Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons to Europe & North America

- Short-Term Effects
- Medium to Long-Term Effects
- Policy Implications

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Short-Term Effects on Smuggling of Migrants

- Lockdowns and travel restrictions have not stopped journeys facilitated by smugglers (to EU; C. America & Venezuela).

- Different impact of COVID-19-related restrictions on migrant smuggling of people fleeing conflict/persecution, compared to other migratory movements.

Migrants & refugees on Med routes caught between:
(1) Need to flee conflicts/poverty; (2) dangerous sea journeys; (3) reduced SAR operations; (4) COVID-19 risks en route.
Recent trends in people arriving along Mediterranean Routes

Sea and Land Arrivals in Spain, 2019 & 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
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<td>13-May</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Recent trends in people arriving along Mediterranean Routes

Sea and Land Arrivals in **Greece**, 2019 & 2020
Recent trends in people arriving along Mediterranean Routes

Sea and Land arrivals in Italy, 2019 and 2020

To 13 May 2019: 298

To 13 May 2020: 772
While it has not stopped people making irregular journeys, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to make smuggling of migrants riskier and more expensive.

Photo Credit: Nev Rimes on Flickr
Medium-to-Long-Term Effects on Trafficking in Persons

Economic downturn and intensified migration restrictions tension between:

- increased interest in labour migration
- limited options for regular migration

May lead to increase in trafficking, especially for people from countries experiencing fastest and longest-lasting drops in employment

E.g., from Bulgaria and Hungary in the Netherlands (vs. from Czechia); from Honduras in USA
Policy Implications

Mitigate potential crime & human rights impact of COVID-19 restrictions and economic downturn

Include in post-crisis recovery plans:

✓ Investments in job creation and economic recovery in both developed and developing countries;

✓ Take into account that (1) lack of avenues for regular migration journeys for refugees & migrants, and (2) lack of regular immigration status in destination countries, increase opportunities for migrant smuggling and related abuses.

#BuildBackBetter
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Thank you!

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