



Background note session I

EU cooperation in the fight against organised crime

Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC
29–30 January 2023, Stockholm

The Swedish Parliament, former Second Chamber

EU cooperation in the fight against organised crime

Background

Organised crime is a significant threat to security in the EU. Serious organised crime moves across national borders and includes all forms of criminality. Criminal groups exist in all EU countries and are **often active across national borders**. 70 per cent of these criminal groups are active in more than three EU countries. In the EU, a number of criteria are used to define the concept of organised crime¹

According to the 2021 EU SOCTA², organised crime groups active in Europe are involved in a variety of criminal activities, with most criminal groups involved in drugs trafficking, organised property crime, followed by fraud (including customs, excise and VAT fraud), migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. While some groups are specialised in a particular criminal market, others are increasingly poly-criminal, using the profits of one criminal activity to finance their expansion into other crime areas.³

Regulatory framework at EU level

On 14 April 2021, the Commission presented a Communication on an EU Strategy to tackle organised crime 2021-2025⁴. The strategy specifies priority areas where action is needed to better protect citizens and the economy from organised criminal groups. The strategy contains proposals for medium- and long-term measures aimed at helping member states in the fight against organised crime.

In May 2021, the EU adopted priorities for the fight against serious and organised crime for the next four years.⁵ The priorities will be implemented in 2022–2025 within the framework for the **European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT)**. EMPACT is a multidisciplinary, intelligence and evidence-based EU initiative aimed at dealing with the main criminal threats facing the EU.⁶ The initiative is run by the member states and involves many bodies working together, including law enforcement bodies, the EU institutions and agencies, public and private organisations as well as relevant countries and organisations outside the EU. It includes both preventative and criminal measures as well as operational and strategic initiatives.

¹ Collaboration of more than two people; each with own appointed tasks; for a prolonged or indefinite period of time; using some form of discipline and control; suspected of the commission of serious criminal offences; operating on an international level; using violence or other means suitable for intimidation; using commercial or businesslike structures; engaged in money laundering; exerting influence on politics, the media, public administration, judicial authorities or the economy; and determined by the pursuit of profit and/or power. (This list can be found in document 6204/2/97 Enfopol 35 Rev 2)

² Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (Europol).

³ COM(2021) 170 final, Communication on the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025.

⁴ COM(2021) 170 final, Communication on the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025.

⁵ Council conclusions setting the EU's priorities for the fight against serious and organised crime for EMPACT 2022 – 2025 (8665/21)

⁶ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-statistics/empact>

Organised crime in armed conflicts and crises

Conflicts create opportunities for organised crime to grow and reinforce the threat that criminal groups can pose to internal security. Crime in situations of conflict can include the following:

- trafficking in human beings
- online fraud
- cyberattacks
- misappropriation of funds in support of refugees
- illegal trafficking in arms

As a result of the war in Ukraine, certain emergency measures were introduced in the EU's priorities against crime within the framework of EMPACT in March 2022. These include trafficking in human beings, criminal assets, money laundering and asset recovery, new psychoactive substances and synthetic drugs, and criminal high-risk networks.

In connection with the **COVID crisis**, criminal networks adapted their technology to exploit the uncertainties surrounding the COVID crisis. The most common crimes during the pandemic include:

- cyberattacks against health and medical care organisations and infrastructures for remote working;
- phishing, blackware and malware;
- online and offline dissemination of counterfeit and substandard personal protective equipment, medicines and sanitary products;
- theft by means or deception, with the “grandchild trick”; and
- looting of health care facilities and pharmacies

[Link](#) to Europol, Security and COVID

Questions for the discussion:

1. The key to combating cross-border organised crime is to cooperate more across borders and across sectors. How could cooperation between the actors concerned be improved in order to combat organised crime?
2. How can EU cooperation be adapted and strengthened to address the forms of organised crime that tend to increase in crisis situations?
3. Rapid access to information, with full respect for fundamental rights and special protection of data, is crucial when it comes to combating all forms of organised crime. How can effective exchange of information be made possible without compromising personal privacy and fundamental rights?
4. Children and women are at a particularly high risk of facing trafficking in human beings. How can the EU-cooperation be used to address the situation facing at-risk groups?