

Refugee crisis: Anti-people smuggling efforts a success, says Europol

Written by Martin Banks on 10 April 2017 in News
News

A new report by Europol claims that European operations to combat people smuggling in the refugee crisis are a success.



Refugee arrivals | Photo credit: Press Association

An estimated 14,000 asylum seekers have arrived by boat in Europe in the first weeks of 2017, with some 366 dying at sea while stranded by border closures.

But a report by Europol, the EU-wide police agency, claimed a year of efforts by the new European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) was seeing progress.

The report comes with migrants continuing to be plucked from the Mediterranean, with 700 alone rescued off the coast of Libya on Wednesday.

Europol's report, which was discussed at a meeting in the European Parliament, alluded to the knock-

on effect of such efforts, noting that boat crossings from North Africa to Europe increased after the EU-Turkey agreement.

Under this deal, Turkey agreed to take in refugees in exchange for aid from the EU.

The report says, “Facilitation by train and by air was increasingly reported; this displacement is believed to be the consequence of the additional controls implemented on land and sea routes.”

It goes on to say that the supply of false documents was also rising.

Dimitris Avramopoulos, the European Commissioner for migration, said the EMSC initiative was “successfully fighting, disrupting and apprehending criminal migrant smuggling networks”.

According to Europol director Rob Wainwright, more than 90 per cent of migrants entering the EU have used smugglers.

He said, “These organised crime networks are taking mass profits from mass migration, and making migrant smuggling the fastest growing criminal sector.

“To tackle this, we have brought together some of the best investigators in Europe in the EMSC.”

According to Europol’s report, almost 17,500 suspected migrant smugglers were identified in 2016, and 1150 social media accounts linked to the trade had been flagged alongside 12,000 “operational messages”, as well as 2500 forged or stolen documents.

More than 500 vessels of interest are also being monitored at sea, although no mention was made of capture and destroy missions in 2015 taking place.

Humanitarian organisations working on rescue operations in the increasingly deadly Mediterranean and providing aid at transit points across Europe say they have not seen any benefit from anti-smuggling operations.

More than 5,000 refugees died crossing the Mediterranean last year and the grim record is likely to be surpassed this year.

About the author

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