

The European External Programme with Africa (EEPA) organisation has focused on supporting work to reveal migration crimes. This programme has been implemented since 2006, for twenty years.

The focus of the programme has been on smuggling and human trafficking on the Central Mediterranean Route from the Horn through Libya and Italy and the route through Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt (Sinai) and Israel. Recently, we have also started to study the routes from Eritrea, Addis Abeba, towards Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda and Kenya. Some routes also includes Chad, Tunisia, Rwanda and other countries.

The work has been conducted in collaboration with academic institutions, humanitarian organisations and human rights defenders. The work has added to the body of information published in regular situation reports, news articles and media, academic articles and books.

EEPA has investigated the significant human rights violation and atrocities that occur on different places on these routes. We have worked closely with different law enforcement agencies, governments, NGOs, humanitarian organisations, lawyers, prosecution offices and other stakeholders to increase the understanding of modus operandi, inventories crimes involved and investigate the criminal organisations involved. . Among others, this work has led to the [prosecution](#) of many individuals, as well as two leaders of the network on the Central Mediterranean Route, Tewelde Goitom, known as Walid/Welid, and Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, known as Kidane. These two notorious Eritrean Human human traffickers have been convicted already in Ethiopia for smuggling and white-washing. They are allegedly implicated in committing atrocities, including killing, grave human rights abuses, including rape, ransoming, and torture of victims in Libya. Convictions include the crime of financial whitewashing (convictions in the United Emirates). The actions have also led to court cases in Kenya on the access provided to Eritrean refugees who are victims of the smuggling and human trafficking occurring on these routes.

One of the international investigations, the [Pearce investigation](#) illustrates the complexity of these investigations where actions take place simultaneously in multiple countries. This includes European actions strengthening the positions of the criminal smuggling and human trafficking networks in Libya or other places, as noticed by the prosecutor of the case against Walid. The global character of operations of the network was illustrated in the Pearce case where the prosecution showed evidence of a refugee might be fleeing persecution in Eritrea, and driven in the hands of smugglers, they are abducted, held in isolated locations under dire circumstances, re-trafficked to other perpetrators including local militia, and operating under protection of governments or administrations in the countries on the route. Militia and local enforcement agents may be involved. In overseas countries, family members may be extorted for thousands of euros, with mental pressure adding to the begging by those held in captivity and being tortured while demanding that relatives send money. It has also shown light on the many deficiencies that currently exist in European cross border police and judicial cooperation in fighting organised crime. In particular, we have noted the lack of

common legal frameworks, and the lack of cooperation, which have caused impunity of these crimes and hamper more effective action against these criminal networks.

A [report was adopted](#) in the European Parliament on 13 November 2025 on transnational repression, which is a useful report to focus on the element of transnational control exercised by state actors supporting the criminal organisations and their operations in Europe. The arms of the organised crime networks in Europe support the actions on the smuggling and trafficking routes, specifically targeting migrants, refugees and vulnerable populations. This report provides many important recommendations, including cross-border judicial cooperation, on fighting transnational repression. Many of these should be also taken into consideration, to fight organised crime networks perpetrating human trafficking. The Walid case showed how witnesses providing testimonies to the Dutch prosecution were targeted with instructions he provided from prison. There is great fear among victims of coming forward due to the power of the transnational criminal organisations in Europe, their ability to target families in home countries, and retribute on family members on the smuggling and trafficking routes. It is also evidence that transnational repression is perpetrated in the EU institutions and European Member States, with the aim to undermine the rule of law. This allows underground criminal networks to link to legitimate state structures, allowing organized crime to infiltrate legitimate institutions of the criminal underworld's interface with the upperworld. This should include the investigation into the state sponsored support to expand the upperworld infiltration by criminal underground transnational organisations.

An important element of this is the creation of a [multi-stakeholder collaboration framework](#): This framework should facilitate complete anonymity to witnesses to protect them from harm, including in Europe. This has protected witness reports in coming forward, assisting in clarifying patterns and evidence against key people involved. A secure data-sharing and collaborative analysis of human trafficking data while maintaining privacy and ethical standards, has also assisted and should allow researchers to share insights collected within an Academic framework (under academic ethical considerations). Such a data-sharing framework allows for researchers, NGO's, and international organisations to share (part of) their information amongst each other and with law enforcement agencies. Collaboration among different investigating teams, including the International Criminal Court, has allowed understanding of the depth and scope of the international criminal organisations perpetrating these crimes.

Recommendations:

1. Establish an Anonymous Investigation and Early-Warning Mechanism

Create a specialised, anonymous investigation team within an EU's mapping and monitoring frameworks to identify, document and analyse incidents of transnational repression targeting Human Rights Defenders within the EU. This mechanism should include a:

- a. focus on uncovering and analysing criminal networks responsible for grave human rights violations against refugees and migrants, including smuggling, human trafficking, and trafficking for ransom;

- b. provide secure and anonymous reporting channels for survivors, witnesses and observers;
- c. issue timely alerts to relevant authorities to support protection measures for witnesses that can assist in criminal investigations.

2. Strengthen International Investigative Cooperation

Enhance collaboration between European investigative teams, Europol, Interpol, the European Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court to:

- ensure coordinated, cross-border investigations that cover all locations where elements of these crimes occur;
- enhance cooperation which facilitates evidence-sharing, joint analytical products and coordinated operational responses to dismantle criminal networks operating across jurisdictions;
- clarify European jurisdiction on prosecuting the crimes of international smuggling and human trafficking perpetrated with grave human rights violations.

3. Address State-Enabled Criminal Infiltration of Legitimate Structures

Enhance cooperation on investigating transnational repression perpetrated by organised criminal networks and by state actors supporting or enabling these networks. Member States should:

- d. establish national focal points for potential and actual victims of transnational repression;
- e. provide a standardised reporting toolkit to guide victims, civil society organisations and frontline authorities on how to recognise and report incidents;
- f. monitor and address attempts by criminal networks to infiltrate legitimate (“upperworld”) public or private institutions.

4. Introduce an EU-Level Auditing and Compliance Mechanism

Implement a mechanism to audit EU and Member State actions to ensure they do not inadvertently facilitate smuggling or human trafficking networks. This mechanism should:

- g. audit the way in which European actions may encourage the perpetration of international smuggling and human trafficking perpetrated with grave human rights violations;
- h. include systematic assessment of transnational repression dynamics;
- i. ensure that these concerns are integrated into the human rights clauses of EU external agreements;
- j. address transnational repression in human rights dialogues with non-EU countries and in multilateral fora such as the UN Human Rights Council.

5. Mandatory Training on Transnational Repression and Criminal Network Tactics

Call on Member States, Europol and CEPOL to provide specialised training on transnational repression, countermeasures and risk-assessment protocols to relevant authorities, including:

- k. cybersecurity and digital-forensics units;
- l. law enforcement agencies;
- m. immigration and asylum authorities;
- n. consular and visa-processing staff;
- o. officials responsible for extradition requests and other legal cooperation with non-EU countries.

Provide training focused on digital surveillance threats, retaliation risks, misuse of legal and administrative channels, and detection of state-supported criminal networks.

More to read:

- EEPA. (2025, March). Landmark court case against Eritrean human traffickers Walid and Kidane: Policy Brief No.5. EEPA.
https://www.eepa.be/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Policy-Brief-No5_Landmark-court-case-against-Eritrean-human-trafficker_FIN.pdf
- EEPA. (2024, November). Identifying nodes and graphs of perpetrators in human trafficking data. EEPA.
<https://www.eepa.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Identifying-nodes-and-graphs-of-perpetrators-in-human-trafficking-data.pdf>
- European Parliament. (2025, November 13). European Parliament resolution of 13 November 2025 on addressing transnational repression of human rights defenders (2025/2048(INI)). European Parliament.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0258_EN.html
- DSP/Tilburg University. (2022, January). The 2% tax for Eritreans in the diaspora. RAEE/Tilburg University.
<https://raee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/the-2-pct-tax-for-eritreans-in-the-diaspora.pdf>
- Van Reisen, M., Mawere, M., Smits, K., & Wirtz, M. (Eds.). (2023). Enslaved: Trapped and trafficked in digital black holes—Human trafficking trajectories to Libya. Langaa RPCIG. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8137444>