

Policy Brief



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The Evolution of Serious and Organised Crime:

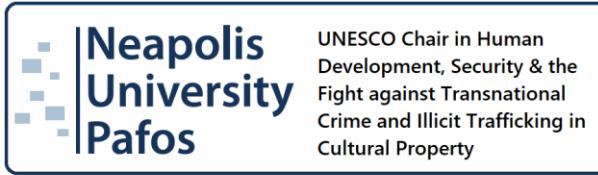
Key Insights from EU-SOCTA 2025

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The Evolution of Serious and Organised Crime:

Key Insights from EU-SOCTA 2025

Executive Summary

*The 2025 edition of the EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (EU-SOCTA), produced by Europol, provides an updated and comprehensive intelligence picture of serious and organised crime in the European Union. Entitled **The Changing DNA of Serious and Organised Crime**, the report examines how criminal networks adapt to technological, geopolitical, and socio-economic transformations, influencing every aspect of EU security and governance.*

Based on contributions from all EU Member States, partner agencies, and Europol's analytical data, SOCTA 2025 highlights an increasingly interconnected criminal ecosystem. Criminal groups are becoming more professionalised, digitally enabled, and globally networked, exploiting vulnerabilities across legal, financial, and technological domains. The report identifies money laundering, corruption, cyber-enabled fraud, and environmental crime as converging priorities for the next EU policy cycle under the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) 2026–2030.

SOCTA 2025 underscores the need for integrated action at EU and Member State levels—combining law enforcement cooperation, asset recovery, digital forensics, and prevention—to safeguard the Union's resilience against organised crime.

Keywords

Europol, EU-SOCTA, Serious and Organised Crime, Money Laundering, Corruption, Cybercrime, Violence, EMPACT, Artificial Intelligence, Hybrid Threats, EU Security.

Background

The EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (EU-SOCTA) is Europol's flagship strategic report on criminal threats affecting the European Union. Published every four years, SOCTA provides the analytical foundation for defining EMPACT's operational priorities and guides the EU's internal security strategy.

SOCTA 2025 is the sixth edition of this assessment and represents the most data-driven version to date. It integrates contributions from law enforcement and judicial authorities across all Member States, complemented by inputs from Europol's databases, the private sector, and EU agencies such as Frontex, Eurojust, and OLAF. The report builds on the previous 2021 SOCTA findings but emphasises the accelerated digitalisation of organised crime, growing levels of violence, and deeper infiltration into legitimate economies.

Key Findings and Trends

SOCTA 2025 identifies major developments shaping the evolving 'DNA' of serious and organised crime in the EU:

- Crime as a Systemic Threat: Organised crime has evolved into a parallel economic system that destabilises governance, weakens democratic institutions, and distorts markets through corruption and financial manipulation.
- Digital Transformation of Crime: Online infrastructures facilitate recruitment, logistics, and money laundering, enabling criminals to operate with speed and anonymity. Cryptocurrencies, encrypted communication tools, and social media play a central role.
- Infiltration of the Legal Economy: Criminal networks increasingly invest in legitimate businesses—particularly in real estate, construction, logistics, and waste management—to launder proceeds and gain influence.
- Corruption and Violence: Both remain core enablers of organised crime. Violence is increasingly used strategically to maintain control and intimidate competitors, while corruption erodes institutional integrity.
- Exploitation of Youth and Vulnerable Groups: Recruitment of young people for online fraud, drug trafficking, and courier roles represents a growing social and security concern.
- Emerging Technological Risks: Artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and automation enhance the efficiency of criminal operations and complicate law enforcement detection efforts.

Operational and Policy Implications

The findings of SOCTA 2025 have far-reaching implications for law enforcement and policymaking within the EU. Organised crime has become a cross-sectoral and cross-border threat that undermines not only security but also economic stability and democratic governance.

Key implications include:

- The convergence between cybercrime, financial crime, and corruption demands coordinated multi-agency responses;
- Asset recovery and financial investigations must be mainstreamed into all major criminal cases;
- EMPICT priorities for 2026–2030 should reflect the integrated nature of modern organised crime, linking financial intelligence, environmental crime, and digital security;
- Stronger regulation and supervision of high-risk sectors—including professional enablers, online platforms, and virtual asset service providers—are required;
- The private sector should be further engaged through structured information-sharing partnerships to identify and mitigate criminal infiltration.

Europol recommends that Member States enhance interoperability of databases and strengthen analytical capacity to ensure timely and actionable intelligence flows.

Strategic Priorities and Recommendations

Based on the SOCTA 2025 analysis, the EU and Member States are encouraged to pursue the following strategic objectives:

- Disrupt Criminal Finances: Expand the use of asset recovery offices (AROs), promote confiscation without conviction, and improve tracing of illicit proceeds across borders.
- Enhance Intelligence Integration: Leverage Europol's capabilities for strategic and operational analysis, ensuring systematic data exchange among national authorities.
- Combat Corruption and Infiltration: Adopt comprehensive integrity frameworks to shield public procurement, infrastructure projects, and political systems from criminal interference.
- Strengthen Prevention and Resilience: Develop education and social initiatives to prevent youth recruitment and reduce the socioeconomic drivers of organised crime.
- Harness Technology Responsibly: Use AI and data analytics to improve predictive policing and forensic investigation while ensuring legal and ethical safeguards.

Collectively, these measures will support a more proactive and coordinated EU security architecture.

Concluding Remarks

The EU-SOCTA 2025 offers a strategic roadmap for addressing serious and organised crime as a multidimensional and evolving threat to European stability. It confirms that criminal networks have become more networked, adaptive, and global—mirroring legitimate economic structures while exploiting regulatory gaps and digital vulnerabilities.

To safeguard the Union’s security and resilience, Europol calls for an intelligence-led, cooperative, and future-oriented approach that integrates prevention, disruption, and deterrence. As the cornerstone of the EMPACT 2026–2030 cycle, SOCTA 2025 reaffirms that only coordinated European action can effectively counter the complex and changing DNA of organised crime.

Further Reading

- Europol (2025), EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2025 – *The Changing DNA of Serious and Organised Crime* ([link](#))