A Year in Review

2021

Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section
In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to dominate our lives. But crime does not stop during times of crisis and neither did we. Despite the ongoing restrictions, we continued to help countries develop and implement effective responses to human trafficking and migrant smuggling. We trained hundreds of officials worldwide who work to prevent, investigate, and prosecute cases of these crimes. We produced, topical publications in multiple languages, and provided expertise to enhance the implementation of the UN Protocols against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Last year, we highlighted the growing abuse of internet technologies in all aspects of the trafficking process, the violence that many smuggled migrants are subjected to, and the urgent need for more pathways for regular migration. Furthermore, we provided a much-needed platform for survivors of human trafficking to share their knowledge to further global efforts to prevent this crime and supports its victims.

This Annual Report highlights the main achievements in 2021 of UNODC’s three global programmes against human trafficking and migrant smuggling (GLOT59, GLOT92 and GLO.ACT), which are operated by the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section (HTMSS).
Globally Active

In 2021, 60 countries supported in their efforts to counter human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Here are some examples:

**Canada**
- Hosted a competition for the development of technology against exploitation

**Honduras**
- Launch of specialized mentoring programme for anti-human trafficking officials

**North Macedonia**
- Experts from South Eastern Europe met to enhance cross border cooperation to tackle migrant smuggling

**Jordan**
- Multidisciplinary training on the identification and first response to victims of trafficking among refugees

**Uzbekistan**
- Law enforcement and criminal justice officials trained in skills to counter human trafficking

**Mexico**
- Shelters for women equipped to respond to cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling

**Sierra Leone**
- Judges from the high, supreme and appeal courts participated in a mock trial and Judicial Colloquium

**Maldives**
- Officials trained to detect, investigate, and prosecute migrant smuggling to, from and through the country
Our Mission

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are global and widespread crimes that use men, women and children for profit. The organized networks or individuals behind these lucrative crimes take advantage of people who are vulnerable, desperate or simply seeking a better life. UNODC strives for the eradication of these crimes through the dismantling of the criminal enterprises that trade in people and the conviction of the main perpetrators. Ultimately, our work safeguards people from the abuse, neglect, exploitation or even death that is associated with these crimes.
How We Work

We help countries to prevent crime, deliver justice and protect lives and human rights in line with the UN Protocols against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants.

Delivering Legal and Technical Expertise

We assist national authorities to draft, revise, and adopt laws, policies, and strategies for more effective responses to human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Investing in People

We train, coach and mentor the people who work to prevent and investigate cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling, assist the people affected by these crimes, and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Supplying Knowledge and Tools

We produce studies and toolkits for training, research, and policy reform and judicial purposes that provide evidence-based and up-to-date knowledge.

Paving the Way for Policymaking

We provide forums where UN Member States can collectively review these global, criminal activities, discuss the challenges they face to combat them, and share experiences of successful practices.

Fostering Networks and Partnerships

We form and nurture partnerships with and between international, government and non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to jointly tackle human trafficking and migrant smuggling.
Delivering Legal and Technical Expertise

Through our three global programmes, we supported the development and revision of legislation, policies, and strategies to counter human trafficking and migrant smuggling in 18 countries.

Some examples of our assistance.

Barbados
Development of recommendations to strengthen and improve current trafficking in persons procedures and protocols

Bangladesh
Consultations to discuss the absence of a specific counter-migrant smuggling policy and legislative national response

Peru
Update of the Inter-sectoral Protocol for the Prevention and Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons and the Protection, Assistance and Reintegration of victims

Iraq
Advice on the drafting of new national legislation on Smuggling of Migrants

Kyrgyzstan
Revision of the Trafficking in Persons provisions in the Criminal Code

Pakistan
Bylaws of 2018 Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Acts developed and approved

Dominican Republic
Revision of the Trafficking in Persons Law which is under review by national authorities
Investing in People

18 countries provided with legislative assistance and policy development support

60 countries supported in their efforts to counter human trafficking and migrant smuggling

72 investigations into cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling supported

5,700 people participated in trainings and activities

Responding to Trafficking of Migrants

The TRACK4TIP initiative, which brings together eight countries in South America and the Caribbean to prevent and investigate cases of human trafficking among migrants, continued to have an impact in 2021. In Colombia, labour inspectors trained by UNODC experts on how to identify and refer cases of human trafficking uncovered a case of suspected forced labour involving 40 Venezuelan migrants. In the Dominican Republic, law enforcement officials, who had taken part in a 12-week TRACK4TIP course on investigations into cases of human trafficking, identified and reported twenty-seven potential cases.

A United Front against Migrant Smuggling in South Eastern Europe

Training exercises based on simulations of cases of migrant smuggling led to increased cooperation between countries in South Eastern Europe. This region lies at the crossroads of the Western Balkan route, one of the main pathways into Europe where organized migrant smuggling groups operate. The three exercises in 2021 between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro were based on previous activities in North Macedonia and Serbia. Officials from border control and law enforcement authorities, government representatives and public prosecutors took part. They acquired new skills for the investigation and prosecution of cases of migrant smuggling.

Preventing the Exploitation of Refugees

With our expertise, major steps were taken to control the widespread exploitation of men, women, and children at the Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi. The implementation of new procedures to identify cases of trafficking, developed by UNODC with the support of the UN Refugee Agency and the International Organization for Migration, led to the rescue of over 90 victims and the arrest of five suspected traffickers. The protocol contains clear procedures for the identification of victims and their referral to the appropriate authority where they can receive support.
Knowledge Week – October 2021

Our first-ever [Knowledge Week] on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling brought together international experts and over 600 participants to discuss a wide range of issues.

Topics on the agenda included the importance of gender-responsive approaches when addressing trafficking and smuggling crimes, and the need to strengthen access to protection and justice for victims of human trafficking and for smuggled migrants who have been subjected to abuse.

Legal uncertainties and challenges to prosecutions in cases of human trafficking was a further focus of the week and a senior judge and criminal law experts provided insights into successful strategies and tools. The relevance of innovative and technology-based solutions and the role of youth and civil society in the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling was also covered during the event. Panelists included a member of ‘Buyer Resist’ the winning team of an international [technology competition] we co-organized.

Knowledge is Power and we will continue to share the vast wealth of knowledge gathered by UNODC to successfully counter human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

In 2021 we released 9 publications in 7 languages

- The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Trafficking
- COVID-19 and the Smuggling of Migrants
- The Concept of Harbouring
- Mainstreaming Human Rights and Gender Equality
- Brazil National Report on Trafficking in Persons: Data from 2017 to 2020 (Portuguese)
- Public Private Partnerships to Prevent Human Trafficking
- Female Victims of Trafficking as Defendants
- Aggravated Migrant Smuggling and Response
- Gender and Human Rights Analysis in Pakistan
Paving the Way for Policymaking

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are evolving crimes. States need to come together to review these criminal activities, discuss the challenges they face to combat them, and share knowledge of successful practices. We play a leading role in the facilitation and follow-up of such discussions and provide forums where UN Member States can collectively focus on responding to these crimes while protecting and supporting the people affected, in line with the provisions of the UN Protocols against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants.

In 2021, we supported and contributed to 8 global, intergovernmental meetings through the provision of background papers, expert guidance, technical presentations, mobilisation of expert participants, and the distribution of summaries, conclusions, and recommendations.

Key Events

Reviewing the Global Plan of Action

The 2021 appraisal of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons resulted in the adoption of a Political Declaration. The Declaration outlines new commitments to fighting trafficking in mixed migration flows and controlling the misuse of internet technology by traffickers. It reports on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human trafficking and the essential role of civil society to combat this crime. The UN Global Plan of Action was adopted in 2010 and is reviewed every four years. For the November 2021 Appraisal, we provided direct support to its convenor, the President of the UN General Assembly.

Preventing Crime and Protecting Rights

The United Nations’ main policymaking body on crime prevention and criminal justice, CCPCJ, held its annual meeting in May. We supported the negotiations that led to the first UN Resolution on the Smuggling of Migrants since 2014. In December, the CCPCJ thematic discussion focused on measures to prevent and counter migrant smuggling while protecting the rights of smuggled people, particularly women and children. We prepared a guide for the delegates that highlighted the vulnerabilities of people on the move created or worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Providing a Forum for Discussion

The 2021 Working Groups on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants brought together over 800 delegates from more than 100 countries to discuss current issues relating to these crimes and adopt action-oriented recommendations. In these intergovernmental sessions, States identify solutions to common gaps and challenges in the responses to trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants in their respective countries. We provided background documentation on the key agenda topics, which included the strengthening of procurement processes to prevent trafficking and the availability of channels for regular migration to reduce the demand for smuggling.
Fostering Networks and Partnerships

Strengthening Transnational Action against Migrant Smuggling

In March 2021, we launched a two-year project to combat organized crime groups that smuggle migrants over multiple continents to North America. The STARSOM initiative brings together thirteen countries that are located along the main smuggling routes through Asia, the Gulf States, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Our experts are training officials in these countries how to detect, investigate and prosecute cases of migrant smuggling and are facilitating cross-border cooperation between law enforcement and criminal justice authorities.

Gender Champions Come Together

The GLO.ACT Women’s Network, which campaigns for the increased representation of female officials at law enforcement and criminal justice institutions that respond to crimes of human trafficking and migrant smuggling, held its first Annual General Meeting in Dubai where the 35 Network members reviewed past achievements and made plans for the year ahead. Under the framework of the Network, the Women Can campaign profiles women and men in leadership positions in Asia and the Middle East who have championed the role of women in the criminal justice sector.

Coordinated Efforts against Human Trafficking

As the coordinator and co-chair of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), we continued to play a key role in the coordinated activities of these 31 international organizations. At the centre of ICAT’s 2021 anti-trafficking action were issues including the mitigation of risks of human trafficking in public procurement processes. We launched policy guidance for the prevention of trafficking through sustainable procurement practices and trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal.

Promoting Safe Migration

Through our role on the Executive Committee of the United Nations Network on Migration, we continued to support Member States in the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), which promotes safe, orderly and regular migration. Ten UN System statements were released in 2021, including one on “Countering Criminals, Protecting Migrants”. Throughout the year, the Network organized and serviced the GCM Implementation Regional Reviews in preparation for the first global GCM implementation review that takes place in May 2022.
COVID-19 and Crime

In 2021, the impact of the pandemic on human trafficking and migrant smuggling was the topic of several publications and events.

Our analysis showed that the pandemic continued to create opportunities for criminal networks that traffic people and smuggle migrants for profit.

The pandemic has taught us that we need to have strategies in place to cope with future crises.

COVID and Human Trafficking

Our global study on The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons focused not only on the challenges created by the pandemic but also assessed how frontline anti-human trafficking organizations adapted and responded. The global study reports that measures to curb the spread of the virus increased the risk of trafficking, exposed victims to further exploitation and limited access to essential services for trafficking survivors. Experts and officials from the law enforcement and criminal justice sectors, as well as victim support organizations in over 50 countries contributed to the study. The study’s key findings and recommendations, available in six languages, provide guidelines on how to prepare for future crises.

COVID and Migrant Smuggling

Our publication on COVID-19 and the Smuggling of Migrants in English, French and Spanish highlighted how lockdown measures, such as the closure of borders and airports, meant that many refugees and migrants had no alternative but to resort to the services of smugglers to start or continue their journey. Therefore, as a result of the pandemic, there were even more opportunities for criminal networks. Our analysis shows that in 2021 smugglers used more remote and riskier routes in harsher conditions to avoid stricter surveillance at entry points and border crossings. The publication concludes with a series of recommendations to prevent migrant smuggling and protect smuggled migrants during times of crisis.
A Platform for Victims' Voices

Throughout 2021, we provided platforms where survivors of human trafficking presented their recommendations for future efforts to combat the crime.

Inspiring Stories of Survival

In February, we launched the Survival Stories series. In their own words, survivors of human trafficking describe their past experiences and discuss their current roles as anti-trafficking advocates. On our website, they have an opportunity to highlight the importance of survivor engagement in the development and implementation of national and international anti-trafficking frameworks, and we have the chance to learn from their first-hand knowledge.

Victims' Voices Lead the Way

In July, we supported the World Day against Trafficking in Persons that was dedicated to Victims Voices. The 2021 theme focussed on the necessity to listen to and learn from survivors of human trafficking. Survivors play a crucial role in establishing effective measures to prevent this crime, identify and rescue victims, and support them on their road to rehabilitation. By listening to victims and turning their suggestions into concrete actions, we can create a more victim-centred and effective approach to combating human trafficking.

Taking Centre Stage at the UN General Assembly

In November, survivors of human trafficking were able to take centre stage at the United Nations in New York during a high-level meeting of the General Assembly. The meeting was convened to review the progress achieved in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which was adopted in 2010. Four victims of trafficking were able to take part in the event, which included the donation of a work of art that had been created by an artist and survivor to mark the 2021 World Day against Trafficking in Persons.
Survivors Speak Out

Survivors of human trafficking can provide invaluable input to prevent this crime and provide the right support for its victims

Shandra Woworuntu

“"The survivor’s narrative is significant in crafting the right policies and practices, because survivors know first-hand how human traffickers operate and the strategies they use to bond victims to slavery.”

“"Our experiences play an essential role in preventing human trafficking. Without our knowledge, no one can be an expert in the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of this crime.”

Jerome Elam

“"Survivors need to be actively involved in the creation of programmes that educate school children about the dangers of human trafficking, and States should consult with survivors when creating anti-human trafficking legislation.”

“"As survivors, we have a vital role to play in the anti-human trafficking community. Our narratives must not merely be inspiring, but the lessons within must be used to create lasting solutions.”

Kendall Alaimo

“"We have lived through trafficking. We are the best people to help everyone understand how terrible it really is. Such insights are crucial for better strategies and campaigns to combat this crime.”

Malaika Oringo

Marcela Loaiza
Global Outreach

Through our external communication channels, we provide audiences worldwide with the latest news about our work.

Webpage: UNODC - Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling
Twitter: https://twitter.com/UNODC_HTMSS
YouTube: Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling - YouTube
Key UN Events on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling

- The International Migration Review Forum 17 – 20 May
  - 1st Session of The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice 16 – 20 May
  - 9th Session of the UNTOC COP Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants 27 - 28 June
  - 2th Session of the UNTOC COP Working Group on Trafficking in Persons 29 – 30 June
  - 2022 World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 30 July
- 11th Session of the UNTOC Conference of the Parties 17 – 21 October
- 2022 International Migrants Day 18 December
Our Donors

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are global, widespread, and lucrative crimes that reduce people to commodities. Our goal is to ensure that countries are properly equipped to respond to these crimes, protect and assist the people who are exploited or abused, and secure convictions of the perpetrators. This work would not be possible without the generous support of our donors who share our goal and continued to invest in us during 2021.
For further information please contact:

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