

Impact of COVID-19 on Serious and Organised Crime

Cornelia Riehle

News

On 27 March 2020, Europol published a [report on exploitation of the COVID-19 pandemic by criminals](#). The report, which aims to support EU Member States' law enforcement, looks at the impact of measures taken by governments against the COVID-19 crisis on serious and organised crime. The report analyses the impact of the crisis in four key areas: cybercrime, fraud, trafficking in counterfeit and substandard goods, and organised property crime. Furthermore, it takes a brief look at other criminal activities.

In the area of cybercrime, the report sees a further increase in the number of cyberattacks involving various malware and ransomware packages themed around the COVID-19 pandemic. The threat of cyberattacks against critical health infrastructure is seen as a major risk.

According to the report, a large number of new or adapted fraud and scam schemes is expected to emerge. Investment scams seem to be being adapted to elicit speculative investments in stocks related to COVID-19. One special form involves supply scams attacking businesses providing supplies to prevent COVID-19, e.g., protective masks. With regard to counterfeit and substandard goods, the report notes a booming market in the pandemic economy, especially with regard to medical products.

As far as organised property crime is concerned, the report finds criminals' *modi operandi* being adapted to already existing schemes involving theft, e.g., the impersonation of relatives or authorities (faking and entering) in 'Corona' situations.

Lastly, looking at other criminal activities, the report finds it difficult to assess the short-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the drug trafficking market, but anticipates that supply shortages will translate into increased drug-related violence between rival suppliers and distributors.

The demand for migrant smuggling services may increase, with new movements being undertaken to circumvent the enhanced border control measures. Sexual exploitation may increase due to the closure of establishments offering legal sex work.

The report is based on information received by the EU Member States on a 24/7 basis.

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