Europol Report on Changing Patterns of Museum Theft

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On 24 August 2026, Europol published a new spotlight report looking at changes in the methods used and objects targeted in thefts from museums across Europe. Under the title "Changing tactics, changing targets: the evolving nature of museum heists", the report finds that museum theft is increasingly characterised by violent and forceful methods, including the use of sledgehammers, explosives, and firearms to gain access to premises or to intimidate staff.

Offenders are increasingly targeting high-value objects such as precious metals, gemstones, and culturally significant artefacts, which offer high returns on illicit markets. The report also points to changes in the profiles of the offenders involved. In addition to criminals traditionally associated with cultural property trafficking, Europol notes the involvement of ad hoc groups, including persons recruited through social media. Criminals active in other illicit markets may also be turning to museum theft because of the perceived combination of relatively low risk and high profits.

The findings are illustrated by recent cases, including the theft of Dacian artefacts in the Netherlands in 2025, the Louvre heist in France in 2025, and the attack on the Cognacq-Jay Museum in France in 2024. Europol supported the respective national investigations with property crime experts at its European Serious and Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC).

The report concludes that the changing nature of museum theft requires law enforcement authorities to look beyond traditional cultural property trafficking and take into account links to other areas of organised crime.

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