



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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A Year in Review

Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section

Foreword: Ilias Chatzis, Chief, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section

2020 was a year that we will never forget. The COVID-19 pandemic affected all our lives on a personal and professional level. Despite the restrictions imposed to control the spread of the virus, we continued to train and mentor officials worldwide who work to prevent and prosecute cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. We provided expertise in the drafting and revising of national legislation and action plans, produced insightful publications and continued to work closely with our global partners.

This Annual Report highlights the main achievements in 2020 of UNODC's three global programmes against trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants (GLOT59, GLOT92 and GLO.ACT) that are managed by the Section. It illustrates the global reach and impact of our programmes and marks the 20th anniversary of the UN Protocols on Trafficking in Persons and against Migrant Smuggling.

Human trafficking exploits people of any age or gender and from anywhere in the world, while smuggling of migrants benefits from the desperation of people. I am confident that the team I lead will continue to make a valuable contribution towards the global campaign to end these crimes.



Table of contents

Our Impact in Numbers

Our Purpose

Working through the Global Pandemic

How We Work

Delivering Expertise

Investing in People

Providing the Tools

Building Networks

Globally Active

Joining Forces

Anniversary of the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons

Anniversary of the UN Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants

Looking Ahead to 2021

Acknowledging the Support of our Donors



Our Impact in Numbers

56 

Countries supported in their efforts to counter human trafficking and migrant smuggling

2662 

People trained to prevent and prosecute cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling and protect the people affected by these crimes

11 

Countries provided with assistance in the drafting, updating and review of legislation

8 

Tools and publications developed and distributed worldwide

86 

Cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling analysed for inclusion in the case law databases

75 

Technical cooperation activities implemented with Member States

45 

Events attended as expert speakers in the fields of human trafficking and migrant smuggling

59 
Events organized

and attended by
3657 
participants



Our Purpose

To prevent crime, protect rights and deliver justice

We help countries develop and implement effective national responses to human trafficking and migrant smuggling and support regional and international efforts to combat these crimes.

Human Trafficking

is a global crime that reduces people to commodities and exploits them for profit. People of all genders, ages and backgrounds can become victims of this crime. Traffickers use violence, fraudulent employment agencies, and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick, coerce and deceive their victims. They take advantage of people who are vulnerable, desperate or simply seeking a better life.

Migrant Smuggling

is a crime in which a smuggler makes a profit by assisting a person to illegally enter or stay in a country. Smugglers often take advantage of people who need to escape poverty, natural disaster, conflict or persecution, or face a lack of employment and education opportunities but do not have the options to migrate legally. Many migrants die of thirst in deserts, perish at sea or suffocate in containers.





Our Work

Like in most parts of the world, 'home office' became the norm for staff of the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section in 2020. We took our meetings, events and training activities online while deploying additional experts in selected locations to maintain in-country relationships with our key counterparts. Despite the restrictions, we were able to support 56 countries in their efforts to counter human trafficking and migrant smuggling and trained over 2,500 people to prevent and prosecute cases of these crimes. The virtual events we organized attracted record numbers of participants, including multiple experts representing Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and countries in transition from conflict situations.

The Crimes

Crime thrives during times of social and economic unrest, and the global pandemic did not stop the illegal activities of human traffickers and migrant smugglers. In May 2020,

we released a [report](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on human trafficking. This highlighted how the pandemic was exposing victims of trafficking to further exploitation while measures to curb the spread of the virus limited their access to essential services. It warned how traffickers would take advantage of the economic downturn created by the pandemic and find increased opportunities for online exploitation. Our report included concrete recommendations for action and outlined our response to the crisis. A further [paper](#) produced by the Section focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the smuggling of migrants. It put forward recommendations on how to combat the crime during the pandemic while caring for the affected migrants. Our research showed that as closed borders and mobility limitations make regular travel more difficult, migrants are turning increasingly to the services of smuggling networks to leave their country or continue their journey. Restrictions at country entry points and increased patrols are leading smugglers to revert to more dangerous routes in harsher conditions where migrants are more exposed to violence, abuse and the risk of exploitation.

Our Response

In response to the pandemic, we developed rapid assessment studies for countries to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on essential services for victims, and law enforcement and justice capacities. We supported anti-trafficking units and shelters to procure personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of staff and victims of trafficking. Our knowledge team embarked on a global study on the impact of the pandemic on human trafficking, which will be released in July 2021. The commitment of people working on the frontline to counter human trafficking and support victims was not overlooked in 2020. Our [COVID paper](#) analysed the effects of COVID-19 on the work of police forces, labour inspectors, justice systems and support services for victims of trafficking. To mark the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2020, we [paid tribute](#) to first responders, recognizing the essential role they play and the challenges of providing vital services throughout the COVID-19 crisis.



How We Work

Our approach is transnational, multifaceted and interrelated

Investing in people



We **train** and **mentor** the people who use these instruments to apprehend, prosecute and convict criminals and protect and support those affected by these crimes.

Delivering expertise



We **assist** countries to draft, develop and review the laws, policies, and action plans they need to effectively combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling.



Providing the tools

We **supply** evidence-based reports, toolkits and studies for training, research and policy reform purposes that expand the knowledge base on human trafficking and migrant smuggling.



Building networks

We **form** partnerships with international organizations, civil society and governments to tackle these crimes and **support** joint investigations into organized crime groups.





Delivering Expertise

The Right Laws

To respond effectively to crimes, from the prevention to the conviction of the perpetrators, it is essential that countries have the appropriate legislation in place, and effective laws provide the foundation for the protection and support of people affected by crimes. In 2020, we assisted 11 countries with the drafting, updating and review of national laws on human trafficking and migrant smuggling and helped them to develop and bring their legislation in line with the internationally recognized provisions of the UN Protocols on these crimes. For example, our support led to the adoption of a new law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants in Ethiopia and to Nepal's ratification of the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. We worked closely with Pakistan and Afghanistan in the development of their National Action Plans to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling based on international standards and norms.

Protocols in Practice

The UN Protocols on [Trafficking in Persons](#) and against [Migrant Smuggling](#) are the world's primary legal instruments to combat these global crimes, support victims of trafficking and protect the rights of smuggled migrants. Countries that have ratified the Protocols must uphold the commitments enshrined in these legally binding treaties. In September 2020, we supported the annual sessions of the related intergovernmental Working Groups. Despite the obstacles created by the pandemic and the fact that the meetings had to take place for the first time online, around 1,000 officials took part to discuss current issues, share best practices and debate on responses to the gaps and challenges in the implementation of the UN Protocols in their respective countries. The Working Group on Smuggling of Migrants adopted a series of recommendations for practical action, which were presented at the Conference of the Parties in October 2020. The Conference also adopted a new resolution on human trafficking that seeks to further encourage States to implement the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

Expert Voices

Our Section consists of multilingual and multinational crime prevention and criminal justice officers. These lawyers, former police officers, legal advisers, humanitarian law and gender rights specialists now use their expertise to help countries tackle the criminal elements of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. We are regularly called upon to share our in-depth knowledge at global events and conferences. In 2020, we were invited to speak at 45 events, including those held at the White House, the European Parliament and organized by NATO and the Nadia Murad Initiative. Topics on discussion included the situation of Venezuelan Migrants, human trafficking during times of armed conflict and the impact of COVID-19 on organized crime. We also provided expert advice to many other events including the [DATAJAM 2020](#), a global competition to develop tools that use both technology and data analysis to prevent and prosecute cases of human trafficking.



Investing in People

Justice Delivered

In July 2020, a court in Bosnia and Herzegovina sentenced a man and woman to ten years in prison for human trafficking offences. For over a year, the perpetrators had exploited four children by transporting them to various cities where they were forced to beg on the streets. This took place in harsh weather conditions, from the early hours of the morning until late in the evening, even at times when the children were supposed to be at school. The traffickers controlled the children with threats of violence and even death. At the end of each day, they demanded the money that the children had collected from begging. The chief investigator, the public prosecutor and the judge involved in this case had all received specialist training by UNODC on identifying and investigating cases of human trafficking for the purpose of forced labour. The sentence delivered represents the highest to date for forced begging in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mentoring With Impact

Recognizing that more needs to be done against human trafficking, the Government of Malawi requested UNODC's support to assist in the review of the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons and the implementation of the National Anti-human Trafficking Law enacted in 2015. The country is facing a serious challenge as men, women, and children are trafficked within and outside of the country, mainly for forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Malawi is also a transit country for victims of trafficking who are taken to other African countries or to parts of Europe. In 2020, our team trained and mentored over 58



officials throughout the country on how to detect human trafficking, identify and protect the victims and prosecute the criminals. This work led to the rescue of around three hundred human trafficking victims and the arrest of 47 perpetrators.

Empowerment Through Training

In Pakistan, female officers represent just two percent of the police service. To address this issue, the Federal Investigation Agency and the Punjab Police Service asked UNODC for assistance. As a result, 25 female police officers received specialist training on investigative techniques in cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. The workshop aimed to improve the understanding of the recently adopted national laws on human trafficking and migrant smuggling, as well as the international legal frameworks in place to address these crimes. Participants were also instructed on human rights considerations and the differing needs and challenges facing men and women in human trafficking and migrant smuggling cases. Furthermore, the female officers gained knowledge on victim protection measures and interviewing skills when dealing with people who have been trafficked or smuggled. Participants spoke of feeling “empowered” by the training and having learnt skills they can apply in their daily work. Read more [here](#).



Providing the Tools

When Marriage is a Crime

The links between human trafficking and forced marriage were analysed in a [publication](#) that explained how countries can prevent such cases, identify and protect victims and prosecute traffickers. The research, which was undertaken in nine countries in different regions of the world over a 12-month period, found that worldwide girls as young as twelve are being forced or tricked into marrying men who exploit them for sex and domestic work.

The 'marriages' are arranged by family members, wedding agencies or brokers, often for financial or material gain. In some cases, brides are kidnapped and forced into marriage. Violence, physical and sexual abuse, restrictions on movement and isolation from family and friends are common factors of these coerced unions.

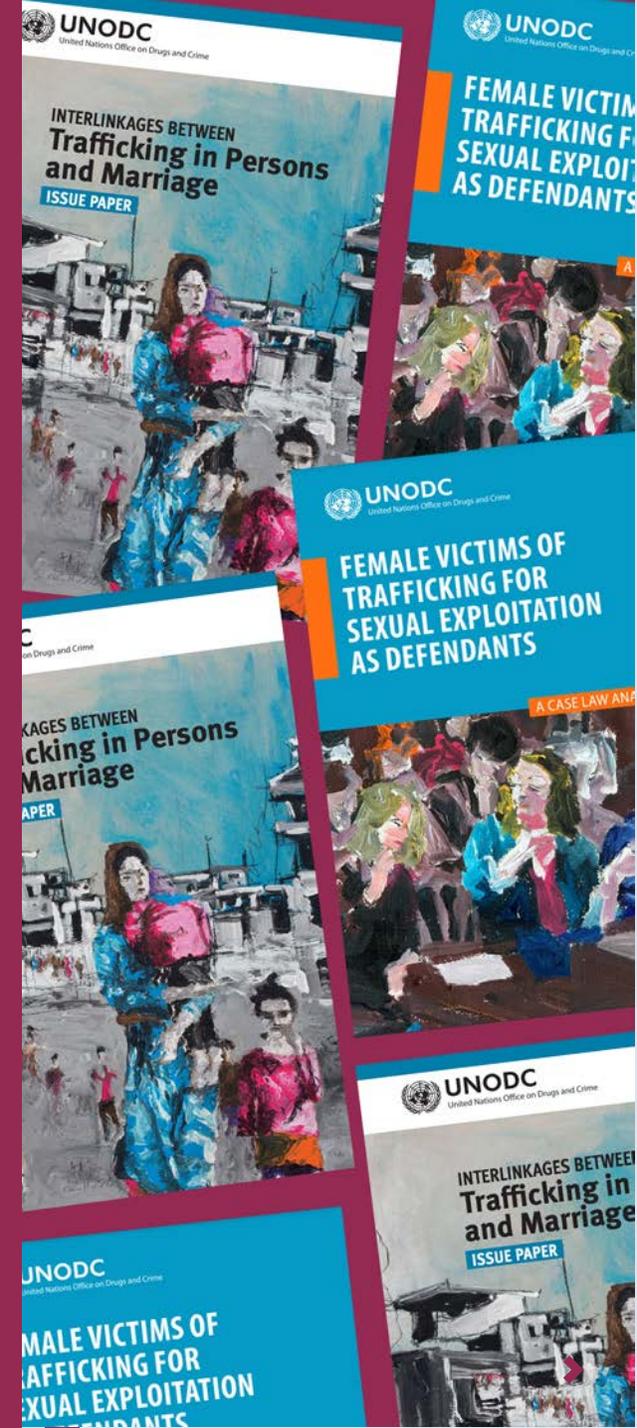
This is the first publication that looks at the issue globally and through the lens of the international legal obligations that States have to address human trafficking. Read more [here](#).

Exploited and Prosecuted

Women and girls who have been sexually exploited by criminal gangs are being prosecuted and convicted for human trafficking-related crimes they are made to commit. This was the main finding of a [study](#) that shed light on this alarming trend while providing guidance to the law enforcement officials, criminal justice authorities and victim support services that handle such complex cases. The study found that the victims involved often had no alternative but to comply with the requests of their traffickers. Some hoped to limit their own exploitation or escape poverty by playing a role in the criminal process. The team behind the study focused on 53 court cases from 2006 to 2020, which took place in 16 jurisdictions and included a female defendant who was also a victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Research was conducted using the [UNODC Knowledge Portal on Trafficking in Persons](#), a unique, global database of case law and legislation. Read more [here](#).

Refreshment for Laws

The [United Nations Protocol](#) to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons and its parent convention against transnational organized crime are the world's primary legal instruments to combat human trafficking. Adopted 20 years ago, the Protocol is the first legally binding instrument with an internationally recognized definition of human trafficking and has so far been ratified by 178 parties. In 2020, two new publications were released to support Member States in their understanding and implementation of the Protocol. The [Model Legislative Provisions](#) and [Legislative Guide against Trafficking in Persons](#) offer practical guidance on the drafting, strengthening and application of national anti-human trafficking laws. These publications are a revision of tools first launched seventeen years ago, and they incorporate progress made in all regions of the world over the past two decades. This includes improvements in how the needs and rights of victims are addressed and an enhanced understanding of how to apply the trafficking in persons definition in practice. The publications consider new laws from over 50 countries and practical experience in the use of existing laws. Read more [here](#).



Building Networks

A Global Response

Global crimes need a global response, and in 2020 we intensified our cooperation with other international organizations. As the coordinator of the [Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons \(ICAT\)](#), we steered the development of a joint [analytical review](#) of efforts globally to implement the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol over the 20 years since its adoption. The Review led to the first-ever [ICAT Plan of Action](#), which details six priority areas to improve international anti-trafficking efforts. 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 orderly and safe migration. Last year, we strengthened our cooperation with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). In December 2020, our experts in Vienna, Austria and in our field offices joined an [INTERPOL-led operation](#) against migrant smuggling. Over 100 victims of human trafficking were rescued as part of this operation.

Gender Champions Come Together

Globally, women remain underrepresented in leading roles within the national law enforcement and criminal justice institutions that respond to the crimes of human trafficking and migrant smuggling and among policy-making bodies. [The Women's Network](#) of Gender Champions against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling was launched to overcome barriers that prevent the inclusion of women in operational and leadership roles in such sectors. It is a community of female and male champions of women's rights who work in policy making, the law enforcement and justice sectors, civil society and other relevant entities in Afghanistan, I.R. Iran, Iraq and Pakistan. The Network strengthens the skills of female professionals who deal with cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling through specialized training, mentoring and coaching activities. It enables closer cooperation between authorities in the Network's member countries through the sharing of information and expertise.

Protection for Migrants

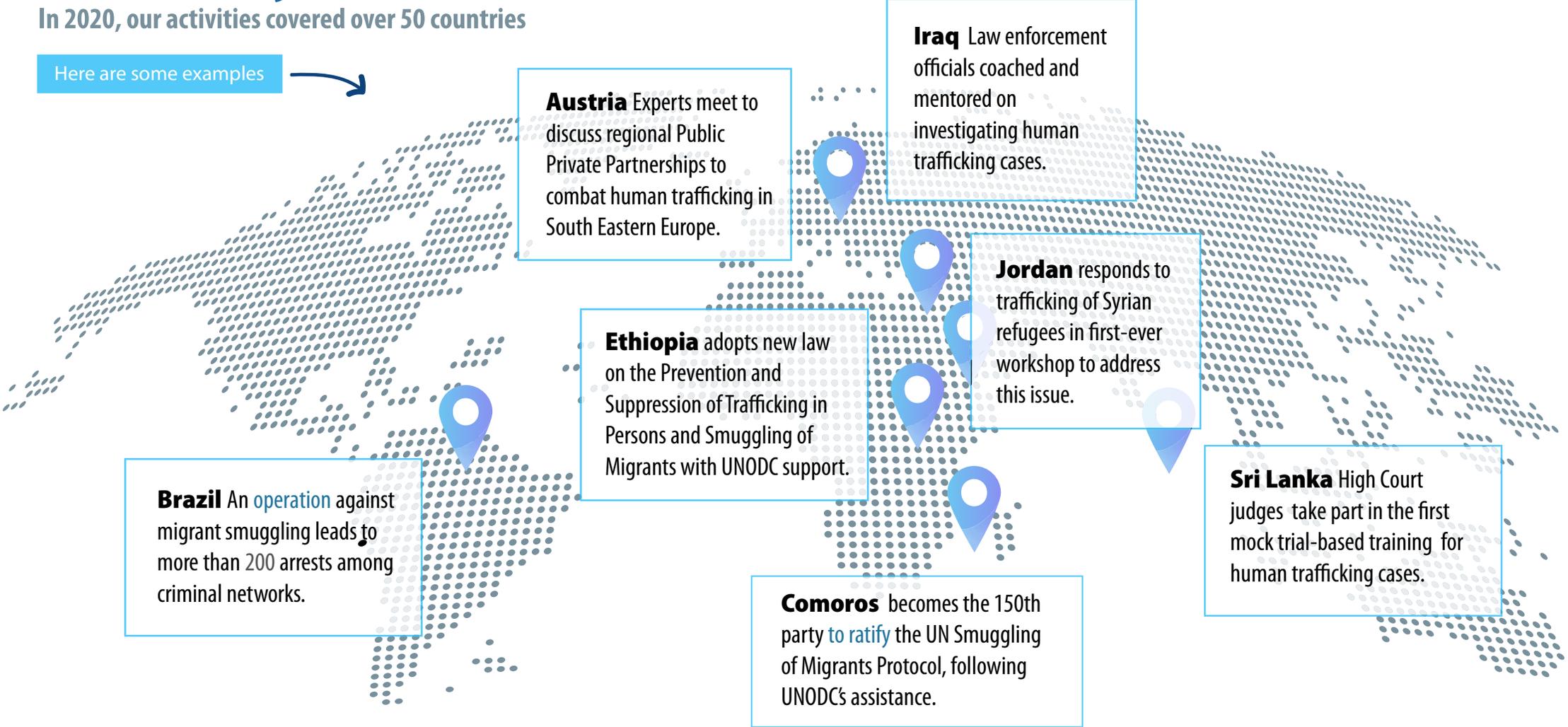
People who flee their home countries due to disaster, conflict, economic or social unrest are at high risk of being exploited in the countries they cross or at their destinations. Many of these men, women and children often travel over long distances. They are scared, tired and in need of urgent assistance, making them vulnerable to human trafficking. In 2020, we launched a new initiative that brings together eight countries in South America and the Caribbean to enhance regional coordination to effectively tackle the exploitation of migrants by traffickers. The initiative supports the relevant authorities to prevent and prosecute cases of human trafficking and facilitates cooperation between police officers, prosecutors and judges. A further aim is to improve the ways in which victims are identified and referred to the appropriate authorities. In December 2020, the work of the initiative contributed to a Colombian operation which resulted in the rescue of 19 victims of sex trafficking from Venezuela and the arrest of 10 traffickers.



Globally Active

In 2020, our activities covered over 50 countries

Here are some examples



Brazil An operation against migrant smuggling leads to more than 200 arrests among criminal networks.

Austria Experts meet to discuss regional Public Private Partnerships to combat human trafficking in South Eastern Europe.

Ethiopia adopts new law on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants with UNODC support.

Comoros becomes the 150th party to ratify the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, following UNODC's assistance.

Iraq Law enforcement officials coached and mentored on investigating human trafficking cases.

Jordan responds to trafficking of Syrian refugees in first-ever workshop to address this issue.

Sri Lanka High Court judges take part in the first mock trial-based training for human trafficking cases.



Joining Forces

Cooperation with our valued partners is essential

I am grateful for the U.S. Department of State's collaboration with UNODC's Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section. We jointly implement important programmes to support countries to address trafficking in persons and have a shared priority of protecting victims during a global pandemic and always. We look forward to a strong ongoing partnership.



John Cotton Richmond,

Former Ambassador-at-Large, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S.

Chifundo Shyreen Harawa

Civil and Political Rights Officer,
Human Rights Commission, Malawi



The partnership with UNODC is very important to me and the Commission because human trafficking is a serious violation of human rights. Thanks to the training from UNODC, law enforcement agencies and other front-line professionals now know how to recognize victims of trafficking, where to forward information on suspected traffickers and where to refer the people they presume are victims.

The concept of partnership is often overlooked when it comes to the fight against human trafficking. But in addition to prevention, protection and prosecution, partnership is what makes a real difference and makes the effort united. In 2020, the partnership between UNODC and Atina assisted trafficking survivors in Serbia to overcome a difficult and challenging period.



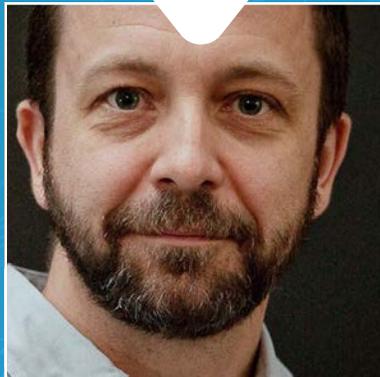
Jelena Hrnjak,
Programme Manager,
Anti-Human Trafficking NGO,
ATINA, Serbia

As a Coordinator of REDTRAM, a specialized network of Ibero-american prosecutors for combatting trafficking and smuggling, I have benefited from the support and technical advice of the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section in achieving the goals set up in our Action Plan. My participation in Expert Group Meetings has contributed to the development of studies that were released by the Section in 2020, and I distributed these further in my region.



Marcelo Colombo,
Federal Public Prosecutor, Head of the
Specialized Anti-trafficking Unit, Argentina

“
The UN Network on Migration was established to support Member States implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Building on UNODC’s expertise among our Executive Committee members is vital to provide guidance to our work in this field. COVID-19 has unleashed an unprecedented crisis that exacerbated vulnerabilities of those already facing perilous situations, including migrants. We must work together and speak with one voice to protect those who need it most.



Jonathan Prentice,
Head of Secretariat, United Nations
Network on Migration



Marcela Loaiza,
Trafficking survivor, author and
activist, Colombia

“
In 2020, Germany’s Anti-Financial Crime Alliance and UNODC’s Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section jointly developed a complex algorithm to more precisely identify financial transactions that could be linked to human trafficking. Initial applications at leading banks have already produced promising findings that were passed on to national investigative authorities. We are confident that in future this will lead to the detection and prosecution of many cases of human trafficking.



Frank Haberstroh,
Lead for the Project on Financial Flows
from Human Trafficking, German
Anti-Financial Crime Alliance

“
I was a panellist at the event to mark the 20 years of the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol where I shared my perspective as a survivor on the subject. It is incredibly important for the UNODC to provide these spaces and platforms to survivors who can contribute different insights about victim care. The perspective of a survivor is pivotal for discussions that concern the handling of future victims or any changes in laws and regulations.

“
Partnering with UNODC’s GLO.ACT project has been strategic for the Department of Criminology at Dhaka University. Making the link between the criminal justice response and educators and students is a key step towards increasing understanding, practical knowledge and following a holistic approach to prevent human trafficking and migrant smuggling.



Umme Wara
Assistant Professor Department of Criminology,
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

20th Anniversary of the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons

Interview with Amina Oufroukhi, Judge, Morocco
Chairperson of the 2020 Working Group on
Trafficking in Persons



How important is the Trafficking in Persons Protocol to your work?

The Protocol is of paramount importance within the framework of combatting trafficking in persons globally. It serves as an instrument to mobilize all countries to combat this crime. It is a key reference document for the development of the anti-human trafficking strategies used by the countries that have ratified the Protocol, both in the legislative sphere and when handling cases of trafficking in persons in accordance with the international standards adopted in the Protocol.

What would the situation be like in your country if you had not ratified the Protocol?

Morocco's ratification of the Protocol in 2011 served as a real starting point in raising awareness of the magnitude of this crime and the type of risks associated with it. It has also paved the way for national, institutional, and legislative efforts to combat trafficking in persons. In addition, this ratification provided the opportunity to make effective use of public criminal law to prevent impunity of traffickers and provide protection for victims. It has also motivated learning about the best practices on the international level and their use as guidance on the national level.

Which steps are necessary to ensure the future success of the Protocol?

The challenges are multiple. We observe the increase in criminal networks trafficking in persons and the increase in their profits and in contrast the shortage and inconsistency of judicial judgements in condemning this crime worldwide. The key to successful strategies in combatting human trafficking is the victim. Efforts need to be intensified to overcome the obstacles of identifying victims and encouraging them to report cases of trafficking in persons. More effort is needed to build trust between them and official institutions, as well as reinforcing means of protection, assistance and integration.



20th Anniversary of the UN Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants

Interview with Francesco Testa, Public Prosecutor, Italy
Chairperson of the 2020 Working Group on the
Smuggling of Migrants



How important is the UN Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants to your work?

During fourteen years as a prosecutor in Catania, Sicily I handled cases of organized crime and migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean Sea. The Protocol is essential to the work of prosecutors and law enforcement agencies in investigating and prosecuting such forms of crime. It represents the most useful legal basis for requesting and providing mutual legal assistance and international cooperation worldwide. Its complete implementation is essential for judicial authorities and institutions involved in migrant smuggling.

What would the situation be like in your country if you had not ratified the Protocol?

Judicial authorities in countries that have ratified the Protocol may request from or provide international cooperation to other ratifying countries when dealing with cases covered by the Protocol. Given the transnational nature of smuggling of migrants, non-ratification by States may hamper successful investigations and contribute to the impunity of criminals engaged in such activities. Most of the judicial assistance provided and received in recent years in Italy in this area has been made under the umbrella of the Protocol.

How do you rate the success of the Protocol over the past twenty years?

The success of the Protocol is closely related to the level of ratification and to the level of awareness of its importance among the officials who use it in each country. After twenty years, in my opinion, the Protocol has now reached a satisfactory rate of success. The international community is increasingly recognizing its importance and relevance to combat transnational organized crime, but we need to see more effort in terms of concrete implementation.



LOOKING AHEAD IN 2021



Key **priorities**

- Strengthen investigations and prosecutions
- Address trans-regional migrant smuggling flows
- Enhance victim assistance and human rights protection
- Analyse illicit financial flows
- Establish closer partnerships with private sector and civil society

New **tools**

- Toolkit to Mainstream Human Rights and Gender Equality
- Study on Aggravated Migrant Smuggling
- Issue Paper on the Definition of Trafficking in Persons (Harbouring Concept)
- Study on the Impact of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons
- Compendium of Promising Practises on Public-Private Partnerships to Counter Trafficking in Persons
- Study on Illicit Financial Flows in Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling

Main UN 2021 **Events**

- The 30th Session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)
- The 2021 [World Day](#) Against Trafficking in Persons
- The 11th Session of the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons and the 8th Session of the Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants
- 2021 UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on the appraisal of the Global Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons



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 2020.



Austria



Australia



Canada



Cyprus



France



Germany



Italy



Norway



Sweden



Switzerland



United Kingdom



USA



European Union



IDB
Inter-American
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HTMSS Webpage



For further information please contact:

UNODC Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section
UNODC
P.O. Box 500
1400 Vienna
Austria

Tel. (+43-1) 26060-5687
Email: unodchtmss@un.org



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