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IOM

UPDATE PAPER

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**Analucia Tello**  
**Sofia Velasco**  
**Renata Venzor**

Dear Delegates,

I am so excited to introduce myself as one of your IOM Administrative Assistant Directors for Session I! My name is Mariana; however, you can name me Mari or Marianita—whichever you like!

For the past three years, NHSMUN has been an excellent part of my life. I started as a delegate, keen to dive into diplomacy and international issues. The passion found in this conference captivated me. From energetic debates, to writing solutions, and making friends around the world—the experience is unforgettable.

I am honored to come back, but with a new purpose. It is my goal to ensure that your conferencing experience runs smoothly, to guarantee you have a superb time and that you learn as much as possible.

I am from Caracas, Venezuela, and am currently pursuing my Psychology degree at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. I have always been fascinated with how humans engage with others. The human mind is truly a beautiful thing, and I am proud to dedicate my professional life to understanding it. Psychology also has a connection with international politics. Analyzing how countries influence each other and how collaboration comes into fruition encompasses psychological factors in the world of diplomacy. NHSMUN is an ideal learning ground to discover how these connections work and to see what drives cooperation on an international scale.

I am appreciative of the large amounts of effort, creativity, and teamwork that go into making NHSMUN happen. It is also very clear to me that you wonderful students, from all parts of the world, are putting in great effort to make this a memorable experience for yourself and others.

NHSMUN is not just about the debates—it is also about the friendships you forge, the educational benefits of studying these profound topics, but also your growth as future leaders. I encourage you to embrace every moment of this conference, but to also make sure you're having fun the entire time.

I can't wait to meet all of you. If you ever have any questions, please ask. Best of success!

Sincerely,

Mariana Rodríguez Reyna

International Organization for Migration

Session I

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**Renata Venzor**

Welcome to NHSMUN 2025! My name is Emily Chavez, and I will be your Session II Assistant Director of the International Organization of Migration (IOM). I am so excited to be chairing for all of you, and I am even more excited to hear the diverse array of ideas that will be brought to the table to discuss the issue at hand.

A little bit about me. I am currently a freshman at American University where I am majoring in international service with a concentration in global security and a regional focus in the Indo-Pacific. I am also pursuing a communications minor. Model UN sparked my interest in international service and global security, which is what brings me to both American University and NHSMUN. I am also fascinated by Asian culture and the rising tensions occurring there, especially disputes within the South China Sea. Alongside my classes, I am on the competitive Model UN travel team at American University and an active member of the American University International Relations Society, or AMIRS.

I am originally from Franklin Township in Somerset, New Jersey, where I did Model UN as a delegate for all four years of high school. I've been attending NHSMUN since I was a freshman in high school, and I have competed in the International Organization for Migration twice. I hold IOM very close to my heart, so I am so excited to be assistant directing it this year. Some of my favorite roles I have represented are Pakistan in UNHRC, Italy in UNHCR, Finland in IOM (NHSMUN 2023!), and North Korea in DISEC. Outside of my love for Model UN, I love music (listening and creating), writing, spending time with friends, trying fun iced coffees, and talking about my dogs, so feel free to ask. My favorite Disney Princess is Rapunzel, and I am a huge fan of romantic comedies. (I'm always looking to give and receive recommendations).

Throughout this committee, you will be focusing on two very serious issues that affect every corner of the world to a degree: Integration of Migrants into the Workforce and Combating Migrant Smuggling. Both topics are becoming more sensitive and more important as the state of the world and its conflict continue to progress. Diplomacy is of utmost importance in the conversations and resolutions that take place over the course of this week. Alongside the serious, meaningful conversations you are going to have both in and out of committee, remember to enjoy your time here. NHSMUN is an amazing opportunity to learn something new and make memories (and possibly even lifelong friendships) with like-minded people. So take advantage of this opportunity, and make the most of it! If you have any questions (committee related or not) or want a fun coffee recommendation, feel free to reach out! We are here to help, so don't be shy! I can't wait to meet you all, and I am looking forward to a week to remember!

Sincerely,

Emily Chavez

International Organization for Migration

Session II

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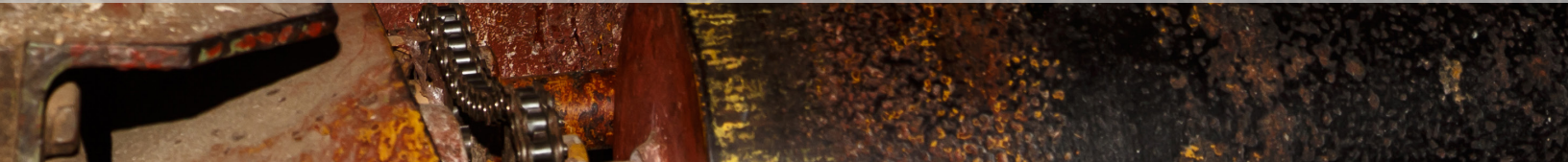
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**TOPIC A:**

**INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS INTO THE WORKFORCE**

Photo Credit: Uwe Aranas





## Introduction

Integrating migrants into the workforce is a complex issue impacting individuals and society. Migrants contribute significantly to the economy. However, their overall well-being, safety, and mental health must also be considered. Many migrants face challenges in finding jobs and settling into new communities. Often migrants deal with issues related to security as they are more vulnerable to exploitation. Recently, migrant workers contracted to work in Saudi Arabia exposed abuses while working in Amazon facilities. 17 men from Nepal, Pakistan, and India were interviewed.<sup>1</sup> These men reported severe underpayment and extensive labor jobs. Furthermore, their sleeping accommodation was dirty and overcrowded. Workers reported sleeping in rooms with six to eight people, where one described it as a “cowshed.”<sup>2</sup> In the facilities, a culture of fear took force. Employees reported being met with threats of firing and abuse if they complained about their working conditions. Due to a lack of legal documentation and a fragile economic status, these people are prone to being taken advantage of by their employers.<sup>3</sup> Many migrants working in low-wage, temporary jobs work in unsafe conditions. The problem worsens as they often cannot request legal protection for human rights violations.

There are many barriers for migrants to advocate for their rights and integrate into society. These include difficulties in housing, language adaptation, obtaining education, and accessing health care.<sup>4</sup> As a result, mental health is a huge concern for this group. This includes stress, anxiety, and depression from adapting to a new culture and potential discrimination. These challenges can make it harder for migrants to get jobs and fully integrate into society.<sup>5</sup> Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach beyond simply focusing on their skills and job opportunities. It is vital to create supportive environments that promote the well-being of migrants. Additionally, as the world and jobs advance, technological expertise is often required. However, technological advancements can provide solutions. This includes platforms for mental health support or resources to connect migrants with community services. By focusing on their overall experience, we can help migrants successfully integrate into their new communities.

## Mental Health Challenges Faced by Migrants in the Workplace

Often, migrants are in a state of stress. This manifests through the different pressures they face in the workplace. This stress comes from various pressures. These include discrimination they encounter during migration, challenges in obtaining a job, and ongoing workplace struggles. These stress symptoms may lead them to seek treatment from a mental health expert requesting a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Emotional suffering related to violence, war, anxiety, depression, and cultural adjustment can cause PTSD. This may hinder workers from performing satisfactorily in their new neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup> General health problems that migrants face is often acute due to their distinct situations such as trauma, low social status, and lack of access to healthcare.

Recently, studies shed light on the numerous difficulties migrants have to go through to receive mental healthcare. The

1 “Saudi Arabia: Migrant Workers at Carrefour Sites Exploited, Cheated and Forced to Live in Squalor,” *Amnesty International*, October 21, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/10/saudi-arabia-migrant-workers-at-carrefour-sites-exploited-cheated-and-forced-to-live-in-squalor/>.

2 Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia: Migrant Workers at Carrefour Sites Exploited, Cheated and Forced to Live in Squalor.”

3 Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia: Migrant Workers at Carrefour Sites Exploited, Cheated and Forced to Live in Squalor.”

4 Forray, A.I., Oltean, O., Hanft-Robert, S. et al. Uncovering multi-level mental healthcare barriers for migrants: a qualitative analysis across China, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, and South Africa. *BMC Public Health* 24, 1593 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-19046-z>

5 Forray et al., “Uncovering multi-level mental healthcare barriers for migrants: a qualitative analysis across China, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, and South Africa.”

6 Chen W, Hall BJ, Ling L, Renzaho AM, “Pre-migration and post-migration factors associated with mental health in humanitarian migrants in Australia and the moderation effect of post-migration stressors: findings from the first wave data of the BNLA cohort study,” *Lancet Psychiatry*, 2017;4(3):218–29.

studies have put an extra emphasis on the necessity to tackle psychological problems first. These include language barriers, strict immigration policies, and self-isolation challenges.<sup>7</sup> Mental health problems can arise from language differences affecting communication. This misunderstanding of the environment leads to poor treatment and misinterpretations. Additionally, undocumented immigrants are frequently denied access to treatment. This is due to restrictive immigration laws that put them in a fragile situation without any support. Furthermore, social isolation may further aggravate mental health problems, causing the distress cycle to continue.<sup>8</sup>

Many migrants in Germany are faced with a significant delay in seeing a mental health professional. This is due to large waiting lists.<sup>9</sup> These delays worsen their situation as they are unable to receive immediate treatment. Cultural obstacles to seeking help, in the form of shame and stigma related to mental illness, make finding treatment even harder. Although urban populations provide more services, smaller communities

usually do not have the same type of services available. This means that support isn't shared fairly.

There is also the problem that mental health services that truly understand people's cultural backgrounds or language are scarce as well. This leads to feelings of exclusion and neglect among migrants. Stigma around mental health issues impact not only migrants but also the local population, who face discrimination and are often discouraged from seeking help.<sup>10</sup> The issue becomes worse as immigrants may be unaware of their rights or the mental health services available to them. The process of seeking help is further complicated. In addition, limited resources due to tight budgets and an under looked mental health sector create large challenges. For that reason, it is rare for migrants to find decent care. As a result, they live in an environment where they cannot properly access mental health services.<sup>11</sup>

Also, there is an overwhelming issue of access to health

7 Jenn Clore, "Mental Health Resources for Immigrants - Stump & Associates," Stump & Associates, December 30, 2024, <https://usvisagroup.com/mental-health-resources-for-immigrants/>.

8 University of South Florida, "Mental Health: The Silent Crisis Among Immigrants in the United States," 2024, <https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/centers/iwrc/news/2024/mental-health-the-silent-crisis-among-immigrants-in-the-united-states-internal.aspx?form=MG0AV3>.

9 Forray et al., "Uncovering multi-level mental healthcare barriers for migrants: a qualitative analysis across China, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, and South Africa."

10 "The overwhelming case for ending stigma and discrimination in mental health," World Health Organization, December 19, 2024, <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/26-06-2024-the-overwhelming-case-for-ending-stigma-and-discrimination-in-mental-health?form=MG0AV3>.

11 Forray et al., "Uncovering multi-level mental healthcare barriers for migrants: a qualitative analysis across China, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, and South Africa."

Women working in a rice field near Junagadh, Gujarat, India

Credit: Bernard Gagnon



care for migrants in South Africa. A lot of migrants lack a translator to help communicate with them when they reach the doctor. This issue worsens due to financial hardships, as many migrants are unable to afford mental health care. Mental health services are also not comprehensive enough for migrants. Certain physicians and analysts do not care for the varied cultures of their patients.<sup>12</sup> This can lead to misunderstandings and bad care.

The mental health needs of migrants in Macao, China, are poorly understood. Often, healthcare facilities cannot address such demands, and there is a shortage of culturally aware professionals. Services do not consider the cultural background of migrants, and many migrants find it embarrassing or shameful to even ask for help. Due to this, migrants are often unaware of where to find assistance.<sup>13</sup> To mitigate this issue, delegates must consider expanding policies for migrants to be able to access mental health services and address their respective challenges.

Furthermore, workplace discrimination is a significant problem for migrant workers leading to increased stress and anxiety. This fear of being judged leads to a tough work environment. Constant stress can result in anxiety disorders and other mental diseased states. Workers may begin to have a poor sense of self-worth and become more socially isolated. Moreover, discrimination can also result in social isolation, making migrants feel unequal to their colleagues. Loneliness is a high-risk factor for mental health conditions. Over time, the stress from discrimination can cause burnout.<sup>14</sup> This mental state is characterized by feeling emotionally drained, cynical, and less effective at work. This can lead to resigning the job or frequently dealing with workplace dissatisfaction.<sup>15</sup> Migrants with challenging situations may engage in unhealthy

behaviors, such as drug or alcohol abuse. These actions not only worsen current mental health problems but also create new difficulties in their personal and working life. Substance use by migrants can lead to a cycle that is very difficult to break free from. It can lead to addiction, which can manifest in their interpersonal relationships, work, and general life quality. Their capacity to stay in touch with their family and friends becomes harder, which in turn can cause feelings of being cut off from everybody and being alone.

Discrimination against migrant domestic workers remains a serious problem around the world. This has a direct impact on the mental health of workers. In the United States, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported a rise in complaints by migrant workers about the abuse of unfair hiring practices. Native-born employees are preferred over equally qualified immigrants when hiring. This is especially the case for agricultural and construction workers. This bias can lead to job insecurity among migrants, leading to an undesirable experience of stress and anxiety levels. These issues reflect the daily problems of discrimination and the absence of help.<sup>16</sup>

Discriminatory experiences faced by migrant workers have a substantial negative effect on their well-being. Many migrants are employed in dangerous lines of work. In the United Kingdom, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) funded research showing that Eastern European migrants are being treated unfavorably and receive low wages. In Australia, the Australian Human Rights Commission noted an increase in reports of workplace discrimination claims involving migrant healthcare workers. They also documented the nature of the problems faced by these workers.<sup>17</sup>

Many migrant workers are often passed over for promotions

12 Forray et al., “Uncovering multi-level mental healthcare barriers for migrants: a qualitative analysis across China, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, and South Africa.”

13 Forray et al., “Uncovering multi-level mental healthcare barriers for migrants: a qualitative analysis across China, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, and South Africa.”

14 World Health Organization: WHO, “Five Key Themes for Improved Mental Health Care for Refugees and Migrants,” WHO, October 10, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news/item/10-10-2023-five-key-themes-for-improved-mental-health-care-for-refugees-and-migrants>.

15 Müssig, S., Okrug, I. Discrimination and Civic Engagement of Immigrants in Western Societies. A Systematic Scoping Review, *Int. Migration & Integration* 25, 2143–2189, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-024-01154-9>

16 Oskooii, K. A. R., “Perceived discrimination and political behavior,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 867–892. (2020)<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000133>.

17 Özdemir, F., Doosje, B., Feddes, A. R., van Bergen, N. R., Ayanian, A. H., Halabi, S., Guevara, Y., Kende, A., Karić, T., de JC, Jong, Pántya, J., Zick, A., Reicher, S. D., & Hopkins, N., “Antecedents and consequences of perceived misrecognition and perceived discrimination in ethnic minorities,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 99, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijntrel.2024.101938>.



because of their nationality or cultural background. According to a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives survey, racialized migrants take a range of hits in the labor market—including discriminatory hiring practices. This leads to underemployment. According to the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency in Germany, migrants experience workplace discrimination, and harassment and thereby suffer to an extent in their well-being and satisfaction at work. The continuous tension of these work environments has resulted in increased rates of anxiety and depression among these employees.<sup>18</sup> These cases illustrate the severe issue of migrant workplace discrimination and its psychological consequences. There is an urgent need for policy action to favor fairness and inclusion in the labor market and to ensure access to mental health care for workers at risk. Tackling those challenges offers the chance to create fairer and more inclusive workplaces, which could have positive mental health and work outcomes for migrant workers.<sup>19</sup>

## Role of Technology in Facilitating Migrant Employment Opportunities

Technology is crucial now to assist migrants in enhancing their employment opportunities in the job market. Various tech tools and platforms can be useful to help search for jobs in a new area. These technologies enable migrants to get access to relevant information about job vacancies, acquire new competencies, and establish professional contacts. The use of such tools for the benefit of migrants is critical for their interests, as well as for policymakers seeking to facilitate the successful entry of migrants into the job market.

Technology offers migrant communities access to vast amounts of information about open vacancies, shifts in the labor market, and employers' needs. Websites like Indeed and

Glassdoor help migrants in Germany and the United Kingdom find potential employers and vacancies that match their skills. Moreover, the many virtual communities of learners (e.g., Coursera, Udemy) provide migrants with an opportunity to do something new. This can include taking a new course or renewing a current skill.<sup>20</sup> This is especially true in contexts where there is a need for technical skills. For example, the availability of online courses can help to connect the skills of a particular individual with the needs of the employer. Social network sites and professional network sites, including LinkedIn, offer migrants the opportunity to network with practitioners, prospective employers, and their peers in the job market. For instance, it is possible to establish a strong professional network that helps with job posting as well as mentorship. It can be very effective in increasing the migrant's chance of landing a job.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of technological developments, migrants can seek employment in a different place than where they currently live due to remote work. In addition, it is anticipated that this mobility will prove useful to those living in places with limited job opportunities. For example, labor market entrants in Eastern European countries were able to find work in Western European countries.<sup>22</sup> Specialized job matching platforms, such as Jobbatical, are tailored not only around linking migrants and employers but also around addressing the challenges that migrants face, e.g., language barriers, and the “visibility” of foreign degrees. For instance, country states such as Australia have managed to thrive by utilizing these platforms and by making the most of the possibility of gaining employment for migrants.<sup>23</sup> Finally, technology has made it possible to collect and analyze information concerning labor market needs and trends that benefit migrants. For example, in the US, labor market information can help migrants make informed decisions about where to submit applications and what skills to develop. These capabilities enhance their chances

18 “Migrant Workers ‘Indispensable’ to Global Economic Growth: UN Labour Agency,” UN News, December 16, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158256?form=MG0AV3>.

19 UN News, “Migrant Workers ‘Indispensable’ to Global Economic Growth: UN Labour Agency.”

20 Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE), “The Use of Advanced Technology in Job Matching Platforms: Recent Examples from Public Agencies,” *Knowledge Brief, Global*, 2023, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/ceb5c5792ad0d874e9b1c3cc71362f46-0460012023/original/Digital-Job-Matching-Platforms-S4YE-Draft-Note-for-Discussion.pdf>

21 S4YE, “Use of Advanced Technology in Job Matching Platforms.”

22 Mierña I, Sūpule I, “Rise of remote work across borders: opportunities and implications for migrant-sending countries,” *Front Sociol*, May 6, 2024, 9:1290629, doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2024.1290629, PMID: 38774032; PMCID: PMC11107943.

23 Renate Otlieb and Lena Knappert, “Labor market integration of refugees: An institutional country-comparative perspective,” 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2023.101016>.





Tehran Povince and City Waste management in Iran

Credit: Mostafameraji

of finding good jobs. With these technological increases, migrants improve their ability to adapt to their host countries more quickly and without difficulty.

However, in the situation of developing countries, typically there is a limitation on technological progress. Problems with infrastructure such as the lack of power supply and a poor internet connection, often prevent people from using technology. Moreover, there is a digital divide between urban and rural cities. Urban areas have more advantages due to having more technology. This gap can limit opportunities in less accessible regions. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of digital literacy and technical skills amongst the overall population. Many people have not been provided with the ability to use such digital tools in a neutral way.<sup>24</sup>

Cost barriers also play a crucial role, due to the expenses of devices and internet access. Furthermore, challenges occur when governments promote policies that do not encourage technological development. This limits innovation and restricts the potential for individuals to use technology to secure employment.

There is low involvement of marginalized groups in technology

<sup>24</sup> Mierina I, Šupule I, “Rise of remote work across borders.”

<sup>25</sup> Barišić, Antea, Mahdi Ghodsi, Michael Landesmann, Alireza Sabouniha, y Robert Stehrer, “New Technologies, Migration and Labour Market Adjustment: An Intra-European Perspective,” The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, May 1, 2024, <https://wiiw.ac.at/new-technologies-migration-and-labour-market-adjustment-an-intra-european-perspective-dlp-6906.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Barišić, Antea, “New Technologies, Migration and Labour Market Adjustment: An Intra-European Perspective.”

and education. Cultural influences, attitudes toward technology, and an absence of educational goals further complicate this issue. Moreover, unemployment and high inflation change priorities in terms of technological innovation. To overcome these challenges, there must be greater developments in infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> It is found that people in developing countries are unable to use new technologies. Creating policies that curb these effects will better support vulnerable community members. Governments can further improve technology use by increasing its accessibility. For example, India and Rwanda implemented public-private partnerships to bring internet services to remote areas. This allowed for the participation of women, the poor, and marginalized groups in the digital economy.<sup>26</sup> Another important approach is building skills for the future workforce. Educational reforms are essential to equip the next generation with the necessary skills to thrive in a digital economy. In Kosovo, efforts are directed at linking young people to employment using internetwork platforms. These initiatives bridge skills shortages, for women and attendees with disabilities who would be well-suited for online employment. Increasing opportunities for people to utilize technology would empower marginalized groups by helping

them find work. For example, in South Africa, efforts to assist small and medium enterprises (SMEs) run by individuals of marginalized communities have been established with the inclusion of access to finance and mentoring education programs.<sup>27</sup> Through the use of these strategies, developing countries will be able to move towards a more inclusive digital economy for the benefit of all of society.

## Conclusion

The integration of migrants into the labor market is a complex problem that requires a systemic response. The health and well-being of migrants are not limited to the labor market. Safety and mental health must also be considered. Discrimination in the workforce can cause migrants to experience struggles such as stress, depression, and anxiety. These commonly form from pre-migration experiences, especially violence, and war. These issues affect their abilities to perform in the workplace and to adapt to their new host countries. These psychosocial problems may be compounded by the pressures of adjusting to a new culture, language barriers, and the fear of social stigma. All these factors continue a cycle of distress and exclusion.

To foster successful integration, it is imperative to create supportive environments that prioritize the mental health and safety of migrants. This can be achieved through community initiatives that promote awareness and understanding of mental health issues, as well as access to mental health resources. To equip healthcare staff, they should be trained to recognize and provide care for the needs of migrants in a culturally appropriate way. Furthermore, the role of technology in developing mental health services should not be ignored. Digital platforms can provide access to healthcare resources, counseling, and peer support networks. Technological advancements make it possible to enhance the overall well-being of migrants.

The provision of mental health support to migrants is not only an individual matter, but a matter of society, as it contributes to the development of resilience, integration, and unity in our communities.

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<sup>27</sup> Barišić, Antea, “New Technologies, Migration and Labour Market Adjustment: An Intra-European Perspective.”





IOM

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## TOPIC B: COMBATING MIGRANT SMUGGLING

Photo Credit: Tony Russell

## Introduction

Migrant smuggling remains a pressing global issue with the sharp increase in migration rates. Migrant smuggling can be found across several different continents. However, there are large increases seen from North Africa to Europe. An estimated 175,000 to 228,000 people were smuggled across the Central Mediterranean route in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, 39,800 people were smuggled on the Northwest African Route. This is approximately an 80 percent increase from 2022.<sup>2</sup> The International Organization of Migration (IOM) states that conflict, natural disasters, and other crises increase the vulnerability of populations. These crises, especially those involving large-scale displacement, can last for extended periods. This information is recorded in the IOM Essentials of Migration Management 2.0 Handbook, or EMM2.0. This serves as a guide for policymakers and practitioners.<sup>3</sup>

Examples of migrant smuggling can be found across several different continents. The beginning of 2024 was marked by the transregional smuggling of people from Bangladesh, Syria, and Pakistan to Europe. 25 percent comprised Bangladeshis and Pakistanis and 17 percent were Syrians transported by sea to Italy.<sup>4</sup> Migrant smuggling also became a large stream of revenue for powerful criminal organizations in Latin America. Organizations such as Columbia's Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces (AGC) and Venezuela's Tren de Aragua are at the forefront of these operations.<sup>5</sup> The Darien Gap in Columbia has become a major route. More than 265,000 people traveled through this terrain last year. This jungle crossing is now one of the most heavily trafficked routes. The AGC now controls the migrant economy generating up to 100 million USD annually.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, multiple incidents in the English Channel, a well-known European smuggling route, resulted in a lot of migrant deaths. Routes such as this show the dangers of smuggling routes. On January 14, five migrants were found dead on a French beach after attempting the crossing of the English Channel. Their journey followed the destruction of

their home countries by hurricanes. Additional deaths and disasters occurred in the following months. This includes the deaths of three migrants in February and twelve in September.<sup>7</sup> These incidents highlight the dangers of smuggling routes and the urgent need to address the root causes of migrant smuggling.

Though they are often confused, human trafficking and migrant smuggling are very different issues. Migrant smuggling involves forced entry of people into a country where the migrant is neither a citizen nor a resident. This is often done for financial or material gain by migrant smugglers and border officials. Despite it being illegal, financial gains and corruption often drive individuals to assist in smuggling activities. For example, Leonard Darnell George, a former US Customs and Border Protection Officer from San Diego, was sentenced to 23 years in prison in October. He had accepted bribes to allow unauthorized migrants to cross the border into the United States.<sup>8</sup> Criminal groups running this profitable trade exploit people fleeing poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, war, or persecution.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, human

1 UNODC Research Team on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants, "Global Report on TRAFFICKING in PERSONS" (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, December 2024), [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024\\_BOOK.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf).

2 "Global Report on TRAFFICKING in PERSONS."

3 "Global Report on TRAFFICKING in PERSONS."

4 "Global Report on TRAFFICKING in PERSONS."

5 Parker Asmann and Henry Shuldiner, "GameChangers 2024: Crime Cashes in on Migration Boom," InSight Crime, December 26, 2024, <https://insightcrime.org/news/gamechangers-2024-organized-crime-cashes-latam-migration/>.

6 Parker Asmann and Henry Shuldiner, "GameChangers 2024: Crime Cashes in on Migration Boom."

7 "Refugee Council calls for decisive action as record number of Channel deaths reached in 2024," Refugee Council, January 2, 2025, <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/refugee-council-calls-for-decisive-action-as-record-number-of-channel-deaths-reached-in-2024/>.

8 Homeland Security Investigations, "HSI San Diego, Multiagency Case Sends Customs and Border Protection Officer to Prison for Receiving Bribes to Allow Drug-Laden Vehicles and Unauthorized Immigrants to Enter the US" Homeland Security Investigations, November 6, 2024, <https://www.dhs.gov/hsi/news/2024/11/06/cbp-officer-sent-prison-receiving-bribes-allow-drug-laden-vehicles-and-unauthorized>.

9 "Migrant Smuggling" UNODC, 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/migrant-smuggling/migrant-smuggling>.



trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, or transfer of people through force, fraud, or deception to use them for profit.<sup>10</sup> While separate crimes, human trafficking and migrant smuggling often overlap.

Displacement and migration create opportunities for traffickers and smugglers to exploit vulnerable individuals. Smugglers also capitalize on weaknesses in immigration and border management systems. Some countries, like Guatemala and Cameroon, are acting through initiatives like Operation Liberterra II, which targets border corruption and smuggling networks. Others, however, struggle to address the problem effectively. This variation in global responses brings attention to the need for collaborative international strategies to combat the issue. In recent months, we have seen both progress and setbacks in tackling migrant smuggling. Cameroon's Operation Liberterra II is addressing smuggling and trafficking on a global scale. However, changes in EU nations' border security laws have complicated efforts to combat smuggling in the Balkan States. Violence along smuggling routes and border instability continue to impact migrants, smuggling networks, and border officials. Case studies such as Operation Liberterra II in Cameroon and Operation Irini in Libya, both launched in the past four months, offer insights into potential strategies. These initiatives could inspire worldwide solutions to address migrant smuggling comprehensively.

## Smuggling Caused by Border Control and Instability

In many countries, corruption, underfunded border programs, low-paid border employees, and weak accountability make borders difficult to control. Human and drug smuggling, weapon trafficking, and organized crime stem from corruption. This corruption makes smugglers even harder to stop.<sup>11</sup>

Corrupt officials often allow smugglers and transporters to avoid checks of vehicles, cargo holders, and vessels. Smugglers, border officials, or militia may demand money, goods, or other services in exchange for protection or passage. Migrants who refuse or cannot afford such requests may be beaten or suffer sexual violence by these listed individuals.<sup>12</sup> The Nigerian borders serve as large trafficking and smuggling hubs. The country shares land and maritime borders with Niger, Benin, Chad, and Cameroon. However, these borders are porous and inadequately monitored. According to former Minister of Interior Abba Moro, there are 1,499 irregular entry routes into Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> As a result, criminal organizations exploit these borders and expand their illegal smuggling efforts. The emergence of militant organizations like Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa (ISWAP) in northern Nigeria has been connected to arms smuggling. Nigeria's attempts to preserve security and authority over its borders are made more difficult by the unregulated influx of weapons, which feeds violence and instability.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, these organizations cross paths with human and drug smugglers. Migrants traveling through Nigeria are often trapped and exploited. Smugglers then demand large sums of money in exchange for a safe journey to Europe. The widespread corruption and weak border security at Nigeria's borders contribute to the migrant smuggling crisis.

The increase in migrant smuggling caused the European Union (EU) to create stronger legislation to penalize smugglers, tighten its borders, and increase security. All member states are to adopt this legislation. This new agreement is intended to create stronger standards to combat migrant smuggling.<sup>15</sup> The new measures include but are not limited to allowing EU states to limit border crossing points or hours. While this helps EU countries combat migrant smuggling, it redirects smuggling routes to weaker nations with less-developed border security.

html.

<sup>10</sup> "Human Trafficking," UNODC, 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-Trafficking/Human-Trafficking.html>.

<sup>11</sup> "Global Report on TRAFFICKING in PERSONS."

<sup>12</sup> "Global Report on TRAFFICKING in PERSONS."

<sup>13</sup> George-Okoli Francisco Chidi, "Cross-Border Smuggling and Its Threat to Nigeria's Economy - Border Security Report," Border Security Report, October 17, 2024, <https://www.border-security-report.com/cross-border-smuggling-and-its-threat-to-nigerias-economy/#>.

<sup>14</sup> Bidisha Deka and Vineet Malik, "How the Bangladesh Crisis Is Influencing India's Border Security Measures In the Northeast?," Diplomatist, 2024, <https://diplomatist.com/2024/09/27/how-the-bangladesh-crisis-is-influencing-indias-border-security-measures-in-the-northeast/>.

<sup>15</sup> Council of the EU, "Migrant Smuggling: Member States Reach Agreement on Criminal Law," Consilium, 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/12/13/migrant-smuggling-member-states-reach-agreement-on-criminal-law/>.



Border security officer in Arizona in the United States  
Credit: CBP Photography

An example of this can be seen within the Balkans.

In November of 2024, five Syrians and an Algerian were reported to have opened a window into a human smuggling operation. This stretched from Turkey to Western Europe, running straight through the Balkans.<sup>16</sup> The Balkans have become a dangerous smuggling route, allowing smugglers to avoid stronger EU borders. Balkan countries are forced to admit the flow of refugees, migrants, and smugglers. This is due to a lack of international support and financial resources to stop them.<sup>17</sup> The EU has also withdrawn its support for the Balkan states by cutting back on funding for humanitarian organizations in the Western Balkans.<sup>18</sup> This is caused by two things. First, the Balkans' slow development of closed borders and their weak fight against migrants and refugees trying to illegally enter their state has reduced trust in the EU. Second, EU member states and supported states such as Switzerland are pulling back funds from assisting the Balkans to improve their military and security.

This results in less monitoring of migration flows. Violence and discrimination by national border forces, including illegal

'pushbacks', have encouraged migrants to seek out less visible routes controlled by smuggling networks.<sup>19</sup> The lack of support for less developed nations to be able to increase their border security has left large gaps and opportunities for migrant smuggling groups to continue their routes. This has left the governments of these countries with very little control over their borders.

Smaller developing nations are not the only ones affected by the need for more border security. Major powers are falling victim to the crisis as well, especially the United States of America. As drug cartels and smuggling operations grow, human and drug trafficking have become major sources of income for Latin American criminal networks. Despite its size and financial capabilities, the United States has lacked the tools and focus needed to stop these smuggling networks. In October of 2024, more than 300 migrants on the US terror watch list had been caught crossing the southern border. These include ISIS suspects and a possible Palestinian explosives expert. They all said that it is still "incredibly easy" for terrorists to get over the border because identification procedures rely on US databases that often lack communication with other

16 Siviero Sasa, "As Borders Tighten, Violence Rises on Migrant Route through the Balkans," Balkan Insight, November 20, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/11/20/as-borders-tighten-violence-rises-on-migrant-route-through-the-balkans/>.

17 Karaj, Vladimir, "As Borders Tighten, Violence Rises on Migrant Route Through the Balkans," Balkan Insight, November 20th, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/11/20/as-borders-tighten-violence-rises-on-migrant-route-through-the-balkans>

18 Karaj, Vladimir, "As Borders Tighten."

19 Karaj, Vladimir, "As Borders Tighten."



countries about possible terror suspects.<sup>20</sup> Even as the United States has worked on increasing its border security, it has been seen as ineffective. The incentives for migration remained unchanged. American employers are hungry for cheap labor, and Mexicans and Central Americans are fleeing poverty and violence. Migrant smuggling has been a way for both groups to benefit, therefore their collaboration has exceeded the security measures of the United States.<sup>21</sup>

## Case Study: Arrests in Guatemala by Joint Task Force Alfa (JTFA)

In June 2021, the US Justice Department, in collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), established the Joint Task Force Alfa (JTFA) to tackle human smuggling. This initiative focuses on dismantling smuggling networks operating across Latin America and key transit regions for migrants seeking to reach the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Over the past three years, the JTFA has played a significant role in taking down the decades-old smuggling network housed in Guatemala. On Tuesday, October 1st, 2024, Guatemalan Minister of the Interior, Francisco Jimenez, announced that Guatemalan security agents arrested 25 police officers and 11 civilians.<sup>23</sup> These arrests were made in connection with a migrant smuggling network that operated along a route used by mostly US-bound migrants. Guatemala is home to a major smuggling route in the village of San Marcos Huista. It is actively used by migrant smugglers due to the area's geographical properties, history of organized crime, and lack of government surveillance.<sup>24</sup> This route was used to transport migrants from all over Latin America up to the US for decades. Guatemalan authorities have said the group has

operated for several years while collecting millions of quetzals, the local currency (one quetzal = USD 0.13). In a voice message, Jimenez announced that this organization made use of police agents and corrupted them to guarantee the course of the people they were smuggling across the country.<sup>25</sup>

Migrant smuggling by these groups and involvement in the Guatemalan smuggling ring expand past the state's borders and the state's citizens. A prior arrest of two people who were illegally transporting 10 migrants from Uzbekistan through Guatemala had led to the operation that ultimately took down the network. The US embassy in Guatemala and the DHS collaborated in the investigation through sharing information, support, and technology, leading to the continued success of JTFA. The US embassy found and stated that the smuggling network had exploited nearly 10,000 migrants in their years of operation.<sup>26</sup> Utilizing the JTFA the US and Guatemalan officials have been working to take down this network. In late August of 2024, Guatemalan and US authorities announced the joint abolition of another human-smuggling network. This group had ties to the 2022 deaths of 53 migrants trapped in an extremely hot truck in Texas. On August 21, Guatemalan law enforcement executed multiple search and arrest warrants across the country. This was accomplished by working together with US law enforcement agents through communication and shared surveillance technology. At the request of the US, Guatemalan authorities arrested Rigoberto Ramon Miranda-Orozco. Orozco had been charged in the Western District of Texas for his involvement with the smuggling ring. Six individuals were also arrested as part of the operation and will be charged locally in Guatemala.<sup>27</sup> Following the conclusion of this case, the US Secretary of State concluded that the tragic incident that claimed 53 lives highlights how smugglers

20 Taer, Jennie, "Border agents caught 300 migrants with terror ties, including ISIS – and it's still 'incredibly easy' for them to enter US: sources," *New York Post*, October 23, 2024, [https://nypost.com/2024/10/23/us-news/border-agents-caught-300-terror-suspects-at-the-border-under-biden-harris-admin/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://nypost.com/2024/10/23/us-news/border-agents-caught-300-terror-suspects-at-the-border-under-biden-harris-admin/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

21 Sheridan, Mary Beth, "As smuggling rings made billions from migrants, the U.S. was sidelined," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/11/01/migrant-smuggling-us-border-cartels/>.

22 Sheridan, Mary Beth, "As smuggling rings made billions from migrants, the U.S. was sidelined."

23 Adam Yamaguchi, "An inside Look at a Migrant Smuggling Operation at the Southern Border Aided by Americans," *Cbsnews.com* (CBS News, January 30, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-look-migrant-smuggling-operation-southern-border-aided-by-americans/>.

24 Adam Yamaguchi, "An inside Look at a Migrant Smuggling."

25 "Guatemala arrests police officers implicated in migrant smuggling ring," *Reuters*, October 2, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/guatemala-arrests-police-officers-implicated-migrant-smuggling-ring-2024-10-01/>

26 "Guatemala arrests police officers implicated in migrant smuggling ring."

27 United States Department of Homeland Security, "Major Enforcement Operation in Guatemala Secures Arrest of Human Smuggler Indicted by Joint Task Force Alpha for Links to 2022 Mass Casualty Event in Texas," *US DHS*, August 22, 2024, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2024/08/22/major-enforcement-operation-guatemala-secures-arrest-human-smuggler-indicted-jtfa>.

exploit migrants for profit and disregard their human lives. He claimed that while agencies worked in collaboration with federal and international partners, addressing the root causes of migration is vital for lasting solutions.<sup>28</sup>

The Guatemalan government is continuing to put out efforts to combat migrant smuggling. These efforts include identifying more victims and increasing the number of smuggling investigations. Authorities also opened new specialized criminal courts for smuggling and immigration crimes. A new anti-smuggling action plan was also enacted. Additionally, they convicted the former head of the police's specialized anti-smuggling investigation unit for involvement with the smuggling ring.<sup>29</sup> These efforts highlight the importance of addressing corruption and improving cross-border cooperation. They also stress the importance of targeting the financial networks and supply chains that keep these operations running.

International collaboration is vital in resolving migrant smuggling. The Guatemalan smuggling ring was not taken down without the collaboration of Guatemala and the United States. The more nations are willing to collaborate, the more likely a global resolution becomes possible. By using joint

<sup>28</sup> United States Department of Homeland Security, "Major Enforcement Operation."

<sup>29</sup> United States Department of Homeland Security, "Major Enforcement Operation."

<sup>30</sup> "Saving lives and protecting migrants: Operation Liberterra II," IOM, October 4th, 2024, <https://www.iom.int/news/saving-lives-and-protecting-migrants-operation-liberterra-ii>.

efforts through the JTFA, authorities successfully targeted a sophisticated operation that preyed on vulnerable migrants for financial gain. This case serves as a powerful example of the impact of sustained and coordinated action. It demonstrates how such efforts can dismantle smuggling networks, save lives, and promote accountability. In doing so, it advances the global fight against migrant smuggling.

## Case Study: Operation Liberterra II

From September 29 to October 4, 2024, a major effort to combat migrant smuggling occurred in Douala, Cameroon. This initiative, named "Operation Liberterra II," was led by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and IOM. This operation helped reduce smuggling, protected migrants, and held smugglers accountable. As a result, criminal networks were targeted, smuggling routes were disrupted, and key individuals were arrested. This effort brought together a team of nearly 30 experts who studied the effects of migrant smuggling in the nation. This team consisted of police officers, judges, and government officials within departments of social affairs, labor, and job training.<sup>30</sup> For nearly a week, the team worked to uncover and stop groups involved in

Tucson Sector Border Patrol agents stop migrant smuggling attempt from Guatemala

Credit: U.S. Customs and Border Protection





exploiting vulnerable people. They carefully watched the city, screened passengers on flights, and searched for people in the country without proper documentation. Their efforts were successful with the rescuing of 17 people who were trafficked and smuggled.<sup>31</sup>

Operation Liberterra II has since expanded its reach beyond Cameroon. In Manila, Philippines, its team has coordinated with governments and law enforcement agencies to dismantle smuggling rings and other adjacent smuggling jobs. Collaborative investigations and the establishment of connected networks have enhanced the operation's success.<sup>32</sup> These efforts have led to the arrest of many suspected smugglers and traffickers, the rescue of thousands of potential victims, and the dismantling of border-based criminal networks. National law enforcement officers from 13 countries in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific gathered in Manila to coordinate cross-border efforts. Countries involved include Brunei, China, Cambodia, and India. This collaboration improved the sharing of evidence and data, boosting the operation's success both regionally and globally.<sup>33</sup> Operation Liberterra II's reach has also extended to Europe. In Nottingham, a Syrian man was arrested for transporting migrants from Bulgaria. This arrest was part of targeting the largest-ever global people-smuggling ring, which involved over 2,500 people in London. These operations disrupted smuggling networks sending migrants illegally across Europe.<sup>34</sup>

Globally, Operation Liberterra II's accomplishments include rescuing 3,222 potential victims of human trafficking, identifying 17,793 undocumented migrants, and arresting suspects across multiple continents. INTERPOL has established operational coordination units in Argentina, Senegal, the Philippines, and North Macedonia to enhance intelligence assessment and cross-border cooperation. There has been support from 15 specialized units within INTERPOL for the operation. Along with partner organizations, national agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Victims rescued through Operation Liberterra II are provided with legal aid, investigative resources, and other services to address the impacts of crime on their lives.

Despite its success, Operation Liberterra II faces challenges. Migrant smuggling is still widespread, but the operation's focus on specific regions means it struggles to address issues in other parts of the world. As a new initiative, its global reach and ability to fully combat smuggling are still growing. In its short time, Operation Liberterra II has become INTERPOL's largest-ever initiative against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Great progress has been made in combating smuggling through the operation. However, the continued existence of this issue highlights the need for near-complete international collaboration. It also calls for expanded efforts to address this pressing challenge.

## Conclusion

Migrant smuggling demands extra global attention as current frameworks are inadequate at combating the issue. Restrictive immigration policies, the growth of criminal organizations, and weak border control are the main contributors. As the number of people fleeing economic and government instability, and violence increase, smugglers can expand their operations and exploit these people. While there has been an increase in global efforts to curb this crime, there is more work to be done. It is the responsibility of IOM to ensure migration, both in travel and destination, is safe, fair, and accessible for all those who need it. This requires a thought-out approach that not only combats the exploitation in migrant smuggling but also addresses systemic challenges and barriers. Delegates must consider the role corruption plays in this issue. When creating long-lasting solutions there must be a focus on improving border security and protections for migrants. The severity of migrant smuggling requires urgent attention from local, national, and international institutions. By

31 "Saving lives and protecting migrants: Operation Liberterra II."

32 "RSO provides technical expertise and support to Asia-Pacific Operational Coordination Unit of Liberterra II, INTERPOL's largest ever counter-trafficking and migrant smuggling operation," Regional Support Office, November 6th, 2024, <https://rso.baliprocess.net/rso-provides-technical-expertise-and-support-to-asia-pacific-operational-coordination-unit-of-liberterra-ii-interpls-largest-ever-counter-trafficking-and-migrant-smuggling-operation/>

33 "RSO provides technical expertise and support."

34 Anthony France, "London man among 2,500 arrested as largest-ever global people smuggling ring smashed," The Standard, November 6, 2024, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/london-arrest-largest-people-smuggling-ring-national-crime-agency-b1192370.html>

fostering collaboration between governments, organizations, and communities, IOM can make a significant impact. It can promote sustainable and ethical migration policies that uphold human dignity and protect vulnerable populations.



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