



**Africa** - Kidnappings across Africa continued to be reported during April, with Nigeria being the clear hotspot. In Uganda, a US citizen and her tour guide were kidnapped from inside the Queen Elizabeth National Park. A ransom of USD 500,000 was made by the abductees, and after negotiations, both the US citizen and tour guide were released unharmed.

**Kenya:** Al Shabab militants are believed to have kidnapped two Cuban doctors in north-eastern Kenya on April 19 after ambushing their vehicle and killing the police escort. The victims are part of a group of 100 Cubans augmenting health services near the border area. Last November, armed fighters with suspected links to al Shabab abducted Silvia Romano, an Italian charity worker, in the south-eastern town of Chakama. Her whereabouts is also unknown. Al Shabab retains control of large swathes of Somalia and continues to wage a cross-border insurgent campaign against Kenya for its role in the AMISOM mission.

**Libya:** On April 28, Sebastien Chadaud-Petronin, son of an elderly Frenchwoman who was kidnapped by jihadists in Gao on December 24, 2016, told the French newspaper, Journal Du Dimanche, that French officials had rejected an offer from the kidnappers which he had received when he visited Mali on December 2018. He added that the French foreign ministry had side-lined him and taken the decision "to sacrifice my mother". A source close to the foreign ministry said that France would continue to do everything to get the victim freed but her son's comments were not helping. He added that her son had made contact with an intermediary of the kidnappers but had refused to reveal the intermediary's identity.

**Morocco:** Police in Sale, close to Rabat arrested four suspects for K&R. The individuals reportedly kidnapped a 22-year-old man and asked for a MAD 4,000 (approx. USD 415) ransom.

**Mozambique:** On April 3, a police spokesman said that a businessman who was reported as the owner of a well-known wine store, had been kidnapped by three armed men as he left one of his shops in the centre of Maputo. Witnesses said that the kidnappers frightened off people by shooting in the air before forcing the victim into a vehicle and driving away. Since 2012, there have been a number of kidnappings for ransom in the country's cities but, over the past few months, the crime had almost died out apparently due to a series of arrests and convictions of criminals involved in this type of crime.

**Nigeria:** A kidnapping group shot dead British aid worker Faye Mooney and a Nigerian man in an armed attack on a holiday resort in north-western Nigeria. Shooters stormed Kajuru Castle, southeast of Kaduna City on April 19, firing sporadically and killing the Briton before kidnapping three others. Ms. Mooney had been working as a communication specialist for Mercy Corps and was one of 12 tourists traveling to the northern city of Kaduna from Lago. On April 26, the kidnappers demanded a ransom of N60 million (USD 166,500) for the three victims in captivity. Kidnap for ransom has intensified in the Kaduna state as criminal gangs comprised of former cattle rustlers shift towards kidnapping operations after military crackdowns on cattle theft. Kajuru is a flashpoint area experiencing worsening intercommunal conflict over limited land resources between herders and farmers.



**Nigeria:** On April 25, two Chinese construction workers, employees of Tongyi Chinese Group of Companies, were kidnapped from a construction site at Ivo River, Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. Many Chinese companies are engaged on multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects including railways, airports and roads in the country and their workers have frequently been targeted by kidnapers. The Ebonyi State Police Command announced the two victims had been rescued by a special anti-kidnapping unit of the Command after being held for two days. A spokesman said that the pressure on the kidnapers from the pursuing police had been so much that the kidnapers abandoned the two men and fled.

**Asia** - Rates of kidnapping in Asia remained generally steady over April. India has seen the most activity with the majority of incidents targeting children, both for ransom payments and trafficking purposes. The targeting of business people across Asia is a common tactic, with gangs seeing it as a means to acquire revenue.

**India:** On April 3, the son of the slain JD(U) leader, Surendra Singh Patel, was kidnapped while playing with friends. The victim's mother received a call at around 7:30pm in which the kidnapers demanded a ransom of Rs.5 lakh (USD 70,400) after which the kidnapers turned off the cell phone. She reported the incident to the police who started an investigation. The police arrested four youths aged 18 to 23 years who used to play cricket with the victim. One of the suspects broke down under questioning and confessed they had killed the victim as he would have been able to

identify them. The victim's body with his throat cut was found late on April 4.

**Pakistan:** On April 8, Peshawar police carried out a rescue operation and rescued two hostages who were chained up and arrested four suspects. The victims had been kidnapped three months ago and the kidnapers had demanded ransoms from their families. They also warned against non-payment. The released victims said they had not seen daylight for three months and the kidnapers had frequently administered intoxicating injections. The police said the kidnapers were criminals.

**The Philippines:** On April 14, Eduardo Ano, Department of Interior and Local Government Secretary, said foreigners need not be scared and alarmed at visiting the country after the US State Department advisory stating it as a country with high risk of kidnapping. He added kidnapping cases in the country had been in a steady downward trend over recent years. The Philippines National Police (PNP) reported that 68 kidnapping cases were recorded in 2018 compared to 79 in 2017. Most of the cases were in Mindanao. As of March 2019, 10 kidnapping cases have been recorded.

**Vietnam:** On May 14, media reported that Vietnamese police arrested 10 local nationals in connection with multiple kidnappings targeting Chinese nationals near the Chinese border. Gang members, posing as Vietnamese police officers, kidnapped at least seven Chinese nationals in the preceding weeks. Using a Chinese instant messaging application, the suspects then demanded that the victims' families pay ransoms. Vietnamese police rescued the victims. However,



at least two suspects remain at large, and police investigations are ongoing.

### Europe and CIS

**Germany:** On April 29, police reported that a teenage girl in Berlin had faked her own kidnapping to extort Euros 40,000 (USD 44,000) from her father. More than 280 police officers were involved in a massive manhunt but the plot unfolded when the girl and her 18-year-old male accomplice were seen walking down a street a day later. The pair were arrested and were set to face charges. The police said the plot seemed to have been well prepared as the pair had even recorded hostage videos.

**Greece:** On April 4, Greek police arrested three men in Thessaloniki for holding 16 migrants for ransom. A Moldavian, a Pakistani and an Indian national were arrested in the raid that took place at a warehouse in the district of Ionia. The men were arrested after one of the suspects brought 12 new migrants to the warehouse where four more people were already being held.

**United Kingdom:** On April 25, a witness saw two men being forced into a van in Worthing and reported the incident to the local authorities. A short time later, a van was stopped, and a 36-year-old man and a 31-year-old woman were arrested on suspicion of kidnap. No other person was in the van and police are now searching for the two individuals to ensure their well-being.

**Portugal:** On May 8, four soldiers attached to the National Republican Guard (GNR) were detained in the outskirts of Lisbon, Portugal, suspected of kidnapping two Nepalese agricultural workers. The

incident took place in October 2018, in the municipality of Odemira, Alentanejo province. After an argument with their employer, the soldiers showed up at the workers' accommodation from where they were assaulted and abducted. The fate of the victims was not ascertained.

**Spain:** Spanish authorities announced on April 11 the dismantling of a kidnapping gang operating between Spain and Morocco. The gang was reportedly involved in the kidnapping for ransom of Moroccan minors. The unaccompanied minors were originally smuggled to Spain by the criminals, who were paid varying amounts by the children's parents to gain them entry to Europe. Once in Spain, the criminal network would contact the parents and demand USD 520 for the release of their child, threatening to kill them or sell their organs on the black market. The arrests were the result of ongoing investigations launched since the summer of 2018, when three kidnapped Moroccan minors were discovered in Granada being held in deplorable conditions. Since then, Spanish police have dismantled several such criminal networks, including three in Almeria, one in Cadiz, one in La Linea and another in Jerez de la Frontera.

**Spain:** On April 26, the Spanish Civil Guard arrested four men for kidnapping a man in the Toledo province town of Mora. Although the kidnap was reported to the Civil Guard on April 25, it had been carried out in November 2018. According to the report, the victim was abducted after he arrived for a business meeting arranged by a man who allegedly had land for sale. The victim was met by three men who assaulted him and took him away at gunpoint. The criminals later phoned the victim's father to demand a ransom of €300,000,



which had to be paid within 20 minutes. Since the father was not able to gather the amount on time, the criminals decided to set the victim free. However, the man was severely beaten and threatened with being kidnapped again if he did not pay the sum soon. The Civil Guard was able to arrest the criminals by tracing the phones used to communicate with the victim's family.

**Russia:** On May 6, the 32-year-old son of a Russian businessman was abducted after being lured by kidnapers to an unfinished building in the Moscow district of Leninsky. The victim was then taken to an apartment in Lyuberetsky district, from where the kidnapers demanded a ransom of 20 million rubles (over USD 306,000) from his relatives. The police managed to locate the safe house on May 8, arresting the kidnapers and releasing the victim. The car and mobile phone used by the kidnapers were found at the property.

**Middle East:** Kidnapping continues to pose a serious risk to those in the Middle East due to ongoing issues with terrorism and insecurity; in particular Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. The threat to foreign nationals in the Middle East remains high. In Lahore, Pakistan reports suggest that around 63% of registered kidnappings in 2018 were spurious. In the majority of incidents these fake or false kidnappings are usually part of a revenge plot or as a means to acquire quick cash.

**Syria:** On April 5, the office of Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte issued a statement that said: "at the end of a complex and delicate activity of intelligence, investigation and diplomacy, today we succeeded in obtaining the release of Sergio

Zanotti." The Italian businessman from the northern city of Brescia was kidnapped in Syria in April 2016 by armed groups linked to al Qaeda. Seven months after his kidnapping, he appeared in a video asking the Italian government to intervene to make sure he was not killed. The Prime Minister's office added that Zanotti was "in good general condition and will be repatriated to Rome in a few hours."

**Yemen:** On April 4, Caroline Seguin, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) programme manager for Yemen, said that, on April 2, armed men had forced their way into MSF's al Sadaqah emergency trauma hospital in Aden, threatened guards and medical staff, kidnapped a patient awaiting surgery who was found dead later on a street in the town's al Mansoura district. She added that, as a result of the incident, MSF had no choice but to suspend the admission of patients until further notice. In recent weeks, the hospital had been functioning at full capacity, particularly the emergency room and intensive care unit, as a result of an escalation of violence in Aden. A police commander said the patient had been admitted to hospital after being wounded in a battle between rival armed gangs.

### North America

**USA:** On April 9, The U.S. State Department issued a press release introducing a new risk indicator that identifies 35 countries where Americans are at risk of being kidnapped. The Travel Advisories now include a 'K' indicator for the risk of kidnapping and/or hostage taking and include: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo,



Ethiopia, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russia, Somalia.

### Latin America and the Caribbean

**Argentina:** On April 18, the Argentinian authorities arrested a gang, which included one Argentinian and ten Colombian criminals, in the city of Buenos Aires. The gang were engaged in a form of extortion known as "*gota a gota*" (drop by drop), in which they would offer loans to members of the public, primarily commercial and small business owners. They extortionists would then change the terms of the loan and increase the interest rates to extortive levels. The money is then laundered in front businesses and most likely passed on to bigger drug-trafficking organizations to help fund their operations. When the victims could no longer pay their debts, the group's debt collectors, known as "*rompehuesos*" (bone-breakers), would threaten them with violence and death. The debt collectors would physically harm the victims and at times shoot at their premises or homes from motorbikes. The group primarily operated in central Buenos Aires city, but has been known to stretch to the north of the city in Zárate and San Miguel. Small business owners will remain the primary targets of the "*gota a gota*" technique.

**Brazil:** On April 22, Civil Police officers in Rio Grande do Sul arrested the three suspects as they were about to kidnap a businessman whom they had lured to a church in Santo Antonio da Patrulha (Rio Grande do Sul state). The victim had arranged to meet the kidnappers to purchase a discounted vehicle that he had seen advertised on the internet, when police officers arrived at the scene.

The three suspects were allegedly part of a criminal gang that specialized in what is known locally as *Golpe do Chute*. These cases involve kidnappers placing online advertisements for goods at lower than the market cost to entice individuals to a pre-arranged meeting point and kidnap them.

**Colombia:** On April 8, Leonardo Antonio Sanchez Rivera (40), a rancher, was rescued by police during an operation in a forest area between Pivijay and Salamina, Magdalena. He had been kidnapped by three armed men during the afternoon of April 6 while helping his foreman erect some gates. The victim was released through the pressure placed on the kidnappers by the authorities.

**Colombia:** Professor Jeremias Ocoro (49) was kidnapped on April 12, while travelling by launch from Timbiqui to Guapi, Choco.

**Colombia:** The police released an announcement in which the successes of "Operacion Renacer" were detailed. The Operation included 39 searches in different regions during which 109 people were arrested on suspicion of being involved in kidnapping and extortion. One of those arrested was Manuel Cardona Puerta, alleged leader of the criminal gang "*Los Socios*" that specialised in extorting businessmen and transporters in Risaralda. The police also arrested three suspects belonging to a group called "*Jacobo Arenas*" formed of former members of FARC. The group was involved in the kidnapping of a merchant in Cauca for who a ransom of 350 million pesos (USD 108,000) was demanded.

**Mexico:** La asociacion civil Alto al Secuestro reported on April 20 that during the first three



months of 2019 there was an increase of 112.5% in the number of recorded kidnapping cases in Tabasco State from 8 in 2018 to 17 in 2019. The figures for Chihuahua over the same period showed a reduction of 11.1% from 9 reported incidents in 2018 to 8 incidents in 2019.

**Mexico:** On April 11, authorities have rescued 143 Honduran migrants who had been kidnapped in Veracruz. The migrants were being held in Naranjos. A ransom of USD 10,000 was being made by the abductees for the release of the migrants.

**Mexico:** On April 4, a couple voluntarily handed themselves into authorities after admitting they had paid over 3,000 pesos (approx. USD 160) for an eight-month-old baby. The baby was kidnapped from the Hospital General Metro Station in Mexico City and had been bought by the couple from a 'female friend'. The baby was rescued unharmed.

**Mexico:** The mayor of Nahuatzen, Michoacan was kidnapped from his residence and murdered by gunmen. The mayor appears to have been tortured before being killed.

**Mexico:** The US embassy in Mexico City confirmed that Mexican security forces had rescued a US couple kidnapped in Sonora on April 24. Security forces detained at least two armed kidnapers, who had requested a USD 15,000 ransom for the release of the couple.

**Mexico:** It was reported on April 2, that a team of cartel gunmen disarmed and kidnapped 11 police officers at Juan Galindo, Puebla State, over the weekend. The gunmen released the police officers hours later after government officials deployed

multiple search and rescue operations. The incident happened as the officers responded to a tip from a concerned citizen. They travelled in two police trucks but, on their way, a large team of cartel gunmen riding in three SUVs surrounded the convoy, ordered them to stop and get down from their vehicles. The policemen knelt as the gunmen took their weapons and cell phones. The gunmen beat the officers but released them after several hours.

**Mexico:** Agents from la Policia General in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, rescued a woman and a young man who had been kidnapped at the bus terminus in Reynosa. Four suspects, two women and two men, were arrested. The kidnapers had demanded a sum of money for the release of the two victims whose families reported the incident to the authorities. After an investigation, the successful rescue operation was mounted.

**Mexico:** A "red alert" published by el Semaforo Delictivo stated that from January to March 2019 the number of kidnappings increased by 550% and extortion by 127% in the country.

**Mexico:** Official sources said that a mob of 600 people from five communities in Veracruz had lynched six people who they accused of being members of a gang of kidnapers. The lynching took place at an indigenous community in Las Choapas, in the south of Veracruz. One of those lynched was identified as Renato Cruz alias "La Bruja" who was the leader of a gang dedicated to kidnapping ranchers in the region.

**Mexico:** The police chief of Manuel Doblado was arrested in León on Monday night when he was caught in the act of kidnapping two young women.



A vehicle driven by Alejandro Alaniz Muñoz was pulled over by Federal Police during an anti-fuel theft operation. Inside, police discovered two women, aged 18 and 23, bound hand and foot with their mouths gagged with masking tape. Authorities also found firearms, ammunition and cell phones. Alaniz, 37, was named police chief in October of 2018 at the beginning of the term of the current administration. Previously, he was a member of a special state police force created to combat organized crime. According to statistics provided by the National Geography and Statistics Institute (INEGI), 6 out of 10 interactions between citizens and police in Mexico are marked by some form of corruption, but only 4.6% victims of corrupt police actions by report the acts.

**Panama:** On April 25, national news outlet *Panama America* reported that a resident of Bugaba (Chiriqui province) had been targeted by a virtual kidnapping scam the previous day. Virtual kidnapping will remain a problem in Panama as the crime continues to spread across Latin America and globally. Perpetrators will remain difficult to disrupt as they continue to commit the crime from inside prisons across the region.

**Peru:** A 32-year-old businessman was kidnapped by five men during the morning in San Martin de Porres. Twelve hours later, agents attached to la Division de Secuestros y Extorsiones de la Dirincri raided a house, rescued the victim and arrested five suspects who were all Venezuelans. The kidnappers had contacted the victim's family and demanded a ransom of USD 250,000. The victim was beaten and threatened with a knife. The rescuers found the victim lying on a mattress with

his hands and feet tied, a hood over his head and adhesive tape over his mouth.

**Peru:** Peruvian police detained three members of a Venezuelan criminal gang, which planned to kidnap the owner of a hospital. The three Venezuelan nationals were arrested in the San Martín de Porres district of Lima, at a restaurant close to a hospital owned by the targeted businessman. The arrest took place after the police were informed of a group of suspicious people roaming the vicinity. This incident followed the kidnapping on April 21 of another businessman in the same district, also by a gang consisting of five Venezuelan nationals. The businessman in this incident was released the following day during a rescue operation. A ransom of USD 250,000 had been demanded from his relatives, who were sent multiple videos showing the victim being tortured to pressure them into paying swiftly. The kidnapping had been planned by a former employee of the victim, who was among those arrested. According to investigations, the gang had studied the businessman's movements for nearly three months. Only one of the suspects could prove he was legally in Peru.

**Trinidad and Tobago:** Responding to a question in the House of Representatives, Minister of National Security Stuart Young said that recent incidents of reported sea piracy and kidnapping in Trinidad and Tobago territorial waters were being investigated for possible criminal links. He added that it was not factually accurate to state that there was an increase in incidents of piracy but that, from time to time, there had been isolated incidents of citizens being subject to, what may be described as, acts of piracy.



**Venezuela:** US Senator Ted Cruz called for the release of six Citgo executives who have been held in Venezuela since 2017. He made the call after a meeting with family members of the six executives. The six executives are: Alirio Zambrano, Refinery Director of the company's Corpus Christi operations, Tomeu Vadell, former VP refining, Jorge Toledo, former VP supply, Jose Luis Zambrano, former VP shared services, Gustavo Cardenas, former head of public affairs and Jose Pereira, acting President and CEO. Five of the six men are from Texas. The six men were arrested in an anti-corruption dragnet.

**Venezuela:** Portuguese businessman Alfredo Fernandes Abreu was killed in an express kidnapping on May 4. After being intercepted by armed men on a road in the district of Carrizal, Miranda State, the expatriate was forced to take the assailants to his home. After they stole jewels and money, the criminals shot the victim as they escaped. Fernandez Abreu was taken to a hospital but did not survive his injuries. According to the Venezuelan authorities, the crime was carried out by a local gang, which in recent months had kidnapped at least 14 other traders in the area.

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