

Europol's SOCTA 2021



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News

On 12 April 2021, Europol published its [Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment \(SOCTA\)](#) for the year 2021. According to the SOCTA 2021, serious and organised crime remains a key threat to the internal security of the EU, affecting and undermining all levels of society from the daily lives of EU citizens to the economy, state institutions, and the rule of law. Criminal networks appear to have similar structures to those of business environments, including managerial layers and field operators as well as a variety of actors providing support services. One of the key characteristics of criminal networks is their ability to adapt to changes. This became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, with criminals quickly adapting their illegal products, *modi operandi*, and narratives to the unprecedented situation.

Cooperation between criminals is fluid, systematic, and driven by a profit-oriented focus. Additionally, the use of violence is increasing in terms of frequency and severity. Corruption is a feature of nearly all criminal activities in the EU, and money laundering is key to facilitating criminal profits. Furthermore, criminals control or infiltrate legal business structures in order to expedite their criminal activities. The use of modern technology is another key feature of serious and organised crime, as it helps criminals to network amongst themselves, to reach a larger number of victims, and to gain access to illegal tools and goods. The report finds that over 80% of the reported criminal networks are involved in drug trafficking, organised property crime, excise fraud, trafficking in human beings (THB), online and other forms of fraud, and migrant smuggling.

The trade in illegal drugs continues to dominate serious and organised crime in the EU in terms of the number of criminals and criminal networks involved as well as the vast amounts of criminal profits generated. While cocaine trafficking is generating multi-billion-euro profits, which are used to infiltrate and undermine the EU's economy, public institutions, and society, criminal networks are also increasing their capacities for the production and distribution of synthetic drugs. Furthermore, cyber-dependent crime has been increasing constantly in terms of both number and sophistication of attacks. This is also evident in the area of THB, where recruitment of victims and advertisement of services have moved almost entirely to the online domain. The report reports a steady increase in activities related to online child sexual abuse. The market for migrant smuggling services has remained constant. A high number of incidents in the field of organised property crime and a growing number of environmental crimes have also been observed.

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