

## **EUROPOL IDENTIFIES 3600 ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS ACTIVE IN THE EU - EUROPOL REPORT WARNS OF A NEW BREED OF CRIMINAL GROUPS EXPLOITING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE INTERNET**

In the most detailed study ever undertaken of its kind in the European law enforcement community Europol has identified an estimated 3,600 organised crime groups currently active in the EU. The EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA), published by Europol today, found that international drug trafficking remains the most active organised crime activity but it also identified the emergence of new criminal phenomena, many linked to the current economic crisis and the internet. These new developments are changing the nature of organised crime towards a model based around a networked community of heterogeneous, international groups.

“A new breed of organised crime groups is emerging in Europe, capable of operating in multiple countries and criminal sectors. These groups are no longer defined by their nationality or specialisation in one area of crime but by an ability to operate on an international basis, with a business-like focus on maximising profit and minimising risk. They are the epitome of our new globalised society,” says Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol.

The 2013 Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) delivers a set of recommendations based on an in-depth analysis of the major crime threats facing the EU. The report draws on significant intelligence collected from law enforcement agencies in the EU Member States, other EU Agencies, and Europol’s own databases. The Council of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers will use the report’s findings and recommendations to define priorities for the next four years.

Based on analysis of the prevailing threats the SOCTA 2013 has identified the crime areas which require the greatest concerted action by EU Member States and other actors to ensure the most effective impact on the general threat. These threats include crime areas that have recently gained significance or were not regarded as priority areas earlier, but now stand out against other crime threats because of their impact on society. The priorities identified in the report are:

- Facilitation of illegal immigration
- Trafficking in human beings
- Counterfeit goods with an impact on public health and safety
- Missing Trader Intra Community (MTIC) fraud
- Synthetic drugs production and poly-drug trafficking in the EU
- Cybercrime
- Money laundering

The conditions of the current economic crisis and resulting changes in consumer demand are fuelling a shift in serious criminal activity. Reduced consumer spending power has inspired counterfeiters to expand into new product lines such as commodity counterfeiting, illicit trade in sub-standard goods and goods violating health and safety regulations. In addition to the traditional counterfeiting of luxury products, organised crime groups are now also counterfeiting daily consumer goods including foods and medical products. The increased production and distribution of these goods have significant implications for public health and safety.

Meanwhile other forms of economic crime, especially fraud, have grown in scale and impact. Missing Trader Intra Community (MTIC) fraud, which derives from a manipulation of the VAT tax regime, is responsible for the loss of billions of Euros each year in the government revenues of Member States, illustrating the extent to which organised crime harms the economy.

“The fight against organised crime has big implications for the EU’s ability to secure an effective economic recovery. Through a recent expansion of the ‘black market’ and notable developments in fraudulent activity

criminal groups are denying governments, businesses, and citizens billions of Euros each year in lost tax receipts, profits, and private income. Stronger action is needed in the EU to close down these criminal activities and protect our economic base," says Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol.

The internet is also a major driver of criminal activity, enabling organised crime groups to access a large pool of victims, obscure their activities and carry out a diverse range of criminal acts in a shorter period of time and on a much larger scale than ever before. The spread of the internet and technological advances have caused significant shifts in crime areas and the pattern of criminal activity.

The SOCTA 2013 report is Europol's flagship product providing information to Europe's law enforcement community and decision-makers about the threat of serious and organised crime to the EU. The report exists in two versions a restricted for law enforcement and a public version which is available in [our publications section](#).

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