

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Topic 2: Smuggling of Syrian Refugees

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War in the spring of 2011, more than 4.7 million Syrians have fled their home country in search of safety and stability.¹ Desperate to escape the war, many have relied on migrant smugglers in Turkey and Libya to bring them to countries in Europe such as Italy, Spain, Cyprus, and Greece. However, smugglers charge exorbitant prices for the trip and the journey is exceedingly dangerous.² In 2016 alone, over 5,000 estimated deaths were recorded and according to current statistics, 2017 may prove to be an even deadlier year.³⁴

One of the duties of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is to address the serious problem of migrant smuggling.⁵ In 2004, a treaty called the “Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air” was enacted to define and criminalize this activity.⁶ According to the treaty, migrant smuggling is defined as “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a state party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.”⁷

Every year, migrants are smuggled around the world as part of an organized crime system that is worth billions of dollars. Migrants are subject to horrifying conditions with smugglers,

¹ http://www.unrefugees.org/2015/07/total-number-of-syrian-refugees-exceeds-four-million-for-first-time/?gclid=CjwKEAajwjQO BRDribyJpc_mzHgSjABdnsFWmfDrRjExHZN5w0Rs8ESbft_5ndQdIBh3777zQ95XSBoCgVz_w_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-34183454/migrant-crisis-the-syrians-exploited-by-people-smugglers-in-turkey> (I encourage you to watch this BBC video to understand the role that migrant smugglers play in the current crisis.)

³ <https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-top-363348-2016-deaths-sea-5079>

⁴ <http://time.com/4845054/amnesty-2017-refugees-crossing-mediterranean/>

⁵ <https://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/migrant-smuggling.html>

⁶ https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtdsg_no=xviii-12-b&chapter=18&lang=en

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jul/31/people-smuggling-how-works-who-benefits-and-how-to-put-stop>

working under larger organized criminal networks, rarely caring about the wellbeing of the people that they are paid to help.⁸ This is particularly apparent in the plight of the Syrian refugees who are smuggled to Europe.

The situation with Syrian refugees and migrant smuggling is incredibly complicated. Many Syrians are so desperate to escape civil war and the horrors at home that they are willing to risk their lives to reach Europe. However, these vulnerable individuals are being subject to the transnational crime of migrant smuggling -- a crime that is resulting in too many deaths.

As UNODC, it is our responsibility to help the Syrian refugees who are being exploited as victims of migrant smuggling. We must protect these migrants and outline a set of universal guidelines that will end this crisis.

Some questions that you might want to keep in mind when conducting your research:

- What strategies have been used in the past to combat migrant smuggling among Syrian refugees? How effective have these measures been?
- What methods are used to combat migrant smuggling around the world? Can those be replicated to protect Syrian refugees?
- What can we do to ensure that Syrian refugees are protected and able to reach safety?

When researching this topic please keep in mind your country's positions regarding the Syrian refugee crisis and preventing migrant smuggling. Does your country struggle with issues related to migrant smuggling? How does your country respond to these issues? Can those tactics be used to help Syrian refugees as well? If you have any questions at all, please feel free to email me at Karen.neugroschl@mail.yu.edu. I look forward to reading your position papers!

⁸ http://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/factsheets/TOC12_fs_general_EN_HIRES.pdf

Good luck,

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