Migrant Smuggling in the Western Balkans 2022

Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration: 28 September 2022
I. Situational picture
Statistic, main trends & threats

II. Europol’s response
Situational picture in 2022

Statistic

• The migration flow from the Western Balkan region strongly affects EU countries;
  
  **Example:** increased migration flow to AT, CZ, DE, HU and SI

• Migrant smugglers and criminal networks strongly involved in facilitation of migration flow from the Western Balkan region

• January – August 2022 increase in detected migrant smuggling cases
  
  **Example:** HU 89%, SI 20 %, HR 14 %
Situational picture in 2022

Main trends

• Most common modi operandi of migrant smugglers: no change

Smuggling is concealment in vehicles, in particular cars, (mini-)vans, and lorries

Arrested smugglers: drivers citizens of WB countries & 3rd country nationals sharing nationality with irregular migrants

Source: HU border police
Situational picture in 2022

Main trends

• Potential abuse of visa policies of Western Balkan Countries

  Increased reporting on smuggling Cuban, Indian, Tunisian and Turkish from the region

  **Cubans:** A mixed transnational network with criminal cells along the route: RU – RS – NM – GR (IT) – ES

  **Turkish:** by plane from Turkey to Serbia to neighboring countries – in vehicles – cars, vans and lorries – on their way to the final destination in the EU.
Situational picture in 2022

Main trends & threats

Increase reporting on use of violence along the Western Balkan routes
- deadly traffic accidents (cars, vans & lorries)
- attacking/shooting at law enforcements officers
- migrant smuggling advertising video showing weapons
- criminal networks armed with weapons
- clashes between criminal networks

Possible further increase in migrant smuggling cases & violence
Europol’s response

• Operational agreement with AL, BA, ME, NM & RS
• Working arrangement with XK*
• Liaison Officers in Europol: AL, ME, NM & RS – JLT
Migrant Smuggling & THB
• Priority cases: supporting on going investigations in the field
• Under construction: Operational Task Force (OTF)
aiming to combat violent migrant smuggling networks
operating along the Western Balkan Routes

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence
Thank you for your attention

Any questions?

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