

OC-SCAN POLICY BRIEF

Use of improvised illegal waste disposal sites by criminals and OC Groups in the EU

Economic growth and globalisation have led to an increase in the volume of waste shipments across borders within and out of the European Union (EU). There has been a proliferation of conventions, EU regulations and national laws to reduce the harmful side-effects of improper waste disposal. In response, criminals and Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) are exploiting the high costs associated with legal waste management and make substantial profits from illegal trafficking and disposal activities that circumvent this patchwork of environmental legislation. Driven by an exceptional 'low risk - high profit' margin, this represents one of the fastest growing new areas of criminal and OC activity, in which some groups are estimated to earn 4 billion Euros per annum.

In the EU, the illegal trafficking of waste is rising, particularly between countries in North West and North East Europe. However, criminals are targeting a wide variety of improvised illegal waste disposal sites such as **gravel-/sand-pits**, **abandoned industrial facilities** and **open-cast mines** that can be found in every region. The main findings related to illegal waste trafficking and disposal in the EU are:

- Illegal waste management activities in the EU are organised by sophisticated networks of criminals and with a clear division of roles (e.g. collection, transportation, recovery or legal expertise).
- Many of the brokers coordinating this activity are embedded in the legal waste management system and also use their positions in legitimate waste brokerages or waste recovery/recycling plants in their attempt to exert corruptive influence on key governmental authorities (e.g. inspectorates and laboratories).
- The current complexity of the legal framework for waste management, as well as the fragmented policing landscape that includes diverse law enforcement and administrative authorities serve as a key facilitator.
- Aside from the apparent ecological damages and public health risks, the financial burden associated with the retrieval of illegal waste repositories, in particular across borders, is substantial for the affected MS.

Drawing on these findings and the contributions of national experts, the main recommendations are:

- Exchange of best practice between national experts involved in combating illegal waste management in the framework of 'EnviCrimeNet' (e.g., on using risk profiling to identify potential illegal disposal sites and on protecting public officials from the hazards associated with the retrieval of illegal waste repositories).
- Adoption of a multi-agency approach during waste transport control operations and visits to suspected illegal waste disposal sites that includes the relevant law enforcement and environmental inspectorates, supported by a regular exchange of information between the relevant policing actors at national level.

