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COUNCIL OF EUROPE

3rd International Conference on Migrant Smuggling

followed by a separate session for the

4th meeting of the CoE Network of Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling

CONCEPT NOTE

Strasbourg, 21-22 October 2025

Agora, Room G03

*The Conference is being organised under the auspices of the
European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC), in collaboration with the
Division on Migration and Refugees*

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Background

Countering migrant smuggling is identified as a priority in the decisions of the Council of Europe Heads of State and Government at their [4th Summit held in Reykjavik on 16-17 May 2023](#). The European leaders stated in the Reykjavík Declaration:

“We recall the increasing challenges of migration and the necessity to fight against trafficking and smuggling of migrants. We commit to intensifying efforts to foster and improve international co-operation in this regard, while continuing to protect the victims and respect the human rights of migrants and refugees, as well as supporting frontline States, within the existing Council of Europe frameworks”¹.

In 2024, thousands of migrants continued to attempt irregular avenues and dangerous routes, increasingly turning to smugglers, which puts their lives at risk and expose them to serious human rights violations. While clear legal consequences for smugglers can reduce the phenomenon, migrants should not be criminalised and their rights should be protected.

The Council of Europe treaties, mechanisms and standards on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters can play a key role in the area of countering migrant smuggling for States Parties. Moreover, most of these treaties are open to third countries. This is particularly important given that the geographical scope of cooperation and coordination of action against migrant smuggling goes beyond the European space.

The Council of Europe Committee on Crime Problems ([CDPC](#))² has been actively engaged in addressing the issue of migrant smuggling and has developed the [Action Plan on Fostering International Co-operation and Investigative Strategies in Fighting the Smuggling of Migrants](#). As part of its Action Plan, the Council of Europe Network of Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling was set up and has met annually in recent years. CDPC Delegations have also developed [country profiles](#) setting out legal and judicial information on migrant smuggling that other countries are able to draw on for their work.

Following on from the Reykjavik Declaration, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe tasked the CDPC with preparing a report assessing the need for and feasibility of a possible instrument in the field of migrant smuggling. In February 2025, based on this report, the Committee of Ministers endorsed the proposal for the CDPC to draft a Recommendation on deterring and fighting the smuggling of migrants through legal means, other actions, and international cooperation. Negotiations will be based on the Palermo Protocol and take into account the ongoing UN discussions on a model law on the smuggling of migrants, as well as the outcomes of the negotiations around the EU’s proposed Directive on preventing and countering facilitation of unauthorised entry. The recommendation will focus on the need for coherence across national laws, the non-criminalisation of humanitarian assistance, and the importance of international cooperation in investigations. The CDPC plans to establish a subcommittee to support this work in 2026.

The Conference is intended to offer an opportunity for representatives from international organisations and their agencies and network - in particular the United Nations and European Union, and from the Council of Europe and its Member States to exchange on the current challenges and their efforts in this field. Representatives from Third Countries, particularly from the South Mediterranean region, and civil society organisations will contribute as well.

[Reykjavik Declaration](#), page 7.

The Conference will conclude with a separate session reserved for a meeting of the Network of Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling, building on the success of such meetings held in previous years.

Aim and topics for the 3rd International Conference on Migrant Smuggling

The aim of the Conference is to foster enhanced international cooperation, discuss the effectiveness of the existing legal frameworks and any possible gaps, share best practices, and discuss the forthcoming draft Recommendation to be prepared by the Council of Europe Committee on Crime Problems.

The exchanges at the Conference should help inform the preparation of the draft Recommendation on the smuggling of migrants and contribute to the future work of the planned Subcommittee. The topics will include:

International cooperation, which is essential when it comes to combating a crime that is transnational by nature. Cooperation between Council of Europe member States, and between member States and third countries where most migratory flows originate, still needs to be reinforced.

Legal frameworks and ongoing discussions on their updates related to migrant smuggling at international and national levels, which may need to be clarified, enhanced or completed, both regarding the criminalisation of offences and the protection of victims of smuggling and those who assist them.

Other challenges related notably to the **investigation and prosecution of migrant smuggling** may include a lack of clarity in terms of criminalisation, aggravations and penalties related to this offence.

Participants may also wish to examine issues such as:

- The protection of **victims** (vulnerable persons, gender dimension) and the rights of witnesses and collaborators of justice.
- Actions to address **new criminal techniques** (use of modern technologies and financial tools to facilitate migrant smuggling).
- Actions to address the **links between smuggling and other types of crime** (money laundering and corruption, as well as child labour, sexual slavery, human trafficking, drug trafficking, etc.). The Council of Europe monitoring processes in this field are an important asset in this endeavour, notably GRECO and MONEYVAL. Moreover, as migrant smuggling is increasingly organised online, E-evidence and investigative capabilities are needed to tackle it; the Council of Europe cybercrime instruments and cooperation fora can be very relevant in this respect.

Target Audience

Participants in the Conference would primarily be:

- Representatives of relevant authorities from Council of Europe member and observer States.

- Members of the Council of Europe Network of Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling.
- Members of the Eurojust Focus Group on Migrant Smuggling.
- Identified partners from third States, in particular, prosecutors and representatives of national legal and judicial authorities.
- Representatives from United Nations agencies/bodies (UNODC, UNHCR, IOM) and from the European Union.
- Civil society representatives.

Timing and place

The Conference will take place from the 21st to the 22nd of October 2025 at the Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg, France, with the morning of the 22nd of October devoted to the annual meeting of the Council of Europe Network of Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling.

A hybrid format will facilitate flexible and remote participation.

Expected outcomes

- **Enhanced understanding and practical insights on the topic of migrant smuggling.**
- **Strengthened International Cooperation:** Building on the progress made during the [2024 Conference](#), the 2025 Conference will foster cooperation among source, transit, and destination countries, in line with the Council of Europe Action Plan on fighting migrant smuggling, as well as on collaboration and synergies at the level of international organisations.
- **Enhanced collaboration among prosecutors on migrant smuggling:** The Conference will reinforce the engagement and mutual trust among prosecutors who are members of the Council of Europe Network of Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling, highlighting the significance of continuing their collaboration, and their interaction with peers, including, but not limited to, the members of the Eurojust Focus Group on Migrant Smuggling.
- **Inform:** The Conference will inform participants about the planned establishment of a Subcommittee on Migrant Smuggling in 2026, as well as the upcoming preparatory work for a draft recommendation on the smuggling of migrants, to be developed under the authority of the Committee of Ministers.