

Drugs and Crime

*The question of migrant smuggling in
Northern Africa and the Middle East*

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Issue: The question of migrant smuggling in Northern Africa and the Middle East

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Introduction

The issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa has been a persistent challenge for the region, with people attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe in search of better opportunities and safety. The root causes of this phenomenon are multifaceted and include factors such as poverty, political instability, and conflict in many of the countries in the region.

The situation has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a reduction in the number of search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean, increasing the risk for migrants attempting the crossing. The pandemic has also led to increased economic insecurity, making the prospect of migration more appealing for some.

Addressing the issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa requires a multi-faceted approach that involves addressing the root causes of migration, including poverty, conflict, and political instability. It also requires cracking down on criminal networks involved in smuggling and providing support for countries that are struggling to manage the influx of migrants. Furthermore, legal channels for migration need to be improved, and international cooperation is necessary to resolve the issue.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugee

“[O]wing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (UN Convention).

Migrant Smuggling

Fundamentally, migrant smuggling is a criminal act involving the illegal transportation of people across borders for financial profit. Migrant traffickers often use dangerous routes for these transportations, causing many people to die. Migrant smuggling is distinct from human trafficking, which involves the exploitation of individuals for forced labor, sexual exploitation, or

other forms of abuse. Smuggled migrants, on the other hand, may have paid for their transportation and may not be aware of the risks involved in their journey.

General Overview

Migrant smuggling is a pressing issue in North Africa and the Middle East, where many individuals attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea or other borders to reach Europe, seeking better opportunities and safety. The problem is fueled by factors such as poverty, political instability, conflict, and persecution in many of the countries in the region.

The United Nations (UN) has been working to address the issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa and the Middle East through various initiatives. In 2016, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2240, which called for increased cooperation among states in the region to tackle the problem and measures to disrupt the activities of smugglers, including the seizure and destruction of vessels and other assets used in smuggling operations. Furthermore, the UN has launched several initiatives to provide assistance and protection to migrants and refugees in the region. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been working to provide shelter, food, and medical care to displaced persons, while the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been involved in efforts to assist stranded migrants and help them return home safely.

Despite these efforts, migrant smuggling remains a significant challenge in the region. One of the primary routes for migrant smuggling is through Libya, where sub-Saharan Africans congregate before embarking on perilous journeys to cross the sea. Smugglers take advantage of the country's civil war and political instability to exploit vulnerable people and profit from their aspirations to escape. Migrants are frequently exposed to hazardous conditions, such as being crammed into overcrowded boats or trucks, which can result in injury, illness, or even fatality. The situation has been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a reduction in the number of search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean, increasing the risk for migrants attempting the crossing. The pandemic has also led to increased economic insecurity, making the prospect of migration more appealing for some.

The international community has responded to the issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa and the Middle East through a variety of measures. In 2015, the European Union (EU) launched the European Agenda on Migration, which aimed to address the root causes of migration, improve border control measures, and provide assistance and protection to refugees and migrants. The EU has also established several funding programs to support countries in the region in managing the influx of migrants and refugees, including the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis. Moreover, in 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which recognized the need for a coordinated and comprehensive response to the issue of migrant smuggling. The declaration called for the adoption of a global compact on migration, which was eventually adopted by the UN in 2018. The compact aims to promote safe, orderly, and regular migration and to address the root causes of migration, including poverty, conflict, and climate change.

Despite these international efforts, the issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa and the Middle East remains a complex and multifaceted challenge. The situation is exacerbated by ongoing conflicts and political instability in the region, which provide a fertile ground for smugglers to exploit vulnerable people. Addressing the issue requires a multi-faceted approach that involves addressing the root causes of migration, improving border control measures, cracking down on criminal networks involved in smuggling, and providing support for countries that are struggling to manage the influx of migrants. It also requires providing legal channels for migration and ensuring the protection and rights of migrants.

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, there have been other international developments aimed at addressing migrant smuggling in North Africa and the Middle East. For example, in 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched the "Aware Migrants" campaign in West and Central Africa. The campaign seeks to inform migrants about the dangers of irregular migration and the risks associated with crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The campaign also provides information about legal pathways for migration and the resources available to migrants who choose to return home. Furthermore, there have been efforts to increase cooperation among countries in the region to address the issue of migrant smuggling. In 2014, the Khartoum Process was established, which brings together European and African countries to address irregular migration, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking. The process focuses on improving information sharing, enhancing border management, and providing protection and assistance to migrants and refugees.

Overall, the issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa and the Middle East remains a complex challenge that requires a comprehensive and coordinated response from the international community. The UN, EU, and other international organizations have launched various initiatives to address the problem, but the situation is complicated by ongoing conflicts, political instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing the root causes of migration, providing legal pathways for migration, and cracking down on criminal networks involved in smuggling are among the key measures needed to tackle the problem effectively. It is essential to prioritize the safety and rights of migrants and to provide them with the necessary support and assistance to ensure their well-being.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR is the UN body that is concerned with the statuses of refugees from all around the globe. It should be noted that the UNHCR have delivered their objections about the legality of the Greek Acts of Legislative Content that have suspended the registrations of asylum for the people that have entered to the territory irregularly. In addition, UNHCR delivers yearly evaluations of countries regarding their efforts about refugees.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

IOM is a UN agency that focuses on the area of humane and orderly migration. IOM usually provides services and advice to governments about their policies as well as collecting data regarding the international refugee crises. It has four main sub-areas under migration

management, namely, migration and development, facilitating migration, regulating migration, and addressing forced migration.

European Union (EU)

The EU, despite its critical role in the crises, has caused the situation to deteriorate by overseeing the actions of its member states. However, it should be noted that the EU did refuse the proposal of Hungary to fund further militarization of the Hungarian border walls with 1 billion Euros. Although, this does not mean that it has not been supporting the advancements in the borders via surveillance systems and drones. When it comes to its contributions to support the refugees, the EU has conducted several maritime operations in the Mediterranean Sea to search and rescue refugees.

Timeline of Events

| Date of Event | <i>Description of Event</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 28 July 1951 | <i>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees</i> |
| 4 October 1967 | <i>Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees</i> |
| 2009 | <i>Boko Haram Insurgency in Africa</i> |
| 2010 - Present | <i>Arab Spring and initiation of several uprisings and civil wars in the regions of Middle East and Northern Africa</i> |
| 15 March 2010 - Present | <i>Syrian Civil War</i> |
| 2015 | <i>European Migrant Crisis</i> |
| 2 and 13 March 2020 | <i>Greek “Acts of Legislative Content” suspending the registration of asylum claims for people entering irregularly</i> |
| 2020 | <i>Further militarization of Greek Border</i> |

Treaties and Events

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) & Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967)

These two conventions are among the first and most important steps of the UN in the goal of the safe settlement of refugees. They define the term refugee and also create an outline for the relevant processes and actions about this issue.

UNSC Resolution 2240

Adopted in 2015, the resolution called for states to cooperate with each other while working on this issue and promoted measures to prevent some of the activities of smugglers, such as the seizure and destruction of vessels and other assets used in smuggling operations.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Several past solution attempts have been made to address the issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa and the Middle East. These include increased border control measures, providing legal pathways for migration, and cracking down on criminal networks involved in smuggling. The United Nations and the European Union have launched various initiatives to address the problem, such as the Global Compact for Migration and the European Agenda on Migration. The Khartoum Process, established in 2014, brings together European and African countries to address irregular migration, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking. In addition, the EU has increased funding for border management and search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

Possible Solutions

Addressing the issue of migrant smuggling in North Africa and the Middle East requires a comprehensive and coordinated response from the international community. Possible solutions include increasing legal pathways for migration, addressing the root causes of migration, and cracking down on criminal networks involved in smuggling. International collaboration and the involvement of the United Nations are essential for tackling the problem effectively. The UN could provide technical assistance and support to countries in the region to improve border management, enhance search and rescue operations, and increase access to legal pathways for migration. Greater cooperation among countries in the region is also necessary, and initiatives like the Khartoum Process and the Global Compact for Migration provide opportunities for increased collaboration. Addressing the issue of migrant smuggling requires sustained efforts and political will from the international community to ensure the safety and rights of migrants and to address the root causes of migration.

Useful Links

- www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html
- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133327>

- <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/migrant-crossings-mediterranean-leave-thousands-dead-2023-02-26/>
- www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/07/croatian-border-police-accused-of-sexually-assaulting-afghan-migrant
- www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/oct/21/croatian-police-accused-of-sickening-assaults-on-migrants-on-balkans-trail-bosnia
- www.unhcr.org/uk/news/press/2020/3/5e5d08ad4/unhcr-statement-situation-turkey-eu-border.html

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