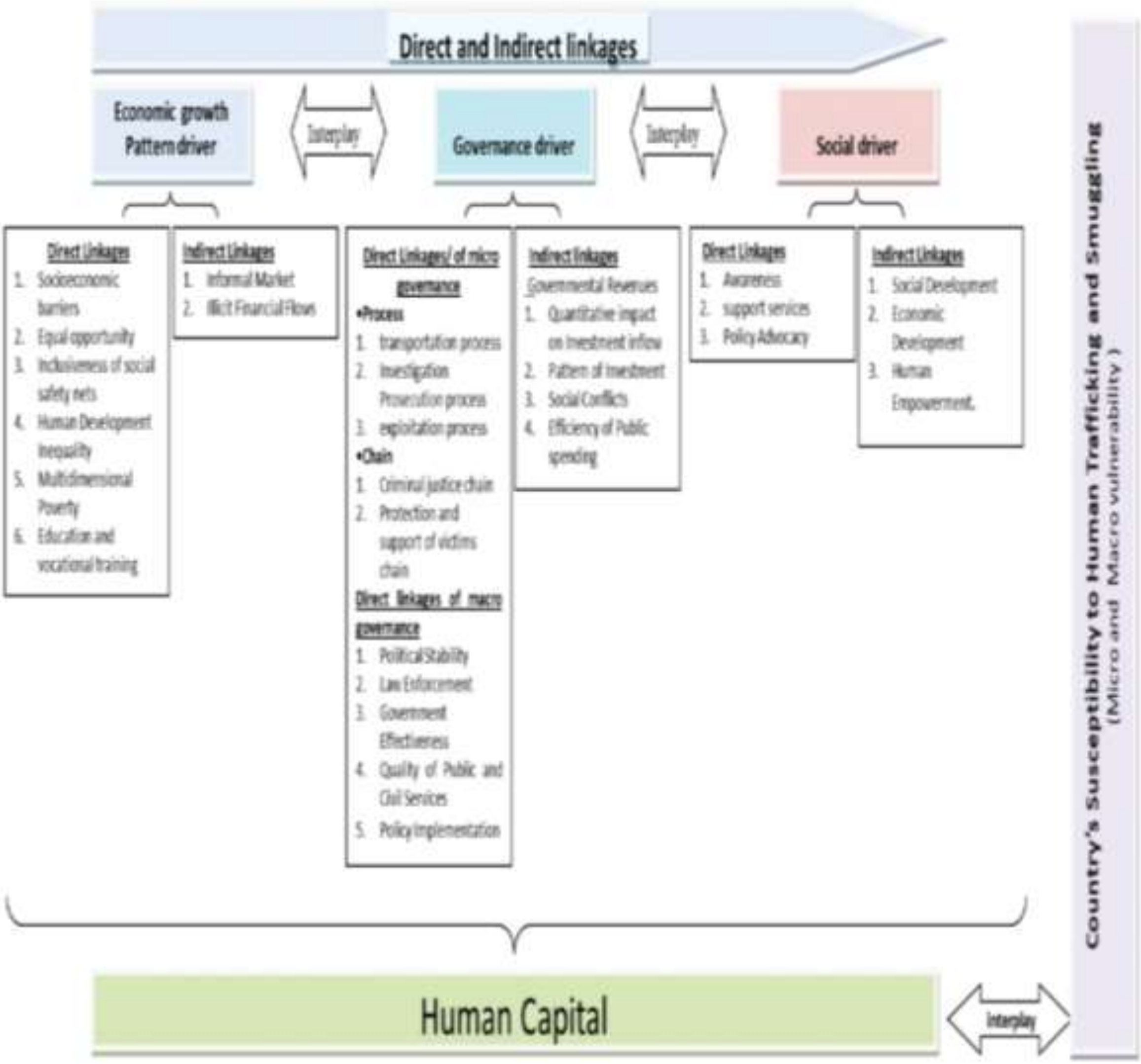
of the population are fundamentally marginalized from societal participation as a consequence of poverty and inequality, thereby facilitating the assessment of social exclusion as a pivotal determinant of economic transformation. This index pertains to structural exclusion rather than a national economy's output efficacy, which is typically indicated by macroeconomic metrics such as unemployment rates or GDP growth. Notably, the SEB scores below 5 for nearly all the SMCs, including Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, where poverty and inequality are both pronounced and partially entrenched. In contrast, Syria and Libya exhibit scores of SEB below 3, indicating that their socioeconomic structures are extensive and deeply rooted in poverty and inequality (BTI data).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Main Drivers of the "Country's Susceptibility to Human Trafficking and Smuggling"



2) Equal Opportunity Index EOI: evaluates the degree to which equitable access to opportunities is realized, reflecting the capacity of individuals to participate in societal activities, irrespective of their social background. This includes equitable access to education and employment. The range of EOI scores in nearly all SMCs is 5- 4, indicating limited and

partially equal opportunity, where women and individuals belonging to ethnic, religious, and other marginalized groups experience constrained access to education, public office, and employment. Although in these countries certain legal frameworks are designed to combat discrimination, their execution is markedly inadequate. The lowest EOI score among SMCs is in Syria and Libya (under 2), where the principle of equitable opportunity remains unmet, and where no legal framework has been established to combat such discrimination.(https://bti-project.org/en/)

3) Social Safety Nets: SSN Economic security is essential for well-being, allowing individuals to plan for their futures. SMCs are characterized by a significant informal sector, with approximately two-thirds of workers operating without formal arrangements and SSNs, and about 30 percent of GDP generated by informal workers and firms (Bizimana 2023). SSN can alleviate vulnerabilities from capitalism, addressing issues such as unemployment and poverty, and assisting those affected by age, illness, or disability. Compensation mechanisms include cash transfers, subsidies, food assistance, and funding sources such as taxation and investment, with welfare regimes being public, private, or hybrid. Jordan and Algeria exhibit the highest SSN (score 7), yet some demographics remain at risk of poverty. Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Lebanon have moderate scores (4-5), with basic SSN covering a few risks for limited beneficiaries, leaving many vulnerable. Scores below 2 indicate that SSN are nearly absent in Syria and Libya, resulting in minimal poverty alleviation efforts (*Middle East and North Africa Report*, n.d.).

4) Human Development Indicators (HDI): refers to the human capital accumulation of a country, is a key determinant and outcome of an equitable economic growth pattern, which indicates the level of poverty and inequality in tandem. The HDI refers to the life expectancy, education, and GNI per capita. In 2023, SMCs such as Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon were positioned approximately at the 100th rank, with Tunisia at the 105th position, all exhibiting an HDI of nearly 0.754, whereas Morocco and Libya demonstrated a lower HDI of 0.71 (*UNDP 2024*).

5) Human Development Inequality-adjusted (IHDI): reformulates the HDI into an inequality factor. The IHDI corresponds to the HDI in the absence of inequality; however, it decreases as inequality increases (UNDP 2024). In 2023, the IHDI varied from 0.58 in Egypt to 0.63 in Jordan, compared to approximately 0.92 in very high-HDI nations, highlighting significant inequality among SMCs. (*UNDP*).

6) Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): refers to three main dimensions of deprivation: health, education, and standard of living, using many indicators for each dimension, such as nutrition, child mortality, schooling, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets. The MPI offers a multidimensional view of poverty beyond income-based measures, informing policy and development efforts. The MPI for SMCs ranges from 6.4 in Morocco to 1.0 in Tunisia, both lower than the averages for developing countries (18.3) and Arab states (14.7). Notably, the contribution of education deprivation to overall multidimensional poverty exceeds the average of developing countries (32%) and Arab states (34%), with SMC rates ranging from 61% in Tunisia to 49% in Algeria. This is

followed by the contribution of health deprivation to overall multidimensional poverty, while living standard deprivation contributes the least. (*UNDP*)

7) Education Policy for Research and Development (R&D) index assesses the presence of effective institutions for all education levels and R&D, focusing on the effectiveness of educational policies and the sufficiency of government R&D support in various Arab nations. In 2024, Jordan, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Lebanon received a score index of 4-5, indicating a deficient educational system and low investments in education and R&D, while Syria and Libya were rated lower at 3-1 due to their rudimentary institutions and high illiteracy rates. ((*Middle East and North Africa Report*, n.d.)

3.1.2 Indirect linkage variables

1) Informal Market (IM): linked to the CSHTS through its impacts on the sustainable development in the country of origin of HTS. Furthermore, a large IM enables HTS through unregulated exploitation. Even though the IM is significantly contributing to economic activity in developing nations, it affects growth patterns and tax base erosion (Maiti & Bhattacharyya, 2020; Choi & Thum, 2005). IM is a cause and result of poverty and inequality, creating a challenging cycle to dismantle, exacerbating wage inequality between formal and informal workers. Nations with widespread informality experience hindered equitable growth, limited government revenues, and public spending on essential services, in addition to experiencing poor governance that negatively impacts human development (Loayza 2018, Dabla-Norris, Gandelman, N. 2017)
.

The indirect linkage variables between informality and developmental challenges are multifaceted. Informal workers typically endure low productivity and income, predominantly in the agriculture and services sectors. Access to finance and public resources for informal enterprises is restricted due to insufficient property rights and documentation, which limits productivity and entrepreneurship. Informal workers are particularly vulnerable during economic downturns because of inadequate social safety nets (Medina and Schneider 2018; WIEGO 2019). Additionally, the IM interplays with institutional weaknesses; excessive taxation and stringent regulations compel firms to stay informal, further impeding government revenues and essential service provision (Dabla-Norris, Gradstein, Enste, and Schneider 1998; World Bank 2019). Informality significantly influences institutional quality through factors such as tax burden, regulatory challenges, financial market development, and legal system quality, while poor governance is frequently linked to high informality as firms aim to evade bureaucratic obstacles (Choi and Thum 2005; Dreher and Schneider 2010).

IM is closely linked to developmental challenges, including poverty, inequality, financial market weaknesses, and limited public service access and lower human development outcomes (Maloney 2004). SMCs with above-median informality have a substantial share of female workers who are informally employed, facing lower wages and poor working conditions (Bonnet, Vanek, and Chen 2019; ILO 2018b). The structural factors that contribute to informality in SMCs are low human capital and low-skilled young individuals. The governance gap in SMCs contributes to about half of such excess compared to advanced economies. Thus enhancements in business regulations and governance reduce informality in Egypt and Morocco. The growth of the IM in Algeria and Tunisia since 2008 has been attributed to diminished economic contributions and weakened governance and regulatory frameworks (Bizimana 2023).

Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs): defined as illicit financial transactions that cross borders and reflect value exchange (UNODC, 2023). Represent cause and result of HTS crimes, financial crimes that support and produce trafficking networks and weaken governance (Blankenburg S and Khan M 2012).IFFs primarily stem from illegal activities, financing crime and terrorism, and legal activities such as tax evasion. IFFs have significant global socioeconomic implications, particularly affecting SMCs, draining essential resources for human development and affecting the public spending for health and education (Miyandazi L 2019), disproportionately impacting the impoverished reliant on government aid. Furthermore, IFFs Impact Social Services: Nations with high IFFs allocate considerably less to vital services, adversely affecting the poor. IFFs deplete development resources during departures (outflows) and arrivals (inflows), exacerbating issues such as money laundering and corruption, thereby destabilizing legal frameworks and market stability. In 2017, IFFs for SMCs were estimated at $21.9 billion in inflows and $40.4 billion in outflows (UNODC, 2018). IFFs are notably linked to HTS, where heightened profits arise during exploitation, ensuring a continuous revenue stream. Criminal entities utilize financial returns from trafficking in three main ways: i) repatriating funds for investment in legal enterprises; ii) financing extravagant lifestyles, thus generating consumer-related IFFs; iii) investing in various criminal or legitimate endeavours within the host country, each potentially facilitating money laundering (UNODC 2023).

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3.1.3 Dynamicity of the SMC Growth Pattern

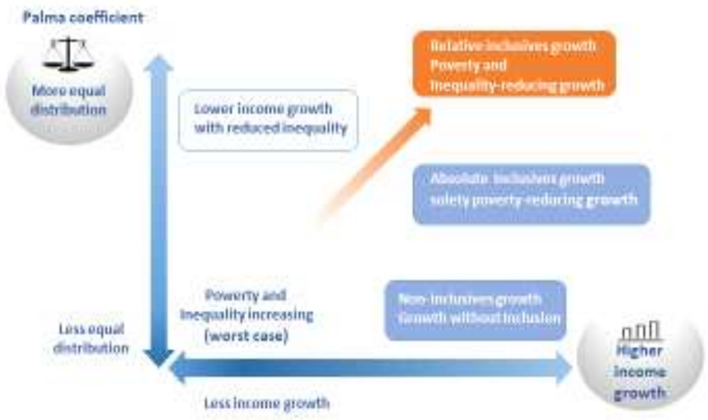
Economic growth does not always reduce poverty in developing countries. Socioeconomic development must align with economic growth and require an equitable distribution of benefits. The concept of "equitable growth" highlights the importance of fair growth, as facilitated by anti-poverty policies. Sustainable poverty reduction depends on a growth model that includes diverse social classes in economic development. "Equitable growth" focuses on inclusive growth and the fair distribution of benefits while enhancing human capital through public investment. It emphasizes the distribution of growth benefits across various socioeconomic groups. As indicated by income growth exceeding that of the general population, pro-poor growth significantly benefits the poor. The pro-poor growth pattern includes significant average income growth, a strong link between income growth and poverty reduction, and alleviating patterns. Inclusive growth ensures equitable distribution of benefits while addressing extreme poverty and inequalities. The inclusive growth model aims to reduce both poverty and inequality, which is sometimes confused with pro-poor growth. Pro-poor growth addresses poverty, whereas inclusive growth improves overall societal welfare. The multidimensional framework of inclusive growth integrates income and non-income factors such as health and education. Equitable growth promotes fairness in employment and wages. Employment is crucial for youth, who are particularly vulnerable to labour market challenges. Despite growth from 2000 to 2011, SMCs struggle with youth employment issues. Employment rates in SMCs are shaped by labour demand, educational gaps, socioeconomic conditions, and macroeconomic policies. These factors influence labour market dynamics and affect the employability of youth and women. SMCs face challenges in job creation and skill matching with market needs. Factors contributing to low employment in SMCs include inadequate labour demand, educational mismatches, and socioeconomic barriers. Governance quality and employment regulations significantly impact employment outcomes.

SMC governments since the 1990s have emphasized economic expansion over the equitable distribution of income. Thus, implementing Policies aimed at reducing income inequality and poverty could foster a pattern of inclusive growth and benefit SMCs in addressing the increasing inequality within capitalist frameworks (Sutanto et al., 2024).

The Palma coefficient is a significant tool for examining inequality stemming from income extremes; it concentrates on income distribution patterns between the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 40% of the population (Cobham & Sumner, 2016).

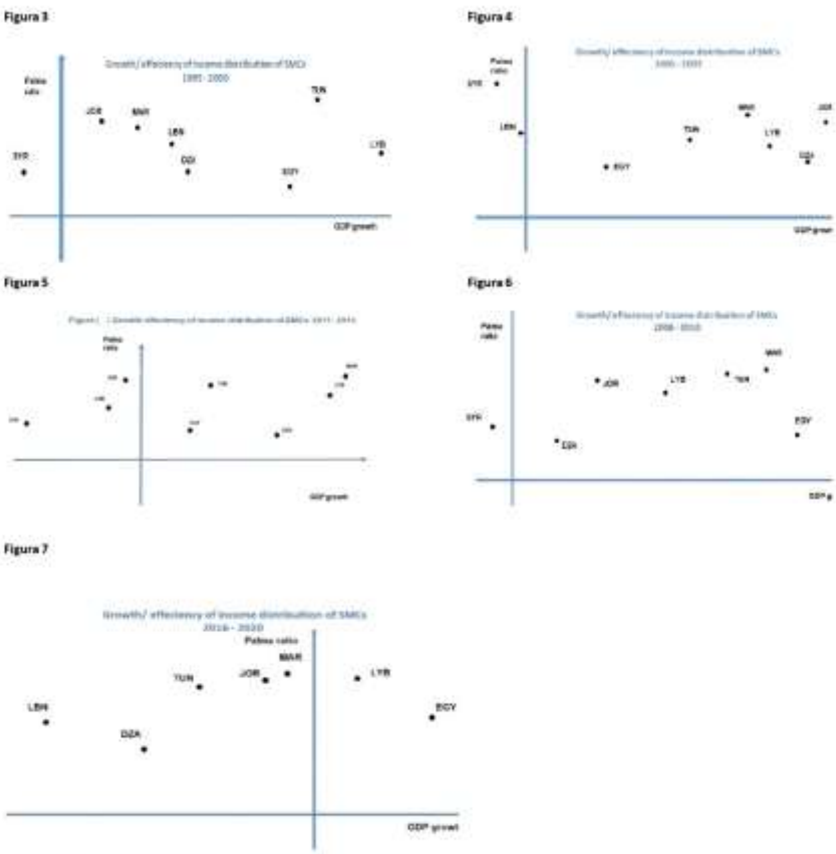
The Palma Proposition posits that these two segments primarily influence changes in income inequality, while the central 50% remains stable, a trend observed across various countries and periods, enhancing the measure's validity. Empirical research supports the stability of the middle-income segment and the significant role of extremes in shaping inequality (Cobham, 2013). This focus on the income distribution "tails" provides a clearer representation of inequality, especially where traditional metrics, such as the “Gini” coefficient, may obscure disparities.

Graphic 2 Conceptual view of the dynamicity of the growth pattern



Graph 2 depicts five economic growth patterns in relation to the income inequality: 1) Relative inclusiveness growth, reducing both poverty and inequality (optimal scenario); 2) Absolute inclusive growth, solely reducing poverty; 3) Lower income growth with diminishing inequality; 4) Non-inclusive growth, growth without equity; 5) Increasing poverty and inequality worst scenario).

Mapping the SMCs according to the equitability of economic growth pattern (1995 - 2020):



Source: Authors' calculations based on World Bank Data World

From the mid-1990s to 2000 (figure 3), Libya was noted for its inclusive growth and reduced inequality, followed by Egypt, which achieved absolute inclusivity. Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria followed Egypt in terms of inequality reduction, while Tunisia displayed high growth without inclusivity. The 2000s were marked by significant economic growth in the Southern Mediterranean Countries, driven by improved macroeconomic policies, despite rising poverty and income inequality, leading to social isolation that impeded market participation. From 2000 to 2005 (figure 4), Algeria was recognized for its economic growth and reduced inequality, while Egypt decreased in growth but remained last in inequality reduction, followed by Morocco, Jordan, Libya, and Tunisia, which achieved growth without inclusivity, whereas Syria and Lebanon faced negative growth and high inequality. Between 2006 and 2011 (figure 5), Egypt improved its standing relative to Algeria, achieving greater growth and lower inequality, while Algeria fell to last place with reduced growth, and Lebanon, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia experienced growth without inclusivity, whereas Syria continued to have negative growth and moderate inclusivity. The 2011 Arab Spring adversely affected economic growth across all SMCs (figure 6 and 7); leading to lower to negative growth, while maintaining high inequality levels.

3.2 Institutional Driver of the CSHTS

Ad hoc abuses of power by public officials during their interactions with ordinary persons are often defined as petty corruption. Corruption occurs on a larger scale and affects entire organizations or public bodies, including law enforcement and justice systems. At the highest levels, it causes significant loss to a state or its people by eroding confidence or otherwise depriving them of fundamental rights.

3.2.1 Direct Linkages “Micro Governance”

The "Micro Governance" refers to the operational dynamics of the HTS crime network, which act as a facilitator within the procedural and chain level, including: bribery and embezzlement, trading in influence, abuse of functions, illicit enrichment, money laundering, and concealment of proceeds of crime, law enforcement measures, engagement in international cooperation, and ensuring asset recovery. Acts of corruption relating to HTS involve actors from the public and the private sectors, such as recruitment agencies, intermediaries, and service providers. The "Micro Governance" against HTS is marked by several pathologies, such as insufficient protection of trafficked persons and inadequate prevention programs in both origin and destination countries, that hinder the overall effectiveness of governance efforts (Friesendorf, 2007 and 2013, Morero, 2022, Sarantaki, 2023). Corruption involves public officials through giving or obtaining an advantage through illegitimate means or means inconsistent with their duties (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Gallagher, A., 2008). Corruption by process may occur on a small scale, involving one or a handful of individuals in a larger public organization taking advantage of opportunities to exploit their power and/or professional position for personal gain (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Micro-governance as a facilitator of HTS by process during:

1) The mobility process: corruption occurs during immigration border crossings and obtaining false documentation through bribery and abuse of power (Broad and Lord, 2018, and Dandurand, Y., 2017). A robust licensing system of recruitment agencies is essential to mitigate corruption opportunities, where bribes are used to expedite bureaucratic processes and circumvent immigration laws. Relationships between recruiters and public officials may foster corrupt structures; however, the corruption exacerbates when recruiters hold public positions. UNODC's study found that traffickers often use bribery to obtain visas, adding such costs to victims' debts.

2) The exploitation processes: occur when police accept bribes to overlook trafficking activities or to provide advanced notice of inspections. The Special Investigative Authorities must scrutinize potential collusion between public officials and trafficking networks (UNODC, 2023). Corruption also extends to the private sector, including hotels and industries, where bribed supervisors ignore exploitative conditions and undocumented workers (UNODC, 2018). This corruption enables the ongoing exploitation of trafficking victims, with private entities, such as labor recruiters and accommodation providers, also facilitating trafficking (UNODC 2018, 2011; McAdam, 2019; Campana, P., 2020).

3) The investigation and prosecution process: occurs when law enforcement officials accept bribes to ignore trafficking activities or actively aid traffickers by returning victims or leaking operational information. Police corruption reduces traffickers' operational costs. Corrupt officials are "protectors" who complicate legal actions against smugglers and often evade prosecution for their roles. Moreover, numerous instances document police involvement in recruiting individuals into exploitative circumstances. Furthermore, officials such as police officers, prosecutors, or judges may be involved in the control of victims, where they may deter victims from reporting abuse, perpetuating exploitation through threats. Corruption in victims' home countries can control them in new environments, with traffickers exploiting perceptions of police corruption (UNODC, 2018).

4) The organ trafficking process. Organ trafficking has historically lacked an international focus. The recent toolkit highlights the expanding geographic scope of this crime. Organ shortages lead desperate patients to bypass domestic systems or seek poorly regulated transplantation abroad. Illicit activities may involve health, medical, and transplant services(UNODC, 2025). Traffickers may collaborate with medical professionals for various purposes, including testing compatibility and conducting procedures. Some medical staff may be deceived unwittingly, showcasing traffickers' manipulation skills. Additional examples include the illegal acquisition of medical licenses and deceiving donors into signing false documents (Jahic, G., Finckenauer, 2005).

Micro-governance as facilitator HTS by chain-specific circumstances, actors, and procedures as follows:

1) Person's chain: involves victim recruitment, documentation, transport, exploitation, and crime proceeds laundering, with corrupt actors including various law enforcement and private sector entities. The procedure entails ignoring, tolerating, and facilitating trafficking through the involvement of corruption and organized crime.

2) Criminal justice's chain: during the creation and implementation of legal frameworks includes legislative activities, crime prevention strategies, investigative measures,

prosecutorial actions, and the enforcement of penalties, with corrupt entities consisting of governmental officials and law enforcement agents. The procedure involves inaction, justice obstruction, information manipulation, and a spectrum of misconduct from duty violations to organized crime involvement.

3) Victim’s protection and support chain: during delivering support, protection, and shelter, with actors including NGOs and public social service entities. The procedure ranges from passivity to the unethical disclosure of the victim’s information.

3.2.2 Direct Linkages “Macro Governance”

In 2016, Europol and Interpol reports highlighted that smuggling hotspots emerge where law enforcement is weak, facilitating smugglers' activities.

Low Corruption Perception assists smugglers in recruiting and manipulating migrants. In corrupt nations, migrants often accept traffickers' claims regarding the necessity of intermediaries for travel documents. Additionally, experiences of corruption lead migrants to perceive reporting exploitation as futile, as corrupt police return them. Corruption also hinders the identification and protection of exploitation victims.

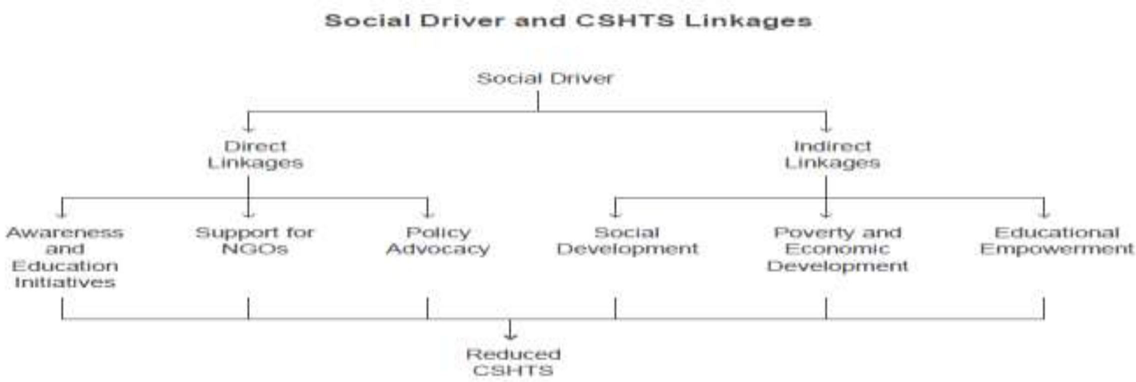
The governance index refers to the macro governance quality. Analysis of BTI data reveals a significant lack of effective governance in the SMCs, with Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria displaying moderate governance quality, while Egypt's governance is weak, and Syria, Lebanon, and Libya exhibit severely deficient governance. In this context, governance refers to the effectiveness, capacity, and accountability of political leadership, which includes governmental bodies, political elites, and non-governmental organizations pivotal to societal change. Effective political leadership embodies good governance principles by managing development processes, efficiently utilizing resources, building consensus for reform, and collaborating with international partners.

The index of rule of law refers to weak performance in SMCs, where the separation of powers exists but is poorly implemented. The judiciary faces significant functional deficits, limited jurisdiction, and resource constraints. Its independence is compromised by external pressures and corruption. Legal breaches by officeholders often go unpunished, despite sporadic media scrutiny. Civil rights are legislated but frequently violated in practice. Institutions for addressing civil rights violations are largely ineffective. The score of the rule of law index in 2024 shows varied performance, with limited effectiveness in Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, while Egypt, Syria, and Libya exhibit inadequate performance. Across SMCs, the score of the anti-corruption policy effectiveness index in 2024 is 3- 5 in Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt, indicating weak prosecution efforts, while in Syria and Libya score is below 3, referring to a failure to manage corruption and a lack of integrity mechanisms (Middle East and North Africa Report, n.d.)

3.2.3 Indirect Linkages of the Institutional Driver

Weak institutional capacity and corruption lead to misallocation of public resources toward speculative and rent-seeking investments, ignites inflation and unemployment rates, that hurt vulnerable people; in addition lead to lower public spending quality .which adversely impact equitable growth, This perpetuates a cycle where high poverty exacerbates corruption and degrades human capital, particularly within the realms of education and skill development, Furthermore, an inefficient legal framework is associated with:1) social conflict and diminishes societal peace, thereby inciting political and economic instability that erodes confidence among both foreign and domestic investors, particularly those seeking to establish strategic industries; 2)Market distortions and weak control that cause an inequitable distribution of goods and services; 3) increases the business uncertainty environment, discouraging long-run productive investment.

3.3 The Social Driver of the CSHTS



The Social Capital (SC) and Philanthropic Organizations (POs) are core elements of the social driver in reducing the CSHTS through addressing "micro" and "macro" vulnerabilities, furthermore enhancing the human capital. The social driver can mitigate the risk factors associated with exploitation such as poverty and social isolation, and enhances private giving's role in the development process (Balihar, 2013; Elaine, J., and others, 2017; Carson, S., and others, 2022). POs can directly and indirectly address CSHTS through awareness campaigns and victim support. Furthermore, create sustainable solutions to developmental issues. SC refers to the community trust, reciprocity, and social networks that foster collective action, particularly in resource-limited rural areas. Effective poverty alleviation necessitates active participation in social networks, especially in complex districts (Zekeri, 2013; Anh, 2024; Scuderi et al., 2022; Tanjung and Muryani, 2019). The SC index quantifies the social trust levels, cooperation and giving culture over time. The index reveals moderate to low trust levels in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon, while Syria and Libya exhibit very low trust and civic organization. The socio-cultural environment influences individual giving, primarily driven by religious motivations, with Lebanon scoring highest at 5.00, followed by Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt at 4.00 ((*Middle East and North Africa Report*, n.d.).

3.3.1 Direct Linkage Variables

1) Educational programs provided by POs can enhance anti-human trafficking knowledge, effectively reduce the vulnerability among at-risk populations, and increase trafficking case reporting (Xie et al., 2024; Faith and, 2011; Gabrielle, Barrientos, 2014). Awareness, education, and anti-HTS policy advocacy encourage communities to build effective

anti-trafficking campaigns.

2) POs can affect the institutional capacity that strengthens legal frameworks against HTS and advocate for victim protection in the judicial system.

3) Social capital can empower trust among citizens, enhance cooperation and support self-help, and empower the community culture against exploitation.

4) POs and SC prioritize victim rescue, vulnerable population protection, and rehabilitation services.

3.3.2 Indirect Linkage Variables

This occurs through the role of the social drivers in the process of economic development, sustainable solutions, and educational and training empowerment for children and women in the marginalized area. Social development initiatives uplift vulnerable communities and decrease trafficking susceptibility. SC and POs target socio-economic objectives to diminish conditions fostering HTS from unequal power dynamics, highlighting its global significance (Barner et al., 2014, Faith et and, 2011). Economic empowerment initiatives create sustainable livelihoods, thereby reducing the allure.

3.3.3 Mapping SMCs in Accordance of the Philanthropic Environment

The Arab Spring has increased the political and economic challenges faced by the POs. Governments of the SMCs have imposed more strict regulations to address terrorism financing.

Despite favorable tax conditions, POs remain insufficient. In countries such as Egypt and Jordan, government interventions require organizational transparency with stringent regulations that contribute to a cumbersome approval process for tax incentives. Regulatory environments in Egypt and Morocco are particularly restrictive concerning cross-border donations, and violations of fundraising norms can result in severe repercussions for POs.

Furthermore, to the challenges concern the autonomy of POs, which include tax complications faced by international POs that differ from domestic charities, thereby hindering cross-border donations. Variability in legal and tax frameworks among nations obstructs effective cross-border operations, while a repressive political climate criminalizes charitable actions, eroding both operational capacity and public trust in NGOs (Mancuso & Signorelli, 2022). Furthermore, POs’ difficulties are exacerbated by stringent foreign exchange regulations and restrictive laws on foreign funding, ultimately undermining the development of a robust philanthropic system (Mart ń et al., 2004).

Indices of assessment:

1) The Global Philanthropy Environment Index (GPEI) evaluates a nation's support for philanthropy, measuring donation facilitation; a higher GPEI score indicates a supportive environment, while a lower score signifies obstacles influenced by legal, societal, and organizational factors. Countries with favorable tax regulations and active charities tend to achieve higher scores, whereas stringent donation laws result in lower scores. GPEI serves as a valuable instrument for governments to enhance the philanthropic sector's effectiveness, awareness, and accountability of charitable activities (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy).
2) The Global Philanthropy Tracker index (GPT) offers comprehensive insights into cross-border philanthropic contributions and domestic philanthropy, enriching the understanding of the global philanthropic landscape. The GPEI score in SMCs in 2018 was 3.17, highlighting significant political and governance challenges for philanthropic organizations (POs), with scores varying from 3.67 in Jordan and Lebanon to 2.75 in Egypt, indicative of stringent governmental control over philanthropic activities. For example, Jordan often restricts registration or foreign funding requests arbitrarily, while Egypt, Morocco, and Lebanon face lengthy registration processes; Egypt has the lowest Ease of Operating Philanthropic Organizations score at 2.50, whereas Jordan and Lebanon score highest at 3.33, with tax incentives varying significantly. However, the GPT score in SMCs is constrained by anti-terrorism policies that enforce strict regulations, complicating the donation process, with Lebanon achieving the highest score for

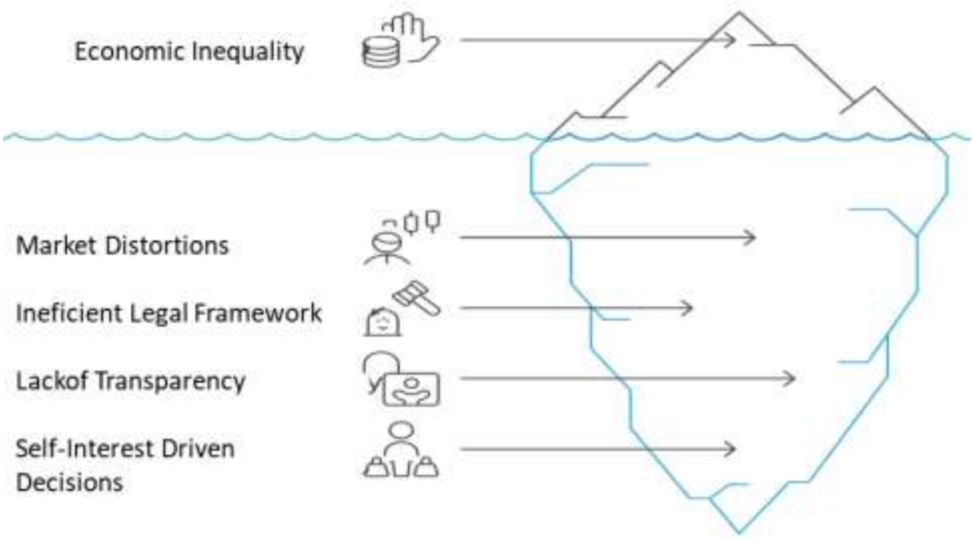
Cross-Border Flows at 4.00, followed by Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy). The political limitations on POs in SMCs create notable challenges, particularly in Egypt and Jordan, where legal registration denials and funding restrictions are prevalent; Lebanon and Jordan possess the highest Political Environment scores, while Egypt records the lowest (Osili and others, 2020).

3) Number of POs (NPOs), refers to the formal engagement of the POs through two perspectives: 1) NPOs/Population, indicating individual engagement ease; 2) NPOs/GDP per Capita, relating to societal generosity. In 2018, Morocco exhibits a high number of registered Philanthropic Organizations (116,836), indicating significant commercial activity. Morocco ranks highest in NPOs relative to population, followed by Lebanon and Jordan, while Egypt ranks lowest. Regarding NPOs relative to GDP per Capita, Morocco also leads, with Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon trailing Egypt (Osili and others 2020). Monitoring these indices is crucial for improving global philanthropic strategies against HTS and CSHTS.

4. Discussion and Research Implications of the Proposed Framework

Equitable economic growth is essential to mitigate CSHTS by addressing poverty and inequality. This entails lowering socio-economic barriers and promoting access to education, social safety nets, and human development policies. Informal markets and illicit financial flows indirectly influence growth patterns, exacerbating poverty and inequity, thus increasing CSHTS. The research evaluated growth pattern equitability in SMCs from 1995 to 2020.

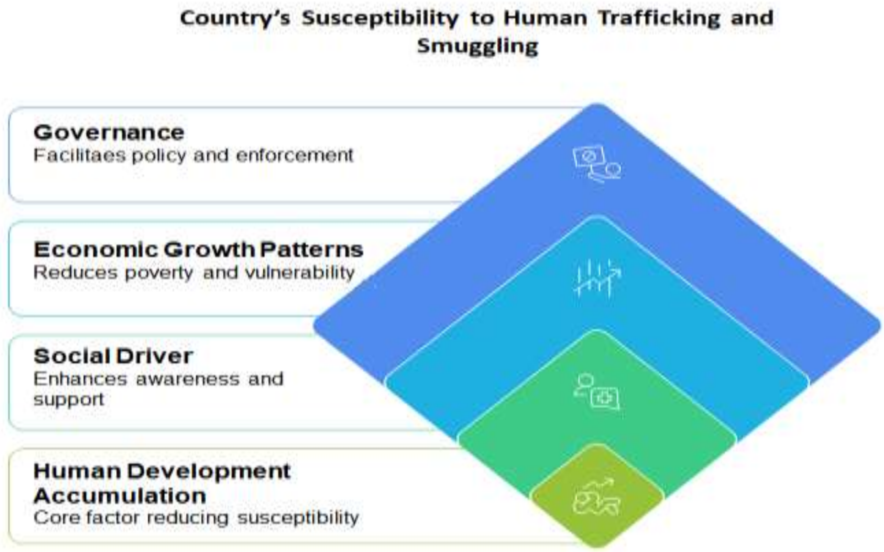
The institutional driver of CSHTS, particularly "Micro Governance" aspects facilitate operational dynamics. Robust micro anti-corruption measures foster trust with victims, aiding in their identification and support. Additionally, the Macro Governance dimension, including the rule of law and corruption perception, can effectively curtail HTS activities. The institutional driver interacts with economic and social factors to decrease CSHTS through improved public resource allocation and targeted investments for sustainable development and human capital enhancement. The study explored governance levels as part of the institutional driver in SMCs.



The social driver fortifies community resilience against HTS crime. The research analyzed Social Capital and Philanthropy Organizations to determine the social drivers' impact on CSHTS in SMCs. Raising community awareness, fostering inter-agency cooperation, and implementing victim-centered strategies can effectively reduce CSHTS . Policy advocacy enables communities to advocate for anti-trafficking legislation. Enhancing POS, promoting cross-border donations, and developing new POs are vital for the social drivers to alleviate CSHTS and prevent new victimization. Moreover, the social driver can bolster the institutional driver by enhancing law enforcement and victim support within the micro governance framework.

- Interplay of the three drivers within the conceptual framework of the CSHTS:

1) Human trafficking and smuggling crimes are the main source of the illicit financial flows that adversely impact economic, institutional, and social drivers of CSHTS.
2) The interaction of institutional and economic drivers enhance the expansion of the informal market, which impacts human development outcomes and CSHTS
3) Misallocation of public resources and spending resulted from low institutional capacity and corruption adversely led to an inequitable growth pattern. This perpetuates a cycle where high poverty exacerbates and corruption degrades human capital and CSHTS,
4) Poor governance ignites social conflict and threatens societal peace, political and economic instability, which increases business uncertainty. Disincentive long-run productive investment lowers job opportunities, increasing CSHTS
5) An inefficient legal framework shortage of public investment in healthcare and education, lower employment opportunities increasing CSHTS.
6) Lack of institutional oversight facilitates tax evasion, impacting the quantity of public spending, which increases the vulnerability of the poorest population segments.
7) Low governance is a fertile land that prioritizes individual capital gains over societal benefits, resulting in a gradual erosion of human capital and affecting CSHTS.
8) The influence of business elites in economic decision-making leads to market monopoly and conflicts of interest, and worsens income inequality.
9) Institutional weakness is a main obstacle faced by the social driver in reducing CSHTS through limiting the role of POs.
10) Poverty and inequality resulting from an inadequate pattern of economic growth and low governance impact the social driver of CSHTS by diminishing the social capital, eroding confidence among people increasing their vulnerability.



5. Conclusion

This study advances an argument for the Human Trafficking and Smuggling (HTS) crimes. The "Country's Susceptibility to human trafficking and smuggling" (CSHTS) as is a new concept that aggregate two types of vulnerability: micro" level which refers to individual vulnerability and "macro" level which refers to governmental vulnerability of the public policies.

The study introduced a conceptual framework that clarifies the direct and indirect linkages of the three main drivers of this crime: economic, institutional, and social drivers, analysing their interconnections and inter-linkages, subject of analysis is the Southern Mediterranean countries. The study found that the Economic, institutional, and social drivers can effectively interplay to reduce the CSHTS through enhance human capital, fortify community ties, and promote empowered and cohesive social capital. The proposed conceptual framework can substantially reduce the CSHTS contingent upon the integration of the variables of the three drivers, establishing an entire framework of equitable growth pattern, good governance, community involvement, and victim-centred strategies.

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