

12 ARRESTED FOR SMUGGLING MIGRANTS IN SMALL BOATS ACROSS THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

30 Sep 2020

[Press Release](#)

10 rubber boats and 158 life jackets among the seizures



A major operation involving law enforcement authorities from Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, supported by Europol and Eurojust, led to the dismantling of a large network of criminals smuggling migrants in life-threatening conditions through the English Channel.

The action spanned over two days, 28 and 29 September. Law enforcement officers from the Belgian Federal Police (Federale Politie, Police Fédérale), British Immigration Enforcement, the Dutch Royal Marechaussée (Koninklijke Marechaussee) and the French Border Police (OCRIEST/BMR62, Police Aux Frontières) within the French National Police (Police Nationale) worked together and 12 suspects were arrested (seven in France, two in the Netherlands and three in the UK). The overall seizures during the two action days included 12 vehicles, 10 rubber boats and engines, 158 life jackets, a caravan, a boat trailer, jewellery, about €48 000 in cash, documents and mobile devices. This investigation targeted a developing trend of migrant smuggling involving small boats across the English Channel, a criminal activity which has escalated exponentially in recent months with increased interceptions in France and the UK.

Overloaded boats and rough weather

This organised crime group consists mainly of Iranian nationals living in France, the Netherlands and the UK. The network was smuggling migrants with small

boats from the north coasts of France to the UK. The suspects had connections in different countries to organise their criminal activity. Members of the criminal group purchased inflatable boats and engines from Germany and the Netherlands and transported them to the departure points. There, they taught the migrants how to operate the boats while charging an average of €3 000 per person for the crossings.

The various elements gathered during the investigations confirmed that this criminal organisation would have facilitated the illegal sea crossing of a large number of migrants. This transportation in overloaded boats, and often in very difficult weather conditions on one of the busiest commercial shipping lanes in the world, endangered both the lives of the migrants and the law enforcement officers involved in rescue operations at sea.

Europol supported the operation by facilitating the information exchange, organising operational meetings and providing analytical support with two intelligence analysts dedicated to this high-priority case. On the action day, Europol set-up a virtual command post to facilitate the operational coordination and exchange of information between law enforcement officers on the ground in real time.

To support national authorities in this high priority investigation, Eurojust set up in June 2020 a Joint Investigation Team with Belgium, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Europol. Eurojust further facilitated the successful cooperation of the judicial authorities of the countries involved.



In 2010 the European Union set up a [four-year Policy Cycle](#) to ensure greater continuity in the fight against serious international and organised crime. In 2017 the Council of the EU decided to continue the EU Policy Cycle for the 2018 - 2021 period. It aims to tackle the most significant threats posed by organised and serious international crime to the EU. This is achieved by improving and strengthening cooperation between the relevant services of EU Member States, institutions and agencies, as well as non-EU countries and organisations, including the private sector where relevant. Facilitation of illegal immigration is one of the priorities for the Policy Cycle.

CRIME AREAS

[Facilitation of Illegal Immigration](#)

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