

The background of the central section features a large, light blue watermark of the United Nations logo, which consists of a world map surrounded by olive branches.

# **UNTOC**

**United Nations Convention  
Against Transnational  
Organized Crime**

**Committee:** United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)

**Topic:** Measures to end all forms of migrant smuggling in Northern Africa

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## I. Committee Background

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) was adopted by the General Assembly on November 15th, 2000, in Palermo, Italy. UNTOC's protocol aims at preventing and combating the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air, fighting against organized crime and trafficking persons, especially women and children. The widespread trafficking and violence with illicit drugs was a rapidly growing problem. Soon, the UN realized it needed a strong body to combat illicit drug activity. As a result, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) was established in 1977 by merging with The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). UNTOC is formed by 147 signatories and 190 parties according to its statistics from July of 2018. The convention is further supplemented by three protocols which target specific areas, and those protocols include the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punishing trafficking in Persons; especially women and children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air; and finally, the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts, Components, and Ammunitions (UNTOC, 2020). The members of the committee include observers and participants. Aside from the state parties, which are actual participants, there are a number of observers which include the signatories and non-signatories, the United Nations secretariat, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The UNTOC regional program currently has a strong focus on the Sustainable Development Goal number 3: Good Health and Well Being. The committee's work on drugs and health care is linked to the

target 3.5 of SDG 3 which clearly states: “Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol”. UNTOC assists many states by meeting these prevention and repression activities against drug trafficking (SDGs, UNODC, 2020).

## II. Topic Information

### A) History of the Topic

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the definition of a migrant is “a person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions” (IFRC, 2019). This means that people that live in a place in poor conditions or that live in an unstable country, make the decision to flee and look towards a better future. Sometimes, these people are migrants trying to get to a country in an illegal way, which can later lead to significant consequences. Migrants try to find ways to flee to other places. One example is Northern Africa. Migrants make their way to this area in order to take boats across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The main reasons that migrants escape from their country are because of war, economic circumstances, higher education, political reasons, etc. (Desperate Journeys, UNHCR, 2018).

Smuggling is the act of “importing or exporting goods secretly in violation of the law; especially without payment of the legal duty” (Dictionary, 2019). Transnational organized crime groups take advantage of migrants who want to reach Europe from Northern Africa. They facilitate their passage by the sea in dinghies and small motorized boats. Smuggled migrants are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, safety and in some cases, even their lives are often put at risk because of the poor conditions and

situations they are put under. The smugglers do not care about their safety and are only focused on the profit that they will obtain. Sometimes, situations can get so bad that they may suffocate in containers or drown at sea (INTERPOL, 2020). According to the United Nations, an estimated 3,000 migrants died in 2017 while trying to reach Europe with the help of smugglers. Besides being smuggled to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea, smugglers are also paid to transport migrants from central and southern African countries to the north overland. Similar to the sea routes, travelling by land can also be very dangerous for migrants (Smuggling of Migrants, UNODC, 2006).

The European Union (EU) has been working with Northern African countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia in order to dismantle migrant smuggling groups. The EU has provided these nations with 15 million euros in order to reduce the reasons why migrants decide to utilize smugglers. These reasons include famine, conflict, corrupt governments and unemployment (European Commission, 2017). Moreover, individual European countries have made deals with Northern African countries in order to prevent smuggling boats carrying migrants from heading across the Mediterranean Sea. In 2015, the EU launched Operation Sophia with the governments of Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. This involved using joint patrol missions to intercept and return migrant boats to their original location. It was also meant to crack down on migrant smugglers and punish those involved. However, it was heavily criticized by human rights groups for forcing migrants to use more dangerous operations to cross the Mediterranean Sea and creating a refugee crisis in Northern African countries that do not have the resources to support large numbers of people (ECRF, 2018).

## B) Current Issues

**Afghanistan:** Many Afghans have migrated from Afghanistan to Europe in order to find a better life. Since 2001, the country has been engulfed in a conflict between the United States, the Afghan government and terrorist groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic State (NBC News, 2018). According to the Afghanistan Analysts Network, the majority of Afghans travel overland to Turkey and then are smuggled across the Aegean Sea to Greece. This crossing is extremely dangerous and has created controversy among many countries. The route smugglers use is generally taken at night in rocky and turbulent waters. Many boats crash on the rocks or capsize because they are overweight. However, many Afghans choose this route because it is faster than the overland route through the Balkans (Bjelica, AAN, 2016).

**Egypt:** In July 2018, government officials from Egypt and Italy met to discuss the Global Project against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (GLO. ACT). The meeting was organized by the UNODC Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa. This was a major step taken as it was the first time the two countries met to discuss ways to end migrant smuggling between Europe and Northern Africa. During the five day event, the officials briefed each other on “recent trends in migration flows towards Italy and Europe, and on the Italian legislative framework, as well as on investigative approaches and techniques to counter organized crime, especially the smuggling of migrants and the trafficking in persons, as the two crimes can be tightly interlinked.” Future meetings are expected and both countries have acknowledged that other countries impacted by migrant smuggling should also be included (Egypt and Italy, UNODC, 2018).

**Nigeria:** Nigerians are leaving their country in search of employment and better educational opportunities. They usually travel by land to Northern African countries such as Libya and Algeria in order to migrate to Europe. The majority of journeys are arranged through people smugglers and the route is dangerous as the Nigerians are passed off from one smuggler to another one. Some will hold the migrants for ransom in order to gain more money; and will ask for fees from Nigeria to Europe that can be as high as 4,000 United States dollars. They also mistreat and beat the migrants, film it and send it to their families. If the ransom is not paid, the migrants are sold off to other smugglers or killed. Once payment is obtained, the migrants are released and permitted to continue on their journey to Europe (Kazeem, Quartz, 2018).

**Syria:** Syrians fleeing years of civil war, poor living conditions and terrorism are using people smugglers to reach Europe. According to the European Commission, they are using the eastern Mediterranean Sea to cross from Turkey into Cyprus, Greece and Italy. The migrants leave Turkey through the port of Mersin. Then, the migrants board smaller boats that take them to cargo vessels just outside the port. The vessels usually carry about 250 to 800 Syrian migrants and the system used to transport these people is called the 'mother boat' method. The European Union has been increasingly intercepting these vessels, they send the migrants back to Turkey and detain the suspected migrant smugglers. While more boats have been stopped, Syrians are still attempting the journey due to an increase in bombings and attacks in previous rebel-held territories (Questions, European Commission, 2018).

**Turkey:** Turkey is a key transit point for migrants trying to reach Europe from the Middle East and Asia. Turkey has the largest refugee population in the world with 4 million people living in border towns or refugee camps. The migrants utilize smugglers to travel by land or sea to reach countries such as Greece. The Turkish government has signed a financial deal with the European Union in order to stop the

flow of migrants reaching its borders. This means that Turkey's military, especially its Navy, is on alert in order to stop and detain migrants. In 2019, it arrested 60,000 people trying to cross into Europe, and around 9,000 of these individuals are currently being held in connection with human smuggling (Migrant Crisis, BBC News, 2020).

## C) UN Action

The United Nations, through the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, is committed to promoting "global adherence to the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol and assist States in their efforts to effectively implement it." This protocol aims to prevent and combat the smuggling of migrants, to protect the rights of these people and promote cooperation between countries in order to end it worldwide. Moreover, the UNODC has been working closely with INTERPOL and EUROPOL to establish basic training modules on preventing and combating migrant smuggling. Through a series of meetings and workshops, government officials, lawyers and law enforcement officers have met to explore methods in order to prevent this serious issue. So far, meetings have been held with European Union countries, Senegal, Egypt and Nigeria. Finally, the UNODC is also supporting countries in West and North Africa in implementing the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol and updating their criminal justice systems through the Impact Programme. This programme provides a toolkit, frameworks and legal assistance in order for countries to review, analyze and rewrite updates to their legal systems in order to protect migrants (Migrant Smuggling, UNODC, 2020).

### III. Essential Questions

1. What is a migrant? What factors cause migrants to leave their home countries?
2. What is migrant smuggling?
3. Has your country been impacted by migrant smuggling? If so, how?
4. Does your country have laws that prohibit migrant smuggling? If so, which ones?
5. What is the United Nations doing to address this issue?
6. What is the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air? Is your country party to it?
7. What other organizations are working on resolving this issue? Is your country working with any of them? If so, which ones?

### IV. Quorum

- Afghanistan
- Brazil
- Canada
- China
- Egypt
- France
- Germany
- India
- Iran
- Israel
- Japan
- Kenya

- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Syria
- Turkey
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom
- United States

## V. Resources

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