

COUNTRY FACTSHEET* – Smuggling of migrants



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LEGAL AND JUDICIAL INFORMATION ON MIGRANT SMUGGLING

GERMANY

Last update 17/02/2026

GENERAL INFORMATION ON MIGRATION



MAIN FIGURES AND TRENDS

In Germany, the number of first-time asylum applications in 2025 was 113,236, approximately 51 % lower than the previous year. The five countries of origin for first-time applicants were Afghanistan (21%), Syria (20.5%), Turkey (10.5%), Somalia (4%), and Iraq (3%). More than half of all first-time applications were thus made from the first three nationalities.



MIGRATORY ROUTES

Illegal migration to Germany in 2025 was largely influenced by developments on the Eastern Mediterranean route and the routes in the Balkan region. Migration via the Eastern Land route remained of secondary importance in 2025. The significant decreases of nationals migrating there and relevant to Germany, were reflected in reduced apprehensions, especially at Germany's southern and eastern borders. A decrease was also observed at the German border with Poland.

Irregular migration by plane from Greece to Germany (approx. 6,000) remained significant. Although the number decreased by almost half compared to the peak in 2024 (approx. 10,500), the number of detections remained more than twice as high as in 2023 (2,654). Germany remains a major destination country for illegal migration in Europe.

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INSTITUTIONAL ORGANISATION

- The jurisdiction at ministerial level for migrant smuggling lies within the area of responsibility of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.
- Within the scope of its border protection duties, the German Federal Police is one of the most important authority in the fight against migrant smuggling. By acting as information and communications centre of the German police, the Federal Criminal Police Office provides support to the police forces of the federation and of the states in connection with the prevention and prosecution of crimes. Given the federal structure of Germany, the Federal Police forces cooperate with the State Police forces within the field of combatting smuggling.
- The police authorities always act on behalf of the responsible public prosecutor's office when it comes to criminal prosecution and therefore also when combating smuggling.



LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The stricter penalties for smuggling offenses announced in the 2023 have already been implemented. Furthermore, an amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure grants the police and public prosecutor's office the authority to conduct telecommunications surveillance and source telecommunications surveillance in all smuggling offenses. Smuggling resulting in death through negligence is punishable by life imprisonment or ten to fifteen years' imprisonment. For commercial and organized smuggling, the penalty is three to fifteen years' imprisonment. In aggravated cases of smuggling (commercial or organized, with a firearm, with a weapon intended for use, endangering health, or involving unaccompanied minors), the penalty is one to fifteen years' imprisonment (instead of the previous six months to ten years). These offenses are now classified as felonies, meaning that criminal proceedings can generally no longer be discontinued.

In other cases of smuggling, the penalty will be six months to ten years imprisonment (previously three months to five years).

With the amendment of Section 96 Paragraph 4 of the Residence Act, the penal provisions now also apply to violations of legal regulations concerning the entry and residence of foreigners into the territory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.



JUDICIAL FRAMEWORK

According to the public prosecutor's office in Traunstein the following has to be emphasised:

- Under German law, the public prosecutor's office is the "master of the investigative process" (cf. section 161 (1) German Code of Criminal Procedure).
- Organized Crime procedures in the field of migrant smuggling are only possible and feasible if the public prosecutor's office is involved in the investigations from the very beginning.

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- In particular, the prosecutor's office must recognise the necessity for decisions encroaching on fundamental rights and quickly obtain these decisions from the investigating judge.
- With regard to international cooperation, the excellent benefit of personal contacts between the prosecutors in charge of the case and their colleagues in other countries should be emphasised.



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In June 2025, Germany was once again designated as the responsible Member State ("so-called Driver") for the area of migrant smuggling within the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).

The German Federal Police have been leading this priority since 2022 and have since then coordinated strategic and operational measures to combat organized migrant smuggling. Together with the co-partner states Austria, Poland, Spain, and Italy, Germany will also be responsible for European coordination in this area in the EMPACT cycle until 2029.

The core objective of the German strategy is the effective fight against internationally operating smuggling networks along key migration routes. This includes, in particular, expanding operational cooperation within and outside the EU, intensifying the police information exchange, combating illegal financial flows, and the strengthening of structures at Europol.

In addition to operational, procedural cooperation, strategic cooperation is also carried out through EU-funded projects (Internal Security Fund). The aim is to make the fight against human trafficking more effective and sustainable. The German Federal Police is focusing on projects that promote the expansion of cooperation and the coordination of investigations with the Western Balkan states and Turkey.

Within the framework of the EU-ISF project "SCOPE II," the German Federal Police is cooperating with the Turkish police and gendarmerie, and under "SCOPE III," with the Western Balkan states.



RELEVANT CASES

In the investigation "YOLCU", the Federal Police Headquarters, acting on behalf of the Landshut Public Prosecutor's Office, is investigating a smuggling ring that trafficked Turkish and Syrian nationals via the Balkan route to Germany and other Western European countries. To conduct the investigation efficiently and to take action against the organization's foreign branches, a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) was formed under German leadership, in cooperation with law enforcement agencies from Romania and Serbia. The investigation was also carried out in close coordination with Turkey and Austria.

The Munich Federal Police Criminal Investigation Department is investigating an international human smuggling network in the investigation "LORD" on behalf of the Traunstein Public Prosecutor's Office. In addition to Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Poland are also investigating this network as part of Europol-supported

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Operational Task Force (OTF) "505". The irregular migrants are picked up by various drivers after crossing national borders on foot and transported in stages, sometimes under life-threatening transport conditions, unsecured on overloaded truck or vans, along the Balkan route to Germany. During the Common Action Day in November 2024, a total of 25 arrests were made in several countries (<https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/25-arrests-in-eu-wide-operation-against-syrian-migrant-smuggling-network>).

The Munich Federal Police Criminal Investigation Department conducted "VARESE" investigation on behalf of the Kempten Public Prosecutor's Office against a predominantly Turkish-origin criminal group that smuggled third-country nationals of Turkish origin (with Kurdish ethnicity) into Germany via the Balkan routes, Italy, and Austria. The smuggled individuals were picked up by the group of drivers upon arrival at the train station in Bolzano, Italy, and transported to Germany in the group's own or rented vehicles. The investigation was conducted as part of a joint investigation with Italian and Swiss judicial authorities. During the large-scale operation by the Federal Police and neighboring security forces in Switzerland and Italy in October 2024, four arrest warrants were executed. The verdicts in the VARESE case were handed down at the Kempten Regional Court in July 2025.

The main defendant of the drivers' organization was sentenced to four years and six months in prison. The three co-defendants received suspended sentences of one year and nine months, one year and eight months, and eleven months, respectively.

The comparatively lenient sentences were largely due to the defendants' comprehensive and, in some cases, timely and substantial confessions, which the court considered "massive assistance in solving the case." Among other things, the main defendant revealed the three-tiered structure of the human smuggling organization from Turkey to Germany, including the specific individuals involved, and presented concrete evidence against the Munich-based financial service providers of the network. Furthermore, the close connection between the crimes was taken into account in favor of the perpetrators. In some cases, several smuggling operations took place on a single day or at least within a short period of time. <https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/64017/5887999>