

[Eurojust supports successful takedown in Romania of an OCG carrying out elaborated cybercrime and bank frauds in Lithuania and Estonia](#)



The Hague, 29 September 2020

With active judicial support of Eurojust, the Romanian, Lithuanian and Estonian authorities have executed coordinated activities, within a Joint Action Day, to dismantle an Organised Crime Group (OCG) specialized in elaborate cybercrime and fraudulent financial operations, arresting 3 suspects and conducting 4 house searches. The OCG allegedly committed identity theft and lured bank customers in several countries into imputing their access credentials online, via text messages containing links to cloned bank sites, subsequently the perpetrators accessing the victims' accounts and making fraudulent transfers into specially-created accounts they directly controlled. Eurojust played a pivotal role in the entire operation by setting up and financing a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) and facilitating the continuous judicial cooperation between the involved National Authorities.

The fraud started in February last year and lasted until recently this month, in various waves. Almost 600 persons, out of which more than 100 in Lithuania and nearly 500 in Estonia fell victim to the OCG members. The victims were mostly natural persons but also companies, with damages in both countries amounting to over EUR 200.000. Additional bank transfers worth approximately EUR 450.000 into the OCG's were stopped by the banks.

For their fraud, the suspects made counterfeit versions of several banks' sites. By sending SMS and other messages to customers in their banking apps on mobile phones, fraudulent links were sent to account holders to obtain access credentials, so-called phishing. Via multiple online payments, the money was transferred into the bank accounts controlled by the OCG. Through the criminal activities, the OCG also gained fraudulent access to the number of governmental e-services in Estonia. "Further investigative measures will be conducted, to establish the total amount of the proceeds of crime, and the full extent of the criminal activities with possible connections to additional countries".

Since 2019, Eurojust facilitated judicial cooperation in this case, supported the creation of the JIT in March 2020, supported the organisation of four Coordination Meetings to prepare for this week's action day and provided over EUR 38.000 in funding. This enabled the participation of Estonian police officers during the operation in Romania.

Europol supported the operation by facilitating information exchange and

providing analytical support. During the action day, Europol deployed an expert on site to cross-check in real-time operational information against Europol's databases and provide leads to investigators in the field.

In Romania, the operation was lead by the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) and Bucharest Brigade for Countering Organized Crime. In Estonia the Riigiprokuratuur (Office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Estonia) and Eesti Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet (Estonian Police and Border Guard Board) participated to the action day. In Lithuania, Prosecutor General's Office and Lithuanian Criminal Police Bureau supported the operation.



Photos © Romanian Police

[EASO publishes a COI report: Afghanistan, Security Situation \(2020 update\)](#)

On 28 September 2020, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) report titled 'Afghanistan, Security Situation'

The EASO COI report Afghanistan: Security Situation (2020 update) aims to provide information on the security situation in Afghanistan, which is relevant for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection.

The security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile during the reference period (1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), while the conflict continued to be described as one of the deadliest in the world for civilians. On 29 February 2020, after more than 18 years of conflict, the US and the Taliban signed in Doha an 'agreement for bringing peace' to Afghanistan. Despite significant fluctuations in violence during the peace talks and periods of reduction in violence following the Doha agreement, several sources reported a spike in violence during the first six months of 2020, with an increase in the number of civilian casualties, particularly in the northern and north-eastern regions. After the agreement, the Taliban issued a statement declaring that fighting will continue regardless of the deal with the US; in some areas of the country, the group has reportedly intensified attacks against the Afghan National Security Forces.

The first part of the report provides a general overview of the security situation in Afghanistan, including conflict background and actors involved,

main security incidents and their impact on the civilian population. The second part holds a geographic subdivision (Kabul city, plus 34 provinces), focusing in greater detail on the security situation in Kabul city and in each province, including a description of the armed actors active, recent security incidents, data on civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements.

This report is produced in line with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#), and was co-drafted by experts from Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Cedoca (Centre for Documentation and Research); France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division (DIDR); Poland, Department of Refugee and Asylum Proceedings; and researchers from EASO COI sector. In addition, the report was reviewed by Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF); Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation; and by ACCORD, the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation.

With 2.7 million refugees as of the end of 2019, Afghanistan was the [third largest country of origin of refugees in the world](#). Afghan continued to be the second most common citizenship of asylum applicants in the EU+ as of June 2020.

The EASO COI report Afghanistan – Security Situation, September 2020 is the last one of a series of COI reports on Afghanistan published by EASO between July and September 2020. The other reports of the series can be found at following links:

- [EASO COI Report: Afghanistan – Criminal Law, customary justice and informal dispute resolution \(July 2020\)](#)
- [EASO COI Report: Afghanistan – State Structure and Security Forces \(August 2020\)](#)
- [EASO COI Report: Afghanistan – Anti-Government Elements \(August 2020\)](#)
- [EASO COI Report: Afghanistan – Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City \(August 2020\)](#)

[**EU – Western Balkans Media Literacy Conference: Opening remarks**](#)



Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

I am pleased to welcome you to the first edition of the European Union – Western Balkans Media Literacy Conference.

The European Union is a Union of values and principles and today you will discuss important principles, which are at the core of the European Union and the European Union integration: media literacy, youth empowerment, the strengthening of civil society and media freedom.

These principles are also essential for fighting disinformation, a global challenge and a threat to democracy.

Misinformation and disinformation proliferated in the Western Balkans, in the European Union and in the whole world during the pandemic. This has been dangerous for all of us. Above all because lies about medical issues can even kill.

We have to engage globally to counter disinformation. To identify sources of disinformation and to provide citizens with reliable, accurate and timely facts.

Work is needed to protect and promote fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression and media pluralism.

During this crisis, fact-checkers and media organisations in the Western Balkans – many of you are present at today's Conference – debunked fake news, exposed disinformation trends and informed citizens.

Fact-checking organisations linked up with partners in the region, worked across borders and teamed up with organisations in the European Union, and made an important contribution to the public debate.

This – your – work does not go unnoticed. It empowers people and the youth to speak their minds and to become agents of change.

It is great to have many young people, who are at the forefront of the digital transformation.

With most of today's participants being from the Western Balkans, let me

conclude by saying what I have underlined several times before: the European Union is not complete without the Western Balkans.

I want to thank all of you and specifically the organisation “Why not” from Bosnia and Herzegovina for co-organising today’s conference, together with our EU Delegation in Sarajevo and the EEAS Stratcom Western Balkans Task Force.

I wish you all fruitful discussions and a good and productive event.

Thank you!



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Photos © Romanian Police

Pandemic worsens Roma and Travellers poverty and discrimination



“The Coronavirus does not discriminate, but the measures to contain it do. Facing stricter lockdown, poor welfare support and limited access to online learning, many Roma and Travellers communities have been ravaged by the pandemic. Member States need to tackle these challenges, strengthen social inclusion and involve Roma and Travellers themselves – both during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond,” says FRA’s Director **Michael O’Flaherty**.

FRA’s latest bulletin [“Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Impact on Roma and Travellers”](#) documents the main challenges:

- **Lockdown** – entire Roma and Traveller communities faced stricter lockdown as precautionary measures, even before there were any confirmed infections.
- **Housing** – many live in overcrowded households with no access to running water. This makes physical distancing or washing hands very difficult, and put Roma and Travellers at higher risk of contracting the disease.
- **Employment** – lockdown left street vendors and those with precarious contracts unemployed. As many Roma and Travellers were not part of the formal economy before the pandemic, they cannot access support or claim welfare benefits.
- **Poverty** – the loss of jobs increased poverty and the risk of malnutrition, which was already high before the pandemic.
- **Healthcare** – in some countries, only half of Roma and Travellers have health insurance. Moreover, many face discrimination when accessing

healthcare.

- **Education** – already before the pandemic, most Roma and Traveller children were early school leavers. Now, many do not have internet access nor computers, so they cannot take part in online learning when schools close.
- **Hate speech** – hate speech and discrimination against Roma and Travellers increased during the pandemic, as they were blamed for spreading the virus.

FRA calls on Member States to implement inclusion measures recommended since [2013 by the Council of the European Union](#). In particular, FRA stresses that:

1. Roma and Travellers must have equal access to all mainstream poverty reduction, employment generation and other social inclusion schemes.
2. Health and education mediators, who provide basic services in Roma communities during the pandemic, need adequate resources and support to assist people in need, especially since the number of infections is rising again across the EU.
3. Member States need to fight anti-Gypsyism and prejudice against Roma and Travellers. Their communities are often presented as a risk to the general population while in fact they are more at risk themselves because of the conditions they live in.

Background:

[FRA's new Roma & Travellers survey](#) shows that a quarter of Roma and Travellers in Western Europe could not afford basic items, such as heating or healthy food already before the pandemic. They also face rampant discrimination and harassment in their everyday lives.

The EU will soon release its new 'EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation'. It aims to find a way forward and address the challenges Roma and Travellers face in the EU.

This bulletin documents the situation of Roma and Travellers in 15 EU Member States between 1 March to 30 June 2020.