

Europol: Environmental Crime Threat Assessment 2022



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News

On 27 June 2022, Europol published a new [report assessing the environmental crime threats](#) targeting the EU.

In three main chapters, the report looks at the criminal networks involved in environmental crimes, the main typologies of environmental crimes investigated in the EU, and the impact of other organised crime activities (such as illicit drug production, counterfeiting, and fraudulent schemes) on the environment. Main typologies of environmental crimes include:

- Waste and pollution crimes;
- Wildlife trafficking;
- Illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing;
- Other environmental crime phenomena such as forestry crimes and illegal pet trade.

In the field of wildlife trafficking, the report points out that the EU is functioning as a hub for global wildlife trafficking. Accordingly, the EU is the main destination for trafficked wildlife as well as a point of origin for endemic wildlife trafficked to other continents. Regarding waste crimes, the report finds that EU criminal networks are increasingly targeting central and eastern Europe to traffic illicit waste produced in Western Europe.

Looking at the incentives for criminal networks to get involved in environmental crimes, it is concluded that opportunities for high profits, legal discrepancies among countries, low risk of detection, and marginal penalties make environmental crime an attractive business for criminals. The infrastructure used by criminal networks to operate such crimes is based on three pillars, i.e. the extensive use of document fraud, the abuse of discrepancies in legislation, and corruption. For the laundering of their illicit proceeds, criminals mainly use the same legal businesses in which they operate. Green investments, certificate and emission trading systems are increasingly subject to fraudulent activities. Overall, the report finds most environmental crime actors as opportunistic legal business owners/operators who decide to increase their chances of profit by establishing a criminal venture. Given that such a large part of the criminal activities is carried out by legal businesses, identifying the criminal networks behind environmental offences is one of the main challenges for law enforcement.

Looking ahead, the following aspects are seen as key for law enforcement to keep up with environmental criminals:

- Increasing the respective budgets;
- Developing specialised environmental units in every EU Member State;
- Filling technical knowledge gaps.

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The report pays special attention to climate change, which functions as a push and pull factor for organised crime. The increasing scarcity of natural resources will likely trigger organised crime interests in terms of profit over their future allocation.

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