APRIL 2021

"LÒT BÒ A"*

Mapping of migration trends by sea

* "On the other side"

IOM UN MIGRATION

Funded by
European Union
Civil Protection and
Humanitarian Aid

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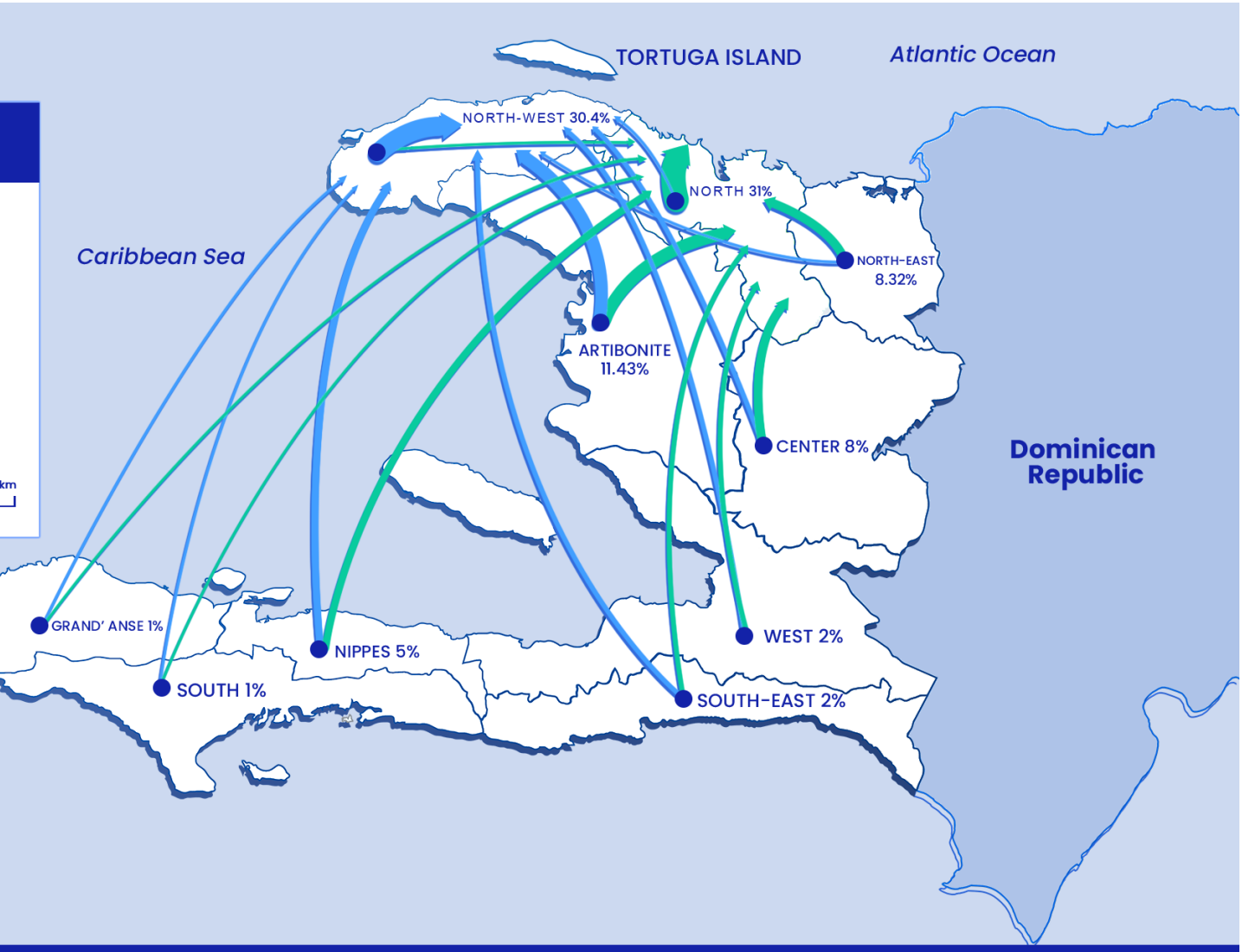
CONTEXTUALIZATION

As part of the project "Supporting vulnerable migrants in Haiti through improved protection", funded by the European Commission's Directorate General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has implemented a pilot maritime border monitoring activity entitled "Blue Border Monitoring". In this framework, IOM seeks to examine and understand the migration flows observed in the North and North-West departments to establish migration trends and better understand the factors of migration. This study provides information on observed migration flows, types of movements, the socio-economic profile of migrants as well as their main vulnerabilities, in order to better guide the protection interventions of IOM and its partners.

This document presents the main routes taken by Haitian migrants and the difficulties encountered by the boats transporting migrants clandestinely out of Haiti to foreign destinations.

The information provided below is based on results obtained from a field analysis through interviews with key informants, such as representatives of state institutions, leaders of civil society organizations (CSOs) and actors involved in the organization of this type of trip (migrants, boat captains, sailors, canvassers, etc.). This study was conducted in the North (Cap-Haitian, Limbe, Limonade) and North-West (Port-de-Paix, Jean Rabel, Saint-Louis-du-Nord, Anse-à-Foleur) departments between March 1 and April 31, 2021.

The data collected made it possible to (i) analyze the main points of departure in Haiti; (ii) trace the maritime routes used by migrants; (iii) identify the main points of arrival, and (iv) describe the difficulties that the boats must face during these migratory journeys. These results are, therefore, to be considered as "trends" and not as factual data.

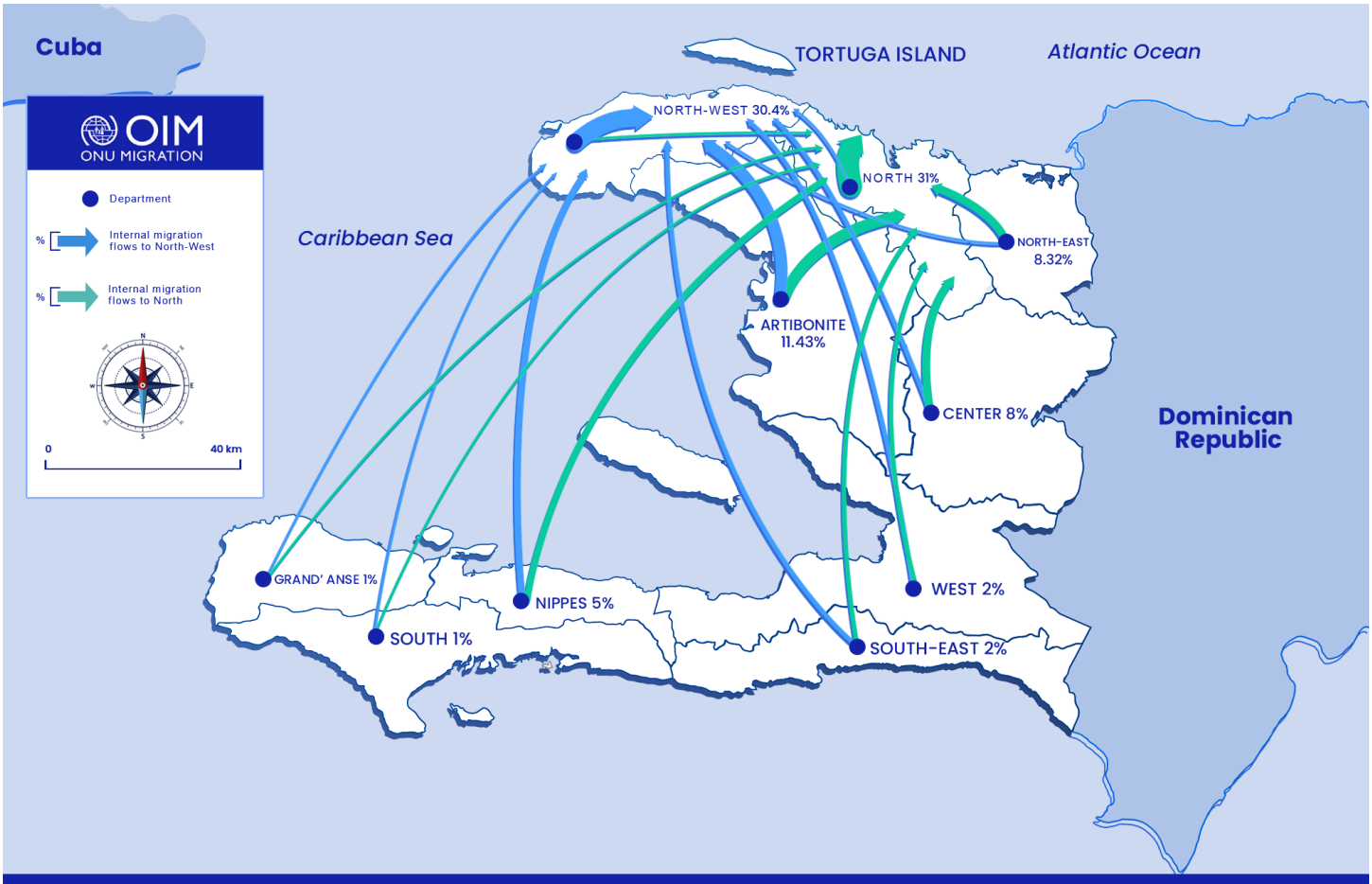


RATION TOWARDS THE POINTS OF DEPARTURE ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF HAITI

INTERNAL MIGRATION TO POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Clandestine migration by sea, as repeatedly emphasized in interviews with key actors, increasingly attracts migrants from all over the country.

Although migrants departing from the northern coasts of Haiti used to be mainly from the northern regions, migratory trends today show that the migrants from other regions in Haiti also tend to make use of this passage way by boat. The map below illustrates this trend.



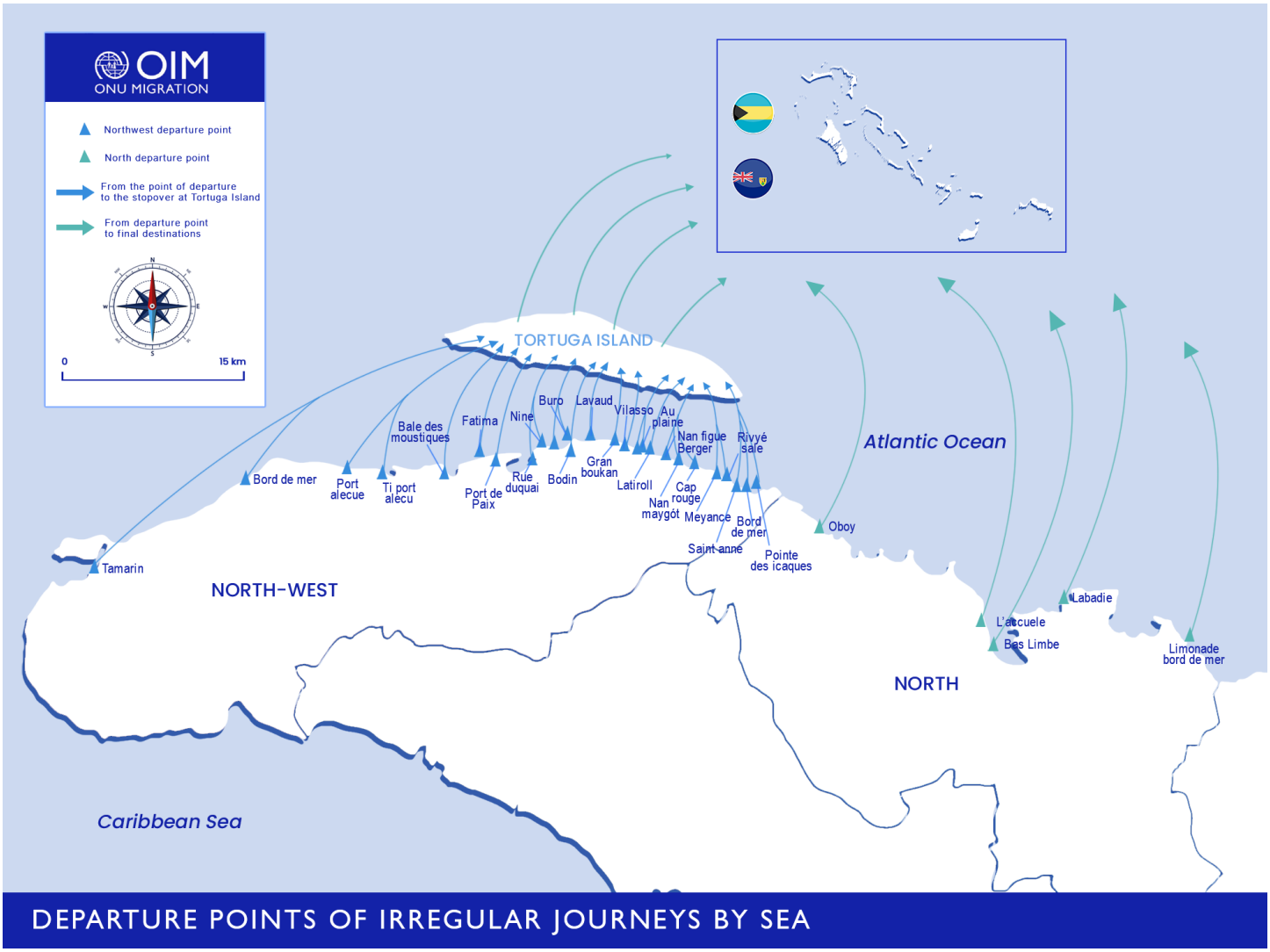
INTERNAL MIGRATION TOWARDS THE POINTS OF DEPARTURE ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF HAITI

POINTS OF DEPARTURE TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Illegal migration by sea takes place mainly from the northern coast of Haiti, particularly in the North and North-West departments.

In the North-West Department, 29 departure points have been identified by IOM for the transportation of would-be migrants to Tortuga Island, from where they will depart to their final destination.

Five departure points to foreign countries have been identified in the North Department.



DEPARTURE POINTS OF IRREGULAR JOURNEYS BY SEA

FINAL DESTINATIONS

As the map below shows, there are three main routes:

1. Tortuga Island → Bahamas
2. Tortuga Island → Turks and Caicos Islands
3. Northern Department → Turks and Caicos Islands

The boats are chosen according to the itinerary:

- Sailboats are preferred for the Bahamas, as the winds (especially between April and September) blow from the northeast and are therefore more suitable for sailing;
- For the Turks and Caicos Islands, the vast majority of boats used are motor boats, although the cost of sailing is higher, as the winds are not favorable even for boats leaving from the north coast.

DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO NAVIGATION

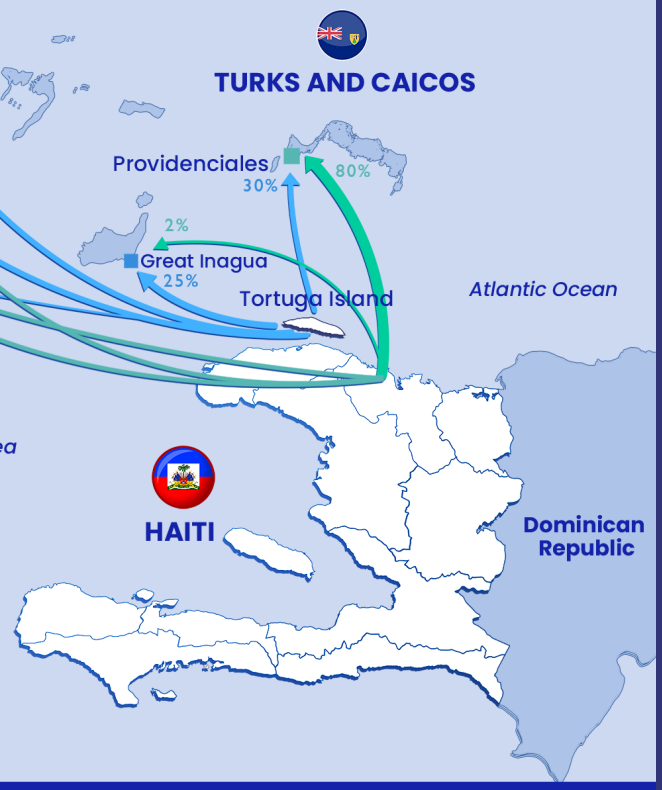
Undertaking a sea crossing in the conditions in which Haitian illegal migrants travel often involves extremely dangerous risks, which can be :

- **Natural** and relatively predictable (storm, etc.) or unpredictable (tsunami, collision with sandbank, reef, tree trunk, cetacean...) ;
- **Anthropogenic**: collision with submarine, other vessel, wreck, floating or semi-submerged object, etc. ;
- **Human:** human error and negligence are often one of the many factors that cause maritime accidents. The risk also depends on the skills of the crew and the condition of the vessel and its maintenance.

MIGRATION FLOWS BY SEA

Common risks to the vessel vary depending on the vessel, location, season and situation. The main risks are engine failure or loss of maneuverability, cargo shifting, fire on board or explosion, grounding and collision, sinking, and in some cases piracy.

When a vessel is involved in a maritime accident, its location and rescue will be more difficult if the vessel: (i) is not properly registered with maritime affairs and has not given prior notification of its voyage and course; (ii) has no means of satellite communication; and (iii) is engaged in an illegal voyage or activity and thus avoids attracting the attention of surveillance, marine police, and rescue.



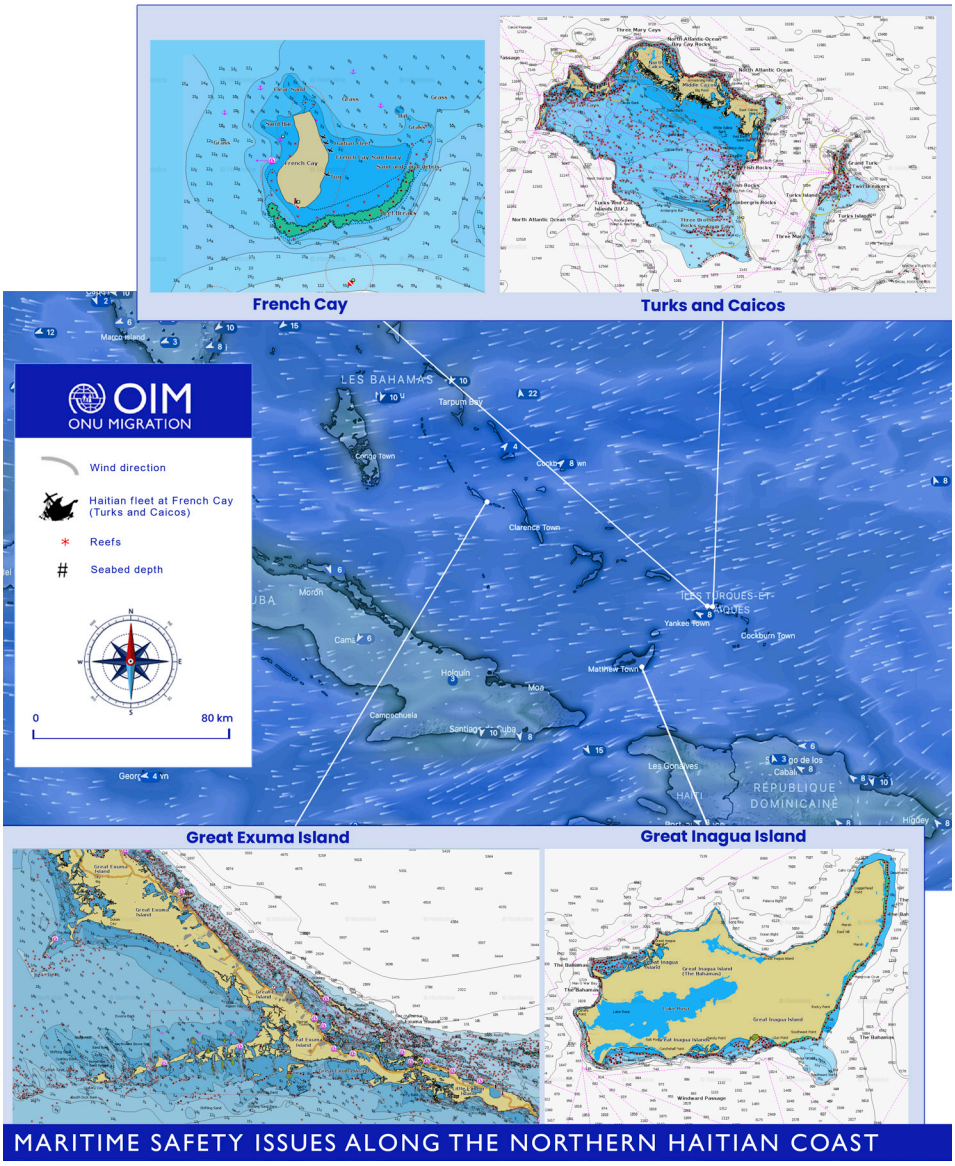
THE CHALLENGES OF MARITIME SECURITY NORTH OF THE HAITIAN COAST

As presented earlier, the two main trajectories used by the boats transporting clandestine migrants from Haiti are: (i) Tortuga Island - Bahamas; and (ii) Cap-Haitian - Providenciales (Turks and Caicos Islands). Vessels using these routes frequently encounter difficulties navigating these waters.

Winds, currents, sandbanks and reefs

The location and geographical conditions of the northern Caribbean are, to a certain extent, elements that can be considered favorable to migratory flows: thanks to its archipelagos, the Bahamas offer "natural bridges" to Florida. In addition, the multitude of islands and islets in the Bahamas, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the northern coast of Cuba are often used as possible landing and transit areas in case of an emergency.

Nevertheless, these advantages are double-edged when you consider the geography of these 700 islands and 2000 islets: extremely flat on the edge of limestone banks, they are marked by drought and sensitive to the impact of tides and hurricanes. Most of these islands are deserted, and only about twenty have a permanent population. In addition, coral reefs and sandbanks that rise to the surface and submerge with the tides are important hazards to consider. Many illegal boats have hit these natural obstacles and sunk, often with fatal consequences for the passengers on board.



Vessel traffic and the Coast Guard

The Windward Passage is a strait that separates the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola and connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean Sea. The name corresponds to the French translation "Passage du vent". Indeed, it is located on the upstream side in relation to the Trade Winds, the dominant local winds.

This strait is the most direct maritime route between the Panama Canal and the Atlantic coast of the United States. It is therefore a strait particularly frequented by commercial ships and tankers (as shown on the map below).

This increases the likelihood of collisions between vessels, but also the possibility that Haitian vessels heading to the Bahamas, among other places, will encounter other vessels during their crossings. Despite this, to date, there have been no reports of Haitian vessels in distress, as required by the Montego Bay Convention, as it is highly likely that they will appear to other vessels in mid-sea...

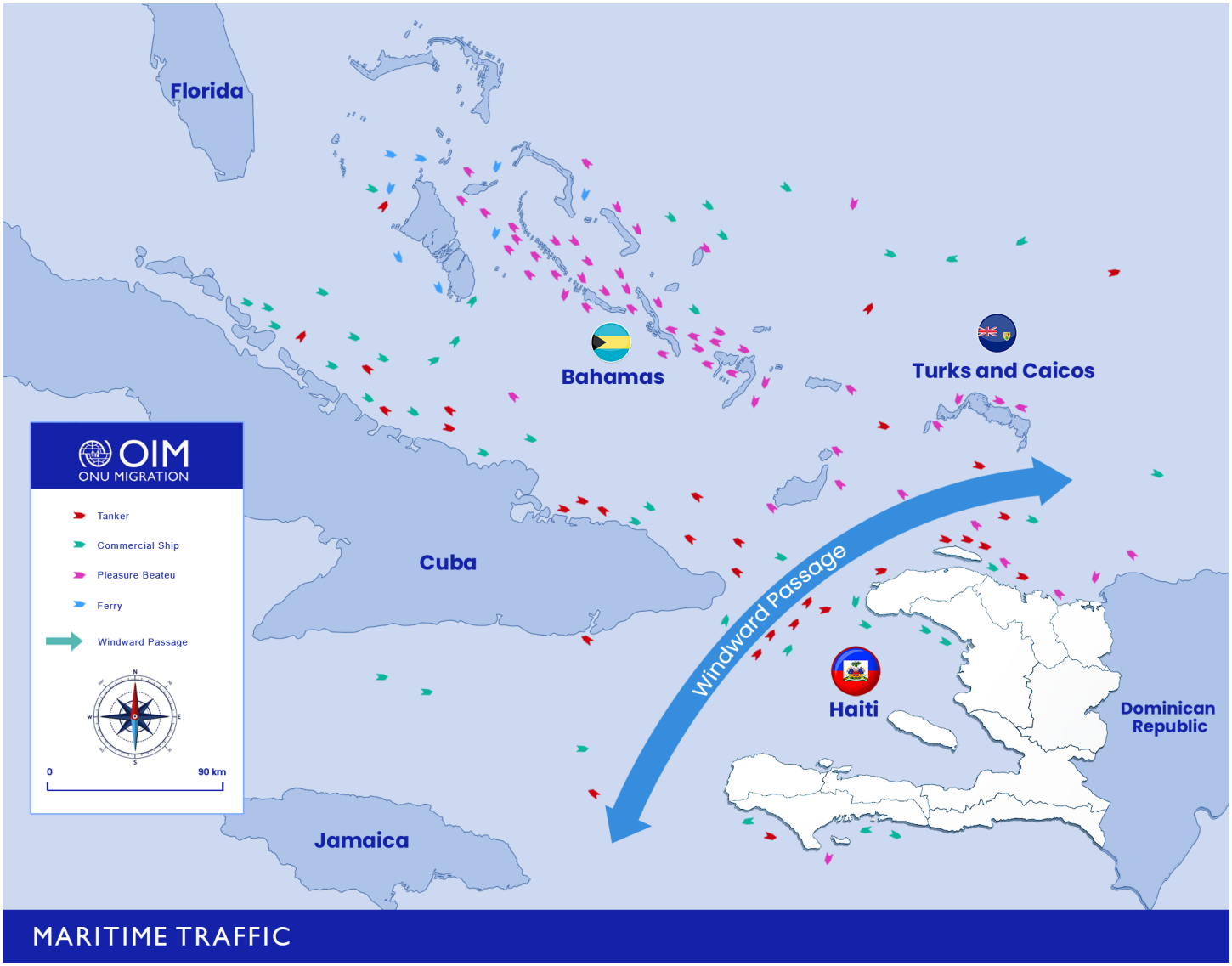


Figure 1 -Own elaboration from https://www.marinetraffic.com/en/ais/home/centerx:-74.9/centery:29.2/zoom:6, 04/2021

But, without a doubt, The main challenge faced by illegal vessels is the large presence of the Coast Guard which is equipped with the most sophisticated radar technology.

The Bahamas Coast Guard, the Turks and Caicos Coast Guard, and especially the US Coast Guard monitor the Haitian coast with ships and helicopters. One would think that the systems used by Haitian captains, via coded messages[1] communicated by telephone as they approach the coastline - among others - would not be of much use in comparison, however it is estimated that at least 1 out of every 4 ships arrives safely at its destination - according to the analysis made on the basis of the information provided by the US Coast Guard and key actors on the ground.

1 *"Lapli ap tombè"* (Translation: "The rain is falling") = The police are present on the spot: do not disembark!
"Kabrit nan lari a" (Translation: "the goat is on the street" = The boss is here: he's waiting for you to show up!

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« Se selment dlo ou ap gade »

("All you see is water")

Migrant

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