

EUROPEAN MIGRANT SMUGGLING CENTRE

3rd ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT – 2018



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EMSC
European Migrant
Smuggling Centre



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FOREWORD

by Executive Director Catherine De Bolle



European Union (EU) Member States continue to be a target for migrant smuggling facilitation services. European law enforcement agencies have to cope with increasingly exploitative criminal activities, associated with violence and serious harm to the life and well-being of irregular migrants.

At times of reduced migration flows at EU external borders, the facilitation of illegal immigration within the EU poses a particular growing challenge. Migrant smuggling in secondary movements threatens the integrity of the Schengen Area of free movement and the internal security of the EU. This is reflected in the increasing number of cross-border criminal investigations supported by Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre.

In December 2018, the Council of the European Union approved a comprehensive and operational set of measures to enhance the response to migrant smuggling networks. Most of those measures directly affect the area of competence of Europol and its European Migrant Smuggling Centre and demands a proactive effort in reaching out to national competent authorities both inside and outside the EU. We embrace the responsibilities conferred to us by European leaders, as well as the expectations the European citizens rightfully place into their police services.

Europol as the EU criminal information hub meets the need for cooperation and for sharing information within EU agencies as well as with the countries of destination, origin and transit affected by illegal migration.

I am proud to lead an organisation that has earned the trust of the law enforcement communities around Europe, and we strive to continue delivering the services and support which are integral to our Member States and operational partners.

The growing number of victims should worry us all and be a sign that the fight against this heinous form of crime needs to continue.

“The growing number of victims should worry us all and be a sign that the fight against this heinous form of crime needs to continue.”

FOREWORD

by Head of EMSC Robert Crepinko



We just witnessed another year of decreasing albeit worrying migratory pressure in Europe. Yet again, we encountered the inhuman practices of ruthless criminal groups putting the health and lives of irregular migrants at risk, only in order to maximise the profits of their criminal activities. Their disrespect for people's lives and dignity leads to ever more men, women and children transported in dangerous conditions, causing tragic deaths on the streets and in the rivers of central Europe.

Increased violence, new innovative ways of smuggling, the use of fraudulent documents, social media and the ability of criminal networks to effectively whitewash their financial assets poses an unprecedented challenge for EU law enforcement agencies.

In light of this, the importance of our work and the desire to be successful have never been greater. While working tirelessly countering the threats at hand, we can comfort ourselves in a European law enforcement community that has never been better trained, better equipped, more motivated nor better connected with one another. An increasing number of complex cases investigated by national authorities and supported by the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) is perfect proof of that. New tools developed and implemented mean another step further and the already broad network of operational partners gained new members. European citizens are right to have high expectations of their police forces; their trust at the same time is our motivation to face the growing challenges.

Key terms and abbreviations

Key terms

Analysis Projects	Analysis Projects (APs) are organisational entities within Europol and focus on certain crime areas from commodity-based, thematic or regional angles, for example, drug trafficking, Islamist terrorism, Italian organised crime or migrant smuggling ⁽¹⁾ .
EU Member States	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK).
Fraudulent documents	False documents (forgeries, counterfeits and stolen blanks) or genuine documents (impostors, fraudulently obtained) used unlawfully in the facilitation of illegal immigration.
Migrant smuggler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Any person who intentionally assists a person who is not a national of a Member State to enter, or transit across, the territory of a Member State in breach of the laws of the State concerned on the entry or transit of aliens; » Any person who, for financial gain, intentionally assists a person who is not a national of a Member State to reside within the territory of a Member State in breach of the laws of the State concerned on the residence of aliens⁽²⁾.
Organised crime group	A structured entity, established over a period of time, of more than two people acting in concert to commit offences which are punishable by deprivation of liberty or a detention order of a maximum of at least four years or a more serious penalty, to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit ⁽³⁾ .
Secondary movements	The journeys undertaken by third-country nationals and stateless persons from one EU or Schengen associated country ⁽⁴⁾ to another without the prior consent of national authorities, with or without the support of migrant smugglers.
Secure Information Exchange Network Application	The Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA) ⁽⁵⁾ enables secure information exchange among Europol, Member States and operational partners ⁽⁶⁾ .
The European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats	The European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) is an ad hoc management environment to develop activities to achieve pre-set goals within the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime. It is a structured multidisciplinary cooperation platform of the relevant Member States, EU institutions and agencies, as well as third countries, international organisations and other (public and private) partners to address prioritised threats of organised and serious international crime ⁽⁷⁾⁽⁸⁾ .
The Schengen Agreement	The Schengen Agreement is a treaty, which led to the creation of the Schengen Area. In total, 22 of the 28 EU Member States participate in the Schengen Area, in which internal border checks have largely been abolished. Of the six EU Member States not part of the Schengen Area, four (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania) are legally obliged to join the area, while the remaining two (Ireland and the UK) have opt-outs. The four countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) – Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland – are not members of the EU, but have signed agreements in association with the Schengen Agreement.

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU) 2016/794 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), Article 18: Purposes of information processing activities.

⁽²⁾ Council Directive 2002/90/EC of 28 November 2002 defining the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and residence.

⁽³⁾ Council Framework Decision 2008/841/JHA of 24 October 2008 on the fight against organised crime, OJ L 300, 11.11.2008, p.42.

⁽⁴⁾ Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

⁽⁵⁾ Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA, Preamble, no 24.

⁽⁶⁾ Europol operational third Parties include: Albania, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, , Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United States of America, as well as Eurojust, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Interpol.

⁽⁷⁾ Council conclusions on setting the EU's priorities for the fight against organised and serious international crime between 2018 and 2021: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9450-2017-INIT/en/pdf>, retrieved on 15/03/2019.

⁽⁸⁾ EU Policy Cycle Terms of Reference, January 2019.

Third country	Any country other than EU Member States or Schengen associated countries.
Trafficking in human beings	The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those persons, by means of 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 ⁽⁹⁾ .

Abbreviations

AP	Analysis Project (see key terms)
CIC	Crime Information Cell
COSI	Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security
CPCC	Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EBCGA	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
EEAS	European External Action Service
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats
EMSC	European Migrant Smuggling Centre
ESOCC	European Serious and Organised Crime Centre
EU	European Union
EU IRU	EU Internet Referral Unit
EUNAVFOR MED	European Naval Task Force Mediterranean ⁽¹⁰⁾
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Association Football)
GAAD	Global Airport Action Day
HVT	High Value Target
ICH	Information clearing house
IVTS	Informal value transfer systems; <i>hawala</i>
JLTF-MS	Joint Liaison Task Force – migrant smuggling
JOT	Joint Operational Team
OCG	Organised Crime Group (see key terms)
OTF	Operational Task Force
SIENA	Secure Information Exchange Network Application (see key terms)
SOCTA	Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment ⁽¹¹⁾
THB	Trafficking in human beings (see key terms)

⁽⁹⁾ EBCGA Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia is a European military operation with the aim to contribute to better information sharing on crime in the Mediterranean: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2018/05/14/eunavfor-med-operation-sophia-operation-to-contribute-to-better-information-sharing-on-crime-in-the-mediterranean/>, retrieved on 15/03/2019.

⁽¹¹⁾ Europol SOCTA 2017: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/socta/2017/>, retrieved on 15/03/2019.

The European Migrant Smuggling Centre 2018 at a glance

The European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) was set up in February 2016 to support Member States' investigations and to increase cooperation and coordination among law enforcement agencies. The EMSC is part of Europol's Serious and Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC).

ESOCC provides effective and agile operational support to EU Member States' investigations in prioritised cases related to serious and organised crime. This encompasses criminal intelligence analysis, provision of specific expertise, deployments in the field, real time information exchange and other capabilities. ESOCC staff supports Member States' investigative activities against individuals and organised crime networks that represent the highest serious and organised crime threats for two or more Member States.

The ESOCC comprises 19 Analysis Projects (AP) focusing on specific crime areas. The EMSC, as part of the ESOCC, covers migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings (THB) as two prominent criminal areas and EMPACT priorities.

Many of the organised crime groups (OCGs) involved in migrant smuggling are active in several other crime areas, especially document fraud and THB, showing the poly-criminal nature of many OCGs affecting the EU.

To combat criminal finances and money laundering and to effectively confiscate criminal profits of smugglers,

facilitation of illegal immigration (one of the EMPACT priorities) is dedicated to disrupting the business model of OCGs active in migrant smuggling by targeting document fraud and financial crime.

Based on Europol's Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2017, the Council of the European Union adopted facilitation of illegal immigration and THB as two of the most pressing criminal threats facing the EU in its conclusions on setting the EU's priorities in the fight against serious and organised crime during the 2018-2021 policy cycle⁽¹²⁾.

In October 2018, the Council approved a comprehensive set of measures⁽¹³⁾ with a law enforcement focus to step up the fight against migrant smuggling networks, which are widely reflected in EMSC operational activities.

At the EMSC, we appreciate the importance given to our work and it is paramount to all of our specialists and analysts to confront the inhuman practices of human traffickers and migrant smugglers. Our experts helped Member States' law enforcement agencies in tackling criminal networks during 39 Action Days on the ground, leading to more than 600 arrested suspects of migrant smuggling in 2018.

⁽¹²⁾ Council of the European Union conclusions on setting the EU's priorities for the fight against organised and serious international crime between 2018 and 2021: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8654-2017-INIT/en/pdf>, retrieved on 12/03/2019; <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-fight-against-organised-crime-2018-2021/>, retrieved on 12/03/2019.

⁽¹³⁾ Council of the European Union comprehensive and operational set of measures: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15250-2018-INIT/en/pdf>, retrieved on 12/03/2019; <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/12/06/migrant-smuggling-council-approves-a-set-of-measures-to-fight-smuggling-networks/>, retrieved on 12/03/2019.

Migrant smuggling

18 234
SIENA Messages
(received)⁽¹⁴⁾

3 657
New Cases (received)⁽¹⁵⁾

39
Action Days⁽¹⁶⁾

101
Priority Cases⁽¹⁷⁾

42 793
New Documents⁽¹⁸⁾

763
Social Media
Account Referrals⁽¹⁹⁾

409
Operational Reports

106
Operational Meetings

141
Strategic Reports

48
Monitoring Reports

750
Processed Migrant
Debriefings⁽²⁰⁾

1 295
EMSC Staff Deployment
(staff days)

4 379
Guest Officer Deployment
(staff days)

49
EMSC Staff
(including THB)

⁽¹⁴⁾ SIENA messages contributed to the EMSC by Member States, Europol operational and Europol strategic partners.

⁽¹⁵⁾ New cases contributed to the EMSC by Member States, Europol operational and Europol strategic partners.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Joint and Common Action Days: Joint Action Days (JADs) target criminal networks affecting the EU by addressing one or two strategic, horizontal or geographic aspects of crime related to multiple priority crime areas as defined in the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime. Common Action Days are regular operational activities performed by a range of partners in the framework of a cross border case supported by Europol but with narrower scope, often confined with a specific investigation.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Number of priority cases receiving the full support by the EMSC; priority cases refer to cases that have been identified as such by a set of criteria and that receive the full support by the respective Europol Analysis Project.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Documents serving to identifying persons contributed via SIENA to EMSC, AP Migrant Smuggling by Member States, Europol operational and Europol strategic partners.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Europol EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU).

⁽²⁰⁾ Sent by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA) via the Personal Data for Risk Assessment channel. The data are aimed at contributing to the fight against cross-border crime by collecting personal data on suspects involved in cross-border criminal activities such as migrant smuggling, THB and terrorism. Only personal data of suspects are processed by Europol in order to support investigations in the Member States.

Trafficking in human beings

7 981
SIENA Messages
(received)⁽¹⁴⁾

1 601
New Cases (received)⁽¹⁵⁾

14
Action Days⁽¹⁶⁾

62
Priority Cases⁽¹⁷⁾

178
Operational Reports

29
Operational Meetings

Intelligence analysis

As Europol strives to be the EU criminal information hub and a platform for European policing solutions, the EMSC understands itself as a centre of expertise and information hub on migrant smuggling and human trafficking intelligence. Hand in hand with the specialists and analysts providing direct support to Member States' investigations, the EMSC frequently delivers strategic intelligence reports on migrant smuggling trends and modi operandi.

The Europol Monitoring Team report updates EU law enforcement agencies on topical issues on a weekly basis. At the same time, the EMSC frequently identifies important or upcoming developments, as for example updates on the main migration routes or dangerous modi operandi, on which it issues more in-depth early warning notifications or intelligence notifications.

The EMSC offers its experience to investigators across Europe through Europol's technical platforms for the exchange of expertise and knowledge. The Europol Platform for Experts is a community for law enforcement practitioners where the EMSC among other topics hosts strategic data for the EMPACT related operational actions. The operational action targets OCGs facilitating illegal immigration by transporting irregular migrants clandestinely in concealments via the Balkan routes⁽²¹⁾. The respective EMPACT community consists of more than 200 investigators from 22 countries who in 2018 reported over 500 single events with more than 6 500 irregular migrants involved.

⁽²¹⁾ Europol Intelligence Notification on migrant smuggling activities along the Western Balkans Adriatic Coastal Route, June 2018, Europol Unclassified - Basic Protection Level: There are several routes for irregular migrants who are moving along the Balkan Peninsula mostly towards Austria and Germany. One leads via North Macedonia or Bulgaria, Serbia and/or Romania and Hungary to Austria. Another, the so-called Adriatic Coastal Route, leads from Greece via Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the Croatian border and onwards to Slovenia. However, other routes and combinations of routes are used as well.

Migrant smuggling intelligence picture

In 2018, the overall migration flow towards the EU continued to decrease⁽²²⁾. At the same time, the EMSC has witnessed a continued, and in some areas, an increased demand for facilitation services. Facilitated secondary movements, specifically along the Balkan routes and across the English Channel, remain a major challenge for EU law enforcement agencies.

Migrant smuggling remains a lucrative and highly profitable criminal business. Low risk and comparatively low penalties attract opportunistic criminals and professionalised OCGs alike. Specifically, the use of cash and underground banking methods such as *hawala* represent growing challenges.

EU law enforcement activities are also increasingly affected by the side effects of professional criminal groups acting along these routes. Citizens of EU countries are frequently confronted with the inhuman practices of human traffickers and migrant smugglers. Irregular migrants are put at risk in dangerous transport or are victimised in abductions and held for ransom.

Trafficked migrants are exploited on construction sites, in food processing plants or parcel delivery services, they are also forced into sex work or to grow illegal drugs.

Migrant smuggling and THB are not altruistic services but a callous and inhumane business⁽²³⁾. The facilitators victimise irregular migrants but also EU citizens – who are affected by migrants being forced into criminal activities as organised begging, organised property crime or drug-related crime.

The use of fraudulent documents is common. Not only are these documents used for migrant smuggling and trafficking purposes, but also their use has spread to fraudulent naturalisation and social benefit fraud.

In combination with expertise and knowledge available within Europol (TOP OCGs, document fraud and financial investigations), EMSC is well placed to collect more targeted intelligence and provide tailor-made operational support to Member States.

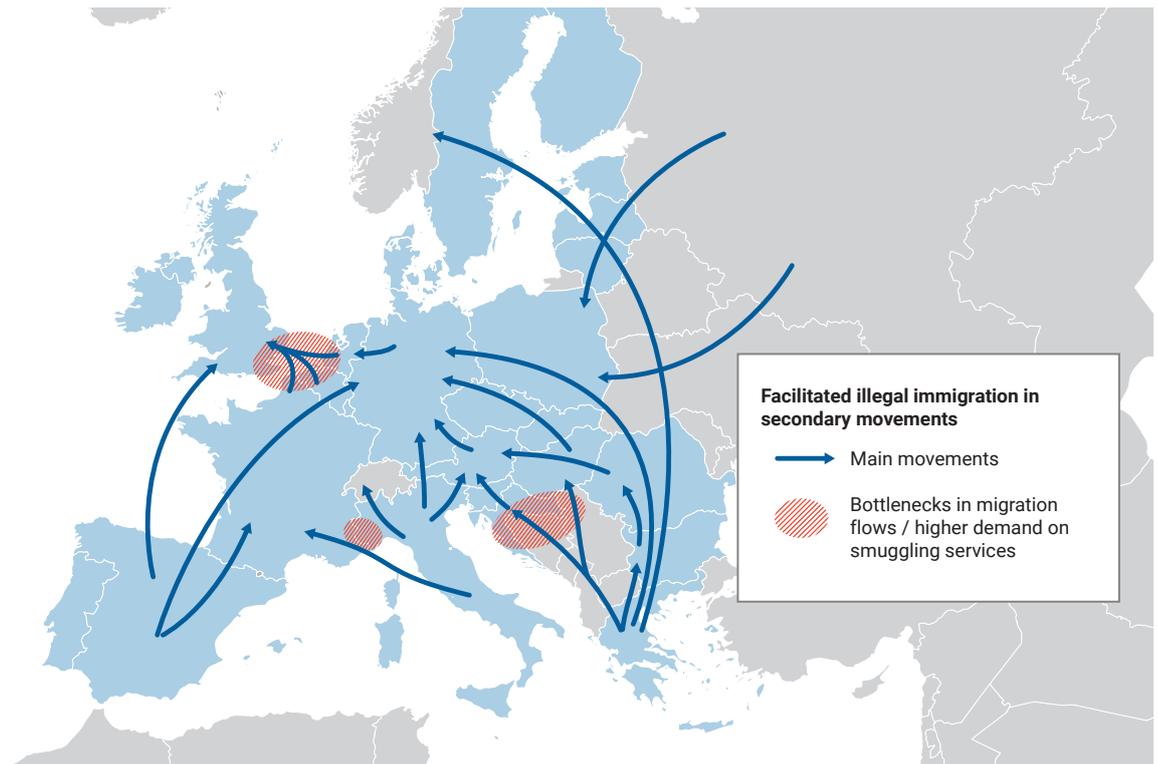
⁽²²⁾ EBCGA: Number of illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders decreased from 1.8 million in 2015 to 0.5 million in 2016 to 204 654 in 2017 and to 150 033 in 2018, https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Migratory_routes/Detections_of_IBC_2019_02_06.xlsx, retrieved on 19/03/2019.

⁽²³⁾ UNODC: migrant smuggling – a deadly business; <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/migrant-smuggling-a-deadly-business.html>, retrieved on 12/03/2019.

Secondary movements

EU law enforcement agencies detected migrant smuggling activities in many different countries, both inside the EU and neighbouring countries. However, the OCGs involved are particularly active in areas with a high concentration of irregular migrants, and areas where physical barriers require smuggling services for irregular migrants to be able to continue their journey (known as 'migrant hubs').

This includes the Balkan routes, the Greek islands, the land border between France and Italy, and the sea borders between the UK and Belgium, France and the Netherlands. In many cases, life threatening concealment methods are used, as irregular migrants are hidden in purpose-built compartments of vehicles.



Operation Muga

With the support of Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC), the Spanish National Police dismantled an organised crime group suspected of facilitating large-scale migrant smuggling between French-speaking African countries and France. It is estimated that this criminal network facilitated the entry into Spain of almost 300 irregular migrants, before arranging for their subsequent smuggling to France.

During an action day at the end of July 2018, seven suspects were arrested in Guipuzcoa (Northern Spain) and one in Madrid. Eight irregular migrants waiting to be smuggled to France were also rescued from a safe house in Guipuzcoa. Europol supported the investigation with analytical capabilities in-house and the deployment of an expert to San Sebastian (Spain) with a mobile office and a Universal Forensic Extraction Device.

The organised crime group, made up of individuals of Sub-Saharan origin, arranged for irregular migrants to be smuggled from French-speaking African countries (Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal) to Spain by boat, usually providing them with fake documents. Upon their arrival at the Spanish coast, the migrants were contacted by members of the criminal organisation who would arrange for their transfer to safe houses in Northern Spain, and from there on to France.

Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the UK, Eurojust, EBCGA, Interpol and Europol's EMSC joined forces in an EMPACT initiative to fight criminal groups facilitating illegal border crossings towards and through Western European countries via secondary movements after entering via the Western Mediterranean route.

The EMSC delivered an intelligence notification on the emergence of the 'Adriatic Coastal route', an alternative route along the Western Balkan corridor, and Early Warning Notifications on topics as the use of rental cars for facilitating the illegal immigration across Western Balkan land borders.

In March 2019, Europol published a joint report with its partner agencies EASO and EBCGA on the issue of secondary movements⁽²⁴⁾.

Facilitated secondary movements gained significance specifically along the Balkan routes and across the English Channel, posing a major challenge for EU law enforcement agencies. Germany and the UK are the principal destination countries; hence, the main smuggling routes, as frequently reported to Europol, are through Belgium, France and the Netherlands to the UK and via the Balkan Peninsula and Austria towards Germany.

France is gaining in importance as a destination country, however, the use of facilitation services is not as widespread on its Spanish and Italian borders as on the Balkan routes or across the English Channel.

Bottlenecks, where irregular migrants gather and look for options to overcome obstacles for further travel, are increasingly targeted by the law enforcement authorities of affected countries. Such actions lead to further displacement of the facilitation services. As an example, the facilitators have distanced themselves from harbours on the English Channel in Belgium, France and the Netherlands and moved further inland. Hence, irregular migrants are now being concealed in lorries hundreds of kilometres from the coast.

In 2018, the number of arrivals via the Western Mediterranean route more than doubled⁽²⁵⁾.

Spanish law enforcement agencies carried out an investigation supported by Europol, to dismantle an OCG that facilitated minors from Morocco into Spain and held them until their families paid an extra ransom for their release. Another operation targeted a highly organised group smuggling migrants via countries in East Africa, the Middle East and South America to France and Spain.



Operation Jet Ski

A Moroccan OCG used jet skis to smuggle migrants and cannabis across the Mediterranean Sea to Spain. The Spanish National Police and the Spanish Civil Guard, supported by Europol on the spot with data and forensic analysis, dismantled the group in a Joint Action Day in April 2018.

Spanish police arrested 19 Moroccans and carried out 7 houses searches in Almeria, seizing 12 kg of drugs and over €15 000 in cash. Altogether, Europol examined 21 technical devices and submitted 16 gigabytes of data to Spanish law enforcement agencies.

The operation was actively supported by the EMSC's JOT Mare team (see page 23), which contributed data analysis of crucial information gathered in front-line migrant debriefings from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA).

Irregular migrants arriving in Spain were mostly from Algeria, Morocco, French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa and West Africa. Onward movements led thus mainly towards France, and in case of those from Nigeria and North Africa, to the UK and Germany. Facilitation services for illegal immigration in secondary movements from Spain to other EU countries were on a larger scale used only on ferry connections to the UK.

⁽²⁴⁾ EASO/Europol/EBCGA report on Secondary movements in the European Union and Schengen Associated Countries, March 2019, Limited/ Europol Unclassified – Basic Protection Level.

⁽²⁵⁾ EBCGA: Number of illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders via the Western Mediterranean route increased from 23 063 in 2017 to 57 034 in 2018; https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Migratory_routes/Detections_of_IBC_2019_02_06.xlsx, retrieved on 19/03/2019.

Migrants hidden in concealments

As land routes remain most prevalent, hiding in concealments of cars, vans or lorries remains the most common modus operandi. At the same time, police and border forces are on high alert and strict court sentences are more commonplace⁽²⁶⁾.

Due to the risk of detection and imprisonment, drivers recruited by the OCGs to smuggle migrants are keen to avoid checks, which leads to reckless and dangerous behaviour. At the same time, OCGs are becoming more professional in nature and try to increase their return on activities by overloading vehicles without safety features for the transported migrants. A typical example of this would be an incident in Greece in October 2018; 11 irregular migrants died when the smuggler drove the overloaded car into a lorry after ignoring a police checkpoint⁽²⁷⁾.

The EMSC has delivered several early warning notifications on topics such as smuggling in trailers on cargo trains towards French harbours at the English Channel; or convoy tactics when several lorries are driven in a convoy across Western Balkan land borders but only one is actually carrying migrants.

More than 6,600 detections of irregular migrants in vehicles via the Balkans have been reported to Europol in 2018; almost 80% were hidden in concealments or transported in high-risk circumstances. On average, 13 migrants were hidden in one compartment; an average of 20 migrants has been transported in transporter vans, 23 in lorries and 7 in cars.

Operation Versteck

An OCG targeted by German authorities smuggled irregular migrants via the Balkans to Germany concealed in lorries.

OP VERSTECK was a common effort of Germany, Romania and Serbia that was concluded in a Common Action Day in May 2018; three suspected smugglers have been arrested in Romania, Serbia and the UK on European Arrest Warrants in a covert strike. At the same time, five suspects were arrested in Serbia in a parallel investigation following several months of joint operational work coordinated by Europol.

One of the suspects located in Serbia was arrested based

on Romanian forensic data on a German arrest warrant. The UK also identified and arrested a suspect who was using a different identity when crossing from France to the UK.

The operation showed how smuggling networks are connected internationally and highlighted at the same time the need for international cooperation and information exchange.

Along the Balkan routes, Afghan, Pakistani and Iranian nationals were the most-reported irregular migrants, followed by Iraqi, Turkish and Syrian nationals. The most reported suspects came from Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by Romanian, Albanian and Turkish nationals⁽²⁸⁾.

The more professional OCGs involved in facilitation activities are normally connected across the countries of origin, transit countries and the countries of destination. High value targets (HVTs) often originate from most prevalent countries of origin of irregular migrants.

Operation Versteck



⁽²⁶⁾ German regional courts of Pirna sentenced migrant smuggler to 3 years of imprisonment: <https://www.bild.de/regional/dresden/dresden-aktuell/schleuser-pferchte-26-vietnamesen-auf-3-8-quadratmeter-60022228.bild.html>, retrieved on 14/03/2019.

⁽²⁷⁾ AP News: <https://www.apnews.com/4866b941e00c47ffb1728dbaab475abd>, retrieved on 25/02/2019.

⁽²⁸⁾ Member States' SIENA contributions to the EMSC.

Intra-Schengen flights

Intra-Schengen flights to northern EU countries by use of fraudulent documents remains a frequently used modus operandi.

Since mid-2016, Europol and the EBCGA have observed a steadily increasing trend of irregular migrants attempting to move directly from Greece to other parts of the EU Schengen Area by using air routes, especially during the holiday season, thus circumventing the perilous journey along the Balkan routes.

This modus operandi goes hand-in-hand with the use of fraudulent documents; in the majority of cases, counterfeit or forged passports or ID cards of Member States were seized. In many cases irregular migrants were exposed as imposters using genuine travel documents (look-alike method), for instance several incidents of imposters travelling with genuine Syrian passports and German or Swedish residence permits were reported.

Global Airline Action Day

Europol coordinated raids at European airports, targeting criminals trying to travel using fraudulently bought tickets.

Over 141 individuals were arrested in a coordinated law enforcement swoop, which took place at over 226 airports around the world in early summer 2018. Between 18 and 22 June 61 countries, 69 airlines and 6 online travel agencies were involved in the 11th edition of the Global Airport Action Days (GAAD) targeting criminals suspected of travelling with airline tickets bought using stolen, compromised or fake credit card details. Some 334 suspicious transactions were reported, and a number of investigations were subsequently opened.

One trend observed were irregular migrants in Greece, coming from the mainland, especially from Athens, by ferry to the holiday islands on the same day as the flight day. They arrive at the airport, only a couple of minutes before the departure time of their flight in order to minimise the likelihood of police checks of their stolen/forged documents.

Four suspects employing this specific modus operandi and using forged ID cards from EU Member States were arrested in Greece in the framework of the Global Airline Action Day (GAAD).

As in the previous years, the main nationalities of facilitated irregular migrants detected on air routes were Syrian, Turkish, Iraqi and Iranian. In 2018, there were 90 smugglers apprehended holding German, Iranian, Syrian and Turkish citizenship or residence permits (most of them in Athens, Greece and Vilnius, Lithuania)⁽²⁹⁾.

The main destination countries are the UK and Germany, followed by the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, France and Finland. The main countries of origin of migrants travelling on air-routes are Iran and Syria. The main hub before entering the EU is Turkey, and Greece and Cyprus remain the main EU internal connection hubs for migrants⁽³⁰⁾.

Document fraud remains a key facilitator of organised crime affecting several other crime areas, including terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering and property crime.

The EMSC's information clearing house (ICH) together with the EBCGA issued an intelligence notification highlighting the use of regional airports for intra-Schengen facilitation services in November 2018.

⁽²⁹⁾ Europol/EBCGA intelligence notification on the use of regional airports for intra-Schengen facilitation services, November 2018, Europol Unclassified – Basic Protection Level.

⁽³⁰⁾ Member States' contributions to Europol AP Migrant Smuggling.

Misuse of asylum procedures

EU Member States increasingly detected the misuse of asylum procedures; irregular migrants, usually in an organised manner, take advantage of the freedom of movement that comes with the status of recognised refugee and leave reception centres to move to other EU countries.

Operation Safar

Spanish authorities investigated an OCG smuggling 1 200 migrants from Palestine to northern Europe through Spain and France, using particular routes via East Africa, the Middle East and South America, charging the migrants between €5 000 and €8 000 for the facilitation. With the support provided to France and Spain from the EMSC, nine members of the criminal network were arrested in a joint operation in October 2018.

The EMSC delivered an intelligence notification on Palestinian irregular migrants abusing airport transit visas.

OCGs appear to abuse the Common European Asylum System to obtain illegal residence in the EU by using the systems in place for recognised refugees who are stranded

along the Western Balkan corridor⁽³¹⁾. These migrants are ready to cooperate with OCGs so they can fraudulently obtain residence status. OCGs facilitate such arrangements by booking transport and hotels for migrants, using their legal refugee passports. Migrants are then instructed to not use the accommodation and return ticket.

Irregular migrants are facilitated on long-haul international flights in order to claim asylum at layover airports. The facilitators provide them with tourist visas for non-EU countries and organise the flight routes via EU countries. During layovers, the irregular migrants exit the EU airport transit zones in order to apply for asylum and once their asylum application has been registered, they leave for a different EU country. For example, a growing number of Palestinian migrants has been reported to have arrived at different Spanish airports where they claimed international protection⁽³²⁾. The claims were preliminarily admitted and processed, allowing them to access the Schengen Area to have their applications assessed. As soon as the administrative process had been initiated, the irregular migrants disappeared from the reception centres in Spain towards other countries as the UK, France, Germany or Belgium. The original trip to Spain as well as the onward journey was facilitated by a criminal network.



Operation Safar

⁽³¹⁾ Europol early warning notification on smuggling of recognised refugees within the EU, May 2018, Europol Unclassified – Basic Protection Level.

⁽³²⁾ See Operation Safar, page 16.

Visa fraud and trafficking services

Visa-free schemes or simple visa procedures between EU countries and neighbouring third countries may contribute to a rise of numbers of irregular migrants. The easing of facilitation services for illegal immigration is exemplified by the Iranian-Serbian visa-free regime introduced between September 2017 and October 2018. In the months following its introduction, the number of Iranian arrivals increased significantly both to Serbia and other countries along the Balkan routes, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia⁽³³⁾. In 2018, Iranian asylum applications across EU countries increased in line with the introduction of visa-free travel to Serbia⁽³⁴⁾ and the number of cases reported from EU countries involving Iranian irregular migrants and facilitators also increased accordingly.

Operation Millennium

A five-year-long investigation into a criminal network involved in the facilitation of illegal immigration of non-EU nationals into the Schengen Area. The OCG fraudulently misused visa arrangements for business use and set up fictional companies. By providing fraudulent invitations for work through these companies, the irregular migrants were able to fraudulently obtain visas for Poland and thus to continue travelling to the desired EU countries.

The EMSC provided its support on the spot during an action day in October 2018 when seven suspects were arrested.



Operation Millennium

Irregular migrants are increasingly targeted by traffickers who misuse EU visa-free regimes – mostly with Ukraine and Moldova. The victims are usually facilitated to EU countries such as Finland or Germany. They use their own passports when entering the EU legally, based on the visa regulations with these countries. When the trafficked migrants arrive in the countries of destination, the OCG provides them with fraudulent ID documents. Usually the criminal networks also facilitate irregular migrants into exploitative working conditions, which typically include work on construction sites, in agriculture or in parcel services.

Operation Betoni

The Finnish Border Guard investigated the facilitation of illegal immigration, document fraud and likely labour exploitation. Ukrainian construction workers were facilitated to Finland for work using fake Romanian ID cards.

The facilitators provided them with fraudulent invitations for Schengen visas to Baltic countries and counterfeit Romanian ID cards to register in Finland.

The OCG also smuggled migrants for sexual exploitation.

During the Action Day, 89 suspects were identified and 38 of them arrested, 28 house searches were executed and 42 forged ID documents were seized.

The EMSC delivered an intelligence notification on potential migrant smuggling during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia by misusing fans' passports (FAN IDs) which granted foreign nationals visa-free entry and exit as FIFA World Cup spectators.

⁽³³⁾ Illegal border crossings in the respective countries, as provided by the European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) posted to Serbia.

⁽³⁴⁾ EASO: 'The level of asylum applications remained largely stable in the first half of 2018, but abruptly increased in the second half of the year peaking in October and November.' In 2018, Iranians lodged 37% more applications for asylum than in the previous year; <https://www.easo.europa.eu/asylum-trends-overview-2018>; retrieved 12/03/2019.

Document fraud

Document fraud is as a key facilitator of organised crime affecting several crime areas, including migrant smuggling, THB, terrorism, drug trafficking, fraud, money laundering and property crime, among others. For the migrant smuggling criminal landscape, document fraud is of particular relevance, considering that the misuse of various forms of document and identity fraud is reported to Europol as a recurrent modus operandi of people smugglers.

Roughly a third of the 3 657 new cases that were contributed to AP Smuggling in 2018, was related to document or identity fraud.

The most abused documents reported to Europol during 2018 were EU identity and travel documents. Passports

(French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Spanish), ID cards (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Romania), residence permits and visa stickers (particularly German C-visas) are among the most forged and abused. The prices of documents offered by OCGs differ widely and depend on variables such as nationality, the quality of forged elements, the likeness with the actual user or if it's for one-time use or for the user to keep. Passports start at around €500, ID cards are usually sold from €200 and documents including biometric features can cost up to €8 000.

Criminal groups were reported to offer more expensive services by providing full migration packages that included false travel documents, travel arrangements and accommodation.

Poly-criminality

Many of the OCGs involved in migrant smuggling are also active in other crime areas, especially document fraud and THB. It is also possible that OCGs specialised in migrant smuggling cooperate with OCGs involved in other crime areas.

Many of the migrant smuggling OCGs, purely aiming at maximising illicit financial gains, offer a full service package, that frequently includes the provision of fraudulent documents. With increased border surveillance throughout the EU, irregular migrants more often rely on such documents to facilitate their journey.

There is considerable overlap between OCGs involved in migrant smuggling and OCGs active in THB. Especially Nigerian OCGs involved in THB often exploit the migrant smuggling infrastructure and routes to traffic their victims from Nigeria into the EU. Vietnamese OCGs are also often involved in smuggling Vietnamese nationals into the EU in order to subsequently exploit them for labour purposes.

While there are individual cases where migrant smuggling and drug trafficking occur at the same time, there is no evidence of a structural or widespread overlap in these two crime areas.

Outlook

The migratory pressure from African countries is likely to continue⁽³⁵⁾⁽³⁶⁾ which will have a continuing impact on migrant smuggling to and within the EU. Generally, the nationalities of irregular migrants coming to the EU are changing which may have an impact on the respective destination countries.

New technologies, such as burner apps allow criminals to use virtually created and hard-to-trace phone numbers when advertising their services on social networks and in communications with irregular migrants or other members of the criminal networks⁽³⁷⁾. Mature OCGs using anonymising technologies and trust-based informal value transfer systems (IVTS), increasingly impede the tracing or monitoring of criminal targets by law enforcement agencies.

We have seen criminal organisations acting and re-acting quickly to changing legislative and/or border security situations; they will continue to adapt to EU internal and external security improvements and new routes will be opened. Eastern entry routes via Ukraine and Belarus could be exploited further.

The widespread use of forged and/or fraudulently obtained documents will almost certainly lead to an accumulating amount of such documents in circulation – and in use not only for migrant smuggling and trafficking purposes, but also for related crimes as fraudulent naturalisation and social benefit fraud.

Trafficking in human beings intelligence picture



Trends

THB involves the recruitment, transportation, housing, and exploitation of victims for different purposes. OCGs are mainly involved in sexual exploitation, although recently reported cases have also seen criminal networks trafficking persons across the EU for the purpose of labour exploitation, forced begging (including disabled victims), forced sham marriages between EU and third-country nationals and to a lesser extent, social benefit fraud. The networks involved in THB are often also involved in other supportive criminal activities, in particular money laundering, migrant smuggling and forging documents.

OCGs often target vulnerable people recruited in their country of origin. Irregular migrants and asylum seekers, in particular

children and unaccompanied minors, are especially at risk of falling victim to trafficking and exploitation in transit and destination countries⁽³⁸⁾⁽³⁹⁾.

In Operation Nanga Parbat, the EMSC supported cooperation between the British National Crime Agency, the Spanish Guardia Civil and the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons where operational information was exchanged with Nigerian partners, leading to successful actions in Spain.

⁽³⁵⁾ EBCGA: Number of illegal border crossings of citizens of African countries at the EU's external borders shows an increasing trend over the last 10 years; https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Migratory_routes/Detections_of_IBC_2019_02_06.xlsx, retrieved on 19/03/2019.

⁽³⁶⁾ International migration from countries in Sub-Saharan Africa has grown dramatically over the past decade, the desire to migrate remains high and populations of the large countries of origin of the region as Nigeria and Ghana continue to grow Pew Research Center, March, 2018; "At Least a Million Sub-Saharan Africans Moved to Europe Since 2010"; <http://www.pewglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/03/Africa-Migration-March-22-FULL-REPORT.pdf>; retrieved on 25/02/2019.

⁽³⁷⁾ Europol intelligence notification (Europol Basic Protection Level): Burner applications are a whole category of apps which allow for the creation of temporary phone numbers; unlike a 'real' number that is allocated and registered by a telecommunications provider and tied to a unique SIM-card these apps do not reveal a user name or caller ID, and can be erased at any time.

⁽³⁸⁾ Europol report on criminal networks involved in the trafficking and exploitation of underage victims in the EU: https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/23-11_report_child_trafficking.pdf, retrieved on 15/03/2019.

⁽³⁹⁾ Europol SOCTA Mid-Term Review 2019.

Operation Nanga Parbat

One of the largest operations against THB in Europe targeted the widespread Nigerian trafficking structures. The OCG was linked to the Eiye brotherhood, which is known for being one of the most influential confraternities⁽⁴⁰⁾ in Nigeria.

The victims were trafficked from Nigeria to Europe via Libya and Italy; once in Spain, the women were kept in squalid conditions in cave houses in Almeria, where they were exploited in prostitution to pay off the €30 000 debt they owed to the criminal organisation. The crime ring transferred and laundered the money using the *hawala* system.

Spanish authorities carried out 89 arrests and 41 house searches in Alicante, Almeria, Barcelona, Cantabria, Madrid, Malaga, Murcia, Navarra, Seville, Toledo and Vizcaya in Spain and in Manchester, UK. The bank accounts used by the organisation to launder the proceeds from their illicit activity were frozen.

Europol supported the investigation from the beginning by providing analytical support with cross-match reports, funding several operational meetings and deploying one specialist in Spain.

The majority of victims of sexual exploitation originate from Eastern European countries; however, a considerable number of identified victims are non-EU nationals, mainly from Albania, Brazil, China, Nigeria and Vietnam, which demonstrates the transnational dimension of this phenomenon.

Europol receives regular notifications of children being sold to criminal networks by their families. In some cases, they engage directly in the trafficking and exploitation of their own children. Female suspects play a key role in the trafficking and exploitation of minors, much more than in criminal networks that traffic adult victims.

Traffickers active in the EU frequently target underage victims mainly for sexual exploitation but also labour exploitation, to beg and to commit criminal acts, such as pickpocketing and shoplifting. Children are trafficked from around the world into the EU. The majority of non-EU networks reported to Europol involved Nigerian OCGs that traffic young girls to be sexually exploited.

In Nigerian criminal networks, women play a central role in the exploitation process; the 'madams' represent a key element in the exploitation process, and some of them supervise the entire trafficking process. They are commonly former victims of trafficking and manage the victims' movements,

debts and other logistical tasks, sometimes supported by a male driver and/or a warden.

Victims are subjected to voodoo rituals. These rituals create a bond by fear, between victims and their traffickers, ensuring victims will remain in the exploitative conditions until they pay their debt bondage and will not report the case to the authorities.

African victims often do not perceive themselves as exploited but rather as migrants who must repay their transportation and harbouring costs; they are prone to support or form an alliance with their offenders. This often results in victims being reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement.

In 2018, the state ruler of the Edo state in Nigeria (the origin region of many trafficking victims exploited into the EU) publicly nullified any oaths undertaken by victims of THB as part of a voodoo ritual and placed a curse on any doctor or juju priest who carried out the practice. This pronouncement is considered a historical move and has already resulted in a decrease of Nigerian trafficking victims arriving in the EU.

The criminal profits are mainly redirected to the country of origin of the key suspect, in small amounts via money transfer services and in larger sums using criminal money couriers and mules.

Joint Action Day on child exploitation 2018

During the week of 2 July 2018, law enforcement officers from 22 Member States, other European countries and partner agencies actively participated in an EMPACT THB action on child trafficking, an EU-wide action week. As a result of the action days, 51 children and 72 adults were identified as potential victims of trafficking. The youngest child was only two years old. The children were exploited for labour, forced begging and sexual purposes. Several links to migrant smuggling and document forgery were also identified.

Joint Action Day on labour exploitation 2018

Europol supported a Europe-wide operation carried out from 14 to 19 May by law enforcement agencies, labour inspectorates, immigration services, tax authorities, trade unions and other partners targeting OCGs trafficking vulnerable people for the purpose of labour exploitation.

During the action week, more than 39 000 individuals were stopped and checked, alongside over 12 900 vehicles

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Confraternities in Nigeria are originally secret-society student groups, some of which ventured into criminal activities and developed mafia-like structures: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confraternities_in_Nigeria; retrieved on 25/02/2019.

and inspections were carried out at over 4 640 places of business and other locations. Because of these checks, 57 suspects were arrested for THB and a further 192 persons were detained or arrested for other offences including illegal

immigration. Overall 379 potential victims of trafficking were identified. Data gathered during the operation has led to the launch of 56 new investigations in order to identify further suspects and victims linked to THB cases across the EU.

Outlook

The victims of trafficking from Ukraine and Vietnam have steadily increased among non-EU victims during the previous year. The introduction of the EU visa-free regime in June 2017 for Ukrainians did have an effect and is likely to further increase the number of trafficking victims from Ukraine as well as from Vietnam as it is an important transit country for Vietnamese migrants.

Increased awareness and intensified partnerships between THB specialised units and labour inspectorates led to cases of labour exploitation being increasingly investigated in EU Member States. The creation of a European Labour Agency may further contribute to coordinated action and an expansion of activities in this field.

EMSC response to countering migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings

Fighting migrant smuggling and THB remains a top priority for Europol and its EMSC. Given the transnational and poly-criminal nature of the OCGs involved in migrant smuggling but also THB, a coordinated and comprehensive response is required, involving third countries and relevant operators

within this domain. Europol's EMSC, pursuing an innovative approach in better supporting EU Member States, has further developed significant capacities and tools, having proven relevant operational impact among Europol's operational partners.

High value targets and operational task forces

Europol's HVT concept allows focusing on prioritised targets and enabling coordinated, expanded and EU-wide investigations concentrating on individuals that constitute the highest risk of serious and organised crime in the EU.

High value targets

An HVT is a person whose criminal activity constitutes a high risk of serious and organised crime to two or more EU Member States.

Operational task force

An OTF is a temporary group of representatives of Member States and Europol. It is based on a multinational and multi-disciplinary approach and formed to carry out a specific

project consisting of intelligence and investigative activities focusing on selected HVTs. Non-EU countries and other operational partners may be invited should it be deemed legally possible and operationally necessary by the Member States.

The EMSC identified eight HVTs that are investigated in two OTFs. In an exemplary on-going case, five HVTs are targeted for their ability to gain profit from different forms of crimes, as smuggling of migrants, forgery of administrative documents, fraud and swindling, social benefit fraud and THB involving minors.

Support to regional operational platforms

The EMSC solidly supports Member States in curbing migrant smuggling and THB through using our unique and state of the art capacities and services, including SIENA. One of the EMSC's key services is also to provide a comprehensive intelligence picture to support investigations developed by any national or regional operational initiative at EU level. Coordinated and agile efforts are aimed to trigger effective and operational responses.

The EMSC will also maintain its participation in relevant inter-agency fora and will support the development and implementation of regional initiatives, platforms and projects in key third countries.

The Joint Operational Office in Vienna, Austria, has been launched in May 2016 under the umbrella of the EMPACT priority facilitated illegal immigration. The office takes advantage of Austria's specific geographic position as transit and destination country at the northern edge of most common Balkan routes.

The office allows responding to any urgent or emergency cases in the region by serving as a regional operational hub for temporary liaison officers or investigators deployed by Member States and by enhancing regional operational casework by providing improved infrastructure and expertise. Europol's EMSC supports the office with operational data, investigative findings and strategic analysis as well as with

financial means via EMPACT funding in order to support foreign officers' travel and accommodation.

In the same way, Europol aims at supporting other joint operational or command centres to be established by

EU Member States or non-EU Balkan countries in an effort to support investigations in a hands-on approach and bring all the available intelligence together.

Information clearing house

The establishment of the Information clearing house (ICH) is founded in the Malta Declaration Implementation Plan. The ICH objective is to enhance the intelligence picture on organised migrant smuggling from source and transit countries by pooling information and developing actionable intelligence packages to enable law enforcement authorities to take action and prevent the smuggling process to continue into Europe.

The ICH aims to make effective use of assets and structures already in place, such as the existing cooperation with EBCGA or INTERPOL channels with third countries of origin and transit.

In addition, the ICH aims to look at initiating or further developing the cooperation with less traditional partners not immediately connected to the law enforcement environment – e.g. the military forces deployed as part of CSDP missions and operations such as EUNAVFOR MED.

The EBCGA and Europol will continue to jointly develop thematic and strategic intelligence products, especially on priority third countries for facilitated illegal immigration in support of EU and Member States political decision-making processes. First results were a common intelligence

notification on the use of regional airports for intra-Schengen facilitation and a joint report with EASO on secondary movements across the EU.

EUNAVFOR MED SHIP



JOT Mare

As part of the EMSC, the Joint Operational Team (JOT) Mare continues to collect, analyse and disseminate intelligence products aimed at initiating and/or supporting investigations on migrant smuggling by sea towards destination countries, including non-EU countries such as Canada and the USA.

Throughout 2018 until the date of the report, the JOT Mare team managed 750 messages from the EBCGA containing migrant debriefings, processing over 3 500 criminal entities which triggered 359 hits with data previously contributed

to Europol. All processed entities were subject to regular communication towards EU Member States.

The JOT Mare team currently manages over 1 000 vessels in its vessels of interest list, all having been reported to Europol as being involved in wider serious and organised criminal activity. The respective data was processed and made available through the JOT Mare team to the relevant law enforcement partners.

Crime information cell

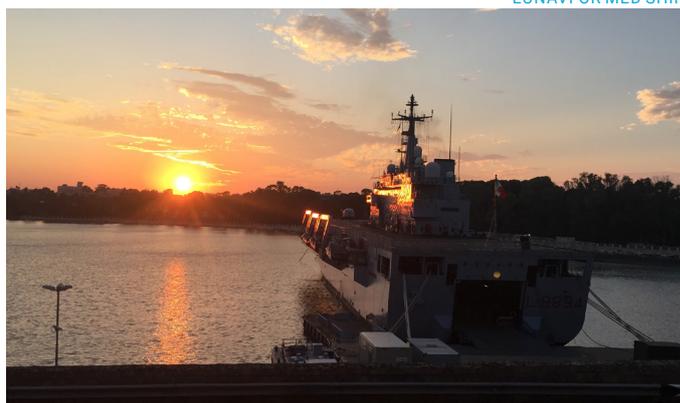
On 14 May 2018, the Council of the European Union adopted a decision allowing the creation of a crime information cell (CIC) within EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia. It is a pilot project tasked with facilitating the receipt, collection and transmission of information on migrant smuggling and human and weapons trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea.

The EMSC has been deploying its personnel to the CIC since July 2018. The CIC is physically located on the EUNAVFOR MED flagship vessels operating in the Mediterranean Sea. The CIC is operating 24/7 and includes representatives of Europol, EUNAVFOR MED, the EBCGA and selected Member States law enforcement agencies. One EMSC staff member is deployed to the CIC for periods between two and three weeks. In addition, the EMSC has established a back office support function with the objective to ensure 24/7 access to Europol information.

In line with the political tasking, the data flow from EUNAVFOR MED CIC is being processed as an ICH data input and currently over 50 maritime intelligence reports

were delivered to the military partners as well as selected EU MS LEA thus supporting the tactical decision-making process and triggering maritime intervention measures from the military. Europol's EMSC participation in the Crime Information Cell amounted to over 200 man/days of deployment in 2018. In December 2018, the Council extended the mandate of the EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia until 31 March 2019.

EUNAVFOR MED SHIP



Development of rotating expert function

In 2018, the EMSC established a rotating expert function with the support of the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The objective is to enhance operational cooperation with third countries. The rotating experts are deployed on an ad hoc basis to support Member States' investigations. The Executive Director and Commander of the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) of the EEAS signed the Terms of References to enable the use of the experts' function within the Civilian CSDP missions of EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya, European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger and EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali.

Several cooperation initiatives have already been concluded by EMSC rotating experts. For example, a week-long deployment supported the French and Spanish Joint Investigation Team in Niger. Two other week-long deployments supported the CSDP missions in Mali and Libya. All deployments so far succeeded in re-enforcing the cooperation with both the EEAS and the third-country authorities. The rotating experts can also be deployed to other non-EU countries than those defined in the contracts signed with the EEAS, should it be deemed operationally relevant.

Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit

The use of social media, dark web platforms, encrypted messaging services and online services allows OCGs to easily engage with potential customers in origin and transit countries.

Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) in close cooperation with the EMSC, has been stepping up its activities in the area of illegal immigration. It is supporting internet investigations, with the view of mapping the footprint of the smuggling networks, and it is proactively

assessing the content of pertinent social media accounts relating to the online facilitation of illegal immigration. In order to reduce the accessibility the EU IRU refers illegal content to online service providers and relevant public and private partners who in most cases are able to take down the indicated content. In partnership with the EMSC, over 800 pieces of internet content containing migrant smuggling related information were assessed and 764 were referred to service providers for removal, with a success rate of 99%.

In addition, 38 reports containing migrant smuggling information identified in various social media platforms were received in the framework of the EMSC's partnership with EASO and processed in Europol's databases. Over 1 100 criminal entities were extracted which triggered 300 hits with information already contributed to Europol.

With the aim of strengthening the links to the most relevant EU institutions, the EMSC participated in the second major civil-military crisis management exercise, EU HEX-ML 18 (PACE), led by the EU, with the aim to test interactions

between EU institutions (European Commission, EEAS, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union), Member States and NATO crisis response mechanisms. The exercise simulated a hybrid threat scenario affecting the EU and Member States and involved CSDP action from the political to the operations level preparing a coordinated and parallel response with NATO staff command. The exercise allowed the participants to improve and enhance their abilities to respond to a complex crisis of a hybrid nature with an internal and an external dimension.



Way forward

EMSC activities will focus on the identification of, together with EU Member States, HVTs and if necessary, the establishment of OTFs. The focus is not only on EU Member States but also in source and transit non-EU countries. In addition, every single EMPACT related operational activity will continue to be fully supported by Europol's EMSC as an effective way to develop common strategies to curb migrant smuggling and THB criminal networks.

In 2018 Europol's EMSC proposed an action plan⁽⁴¹⁾ to further enhance the fight against migrant smuggling, which was presented at COSI during its meeting in July 2018 and was endorsed in November 2018. In December, the Council of the European Union⁽⁴²⁾ endorsed the proposals in its comprehensive set of measures to step up the fight against migrant smuggling networks.

The Council endorsed to connect all relevant actors to the ICH at the EMSC, to establish a Joint Liaison Task Force on migrant smuggling (JLTF-MS) at Europol, to use regional joint operational platforms and to strengthen the financial investigation component.

Apart from initiatives already on their way, Europol is aiming to further strengthen links with CSDP missions/operations and building on the experiences of the CIC pilot project.

Financial investigations

One of the operational actions in the EMPACT priority of facilitation of illegal immigration is dedicated to targeting document fraud and financial crime.

To strengthen the financial investigation component, the EMSC supports an exchange programme with non-EU Balkan countries' law enforcement agencies in the framework of the CEPOL Western Balkan Financial Investigation project. The EMSC intends to implement six exchange programmes with Western Balkan countries in order to let the local investigators familiarise themselves with Europol's Financial Intelligence Unit and its asset recovery, suspicious transaction and money laundering activities.

Due to the importance given to proactive financial investigations, the EMSC steps up its efforts in that regard along with all of Europol's crime areas. Targeting a specific

investigation, the EMSC set up a working group with Europol's Financial Intelligence Unit in order to support the national authorities.

The EMSC is providing its expertise to an EU Council policy paper on IVTS with the purpose of raising awareness of the dangers arising from the increasing use of unregulated IVTS like *hawala* to launder criminal funds.

JLTF-MS

Europol responds to the growing proliferation and sophistication of transnational criminal activities by strengthening coordinating operations at working level. In this context, Europol aims to benefit from the successful taskforce approach already applied in the European Counter Terrorism Centre and the European Cyber Crime Centre by establishing a Joint Liaison Task Force (JLTF) embedded into its European Migrant Smuggling Centre.

The Member States-led, comprehensive long-term response to complex and ever-adapting threats, with the potential to involve third countries is part of the EMSC's ten-point action plan to enhance the fight against migrant smuggling, which was endorsed by COSI in November 2018.

The concept is to complement the work of Europol mobile teams on-the-spot and Europol's support to regional operational offices like the JOO.

Through Liaison Officers at the JLTF-MS, Member States will be able to drive and stimulate intelligence-led coordinated action against OCGs active in migrant smuggling and THB.

The JLTF-MS members will be expected to deploy a dedicated migration and/or THB Liaison Officer from a national competent authority (e.g. border authority, etc.) at Europol who will represent the Member State or agency in facilitating the day-to-day operational work within the team.

Migrant smugglers and human traffickers are running their inhuman business on an international scale; most OCGs in EMSC priority cases are run by individuals, groups, families or clans from migrants' origin countries. The large and successful operations mostly span from recruitment in the

⁽⁴¹⁾ Europol's EMSC contributed with its action plan to the Council of the European Union comprehensive and operational set of measures: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15250-2018-INIT/en/pdf>, retrieved on 12/03/2019; <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/12/06/migrant-smuggling-council-approves-a-set-of-measures-to-fight-smuggling-networks/>, retrieved on 12/03/2019.

⁽⁴²⁾ Ibid.

countries of origin via facilitation services in transit countries to the countries of destination. A clear intelligence picture across the whole stretch of criminal activities will help the investigations in the EU Member States. Hence the need to exchange operational information with third countries.

We see the exchange of operational information with third countries as vital. In its position as migrant smuggling crime information hub the EMSC continues with its activities in the ICH and with initiatives as the rotating expert or its support of the CIC to foster and expand the opportunities of information exchange.

Close cooperation with relevant third countries could be a relevant factor to trigger subsequent operational actions. Europol Liaison Officers as well as the EMSC's rotating experts will be a vital asset for further strengthening relations to law enforcement agencies in non-EU origin and transit countries.

The EMSC is working on enhancing the direct link between front line information and Europol's information analysis capacities. Enhanced real-time access for Europol experts and Europol Guest Officers on the ground, to perform checks and analysis is essential for an immediate reaction to challenges arising during action days on the spot and in long-term support of migrant smuggling investigations alike. The right data in the right place at the right time can trigger successful and immediate detections of criminals and risks at an early stage.

Irregular migration flows towards the EU have stabilised due to a broad set of measures by the EU⁽⁴³⁾, consequently the number of irregular migrant arrivals to the EU is the

lowest in five years (144 166 in 2018)⁽⁴⁴⁾. This is the result of joint EU efforts on all fronts, including the EBCGA's in supporting border protection measures of the EU Member States and Europol's in supporting the migrant smuggling and trafficking investigations of the Member States' law enforcement agencies.

After the migration crisis at the external borders the challenge to tackle the imminent criminality remains, as facing tens of thousands of irregular migrants in European transit countries waiting for opportunities to illegally cross the EU borders. EU law enforcement authorities are confronted with a continuous threat of migrant smuggling in secondary movements and trafficking-related crime as forced begging, organised property crime or drugs-related crime. The risk of transporting migrants in concealments of vehicles – as exemplified by an average of 20 migrants being transported in ordinary transporter vans – leads to an increasing share of migrants experiencing physical harm.

The need for tackling OCGs and their callous and inhuman business is higher than ever. Hence, Europol's EMSC keeps on gathering relevant intelligence and provide agile and tailor-made operational support to Member States' investigations and to connect and coordinate among law enforcement agencies.

⁽⁴³⁾ European agenda on migration: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration_en, retrieved on 12/03/2019.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ IOM migration flow monitoring Europe; <https://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals>; retrieved 25/02/2019.



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