



The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ( [UNODC](#) ) launched its first '[UNODC Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants](#)'

. The extensive study shows that migrant smuggling routes affect every corner of the globe and presents detailed information about key smuggling routes, such as the magnitude, the profiles of smugglers and smuggled migrants, the modus operandi of smugglers and the risks these migrants face.

Even though the debate on migration and refugees is high on the agenda in Europe, it remains quite difficult for the general public to understand what the smuggling of migrants actually entails. The second protocol of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime defines it 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". In this context, special attention needs to be given to people crossing the borders in an irregular manner in exchange for payments explained Mr. Jean-Luc Lemahieu, UNODC Director for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, who presented the study to various EU entities in Brussels on 15 June 2018.

In the study, UNODC was able to identify thirty main smuggling routes worldwide very often

leading to countries in Africa and South East Asia, underlining that, contrary to what is often assumed in the western world, these routes are truly global. a minimum of 2.5 million migrants were smuggled illegally in 2016. Mr. Lemahieu explained that profit is the biggest incentive for smugglers: “if one were to multiply the average fee that smugglers receive and multiply it by 2.5 million, one could make up between 5.5 to 7 billion [US\$]”. This is the main reason why migrant smuggling has reached such a scale and is far from being over. When confronted with such a complex issue as migrant smuggling we have to keep in mind that “even though the smuggler is a criminal, it does not mean the migrant is too.” Mr Lemahieu added.



The study also demonstrates that smugglers use land, air and sea routes – and a combination of these – in their quest to profit from people’s desire to improve their lives. The risks to which migrants are exposed are quite difficult to assess because of the illegal aspect of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, the means of transportation used by migrants can give us a good idea of the dangers they face. In this context Mr Lemahieu also highlighted that “the illegal methods used to traffic, for instance, narcotics or stolen art, are similar to those used for smuggling people. They are perceived as a commodity which puts them in a vulnerable state that often leads to dramatic consequences.” This means that during the often dangerous journeys undertaken by migrants, they expose themselves to a wide range of risks such as violence, theft, exploitation, sexual violence, kidnapping and even death.

When asked about possible solutions to tackle the smuggling of migrants Mr Lemahieu stressed that migrant smuggling is a complex issue that involves political, emotional and technical connotations. “The European Union should in the first place make sure there are more possibilities for regular visa application and legal access to Europe. In the long term, besides making migration safe and regulated, more incentives need to be created to ensure that people don’t have to leave their home countries in the first place” said Mr Lemahieu. This would require the EU to be involved just as much in development cooperation, as in dealing with security issues in migrants’ countries of origin. Additionally, a change of perception is also needed in order to debunk the erroneous idea that migrating to places such as Europe, South Africa or Yemen will make everything better. Often, migrants do not realise the risks they are about to take and that their struggle is not over once they have arrived in the country of destination.