

Human Rights Council

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*Waves of Change*  
*CalsMUN 2024*

**Research Report**

**Forum:** Human Rights Council

**Issue:** Combating the Issue of Migrant Smuggling and  
Human Trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea Region

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## Introduction

The Human Rights Council (HRC) convenes to address the escalating and alarming issue of combatting the issue of migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea region. This problem has made the Mediterranean Sea a testing ground for some of the most urgent humanitarian and security issues of our day in recent years. The Mediterranean region, surrounded by several nations with disparate socio-political environments, has seen an increase in covert operations about coordinated migration across its waterways. This practice has led to a complicated web of problems, including abuses of human rights, security issues, and pressure on the resources of the nations of origin and the countries of destination.

## General Overview

### Historical Context

Throughout history, the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean area has been an enduring and difficult task. The Mediterranean has always been a crossroads for migration, trade, and civilizations. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in illegal activity in the area linked to human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Organized crime networks have grown in number as a result of the post-Cold War era's geopolitical upheaval and economic inequality, which have left vulnerable populations looking for safety or better opportunities. The number of people making dangerous trips across the Mediterranean at the beginning of the 21st century increased heavily, frequently traveling in overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels. International organizations, states, and non-governmental organizations were forced to address the underlying reasons for migration, improve maritime surveillance, and launch search and rescue operations as a result of this humanitarian disaster. Despite these initiatives, there are still many facets to the problem, which are fueled by geopolitical conflicts, unstable economies, and insufficient legal frameworks.

### Security Challenges

Illegal security operations are carried out by criminal networks that take advantage of the large and porous maritime borders as well as the political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa. Regional security is seriously threatened by the growth of trafficking routes, which offer a pathway for the transportation of illegal commodities, weapons, and potential terrorists in addition to migrants. The difficult task of handling these security issues is made more difficult by the limited resources in both the nations of origin and destination, which raises the possibility of political instability and societal discontent. Moreover, a coordinated and cooperative security response is required due to the convergence of varied geopolitical interests among governments in North Africa, Southern Europe, and the European Union. To ensure the stability and security of the Mediterranean Sea region, addressing the security dimensions of this issue requires a comprehensive strategy that includes stepping up maritime surveillance, tightening border controls, breaking up criminal networks, and promoting international cooperation.



### Violations of the Right to Life and Security

When traveling by water, migrants and refugees frequently encounter dangerous conditions. They travel in packed, unseaworthy vessels, which puts them at risk of drowning and other serious injuries. Sadly, the Mediterranean has turned into a seafaring cemetery for thousands of those who perished at sea. Vulnerable people are left in risky situations because of the deficiencies in the marine infrastructure and the difficulties involved in conducting search and rescue missions, which worsen these violations. Furthermore, the concerns about the security of people seeking asylum are exacerbated by the role organized criminal networks play in enabling irregular immigration, leaving them vulnerable to abuse, assault, and exploitation.

### Violations of the Right to Freedom from Torture and Inhumane Treatment

Desperately seeking safety, migrants, and refugees frequently fall victim to dishonest traffickers and smugglers who put them in appalling situations. Torture, extortion, and sexual violence are among the frighteningly frequent forms of physical and psychological abuse that occur along the migration routes. Detention facilities, which are frequently overcrowded and devoid of basic amenities, turn become places of further misery where people get cruel treatment. In addition to being used by criminal networks, the perilous voyage itself violates the right to be free from torture and cruel treatment. To address these violations, strong action must be taken to dismantle criminal networks. Additionally, international cooperation must be prioritized to create safe and humane migration routes, guaranteeing that people are treated with respect and dignity both during their journey and once they arrive at their destinations. Fostering a more compassionate and just approach to the issues of migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea region requires upholding the right to be free from torture and brutal treatment.

### Violations of the Right to Seek Asylum

When people and families set out on dangerous treks to flee violence, persecution, and economic hardship, they frequently run into obstacles when trying to access the official channels for filing asylum claims. Due to the dearth of secure and controlled routes and the illegality of irregular migration, a large number of asylum seekers end themselves in the hands of traffickers and smugglers. These vulnerable groups regularly suffer from mistreatment and exploitation, which undermines their inalienable right to seek safety and refuge. The difficulties are further exacerbated by insufficient receiving facilities and overburdened asylum processes in the countries of destination, placing those seeking protection in risky circumstances. To effectively address these violations, a comprehensive strategy that recognizes and upholds the inalienable right of individuals to seek asylum as a crucial component of larger initiatives to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking in



the Mediterranean Sea region must be implemented. This strategy must not only dismantle criminal networks but also establish strong mechanisms for the legal and humane processing of asylum claims.

### Gender-Based Violence

Girls and women who travel at great risk in quest of better prospects or safety are frequently more susceptible to sexual assault, forced labor, and other types of abuse. Human traffickers often take advantage of power disparities to force women to endure situations that are inhumane and violate their fundamental rights. The trip itself becomes risky, and women and girls may be exposed to GBV even more in detention facilities. The difficulties experienced by female migrants are made worse by the absence of gender-sensitive legislation and insufficient support networks. Comprehensive efforts are required to address GBV within the larger context of fighting human trafficking and migrant smuggling. To lessen the hazards experienced by women and girls along their migratory route, they include information campaigns, training for law enforcement and humanitarian actors, and the creation of safe places and support services.

### Major Parties Involved

#### Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency)

Frontex, established in 2004, is the European Union's body in charge of coordinating and enhancing border control measures. Frontex conducts collaborative operations, fast interventions, and aerial monitoring to strengthen the EU's external frontiers. Frontex operates many operations in the Mediterranean, including Operation Poseidon, which focuses on the Central Mediterranean route. Patrolling, search and rescue operations, and intelligence collecting are all part of its role in identifying and deterring people traffickers, and smugglers.

#### International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The International Organisation for Migration is an international organization that provides migration services and guidance to both governments and migrants. Founded in 1951, IOM focuses on humanitarian aid to migrants, voluntary return programs, and project implementation aimed at resolving the core causes of migration. IOM also works with nations of origin, transit, and destination to improve border management and defend migrants' rights.

#### UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

The UNHCR is the United Nations organization tasked with protecting and assisting refugees and internally displaced people across the world. In the Mediterranean setting, UNHCR works to assist asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom embark on risky boat crossings. The organization fights for the creation of safe and legal paths for refugees and migrants and promotes rescue-at-sea operations.



### **European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) - Operation Sophia**

EUNAVFOR MED, often known as Operation Sophia, is a naval mission initiated by the European Union in 2015 to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the Southern Central Mediterranean. The mission of Operation Sophia is to identify, apprehend, and destroy vessels used by migrant smugglers or traffickers. It also wants to damage the economic model of people smuggling networks and help enforce the UN weapons embargo along Libya's coast.

### **Previous attempts to solve the issue**

#### **EU Migrant Smuggling Action Plan (2015)**

In response to the rising issue, the European Union developed a plan of action to tackle migrant smuggling in 2015. The strategy aimed to strengthen internal and external cooperation, improve information exchange, and improve operational measures. It also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying reasons for migration while also supporting stability in source and transit nations.

#### **Operation Triton and Frontex Expansion (2014)**

Frontex spearheaded Operation Triton in response to the sad shipwrecks in the Mediterranean in 2013 and 2014. It attempted to improve border control and surveillance operations, with an emphasis on rescuing migrants in difficulty at sea. Frontex's mandate and skills were also enhanced to improve its capacity to deal with irregular migration and people smuggling.

#### **EU-Turkey Agreement (2016)**

In 2016, the European Union and Turkey agreed to solve the migratory situation. The deal intended to limit the number of irregular migrants crossing into Greece from Turkey. It included the repatriation of irregular migrants from Greece to Turkey, financial assistance for humanitarian aid, and the resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to EU member states.



## Possible Solutions

### Legal and Safe Pathways for Migration

Establishing legal and secure migration channels is critical to decrease reliance on unsafe and irregular routes. This answer entails increasing the number of relocation programs, family reunion programs, and humanitarian visas. There is potential to reduce demand for unlawful smuggling networks by offering other pathways for persons seeking refuge or better economic possibilities. To simplify immigration processes, assure refugee protection, and satisfy the concerns of all stakeholders, such a strategy necessitates coordination among destination nations, transit countries, and international organizations.

### Comprehensive Regional Cooperation and Development Initiatives

This might imply the formation of a multilateral framework bringing together countries from North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Economic inequality, political instability, and social difficulties in source and transit nations should be prioritized. These activities might be facilitated and supported by international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union. There is potential to minimize the push factors that cause individuals to go on risky travels by generating possibilities for economic development, enhancing governance, and increasing stability.

### Strengthening Search and Rescue Operations

A joint effort comprising coastal nations, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) might result in a strong and coordinated search and rescue apparatus. This might involve the deployment of suitably equipped and financed marine patrols, satellite monitoring devices, and aerial surveillance. A standardized methodology for disembarking and receiving rescued passengers might also be devised to guarantee a fair division of obligations among coastal nations.

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