

# TWO YEARS OF EMSC

ACTIVITY REPORT

JAN 2017 — JAN 2018



# European Migrant Smuggling Centre

● EUROPOL PUBLIC INFORMATION



**TWO YEARS OF EMSC**  
ACTIVITY REPORT  
JAN 2017-JAN 2018

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# FOREWORD

by Executive Director Rob Wainwright



The launch of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) in February 2016 was a major element of the EU's response to the migration crisis that began to unfold in 2015. The creation of this new Centre was also a significant organisational undertaking for Europol. Challenges included the need to recruit and train new staff in order to have them operational in a short space of time; the development of a new staffing model to allow for short-term deployments to the migration 'hot spots'; and the establishment of working relationships with new partners such as the EU NAVFOR-MED naval mission in the Mediterranean.

We did not allow these diverse challenges to distract us from the core tasks of the EMSC, namely supporting cross-border investigations to disrupt and prosecute organised crime groups. EMSC's operational focus is a good illustration of the wider crime trends we have observed, as reported in the Serious Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) last year. In particular, the three so-called 'engines of crime' have been a particular focus: the online trade in illicit services, document fraud and money laundering.

Regarding the use of online platforms by criminals, devices used by suspects have been a useful source of digital evidence, which national authorities can obtain with technical support from Europol. Furthermore, the EMSC (in cooperation with the EU Internet Referral Unit) has the task of monitoring social media platforms to gather intelligence about organised migrant smuggling activity.

Document fraud is of course a crucial enabler for the organised smuggling of migrants, and an illicit document industry has sprung up in the last three years, largely driven by the demand created by the smuggling gangs. The insights we have gained through the work of EMSC are also helping Europol and the Member States to tackle document fraud in relation to other types of organised crime.

Last, but by no means least, is the issue of money laundering. We know that organised crime groups are generating vast profits from the smuggling of migrants, but these funds are often difficult to trace, particularly beyond the borders of the EU. Europol has strengthened the provision of financial intelligence expertise to support migrant smuggling investigations, and the anti-migrant smuggling objectives of the EU Policy Cycle for International Serious Organised Crime encourage Member States to do likewise.

Fortunately the numbers of irregular migrants arriving in the EU have fallen since 2015, but there are still far too many deaths at sea caused by ruthless and reckless smugglers. Furthermore some of the organised crime groups who have profited from the crisis have established sophisticated criminal networks which remain challenging to disrupt and unravel.

As it enters its third year, the EMSC will need to maintain the levels of agility which allowed it to become operational so quickly in 2016, in order to continue to respond effectively to the rapidly evolving criminal threats.

# FOREWORD

by Head of EMSC Robert Crepinko



Ruthless and violent criminals are increasingly providing smuggling services to irregular migrants to evade border controls, migration regulations and visa requirements. Most irregular migrants resort to the assistance of profit-seeking smugglers. With improved border controls, migrants are deterred from attempting to illegally cross borders by themselves and are diverted into the hands of smugglers who put migrants' lives at serious risk and therefore pose a security challenge to the internal security of the European Union (EU). A pan-European response to efficiently disrupt migrant smuggling activities is still needed and the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) is leading it by strongly supporting EU Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs).

Migrant smuggling continues to represent a highly-profitable business in which criminal syndicates enjoy low risk of detection and punishment. The business model of criminals involved in migrant smuggling is continuously evolving and responding to the dynamics and the needs of the migratory flows impacting the EU. Migrant smugglers are becoming more and more organised, establishing sophisticated professional networks, operating transnationally from source towards destination countries.

According to the vast amount of data and information reported to the EMSC in recent months, targeting migrant smuggling therefore persists as one of the most relevant priorities. These factors highlight the need to continue developing comprehensive and coordinated responses across and between affected continents to efficiently combat migrant smuggling. Adaptable, innovative and agile support to EU Member States in the fight against this serious crime is required in order to face new challenges and that is where the EMSC is investing its efforts and allocating resources.

The results of this report are the outcome of the cooperation between Europol, EU and non-EU law enforcement partners.

# 2017 AT A GLANCE

## MIGRANT SMUGGLING



**12 300**

**SIENA messages**  
contributed to AP  
Migrant Smuggling



**1 700**

**new cases**  
initiated



**32 005**

**contributions containing**  
**references to documents**



**27 075**

**contributions concerning**  
**suspects**



**700**

**contributions containing**  
**social media accounts**



**27**

**Action Days**  
supported by the EMSC



**93**

**high-priority**  
supported by the EMSC



**58**

**operational meetings**  
supported by the EMSC



**338**

**operational analytical products**  
delivered



**60**

**Migrant Smuggling**  
**Monitoring Reports**  
produced and disseminated



**1 240**

**migrant debriefings**  
received via the Frontex PeDRA  
channel and processed by the EMSC



**1 050**

**vessels of interest**  
reported to EMSC's Joint  
Operational Team (JOT) Mare



**1 750**

**days of deployment**  
**of Europol staff**  
to EURTFs in Greece and Italy



**10 000**

**days of deployment of**  
**Europol's Guest Officers**



**45**

**dedicated**  
**EMSC staff**

## TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS



**4 749**

**SIENA messages**  
contributed to AP  
Phoenix



**1 063**

**new cases**  
initiated

# INTELLIGENCE PICTURE

Despite the significant decrease in the number of irregular migrants arriving in Europe, especially when compared to 2015, migrant smuggling remains a profitable and widespread criminal activity for organised crime in the EU.

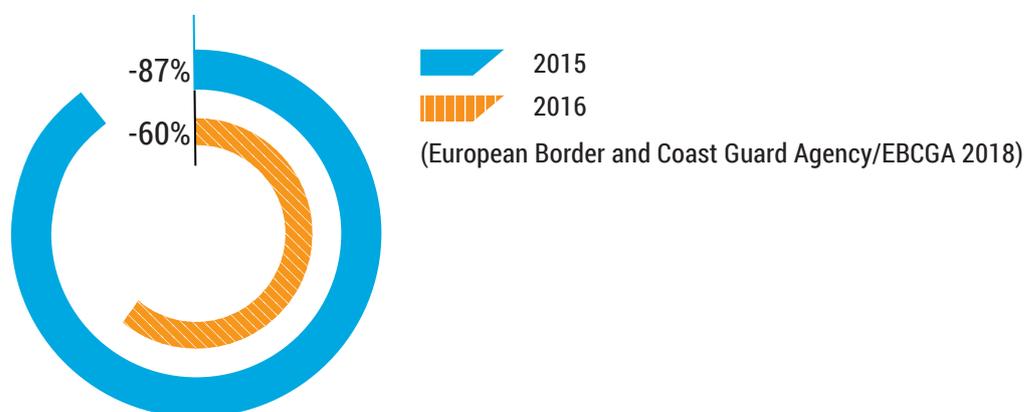
Since the migration crisis in 2015 the migrant smuggling business has established itself as a large, lucrative and sophisticated criminal market.

Facilitators equally continue to concentrate on primary and secondary movements and cater to increasingly diverse target groups, with different final destination countries located within, but also outside of the EU. They offer a variety of tailor-made facilitation services, often including the provision of fraudulent documents and accommodation en route.

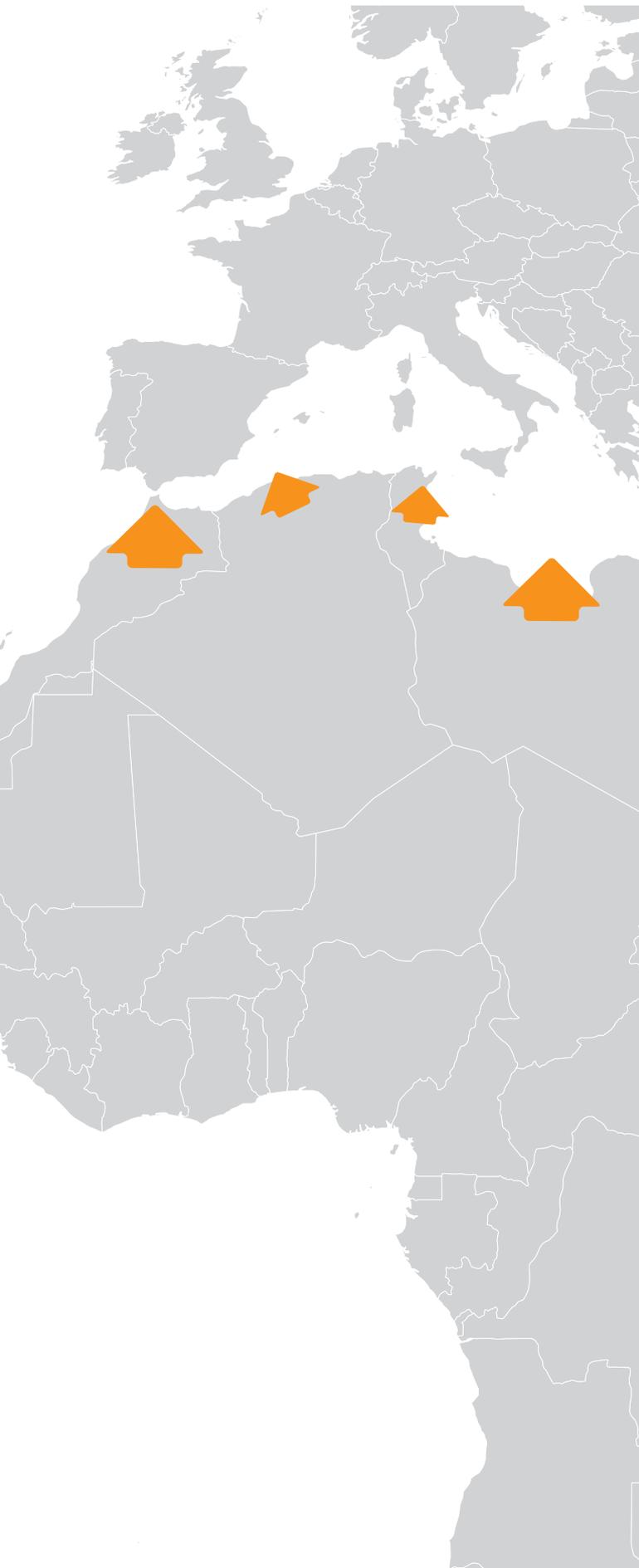
Many different factors, including policy developments, law enforcement activities, as well as budget and travel preferences of irregular migrants, have an impact on the migration routes and modi operandi used by facilitators. Criminals quickly adapt to changes and show great versatility in the means of transport, concealment methods and technologies they use.

## DETECTIONS OF ILLEGAL BORDER CROSSINGS IN 2017

**204,719** ▼



# ROUTES



## CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

On the Central Mediterranean route, Libya continues to be the main departure point towards Europe, with an overall number of **118,962 irregular migrants** detected in 2017 (-34%, EBCGA). However, new departure points have been established in Tunisia and Algeria. Irregular migrants travel mostly from the eastern coast of Algeria to Sardinia. In Tunisia the common departure points are located southeast of Tunis.

This route is primarily used by Tunisian irregular migrants, which so far has not pointed at a displacement effect from Libya, but rather at an increasing push factor within Tunisia.

## WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

The number of irregular migrants on this route more than doubled in 2017, with 23,143 detections comprising mostly of nationals from Morocco, Algeria and Ivory Coast (EBCGA). This upward trend also continues in 2018. In addition to rubber dinghies often being used on this passage, migrants are also smuggled on pateras (wooden fishing boats) or high-speed jet skis, typically used for drug trafficking from Morocco. The poly-criminal aspect, as well as links to previous cases, indicates the involvement of organised crime groups (OCGs).

# ROUTES

## WESTERN BALKANS

Migration routes across the Western Balkans region are often a reflection of increasingly restrictive border control measures or migration/visa policies. One of the common routes leads via Serbia, Romania and Hungary or via Serbia and Croatia onwards to Western Europe. However, the smuggling networks operating in the region quickly adapt to changes and are capable of dynamically shifting the routes. One of the new passages is emerging via Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Smuggling networks are particularly active in places with a high concentration of irregular migrants, such as reception centres and main transportation hubs.

## UK-FRANCE BORDER

OCGs operating in Belgium and France provide smuggling services to migrants attempting to enter the United Kingdom (UK). Major transportation hubs, such as Brussels or Paris, are used for the recruitment of irregular migrants and arrangement of the facilitation services. Albanian OCGs are especially well-established in this region and play an important role in smuggling mostly their own nationals, who constitute a large part of those attempting to reach the UK.

# MODI OPERANDI

## SOPHISTICATED METHODS FOR CLANDESTINE ENTRY

Sophisticated and often life-threatening concealment methods are used by criminals to smuggle migrants across borders. Cases of irregular migrants being detected in purpose-built, airtight compartments, and even spaces behind engines in vans, lorries, cars and cargo trains are increasingly reported to Europol. Smugglers are also strengthening their efforts to evade video surveillance on motorways, not wishing to leave any electronic footprints which may lead to their detection. To do so they put fake number plates on the cars used for migrant smuggling or even place their cars on trailers and instruct migrants to either cross the border on foot or hide in the trailer.

Contrary to hiding irregular migrants, in another case at the Serbian-Hungarian border, smugglers have instructed them to wear the highly visible yellow road vests and pretend to be bus or truck drivers.

## USE OF FRAUDULENT OR FRAUDULENTLY OBTAINED DOCUMENTS

Fraudulent or fraudulently-obtained travel and identity documents are increasingly part of the smuggling package, especially by air, and raise the price of the service. The abuse of genuine documents by lookalikes continues to be a widely used modus operandi. OCGs located in Greece, one of the key entry points to the EU, and Turkey are frequent providers of false and genuine identity and travel documents.

# MODI OPERANDI

## ABUSE OF VISA-FREE TRAVEL

Irregular migrants attempt to enter the EU via non-EU Balkan countries by air, using visa-free travel schemes. Several Balkan countries introduced visa liberalisation for citizens of, among others, China, Guinea Bissau, Iran or Turkey which allows them to enter a country as tourists with the right to stay up to 30 days. This visa-free scheme is often abused and migrants, upon arrival to the Balkan countries, use the opportunity to establish contacts with smuggling networks and illegally travel to countries in Western Europe. For example, since visa liberalisation in September 2017, Serbia and especially Belgrade airport has seen a surge in the number of Iranians who use visa-free travel to Serbia to then enter the EU illegally.

Visa-free arrangements with the EU are also often misused. Non EU nationals use the visa-free scheme to travel to EU Member States for mid to long-term work purposes. OCGs were reported to have facilitated their travel and visa overstay, often by using forged identify documents to register migrants locally. In two recent cases, non-EU nationals were smuggled for the purpose of executing construction works or to act as subcontractors for contractors of a logistics company, in both cases they were provided with forged Romanian identify documents.

## USE OF LEGAL BUSINESS STRUCTURES

Legal businesses, such as travel agencies, in the countries of origin, both transit and destination, continue to be used to support migrant smuggling activities. These channels are also commonly used to launder the proceeds of crime. Investigation into a smuggling gang from Spain revealed that criminals used a travel agency to organise flights, transfers and accommodation using forged passports for Iranian nationals travelling to the UK.

# DIVERSE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION



## LORRIES WITH LARGE GROUPS OF MIGRANTS

Cases of large migrant groups being transported in trucks from Turkey, mostly via Romania towards Germany, continue to be reported. In one case, 40 Syrian and Iraqi migrants were detected in Germany being smuggled in a truck from Turkey via Romania to Poland. From Poland they were transported to Germany in groups of ten in an estate car.



## USE OF LEISURE VESSELS

Leisure vessels, mostly sailing yachts, continue to be used to smuggle migrants directly from Turkey to Italy. On average, 50-60 irregular migrants, commonly Syrians, can be smuggled per boat and the cost is substantially higher, between EUR 2 500 up to EUR 6 000.



## TRAINS

Irregular migrants are also smuggled on board of international freight and passenger trains. The *modi operandi* of the reported incidents indicate the involvement of OCGs operating along the transit routes. Migrants are well-hidden within the transported cargo or in the shipping containers, often with the customs seals left intact.



## SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS ON LIGHT AIRCRAFTS

This phenomenon has re-emerged in different parts of the EU. The majority of reported cases concerned Albanian irregular migrants travelling to the UK from other EU countries, but this *modus operandi* has also been used to smuggle migrants from Greece or Ukraine. Light aircrafts have limited passenger capacity. They depart from small regional airports often lacking the stringent security checks or from undesignated rural areas. One investigation showed that criminals using this transportation method were poly-criminal and involved in poly-drug trafficking and migrant smuggling.

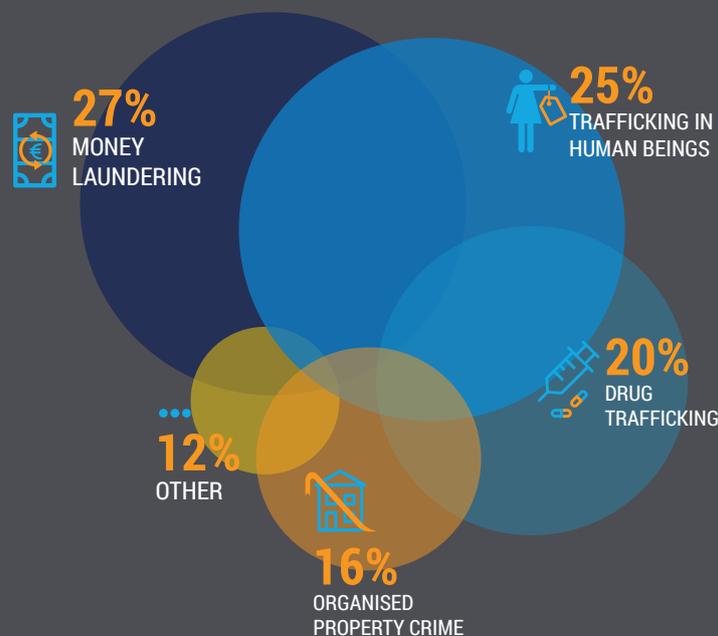
## POLY-CRIMINALITY

The share of the poly-criminal OCGs involved in migrant smuggling and other criminal activities is significant.

**46%** 

OF THE OCGs REPORTED FOR THE SOCTA AS ACTIVE  
IN MIGRANT SMUGGLING ARE POLY-CRIMINAL

### MIGRANT SMUGGLING SUSPECTS' LINKS TO OTHER CRIME AREAS



The reason for the high poly-criminality is related to the nature of migrant smuggling. It is a hugely lucrative criminal business with relatively low levels of risk.

Driven by profits and in response to the sustained level of demand for smuggling services, some OCGs previously involved in other criminal activities have added migrant smuggling to their crime portfolio.

In addition, OCGs that got involved in migrant smuggling do not require sophisticated skills or expertise and can rely on their existing knowledge of routes and infrastructures used for the trafficking of other commodities. For example, the OCGs traditionally involved in drugs trafficking, have recently become active in smuggling of migrants from Morocco to Spain.

Other poly-criminal groups are typically involved in document fraud and migrant smuggling, or have links with THB.

## TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS (THB)

Trafficking in human beings (THB) for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation remains a key threat in the EU. Cases of THB for sexual exploitation are the most predominantly reported. However, with the increased presence of vulnerable groups within the EU, including irregular migrants and asylum seekers, an increase in cases of labour exploitation can be expected. Even though the majority of victims of THB are EU nationals, criminals are also targeting non-EU victims willing to relocate to the EU with the promise of a better life. OCGs involved in THB often exploit existing migratory routes to traffic victims into and within the EU or take advantage of asylum seekers and irregular migrants already present in the EU, gathered in or around the reception centres. Unaccompanied minors are especially vulnerable to all types of exploitation.

## OPERATION AGAINST CHILD TRAFFICKING

During an EU-wide law enforcement operation against child trafficking, coordinated by Europol and supported by Frontex, Interpol and 19 European countries, at least 34 minors and 1 072 adults were found in vulnerable or potentially exploitative situations. 16 suspects of THB were arrested and several links to migrant smuggling, document forgery and drug trafficking were identified. The action was aimed at enhancing the intelligence picture on the phenomenon, safeguarding children and disrupting OCGs' activities. The activities focused mainly on hotspots for sexual exploitation, forced begging and forced criminality, reception centres, and border crossing points. For example, one child was detected arriving at a major international airport using a lookalike passport and accompanied by an unrelated adult who posed as the father. Other examples include an underage migrant in a reception centre who is suspected to have been sexually exploited during the migratory path to Europe and possibly also in Europe.

**115 suspects** were **identified**, **16** of them were **arrested**. Small amounts of drugs, forged documents and mobile devices were seized.

[Europol Press Release, October 2017](#)

## JOINT INVESTIGATION INTO INTERNATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The Spanish authorities, supported by Europol, dismantled a Nigerian OCG which was highly active across several Member States engaged in trafficking Nigerian victims for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The modus operandi comprised the organised recruitment of young, socially challenged female victims from Nigeria and their subsequent transfer to Europe using the dangerous, illegal immigration route via the Central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy.

The women were kept in inhumane conditions and forced to repay a debt of around EUR 30 000, which corresponded to the accumulated expenses for the transfer through irregular immigration networks from Nigeria to Europe, through the Libya-Italy route. Once at the migrant camps in Lampedusa, they were picked up by a member of the criminal organisation who was responsible for moving them to several European countries, including Spain.

Well-known voodoo rituals, specific to Nigerian THB, were used to make victims submissive and ensure that they collaborate and accept their trafficking until the imposed debt was eventually repaid. The criminal proceeds obtained by the OCG were destined to be sent to Nigeria and laundered via the hawala method.

[Europol Press Release, March 2018](#)

# OUTLOOK

Migrant smuggling to and within the EU is likely to remain a key criminal threat. It will continue to be strongly affected by a variety of factors, ranging from legal and political developments to law enforcement activities in the countries of origin, transit and destination. Armed conflicts, economic, population and environmental pressures will continue to act as push factors for irregular migrants travelling to the EU.

In order to fight this crime more effectively, it is important to anticipate the developments of new modi operandi and shifts in the criminal market. Among others, use of advanced technology, especially related to document fraud, increased use of genuine documents by lookalikes, and abuse of visa-free travel are expected to significantly impact the migrant smuggling landscape in the future.

## FACTORS SHAPING MIGRANT SMUGGLING LANDSCAPE IN THE FUTURE:

### ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES

High-quality forgeries of documents

Manipulation of anti-forgery devices and techniques to circumvent biometric checks (fingerprint spoofing, morphing)

Abuse of IT systems used by governments to issue official documents (e-governance)

Illicit trade in documents on Darknet marketplaces and their distribution via post and parcel services

### INCREASED USE OF GENUINE DOCUMENTS BY LOOKALIKES TO ILLEGALLY CROSS BORDERS

### ABUSE OF VISA LIBERALISATION AND OTHER POLICIES AFFECTING FREE MOVEMENT

Agreements between non-EU countries, especially in the EU neighbourhood (e.g. Balkan countries)

Agreements between the EU and non-EU countries

Agreements between other non-EU countries and regional bodies (e.g. Morocco and Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS)

# COUNTERING MIGRANT SMUGGLING

## MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS



**Document fraud** is a key enabler for migrant smuggling.

Fraudulent or fraudulently--obtained documents increasingly provided by smugglers allow irregular migrants to enter and move within the EU, as well as to change from irregular to legalised residence status under false pretences or by using fake identities. Documents can be rented to migrants and re-used for different criminal offences. They are provided to migrants in person but are also increasingly sold online on Darknet marketplaces and via social media platforms and distributed via post and parcel services. The most common type of fraud continues to be:

- Use of high-quality counterfeit (entirely fabricated) documents
- Use of forged (altered/modified) documents
- Abuse of genuine ID/travel documents by lookalikes

In 2017 a third of operational cases supported by the EMSC had a strong document fraud component. Passports, ID cards, residence permits and visas were most commonly detected and seized. The type of documents used depends on different factors, such as the purpose of use, the type of border to be crossed, the level of control and the availability on the market.



### EUROPOL'S RESPONSE

**HORIZONTAL EXPERT GROUP (HEG) ON DOCUMENT FRAUD:** document fraud is a cross-cutting threat and a horizontal priority in the EU Policy Cycle 2018-2021. To ensure consistent implementation of all operational actions related to document fraud across relevant crime priorities, a HEG on Document Fraud was established. It provides expertise and support in all fields of document fraud. A number of actions related to document fraud have been embedded under the Facilitation of Illegal Immigration (FI) EU priority.

**OPERATIONAL SUPPORT:** the EMSC supported EU Member States in operations and high-priority cases related to migrant smuggling and document fraud, either from HQ or through permanent deployments at European Union Regional Task Forces (EURTFs) Greece and Italy and ad hoc deployments by offering expertise, coordinating operational meetings, providing tailored analytical support and cross-checks against Europol databases.

**FORENSIC SUPPORT:** Europol provides forensic support to its law enforcement partners in relation to questioned documents and materials used to produce suspicious documents.

**ON-THE-SPOT TECHNICAL SUPPORT:** a mobile toolkit can be used to provide on the spot technical support and expertise in investigating forged documents and dismantling illegal print shops.

**ENHANCING INTELLIGENCE PICTURE:** Europol provides and disseminates information on trends and modi operandi related to document fraud.

# MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS



**Social media** continues to be widely used to advertise smuggling services.

Criminals employ various marketing techniques, for example offering discounts for additional migrants such as family members or providing entire smuggling packages to include fraudulent travel and identity documents.

Smugglers have become increasingly discreet in their advertising within the last year.

Criminals increasingly rely on popular instant messaging applications to coordinate their illicit cross-border activities and to communicate with irregular migrants.



## EUROPOL'S RESPONSE

**OPERATIONAL SUPPORT:** Europol's European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) cooperates closely with the EMSC in detecting migrant smuggling offers advertised online and providing EU Member States with the necessary operational support to efficiently disrupt migrant smuggling networks operating online. This work enables Europol to increase its investigation capabilities and refer the content posted online for removal, while building strong partnerships with the private sector, especially online service providers.

In 2017 26 social media analysis reports were provided by Europol to relevant stakeholders and as a result an increasing number of operations were initiated.

**JOINT ACTIONS:** to enhance Europol's day-to-day activity, Joint Actions were organised to identify social media accounts which were facilitating illegal immigration and THB. An increasing number of accounts have been referred to social media companies for them to consider closure in line with their terms and conditions.

**REFERRALS:** overall in 2017, 433 pieces of content were detected. 93, 77% of the detected content was referred and successfully removed.

# MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS



Migrant smuggling, like other illicit activities, is profit-driven. Payments for migrant smuggling services are predominantly made in cash or any informal value transfer systems, such as, for example, hawala. Money Service Businesses (MSB) are also frequently used by migrants and facilitators.

The ultimate aim of **financial investigation** is to tackle migrant smuggling business models: how irregular migrants finance their trip and generate a great amount of illicit profit for smugglers.

Parallel financial investigations in the prioritised cases of facilitation of illegal immigration are of great importance and help close intelligence gaps on illicit money flows. They also lead to identifying and confiscating OCG assets. Many migrant smuggling networks operate or invest their criminal gains outside the EU.

Therefore, it is equally relevant to be engaged with source and transit countries outside the EU.



## EUROPOL'S RESPONSE

**COOPERATION WITH PRIVATE PARTNERS:** Europol and the EMSC are strengthening cooperation with private financial partners, including the banking sector and MSBs to improve information exchange on suspicious transactions linked with organised crime, including migrant smuggling.

**PARALLEL FINANCIAL INVESTIGATIONS:** migrant smuggling can serve as a predicate offence to money laundering investigations. Therefore the EMSC works closely with Europol's team responsible for criminal finances and money laundering, national Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) and Asset Recovery Offices (AROs) to support EU Member States in their investigations.

**CRIMINAL FINANCES AND MONEY LAUNDERING** is a horizontal crime threat and a priority in the EU Policy Cycle 2018-2021. As a cross-cutting phenomenon, measures against it have become an indispensable part of the fight against organised crime, including migrant smuggling.

# EUROPOL AND EMSC PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

## ON-THE-SPOT SUPPORT

The EMSC continuously supports EU Member States in their investigations and regularly deploys its European Mobile Investigation/Analyses Teams (EMIST/EMAST) to the field.

## DEPLOYMENT TO EURTFs AND HOTSPOTS

Europol has ensured its permanent presence on the frontline EU Member States most-affected by irregular migration. EMSC staff work in the EURTFs in Piraeus and Catania, whereas Europol's Guest Officers are continuously deployed to hotspots in Greece and Italy. Last year 10 069 days were spent at Greek and Italian hotspots and the EURTFs by Guest Officers.

EMIST/EMAST have provided added value particularly in Greek and Italian hotspots and EURTFs as they deliver regional operational support and serve as a platform to ensure trustworthy relationships with national authorities. At the same time the EMSC cooperates more closely with the Greek and Italian authorities, specifically out of the EURTFs in Piraeus and Catania. This continuous engagement has already led to a number of successful operations supported by the EMSC.

Europol's presence in the Greek and Italian hotspots and EURTFs



## OTHER DEPLOYMENTS



Throughout most of 2017 the EMSC deployed an experienced analyst to the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in Libya. The analyst developed strategic cooperation and prepared the groundwork for future engagement with local authorities in Libya itself and the wider region.

Europol's rotating visiting experts will continue with different deployments to enhance cooperation with third countries.

## JOINT OPERATIONAL TEAM MARE



As part of the EMSC, Joint Operational Team (JOT) MARE continues to collect, analyse and disseminate intelligence products aimed at initiating and/or supporting investigations on migrant smuggling by sea towards destination countries, including non-EU countries like Canada and the USA.

## INFORMATION CLEARING HOUSE



As part of the EMSC's JOT MARE, an Information Clearing House (ICH) has been established. This type of fusion centre cooperation platform aims to improve Europol's intelligence picture on migrant smuggling and to consolidate its support to partner law enforcement agencies, with a focus beyond EU borders on source and transit countries.

The ICH makes effective use of assets and structures already in place, such as existing cooperation with Frontex and INTERPOL as a bridge to third countries. The ICH aims to initiate or further develop cooperation with less-traditional partners not immediately connected to the law enforcement environment – for example, military forces deployed as part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, such as European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Med) and the European Gendarmerie Force (EUROGENDFOR). The above-mentioned partners shall be deployed to Europol/EMSC as part of the ICH. Enhanced cooperation and improved information and intelligence sharing will contribute to detecting and selecting High Value Targets (HVT) more easily and setting up of Operational Task Forces (OTF).

Establishing of the ICH is also a Europol/EMSC-led operational action embedded in the Operational Action Plan (OAP) 2018 on Facilitated Illegal Immigration (approved in COSI on 1 December 2017) therefore the initiative is supported by all Member States as part of the EU Policy Cycle 2018-2021.

## EMPACT

The EU Policy Cycle together with the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) projects and OAPs continue to be the backbone of the EMSC's activities at both strategic and operational levels. The EMSC continuously provides assistance to the EMPACT Facilitated Illegal Immigration platform, its driver and co-drivers, EU Member States' initiatives, ongoing projects, investigations and joint cases.

Europol is a co-driver of the OAP for 2018 in the EU priority Facilitation of Illegal Immigration, led by Austria and Germany with Greece, Italy, Spain and Frontex as co-drivers. In this way, the EMSC fully supports all activities evolving from the OAPs and will take the lead on a number of operational actions.

## JOINT ACTION DAYS 2017

EMPACT operational actions are the backbone of and guide the EMSC's operational and strategic activities. In 2017 the EMSC led and/or participated in a significant number of EMPACT Joint Action Days (JADs) embedded in the Priority of Facilitation of Illegal Immigration. The EMSC will continue to support initiatives coordinated by Frontex and co-led by EU Member States (JAD DUAL) in 2018 as in the past, such as the Global Airport Action Days and Cyber-patrolling Week.



## STRATEGIC SUPPORT

The EMSC regularly produces Europol Monitoring Team (EPMT) reports.

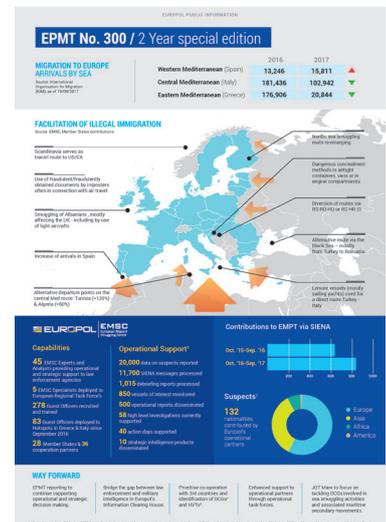
- Weekly updates on trends and developments in the field of migrant smuggling
  - EPMT report issue 300 released in September
  - January issue 316

Active and consolidated participation in the Council's integrated political crisis response (IPCR) run by the Presidency of the Council of the European Union:

- contributes to the weekly integrated situational awareness and analysis (ISAA) reports;
- organises high-level meetings with the EU institutions and agencies;
- regularly meets and takes part in video conferences about the Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes with other EU institutions and agencies.

Monitoring migrant smuggling dynamics:

- Early Warning Notifications /Intelligence Notifications.
  - 10 such intelligence products released in 2017.



## OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Since May 2017 Europol's EMSC has been taking full advantage of the new legal framework. In using the new regulation, the EMSC aims at reaching out to key stakeholders operating in the external domain beyond European borders, specifically source and transit countries, proactively engaging in regional partnerships. Cooperation with the European Commission to further develop EU cooperation platforms on migrant smuggling continued in 2017, as did the reinforcement of close cooperation with INTERPOL by actively supporting and contributing to INTERPOL's Specialised Operational Network (ISON) and strengthening links with the Euromed countries.

Owing to the changing dynamics associated with migrant smuggling and the political tasking emerging from various political instruments connected to the area of security and migration, in line with the dynamic developments on the ground, the EMSC is strengthening its cooperation with and increasing its support to third countries of origin and transit, implementing scoping visits to Joint Investigation Teams (JITs), CSDP missions and regional platforms launched in third countries.

In order to curb emerging and evolving criminal trends, the EMSC is cooperating with military actors like EUNAVFOR Med and working 'upstream' on close relationships with source and transit countries.

The phenomenon of migrant smuggling most definitely requires an inclusive operational and strategic response from all identified partners in countries of source, transit and destination. Since many of the countries that Europol supports in their investigations are destination countries themselves, the EMSC is in a key position to complement existing and active initiatives.

### EMSC and INTERPOL

The EMSC will further support INTERPOL's Specialized Operational Network against Migrant Smuggling (ISON) through EMSC-appointed experts. These experts will bring EMSC capabilities when implementing projects and in turn the EMSC will benefit from the wider global competences of INTERPOL by appropriately accessing data and analytical products.

### EMSC and Euromed Police

The EMSC will continue to support EU initiatives within its outreach area, such as the Euromed



Police IV project. Europol's capacities and expertise will be devoted to the project and recently-created platforms, such as the Europol's Platform for Experts (EPE) to the Euromed Threat Forum practitioners.

### EMSC and Frontex-led AFIC

In response of the challenges associated with migrant smuggling activities on the African continent, the EMSC will continue devoting resources to support relevant initiatives, such as the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC), a consolidated platform for regular knowledge and intelligence sharing in the field of border security between Frontex and African countries where the EMSC is actively participating.



### EMSC and Eurojust

Europol's EMSC and Eurojust are reinforcing their relationship to better combat transnational syndicates operating in the migrant smuggling business. The EMSC operationally supports a wide range of coordination meetings and Eurojust's Joint Investigation Teams (JITs), along with significant Eurojust strategic activities. Europol actively participated and supported the Eurojust-led meeting on migrant smuggling.

## TRAINING AS A KEY ELEMENT

Europol's EMSC regularly delivers training courses to a wide range of actors and practitioners at EU level. Special support is provided for EU training modules and courses developed by CEPOL and other institutions. Focus is given to relevant topics, such as combatting migrant smuggling, financial investigations on migrant smuggling, or the role of Europol in combatting migrant smuggling.

Training activities aim at keeping practitioners (LEAs and judiciary) updated about EMSC tools and actions which enhance cross-border cooperation in countering migrant smuggling, such as EMSC's engagement in the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN) professional training courses on Countering Migrant Smuggling.



## RAISING AWARENESS

Fighting migrant smuggling demands a multi-angle response, including a strong preventive component which should be transnational in nature and focus on source and transit countries. The EMSC supports initiatives which aim to increase awareness among its partners. For example, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) #DeadlyBusiness awareness campaign was recently launched with the support of the Spanish National Police and Europol.

# OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

## OPERATION MAVERICK

Hellenic police, supported by Europol, dismantled an OCG involved in stealing and falsifying travel documents to facilitate third-country irregular migrants throughout Europe. The group stole documents from pedestrians, passengers on public transport and parked vehicles. They then sold the documents, priced them according to their type, the country of issue and matching personal likeness of the original owner. Group members residing in France often relied on international courier companies to send genuine lost or stolen travel documents.

 **7** house searches

 **11** OCG members arrested

 **939** travel documents confiscated (620 of these recorded as lost or stolen in European databases)

 **EUR 30 000** in cash, a vehicle, forgery equipment, fraudulent documents, stamps, receipts for financial transactions and a large number of digital devices seized



## OPERATION MOULTI PASS/TRAUMFABRIK

France, in coordination with Germany and with the support of Europol, dismantled an OCG involved in facilitating irregular migration of Indian nationals, forging official documents and labour exploitation. They used a travel agency in the country of origin to arrange for the migrants' departure to Europe. The agency supplied visas to migrants by sending them to consulates using fake supporting documents. The price for such a service varied from EUR 7 000 for

one person to EUR 25 000 for a family. Once visas were obtained, the network would arrange for the victims to travel to the suburbs of Paris. They were then transported to Eastern Germany, where they were forced to work for a very low pay, overstaying the legal duration of their tourist visa.

 **14** suspects arrested in France and Germany

## OPERATION TAURUS

The investigation, supported by Europol, successfully targeted an OCG engaged in document fraud and migrant smuggling by air from Greece to the UK using falsified documents.



 OCG smuggling migrants by air from Greece to the UK, using falsified documents

 **90** Greek police officers involved

 **23** house searches in Athens

 **20** persons arrested

 **4** fully-equipped print shops, printing and scanning equipment, hundreds of passports, identity cards, certificates, driving licence, boarding passes and stamps seized

## OPERATION HALIFAX

The investigation targeted an OCG led by an Afghan citizen smuggling migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan in specially-adapted vehicles with the UK as final destination.



 Modus operandi: Special concealment hideouts in vans and vehicles

 Use of life-endangering methods

 JIT with Belgium, Bulgaria, France, the Netherlands and the UK, supported by Europol and Eurojust

 **42** house searches across Europe

 **26** arrests

# WAY FORWARD

Over the coming years the EMSC will continue prioritising and further developing its operational support based on emerging threats related to migrant smuggling, in accordance with the current operational realities and requirements from the EU Member States. The EMSC's activities will focus on the identifying, together with EU Member States, High Value Targets (HVTs) and, if necessary, establishing Operational Task Forces (OTFs). The EMSC will provide the necessary support to these processes and will harmonise the use of HVT and OTF concepts for EMPACT activities.

Acting as an information hub on migrant smuggling, the EMSC continues collecting, analysing and disseminating evidence and intelligence with a view to breaking the business model of smugglers, closing intelligence gaps, providing strategic analysis on evolving modus operandi and identifying investigative opportunities. Within this context, the EMSC will reinforce its operational, strategic and analytical support in agreement with the EU Member States, aiming to address specific arising needs.

In line with existing agreements the EMSC will maintain its regular participation in the European Union Regional Task Force (EURTF) and other relevant inter-agency fora, ensuring adaptable and flexible support to Greece and Italy and providing appropriate support to address emerging needs in line with the evolving situation impacting in any other Member State. Europol's Mobile Support Teams (EMST), a relevant and in-demand EMSC tool, will continue supporting EU LEAs, responding to various natures of threats.

The dynamics and numerous challenges of the ever-changing migrant smuggling business model require a comprehensive and active role in third countries.





Following the EMSC's recent experience in deploying an expert in EUBAM Libya, the posting of Europol's rotating visiting experts to key areas will be a significant element within the EMSC's outreach activities to stimulate enhanced information exchange, including cooperation with European Migration Liaison Officers (EMLOs) and Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs).

In parallel and according with its capacities and priorities, the EMSC will support developing and implementing regional initiatives, projects and platforms in key third countries, whether they are led by EU agencies and institutions, international organisations or EU Member States. The objective is to trigger added value and consolidate the EMSC as a supportive entity when identifying and developing relevant operational activities aimed at dismantling criminal organisations which operate in source-transit countries and on EU territory.

In addition to the consolidated activities integrated under the JOT MARE project, as stated within the Malta Declaration and its implementation plan, the EMSC will further develop its recently-launched Information Clearing House (ICH). Through this the EMSC will closely cooperate with its participating stakeholders while assessing the need to involve and initiate contacts with other relevant actors.

The renewed EU Internal Security Strategy, the European Agenda on Security and the EU Global Strategy call for stronger cooperation between CSDP missions and JHA agencies. Establishing Crime Information Cells (CIC) within missions carried out by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the CSDP is expected to further enhance and complement the work of the ICH, bringing the data collection exercise closer to the operational environment in source and transit countries for illegal migration, as outlined in the Malta Declaration.

The ultimate goal of disrupting OCGs involved in migrant smuggling demands maximum engagement from all stakeholders. Europol's EMSC will continue playing a pivotal role in this context.

