

Migrant smuggling in the EU

February 2016

FOREWORD

Europe has seen an unprecedented increase in the number of irregular migrants arriving in the European Union since 2014. The scale of these migratory flows reached previously unseen heights in 2015. This trend of exponentially increasing numbers of migrants arriving in the EU is set to continue in 2016.

In 2015, more than one million migrants reached the EU. This development has had a profound impact on Europe's criminal landscape. Criminal networks have quickly adapted to this development and substantially increased their involvement in migrant smuggling. More than 90% of the migrants travelling to the EU used facilitation services. In most cases, these services were offered and provided by criminal groups. A large number of criminal networks as well as individual criminal entrepreneurs now generate substantial profits from migrant smuggling.

Criminal networks exploit the desperation and vulnerability of migrants. They offer a broad range of facilitation services such as the provision of transportation, accommodation and fraudulent documents at excessively high prices. In many cases, irregular migrants are forced to pay for these services by means of illegal labour. The scale of this exploitation is set to further increase in 2016.

In 2015 alone, criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling are estimated to have had a turnover of between EUR 3 -6 billion. This turnover is set to double or triple if the scale of the current migration crisis persists in the upcoming year.

Migrant smuggling to and within the EU is a highly attractive business for criminal networks and has grown significantly in 2015. As the fastest growing criminal market in Europe and other regions, this trend is set to continue in 2016.

In tackling the sophisticated international and European migrant smuggling networks generating enormous profits, law enforcement authorities face a significant challenge over the coming years.

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Europol would like to thank all EU MS, partner countries, Frontex and INTERPOL for their contributions.





More than **90%** of migrants are facilitated to the EU, mostly by criminal networks



A highly ATTRACTIVE CRIME: large profits and low risk of detection



MULTIBILLION BUSINESS
Criminal turnover between EUR 3 and 6 billion in 2015



High-quality **DOCUMENTS COUNTERFEITING** is an increasing business for EU criminals

CRIMINAL NETWORKS

The criminal infrastructure of smuggling networks
In 2015 more than 1 million migrants entered the EU. Criminal facilitation services are provided by flexible and loose criminal networks but also by individuals active along the routes and in key transit or destination hubs.



EUROPOL DATA

nearly **40,000** Suspects

12,200 Since 2015

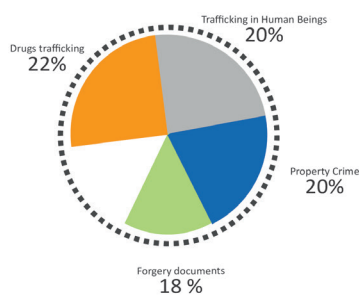
>100 different nationalities

Most common nationalities

Bulgaria, Hungary, Iraq, Kosovo, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Syria, Sweden, Turkey

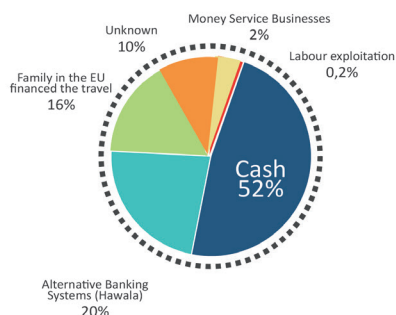
MIGRANT SMUGGLING SUSPECTS' LINKS TO OTHER CRIME AREAS

Source: Europol data 2015



MEANS OF PAYMENT

Source: Europol data 2015



FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

- Migration flows will remain high and may further increase in 2016.
- Criminal networks will continue to exploit the high demand for facilitation services
- Small smuggling networks will gradually be taken over by larger criminal networks.
- A further diversification of the routes is expected, new hotspots in the EU will emerge.
- The demand for high-quality fraudulent identity and travel documents will increase.
- A potential increase in abuse of legal systems for the purpose of status regularisation is expected.
- Forced criminality and labour exploitation will increase.
- Reducing the opportunities for criminal groups will be the main challenge for LEAs.

EUROPOL THANKS EU MS & THIRD PARTNERS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Migrant smuggling routes to and in the EU

In 2015, more than one million irregular migrants reached the EU. More than 90% of these irregular migrants used facilitation services at some point during their journey. In most cases, these services were provided by migrant smuggling networks. Migrant smuggling to and within the EU is taking place on an unparalleled scale and at a record pace. In 2015, the total number of irregular migrants arriving in the EU was almost five times higher than in 2014. In 2016, this trend is set to continue: In the first seven weeks of 2016, more than 84,000 irregular migrants reached the EU.¹

Irregular migrants travelling to the EU primarily originate from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq as well as from Senegal, Somalia, Niger, Morocco and other African countries. In addition to these nationalities, there is also a continuous flow of irregular migrants from Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, China, and Vietnam, albeit to a lesser extent.

Within the EU, the preferred destination countries of these migrants are Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

A migrant's journey takes them from their country of origin through a number of transit countries to their eventual country of destination. Migrant smugglers and other criminals offer a wide variety of often highly priced services throughout this journey. These facilitation services include the provision of transportation, accommodation and fraudulent documents. In many cases, irregular migrants are forced to pay for these services by means of illegal labour.

¹ IOM

Routes crossing the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas currently see the highest number of irregular migrants trying to reach the EU. A significant number of smuggling networks facilitate migrants from Turkey and North Africa to Greece and Italy.

Sea routes

The Eastern Mediterranean entry route: Currently, the largest number of irregular migrants arrives in Greece. From there, migrants travel towards their intended destinations on one of three different routes: transiting through the Western Balkans to re-enter the EU in Croatia and, to a smaller extent, via Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, or by sea towards Italy.

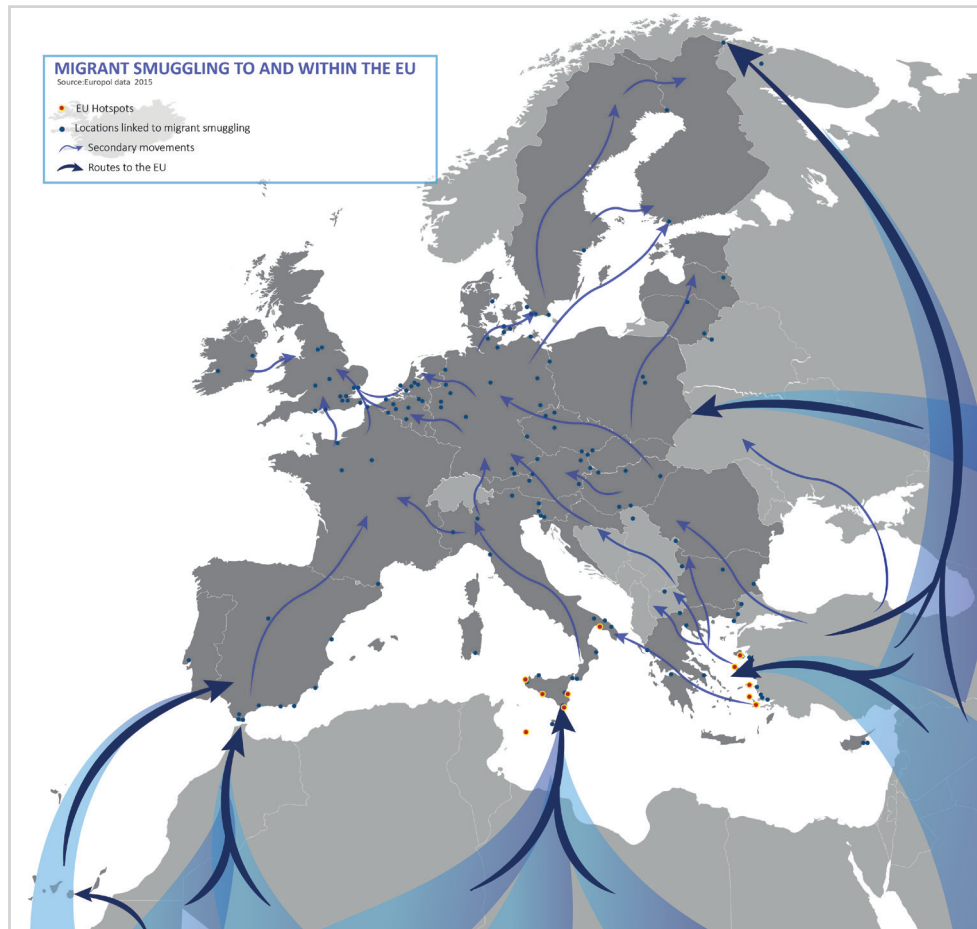
The Central Mediterranean entry route: Italy is second in the EU in terms of the number of irregular migrant arrivals. After arriving in the south of Italy, irregular migrants typically depart from Milan to reach destinations in Northern Europe via Switzerland, Austria and Germany. To reach destinations in Western Europe, migrants travel via France.

Irregular migrants also travel along the Western Mediterranean entry route to enter the EU in Spain. However, this route is less significant than the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean entry routes.

Land and air routes

The Northern route leads irregular migrants to the EU via Russia and then Norway. This route has been used by an increasing number of migrants since the end of 2015.

Few migrants travel on the Eastern entry route, which leads them along the 'Via Baltica' entering the EU in one of the Member States on the Baltic Sea before travelling to destination countries via Poland.



Migrant smuggling by air is currently a less frequent *modi operandi* but is likely to become more attractive in the future due to increased controls on the land and sea routes. It is generally perceived as a safer though more expensive mode of travel which offers high chances of success. Flights can be booked as part of a full travel package either directly from the country of origin to an EU MS or via multiple countries before reaching the destination. Migrant smuggling by air typically includes the provision of fraudulent documents.

Secondary movements in the EU

In most cases, secondary movements take migrants to destination or transit countries in Western and Northern Europe, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden.

The criminal hotspots

Smuggling hotspots are located along the main migration routes and attract migrant smuggling networks. These hotspots may be favourably located along routes where most migrants travel or may feature easy access to transport infrastructures used for illegal facilitation activities.

In and outside the EU, more than 230 locations where illegal facilitation or migrant smuggling take place have been identified. The main criminal hotspots for migrant smuggling outside the EU are Amman, Algiers, Beirut, Benghazi, Cairo, Casablanca, Istanbul, Izmir, Misrata, Oran, and Tripoli.

The main criminal hotspots for intra-EU movements include Athens, Berlin, Budapest, Calais, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hoek van Holland, London, Madrid, Milan, Munich, Paris, Passau, Rome, Stockholm, Tornio, Thessaloniki, Vienna, Warsaw, and Zeebrugge.

The hotspots channel migratory flows, act as pull factors and have grown exponentially in the last years. Migrants gather in hotspots where they know they will have access to services during their travel to their preferred destination.

During their journeys, migrants often stop over in urban or semi-urban areas to work illegally in order to pay their debts to the migrant smugglers or to save money for the next leg of their journey.

Transport infrastructure hubs such as international train stations, airports and stops of long distances coaches are key locations for migrant smuggling activities in the EU. These hubs facilitate the movement of people and function as central locations where criminal groups offer their services including accommodation, fraudulent documents and information on contact points in other countries.

The routes used by irregular migrants will likely further diversify and new hotspots for migrant smuggling will emerge in response to shifting migration flows.

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

2. The criminal networks

Networks and individual criminal entrepreneurs

Europol holds intelligence on more than 40 000 individuals suspected of being involved in migrant smuggling. In 2015 only, information on more than 10 000 suspects was shared with Europol, resulting in 1 551 investigations targeting networks active in the EU. A significant share of these suspects operates as part of criminal networks.

Migrant smuggling is an international criminal business. The suspects reported to and identified by Europol originate from more than 100 countries. The most common nationalities or countries of birth for these suspect are Bulgaria, Egypt, Hungary, Iraq, Kosovo², Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

*44% of the networks are exclusively composed of non-EU nationals
30% are composed of EU nationals only
26 % are composed of both EU and non-EU nationals*

Networks operating in the Scandinavian countries, Belgium and source countries are typically composed of members of the same nationality. The networks active in the rest of the EU are more heterogeneous in their composition.

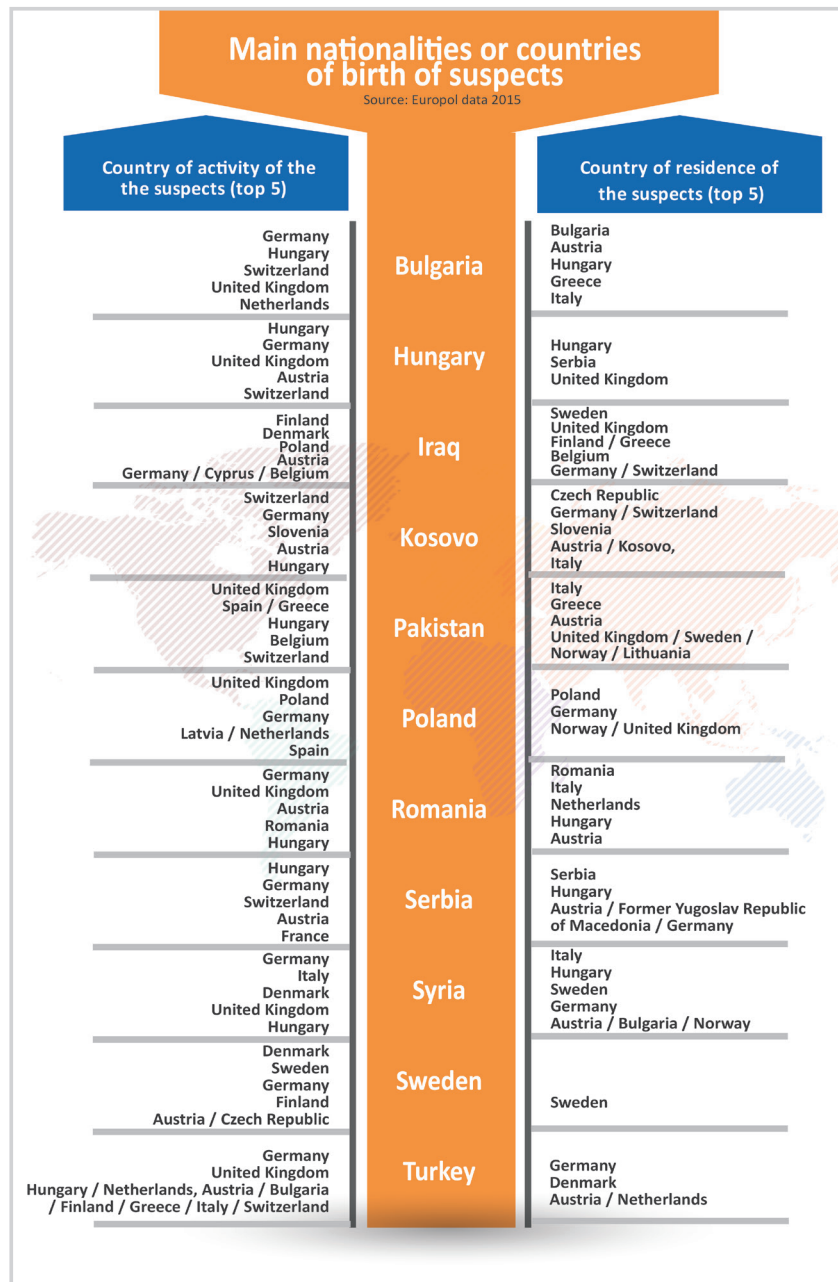
13% of the suspects known to Europol operate in their own country of origin. Most of the groups these suspects belong to feature a homogenous composition. Hungarian and Swedish suspects are most likely to reside and operate in their respective countries of origin. These suspects already live in key migration hubs or destination countries and therefore provide facilitation services "at home".

Some suspects with EU nationality reside in their country of origin, such as Bulgarians, Romanians and Poles, but are primarily active in other Member States, which are typically close to their country of origin or are final destination countries such as Germany,

The Netherlands or the United Kingdom. Most of these suspects work as drivers transporting migrants from Eastern to Western Europe or are members of mobile organised crime groups seeking criminal opportunities in large migration hubs.

Suspects with non-EU nationalities are primarily active in countries of transit or destination. They often work as organisers orchestrating migrant smuggling activities along entire migration routes and are based in the country of destination. In other cases, they act as local coordinators and are located in transit countries.

The table below provides an overview of the top 10 nationalities of the suspects, their countries of activities and their countries of residence.³



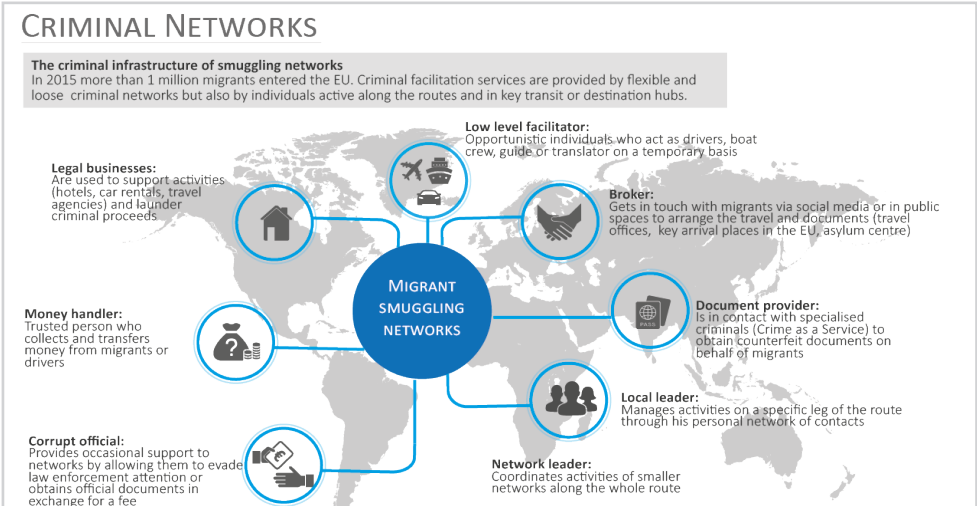
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Networks vary in size. Regional and smaller networks operate autonomously and rely on freelancers who act as drivers, recruiters, document falsifiers or organisers. In many cases,

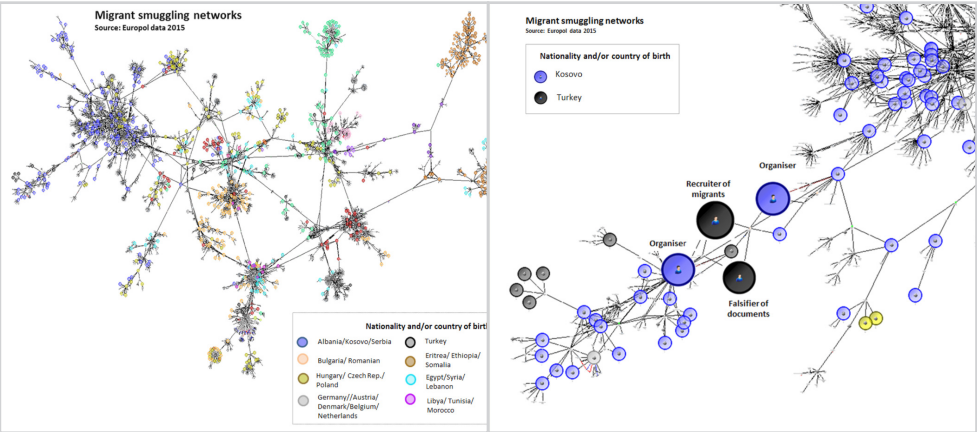
these freelancers provide their services to multiple networks at the same time. Larger networks typically operate at an international level and offer full facilitation packages taking migrants from source to destination countries.

Criminal networks are typically composed of several key individuals. The organiser or leader of the network is usually located in a key migration hub and is responsible for the overall coordination within the network. The leaders of migrant smuggling networks usually operate remotely and only maintain contact with a limited number of core members.

Local or regional leaders set the prices of facilitation services, order transfers, book flights and other carry out other coordination activities. These associates are the heads of smaller cells operating at a local level and are responsible for ensuring travel and other services are provided within their territory before the migrants relying on their services are handed to the next associate along the route. The tasks of these local cells vary depending on the complexity of the network they belong to. The services they provide include buying or renting vehicles, driving forerunner cars, or recruiting and coordinating drivers. The graphic below provides a typology of the key individuals operating migrant smuggling networks.



An in-depth analysis of several networks reveals that smuggling networks' operations are based on a crime-as-a-service business model. Criminal experts in document fraud or recruitment often work for several migrant smuggling networks at the same time. The graphs below show an overview of different networks active in the EU and the roles of the suspects.



Members of migrant smuggling networks typically work autonomously with a number of lower-level contacts who are part of their personal network. Low-level contacts are used as drivers, crew members, scouts, or recruiting agents. These contacts typically operate as part of a network only for a limited time and are exchanged regularly. Migrant smuggling networks are flexible and adapt to changing business demands by relying on auxiliary members as necessary. These auxiliary members act as money handlers, guarantors or forgers. These individuals provide services to the network, but do not form part of networks' core memberships.

The complexity of networks is determined by the length and the degree of risk involved in the routes they service as well as the type of facilitation services offered by them. For instance, air travel usually requires the provision of travel documents and necessitates the involvement of forgers and guides.

Links with diaspora communities

Migrant smuggling networks in source or transit countries exploit ethnic and national ties to diaspora communities across the EU. Facilitated irregular migrants often choose particular destination countries where they will find existing communities with which they share national, linguistic and cultural ties. Established diaspora communities in these countries often offer support networks and opportunities for irregular migrants to prolong their irregular stay in the EU. Members of diaspora communities that are part of migrant smuggling networks provide support in arranging accommodation, travel or employment on the black labour market.

The average age of migrant smugglers arrested in 2015 is 36 years. Migrant smugglers from Syria, Pakistan and Iraq tend to be significantly younger than smugglers from Western Balkan countries or EU Member States. Members of Romanian networks are the youngest among those networks composed of EU nationals. The age of suspects often depends on the role they play within migrant smuggling networks. Romanian suspects arrested in the last year typically acted as drivers. Iraqi, Syrian and Afghani suspects tend to be young irregular migrants themselves and are involved in arranging the facilitation services for fellow nationals.

Social media

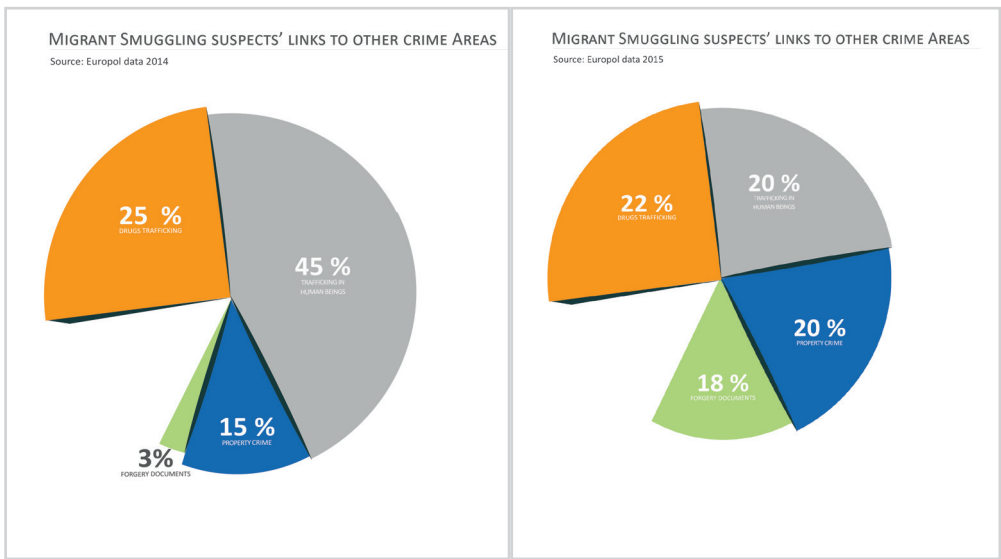
Some migrant smugglers rely on social media to advertise their services. A migrant smuggler's post on his social media page advertised the following services:

"The cost of a package with travel from Turkey to Libya by air and onward sea journey from Libya to Italy costs USD 3,700. For the sea journey adults cost USD 1,000. Three children cost USD 500".

Within the EU, migrant smuggling networks also use social media platforms to recruit drivers. These platforms are also used by migrant smugglers and irregular migrants to share information on developments along migration routes, including law enforcement activities, changes in asylum procedures, or unfavourable conditions in countries of destination. This type of information allows other migrant smugglers to adapt to changing conditions. Migrant smugglers adopt their pricing models in response to developments such as increased border controls by charging higher prices for alternative and safer routes.

3. Links to other crimes and terrorism

Some of the suspects involved in migrant smuggling are also involved in other types of crime such as drug trafficking, document forgery, property crime and trafficking in human beings. Suspects acting as drivers for migrant smuggling networks were typically previously involved in property crime or drug trafficking within the EU. In the case of trafficking in human beings a significant link can be made to labour exploitation or sham marriages or marriages of convenience. In 2015, of the suspected migrant smugglers linked to other types of crime, 22% were linked to drug trafficking, 20% to trafficking in human beings and 20% to property crime.



⁴ UNHCR, 20/01/2016.

Document counterfeiting

The share of suspects linked to the forgery of documents increased significantly between 2014 and 2015. This is a clear indication that document counterfeiting is increasing in the EU. The false documents used by irregular migrants originate mainly from Athens, Istanbul and Syria as well as Asian hubs such as Thailand. Migrants are provided with false documents at the start of their journeys or they receive them during their journey in small parcels sent by facilitators to transit or destination countries.

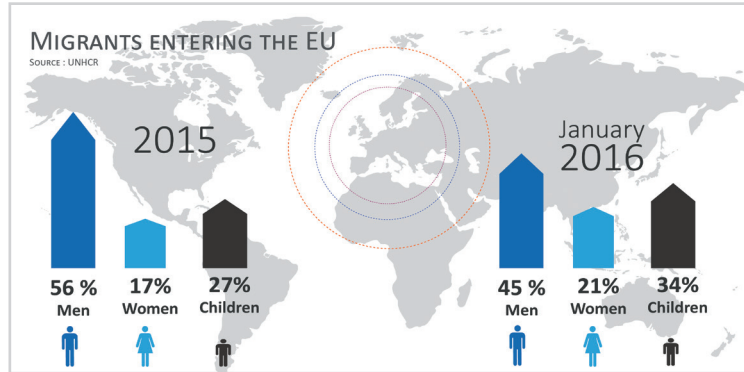
An investigation led to the discovery of a state-of-the-art counterfeiting print shop in Albania, with equipment worth millions of Dollars. The main suspect, who was running the print shop, received orders from migrant smuggling networks to produce false documents on order. The documents were sent via small parcels and couriers. These high-quality documents were provided to irregular migrants in Greece in order to facilitate their further travel into the EU. The suspect cooperated closely with criminal networks in Bulgaria and Turkey. A search of the print shop led to the seizure of thousands of blank visa documents, residence permits, ID cards, security gelatines, passports and driving licenses for various EU countries. Europol (2015)

Trafficking in human beings

In January 2016, 55% of the irregular migrants arriving in the EU were women and minors. This represents an increase of 34% compared to 2015.⁴

A considerable share of the minors arriving in the EU is unaccompanied. These unaccompanied minors travel to and within the EU without a responsible adult. In 2015, 85 482 unaccompanied

minors applied for asylum in the EU. This number is three times higher than in 2014. 50% of these unaccompanied minors were Afghan nationals and 13% had Syrian nationality.



In many EU Member States, unaccompanied minors disappear from asylum or reception centres. In 2015, several networks involved both in migrant smuggling and labour exploitation were dismantled in the EU. The group of people vulnerable for labour or sexual exploitation is increasing, it is expected that these types of exploitation will increase in the upcoming years.

An investigation into a Pakistani criminal network involved in the smuggling of Pakistani migrants to the EU revealed that the group's activities were linked to labour exploitation. Upon arrival in the EU, the irregular migrants facilitated by this network were forced to work in restaurants owned by members of the criminal network in Spain.

Corruption

Corruption is a key facilitating factor for migrant smuggling. Corruption is used at several stages along the migrant journey. In typical cases of corruption, law enforcement officers receive bribes to allow vehicles to pass through border-crossing points unchecked. Other instances involve naval or military officers who receive payments for every migrant or ship they release. Consulate and embassy staff are also targeted by criminals to support immigration applications and provide visas and passports.

Terrorism and violent extremism

The increased flow of migrants trying to reach the EU has raised concerns that migrant smuggling routes and networks are used to infiltrate potential terrorists (e.g. foreign fighters) into the EU. There are also concerns that terrorist organisations rely on migrant smuggling as a source of funding.

In 2015, EU law enforcement authorities identified some isolated cases involving the use of migration routes by terrorist actors. The majority of these incidents involved Syrian nationals or nationals of other Middle Eastern or North African countries. Two of the suspected perpetrators of the Paris attacks on 13 November 2016 travelled to the EU disguised as irregular migrants.

Members of terrorist groups or returning foreign fighters with EU nationality generally rely on genuine and fraudulent documents to travel to the EU and typically do not rely on the facilitation services offered by migrant smuggling networks.

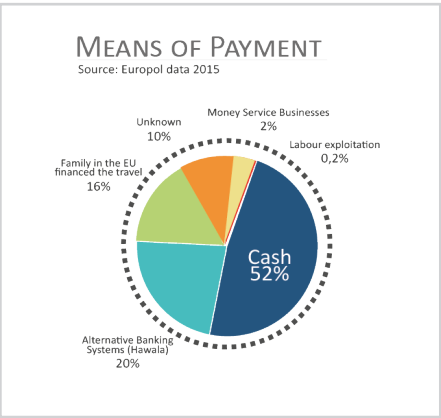
2015 has seen a significant increase in the number of violent attacks targeting migrants in asylum centres and other accommodation. A significant number of attacks on migrants as

well as public disorder and incidents of arson were reported in Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, Finland Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Greece, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom. In addition to direct assaults on migrants and facilities, many protests and anti-protests were organised by right-wing and left-wing extremist groups, sometimes leading to clashes among protesters.

4. Illicit financial flows

Migrant smuggling is a highly profitable business. In most cases, migrant smuggling services require limited investment by the networks involved and are in persistent high demand.

A rough estimate of the yearly turnover of migrant smuggling can be produced by multiplying the approximate number of irregular migrants reaching the EU, most of whom were facilitated, with the average cost of the facilitation services provided by migrant smuggling networks. Overall, the estimated criminal turnover associated with migrant smuggling to and within the EU is between EUR 3 - 6 billion for 2015 alone.



There is only limited intelligence available on the criminal proceeds, illicit financial flows or money laundering processes associated with migrant smuggling activities.

In 2015, less than 10% of the investigations into migrant smuggling activities produced intelligence on suspicious transactions or money laundering activities.

5. The way forward

90% of the migrants arriving in the EU use facilitation services at some point during their journey. In most cases, these services are provided by migrant smuggling networks. Criminals are set to continue to exploit the migration crisis offering facilitation services and expanding their networks of migrant smugglers and associates. These criminal networks also exploit vulnerable migrants as part of labour and sexual exploitation and fraud schemes as well as many other types of crime. The scale of this exploitation is expected to increase significantly over the coming years unless decisive action is taken.

As the European law enforcement agency, Europol plays an essential role in supporting the Member States in tackling these inherently international types of organised crime and protecting European citizens. In response to the escalating scale of the criminal activities associated with migration crisis, Europol has made migrant smuggling one of its key priorities.

Europol has a positive track-record in tackling cross-border crime and providing EU Member States and operational partners with a sophisticated platform for the exchange of criminal intelligence and the coordination of joint operational actions targeting the most serious types of organised crime.

The European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) builds on the experience and expertise in supporting cross-border investigations in the area of migrant smuggling as well as other

forms of serious and organised, cybercrime and terrorism accumulated at Europol over the last decades.

The EMSC will proactively support EU Member States and their operational partners in targeting and dismantling complex and sophisticated criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling.

Given the scale of migrant smuggling, and its centrality to the migration challenge as a whole, leveraging a greater law enforcement response through EMSC is critical to the EU's migration strategy. Success depends, however, on the strong and consistent engagement of Member States and other partners through enhanced information sharing and operational cooperation.



EMSC
European Migrant
Smuggling Centre