

Migrant trafficking and smuggling has become a global business generating huge profits for traffickers and organized crime syndicates. A recent IOM study revealed that at any one time there are an estimated 15 to 30 million irregular migrants worldwide. Of this total, the United States Department of Justice estimates that 700,000 women and children are trafficked yearly across borders. Because of their clandestine nature, irregular migration and trafficking are likely to remain significantly underreported crimes. Reliable statistics are kept on apprehensions of unauthorized migrants at borders and on arrests of traffickers, amongst other things, but these figures account for a small fraction of the overall problem.

Trafficking exposes migrants to exploitation and violation of their fundamental human rights. Trafficked migrants are often dependent on their agents and employers, and are therefore extremely vulnerable. Because they have to pay back a debt to traffickers, migrants frequently find themselves confined to sweatshops, factories, or are forced into prostitution or begging, often controlled by criminal networks. In addition, migrants who lack valid travel documents are primarily regarded as irregular migrants, and are therefore subject to deportation in many countries. Because of their irregular status, they do not have access to legal assistance and medical care.

In many parts of the world possibilities for legal migration have decreased whilst demand for foreign labor has remained constant. This, together with poverty, lack of opportunities, political and social violence in the countries of origin, may force potential migrants to turn to criminal networks. As a consequence, new trafficking routes are regularly established and the market for fraudulent travel documents, clandestine transportation and border crossing has developed worldwide.

Trafficking vs. Illegal migration

*"I am not against migration, but I just would like it to be legal and to contribute to professional development of those who decide to migrate... I hope that soon we will be able to go to Europe freely as tourists or required professionals in different spheres."
A Moldovanian victim of trafficking*

The difference between trafficking and illegal migration are the supplementary elements which characterize the former and which are the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, **for the purpose of exploitation.**