
INTERPOL-Europol forum targets migrant smuggling networks

Developing a coordinated and effective law enforcement response against the organized criminal networks behind people smuggling is the focus of the INTERPOL and Europol Operational Forum on Countering Migrant Smuggling Networks.

The two-day (15 and 16 October) meeting at INTERPOL's General Secretariat headquarters brings together more than 120 participants from some 50 source, transit and destination countries affected by irregular migration flows, as well as representatives from international and regional organisations and the private sector.

The forum will also review the links between people smuggling, human trafficking and other crimes involving illicit money flows, corruption and the use of fraudulent travel documents.

It aims to build an international platform coordinating criminal analysis, training and operations against people smuggling.

"There are many countries and organizations involved in addressing the migrant smuggling challenge, and no one actor is able to stop the smuggling networks on their own," said INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock.

"These networks are both extensive and complex, comprising individuals who carry out a range of criminal activities. Coordinated action among source, transit and destination countries is therefore needed, and law enforcement is a critical component in the fight against smuggling groups."

"As a neutral platform with 190 member countries, INTERPOL is uniquely placed to coordinate international efforts to target people smuggling networks, not just in destination countries, but critically and simultaneously in source and transit countries," said Mr Stock.

With INTERPOL and Europol already working closely together across a range of crime areas, including on Europol's Joint Operational Team (JOT) Mare initiative against people smuggling, Mr Stock also underlined Europol's role and capabilities in working with the world police body against crime networks.

Mr Wil van Gemert, Deputy Director of Operations at Europol, said: "The unparalleled increase in the number of migrants and refugees attempting to enter Europe has led to an unprecedented scale of criminal activity. As the challenge is complex and multi-dimensional, our response also needs to be."

"Europol is stepping up its efforts to convert the Joint Operational Team Mare into a new-style European Migrant Smuggling Centre. This will strengthen our ability to offer on-the-spot support and increase our analytical capabilities."

Mr van Gemert added that, as the challenge goes beyond EU borders, Europol's partnership with INTERPOL is crucial. While Europol serves as the criminal information hub for European Union Member States, INTERPOL can play a significant role in facilitating the exchange of information between source and transit countries, and in making sure the information relevant for law enforcement is shared quickly.

"Together with INTERPOL, this Forum we open today and the next meeting at Europol, will deepen our operational cooperation and strengthen our mutual trust. This is a precondition for increasing the exchange of information and undertaking concrete action in the joint fight against crime."

In this respect, the audience heard that INTERPOL aims to create a Specialist Operational Network against Migrant Smuggling to build and maintain its information sharing hub on known smuggling groups.

A follow-up meeting to this week's forum on migrant smuggling networks will also be held at Europol headquarters in The Hague early in 2016.



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