

CALL TO ACTION ON A GLOBAL ALLIANCE TO COUNTER MIGRANT SMUGGLING

Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling

Brussels, 28 November 2023

Migrant smuggling is a global and common challenge

It is a criminal activity under international and European law that disrespects human life and the dignity of people in the pursuit of financial or other material profit. Smuggling networks are often part of well organised multi-national criminal networks. They take advantage of migrants' vulnerability, all too often leading to violence, abuse, exploitation, and loss of life. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), since 2014, almost 60 000 migrants have lost their lives or gone missing during smuggling operations.

Criminal network operations are pervasive. They are linked up across every stage of the journey, from countries of origin, through countries of transit and destination. Smuggling is a multi-billion-euro business, with profits estimated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to be in the range of EUR 4.7 – 6 billion worldwide a year. Migrant smugglers are poly-criminal, involved in trafficking in human beings, drugs, firearms, with highly adaptable and ever changing modi operandi. They make use of digital tools, including online platforms and electronic communication, as their primary means of communication and coordination, allowing them to remain hidden.

The scale of migrant smuggling has reached new and devastating heights. The uncontrolled and irregular arrivals brought about by smuggling put systems under strain and undermine effective migration management. **The mobility of people needs to be managed through the right policy and legislation, not by smugglers.** A comprehensive and sustainable approach to people's mobility requires a combination of robust and effective actions, complementing mutually beneficial partnerships with countries of origin and transit, addressing the root causes of irregular migration, and at the same time fighting organised crime, including migrant smuggling, and trafficking in human beings.

A strong, united, and global response to this phenomenon is necessary from all State and non-State actors.

The constantly changing business model of smugglers needs to be broken and transnational criminal networks should be dismantled through informed, decisive and coordinated actions of law enforcement and judiciaries. Migrants' rights, dignity and protection must always be at the centre of our response.

International cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination and with all relevant stakeholders, including international organisations, in a whole-of-route approach, needs to be significantly reinforced. Our actions should be grounded in the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocols. Together we should build on the Conclusions of the Ministerial Conference on the 20th Anniversary of the Palermo Convention (September 2023).

A new era of cooperation through forming a Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling is necessary to combat migrants smuggling.

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A determined and concerted multi-dimensional Global Alliance is crucial for coming together on prevention, response, protection and alternatives to irregular migration, including addressing the root causes of irregular migration and facilitating legal pathways.

To that end, Governments are called upon to:

Strengthen efforts on prevention by:

- Reaffirming their commitment to join and implement fully the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and the Protocols thereto as the main global instruments for tackling smuggling and related crimes;
- Developing and reinforcing national legal frameworks and capacities to counter migrant smuggling, based on the UN Protocol on Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air;
- Enhancing border management actions as the key element in the fight against migrant smuggling;
- Developing information and awareness raising campaigns on the risks of irregular migration and migrant smuggling, as well as the availability of legal migration opportunities to dissuade people from taking perilous journeys;
- Dedicating adequate and targeted resources and building up the necessary capacities to prevent and fight migrant smuggling.

Enhance the response to counter migrant smuggling by:

- Improving the collection and sharing of situational awareness data related to migrant smuggling (i.e., *modi operandi*, routes, economic models of smuggling networks, links with trafficking in human beings and other crimes, financial transfers, root causes) between governments and relevant stakeholders in the fight against migrant smuggling;
- Promoting joint law enforcement investigations and operational cooperation, including with the support of agencies;
- Enhancing cooperation between respective judicial authorities;
- Cooperating on financial investigations, asset confiscation and recovery;
- Limiting the supply of, seizing, and destroying smuggling-relevant equipment, notably boats and vehicles;
- Ensuring the protection of migrants' rights and assistance, especially to those in vulnerable situations.

Address alternatives to irregular migration by:

- Promoting legal pathways as alternatives to irregular migration;
- Addressing the root causes of irregular migration through strategic partnerships with countries of origin, including alternative livelihoods;
- Working on the effective return of smuggled migrants who do not have the right to stay, their readmission and sustainable reintegration;
- Facilitating legal migration opportunities, including through continuing the setting up of programmes and offering training opportunities.

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International Organisations are called upon to support the three working strands by:

- Promoting international cooperation and awareness among actors globally, including states, civil society, non-governmental and community-based organisations;
- Assisting in the development and reinforcement of national legal frameworks to counter migrant smuggling;
- Providing capacity building to countries of origin and transit and to local communities affected by departures;
- Facilitating judicial cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination in investigations, prosecutions and judicial proceedings;
- Ensuring effective implementation of international cooperation mechanisms and operational actions implementing them.

Online service providers are called upon to:

- Work together with Governments, International Organisations and specialised law enforcement agencies to identify and take down online content that publicly instigates people to migrate irregularly or that promotes illicit activities related to the smuggling of migrants.

We are all called upon to work collectively to:

- Provide a strong, united and global response to migrant smuggling.
- Ensure concerted and coordinated action to step up the operational response to migrants smuggling at the international level.
- Ensure follow-up at technical and political level, to take forward the work on the three key strands on prevention, response, and alternatives to migrant smuggling.

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Way forward:

Countering migrant smuggling is an integral part of EU migration partnerships with focused exchanges with key partners taking place back-to-back with broader comprehensive migration dialogues.

The work on this Call to Action will be taken forward by the European Commission by setting up a framework, which will work closely with and act as a contact point for all global stakeholders. The European Commission will convene technical Expert Groups with representatives from Union institutions, agencies and bodies, as well as EU Member States, partner countries, international organisations and other stakeholders, which will focus on taking forward work on the main strands identified in the Conference, confirm priorities, take stock of progress achieved and identify new areas where cooperation on countering migrant smuggling can be stepped up.

The first thematic Expert Group meeting on tackling the phenomenon of digital smuggling will take place in early 2024. The Expert Group will engage with online service providers and private companies with a view to developing public-private partnerships. Further thematic meetings will be organised on priority topics falling under the main strands.

Regular stocktaking at political level should be ensured. Denmark will be hosting a migration conference on mutual partnerships in Copenhagen in spring 2024. The Conference will be the first such opportunity to take stock of the achievements of the Global Alliance.

In addition, regional migration dialogues and initiatives may choose to prioritise countering migrant smuggling in dedicated working sessions, in close coordination with working groups in the UNODC context.