

Migrant smuggling: Council approves a set of measures to fight smuggling networks

Press contacts

Verónica Huertas Cerdeira

Press officer

+32 2 281 45 48

+32 470 88 21 99

The EU is cracking down on migrant smuggling.

The EU is cracking down on migrant smuggling. Today, the Council approved a comprehensive and operational set of measures with a law enforcement focus to step up the fight against migrant smuggling networks. This follows a call by EU leaders at their meeting in October.

These measures build on ongoing efforts at EU and national level, for example as part of the EU action plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020). The concrete actions draw on:

- enhanced inter-agency approach both at EU and national level,
- making the best use of synergies between the operational tools available,
- maximising the use of the external assets of the EU,

The objective is to disrupt migrant smuggling networks both inside and outside the EU, taking into account their high level of adaptability and the increased interlinking of different criminal activities (including drug trafficking, money laundering).

Migrant smugglers draw huge financial benefits by exploiting people and putting their lives at risk. EU leaders called for an end to this business model and today we are taking a step forward in this direction. With increased information sharing, coordinated operational actions and cooperation with third countries we want to ensure that smugglers have no space to act.

Herbert Kickl, Minister of the Interior of Austria

Enhancing information flows

The operational and analytical capacities of the European Migrant Smuggling

Center (EMSC) at Europol will be increased, so it can better support member states in migrant smuggling investigations. Deepening and expanding the activities of the Information Clearing House at the EMSC is also envisaged.

A stronger link will be established between front line information and information analysis capacities. Exchanging this information will allow for both an improvement in on-the-spot cross-checking in real time and a strengthening of the assessment of irregular migration to and within the EU.

Strengthening operational tools

The fight against migrant smuggling is one of the priority areas of action of the EU policy cycle to fight crime (EMPACT). Building on the operational results so far, the use of the possibilities provided under EMPACT will be intensified.

Furthermore, a joint liaison task force on migrant smuggling will be established within the EMSC. This task force will provide a platform for multilateral, intelligence-led, coordinated actions against key migrant smuggling threats.

The cooperation on the financial investigation component and the judicial component will also be strengthened.

Operational needs-based training will be further made available by CEPOL for border control units, consular offices and other relevant services.

Disrupting online communications

The capacity of the EU internet referral unit within Europol will be strengthened so as to increase the number of referrals of pages to be taken down by online service providers, as well as to map and disrupt the technical infrastructure used by smuggling networks.

External action

The synergies with EU external action in priority third countries and regions needs to be maximised. This includes strengthening links with CSDP missions and operations and with EU liaison officers in third countries. It also foresees the development of common operational partnerships with third countries, in order to support their law enforcement activities and to improve cooperation.

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