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UNITE

Uniting efforts to defeat wildlife,
timber and waste trafficking

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AT A GLANCE

Geographical coverage:

The European Union, plus a special focus on Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe.

Aim:

Disrupting criminals and organised crime network trafficking wildlife, timber, waste, and recover their assets.

Project coordinator:

The French Gendarmerie Nationale represented by the OCLAESP (Central Office against Environment and Public Health Crime).

Project partners:

The Spanish Guardia Civil, the Italian Carabinieri, the police forces from Hungary, the Presidium of the police force of the Slovak Republic, IFAW, WWF France, WWF Belgium, WWF Hungary, and the in-kind support from TRAFFIC.

Project advisors:

European Commission, EUROPOL, CEPOL

Project supporters:

Authorities from Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine.

Donor:

European Union's Internal Security Fund-Police (DG HOME)

Duration:

2 years from December 2021 to December 2023

Project website:

www.uniteproject.eu

CHALLENGE

Environmental crime, including waste, wildlife and timber trafficking, is among the largest and most profitable transnational criminal activity. It poses severe threats to biodiversity, security, development and human health.

Environmental crime expanded rapidly. It is now estimated to be worth between USD 110 to 281 billion annually¹. Criminals exploit legal channels for their activities, as they are selling wildlife products on well-known online companies (marketplaces, e-commerce) and social media, transporting smuggled goods through cargo, airplanes, or couriers, and keeping financial assets in banks. Environmental crime is perceived as a low-risk – high-value activity by criminals as it generates high profits with a limited risk of detection. Traffickers' assets are rarely recovered and typically, low sanctions are applied.

The EU has a vital role to play in addressing environmental crimes and dismantling associated Organised Crime Groups (OCGs). The EU can be the origin for trafficking (e.g. illegal waste, glass eels), the destination market (e.g. protected species of reptiles, illegal timber), or a hub for trafficking in transit to other regions (e.g. ivory). Since 2018, the EU and its Member States have made environmental crime and particularly illegal wildlife trade (including timber) and waste trafficking one of their 10 priorities for the fight against organised and serious international crime. Combating criminal finances, money laundering and facilitating asset recovery is also a cross-cutting objective².

¹ - INTERPOL, GITOC, RHIPTO (2018) World Atlas of Illicit Flows

<https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Atlas-Illicit-Flows-FINAL-WEB-VERSION-copia-compressed.pdf>

² - EUROPOL (2022)

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-statistics/empact>



WHAT DOES THE PROJECT AIM TO ACHIEVE ?

The UNITE project's objective is to disrupt criminals and organised crime networks involved in waste, wildlife, and timber trafficking in and via the EU, and to recover the assets generated from these illegal activities.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT ACHIEVE ITS AMBITION ?

It will unite efforts between law enforcement authorities, NGOs, EU and international agencies, and the financial and private sector, to defeat environmental crime with a 5-pillar approach. The project will promote the use of financial investigations and state of the art cyber-investigation techniques.

1. Strategic Intelligence

It is essential to strengthen knowledge and strategic intelligence in the fields of waste, wildlife and timber trafficking. UNITE will conduct several multidisciplinary analyses to support law enforcement agencies in addressing those crime areas.

Deliverables:

- Strategic analysis of waste trafficking involving the EU;
- Report on financial crimes related to wildlife and timber trafficking in the EU;
- Report on illegal ivory trade involving the EU;
- Guidelines on software development to tackle online wildlife trafficking;
- Report on timber trafficking involving the EU.

2. Tools and training

UNITE will provide strategic and pre-operational training to EU law enforcement agents and prosecutors in the field of waste, wildlife and timber trafficking to improve capabilities on financial crime investigations, cyber-investigations and ivory trafficking investigations.

Deliverables:

- Assessment report on the training needs;
- Training manual on financial investigations in wildlife and waste trafficking;
- Online training modules and 'train the trainer' workshop on financial investigations;
- Pre-operational trainings on cyber-patrolling and ivory trafficking.



3. Investigations and operations

In the framework of the UNITE project, intelligence-led operations (with a particular emphasis on financial investigations) will be conducted to detect and dismantle organised crime groups in the field of waste, wildlife (including exotic pets and ivory) and timber trafficking.

Deliverables:

- Implementation of investigations and operations;
- Operational analytical report for the above operations;
- Reports on the test and use of new equipment to detect and identify ivory.



CONTACT

OCLAESP:

Stéphanie Leterme,
Police Officer
oclaesp-europe@gendarmerie.interieur.gouv.fr

Spanish Guardia Civil:

Julio Serrano,
Police Officer
jserrano@guardiacivil.es

Italian Carabinieri:

Giovanni Diglio,
Police Officer
giovanni.diglio@carabinieri.it

Police forces from Hungary:

Gergely Imre,
Police officer
imreg@nni.police.hu

Presidium of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic :

Ondrej Koporec,
Police Officer
ondrej.koporec@minv.sk

IFAW:

Bianca Becherer,
Wildlife Cybercrime Project Manager
bbecherer@ifaw.org

WWF France:

Lorélie Escot
Wildlife Trade Project Officer
lescot@wwf.fr

WWF Belgium/TRAFFIC:

Emilie Van der Henst,
Senior Manager "Wildlife Trafficking"
emilie.vanderhenst@wwf.be

WWF Hungary/TRAFFIC:

Katalin Kecse-Nagy,
Programme Office Director – Europe
katalin.kecse-nagy@traffic.org

4. International cooperation

UNITE will strengthen the law enforcement and judicial cooperation between the EU and non-EU countries from Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and observers from Africa to foster rapid intelligence exchanges, sharing best practices and joint operations.

Deliverables:

- An international meeting organised in Asia;
- Creation of an expert network;
- 2 action weeks in major harbours from Asia and Southeast Europe.

5. Engaging the financial and private sectors and raising awareness of EU citizens

UNITE will strengthen and develop the engagement with financial institutions, online and transport companies in combating wildlife and timber trafficking, in order to prevent traffickers from exploiting legal businesses to sell, transport and launder assets from wildlife trafficking. It will also explore the engagement of waste management companies in combating waste trafficking. Finally, UNITE will raise awareness of EU citizens on the issues of wildlife and waste trafficking.

Deliverables:

- Awareness-raising materials targeted at the financial and private sectors;
- List of companies/professional organisations approached, and of actions and measures developed collaboratively;
- Training materials designed to raise the awareness of and train companies' staff;
- Report assessing the existing cooperation with the private sector in the domain of waste management, including a mapping of the companies which could be interested in a cooperation initiative;
- Two reports from the workshops gathering law enforcement agencies and waste companies;
- Awareness raising campaigns on EU wildlife trade rules and waste trafficking towards EU citizens.



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