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COUNCIL OF EUROPE

3rd International Conference on Migrant Smuggling

followed by a separate session for the

**4th meeting of the Council of Europe Network of Prosecutors
on Migrant Smuggling**

Meeting Report

Strasbourg, 21-22 October 2025

Agora, Room G03

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

Opening session

The 3rd International Conference on Migrant Smuggling followed by a separate session for the 4th meeting of the Council of Europe Network of Prosecutors on Migrant Smuggling took place on 21–22 October 2025, in Strasbourg. the Conference aimed to enhance international cooperation, evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and identify potential gaps, exchange best practices, and discuss the forthcoming draft Recommendation being prepared by the Council of Europe Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC).

The meeting was opened by Hanne Juncher, Director of the Directorate of Security, Integrity and Rule of Law; Fritz Zeder, President of the Council of Europe Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC); and Michael O'Flaherty, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe. In their opening remarks, the speakers underscored the importance of addressing legislative and practical loopholes at the national level and of establishing common international standards to prevent and combat migrant smuggling as a criminal offence. They expressed confidence that the discussions and outcomes of the Conference would contribute to the ongoing work of the CDPC, including the preparation of the draft Recommendation on deterring and fighting migrant smuggling through legal means and other actions by the end of 2027.

I. Update and practical challenges in the implementation of international and national instruments

Session I addressed updates and practical challenges in implementing international and national instruments. Participants engaged in discussions with representatives of international organisations, national experts, and civil society organisations.

International perspectives:

Martin Fowke, Team Leader, Normative and Policy Team Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provided an update on the work related to the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. He outlined current and forthcoming initiatives to support implementation of the Protocol. Beyond greater protection action, he also emphasised the need, globally, for greater international cooperation, capacity building, and tackling of the financial and technology aspects of migrant smuggling, as well as related organised criminal networks, to better address migrant smuggling and implement the Protocol.

Delphine Leneutre, Legal Officer at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Strasbourg (UNHCR) shared UNHCR's perspective on gaps within the current EU anti-smuggling framework and potential avenues for its reform. She reiterated that without safe and legal pathways, refugees are forced onto perilous journeys, often exploited by smugglers and risking death, especially along routes like the Mediterranean. She stressed the need for a route-based approach and reforms that provide protection, uphold humanitarian principles, and ensure refugees and humanitarian actors are not criminalized. .

Krzysztof Nowaczek, Deputy Head of Unit for Migration Management Response and Counter-Smuggling at the European Commission's Directorate-General Migration & Home Affairs,

confirmed the Commission's strong commitment to preventing and countering the smuggling of migrants. He provided an update on the EU's Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling, including the forthcoming international conference on 10 December and the Commission's legislative proposals in this area. The Commission will also propose sanctions targeting smugglers and traffickers to freeze their assets, restrict their freedom of movement and cut off their profits.

National perspectives:

Slawomira Dewitz from the German Federal Ministry of Interior and for Community, delivered a presentation on Germany's situation regarding migrant smuggling. Ms Dewitz outlined the operational results achieved within the framework of the EMPACT Priority on Migrant Smuggling and underscored the challenges that remain, particularly those linked to the growing digital dimension of migrant smuggling.

Calogero Ferrara, the European Delegated Prosecutor at EPPO for Italy and member of the Council of Europe Network on Smuggling of Migrants presented Italy's approach to addressing migrant smuggling. He provided insights into national investigative tools and operations, stressing the need to tackling the phenomenon with the instruments typical of the fight against organised crime. He also emphasised the importance of the "follow the money" approach in dismantling smuggling networks and highlighting the critical role of international cooperation in effectively combating this crime presenting examples of a more proactive approach.

Contributions by civil society:

Tuesday Reitano, Deputy Director of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, emphasised the growing impact of technology on migrant smuggling and stressed the importance of strengthening international cooperation among all countries along migration routes. She also highlighted the effectiveness of financial investigations targeting the supply infrastructure that supports human smuggling operations.

Noemí Alarcón, Chair of Migration Committee of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) underlined the need for a common definition of migrant smuggling and reaffirmed the importance of protecting humanitarian actors and legal professionals working in this field, emphasising the importance of including a binding humanitarian exemption for lawyers and civil society in proposals for an EU anti-facilitators/anti-smuggling Directive.

II. Reflection on elements of the new Council of Europe Recommendation on deterring and combatting the smuggling of migrants

Andreas Schloenhardt, Professor at the University of Vienna and of Queensland and Council of Europe consultant, presented the "Feasibility Study on a Possible Council of Europe Instrument on Smuggling of Migrants" he co-authored with Calogero Ferrara for the Council of Europe Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC) in 2024.

III. The role of European and international networks and agencies in countering migrant smuggling

Session III examined the role of European and international networks and agencies in countering migrant smuggling.

Ljiljana Plazzeriano, Operational Coordination Team at EUROPOL's European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) highlighted the growing intersection between the digital domain and migrant smuggling, noting the role of emerging technologies including those concerning cryptocurrencies. She emphasised the importance of systematic network disruption as a key strategy in combating these evolving threats.

Adriano Silvestri, Head of Migration and Asylum Sector in the Justice, Digital and Migration Unit of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) presented FRA's ongoing activities related to migrant smuggling and underscored the need to ensure that humanitarian actors are not subject to penalisation. He also introduced the 2025 update to FRA's publication 'Investigating Alleged Ill-Treatment at the European Union's External Borders', which provides an overview of the status of judicial and disciplinary investigations into alleged border-related ill-treatment up to the end of 2024.

Ofelia Hough, Criminal Intelligence Officer in the Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Unit, Vulnerable Communities Sub-Directorate at INTERPOL, outlined how INTERPOL supports member countries in ongoing investigations. She also drew attention to the role of the internet as a facilitator in migrant smuggling operations and to the financial crimes associated with such activities.

Eva Pastrana, Head of the Criminal Law Division of the Council of Europe and Secretary to the CDPC, as moderator of this session, stated that representatives from the European Union including its agencies and INTERPOL would be invited as participants in the envisaged drafting of the Recommendation on SoM, alongside observers from non-member States with which the Council of Europe has a Neighbourhood Partnership.

IV. National experiences of applying international instruments in the field of migrant smuggling: contributions by third countries

Session IV was dedicated to contributions from third country representatives, who shared their experiences in applying international instruments in the field of migrant smuggling.

Ghizlane Loghmari, from the Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Morocco presented Morocco's national migration policy and the forthcoming amendments to the national criminal procedural code. She underlined the importance of international cooperation and collaboration in combating migrant smuggling and dismantling the criminal networks behind it

Dr. Islam Mohamed Radwan Elhadidy, Chief Prosecutor at the Technical Office of the Prosecutor General's Office in Egypt, emphasised the crucial role of international cooperation and outlined Egypt's legal framework for international judicial cooperation. He also presented a recent example of effective mutual legal assistance between Egypt and Greece in addressing a migrant smuggling case involving an organised criminal group.

Lara Mnayyar, Investigative Judge in Lebanon, described the current challenges faced by the country and stressed the importance of international cooperation in formulating policies that foster the social and economic integration of migrants while combating organised crime.

V. Nikolaos Sitaropoulos, Head of Migration and Refugees Division, Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe

Mr Nikolaos Sitaropoulos, Head of the Council of Europe Migration and Refugees Division, presented the ongoing work of the Division (established in February 2025) in the area of migration and refugees. He reported on the implementation of the current Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021–2025), where fighting smuggling of migrants is part of Pillar 2, and noted that in a new draft Action Plan under consideration the issue of migrant smuggling is expected to occupy a prominent place.

Closing remarks by Gianluca Esposito, Director General, Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe

Closing remarks were delivered by Gianluca Esposito, Director General of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe. He emphasised that the smuggling of migrants is a rapidly evolving global crime that no country can tackle alone, describing it as a ruthless and exploitative phenomenon that thrives on human desperation and vulnerability.

Mr Esposito encouraged member states to make full use of the Council of Europe's comprehensive legal framework to address migrant smuggling and related, intertwined crimes, including those governed by the Council's conventions on mutual legal assistance, extradition, cybercrime, human trafficking, and money laundering.

He further recalled that the Committee of Ministers has tasked the Council of Europe Committee on Crime Problems with developing a Recommendation on deterring and fighting migrant smuggling through legal means and other actions, to be finalised within two years. He underlined the importance of international cooperation to ensure consistency in national legislation and practices, and to establish common standards for preventing and combating the smuggling of migrants.