

# CRIMINAL GROUPS EXTORT EUROPEAN RELATIVES OF KIDNAP VICTIMS

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[Press Release](#)

Europol has warned EU law enforcement authorities about the kidnapping of irregular migrants and the subsequent extortion of their relatives or friends who are residing in Europe.

In the cases known to law enforcement, ransoms extorted from the European contacts have ranged from EUR 4400 to EUR 25 700. In most cases, the extortion processes involved multiple negotiation steps and sequential increases in the ransom amount. Payments were made to multiple cash handlers used by organised criminal groups in locations inside and outside of Europe.

Based on data provided by national law enforcement authorities it is clear that individuals of Eritrean origin living in Sweden and at least two other European countries have been subject to extortion as relatives for Eritrean kidnapping victims held hostage and exposed to torture in the Sinai Peninsula. The extortion operations were run by organised crime groups (OCGs) of Bedouin origin exploiting irregular migrants who had been kidnapped in Eritrea and Sudan by OCGs of Rashaida origin.

“Europol has issued a warning to all police forces in Europe that this form of international extortion may also be happening in their areas,” says Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol. “In response to any increase in cases reported to national competent authorities in Europe, the centralised analysis of this data at Europol would enable the detection of cross-border links between different cash handlers. Europol is ready for coordinated action with Interpol to deal with the problem in Europe and the Sinai region.”

Cecilia Malmström, European Commission for Home Affairs, comments: “This is a worrying and sad phenomenon – a terrible tragedy that is also having direct consequences in our Member States. It needs to be tackled from every possible angle. I would like to call for more cooperation between Member States, in particular regarding the extortion of individuals and the organised crime groups operating within Europe that support and perpetuate the horrendous practices occurring in the Sinai”.

In some cases, hostages have been provided with phones to call their European contacts and request payment for their release. In other cases, the relatives have been extorted by cash handlers that are based in Europe and working for Bedouin criminal groups operating in the Sinai Peninsula. For instance, a victim’s friend located in Sweden was contacted by two Swedish-speaking suspects on local mobile phone numbers demanding EUR 24 000 for a victim being held in the Sinai. Threatening that non-compliance would result in the victim’s death and sale of the victim’s organs, the

suspects attempted to arrange face-to-face meetings in Sweden for the handover of ransom payments. Subsequently, the relative was sent regular threat messages via SMS and presented with a shortened deadline. In this case, the victim was killed and the transaction was not completed.

While the dark figure for the extortion of the European contacts of hostages in the Sinai may be considerably higher, the number of cases recorded by law enforcement authorities is low. Increased public awareness may encourage affected individuals to come forward and report these incidents of extortion.



EN [Scan Policy Brief](#) [166.5 KB]

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