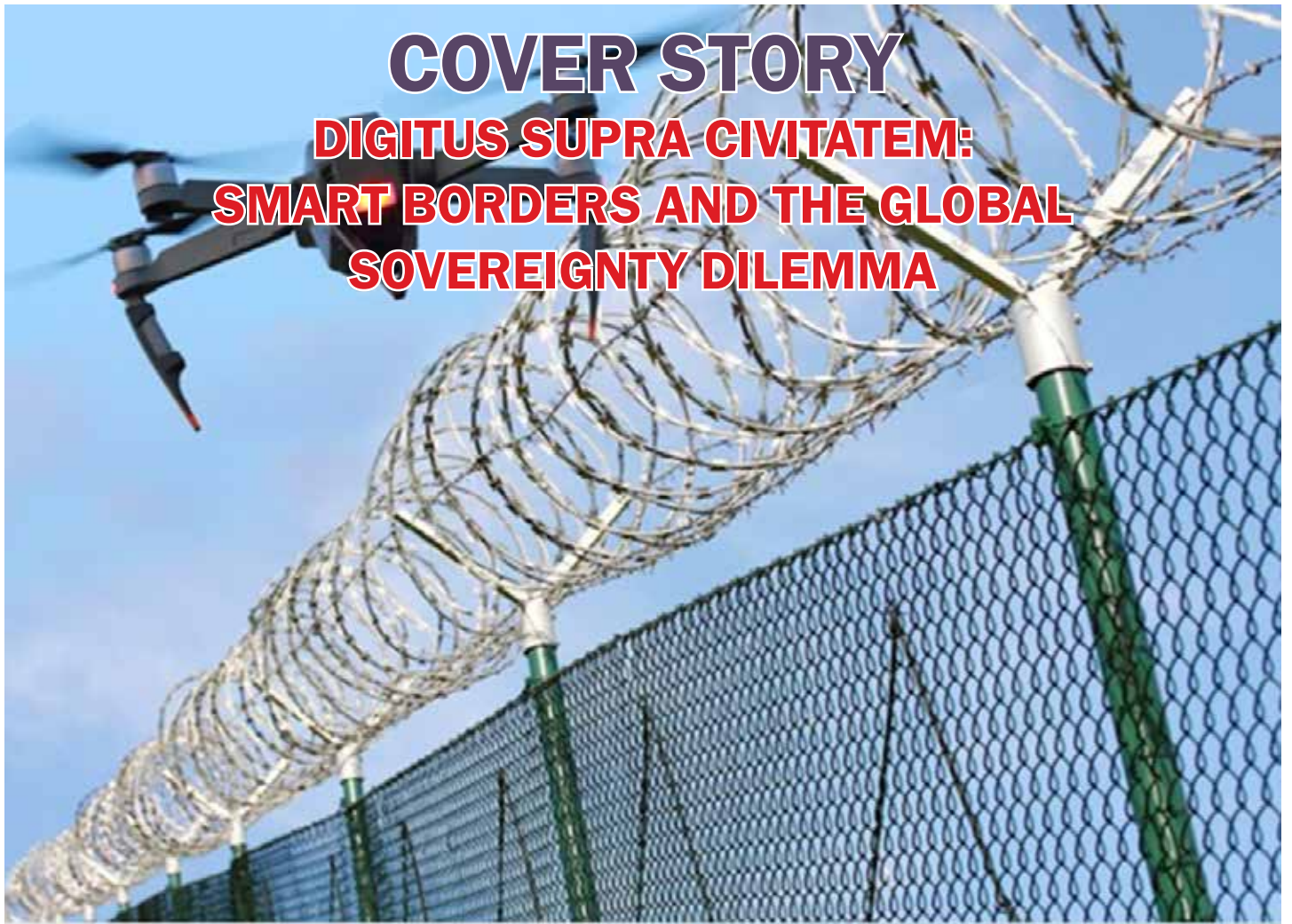


BORDER SECURITY REPORT

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THE JOURNAL OF BORDER SECURITY AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME FOR THE WORLD'S BORDER
PROTECTION, MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY INDUSTRY POLICY-MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

COVER STORY DIGITUS SUPRA CIVITATEM: SMART BORDERS AND THE GLOBAL SOVEREIGNTY DILEMMA



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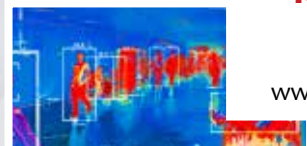


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SAVE THE DATES

Austria's border security faces a complex set of challenges, largely stemming from its geographical location and its participation in the Schengen Area. A primary concern is managing irregular migration flows, which fluctuate significantly due to geopolitical instability in various regions. This puts pressure on Austria's capacity to effectively screen and process asylum seekers.

The inherent nature of the Schengen Area, while facilitating free movement, also presents vulnerabilities. The potential for secondary migration, where individuals move from one Schengen state to another, necessitates close cooperation with neighbouring countries. However, differing national policies and capacities can complicate these efforts.

Furthermore, the rise of transnational crime, including human trafficking and smuggling, adds another layer of complexity to border security. Austrian authorities must balance the need for stringent controls with the imperative to uphold human rights and international obligations.

The evolving security landscape, with threats such as terrorism and hybrid warfare, also requires constant adaptation of border security measures. This necessitates investment in advanced surveillance technologies and enhanced intelligence sharing. The need to maintain public confidence in border security, while respecting the principles of open borders within the EU, creates a delicate balancing act for Austrian policymakers.

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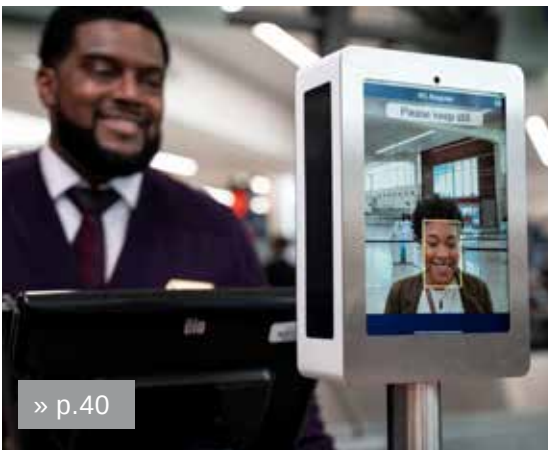
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Schengen Teetering on the Edge



The Schengen Area is currently facing significant threats to its future due to rising migration pressures and security concerns. Recent developments have put the very principles of the Schengen Agreement under scrutiny, with countries like Poland and Germany reinstating border controls in response to the escalating migrant crisis.

Poland's border control measures, reinstated amid a growing influx of migrants, have sparked considerable debate. In the first week of these controls, Polish authorities deployed thousands of officers and soldiers who checked over 100,000 individuals, denying entry to just 60 people. This move came in the wake of a surge in migration, particularly from Belarus, where many migrants are reportedly being pushed towards the European Union. These actions have drawn criticism from various international organizations, which argue that such measures could violate asylum rights and international law.

Germany, facing its own migration challenges, has also reinstated border controls with Poland and other neighbouring countries. This decision has been framed by some as a

necessary step for national security, yet it raises concerns about the erosion of the Schengen principles. Critics argue that these unilateral actions reflect a growing trend among EU member states to prioritize national interests over collective agreements, potentially leading to a fragmented approach to border management.

The Schengen Area's integrity is further threatened by political pressures within member states. French President Emmanuel Macron has faced criticism for his handling of migration issues and the perceived rigidity of the current Schengen framework. Some political figures, such as Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, argue that these developments signal the potential end of the Schengen system as countries increasingly resort to border controls in response to domestic pressures.

In light of these challenges, the European Union has proposed the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), aimed at enhancing security and streamlining travel within the Schengen Area. However, the effectiveness of such measures remains to be seen, especially as member states grapple with the delicate balance between ensuring security and maintaining the open borders that have long defined the region.

As migration flows continue to rise, the future of the Schengen Area hangs in the balance. The ongoing debates around border controls and asylum rights indicate a pivotal moment for European unity and the principles that underpin the Schengen Agreement.

Tony Kingham
Editor

EU migration trends and policy changes revealed in new report



The European Migration Network (EMN) published a comprehensive overview of asylum and migration trends in the EU. The 2024 EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (AMO), accompanied by a Statistical Annex developed by Eurostat, provides an in-depth analysis of key developments in EU migration and asylum policy during 2024.

The report highlights a significant turning point in EU migration policy, with the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, set to apply from June 2026. The Pact introduces a more coordinated framework for managing migration across the EU. Other notable developments include the revised Schengen Borders Code, the recast Single Permit Directive, and the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive.

Key findings

According to the report, first-time applications for asylum decreased by 13% across the EU and Norway in 2024, with the majority of applicants coming from Syria, Venezuela, and Afghanistan. The report also notes that international protection remains a key area of national and EU-level policy developments, with many countries implementing measures to improve the efficiency and fairness of international protection systems.

The EMN AMO 2024 also explores the use of digitalisation and technology in migration, asylum, and integration, including the processing of applications, issuing residence permits, and providing integration information through apps and portals.

Background

The European Migration Network (EMN) is a network of migration and asylum experts consisting of 35 National Contact Points in EMN Member and Observer Countries, the European Commission, and EU Agencies. Its aim is to provide up-to-date, objective, and reliable information on migration and asylum issues to support policymaking and public debate.

The EMN annual report is based on contributions from 30 National Contact Points, as well as statistical contributions from additional EMN Observer countries and EU-level sources, including Eurostat statistics. It offers a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and the general public, seeking to understand the complex issues surrounding migration and asylum in the EU.

The European Migration Network Asylum and Migration Overview (AMO) is produced in accordance with Article 2(1)(d) and Article 9(1) of Council Decision 2008/381/EC establishing a European Migration Network. The AMO name is updated for the 2024 edition, to better distinguish it from the European Annual Asylum and Migration Report (EAAMR), to be issued by the European Commission under Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 (AMMR) by 15 October 2025. The EMN AMO does not include reporting related to the Pact on Migration and Asylum but retains the structure and content of previous annual reports from the European Migration Network.



DIGITUS SUPRA CIVITATEM: SMART BORDERS AND THE GLOBAL SOVEREIGNTY DILEMMA

*By Adnane KAAB, International
Strategy Analyst (IRIS, Paris) and
former senior officer in the Royal
Moroccan Air Forces*

Across the globe, governments are investing in “smart borders” to address the rise of terrorism, illicit trafficking, irregular migration, and digital-age vulnerabilities. These technologies—ranging from biometrics and AI-driven analytics to integrated surveillance networks—offer the promise of enhanced control and real-time responsiveness. But

their adoption also raises strategic questions about sovereignty, digital dependency, and civil liberties.

Nowhere are these tensions more visible than in West Africa, where transnational security threats and fragile governance structures intersect with ambitious modernization programs. Countries in the region are turning to advanced

border management systems—often backed by foreign donors and private vendors—as a way to assert control and enable regional integration. Yet, in doing so, they risk importing vulnerabilities that could ultimately undermine their autonomy.

This article explores the global implications of smart border systems by focusing on developments in West Africa as a regional case study. It is structured in three parts: the first outlines how smart borders are emerging in the region; the second probes the strategic risks they introduce; and the third offers a policy path forward for states aiming to innovate without surrendering control.

Smart Borders: Global Model, African Testbed

Biometric terminal in use at an African airport, representing the integration of advanced technologies in border control.

The concept of “smart borders” emerged in the early 2000s, shaped by global security realignments following the 9/11 attacks. It was institutionalized notably through the European Union’s Smart Borders Package (2013) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s bilateral agreements with Canada and Mexico. These frameworks laid the foundation for border management strategies built on automation, surveillance, biometric identification, and integrated data platforms.

While rooted in the Global North, the smart borders model



has progressively influenced African border governance. At the continental level, the African Union has embraced the digital transformation of border management as part of its Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030). This initiative encourages the adoption of biometric systems, interconnected databases, and smart corridors to support trade facilitation and mobility governance within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

At the regional level, institutions like ECOWAS have advanced the operationalization of smart border components through the ECOWAS Biometric ID Card (E-BID) and the WAPIS police information-sharing platform, developed in partnership with INTERPOL. These tools aim to reconcile free movement protocols

with stronger regional security coordination.

In West Africa, the uptake of smart border technologies is driven by the urgent need to address persistent transnational threats. Governments increasingly view digital infrastructure as a strategic solution to enhance national security and operational control.

Senegal has adopted a “single window” platform for customs operations and invested in drone-based surveillance and non-intrusive scanning systems at key entry points.

Côte d'Ivoire, though primarily focused on urban security, has extended surveillance technologies such as facial recognition and high-definition video systems—installed with assistance from Huawei—into areas relevant to cross-border control.



Modern border post in Africa, illustrating the connection between territory, identity, and technology.

Nigeria has launched multiple modernization programs involving electronic surveillance and biometric systems, often in collaboration with INTERPOL and the IOM.

Mauritania, while not yet a full adopter of smart border frameworks, is upgrading border posts such as Gogui through EU and IOM partnerships, laying the groundwork for future integration.

While these developments illustrate progress, they also introduce new concerns: data privacy, foreign dependency, and digital insecurity. The suspected cyberattack on Europe's power grid underscores how digital infrastructures, once interconnected, become potential targets. This dilemma—between innovation and sovereignty—frames the next section.

Sovereignty for Sale? Global Risks, Local Vulnerabilities

While smart borders promise enhanced control and operational efficiency, they also present new forms of vulnerability. As countries deepen their reliance on foreign technologies and external funding, they risk compromising long-term sovereignty and resilience.

A core challenge lies in technological dependence. Systems deployed across West Africa—from biometrics to data storage—are often designed, hosted, or maintained by foreign providers. In Côte d'Ivoire, facial recognition infrastructure installed via Huawei raises questions over data ownership and system integrity. Similar dependencies are observed in Nigeria, Senegal, and Mauritania, where donor-funded projects are operational but externally maintained.

As reliance grows, so does the exposure to cybersecurity threats. The recent cyberattack on Morocco's National Social Security Fund (CNSS), involving a major data leak on Telegram, illustrates the risks faced even by robust national agencies. When coupled with the suspected disruption of Europe's power grid, it becomes clear that digital border infrastructures may be targeted in future geopolitical escalations.

Compounding this is the absence of modern legal protections. Many states lack updated legislation on data protection, surveillance oversight, or biometric governance. Without legal safeguards, border technologies can be repurposed for political control, undermining public trust.

Fragmentation also hinders progress. Despite ECOWAS efforts, national systems remain siloed, limiting regional coordination and interoperability. In this fragmented environment, smart borders may function more as isolated experiments than integrated security solutions.

Retake the Controls: Principles for Sovereign Digital Border Governance

Navigating the tension between innovation and sovereignty requires strategic reorientation. The goal is not to reject technology but to govern it deliberately.

A foundational step is to build national cybersecurity and data governance strategies. Legal clarity on data ownership, auditability of foreign tech partnerships, and national control over biometric data are essential.

Parallel to this, investing in local expertise is crucial. Reducing dependency on foreign vendors requires training engineers, data analysts, and customs officials. Leveraging open-source tools can improve flexibility and reduce long-term costs.

However, national efforts alone are not sufficient. Regional harmonization through ECOWAS and the African Union is necessary to align legal frameworks, enable system interoperability, and strengthen collective bargaining power.

Just as important, smart borders must be developed within a rights-respecting framework. Technologies should not be tools for repression. Independent oversight bodies, civil society engagement, and legal accountability must accompany digital deployments.

Finally, resilience must include anticipation of unconventional threats. Cyber incidents like the CNSS breach in Morocco reveal how critical infrastructure can become a vector for destabilization. Scenario planning, incident response capacity, and regional intelligence sharing should be part of every smart border strategy.



In conclusion the promise of smart borders lies not merely in their technological sophistication, but in their potential to recalibrate the delicate relationship between state authority, regional solidarity, and the movement of people in an increasingly uncertain world. These systems—if thoughtfully conceived and sovereignly managed—can serve as powerful instruments for peace, economic integration, and the protection of national and human security alike.

Yet, the allure of innovation must not obscure the deeper stakes at play. A border is never just a line—it is a mirror of the state's values, its capacity for governance, and its contract with society. In delegating core functions to foreign-built platforms or opaque digital architectures, governments risk trading one form of vulnerability for another—less visible, more insidious, and perhaps more difficult to reclaim. To embrace technology without losing sovereignty, to protect borders without



compromising freedoms, to integrate data systems without dismantling democratic oversight: these are not simply technical questions—they are profoundly political choices. They require vision, courage, and above all, the humility to ask not only how we secure our borders, but for whom, and to what end.

In the final analysis, the challenge before any region embracing smart borders is not whether it will be more secure, but whether it will be more sovereign in the process.

And so we must ask, in the digital age : Can a nation truly control its borders if it no longer controls the code that governs them?

EU and UN cooperate on combatting trafficking in human beings



the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Diane Schmitt, and the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), which was mandated by the UN General Assembly, discussed emerging trends, challenges, and priorities in a meeting aimed at improving coordination among UN agencies and

other international organisations to combat human trafficking.

Main topics included trends on trafficking in human beings, especially in and from Latin America, as well as the link between the revised EU Anti-Trafficking Directive and the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

. The victims from Latin America are among the key trends observed in the European Union. Overall, most victims in the EU are now non-EU citizens.


The participants stressed the importance of international cooperation in tackling the global challenge of trafficking and agreed to continue cooperation on issues of common interest through Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons and bilaterally between the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and Inter-Agency Coordination Group members and partners.




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AMERICA'S TOUGH STANCE AGAINST THE CARTELS WILL IMPACT EUROPE AND ITS PORTS

By Michael W. Brown, Global Director of Counter-Narcotics Technology, Rigaku Analytical Devices

America's approach to Mexican drug cartels changed when President Trump signed an Executive Order designating certain cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), and the subsequent hardening of the US/Mexico border. Following the order, the House Committee on Homeland Security called on law enforcement to more actively address threats on US soil from violent Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) like Tren de Aragua, the largest criminal organization in Venezuela. The committee also requires the US

to enhance its efforts in foreign countries to thwart international drug trafficking and human smuggling, creating an opportunity for Europe to optimize its drug enforcement operations.

The modification of the US approach is something the European counter-narcotics agencies and port authorities must be aware of as it changes the game for the cartels, especially their leadership. Apart from being drug dealers and facing the often-restricted opposition from America's law

enforcement operations, as FTOs, their operations become a national security concern, and the charges they face in the United States are far more severe. The leaders of the cartels, therefore, do not want to be extradited to America, as they know they face spending the rest of their lives in a maximum-security prison.

The cartels' American connections are also reticent to openly support these organizations in the future, as the FTO designation implies they can face charges as domestic terrorist proxies according to 18 U.S.C. 2339A and 18 U.S.C. 2339B. These federal statutes address providing 'material support' to terrorists, which does not require that they have the same 'specific intent' as the terrorist, but only that they are aware of what their support (transport, storage, money laundering, etc.) is intended for.

The declaration of cartels as FTOs is, therefore, a win for American law enforcement as it gives them more leverage in a long and frustrating conflict. However, the result is that the cartels have intensified their growth strategy in Europe to prepare for a possible decline in their American revenue. Cartels are increasingly exploiting Europe's seaports and its reliable road and rail connections between member countries to move people and goods throughout the borderless, 4 million square kilometer region.

The fact that the EU (and Canada) have not extradited drug dealers in the past is another benefit for



criminals targeting the region. Focusing on the EU is, therefore, a good business strategy for the cartels. The risk of extradition is low, and the EU is a mature market with sophisticated supply chains (both legal and illegal) that can be exploited to increase profits.

The nightmare scenario of tens of thousands of annual overdose deaths, the social impact of increased addiction rates, and a significant rise in violent crime is therefore at Europe's door. The region has the opportunity to prevent it from becoming a frightening reality if it can strengthen its political resolve, improve cooperation among internal and international law enforcement agencies, and take the necessary steps to secure its ports and long, porous coastline.

Is EU law enforcement ready for the challenge?

The EU is no stranger to the drug trade, with the European Union

Drugs Agency (EUDA) reporting the consistent drug usage in the EU, with large numbers of illicit substances available, with marijuana and cocaine (the leading and second most popular drugs), respectively, showing increased usage over the past year.

EUDA also notes that there is evidence for increased domestic production of synthetic drugs, such as amphetamines and MDMA. Authorities are concerned that local production may lead to changes in consumption trends, which suggests heightened challenges for the effectiveness of current monitoring systems and the suitability of existing responses. It also raises the shadow of fentanyl addiction with the associated high fatality rates, something the US experienced firsthand.

Local production does not exclude the Mexican cartels in favor of domestic European TCOs; it



includes them through a “transfer of know-how and a migration of criminal syndicate members” to EU countries, where they assist in developing methamphetamine laboratories. The same report relates the increase in violence in the EU drug market to the cartels’ influence.

European authorities have long focused on drug smuggling, achieving some notable successes. Drug seizures at the two primary seaports most used by smugglers, Antwerp in Belgium and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, declined by half in 2024 compared to 2023. Unfortunately, this shift is because cartels have redirected their efforts toward less secure ports in Spain, Portugal, and Scandinavian countries, where authorities can expect to see violence linked to cartels soar.

Commercial ports, therefore, continue to play a crucial role in the drug trade within the EU. Synthetic opioids, including substances like fentanyl and nitazenes, can be manufactured in the EU because the necessary chemical precursors are readily available domestically. When it comes to narcotics based on plants, such as cannabis, heroin, and cocaine, importing the product, or the foundation elements of the substance, still requires transnational trade.

New challenges require new strategies

Sophisticated anti-narcotic operations and operatives are already working around the clock to counteract the EU’s illicit drug trade. While there are many success stories, the shift in TCO tactics will necessitate new strategies, prompting EU authorities to

leverage their integrated structure and approach more effectively. For example, in the context of ports, a public-private partnership known as the European Ports Alliance was established in 2024 to enhance the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime. A partnership approach like this is crucial for addressing drug crime and finding solutions to protect ports.

The solutions to what amounts to a more intense organized crime attack against the region are complex. TCOs have advanced intelligence operations at ports and along all the road and rail routes throughout the EU to support their operations. In the ports, the influence of these criminal organizations extends from harbor masters to dock workers who accept bribes to facilitate the passage of shipments. Not everyone cooperates willingly, but the threat of violence to ensure compliance is common.

Most large drug shipments entering Europe are smuggled inside shipping containers; for example, they could be concealed within shipments of bananas from a country in Central America. Authorities must therefore enhance their intelligence operations to gain more insights into which ships to focus on and what cargo is potentially compromised by monitoring port workers. Human intelligence remains a crucial factor in mitigating the risks associated with narcotics smuggling.

Technology can also help examine data from all ships scheduled to dock in EU ports, which can be

analyzed along with their registered cargo. If containers linked to companies suspected of being cartel fronts are discovered, or if an unknown corporation suddenly appears to be shipping goods, the suspect containers must be opened and thoroughly searched.

Similarly, vessels that have taken a roundabout route instead of the direct route from origin to destination must be marked as suspect.

Transporting cargo over the ocean is expensive, and legitimate companies take the shortest and safest route to their destination.

Another increasingly common tactic to smuggle drugs into Europe is the 'mothership' approach. Using cargo ships, fishing vessels, merchant ships, and sailboats with compromised crews, hundreds of kilograms of cocaine (or whichever drugs are shipped) are dropped offshore. TCO speedboats then pick up the packages, which are outfitted with GPS locators or infrared beacons for quick location, and bring them onshore without the hassles of passing through customs.

These shipments are generally successful because it is impossible to monitor and patrol thousands of miles of coastline for small boats and floating drug packages. Even with the aid of intelligence, boat and air patrols, and satellite surveillance, the area to monitor and the human resources needed to intercept drop-offs are beyond the capacity of any country. Once again, human intelligence remains crucial for



gathering information to support drug interdiction.

An integrated, global approach to confront TCOs

Despite the political animosity prevalent in the world today, including between the EU and the USA, enhanced cooperation across the Atlantic Ocean is the best way to deal a devastating blow to the cartels and European TCOs involved in drug smuggling. One approach that will empower better collaboration is for the EU to follow the American example and declare the cartels as FTOs and their EU partners as Domestic Terrorist Organizations (DTOs).

With both continents addressing the TCOs as terrorist organizations, more law enforcement and intelligence agencies will be involved in the fight. Additionally, cooperation between the two continents will also leave the cartels on the back foot, with more pressure, including

political pressure on countries hosting the cartels, creating more opportunities to curtail their deadly trade.

In this scenario, Interpol could serve as the central hub for Europe's operations against the TCOs, working closely with the US Attorney's Office to coordinate operations among the respective law enforcement agencies. The joint venture would also capitalize on joint intelligence operations to strengthen efforts to disrupt the financial supply chain that the cartels rely on, targeting financiers internationally. A criminal prosecution is not as intimidating to banks as a guilty verdict for providing material support to FTOs or DTOs.

The threat of prosecution from two global powers that rank first and third in terms of global GDP will limit the cartels' options, both in terms of narcotics smuggling and their access to money laundering



partners. Reducing their cash flow in this manner will result in internal pressures, which could lead to internal strife and dissatisfaction, and the inability to pay as many bribes to smooth the path for smuggling drugs into both regions.

Cooperation will also balance the regions' laws in terms of precursor chemical production and distribution, degrading the ability to produce synthetic opioids to replace the reduction in cocaine and heroin supplies.

Integrated information and targeted operations

Designating the cartels and their TCO partners as FTOs and DTOs will suffocate the cartels, reducing their power as their cash flow decreases and their ability to manufacture drugs on any continent is degraded, even in countries that are currently deemed safe for their operations. Europe would no longer be safe for cartels, especially if

the cooperation agreement entails extradition to America and/or simultaneous prosecution of cartel members and their partners in the US and EU.

Europe will also gain insights into the synthetic opioid epidemic that hit the US, resulting in over 100,000 deaths in 2023, hopefully allowing European authorities to proactively prevent a similar tragedy. Put simply, sharing and integrating information to develop powerful yet effective collaborative tactics to address drug smuggling will benefit both parties, to the detriment of the cartels.

There is no easy way to address cartels and other TCOs. Authorities in Europe and the US are aware that these organizations have no moral or ethical boundaries and can't be confronted with laws, discussions, and gentle philosophies. The only way to degrade these organizations is to attack them directly and harshly, striking the vulnerabilities that joint operations create, while

removing their safe places in Mexico, Venezuela, and other South American countries. Only through decisive and collaborative global action can cartels be effectively confronted and their power and influence broken.

Michael W. Brown is the global director of counter-narcotics technology at Rigaku Analytical Devices. He has a distinguished career spanning more than 32 years as a Special Agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Most recently, he was the DEA Headquarters staff coordinator for the Office of Foreign Operations for the Middle East-Europe-Afghanistan-India. Prior to that, he served as the country attaché in India and Myanmar, providing foreign advisory support for counter-narcotic enforcement. He also spent 10 years in Pakistan as a special advisor to the US Embassy on various law enforcement issues.

Major Cocaine Seizure in the Caribbean by French Armed Forces



French Armed Forces in the Antilles (Forces armées aux Antilles), with support from international partners, conducted a significant counter-narcotics operation in the Caribbean Sea.

A French Navy vessel, acting on intelligence and assisted by a U.S. maritime patrol aircraft and an aircraft from the Coast Guard, intercepted a Go-Fast

vessel sailing without a flag in international waters, near the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Upon boarding the vessel, the French military discovered a large quantity of suspicious cargo. Subsequent testing confirmed the presence of cocaine. A total of 100 bales were seized, weighing approximately 2.4 tonnes. All crew members on board were immediately placed under restrictive measures.

This operation marks another successful joint effort in the fight against transatlantic drug trafficking, highlighting the importance of international cooperation in addressing maritime security threats.

MAOC (N) supported the operation through the facilitation of international coordination between liaison officers and the exchange of operational information, reinforcing the collective commitment to combating international drug trafficking via sea.

940 Kg of Cannabis Resin seized by the French Navy off Guyana



French Forces in the Caribbean carried out a maritime operation that led to the seizure of a substantial quantity of cannabis resin on board a sailing vessel, located in international waters off the coast of Guyana.

Acting on intelligence shared by several countries under the MAOC-N framework, authorities had strong reasons to suspect the vessel, which was sailing under the Portuguese flag, was involved in illicit activities. Following its interception and subsequent boarding, French Navy officers discovered 24 bales on board, which were later confirmed to contain cannabis resin, totalling approximately 940 kilograms.

The sailing vessel was subsequently escorted to Fort-de-France (Martinique), where the two crew members were handed over to the competent judicial authorities.

This operation was carried out in close cooperation between the French authorities (Navy, DNRED and OFAST), working alongside the Spanish and Portuguese authorities.

Two-way migrant smuggling network busted in France and Spain



Europol supported the French National Police (Police Nationale/OLTIM Perpignan) and the Spanish National Police (Policía Nacional/UCRIF Central) in dismantling an organised criminal network smuggling migrants of Algerian and Moroccan origin from Spain to France as well as in the opposite direction, from the United Kingdom to

Spain. In addition to the arrests made in Spain and France, during action days, French law enforcement intercepted a British national connected to the wider criminal network. The suspect was caught in the act while transporting 12 irregular migrants from the United Kingdom to France across the Channel.

The investigation has revealed the extensive operations of a criminal network involved in large-scale migrant smuggling across the European Union and beyond. Law enforcement authorities have so far uncovered 38 migrant smuggling instances directly linked to this network since the beginning of the investigation. Further intelligence and forensic analyses have enabled investigators to link an additional 100 smuggling incidents, which occurred since 2021, to the same criminal organisation. The network is believed to have facilitated the illegal entry of approximately 1 000 migrants into the EU.

158 human traffickers arrested and 1,194 victims safeguarded in global operation

A major operation against human trafficking has resulted in the safeguarding of 1,194 potential victims and the arrest of 158 suspects. As part of ongoing investigations, an additional 205 human trafficking suspects have also been identified. The global crackdown focused on trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced criminality and forced begging, with a special focus on underage victims.

The operation engaged nearly 15,000 officers from 43 different countries and involved law enforcement, border guards, labour inspectorates, tax- and customs

authorities. Potential victims were reported from 64 different countries, with a majority from Romania, Ukraine, Colombia, China and Hungary. Many of the victims had been trafficked across borders, and even continents, demonstrating the global nature of human trafficking schemes. Investigations show that the vast majority of victims of sexual exploitation are female and adult, while the exploitation of underage victims is mostly connected to forced begging and forced criminal activity such as pickpocketing. In many of these cases, the safeguarding of victims can be challenging, as they are often exploited by family members.

28 'Ndrangheta associates arrested for drug trafficking and violence

Europol has supported Italian law enforcement in dealing a heavy blow to the 'Ndrangheta criminal organisation. In an action day conducted across Italy, Spain and Albania, special intervention teams have arrested 28 suspected criminals of Italian and Albanian nationality. Among the individuals taken into custody is

an Italian national from the Calabria region suspected of setting up the criminal structure for cocaine trade in the San Basilio area of Rome.



80 arrests and more than 37,700 cultural goods seized in major art trafficking bust



The ninth edition of Operation Pandora, an international operation targeting the trafficking of cultural goods, has led to 80 arrests and the seizure of 37,727 items including

archaeological pieces, artworks, coins and musical instruments.

The Italian Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (TPC) in coordination with the Italian Customs and Monopolies agency (ADM) seized a painting attributed to renowned artist Jannis Kounellis during a joint border operation. Upon inspection, it was determined to be inauthentic. Had it been genuine, its estimated value would have been around EUR 100,000. In a separate investigation, the Carabinieri TPC seized more than 300 items, including coins, metal and ceramic fragments such as arrowheads and spearheads dating back to the Roman and Punic periods. These artifacts were being offered for sale on e-commerce platforms and were discovered in a private apartment.

20 arrested in international operation targeting child sexual abuse material

An international operation against the production and distribution of child sexual abuse material, led by the Spanish National Police in collaboration with INTERPOL and Europol, has resulted in the arrest of 20 people across the Americas and Europe.

Spanish authorities arrested seven suspects, including a healthcare worker and a teacher. The healthcare

worker allegedly paid minors from Eastern Europe for explicit images, while the teacher is accused of possessing and sharing child sexual abuse material via various online platforms. Searches carried out during the operation resulted in the seizure of desktop computers, laptops, mobile phones, tablets and digital storage devices.

20,000 malicious IPs and domains taken down in INTERPOL infostealer crackdown

More than 20,000 malicious IP addresses or domains linked to information stealers have been taken down in an INTERPOL-coordinated operation against cybercriminal infrastructure.

During Operation Secure, a regional initiative organized under the Asia and South Pacific Joint Operations Against Cybercrime (ASPJOC) Project, law enforcement agencies from 26 countries worked to locate servers, map physical networks and execute targeted takedowns.

Ahead of the operation, INTERPOL cooperated with private-sector partners Group-IB, Kaspersky and Trend

Micro to produce Cyber Activity Reports, sharing critical intelligence with cyber teams across Asia. These coordinated efforts resulted in the takedown of 79 per cent of identified suspicious IP addresses.

Participating countries reported the seizure of 41 servers and over 100 GB of data, as well as the arrest of 32 suspects linked to illegal cyber activities..



OSCE Strengthens Co-operation with Kyrgyz Border Service through High-Level Visit and Equipment Demonstration in Batken



The OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek (POiB) reaffirmed its long-standing partnership with the Border Service of the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The meeting highlighted the achievements and

ongoing work of the OSCE-led extrabudgetary project “Reducing the risk of illicit trafficking of SALW, conventional ammunition and explosives across the border of the Kyrgyz Republic.”

As part of the event, engineering, medical, and K9 equipment previously donated by the OSCE was showcased through dynamic field demonstrations by Border Service specialists. The demonstrations underscored how modern equipment and training contribute to more effective border management and risk mitigation.

In addition, a Kyrgyz-language copy of the Frontex Firearms Manual was formally presented for use at border crossing points—providing a practical tool to enhance operational capacity and frontline performance..

OSCE welcomes the adoption of the Strategy for Integrated Border Management 2025–2029

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mission) welcomes the adoption of the Strategy for Integrated Border Management 2025–2029 and its accompanying Action Plan at the BiH Council of Ministers session.

This important step aligns Bosnia and Herzegovina's border management framework with the local and

international standards and aims to strengthen overall security while enabling a more efficient and functional system at the borders. Furthermore, it supports the smoother movement of people, goods, and transport.

The Mission has supported the development of this Strategy and remains committed to assisting BiH authorities throughout its implementation.

OSCE training on arms control enhances border security in Turkmenistan

The OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, in close co-operation with the Conflict Prevention Centre/Forum for Security Co-operation of the OSCE Secretariat, organized the course to strengthen the existing institutional capacities of border, customs, police and other law enforcement bodies in the area of combating illicit trafficking of SALW, CA and Explosives.

The training course presented the Frontex Handbook on Firearms and shared European and international good practices and experiences in the fight against illicit

trafficking of SALW, ammunition and explosives at the borders. In addition, this course offered comprehensive training in SALW/CA identification, documentation, post-seizure record-keeping and tracing, focusing on the target groups..



Italy Multi-Year Migration Plan Milestone for Regular Pathways, Says IOM Chief



The IOM has welcomed the Italian government's adoption of a new multi-year "Flow Decree" (Decreto Flussi) for the 2026–2028 period, hailing it as a strategic move to strengthen safe and regular migration channels.

By introducing multi-annual quotas and streamlining the recruitment of foreign workers across key sectors, including domestic work, caregiving, agriculture, and tourism, Italy is taking a long-term approach to migration governance that balances economic needs and helps reduce irregular migration.

"This is the kind of bold, forward-looking policymaking we urgently need," said IOM Director General Amy Pope. "When countries expand regular migration channels, they not only respond to labor shortages but also protect people from falling into the traps of exploitation and irregular routes. Migration, when managed responsibly, can be a catalyst for economic growth."

IOM and OIC Sign Landmark Plan of Action to Strengthen Cooperation on Migration Governance

The IOM and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have signed a groundbreaking three-year Plan of Action that will significantly enhance cooperation on migration governance and humanitarian response across OIC Member States.

Building on the Cooperation Agreement signed in January 2003, the Plan of Action 2025–2027 establishes a clear framework for collaboration between the two organizations through joint programming, policy dialogue, and operational cooperation. It outlines four priority areas of collaboration and concrete actions

to be pursued jointly by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the International Organization for Migration at the national, regional, and global levels.

"With this plan, we move from principle to practice as we strengthen coordination between our institutions to deliver meaningful support for displaced populations, migrants, and host communities in the OIC region," said Mr. Othman Belbeisi, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa and IOM's Representative to the OIC, who signed the agreement on behalf of IOM.

IOM Reports 60 Migrants Missing in Two Deadly Shipwrecks off Libya

The IOM is deeply saddened by two confirmed shipwrecks off the coast of Libya, with at least 60 people feared missing at sea, according to IOM's search and rescue teams on the ground. Survivors received urgent medical care from IOM staff immediately upon disembarkation.

"With dozens feared dead and entire families left in anguish, IOM is once again urging the international community to scale up search and rescue operations and guarantee safe, predictable disembarkation for survivors," said Othman Belbeisi, Regional Director for

Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

21 people were reported missing after a shipwreck near Alshab port in Tripolitania, where only five survivors were found. Among those feared dead are six Eritreans, including three women and three children, five Pakistanis, four Egyptians, and two Sudanese men. The identities of four others remain unknown.



The 2025 Vulnerability Assessment brings an encouraging outcome



The Agency's vulnerability assessment function is still two years short of its first round anniversary. With the important inputs from border guard colleagues in the 29

Member States and Schengen Associated Countries, this year Frontex shared the eighth edition of individual country assessments with its stakeholders on Thursday.

The overall results are encouraging - the total number of identified vulnerabilities concerning the capacities and preparedness of border control in Member States show a relevant overall downward trend. Less vulnerabilities and, potentially, less recommended measures for remedial action down the line do, however, not automatically translate into a situation where all is just fine at the European external borders. For that, the geopolitical faults at our doorstep are too manyfold, furthermore, the digitalisation of borders might herald new challenges of which currently only rough contours have become visible.

Frontex to Open New Training Centre for European Border Guards in Warsaw

Frontex plans to open a new training centre in Warsaw, Poland, to train future European border guards. To formalise this cooperation, Frontex Executive Director Hans Leijten and Poland's Minister of Interior Tomasz Siemoniak signed a Memorandum of Understanding, laying the groundwork for the new training centre and future collaboration.

This important step strengthens Frontex's cooperation with Poland, which has hosted the Agency for over

20 years. It also supports the growing needs of the European Standing Corps, the EU's first uniformed border service.

The new training facility will welcome over 200 officers later this year, with hundreds more to come in future years. It offers modern classrooms, sports and tactical training areas, and will reduce costs by keeping training close to the Agency's base.

Frontex supports European countries with EES pre-registration

Frontex has developed a mobile application to support European countries with the implementation of the new Entry/Exit System (EES) and to facilitate border checks for travellers.

The Travel to Europe mobile app allows non-EU travellers comfortably to pre-register travel document data and facial image for the EES before arriving at a border crossing point. It also allows travellers to provide their replies to the conditions of entry questionnaire. In simple terms most of the information that border guards would have to insert to EES about a third country national at the border crossing point could be sent with the app in advance, allowing faster

entry or exit.

The app will go live in selected travel hubs and remains voluntary for Member States and travellers. The first confirmed go-live will take place in Arlanda Airport Sweden this year, in parallel Frontex is planning jointly with Dutch, French and Italian authorities' pilots in selected major entry points in 2026. In addition, Portugal and Greece and Hungary have expressed interest for the implementation of app."



Rise in production and trafficking of synthetic drugs from the Golden Triangle, new report shows



The illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs from the Golden Triangle have grown exponentially, according to a report released today by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The explosive growth has led to a record amount of methamphetamine seizures in East and Southeast Asia, totaling 236 tons, marking a 24 per cent increase compared to 2023.

“The 236 tons represent only the amount seized; much more methamphetamine is actually reaching the market,” said Benedikt Hofmann, UNODC Acting Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. “While these seizures reflect, in part, successful law enforcement efforts, we are clearly seeing unprecedented levels of methamphetamine production and trafficking from the Golden Triangle, in particular Shan State.”

The report, titled *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges*, shows that the production and trafficking of methamphetamine in Shan State, Myanmar, have significantly increased since 2021. “The ongoing crisis in Myanmar is further increasing the need for proceeds from the drug trade, but at the same time there is a degree of stability in certain parts of the country, especially those known for large-scale synthetic drug production,” Hofmann said. “This combination of conflict and stability has created favourable conditions for the expansion of drug production, impacting countries across the region and beyond.”

Thailand remained the main transit and destination point for methamphetamine trafficked from Myanmar

and recorded the largest quantity of methamphetamine seizures in the region, including one billion tablets of yaba – a combination of methamphetamine and caffeine popular in many parts of Southeast Asia due to its easy availability and low price. At the same time, transnational drug trafficking groups have increasingly exploited emerging trafficking routes to evade law enforcement detection.

“The trafficking route connecting Cambodia with Myanmar, primarily through Lao PDR, has been rapidly expanding,” said Inshik Sim, Lead Analyst at the UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. “Another increasingly significant corridor involves maritime trafficking routes linking Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with Sabah in Malaysia serving as a key transit hub.”

The report highlights the evolving nature of transnational drug trafficking groups operating in East and Southeast Asia. These groups have demonstrated remarkable agility in reacting to law enforcement pressure, as shown by the spread of production sites for ketamine and related precursor chemicals, which has now reached most of the lower Mekong countries. Most recently, authorities in Viet Nam dismantled an industrial-scale facility in March 2025.

Another example is the rise in the illicit manufacture of pharmaceutical products, especially etomidate and its analogues, designed to evade controls on novel substances. The report also underscores the growing use of technology across the entire chain of drug-related crimes, from planning, coordination, and the execution of trafficking to financial transactions and money laundering linked to the synthetic drug trade.

“With the surge in synthetic drug production and trafficking in the region, most countries report an overall increase in the use of methamphetamine and ketamine,” Hofmann said. “However, in some countries, we are seeing a decline in the number of younger drug users admitted to treatment facilities, which may be attributable to drug use prevention campaigns targeting youth populations,” he added. “It will be key for the region to increase investment in both prevention and supply reduction strategies.”

SUMMARY OF THE “EU TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND REPORT 2025” FROM EUROPOL

By *EUROPOL*

The “EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2025,” published by Europol, provides a thorough and multifaceted examination of the terrorism landscape within the European Union. It reflects not only on the trends and patterns of terrorist activities but also on the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures implemented across member states. One of the most striking observations in the report is the overall decrease in the number of terrorist attacks

in the EU, a trend that contrasts sharply with the heightened levels of violence witnessed in previous years. This decline is seen as a result of several key factors, including the implementation of robust counter-terrorism strategies, enhanced collaboration among EU member states, and improved intelligence-sharing mechanisms, which have collectively contributed to the disruption of potential threats. However, while this reduction in

attacks is encouraging, the report cautions that the threat level remains significant, necessitating ongoing vigilance and adaptive measures from law enforcement agencies.

The report provides a nuanced analysis of the changing nature of terrorist threats. It notes that while there are fewer attacks, the incidents that do occur are typically characterized by increased complexity and sophistication. This evolution is evident in the tactics employed by terrorist groups, which now often incorporate advanced methodologies and technologies. For example, many terrorist actors are utilizing digital platforms for recruitment, propaganda dissemination, and operational planning. The rise of encrypted communications has made it challenging for law enforcement agencies to monitor and intercept communications, complicating efforts to prevent attacks. The report underscores the importance of adapting counter-terrorism strategies to address these shifts, arguing that traditional methods may not suffice in tackling the new realities of terrorism.

A significant focus of the report is the persistent threat posed by jihadist terrorism, which continues to be a primary concern for security agencies across the EU. Despite the overall decrease in attacks, jihadist ideologies remain influential, inspiring individuals and small groups to commit acts of violence. The report highlights the risks associated with

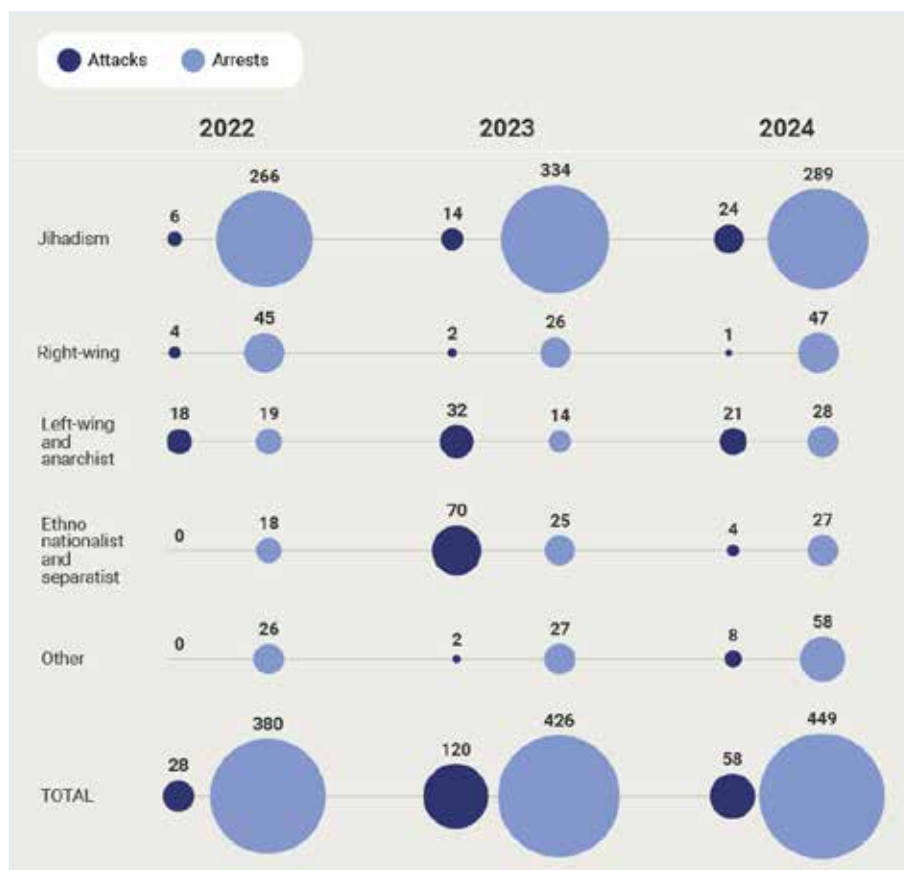


foreign terrorist fighters returning to Europe after participating in conflicts in regions such as Syria and Iraq. These individuals often possess combat experience and may have established networks that facilitate their reintegration into society, presenting a substantial threat. The potential for high-impact attacks perpetrated by self-radicalized individuals or small cells inspired by online extremist propaganda is noted as a critical area of concern. The report emphasizes the need for effective monitoring and preventive strategies to mitigate the risks posed by these returnees.

In addition to jihadist terrorism, the report draws attention to the alarming rise of right-wing extremism, which has emerged as a significant threat in various EU member states. This

growing trend is linked to broader societal factors, including increasing polarization surrounding issues like immigration, national identity, and socio-economic inequality. The report documents several incidents of violence motivated by far-right ideologies, emphasizing that individuals inspired by these beliefs are increasingly willing to resort to violence. The report calls for a comprehensive approach to counter both left- and right-wing extremism, recognizing that failure to address the full spectrum of extremist ideologies could lead to further violence and societal division.

The report delves deeply into the factors that contribute to radicalization, emphasizing the importance of understanding the underlying causes to effectively



Terrorist attacks (completed, failed, foiled) and arrests for terrorist offences in the EU per type of terrorism, 2022-2024 (Source: EU Member States' contributions)

prevent terrorism. It identifies key drivers of radicalization, such as social isolation, economic disenfranchisement, and exposure to extremist narratives, particularly through online platforms. The report advocates for community engagement and education as essential components of prevention efforts. Initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion and resilience in communities are seen as vital in countering the appeal of extremist ideologies. By promoting dialogue and understanding among diverse

groups, communities can build defences against radical narratives and create environments that discourage violence.

The impact of technology on the terrorism landscape is a central theme in the report. While technology can facilitate terrorist activities, it also offers opportunities for counter-terrorism efforts. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to embrace technological advancements to enhance their capabilities in preventing and responding to terrorism. The report highlights the

need for innovative approaches to combat online radicalization, including partnerships with technology companies to identify and remove extremist content from social media platforms. By leveraging technological tools and data analytics, law enforcement can improve their ability to monitor potential threats, identify individuals at risk of radicalization, and intervene before violence occurs.

International cooperation and intelligence sharing are emphasized as crucial elements in combating terrorism effectively. The report points out that the transnational nature of terrorist threats necessitates a coordinated response from EU member states and their international partners. Enhanced intelligence-sharing mechanisms, collaborative training initiatives, and joint operations are recommended to strengthen the collective response to terrorism. The report provides examples of successful cross-border cooperation, illustrating how collaborative efforts can lead to the identification and disruption of terrorist plots that span multiple countries. Such cooperation is essential not only for countering existing threats but also for anticipating and mitigating future risks.

The report concludes with a series of strategic recommendations aimed at improving the EU's counter-terrorism framework. It emphasizes the need for member states to strengthen

intelligence-sharing protocols and operational cooperation while fostering public-private partnerships to enhance cybersecurity and address online radicalization. The report also advocates for the development of tailored counter-radicalization programs that focus on local communities and at-risk individuals. By promoting awareness campaigns that educate the public on the dangers of extremism and the importance of reporting suspicious activities, the EU can empower communities to play an active role in preventing terrorism.

In summary, the “EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2025” provides a comprehensive and nuanced view of the terrorism

landscape in Europe. While the decline in attacks is a positive development, the evolving nature of threats—particularly from jihadist and right-wing extremist ideologies—calls for ongoing vigilance, adaptability, and innovation in counter-terrorism strategies. By addressing the root causes of radicalization, enhancing cooperation among member states, and leveraging technological advancements, the EU can better position itself to confront the challenges posed by terrorism in the future. The insights provided in this report are critical for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and community leaders as they work collaboratively to safeguard public safety and promote social cohesion

in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Download the full report at

https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/EU_TESAT_2025.pdf



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IOM Reaches Milestone as 100,000 Migrants Return Home from Libya



In a significant milestone, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has helped over 100,000 migrants voluntarily return home from Libya since launching its Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) programme in 2015. This figure reflects a decade of efforts to offer a lifeline to migrants stranded in precarious conditions across the country.

To date, tens of thousands of migrants have returned safely and voluntarily to 49 countries of origin across Africa and Asia, including Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Bangladesh and The Gambia. Of those assisted, nearly 73,000 were men, close to 17,000 women, and over 10,000 children – some of whom were unaccompanied – a reflection of the diversity and vulnerability of Libya's migrant population.

"In a context where protection risks remain high and regular pathways are limited, VHR offers a crucial, life-saving option for those who wish to return home," said Nicoletta Giordano, IOM Libya Chief of Mission. "While we continue to provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations, we are also working to support more sustainable, long-term solutions."

The programme has served as a lifeline for migrants seeking to go home voluntarily. In a context where protracted instability, limited regular pathways, and protection risks leave many migrants stranded in

precarious conditions, VHR offers a safe, dignified, and rights-based alternative.

VHR covers a comprehensive package of pre-departure and post-return assistance, including protection services, health screenings, mental health and psychosocial support, travel document facilitation, and reintegration assistance.

IOM ensures that every return is voluntary and based on informed consent, even when migrants are faced with constrained options, in line with the Organization's return, readmission, and reintegration policy and its due diligence process. The programme also includes robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including return and reintegration assessments, to strengthen accountability and improve service delivery.

Recently, five return flights were organized, two from Benghazi, two from Sebha, and one from Misrata, underscoring the programme's broad operational reach.

Among those recently assisted are John and Temnaia, a married Nigerian couple who met in Libya. As they tried to build a life together, challenges mounted, especially after the birth of their daughter, who had no access to education. "We didn't see a future for her here," John explained. Their story echoes that of many others who turn to VHR as a pathway toward safety and a chance to begin again in more stable conditions.

While VHR provides critical support for many, IOM remains deeply concerned about the persistent challenges and risks faced by migrants along the Central Mediterranean Route. The Organization remains committed to facilitating safe, dignified, and rights-based solutions for migrants who choose to return home, while continuing to engage with partners to ensure protection and pursue durable outcomes for all.

From Training to Action: Dominican Republic Advances Firearms Control



Santo Domingo hosted a series of key events aimed at enhancing the Dominican Republic's national capacities to combat illicit firearms trafficking. The week began with a comprehensive firearms training course, followed by a focused workshop on the establishment of Integrated Firearms Centres (IFCs), both critical components in the country's ongoing efforts to modernize and strengthen its firearms control framework.

In response to the shifting dynamics of arms trafficking, the workshop offered participants in-depth insights into both global and regional firearms smuggling patterns. It examined the involvement of organized criminal networks, the consequences of illicit arms flows, and the increasingly sophisticated concealment methods employed by traffickers. The sessions also explored emerging challenges, including the proliferation of 3D-printed weapons and the use of the dark web to facilitate illegal arms deals, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen detection tools and investigative expertise.

The four-day training course successfully addressed vital capacity gaps in the detection, tracing, forensic analysis, and investigation of illicit firearms trafficking. Participants engaged in expert-led presentations, practical exercises, and case studies that expanded their understanding of global and regional trafficking trends, smuggling tactics, and advanced technical skills such as firearm classification, ballistic and X-ray image interpretation.

Hands-on sessions enabled participants to simulate real-world interdictions, apply risk profiling, and master seizure documentation procedures, while also becoming

familiar with international firearms tracing platforms, including eTrace, and iARMS. A notable focus was placed on emerging digital threats, with deep dives into the role of the dark web, encrypted communications, and social media in facilitating illegal arms sales. The training underscored the urgent need to build investigative capabilities in cybercrime, cryptocurrency tracking, and digital evidence management.

The course also explored firearms-related financial flows, emphasizing the integration of financial intelligence into investigations and the importance of inter-agency cooperation with financial oversight bodies.

Building on the course, the IFC workshop brought together participants from multiple institutions to discuss the potential design and implementation of Integrated Firearms Centres in the Dominican Republic. These centres aim to centralize critical functions such as ballistic forensics, tracing, intelligence analysis, and operational coordination, thereby streamlining efforts and improving effectiveness in firearms control.

The workshop included collaborative exercises to map institutional roles and responsibilities within an IFC framework. Participants openly discussed challenges, including institutional fragmentation, legal and procedural inconsistencies, and resource constraints. Nonetheless, there was strong recognition of the favourable political climate driven by the country's police reform process and alignment with the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap's National Action Plan.



EMN STUDY OUTLINES EFFORTS TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

The European Migration Network (EMN) has released a study outlining efforts by 25 EMN Member and Observer Countries to combat trafficking in human beings. It delves into current and future strategic responses across prevention, law enforcement, and international partnerships.

Trafficking in human beings constitutes a serious violation of

human rights under international law and the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights (Article 5(3)). Trafficking in human beings involves recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or control of individuals through coercion, deception, abuse of vulnerability, or financial inducements for the purpose of exploitation.

While many trafficking victims within

the EU are EU nationals, data from third-country nationals comprised 63.1% of victims of human trafficking in 2022, compared to roughly 43% for the period 2019-2021. At the same time, many victims remain undetected.

Strengthening the EU's response

Recognising the increasing international dimension, the

EU designated this issue as a priority under the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025 to reinforce efforts to combat trafficking in human beings beyond EU borders. The EU Anti-Trafficking Directive was amended in 2024 and entered into force on 14 July 2024. The modifications introduced stronger rules to fight trafficking in human beings and provided reinforced tools for public authorities to investigate and prosecute trafficking offences. It also provides for better support to victims of trafficking. Based on the Strategy and the Directive, the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (EU ATC) promotes a coordinated and coherent approach to address trafficking in human beings.

EMN Member and Observer Countries' initiatives

Within this framework, EMN Member and Observer Countries have implemented a range of policy measures to tackle the international dimension of trafficking in human beings. Prioritised thematic areas include crime prevention, victim protection, law enforcement coordination, and prosecution of perpetrators. Many countries focus on specific third countries, regions, or migrant groups, reflecting tailored approaches to address trafficking risks effectively.

Most of the national measures specifically targeting third-country nationals in EMN Member and Observer Countries are implemented by international organisations (primarily IOM) and/or NGOs and CSOs and were funded through



a combination of national and EU funds.

Most countries addressed the international dimension as part of broader anti-trafficking strategies, interlinking policies with migration, asylum, border management, and organised crime efforts. Although no country has a dedicated policy exclusively focused on the international dimension of trafficking in human beings, many integrated human trafficking responses within existing national strategies.

Operational cooperation and strategic partnerships

The EU plays an important role in supporting EMN Member and Observer Countries through funding, operational coordination, and information exchange, such as through the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).

Cooperation with EU agencies has been highlighted by 11 countries, which reported active participation

in initiatives coordinated by EU agencies like EUROPOL, Frontex, and EUROJUST implemented in third countries.

The EU has also directly managed and/or funded development cooperation programmes in third countries, in line with the EU Strategy on combating trafficking in human beings, focusing both on law enforcement and judiciary authorities, but also on the digital and illicit financial dimensions of trafficking in human beings as well as identification and support of trafficking victims. Several EU programmes also address migrant smuggling, an issue often linked to trafficking in human beings.

In November 2023, the European Commission presented a package to counter migrant smuggling consisting of a proposal for a new Directive laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the EU and a proposal for a Regulation to reinforce police

cooperation and Europol's role in the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

The latter reinforces the European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling within Europol to build further capacities for cross-border investigation both in migrant smuggling and in trafficking in human beings. Both proposals are being discussed by the co-legislators.

Good practices in preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings

Thirteen EMN Member and Observer Countries identified good practices in relation to policies and measures aimed at preventing trafficking in human beings.

Nine countries identified awareness-raising measures as good practices for the prevention of trafficking in human beings in third countries, while some countries have strengthened their engagement with countries of origin or partner countries. Others have relied on cooperation projects with Civil Society Organisations.

Countries also praised the deployment of police liaison officers in third countries and support from EU agencies to support judicial and law enforcement response.

Key good practices in identifying and supporting victims in third countries included cooperation with NGOs and stakeholder capacity building activities. Good practices included, among others, mentoring

and training of law enforcement authorities, the establishment of specialised law enforcement units or victim assistance, support and referral systems and the organisation of capacity building activities for key stakeholders.

Nine EMN Member Countries, along with Serbia and Georgia, have established various forms of structured cooperation with third countries to tackle the cross-border aspects of trafficking in human being. In contrast, other countries indicated they engage with third countries mainly at an operational level, often on an ad hoc basis.

Targeted regions include the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, North Africa, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

Challenges in combatting trafficking in human beings

EMN Member and Observer Countries face recurring challenges in addressing trafficking in human beings, including prevention and demand reduction, law enforcement and judicial response, victim identification and support, and international cooperation.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased victim vulnerability and accelerated the shift of trafficking in human beings into the digital space, making detection and intervention more difficult in several countries. This calls for the development of new methods to fight trafficking in human beings in the digital space.

Nine EMN Member Countries

identified challenges in preventing trafficking in human beings towards EMN Member and Observer Countries, particularly in third countries of origin and transit of (potential) victims. Over half of these mentioned low trust levels and/or cultural differences with third countries as a challenge. These factors hindered joint action, such as the sharing of information and resources to combat trafficking in human beings.

Outlook: reinforcing international responses

EMN Member and Observer Countries identified the need to strengthen the identification and protection of victims also through financial investigations, digital monitoring and labour exploitation responses. Other institutional challenges include the need for reinforced cooperation with certain third countries and additional capacity building for competent authorities.

Several countries are currently discussing how future policies could address these needs. At the end of 2023, several EMN Member and Observer Countries were reviewing or establishing their national anti-trafficking strategies, including measures to reinforce international cooperation. Some countries are evaluating agreements with third countries to reinforce cooperation with third countries of origins and transit of victims.



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OSCE and the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel ('CT Travel') Programme provide expert support to Turkmenistan with establishing an Advance Passenger Information (API) system



Officials from the State Migration Service of Turkmenistan held a two-day online consultation with experts from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel ('CT Travel') Programme, and OSCE participating States to discuss the legal aspects and financial considerations for establishing of an Advance Passenger Information (API) system in Turkmenistan on 7-8 July. The event followed an introductory meeting held on 10 April, which aimed to identify the country's needs for practical expertise and technical assistance required for implementing and launching the API system.

Experts from the OSCE, CT Travel Programme, Albania, the Kyrgyz Republic and Montenegro exchanged information on existing international legal frameworks for passenger data collection and analysis. They discussed expected financial implications and shared their respective country's experience with developing the legislation required to support API system integration into national border security and management structures, in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs).

The meeting was organized by the Centre in Ashgabat with support from the OSCE Transnational Threats

Department's Border and Security Management Unit and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT).

With the expected growth in air traffic and the persistent threat of terrorism, the collection and processing of API data has become increasingly important. National API systems play a critical role in expediting border checks while strengthening the ability of law enforcement agencies to combat irregular migration, prevent terrorist and other serious criminals travel and enhance overall travel and national security. This importance has been underscored through United Nations Security Council resolutions 2178 (2014), 2309 (2016), 2396 (2017) and 2482 (2019) as well as Amendment 26 to Annex 9 of the Chicago Convention, all of which mandate the establishment of API systems at the national level.

During the meeting, the CT Travel Programme delivered a comprehensive briefing on the latest legal developments in the area of API and Passenger Name Record (PNR) at the international level.

The presentation covered key components of the international legal framework governing passenger data, including relevant obligations under international human rights law, with a particular focus on privacy and data protection principles. CT Travel representatives also outlined how the Programme's technical assistance, including in the area of legal and regulatory frameworks can support Turkmenistan.

The Kyrgyz Republic shared its national experience and best practices, presenting the domestic legal framework on passenger data and offering practical insights from the establishment and operation of their Passenger Information Unit (PIU). Additionally, OSCE experts provided an overview of financial and operational aspects to consider when drafting national passenger data legal frameworks, as part of the assistance

provided to OSCE participating States within the framework of OSCE project “Promotion of information exchange and support for the establishment of Advance Passenger Information (API) systems in the OSCE area – Phase II”.

The CT Travel Programme, a flagship global initiative led by UNOCT, follows an “One-UN” approach to provide comprehensive, yet tailored assistance to beneficiary Member States, with the support and expertise of six implementing partners: United Nations

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), ICAO, the United Nations Office of Information and Communication Technology (OICT), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The Programme is currently working closely with 88 Member States, including sixty-six (66) beneficiaries and (8) strategic partners..

Europol coordinates operation against terrorist content online targeting minors

Europol coordinated a Referral Action Day (RAD) on minors' exploitation and radicalisation online. More than 2 000 links pointing to jihadist and right-wing violent extremist and terrorist propaganda targeting minors were referred during the action day.

The referral day took place only a few weeks after Europol launched a new Operational Taskforce to tackle the rising trend of recruiting young perpetrators into serious and organised crime. Recent data provided to Europol reveals that minors are now involved in over 70% of criminal markets. Protecting children from being recruited and exploited by criminal networks is one of Europol's key priorities.

Terrorist groups are increasingly targeting young people, exploiting their vulnerabilities but also their abilities to manage online capabilities to advance violent and extremist agendas. Strong collaboration between public authorities and private sector partners is essential to prevent the radicalisation of minors into harming themselves and our society.

New wave of propaganda using broader manipulation tactics

Terrorist organisations and their online supporters have developed new tactics to recruit and gain followers, tailoring their message and investing in new technologies and platforms to manipulate and reach out to minors. The propaganda identified during the operational action included content combining images

and videos of children with extremist messaging, as well as materials offering guidance to radicalised parents on raising future jihadists.

One of the key observations that led to this coordinated action is the use of AI, particularly in the creation of images, text and videos designed to resonate with younger audiences. Propagandists invest in content, short videos, memes, and other visual formats, carefully stylised to appeal to minors and families that may be susceptible to extremist manipulation, as well as content incorporating gaming elements with terrorist audio and visual material.

Another type of targeted content is the glorification of minors involved in terrorist attacks. In this regard, terrorist propaganda predominantly targets male minors, manipulating them into joining extremist groups by promoting heroic narratives that portray them as “warriors” and the “hope” of society. Female minors are referenced less frequently, with their roles largely confined to raising and indoctrinating future “fighters” for the cause.

Another manipulation technique that has been worrying for the past years is the increased use of victimhood narratives, particularly imagery of wounded or killed children in conflict zones. This manipulation serves a dual purpose: it fosters emotional identification with the victims while simultaneously inciting a desire for retaliation and further violence.

AGENCY NEWS AND UPDATES

Civil Guard and Portuguese National Republican Guard dismantle narcologistics network



The Civil Guard, in a joint operation with the Portuguese National Republican Guard (GNR), has dismantled the main criminal organization dedicated to launching semi-rigid boats for use in drug trafficking on the Iberian Peninsula. The value of the assets seized from the organization, as well as the market value of the seized drugs, amounts to more than €36 million.

Due to the police pressure exerted since the start of the Special Security Plan for Campo de Gibraltar, it has been observed how criminal organizations dedicated to drug trafficking have been changing their modus operandi and stash locations, increasingly moving towards the Guadiana River area and the border with Portugal.

The investigations revealed how these organizations, since the manufacture and ownership of these types of high-speed vessels is prohibited in Spain, decided to establish illegal speedboat factories for transporting drugs, both cocaine and hashish, in the neighboring country, specifically in the area of the mouth of the Tagus River in Portugal, near the towns of Lisbon and Setubal.

64 people have been arrested, and more than 7 tons of hashish, 650 kilos of cocaine, 19 high-speed boats, a fishing boat, and 40 high-powered motors have been seized, along with 24 vehicles, 14 firearms, and nearly €800,000 in cash.

BOC Seizes PHP 749-M Shabu Shipment Hidden in Balikbayan Boxes

The BOC, acting on credible intelligence, issued an Alert Order on a 1×40-ft container declared as balikbayan boxes. A 100% inspection uncovered 110.24 kg of methamphetamine hydrochloride (shabu) concealed within four (4) boxes, with an estimated value of PHP 749.63 million.



Samples were immediately extracted and submitted to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) for confirmatory testing. Laboratory results later confirmed that the recovered substances were indeed methamphetamine hydrochloride.

The seized contraband will be turned over to PDEA for further investigation, in relation to violations of Republic Act (RA) No. 9165, or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, and R.A. No. 10863, or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.

Trio arrested over alleged plot to import 600kg of meth concealed in rolls of fabric

Three men have been charged for their alleged roles in the importation of \$555



million worth of methamphetamine concealed in rolls of fabric.

Australian Border Force (ABF) officers in Queensland identified and intercepted a sea cargo consignment from Thailand, following its arrival into the Port of Brisbane. The illicit drugs were allegedly concealed in eight wooden crates declared as 'UV protective fabrics'.

ABF assessed multiple red flags in relation to the consignment. Forensic testing established the shipment contained 597kg of methamphetamine wrapped inside 200 rolls of fabric and the matter was handed over to the AFP..

ABF strikes record illicit tobacco detections



The Australian Border Force (ABF) has uncovered a significant surge in illicit tobacco detections in New South Wales, intercepting multiple major consignments of undeclared and illegal tobacco products at both air and sea ports.

Since mid-June, three separate detections at Sydney airport involving travellers all arriving from Lebanon have highlighted ongoing efforts by individuals attempting to smuggle illicit tobacco through aviation routes, including a couple was intercepted with a staggering 65.6 kilograms of tobacco and 480 cigarettes concealed within their baggage; a separate passenger carrying 14 kilograms of undeclared tobacco in his luggage; and in another case, a man travelling with his wife and children was caught with 31 kilograms of tobacco and 940 cigarettes, hidden in their checked baggage.

ABF officers also made two near record-breaking discoveries in separate shipping containers arriving into Australia, one holding 14 million illicit cigarettes and the other concealing over 3 tonnes of loose leaf tobacco.

Philadelphia CBP interrupts magic mushrooms trip to Spain



U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers found nothing magical about the mushroom products they caught tripping to Spain from California and seized the shipment on Tuesday in Philadelphia.

CBP officers seized over 12 pounds

of psilocybin mushroom gummies, chocolates, and capsules in Philadelphia.

In total, CBP officers discovered over 12 pounds of psilocybin mushroom gummies, chocolates, and capsules. Psilocybin mushrooms, also known as magic mushrooms or shrooms, are hallucinogenic psychedelics. Packaging may say watermelon, but there's no escaping these psychedelic magic mushroom gummies.

The shipment, which arrived as an express consignment parcel, was labeled as supplements; however, samples of the gummies, chocolate, and capsules field-tested positive for the properties of psilocybin.

The shipment contained 50 packages of gummies, 40 chocolate bars, and 10 packages of capsules..

CBP officers seize \$78K in unreported U.S. currency at the Brownsville and Matamoros International Bridge



U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers working at the Brownsville and Matamoros International Bridge Port of Entry seized \$78,040 in bulk, unreported U.S. currency.

"Our CBP officers continue to secure our borders, and their vigilance led to

this significant currency seizure,” said Port Director Tater Ortiz, Brownsville Port of Entry. “Outbound bulk cash seizures like these, often proceeds from illicit activity, help to further disrupt criminal enterprises by depriving them of their economic resources.

The seizure took place when CBP officers working at the Brownsville and Matamoros International Bridge encountered a 31-year-old male Mexican citizen driving a 2018 BMW which was selected for a routine outbound inspection. In secondary, CBP officers discovered bulk U.S. currency totaling \$78,040 hidden within the vehicle.

CBP officers seized the currency along with the vehicle, arrested the driver, and turned him over to the custody of Homeland Security Investigations special agents for further investigation.

Cigarettes worth over 1.7 million lei confiscated at the northern border



Border police officers from the Brodina Border Police Sector discovered several bulky packages hidden in vegetation. Given that there were cigarettes inside, measures were taken to monitor the area in order to identify and apprehend the people involved in transporting the boxes. At the same time, contact was immediately made

with the Ukrainian border authorities, to jointly investigate the event.

The packages were transported to the sector headquarters in order to continue the research, and following their inventory, the quantity of 89,336 packs of cigarettes of duty-free origin, worth 1,727,580 lei, was found.

In this case, the border police are conducting investigations into the commission of the aggravated smuggling crime and documenting the entire criminal activity under the direct supervision of the case prosecutor from the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Rădăuți Court.

Border Guards in Grzechotki detained Russian citizens who were tricked into crossing the border and smuggling amber



At the road border crossing in Grzechotki, on the way to Poland, a Chrysler car pulled up for customs. The driver was a 59-year-old Russian man, and his 20-year-old son was a passenger. They carried Latvian residence cards and declared transit to Latvia. Also in the vehicle was a 57-year-old Russian woman who claimed to be married to a German citizen and was traveling to Germany.

It turned out that this wasn't the first

time the father and son had attempted to cross the border from Russia into Poland using deception. Border Guard officers confirmed that they had previously declared the same destination. As a result, they were detained. During the investigation, amber beads were discovered in the passengers' pockets. Officers from the Border Guard Post in Grzechotki directed the car and the passengers to a thorough search, which they conducted with officers from the National Revenue Administration (KAS). 120 amber necklaces were discovered in the driver's luggage. His son had 70 beads, and his wife had 40. The smuggled goods were valued at nearly 11,000 złoty.

28 'Ndrangheta associates arrested for drug trafficking and violence



Europol has supported Italian law enforcement in dealing a heavy blow to the 'Ndrangheta criminal organisation. In an action day conducted on 8 July 2025 across Italy, Spain and Albania, special intervention teams have arrested 28 suspected criminals of Italian and Albanian nationality. Among the individuals taken into custody is an Italian national from the Calabria region suspected of setting up the criminal structure for cocaine trade in the San Basilio area of Rome.

This individual, together with his

three sons, is suspected of closely collaborating with an Albanian criminal group, which handled some of the logistical aspects of the drug trafficking trade. The Albanian members of this network allegedly organised the extraction of shipments from various Spanish and Dutch ports as well as the subsequent transport to Italy. In addition, they were responsible for the drug sale in other parts of Rome.

Investigations show that the cocaine sold in Italy was acquired in South America and transported in containers to ports across Europe. The transport from the Gioia Tauro harbour in Calabria to Rome was allegedly facilitated by Calabrian criminal brokers. The arrested individuals are suspected to have trafficked at least 1 019 kilograms of cocaine and 1 497 kg of hashish in 80 trafficking operations.

Migrants attempted to cross the Polish border in groups of several dozen



Foreigners who attempted to illegally cross the Polish-Belarusian border on July 15 came from countries including Yemen, Iran, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Border Guard officers from Narewka, Czeremcha, Mielnik, Płaska, Michałów, and Czeremcha conducted operations to combat illegal migration.

Near Czeremcha and Mielnik, migrants

attempted to cross the border in groups of several dozen. All were immediately detained. Polish patrols were also attacked. During one such incident, a Border Guard vehicle was damaged.

Border Guard officers in Leipzig detained a courier. The 22-year-old Ukrainian citizen attempted to transport a group of illegal migrants to Western Europe.

Six people stopped at Prut before illegally entering Romania



Following information promptly transmitted by the border authorities of the Republic of Moldova, border police officers from the Rădăuți Prut Border Police Sector intervened promptly and efficiently, in a coordinated action carried out on both banks of the Prut River.

As a result of this cross-border collaboration, a group of six people of Afro-Asian origin was detected attempting to illegally cross the state border from the Republic of Moldova to Romania, by crossing the Prut River.

Following the checks carried out, our officers determined that the individuals are Afro-Asian citizens (Sri Lanka and Iraq). They stated that they intended to reach a state in Western Europe.

During the same operation, Romanian border police managed to identify and

detain two men who were going to pick up Afro-Asian citizens with the aim of transporting them to Western Europe.

The two men, Romanian citizens, were caught while waiting in a car parked near the Prut River to pick up the Afro-Asian citizens, to whom they had previously sent their coordinates by phone.

US CBP AMO seizes more than 1,000 pounds of cocaine and arrests 3 Venezuelan aliens near Puerto Rico

Air and Marine Operations (AMO), an operational component of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, nabbed a yola-type vessel Saturday arresting 3 aliens from the Venezuela and seizing 1,009 pounds (457.8 kilograms) of cocaine in southeastern Puerto Rico. The estimated value of the seized cocaine is \$8.2 million.

At midnight, a Caribbean Air and Marine Operations asset detected a suspect vessel navigating north approximately 6 nautical miles south of Punta Tuna, Maunabo, Puerto Rico. The AMO Fajardo Marine unit deployed the crew of a Coastal Interceptor Vessel crew as well as Marine Interdiction Agents, by vehicle, to the vicinity of Punta Tuna.

The AMO vessel crew intercepted a yola-type vessel, which failed to heave, making landfall in Playa Mario, Maunabo. Marine Interdiction Agents arrested three Venezuelan nationals without proper documentation to enter or remain in the United States legally and seized a total of 16 bales of cocaine.

BEYOND THE DIGITAL BORDER, AND WHY THE NEXT EVOLUTION MIGHT SURPRISE YOU

The push and pull factors, the standout possibilities, and the unfolding future of digital borders. By Andy Smith, Director, Industry & Innovation at SITA

Human innovation is littered with instances of biomimicry, where nature's ingenious design is replicated to solve for increasingly complex human challenges. High-speed bullet trains in Japan were inspired by the streamlined Kingfisher bird, while termite mounds moved architects in Zimbabwe to design sustainable, self-cooling structures.

In the business of borders, there's a lot we can learn from the industrious ant.

Ants are orderly. They are efficient. And their execution is seamless. With row upon row of individual ants rushing backwards and forwards across narrow connected pathways en route to a single destination – the ant is possibly the closest natural

example of how best to manage crowded queues and surging lines of human traffic. People gathering, for instance, at an international airport or a centralised immigration control point.

Researchers from France, the USA and Australia have studied ant behaviour for this very reason: to understand how, even when things get crowded, ants just keep on moving.

The answer, it seems, has a lot to do with an ant's ability to self-regulate its behaviour by cooperating, slowing down, or creating new traffic lanes when density demands it. In many respects, this is not unlike the digitally interconnected human travel ecosystem that is currently taking root around the world. Only in our human world do we have the luxury of being able to add a skin of additional protection in the form of advanced digital technology.

Like ant colonies – where the security of the nest and its inhabitants is critical – safety is also the guiding principle behind any digital border system. However, that's not the only consideration. Efficiency is just as important for us humans as it is for our ant counterparts, maybe more so. Corraling billions upon billions of airline passengers a year through under-resourced and constrained immigration and customs control points must consider more than just the common good. We also need



to cater to the likes, dislikes, needs and complexities of every single individual traveller.

With the International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimating that , by 2043, the number of global air passengers will hit eight billion, humans certainly need efficient digital systems to replicate the chemical communications and collective behaviour of a disciplined ant colony. It's the only way we can hope to achieve the consistently high level of identity management and threat detection required to manage global travel at a level never before witnessed in human history.

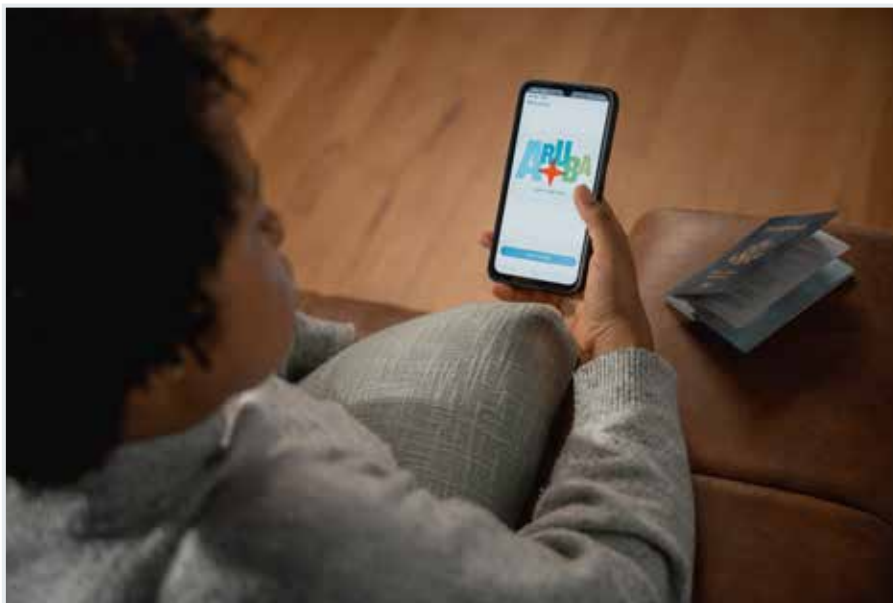
Unlike in our ant analogy, it's here that the human story gets more complicated. Specifically, there are three additional drivers that we need to think about very carefully:

- the changing face of global threats,
- a glaring lack of resources, and
- a growing global appetite for convenient, self-directed travel and border crossing.

Considering each in turn, it is increasingly clear that as passenger numbers increase, each of these drivers will ratchet up the pressure. This will turn what is currently a firm push towards biometric-enabled digital borders into an existential game-changer for national security, economic development, tourism, and effective threat detection and prevention.

Keeping pace with fast-changing global threats

Border security, the verification of visitor identities, and ensuring the integrity and authenticity of travel documentation were among the



driving forces behind Malaysia becoming the first country in the world to issue a biometric electronic passport in 1998. At the time, this was truly revolutionary and a move that soon saw others follow. By 2025, over 140 countries are issuing e-passports.

Around the same time, the first Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) systems were rolled out, enabling trailblazers like Australia and Singapore to replace paper visas with online travel permissions for tourists or business travellers. While in the United States, the first semi-automated facial recognition system was deployed in Los Angeles as a way to search through digitized mugshots.

From there, things mushroomed in the 2000s as automated biometric border solutions were used to process billions of transactions at the

2000 Sydney Olympic Games, the 2004 Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix, the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup in South Africa, and the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. The arrival of the smartphone in 2001 and, more recently, the potential for Large Language Models and Artificial Intelligence (AI) added more exciting technologies to the mix. Today, the range of advanced technologies that work together to facilitate smarter, safer borders spans digital identities, biometric authentication, seamless data exchange, and risk assessments powered by AI.

However, as the world has become more interconnected – and, quite frankly, smaller and easier to circumnavigate – what started as border enhancement and security support has become a necessity for governments under growing pressure to counter emerging

security threats. Not just national security, but terrorism, human trafficking, organised crime, and – since the Covid-19 pandemic – global health threats. Digital borders effectively move the parameters of existing border management away from a country's physical border to the time of booking a ticket, or the moment a passenger applies for digital pre-clearance in the form of an eVisa, traditional entry visa, or ETA.

This might not sound like a big deal, but it is.

A digital border gives governments, border officials, and airlines the time they need to carefully cross-check and confirm passenger details and, if necessary, conduct security checks. With so much of this process now leveraging automated systems and biometric checks – and, more recently, the use of smartphones for self-capturing facial biometrics – this equates to reduced workloads and pressure on border staff. In reality that means a smarter, faster, and more secure border – with fewer queues. It means low-risk travellers can get on with their holidays or business meetings, while border guards focus on the real, high-risk threats.

Enabling talent, not fighting for resources

The challenge, however, is that as threats become smarter and more pervasive, major transport hubs like airports are facing a capacity

shortfall of 1.5 billion by 2040. The aviation industry as a whole will be short of 1.6 million people by 2030. Governments are also battling to fill critical border officer vacancies, with many countries – including the United Kingdom – dealing with significant understaffing as they struggle to find new recruits.

This is not just a people challenge but a matter of space constraints. For instance, a major airport like Heathrow in London has been operating at 98% capacity for over a decade and is battling to get expansion plans off the ground due to financial considerations and environmental and community concerns. That's another resource headache.

One solution is to keep building bigger and bigger infrastructure projects and beefing up staffing levels to prop up outdated systems that are no longer fit for purpose. The smarter move is to shift towards modern, digital border solutions, which is exactly what has been happening for the past 20 years.

Appetite for digital identities and digital travel

Between 2004 and 2028, it is expected that around 5.6 trillion biometric digital identity transactions will take place globally. This represents an anticipated market of some US\$315 billion in digital transformation revenue, but it's the game-changing potential of this digital future that is the real drawcard.



For governments and border officials, that future might involve smoothing the way for visitors, improving efficiencies, ensuring regulatory compliance, and putting strong safeguards in place to identify potential threats. But there is also the human experience to consider, and that's where things are getting increasingly interesting.

Having experienced what digital solutions mean for a safer, less stressful journey, people are hungry for more. According to IATA's 2024 Global Passenger Survey, 73% of passengers favour using biometric data to board a flight and to pass through immigration. Of those surveyed, nearly half made use of biometric solutions at an airport in 2024, while 45% were keen to get all their immigration red tape out of the way before arriving to take their flight. This is particularly true of the younger generations,

the 20-to-40-year old Millennials and Generation Z travellers who fully embrace the digital world they grew up in and much prefer using technology and digital tools at each stage of their travel experience.

For governments, airlines, airports, and tourism providers still debating the merits of investing in digital technology rather than brick-and-mortar solutions, understanding the spending patterns and preferences of modern-day travellers is going to be quite a mindset shift. If we really listen to what passengers are saying, and how they are gravitating towards the likes of digital identities and online loyalty programmes, it's becoming clearer that the physical infrastructure that defined status and standing just 20 years ago no longer underscores the attractiveness of a destination or the global reputation of a country.



beyond the border – creating an interconnected travel experience that continues beyond the border and into a welcoming web of digitally-connected tourism services like hotels, restaurants, conference venues, taxi rides, and car hire platforms. Seemingly, any touchpoint that can be improved through efficient digital solutions has a place in Aruba's plans for the future.

This is how borders are evolving. What started as rows of ants demonstrating efficiency and organization has now taken on an exciting human-inspired dimension all its own. Yes, we want better borders, but why stop there?

In this respect, one of the most exciting aspects of digital travel transformation is that it gives an up-and-coming African or Asian nation access to the same tools as a world superpower. The only limitation is how each country chooses to innovation within their own digital border ecosystem.

The ultimate leveller

There are a number of countries that could be singled out for their innovative use of digital technology to enhance borders and enable travel and tourism. Singapore is up there. So is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Australia, the European Union, the United States, and large swathes of Latin America, Africa, and Asia continue to shine.

We are seeing the widespread use of digital technologies to check passenger data, streamline airport

and border activities, optimise border agent activities, and combat transnational crime. We are also seeing firmer control of migratory flows and enhanced risk prevention and planning. These we expected, but what is increasingly on our radar is the potential for boosting trade and economic development by attracting and promoting tourism.

This whole dynamic package is being showcased by the Caribbean island of Aruba, which is enhancing its national brand and standing on the world stage by embracing digital solutions and platforms. Aruba was quick to recognise the intrinsic value of digital borders, both financially and in terms of security and goodwill. Yes, they streamlined pre-boarding clearances and at-border processing. Still, they are also actively finding ways to broaden their digital travel ecosystem

Irish Authorities Seize 440kg of Cocaine off the Coast of Ireland



In a significant blow to international drug trafficking networks, Irish authorities have seized 440kg of cocaine following a coordinated maritime interdiction operation off the coast of Cork, Ireland.

The drugs were offloaded from a suspected mother vessel — a 200-metre bulk carrier arriving from South America — and collected at sea by a go-fast, which subsequently landed at Broad Strand, near Courtmacsherry, on Tuesday.

Four individuals — two Scottish nationals, one

English and one German — were arrested in connection with the smuggling attempt. According to An Garda Síochána, the group operated in two teams: a “maritime team” responsible for retrieving the drugs at sea, and a “ground team” which was intercepted onshore on July 1st while attempting to transport the consignment by van.

Authorities believe the group behind this operation may be linked to an earlier successful importation of between 500kg and one tonne of cocaine into western Ireland earlier this year.

This seizure is the largest of its kind in Ireland since the 2.25 tonnes recovered from the MV Matthew in September 2023 and underscores the continued threat posed by maritime drug trafficking from South America into Europe.

MAOC (N) commends the multi-agency cooperation involved in this operation and remains fully committed to supporting its partners in the ongoing fight against transnational organised crime.

Irish Authorities Seize 440kg of Cocaine off the Coast of Ireland

MAOC (N) participated in Operation White Sea V, a large-scale international initiative targeting maritime drug trafficking across the European west coast, the English Channel, the North Sea, and major seaports. The operation, led by Belgian Customs and coordinated under the EU’s EMPACT framework by Europol, ran from 2 to 30 June 2025.

Operation White Sea V focused on a range of smuggling techniques, including at-sea drop-offs, transfers to smaller vessels, concealment by crew

members, and narcotics hidden on or beneath ship hulls. Operational deployments included patrol vessels, boarding teams, speedboats, divers, helicopters, and coast guard aircraft, supported by analysis teams.

Throughout the month-long effort, authorities monitored 951 vessels and carried out 119 physical inspections. Nine drug trafficking incidents were recorded in Europe, leading to the seizure of 3348 kg of cocaine and the arrest of 13 individuals.

Unprecedented scale of criminal infiltration of global cargo supply chains sustaining the surge in illicit drugs trade, WCO Report finds



A major report by the World Customs Organization (WCO) has revealed that over two-thirds of detected drug shipments were found to have the involvement of someone directly employed within the maritime cargo supply chain.

WCO's analysis of over 2,600 global drug seizures, totaling 1,347 tonnes, found that the role of so-called 'internal conspirators' - those working directly with criminal gangs either under duress or for profit - are providing an underrecognized, but essential, link in the global drugs trade, especially for cocaine.

Coasting on the global supply chain

While the illicit use of global cargo supply chains for the distribution of cocaine is well known, the WCO Report focuses in on the infiltration of maritime cargo supply chains as the main conduit of cocaine and the often under evaluated role of internal conspirators. A two-year in-depth analysis of 2,600 global drug seizures by the WCO, based on Member reported and open-source data, found;

- 68% of detections were assessed to have had some level of involvement from an internal conspirator employed within the maritime cargo supply chain.

- Internal conspirators massively target shipping containers, accounting for 85% of seizure events and 80% of seized narcotics by volume.
- Considerable shifts in maritime cocaine flows over the course of 2023 and 2024 as transnational organized crime networks adapted, shifting more of their smuggling efforts into smaller ports in other parts of Europe.

WCO Secretary General, Ian Saunders, said:

"Illegitimate actors are undermining our collective efforts with industry to promote a system of trade that is safe, secure and free flowing. The sheer quantities of illicit narcotics being detected around the globe clearly demonstrate that those responsible are well-resourced, skilled and persistent. And they deserve to receive responses of equal focus and dedication. As threats continue to evolve and become more sophisticated, our approaches to addressing them must do so as well."

Cargo, Containers and Concealing Cocaine

Organized crime groups increasingly leverage internal conspirators using four main methods to smuggle cocaine: compromising the structure of shipping containers, breaking into containers as they move through the supply chain, attaching drugs to a vessel's hull, or at sea drops in the ocean.

WCO's analysis found that gangs are increasingly embedding smaller cocaine loads directly into container structures, particularly void spaces in refrigerated containers, with retrieval often occurring at unsecured empty container yards, post-border clearance. This method is fast, discreet, and frequently supported by internal conspirators with access to logistics systems, enabling tamper-free concealment. Organized crime groups are readily exploiting easy access points across the supply chain. WCO's analysis found 627 cases recorded (average of 52 kg) and growing use of GPS trackers for retrieval.

WCO's Report also finds evolving tactics with deep concealments in container ceilings, where seizures jumped from 0.9 tonnes in 2023 to 3.4 tonnes in 2024. However, floor concealments saw a 40% drop, with authorities believing enforcement successes and logistical challenges - as these concealments require sophisticated coordination and often fail mid-route - account for this change.

The Report demonstrates organized crime's ability to successfully infiltrate and exploit multiple supply chain vulnerabilities across various supply chain nodes, including many of the world's maritime ports and terminals.

The full report, *Infiltration of maritime cargo supply chains, Organized crime, cocaine and the internal*



conspirator is now available in English, French and Spanish. The ABF/WCO Supply Chain Integrity Project is funded by the Australian Department of Home Affairs and the Australian Border Force.

ASEANAPOL and Freeland: TRIPOD II - Counter Transnational Organized Crime – Wildlife Trafficking (CTOC-WT) in Hai Phong, Vietnam



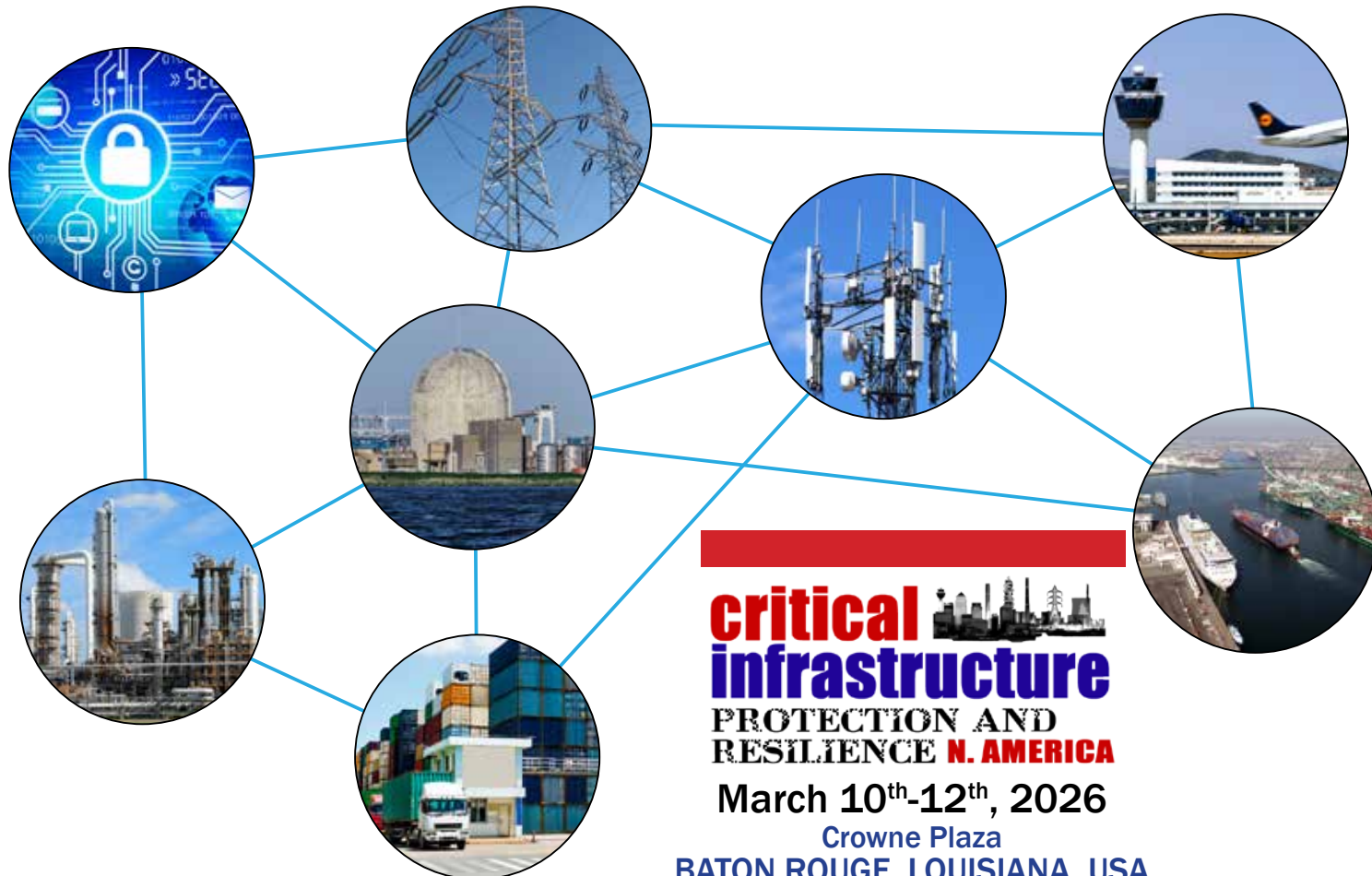
The ASEANAPOL Secretariat, in strategic partnership with Freeland, actively participated in the TRIPOD II - Counter Transnational Organized Crime – Wildlife Trafficking (CTOC-WT) training course, held from 9 to 13 June 2025 in Hai Phong, Vietnam. This impactful initiative was generously supported by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

Representing the ASEANAPOL Secretariat were

Police Senior Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Huu Ngoc, Director for Plans and Programmes (under the supervision of Executive Director Police Colonel David Martinez Vinluan), and Ms. Suhasini Gunasagarar. Both made valuable contributions to the training sessions and inter-agency dialogues, reinforcing ASEANAPOL's steadfast role in advancing regional law enforcement collaboration.

This high-level capacity-building program directly addressed the complex and evolving threat of wildlife trafficking across Southeast Asia. Designed to empower frontline officers and specialists, the course fostered greater intelligence sharing, operational coordination, and strategic planning among regional partners.

The training convened 27 participants (12 from Malaysia and 15 from Vietnam) representing a diverse range of agencies, including police, customs, financial intelligence units, tax authorities, and public prosecutors. Their enthusiastic engagement reflected the region's strong and united commitment to confronting transnational wildlife crime.



SAVE THE DATES

Securing the Inter-Connected Society

The ever changing nature of threats, whether natural through climate change, or man-made through terrorism activities, either physical or cyber attacks, means the need to continually review and update policies, practices and technologies to meet these growing demands.

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BOC Chief Pushes Reforms to Combat Agri Smuggling



Determined to protect the country's food security and agricultural sector, the Bureau of Customs (BOC), under the leadership of Commissioner Ariel F. Nepomuceno, is advancing a multi-pronged approach to eliminate agricultural smuggling. These efforts include the full automation of customs processes, the proposed implementation of a Pre-Shipment Survey mechanism, and the strict enforcement of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act.

Commissioner Nepomuceno emphasized that curbing agricultural smuggling is not only a matter of enforcement but also a question of system integrity. "We must modernize our systems, tighten our enforcement, and transform our workforce to truly protect our borders and support our farmers," he said.

To eliminate human discretion and reduce opportunities for corruption, the BOC is accelerating the full automation of customs procedures, especially in the processing and clearance of agricultural imports. Automation will enable real-time tracking, automated risk management, and digital verification, significantly improving transparency and operational efficiency.

As an added safeguard, the Bureau is reinforcing stricter and risk-based monitoring of shipments originating from identified high-risk countries with a history of illicit importation or agricultural smuggling. Enhanced profiling and targeted inspections are being applied to detect and intercept suspicious shipments before they reach the Philippine market.

As part of its broader reform agenda, the BOC is also

studying the possible adoption of a Pre-Shipment Survey mechanism. This proposed measure would require goods to undergo inspection and verification before leaving the exporting country. While the concept is still under evaluation, it is being considered as a potential solution to address issues of misdeclaration, underdeclaration, and technical smuggling before the goods reach Philippine shores.

With the enactment of Republic Act No. 12022, also known as the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, the BOC is reinforcing its enforcement efforts. The law imposes severe penalties, including non-bailable charges, for individuals found guilty of smuggling agricultural goods worth at least ten million pesos. The Bureau has since intensified its inspection, alert, and seizure operations to detect violations and pursue legal action against offenders.

In recent months, the BOC has successfully intercepted several attempts to smuggle agricultural products, including misdeclared onions, carrots, and frozen fish at major ports such as Subic and Manila. One major operation, conducted in partnership with the Department of Agriculture (DA), uncovered 10 containers falsely declared as "chicken poppers" which were actually loaded with smuggled carrots and onions valued at over 100 million pesos.

These operational successes underscore the BOC's strengthened collaboration with law enforcement agencies such as the Philippine National Police, National Bureau of Investigation, and Philippine Coast Guard. The Bureau also works closely with the Department of Agriculture to ensure that only lawful and properly declared agricultural imports are allowed into the country.

Beyond enforcement, Commissioner Nepomuceno is committed to building a culture of integrity and discipline among BOC personnel. From entry-level staff to high-ranking officials, all employees are expected to uphold the values of professionalism and accountability. "This is not just about stopping smuggling. It is about transforming the institution and building a Bureau that the Filipino people can trust," he added..

Arab Experts Convene in Amman for High-Level Scientific Symposium on Integrated Border Management



The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan hosted a high-level Scientific Symposium on Integrated Border Management (IBM), jointly organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS), in close coordination with the Jordanian Ministry of Interior. The symposium brought together senior government officials, border authorities, representatives of international organizations, academics, and technical experts from across the Arab region and beyond.

The three-day event aimed to strengthen regional understanding of Integrated Border Management as a holistic framework that balances national security, trade facilitation, and humanitarian considerations. In the face of growing global mobility and transnational threats, the symposium served as a platform to explore practical and strategic approaches to more effective and rights-based border governance, while safeguarding the dignity of migrants.

Participants engaged in expert-led discussions addressing a wide range of border management challenges in the Arab region, including irregular migration, migrant smuggling, and transnational organized crime. These discussions highlighted the urgent need for collaborative and innovative responses, especially in light of regional instability and operational gaps.

Strengthening Protection Systems for Vulnerable Migrants in Southeast Nigeria



Director General of the National Agency for the The International Organization for Migration (IOM), with support from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Cooperation on Migration and Partnerships to Achieve Sustainable Solutions (COMPASS) programme funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, convened a four-day

Specialized Protection Training for State and Non-State Protection Actors in Enugu State.

Southeast Nigeria remains a notable origin point for irregular migration, with Enugu, Imo, Anambra, and Abia states frequently recording high cases of irregular migration and trafficking. According to data from IOM, over 3,000 migrants have been returned to the region between 2017 and May 2025. Socioeconomic challenges and exploitative recruitment practices continue to expose vulnerable populations, particularly women, youth, and children, to violence, exploitation, and abuse along migration routes.

In response, IOM organized the capacity-building training to enhance the capacities of frontline protection actors to provide ethical, survivor-centred, and coordinated protection and reintegration services to migrants in vulnerable situations identified in the southeastern region of Nigeria.

NAPTIP Arrests Three Suspected Members of Inter-State Human Trafficking Syndicates and Rescues Three Victims

Operatives of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Katsina State Command, have arrested three suspected members of an inter-state Human Trafficking syndicates who specialized in the recruitment, harbouring and trafficking of young girls from other parts of the Country to the Northern region for sexual exploitation.

They were arrested inside one of the prominent hotels located in Katsina township (name withheld), with three suspected victims of human trafficking rescued during the operation. The Manager of the hotel and two other workers were arrested. Two of the victims are from Benue State and one from Rivers State. Their age ranges from 21 to 26 years old.

According to a preliminary investigation, the suspects were believed to be the major suppliers of victims to brothels and other notorious Centres, including some neighbouring Countries.

It would be recalled that the Director General of NAPTIP, Binta Adamu Bello, OON, had directed Operatives of the Agency across the country a few weeks ago to step up surveillance and intelligence-gathering activities within their jurisdictions to address the reported cases of inter-state recruitment and trafficking.

She also directed the Operatives to beam searchlights on the activities of some hotels, drinking joints, and motor parks in all the State Capitals, to curtail the activities of some criminal elements who operate as members of human trafficking gangs in the Country.

Report says the rescued victims were found inside a small room located within the Hotel complex, while the traffickers were inside another well-furnished room within the same compound, relishing the proceeds of the exploitation.

Speaking after the operation, the victims claimed that they were deceived, recruited, and trafficked to Katsina with a promise of a legitimate job, only to be forced into prostitution against their will.

"I was brought here by a woman (name withheld). She promised to give us a job and that we would be paid very well. I asked her the details of the job, but she said I will

know the nature of the job when I get here. When we got here, she introduced us to prostitution, which was not part of what they told us before.

"We actually sleep with a lot of men, at least 20 men a day, and all the money we get goes to the chairlady of the place, by name Amarachi. We have no choice but to sleep with 20 men a day. Even when we are on our monthly period, we are being forced to sleep with the same number of men. Even when we are sick of tired, they will force us to sleep with me. They said it is not their business to know how we feel, but to engage in prostitution. They give us a fearless energy drink each to take every evening so that we can have energy to work, be awake to sleep with the men, and get money for them.

"They take all the money we make and leave us to feed ourselves", the victim lamented with uncontrollable tears.

While thanking NAPTIP for coming to their rescue, the victims disclosed that the traffickers, in addition to crippling them financially so that they will not be able to escape, also paid some men to keep eye on them.

Speaking on the development, the Director General of NAPTIP, Binta Adamu Bello, expressed worry over the activities of some hotels and centres across the Country that harbor victims of human trafficking, saying that the hotel in question shall be sanctioned in line with the provisions of the trafficking law.

"I wish to commend the Operatives of NAPTIP in Katsina for the raid and rescue of the victims. Their stories are painful and sad. They were deceived, recruited, trafficked, and forced into prostitution. While they are facing horror every day from prostitution, their traffickers were somewhere within the same hotel, feeding fat on the proceeds of the exploitation.

"It is also important to reiterate our earlier warning about operators of hotels aiding and abetting the exploitation of victims of human trafficking in their facilities. We have commenced a legal process to determine the next execution order for the hotel. The law shall definitely take its course", Binta Adamu Bello stated.

EU seaports must join forces to tackle maritime drug trafficking and strengthen data reporting, new report finds



JOINT REPORT

Seaports: monitoring the EU's floodgates for illicit drugs

EU seaports remain a prime focus for drug trafficking networks, serving as key entry points for illicit drugs into the region. As a result, there is a vital need for closer cooperation and better data sharing among ports to effectively tackle the problem. This is according to a new report released today ahead of International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking (26 June). The report, entitled *Seaports: monitoring the EU's floodgates for illicit drugs*, is a joint analysis by the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Western Europe (RILO-WE).

Developed in support of the European Ports Alliance Public-Private Partnership (European Ports Alliance) (1), the report provides the first detailed overview of maritime drug trafficking targeting EU ports. The ultimate aim of reporting on this issue is to strengthen capacity to monitor trafficking trends at these key locations and inform evidence-based responses at EU level.

The findings highlight the worrying scale of criminal activity targeting EU seaports. Over 1 826 tonnes of illicit drugs were seized, at, or in transit to, EU seaports between January 2019 and June 2024 — 68 % being intercepted at the EU seaports themselves (1 244 tonnes) and the remainder in non-EU locations but in

shipments destined for the EU. Around 1 507 tonnes (83 %) were seized from container ships.

A total of 18 EU Member States, covering 96 EU ports reported drug seizures to the WCO Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) database, including 24 of the 33 seaports belonging to the European Ports Alliance. The analysis describes how some seaports that are currently not members of the Alliance are 'significant targets for maritime drug trafficking', indicating the potential importance of expanding its membership, as announced in the ProtectEU Strategy.

The report reveals that a small number of EU ports, such as Rotterdam (Netherlands) and Antwerp (Belgium), capture a large proportion of all the drugs seized in Europe. However, a diverse range of other ports, of varying sizes and shipping capacities, are also impacted and report significant seizures of a variety of drugs.

Cocaine is by far the most trafficked drug, accounting for around 82 % (1 487 tonnes) of the total drugs intercepted in the monitoring period, followed by cannabis resin (260 tonnes). The ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam seized the largest quantities of cocaine (around 443 tonnes and 181 tonnes respectively) and heroin (8.1 tonnes and 5 tonnes respectively). The Spanish ports of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Huelva seized the largest quantities of cannabis resin (42 tonnes and 30 tonnes respectively). At least 21.7 tonnes of captagon were intercepted at EU seaports during the period, the majority from one seizure in Salerno (Italy) in 2020 (14.2 tonnes).

The report warns that the scale and regularity of large shipments (averaging over 500 kg of cocaine and 1.3 tonnes of cannabis resin per shipment) confirm that criminal networks are using EU ports to smuggle wholesale amounts of drugs, especially cocaine. It also implies a significant degree of penetration by

organised criminal networks in EU ports, including the likely corruption of some port staff. Additionally, violence related to drug trafficking has frequently been seen in these port environments. Most of the drugs smuggled through EU ports eventually supply national drug markets where violence is increasingly observed.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations, including strengthening data collection and reporting on seizures of drugs and precursor chemicals and ensuring that all seaports belonging to the European Ports Alliance regularly provide comprehensive seizure data to the WCO CEN database. The report also stresses the relevance of expanding the membership of the European Ports Alliance and providing training and resources to law enforcement officials, port authorities and other stakeholders to improve data collection and reporting.



The European travel authorisation ETIAS will cost EUR 20



The Commission has announced a new fee for non-EU travellers who do not need a visa to enter 30 European countries. The European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) fee will be EUR 20 instead of the previous EUR 7. This increase aims to cover the operational costs of ETIAS, taking into account all its functionalities and inflation rates, and align the EU fee to the ones of

other countries that have similar travel authorisation programmes.

The ETIAS system is designed to make it easier for visa-exempt non-EU nationals to travel to the EU while improving security. Travellers will need to fill out an online application before their trip, providing personal information. The application will be processed automatically, and the traveller will receive a decision within minutes. Certain groups, including individuals under 18 or over 70, will be exempt from paying the fee.

The adjustment of the fee will now undergo the two-month review period of the Council and the European Parliament (renewable once). It will enter into effect as soon as ETIAS is operational, which is expected for the last quarter of 2026.

The ETIAS system will start operations at the end of 2026.

SECURING THE SEAS AROUND SMALL ISLAND STATES

By Sirius Insight

Intrinsic to global trade, geopolitical security and environmental stability, the maritime domain plays a critically important role in ensuring the uninterrupted use of the Global Commons and international connectivity. In this increasingly complex maritime environment, Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is essential to facilitate the delivery of good ocean governance, maritime

border security and economic resilience.

Now more than ever, it is crucial that MDA systems are effective and efficient, enabling evidence-based attribution of criminal behaviour at sea and action to interrupt illegal activities. While all coastal nations' security is strengthened from such maritime oversight, as highlighted by the UN Sustainable Development

Goals, it is especially important that Small Island Developing States (SIDs), in particular, are suitably equipped to meet the challenges that they will face over the coming years. Essential to their own sovereignty, security and to realise the enormous potential in the Blue Economy, it is important that they have the resources at their disposal to be able to protect their maritime domain and know what is happening within it. However, the challenges that SIDs may face in achieving this are both considerable and frequently underestimated.

The Maritime Challenges for SIDs

Often presiding over large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) which are sometimes hundreds or even thousands of times larger than their land mass, the maritime domains of small island states both teem with potential for economic development but also pose significant governance and security challenges.

Challenges that SIDs may face in their maritime domain are wide-ranging, encompassing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, transnational organised crime, pollution, trafficking, and climate-related maritime disasters. Moreover, if these challenges are not appropriately addressed and dealt with, they have the potential to threaten the economies, livelihoods, culture, and food security of these small island states.



Too often, these states lack the physical infrastructure, resources, and personnel to monitor their waters, resulting in sizeable maritime domains being left inadequately monitored and therefore protected in a timely and effective manner.

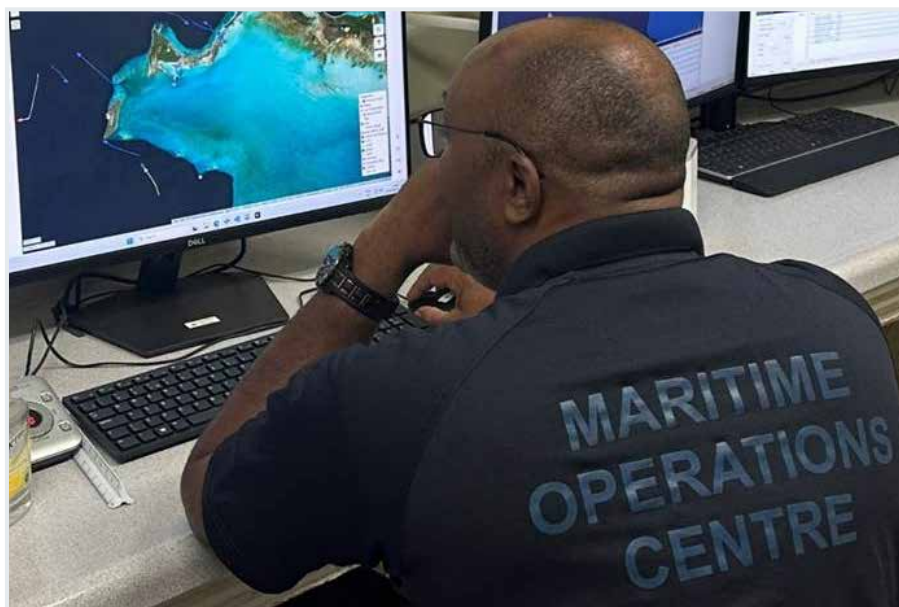
Moreover, these threats often stretch past national borders. Ineffective management of these, often transnational, challenges will invariably have transnational consequences, making it not only beneficial but, in fact, vital that these SIDs are supported to the greatest possible extent.

Addressing these challenges through new technology

These challenges can, however, be easily addressed through scalable, intelligent technology. Effective MDA, underpinned by maritime data

sources, is a crucial first step that small island states can take to help prevent and address illegal and illicit activities in their maritime domains.

Technology platforms, such as web-based portals, can play an integral part in seeking to overcome the challenges that SIDs face. Organised into a user-friendly platform that filters big data from deployed sensors into clear, actionable insights, these tools enable maritime authorities to gain a deeper insight into and understanding of their maritime domains. While it is vital that SIDs are able to identify and address illegal activities, it is similarly important that they are able to identify legal activities and be able to distinguish between when to initiate early intervention and, conversely, when not to take action.



Through the integration of a diverse range of maritime data sources such as radar, AIS, and imagery, modern systems are able to generate a detailed real-time, maritime picture, providing a common multi-use service for multiple maritime users and elevating maritime authorities' understanding of their domain and cooperation.

By deploying these technologies, maritime authorities in small island states become exceptionally well placed to respond to threats with a greater level of confidence and more efficiently, enabled to deploy precious and finite assets in a thoughtful and timely way, and with pinpoint accuracy. All of this contributes to ensuring that they are able to prioritise the security, safety and sovereignty of their territory and properly protect their citizens and

assets.

Effective MDA technology is not only beneficial for the SIDs themselves but make a fundamentally important contribution to maintaining and enhancing international maritime partnerships.

Through the secure sharing of data across jurisdictions, MDA portals seamlessly support and strengthen international collaboration through shared alerts which can create coordinated responses to incidents ranging from IUU fishing to search and rescue operations, affirming the role that stronger Maritime Domain Awareness by SIDs is not only nationally beneficial, but transnationally, too.

Moreover, in order that no SIDs are left behind in this increasing digitisation of the management of maritime-related security and

safety, it is important that MDA tools continue to be as cost-effective and scalable as possible as threats transform in size and type over time. Maximising MDA using commercial-off-the-shelf equipment and tracks (software)-as-a-service ensures that small island states are able to take advantage of dual-use capabilities that are both cost competitive and modular, benefit from scale and scope economies where practicable, and, in this way, it is possible to ensure that SIDs' maritime security remains up to date, relevant and achievable, despite competing resources.

The scalability of this technology is equally fundamental to the future protection of SIDs. As threats and challenges are bound to change and develop, the technology deployed can similarly adhere to both these new challenges but also reflect emerging ambition and capability development. Strengthening the safety, security, and sustainability of small island states should be accessible and long-lasting, which many of the available technology ensures.

In addition to MDA technology, SIDs continue to benefit from their participation in organisations like the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) which provides global oversight and also regional mechanisms such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCCoC), Yaoundé Code of Conduct and other

agreements designed to enhance regional cooperation and maritime security.

In the Caribbean, for example, the Regional Security System (RSS) is a multinational security alliance that upholds mutual assistance in security among member states, recognising that the security and safety of individual maritime domains are not only relevant to their respective nations but to contiguous states as well as those well beyond.

These interconnected and mutually reinforcing frameworks are an integral part of well-managed maritime governance and safety and, coupled with modern MDA technologies, SIDs have the opportunity to benefit individually and collectively from enhanced levels of rigour and protection.

Ensuring that the maritime domains of small island states are effectively monitored and protected goes beyond being a national imperative, but an intrinsic part of global interconnectivity and its future. Therefore, while it is a necessity that the sovereignty of small island states is upheld, this cannot happen without ongoing support. Through deploying MDA technology, and further bolstering international information sharing, SIDs are significantly better equipped to address and mitigate the threats that they are face.



While small island states may face threats and challenges that are unique to them, their consequences can have global repercussions. Significant and continuous improvements in the ability to manage MDA will undoubtedly be beneficial to SIDs as well as to their regional and international partners, promoting the confidence and economic vitality that naturally flows from the ability to enhance transnational security, safety, and sustainability.

Change is afoot. Rarely has there been a time when the ability to understand and secure a maritime domain was so readily available. But that is now within the grasp of any small island state keen to enhance its own security, safety and resilience.

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SECURING EUROPE'S BORDERS IN AN ERA OF RISING COMPLEXITY

By IDEMIA Public Security

From irregular migration to cross-border crime, Europe's borders are under mounting pressure. Shifting geopolitical tensions, climate-driven displacement, and the increasing sophistication of criminal networks are challenging the ability of national authorities to protect the Schengen Area while upholding the free movement that defines it.

In recent years, the task of border management has evolved

far beyond passport stamping. Authorities must now strike a delicate balance between tightening security and maintaining fluidity at entry and exit points. They are expected to screen growing volumes of travelers, process biometric data in real time, and detect threats before they materialize without creating bottlenecks or compromising personal privacy.

At the same time, the EU's border

control systems must adapt to new regulatory frameworks, including the upcoming Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). These introduce added complexity, demanding high levels of interoperability, automation, and resilience across member states' border infrastructure.

Against this backdrop, projects like SafeTravellers and EINSTEIN are shaping the future of border control. Funded under the EU's Horizon Europe framework, they explore how cutting-edge technology—from advanced biometrics to AI and privacy-by-design systems—can help secure borders while ensuring a seamless and trustworthy experience for travelers.

Exposing new threats and closing the gaps

One of the core motivations behind SafeTravellers is the growing threat of identity and document fraud. Criminal organizations have developed increasingly sophisticated methods—including biometric manipulation, morphing attacks, and document forgery—to evade detection at border controls. These techniques are used to facilitate transnational crime, from illegal migration and human trafficking to terrorism.

SafeTravellers seeks to close these security gaps while safeguarding individual rights. Its mission is twofold: to detect and prevent fraud at borders using advanced biometric



and analytical tools, and to give travelers greater control over their personal data. This dual emphasis on security and privacy represents a shift from traditional border control models toward more citizen-centric, trust-based systems.

Backed by a consortium of 23 organizations from 14 countries, SafeTravellers is also a model of European cooperation. Its multi-stakeholder structure includes research institutions, public agencies, and industry leaders, each contributing expertise to modernize how borders are managed and secured.

Technologies behind SafeTravellers

The innovations at the heart of SafeTravellers are designed to enhance both security and user experience. By decentralizing identity management, the project allows travelers to store a digital

version of their identity in a secure mobile wallet, giving them the ability to preregister and control what data is shared at the border. This system complies with current and forthcoming regulations, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the EU AI Act.

SafeTravellers integrates a wide range of cutting-edge technologies:

- Self-Sovereign Identity and mobile passports: Enabling secure, user-controlled digital identity.
- European multibiometric data space: Creating a unified biometric framework for cross-border checks.
- Multimodal biometric fusion: Combining facial and fingerprint recognition for increased accuracy.
- Threat intelligence and unusual event detection: Using AI to identify suspicious patterns in real time.



- Explainable AI recommendation engine: Supporting transparency in decision making at the border.
- Advanced fraud detection: Tackling forged documents, biometric morphing, and look-alike fraud.
- Sensor tampering and interception defenses: Reinforcing the integrity of biometric systems.
- Frictionless ID verification: Offering seamless identity checks for both EU citizens and Third-Country Nationals (TCNs).

SafeTravellers is more than a technical project—it is a strategic initiative to align Europe's border security with its values of privacy, fairness, and efficiency. By delivering tools that both enhance detection and respect civil liberties, the project sets a precedent for how next-generation border systems can work in practice.

For travelers, the outcome could mean faster border crossings, fewer manual checks, and greater

trust in how their data is used. For border agencies, it promises better detection rates, improved workflows, and greater compliance with evolving legal frameworks.

With its strong foundation of cross-border collaboration and a privacy-first approach, SafeTravellers is paving the way for a more secure and seamless travel experience across Europe. For more information, please refer to safetravellers-project.eu.

IDEMIA Public Security: Bringing innovation to the front line

As a global leader in identity and security technologies, IDEMIA Public Security is playing a central role in the SafeTravellers project. The company's expertise spans biometric authentication, document verification, and AI-powered fraud detection—key capabilities for future-proofing Europe's borders.

In France, IDEMIA Public Security's research team is developing document classification and

authentication tools that can identify travel documents based on country and model. One persistent challenge is glare—light reflections on glossy passports or ID cards captured via smartphone can obstruct key features. IDEMIA Public Security is working on new capture and image enhancement techniques to reduce glare and improve Optical Character Recognition results.

Meanwhile, in Germany, the focus is on fighting look-alike fraud and disguise-based deception. IDEMIA Public Security researchers are training AI models to detect facial anomalies and differentiate between legitimate travelers and those attempting to alter their appearance to bypass controls. These tools are expected to strengthen border officers' ability to spot impostors and prevent identity fraud.

In addition to these national contributions, IDEMIA Public Security is also co-developing an integrated software platform with SafeTravellers partners. The solution will include mobile apps for travelers and border agents, as well as fixed installations for eGates and kiosks. A working prototype is already underway, and a pilot phase is planned to evaluate real-world performance.

Bringing border innovation to life: The EINSTEIN project

While many promising security technologies are developed in research labs across Europe, few ever make it to operational deployment. The EINSTEIN project,

along with SafeTravellers, is the exception. Launched in early 2024, it aims to fast-track high-potential solutions into the hands of border guards and frontline officials. Its mission is both technical and strategic: to boost identity and document fraud detection while ensuring these new capabilities can be integrated across Europe's diverse border ecosystems.

Led by the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas in Greece, EINSTEIN brings together a multidisciplinary consortium of 21 partners from 11 European countries—spanning public authorities, research institutions, and private sector organizations. The project is not just about building prototypes but also delivering operational capabilities that can support EU priorities like EES, ETIAS, and the adoption of Digital Travel Credentials.

Innovation in EINSTEIN

Over a three-year course, the project will provide a suite of six interconnected applications:

- **Online document issuance:** A web application which provides the eGovernment service for a citizen to apply online for a first time or renewal of a document (e.g., travel, identity), with the main innovation to detect and prevent fraudulent enrollment of biometrics uploaded by the applicant.
- **Mobile document and identity checks:** An application, available



on smart devices, which will be able to scan ID documents and determine if the document is likely to be fraudulent or not.

- **Document authentication:** An application supporting document experts from immigration services and border authorities to authenticate travel, identity, and breeder documents.
- **Preregistration for border crossings:** An application to permit travelers to preregister for (land) border crossings to enable enhanced security checks and an overall improved border crossing experience for travelers and border guards.
- **EES kiosk with advanced fraud detection:** Development of a kiosk application to expedite entry of TCNs' biometric and biographical data and to efficiently conduct fraud checks.

- **Fast-track biometric corridor:** An application which allows the identity verification of travelers at a border without the traveler having to stop, supporting a smoother experience for both travelers and border guards.

Each application is being tested in real-life border scenarios across multiple EU countries, targeting Technology Readiness Level 7 or higher to ensure operational readiness.

EINSTEIN emphasizes modularity and interoperability, with all applications designed to plug into existing systems. Whether at a southern European airport or a northern land border, tools developed under EINSTEIN are built to scale and comply with regulations like GDPR and the forthcoming AI Act. For more information, please refer to einstein-horizon.eu.



IDEMIA Public Security in EINSTEIN

As a key partner in the EINSTEIN project, IDEMIA Public Security is contributing its expertise in biometric and document authentication technologies. This includes developing an advanced biometric kiosk with AI-powered fraud detection, as well as researching methods to authenticate security features in identity documents that are often overlooked.

A critical area of focus is morphing attack detection—identifying subtle manipulations in facial images designed to bypass identity verification. IDEMIA is developing algorithms capable of flagging potential morphing attempts in real time, while ensuring biometric data is deleted immediately after analysis, in line with data protection regulations.

The company is also helping develop mobile-based preregistration solutions, enabling travelers to

securely submit identity information ahead of time to streamline passenger flows at border crossings.

Joint benefits and shared vision

SafeTravellers and EINSTEIN share a common goal: building a future where Europe's borders are secure, efficient, and respectful of individual privacy. Together, the projects aim to:

- Strengthen identity and document fraud detection
- Improve the traveler experience through faster, more seamless processes
- Equip border authorities with real-time tools for fraud detection and risk analysis
- Ensure compliance with evolving EU regulations and privacy standards
- Promote interoperability and scalable solutions across the Schengen area

For travelers, this means quicker border crossings, fewer manual checks, and greater transparency in how their data is handled. For border agencies, it means improved detection rates, streamlined operations, and the ability to adopt new technologies without compromising on legal or privacy obligations.

The EINSTEIN project is funded by the European Union (EU) under G.A. no. 101121280 and UKRI Funding Service under IFS reference 10093453. The SafeTravellers project is funded by the European Union under Grant Agreement N° 101121269. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU/Executive Agency or UKRI. Neither the EU nor the granting authority nor UKRI can be held responsible for them.



**Co-funded by
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New SmartGate Kiosks go live at Sydney Airport fast-tracking international arrivals



Sydney Airport has announced the installation of eight new Australian Border Force (ABF) SmartGate kiosks at the T1 International Terminal, in a move that will boost inbound international passenger processing capacity by 640 travellers per hour.

The rollout stems from a joint 2024 agreement

Combined with a \$200 million T2 Domestic transformation and a T3 food and beverage refresh, this investment underlines Sydney Airport's commitment to streamlining operations and enhancing the traveller experience across the entire precinct.

UK and France agree major deal to crack down on illegal Channel crossings



Prime Minister Kier Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have agreed to take forward a groundbreaking partnership to address illegal Channel crossings and dismantle the people smuggling networks.

A new pilot scheme will see small boat arrivals being returned to France then an equal number of migrants will be able to come to the UK from France through a new legal route – fully documented and subject to strict security checks.

The pilot agreement is intended to prevent illegal migrant journeys across Europe to the UK and prevent dangerous small boat crossings, helping to undermine the business model of organised gangs profiting from people's misery by showing others these journeys could result in them being returned back to France – ultimately saving lives.

Both countries are working to implement the pilot in the coming weeks, and, once in force, migrants who cross the Channel by small boat can be detained and removed.

Prime Minister Starmer has made it a priority to reset relationships across Europe and the government is now unlocking, for the first time, the levels of co-operation needed to deliver new and bold approaches to tackle organised immigration crime.

The French government are working to implement new ways of cracking down on small boats, including a review of their maritime tactics so their operational teams can intervene on the water, ensuring taxi boats that pickup migrants waiting in the water can be stopped.

THE SAHEL REGION AND EMERGING THREATS OF BORDER SECURITY IN WEST AFRICA

*By George-Okoli Francisco Chidi,
Director of Programs, West African
Action Network on Small Arms
(WAANSA) – Nigeria*

The Sahel a semi-arid region in Africa formed a transitional zone between the Sahara desert to the North and the Savannah to the South. It stretches across West Africa and North Central Africa, extending from Senegal in West Africa to Sudan in the east. The Sahel acts as a cultural and ecological bridge between the desert

and more fertile regions, facilitating trade and cultural exchange. The Sahel, sprawling across the heart of West Africa, stands as one of the most troubled frontiers on the continent, if not the world. The Sahel's vast and porous borders have morphed into corridors for a host of transnational threats: armed insurgencies, illicit arms

trafficking, organized crime, human trafficking, and the movement of extremist groups. Nations like Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Nigeria find themselves battling on multiple fronts not just with non-state actors, but also with the structural weaknesses of their own border management systems. According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the Sahel accounted for 19% of all terrorist attacks worldwide and 51% of Global Terrorism related Index deaths in 2024 up from 48% in 2023.

At the core of this crisis lies the rampant proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). These weapons, often smuggled in from conflict zones like Libya and Sudan, circulate with alarming ease across under-policed borders, fueling violence and undermining state authority. With every rifle that crosses unchecked into a borderland village, trust in governance erodes, and communities are pushed further into cycles of fear, displacement, and despair.

WAANSA Nigeria, have witnessed firsthand how these dynamics manifest on the ground. Our work in border communities linking the Sahel reveals that insecurity is not just a product of militant activity; it is the outcome of years of institutional neglect, economic marginalization,



and a lack of regional coordination.

A sustained military focused strategy in Sahel can exacerbate instability and conflicts rather than resolve it. While it may weaken terrorist groups and reclaim territory, it can also lead to civilian casualties. While kinetic responses may suppress symptoms, they rarely address root causes. What the Sahel requires is a multidimensional approach that will integrate intelligence-led border management, arms control protocols, and the empowerment of borderland populations.

Our recent research and field engagements suggest that community-based early warning systems, civil-military partnerships, and youth inclusion in peace-building are keys to reversing the tide. Equally critical is the harmonization

of border policies across ECOWAS states, and the strengthening of regional arms embargo monitoring mechanisms. Revitalization of agriculture remains a mainstream in Sahel economy, providing employment for 80% - 90% of the population. Investing in agriculture targeting unmarred border areas can stimulate rural development with the capacity to improve overall living standard.

This crisis is not confined to Africa. The ripple effects of Sahelian insecurity extend to Europe through irregular migration and to the global stage. The global community, the African Union, ECOWAS, and international partners must treat border security in the Sahel not as a localized problem, but as part of the broader global peace and security agenda.



sustained arms control efforts that we can transform the Sahel from a battleground of insecurity into a zone of resilience, peace and sustainable development.

Border communities must be reimagined, not as peripheries of the state, but as frontline partners in peace. Investing in their security, livelihoods, and civic agency is not charity but a strategic necessity.

In conclusion, addressing the threats facing the Sahel's borders demands urgency, innovation, and unwavering political will. It is only through regional cooperation, people-centered governance, and

Trio arrested over alleged plot to import 600kg of meth concealed in rolls of fabric



Three men have been charged for their alleged roles in the importation of \$555 million worth of methamphetamine concealed in rolls of fabric.

They have each been charged with one count of attempting to possess a commercial quantity of an unlawfully imported border-controlled drug, contrary to sections 307.5 and 11.1 of the Criminal Code

(Cth). The maximum penalty for this offence is life imprisonment.

Australian Border Force (ABF) officers in Queensland identified and intercepted a sea cargo consignment from Thailand, following its arrival into the Port of Brisbane. The illicit drugs were allegedly concealed in eight wooden crates declared as 'UV protective fabrics'.

ABF assessed multiple red flags in relation to the consignment. Forensic testing established the shipment contained 597kg of methamphetamine wrapped inside 200 rolls of fabric and the matter was handed over to the AFP.

The AFP removed the illicit drugs and the consignment was delivered to a warehouse in Bowen Hills, in Brisbane's inner north.

Strengthening Somalia's Maritime Governance: EUCAP Somalia and UNTMIS Deliver Joint Training on Vessel Traffic Management & Information System



In a coordinated effort to strengthen maritime governance in Somalia, EUCAP Somalia and the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) jointly delivered a capacity-building training programme on Vessel Traffic Management and Information System (VTMIS).

This system will help Somalia monitor and protect its waters more effectively, prevent incidents & respond to threats.

The training targeted officers from the Somali Navy and Coast Guard (SNCG), the Maritime Rescue

Coordination Centre (MRCC), and the Somali Police Force – Department of Coast Guard (SPF-DCG). Held at the Joint Maritime Training Centre (JMTC) in Mogadishu, the training covered the structure and functioning of the VTMIS, including the legal foundations and Rule of Law, operational techniques and practical skills such as the interpretation of radar returns and the use of VHF communication, as well as institutional coordination between the MRCC, the Maritime Operations Centre (MOC), and the Tactical Operations Centre (TOC) of the Somali Navy and Coast Guard.

Initial VTMIS deployment is foreseen in strategic coastal areas and will be integrated with the national early warning network, marking a concrete step forward in Somalia's maritime development that EUCAP is actively sustaining along with international partners such as UNTMIS.

Polish-Lithuanian Border Guard officers, in cooperation with Territorial Defense Force soldiers, detained 12 people



At the Lithuanian border in Markiškės, Border Guard officers and Territorial Defense Force soldiers detained a courier. He was a Latvian citizen

transporting four Afghan nationals. Further actions are being taken against the driver and passengers.

After midnight, in the town of Wołyńce, Border Guard officers and Territorial Defense Force soldiers detained seven people (four Somali citizens and three Moroccan citizens). During the detention, a courier, a Latvian citizen, arrived to pick up the migrants. He was detained. Further investigations are ongoing.

Since the temporary reintroduction of border controls, more than 60 people have been detained on the Polish-Lithuanian border, including 10 couriers.

2026 WORLD BORDER SECURITY CONGRESS DEVELOPING BORDER STRATEGIES THROUGH CO- OPERATION AND TECHNOLOGY



**World Border
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Austria, a landlocked country in Central Europe, faces significant border security challenges stemming from its geographical position and its membership in the Schengen Area. The Schengen Agreement, designed to ensure the free movement of people within the participating European countries by abolishing internal border controls, paradoxically complicates Austria's ability to tackle cross-border crime, including illegal migration, drug

smuggling, and human trafficking.

One of the primary challenges is the management of illegal migration. While the absence of internal border checks facilitates movement, it also makes it easier for individuals who have entered the Schengen Area irregularly through other member states to reach Austria. Austria has experienced significant fluctuations in migration flows, influenced by geopolitical instability in neighboring regions and beyond. The country

serves both as a transit route and a destination for asylum seekers, placing considerable strain on its reception and processing capacities. Although Austria can temporarily reintroduce border controls under specific circumstances outlined in the Schengen Borders Code, these measures are intended as exceptions and must be proportionate and limited in duration. The constant need to balance the principle of free movement with national security concerns creates a persistent challenge for Austrian authorities.

Drug smuggling is another major concern. Austria's central location makes it a transit country for various illicit substances destined for other parts of Europe. Criminal groups, often with international connections, exploit the open borders within the Schengen Area to transport drugs. While Austria maintains controls at its external Schengen borders and conducts police checks in border regions, the ease of movement across internal borders complicates detection and interdiction efforts. Vienna International Airport is a known entry point for drug smugglers, and distribution networks operate within the country, involving both local and foreign actors. The rise of online drug markets and the use of encrypted communication further compound the difficulties in combating drug trafficking.

Human trafficking is a particularly heinous crime that Austria



grapples with as both a transit and a destination country. Victims, including men, women, and children, are trafficked for various forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, forced begging, and forced criminality. The abolition of internal border controls within the Schengen Area can facilitate the movement of traffickers and their victims across national boundaries. While Austria has a national action plan and cooperates internationally to combat human trafficking, the clandestine nature of the crime and the involvement of transnational criminal organizations pose significant challenges. Identifying victims and prosecuting traffickers require extensive intelligence sharing and cooperation across Schengen member states.

Austria's border security challenges are multifaceted, with its rich historical connections and central European location, makes its capital,

Vienna, an ideal place to re-convene for the next meeting of the World Border Security Congress.

The World Border Security Congress is a high level 3 day event that will discuss and debate current and future policies, implementation issues and challenges as well as new and developing technologies that contribute towards safe and secure border and migration management.

Join us in Vienna, Austria on 14th-16th April 2026 for the next gathering of international border security, protection and migration management professionals.

www.world-border-congress.com

908 Devices Launches VipIR, a 3-in-1 Handheld Analyzer for Field-Based Chemical Identification of Unknown Bulk Substances

908 Devices has announced the launch of VipIR, a 3-in-1 handheld analyzer that sets a new standard for rapid and confident field-based chemical identification of unknown bulk solids and liquids, such as narcotics, explosives, and toxic chemicals.



VipIR enables customs and border personnel and hazardous response teams to simplify workflows and eliminate guesswork, accelerating decision making on scene.

At the heart of VipIR is Smart Spectral Processing (SSP), a proprietary algorithm that actively integrates data from Raman spectroscopy and FTIR (Fourier Transform Infrared) spectroscopy for analysis of complex or mixed substances from just one sample. No repositioning or repeated sampling is required. SSP

uses the results of one spectroscopy technology to refine or confirm the other spectroscopy technology, delivering a more accurate and reliable chemical identification of an unknown substance.

"VipIR is redefining chemical analysis at the point of need with its combination of lab-grade analytical technologies, sophisticated algorithms and a simple, smart workflow that provides one confident result," said Kevin J. Knopp, CEO and Co-founder.

Regula Powers Ecuador's Plan to Modernize Every Border – From Airports to Maritime Ports

Ecuador's border control authorities have significantly enhanced their identity verification capabilities by deploying a suite of advanced document examination devices from Regula.



The nationwide upgrade, supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and local partner INSETK, brings automation, precision, and speed to the country's border checkpoints, which collectively process nearly 1.5 million travelers annually.

The project is a major step in Ecuador's mission to modernize all land, air, and maritime entry points, including key international airports in Quito and Guayaquil, as well as northern and southern border crossings.

These strategic locations now benefit from Regula's advanced forensic devices, which enable fast and reliable detection of fraudulent documents—critical in the fight against identity-related crime.

Closing the gap with a set of forensic devices

Previously, document checks at Ecuador border crossings were largely manual and supported by outdated equipment, often handled by just two officers per site. This made the process slow, error-prone, and vulnerable to sophisticated fraud.

Rigaku Launches Fourth Generation Handheld 1064 nm Raman Analyzer for Chemical Threat Analysis

Rigaku Analytical Devices has announced the launch of its fourth generation 1064 nm Raman analyzers – the Icon series, featuring enhancements in chemical threat analysis for safety and security applications.



The Icon-X is the first 1064 nm Raman analyzer to provide standoff chemical analysis allowing users to analyze potentially dangerous substances from a safe distance. This is critical for military, first responders, EOD, and border protection teams who could potentially be exposed to explosive threats, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), homemade explosives (HMEs), and chemical threats.

This new, optional feature

also reduces the need for time-consuming sample collection, while allowing responders to assess hazards without disrupting the scene. In addition to the new standoff capability, the Icon-X contains an on-board, comprehensive library of chemical warfare agents (CWAs), explosives, narcotics, toxic industrial chemicals, precursors, cutting agents, and more. The Icon-X features a more ergonomic form factor, with improvements in all areas over previous generations, including: Use of the latest technology for enhanced processing, illuminated keypad and larger, more responsive touchscreen for easier use, optional GPS ability to mark critical scan data for fleet management and sensitive site exploitation.

New Scout Pro II/III Expand FLIR's Thermal Monocular Family, Offer Exceptional Situational Awareness and Detection Range

FLIR, a Teledyne Technologies company, is introducing its Scout Pro II and III thermal monoculars: the latest Scout Pro models designed to help law enforcement and public safety professionals quickly survey vast urban or rural areas without losing focus on observed people or objects.



Replacing the existing Scout II/III, LS and Scion series, the next-generation Scout Pro II and III simplify tasks that include surveillance, search and rescue, evidence gathering, and active pursuit and intervention. Exceptional situational awareness, wide coverage, and long detection ranges combine to provide

the vital intelligence required to patrol areas safely or locate missing or injured people quickly.

Developed in partnership with industry professionals, FLIR's Scout Pro II and III are built on a trio of key design principles: streamlined interaction, mission-critical reliability, and efficient human detection.

Blighter's New Long-Range Border Surveillance Radar Detects a Person at 15km with just 4 Watts of Power

Blighter has unveiled its longest-range smart border surveillance radar system. The Blighter B422LR can detect a person 15km or 9.3 miles away with just 4 Watts of power – that's the same as what is needed to power a mobile phone or a modern LED light bulb.



This extended range means earlier interception of intruders and significant cost savings for border security operators. With its 'person at 15km' detection range, the Blighter B422LR can now monitor an area of 707km² compared with

201km² for a radar with a 'person at 8km' range.

Mark Radford, co-founder and chief technology officer (CTO) at Blighter, says,

"Our radar's ability to detect a person 15km away, or a crawler 6.4km away, in all weathers and in complex terrains,

and with just 4 Watts of transmission power, makes the case for adopting our solution even more compelling.

"With the extended range, customers will not only be able to detect and intercept targets earlier but with a larger area covered by each radar system, the number of radars, towers and the supporting infrastructure needed will be reduced."

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