

19 arrests for smuggling irregular migrants from Morocco to the Spanish Canary Islands



PUBLISHED DEC 17, 2020
BY [EUROPA](#)

The criminal network was active in Morocco and Spain

On 3 December 2020, Europol supported the Spanish National Police (Policía Nacional), to dismantle an organised crime group smuggling irregular migrants from Morocco to the Canary Islands.

The criminal network, active in Spain and Morocco, was facilitating illegal and often life-threatening crossings from the Moroccan Atlantic Coast towards the Spanish Canary Islands. The irregular migrants crossed the sea in cayucos – wooden boats similar to canoes capable of sailing in open waters – often purchased from those working in the fishing industry in Africa.

The suspects arranged accommodation for the irregular migrants on the island of Lanzarote in abandoned houses, campervans and motorhomes, before routing them by plane or ferries to their final destinations within the EU (France, Finland or Italy). For the irregular migrants to move within the EU, the criminal network supplied them with look-alike/forged documents.

The network charged between €1 000 and €1 500 per person depending on the final destination and the means of transport. The Spanish investigators estimated that the criminal group has generated over €100 000 in illegal profits.

Europol facilitated the information exchange and provided analytical support. During the action day, Europol deployed an expert on the spot to cross-check operational information in

real-time against Europol's databases and to provide technical support with digital forensic capabilities.

JOT MARE, a long-term Europol project, was established in March 2015 as an EU-led response to the increasing sea smuggling activities. The team focuses on operational support and development of intelligence on sea smuggling and sea facilitated secondary movements in line with the dedicated EMPACT action plan.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, we support the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other serious and organised forms of crime. We also work with many non-EU partner states and international organisations. From its various threat assessments to its intelligence-gathering and operational activities, Europol has the tools and resources it needs to do its part in making Europe safer.

Press release distributed by Media Pigeon on behalf of Europa, on Dec 17, 2020. For more information subscribe and [follow us](#).

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