

EARLY WARNING NOTIFICATION

Large complex networks of Albanian-speaking criminals active in the EU Changing Modus Operandi

What is happening?

Small groups (3-5 persons) of young Albanian-speaking individuals are sent to destinations hosting established Albanian-speaking diaspora communities in Schengen area member states, where they commit numerous residential burglaries. These criminals make use of visa free regimes, which allow travel to and within the Schengen area for up to 3 months. During their stay, they are directed by senior Albanian-speaking criminals who have been living within EU host countries for years. After a few weeks or months, the burglars return to their countries of origin and are replaced by another group or groups. Following their initial string of burglaries and return home, burglary teams can also return to target countries for another tour of duty within only a few months. In addition to coordinating and facilitating burglaries, the senior Albanian-speaking individuals permanently based in the EU also provide cash money to buy cars and handle stolen items. The legal business structures owned by them (bars, hotels, garages, call shops) are used to obscure a wide range of criminal activities and profits. Extensive security measures are usually taken in and around these locations. These groups cooperate with non Albanian-speaking associates to gain access to cars and fake documents and to fence their loot.

How do they operate?

The burglars are active five days a week, committing up to 10 burglaries per day, predominantly in the evening and at night. They target houses located close to motorway exits and steal jewelry, small hi-fi, electronic devices and cameras. The burglary teams use a number of (second-hand or stolen) cars shared across the criminal network to get to target locations. Mobile phones are switched off during the burglary.

What is different about these groups and this specific *modi operandi*?

The **role and impact of criminal elements within diaspora communities** is changing from mere facilitation to **coordination and organisation** of the criminal activities. Previously, the main organisers directed these activities from the countries of origin. The rotation of perpetrators, facilitated by abuse of the visa free regime in the Schengen area, makes it increasingly difficult to dismantle these emerging **large and complex networks**.

Group members are adept at concealing their communication and use social media extensively to communicate.