
39 migrant smugglers arrested during Sirocco-2 Action Day along Western-Balkan route

Europol has supported the Sirocco-2 action day to dismantle migrant smuggling criminal networks operating along the Western-Balkan channel. All relevant countries from the South East European region participated in this common operation. 39 migrant smugglers and 580 smuggled migrants were arrested during this 36 hour long action.

Border management restrictions in the South East European region have created demand for criminal networks to offer their services to those migrants who are stranded in various phases of their journey. Facilitators often appear in refugee camps and offer their services to asylum seekers.

Police and border management forces from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland joined forces for this 36 hour long action. An operational centre, involving temporary liaison officers from the region, has been set up at the Joint Operational Office in Vienna to support the ongoing cross border operations. The Mobile Analyst team (EMAST) of Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) was deployed to the main criminal hubs in Germany, Austria and Hungary to facilitate real time information exchange and perform live cross matching.

Nearly 30 migrant smuggling incidents were detected, 39 migrant smugglers arrested and 580 smuggled migrants were intercepted. The aim of the action was to trigger real time information exchange and the law enforcement reaction to detect migrant smuggling activities. Real time information exchange is one of the best law enforcement tools to stop cross border criminal activities.

Due to this technique, a smuggler who attempted to escape from Hungary with 6 Syrian irregular migrants was stopped in Austria after a hot pursuit through Slovakia.

During the implementation of this action increased smuggling activities were detected along the Western-Balkan route. The stricter border control measures result in organised crime groups offering their services to migrants.

"Criminal groups are offering services to migrants to facilitate their journey, making substantial profits. In 2016 alone, more than 7000 new suspected migrant smugglers were reported to Europol. It is expected that the prices for smuggling will continue to rise and exploitation is expected to further increase both in countries of transit and arrival. Law enforcement in Europe can only fight this phenomenon by joining forces", concludes Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol.

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