



Towards effective solutions: Addressing the complexities behind the Smuggling of Migrants

22 June 2023

Summary Report

Background

The Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) calls upon the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the United Nations Network on Migration (Network) and other stakeholders, to support initiatives aimed at strengthening measures to tackle the smuggling of migrants. It also emphasizes the importance of closer coordination with other networks addressing trafficking in persons. In paragraph 61 of the Progress Declaration, States committed to intensifying efforts to combat the smuggling of migrants while upholding migrants' rights and addressing the impunity of criminal networks.

To fulfil this mandate, the Network established a thematic [workstream](#) as part of its 2022-2024 workplan. On 22 June 2023, the workstream on “*Ensuring migrant protection through strengthened responses to migrant smuggling and increased coordination on its linkages with trafficking in persons*” conducted its first global consultation, referred to as a GCM Talk. In preparation for the upcoming round of Regional Reviews and the forthcoming biennial report of the Secretary-General, both scheduled for 2024, the workstream will organize a series of consultations at the global, regional, and national levels. These consultations aim to provide policy guidance, facilitate information sharing, exchange best practices, and promote joint initiatives to enhance understanding of and address the smuggling of migrants. Furthermore, the workstream will foster coordination with existing platforms, including those focused on trafficking in persons, where intersections between the two issues exist. This coordinated approach aims to optimize available resources and ensure a comprehensive and unified response.

Organization

The 90-minute introductory GCM Talk for this workstream took place both online and in-person at the IOM Headquarters in Geneva. Simultaneous interpretation was available in English, French, and Spanish.

This GCM Talk, focused on comprehending the intricate nature of the smuggling of migrants, was organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNODC. They served as co-chairs of the workstream, with the support of the Network secretariat, in close collaboration with the Mixed Migration Centre, a member of the workstream.

Objective

The objective of this introductory GCM Talk was threefold:

- Promote a shared understanding among UN entities, civil society organizations, and governments regarding the definitions and various aspects of the smuggling of migrants. Facilitate bilateral and multilateral cooperation to effectively intercept, disrupt, investigate, and prosecute individuals involved in these activities, while adhering to lawful and standardized procedures.
- Emphasize the significance of a rights-based approach in addressing the smuggling of migrants, with specific attention to the agency and needs of migrants, the role of their communities of origin, and the integration of innovative perspectives into counter-smuggling responses.
- Foster the exchange of experiences and best practices to advance the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) in the context of combatting the smuggling of migrants.

The discussion was based on the following guiding questions:

- How can international cooperation and coordination be strengthened to effectively identify, disrupt, investigate, and prosecute criminal entities involved in the smuggling of migrants, while ensuring the protection of migrants' rights? What can be learned from national and regional experiences in this regard?
- How can the utilization of data be optimized to enhance responses to the smuggling of migrants? How can data-driven approaches contribute to more informed and effective strategies?
- In what ways can responses to the smuggling of migrants better incorporate an understanding of migrants' agency and decision-making processes, as well as their connections to local contexts? How can we promote nuanced and inclusive solutions through this approach?
- What are the major challenges and opportunities associated with advancing the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) in the context of combating the smuggling of migrants? How can these challenges be addressed, and how can the GCM be effectively utilized to tackle this issue?

Participants

- Registered participants: 572 (online), including 80 Member States;
- Participants: 364;

- Speakers and panellists:
 - Jonathan Prentice, Head of the Secretariat of the UN Network on Migration;
 - Samantha Munodawafa, Legal Officer, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section, UNODC;
 - Roberto Forin, Deputy Director, Mixed Migration Centre;
 - John Brandolino, Director of Treaty Affairs Division, UNODC;
 - Damien Thuriaux, Head of the Immigration and Border Governance Division, IOM.
 - Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

Key Challenges identified

While there are growing initiatives that states and other actors are undertaking to strengthen or replicate existing practices, challenges remain. Some of those identified and discussed during the GCM talk relate to:

- **Enhanced international cooperation and coordination:**
 1. Information sharing gaps and technical challenges;
 2. Establishing trust amongst entities involved to share non-sensitive data related to the modus operandi of smuggling networks;
 3. Discrepancies amongst legal definitions and provisions across different levels of action;
- **Leveraging data for informed responses:**
 1. Varying data standards and formats;
 2. Addressing data gaps and ensuring data accuracy;
- **Integrating migrants' agency and local contexts:**
 1. Overcoming biases and processes that tend to criminalise smuggled migrants;
 2. Promoting inclusive approaches and meaningful participation;
 3. Developing context-specific solutions and addressing diverse needs;
- **Implementing the Global Compact for Migration:**
 1. Aligning national policies with GCM objectives;
 2. Monitoring progress and ensuring accountability;
- **Coordinating with existing platforms and networks:**
 1. Harmonizing strategies and avoiding duplication;
 2. Effective communication and coordination mechanisms;

Recommendations and key take-aways from the GCM Talk

During the GCM Talk, panellists and participants highlighted the following areas in which intervention and increased efforts would be beneficial:

- **Foster Dialogue and Collaboration:** Organize regular forums, workshops, and conferences that bring together stakeholders from UN entities, civil society organizations, and governments to discuss and share insights on the definitions and various aspects of the smuggling of migrants. These platforms should encourage open and constructive dialogue, aiming to enhance mutual understanding and coordination.
- **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Invest efforts for the development and adoption of comprehensive and standardized legal frameworks at the national and international levels to address the smuggling of migrants. These frameworks should emphasize lawful and standardized approaches to intercept, disrupt, investigate, and prosecute those involved in such activities. Cooperation agreements and information-sharing mechanisms should be established or strengthened to facilitate bilateral and multilateral cooperation.
- **Rights-Centered Approach:** Emphasize the importance of a rights-based approach in countering the smuggling of migrants. Recognize the agency and specific needs of migrants, considering their exposure to situations of vulnerability and potential protection needs. Ensure that responses prioritize the human rights of migrants, including access to justice, non-discrimination, and protection from violence and exploitation. Engage with migrant communities and their countries of origin to understand their perspectives, address root causes, and foster cooperation in countering smuggling.
- **Integration of Innovative Perspectives:** Encourage the integration of innovative approaches into responses aimed at countering the smuggling of migrants. Explore data analysis and information-sharing platforms to enhance monitoring, early detection, and prevention efforts. Foster collaboration with research institutions and civil society organizations to develop innovative solutions and share good practices. Ensure efforts to counter corruption and organised crime are taking place on the side of institutional authorities in their contexts of concern.
- **Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration:** Promote the exchange of experiences and good practices among UN entities, civil society organizations, and governments to advance the implementation of the GCM in the specific area of countering the smuggling of migrants. Share successful strategies, lessons learned, and challenges faced to foster a collective learning process. Establish mechanisms for regular reporting, monitoring, and evaluation to assess progress and identify areas requiring further attention.

This summary of the GCM Talk held on 22 June 2023 was prepared by the members of the workstream “Ensuring migrant protection through strengthened responses to migrant smuggling and increased coordination on its linkages with trafficking in persons” and the secretariat of the UN Network on Migration. It does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Network members. As a summary, it is not a verbatim transcript. Watch the full recording [here](#).