

# Illicit goods trafficking via port and airport facilities in Africa

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## Executive Summary

With this analytical report, INTERPOL, under the European Union funded project ENACT, has sought to assess how organized crime exploits ports and airports in Africa to traffic illicit goods as this crime phenomenon is still a significant challenge for law enforcement on the continent.

Ports and airports across Africa continue to be targeted by organised crime groups (OCGs) to traffic illicit goods. The traffic of illicit goods in Africa generates substantial profits, stemming from opportunities created by socio-economic and geo-political vulnerabilities, fragile legal frameworks and corruption. OCGs taking advantages of port and airport facilities in Africa are both local and international, often working together to maximise their illicit profits and reduce law enforcement detection.

OCGs involved in trafficking at ports and airports on the African continent are almost certainly connected across borders. They are active in all types of illicit goods trafficking, including drugs, wildlife, natural resources, cigarettes, stolen motor vehicles, weapons, pharmaceuticals, cash and counterfeit goods. To continue their criminal activities, they adapt their strategies and tactics, changing routes, concealment methods and modus operandi in response to law enforcement.

Trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa affects all regions on the continent. There is limited law enforcement capacity to counter this trafficking at national, regional and continental level. Trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa is suspected of being consistently under-reported and going undetected, despite multiple data sources reporting on several types of illicit goods trafficking, involved OCGs and networks dynamics.

The following are the key findings regarding the smuggling of illicit goods via airports and ports in Africa:

- ❖ Large international airports with limited or poor screening procedures and with many connecting flights are at the highest risk to be exploited by OCGs in Africa;
- ❖ OCGs based on the African continent are very likely connected to the international supply of illicit commodities through close collaboration with transnational OCGs that target the continent specifically to maximize illicit gains;
- ❖ OCGs active in Africa are most certainly able to exploit a range of socio-economic and geo-political dynamics to maximize illicitly gained profits. Their involvement in trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports is often met with only limited law enforcement response and sometimes even enabled by corruption;
- ❖ OCGs involved in trafficking illicit goods through ports and airports in Africa consist of a range of actors. These include non-state armed groups, the Italian mafia, terrorist groups, public officials and businessmen, making detection more difficult. Moreover, they often adapt their tactics, concealment methods and smuggling modi operandi in response to law enforcement efforts;
- ❖ A myriad of methods are used by OCGs to evade detection at airports in Africa;
- ❖ It is very possible that they often resort to the use of diplomatic bags at African airports to facilitate the movement of a variety of wildlife commodities;
- ❖ Ports and airports across Africa are most probably used as departure, transit and destination hubs for the trafficking of illicit goods.

- ❖ Illicit goods trafficking is occurring at ports and airports within countries, within regions, between regions and between the continent and other parts of the world;
- ❖ OCGs are likely increasingly turning to informal landing sites in Africa, instead of ports, to traffic certain illicit goods. This enables the OCG to circumvent law enforcement inspection and detection of the illicit commodity they are smuggling;
- ❖ Commercial, cargo and private planes are probably the most frequently used aircraft to traffic illicit goods through airports in Africa. African airlines and not foreign airlines are more often used by OCGs to smuggle goods;
- ❖ The choice of maritime vessels depends on the illicit good, as well as the length of the journey and law enforcement measures. Cargo ships, ferries, cruise ships, private yachts, fishing boats, dhows and speedboats are some of the vessels used by OCGs to traffic illicit goods at ports and informal landing sites on the continent;
- ❖ Containers, couriers, and the increase use of mail parcels, are popular methods of illicit goods trafficking at airports and ports on the continent;
- ❖ OCGs are increasingly breaking up a smuggling journey via various ports and airports on the continent and beyond, confusing the trail, reducing the chance of detection and better concealing the origin and/or destination of the illicit goods;
- ❖ OCGs are often trafficking illicit goods via Free Trade Zones in the Middle East before arriving in, or after departure from, African ports and airports. They are believed to take advantage of the flexible regulation environment in order to better conceal the origin and/or destination of the illicit goods;
- ❖ Illicit financial flows are probably a major trafficking element, obscuring or concealing the origin of illicit proceeds through cash trafficking at airports, enabling trafficking of illicit goods at ports through the Feiqian scheme, and generating revenue for non-state armed groups through illicit taxation at ports and airports;
- ❖ Corruption is likely a major facilitator of the trafficking chain in Africa, involving airline and shipping crew members, customs, police, and airport and port authorities and staff.

## Introduction

Since the emergence of multimodal containerized shipping shortly after World War II, the industry has steadily grown to a position of global dominance – where now over 90 per cent of the world’s cargo is shipped over water.<sup>1</sup> From the worldwide reserve of over 17 million shipping containers, a record 420 million deliveries were recorded in 2018. While this industry is one of the major driving factors in globalization, it has also presented organized crime with a myriad of opportunities to transport counterfeit goods, cash, drugs, cigarettes, weapons, pharmaceuticals, wildlife, natural resources, and stolen motor vehicles. The sheer volume of this industry presents organized crime with an ideal opportunity to hide their illegal activities in plain sight.

Similarly, steady advances in the commercial passenger and cargo aviation sector have contributed to an industry that recorded over 39 million flights in 2018. From a worldwide fleet, estimated to be in excess of 25,000 aircraft, over 4 billion passengers flew in 2018. Industry analysts estimate that this number will likely double by 2030.

While global regulatory and security standards for both the marine and aviation transportation sectors have increased substantially since the turn of the millennium, there exist large areas of vulnerability and inconsistent application of these worldwide standards. Organized crime continues to exploit these regions and expand their sphere of operations to take full advantage of this. In this light, continued economic instability across Africa, fragile legal frameworks and limited resources and infrastructure, make Africa one of the most vulnerable continents for exploitation by organized crime. This report will explore several strategic indicators to this threat on the African continent.

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**\*\* Two versions of this report exist. This report is the public version of the completed analysis, which included police information; where specific police information was used, this information has subsequently been sanitized for public distribution \*\***

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## Scope of Analysis

The objective of this report is to assess how organized crime exploits ports and airports in Africa. It aims at identifying and analysing the latest transportation trends and methods used on the continent by organized crime, to further their sphere of operations. This will include detailed explanation of the criminals involved, trafficking routes and specific modus operandi, and recommendations to identify and disrupt these OCGs.

The assessment may ultimately help law enforcement in the appropriate targeting and disruption of transnational organized crime groups (OCGs), and elicit law enforcement cooperation between countries to effectively fight the trafficking of illicit goods via ports and airports in Africa.

## Methodology

This assessment follows an all source intelligence methodology. It is the result of integrating multi-level data sources including information from inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and open sources, in order to have the most accurate picture of trafficking threats and trends occurring via ports and airports in Africa.

Information collected from all aforementioned data sources was collated using a data collation matrix, in order to draw out consistencies across all data, which identified current

patterns and trends as well all identifiable convergences. A systemic qualitative analysis was also done of all available information and conclusions were drawn about group dynamics, scope of operations, public and private sector involvement, and various modus operandi relating to trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa.

The following analysis is broken down into four parts, covering OCGs, organized crime at African airports, organized crime at African ports and financial flows at both ports and airports. Some of these sections have sub-types and are broken down by regional patterns and trends detected through the analysis. While this analysis is focused on the African continent, any links to other parts of the world found during the analysis are also highlighted. Despite there being many types of trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa, this report highlights those that appear to affect significantly the continent and are reported in both open and police sources.

## 1. Organized Crime Groups or Networks

This section examines the various dynamics of those crime syndicates found to be engaged in trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa. It highlights how OCGs connect across the regions and beyond, and focuses on the activities in which groups are involved and how. Where possible, it draws attention to specific OCGs and outlines how they operate locally, regionally, and transnationally.

Through trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa, OCGs link many African countries together as well as Africa to many parts of the world. They are driven by constant trafficking opportunities, arising from many social, economic and geo-political conditions found on the continent.

Generally, trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports on the continent is carried out by key facilitators, and OCGs usually work horizontally, where higher level members go undetected. However, some criminal networks are centrally controlled, run by crime bosses or kingpins, who nevertheless, remain isolated from trafficking activities, making the dismantling of OCGs difficult. Their wealth and power usually grows into legitimate businesses, suggesting close connections between trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports and the private sector in Africa.<sup>2</sup>

**OCGs carry out trafficking at ports and airports where environments are unregulated and state control is weakest, thriving on corruption, relying on pay-offs, bribes and coercion to conduct trafficking.**

African OCGs are suspected of being implicated in the trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports on the continent, operating within their country but also across their region and sometimes even beyond to maximize profits. Based on open sources and police information, this pattern has been identified in a number of commodity trafficking at African ports and airports. For example, West and Southern African OCGs are believed to be operating at ports and airports in East Africa to traffic narcotics. On the other hand, East African OCGs are suspected of smuggling heroin at Southern African ports.

Ties to international OCGs are highly likely across the continent, with regards to trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa, showcasing the general connectivity of this crime phenomenon to many parts of the world. For most of the illicit goods covered in this analytical report, Asian, European, Middle Eastern and North and South American OCGs

are suspected of being involved, from trafficking in wildlife, cigarettes and weapons to stolen motor vehicles and drugs smuggling. Asian OCGs appear to be the biggest international group to be using African ports and airports to illegally export wildlife, including rhino horns, lion and warthog products, abalone and pangolin scales.<sup>3</sup> They typically orchestrate the wildlife trafficking internationally and are the commercial drivers of the crime.<sup>4</sup> This finding is corroborated by searches conducted in the Thomson Reuters World Check database, where it was found that a majority of suspects involved in wildlife trafficking at African airports in the last three years were from the Asian region, notably Vietnam, China and South Korea, with their illicit wildlife shipments destined for Asian markets.<sup>5</sup>

**Collaboration between locally-based criminal associates and international OCGs has been detected to traffic illicit goods via ports and airports on the continent.**

The Italian mafia is likely smuggling cigarettes from North African ports to Italy.<sup>6</sup> Latin American cartels are suspected of trafficking cocaine from South America to African ports and airports to feed the African consumption market and to reach Europe.

Seizures of cigarettes at airports on the continent demonstrate that both local and international OCGs are implicated in this crime. The Italian mafia is believed to be partnering with Moroccan OCGs to smuggle hashish from North African ports to Europe.<sup>7</sup> Latin American syndicates, are suspected of working with the Italian mafia and West African criminals to traffic cocaine from South America to African ports in order to reach Europe. Stolen motor vehicles originating from other continents

arrive illegally at ports in Africa, confirming that African OCGs involved in stolen motor vehicles trafficking are well connected to accomplices operating abroad. International OCGs are partnering with local OCGs as they need local knowledge and expertise to reduce law enforcement detection.

These findings suggest the existence of various foreign-based syndicates and criminal organizations operating across African ports and airports, and the extent of criminal connectedness to the rest of the world. The variety of trafficking routes they have established, suggests that foreign OCGs involved in illicit goods trafficking activities at ports and airports across the continent are firmly entrenched.

**Terrorists and armed insurgents draw proceeds from trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa in order to carry out campaigns of violence, and commit violent crimes in the name of their ideological motivation.**

Jihadist groups are suspected of being involved in cigarettes and weapons smuggling at ports on the continent, and of conducting illicit taxation at ports and airports in territories they control to fund their criminal operations.<sup>8</sup> Overall, terrorism and armed insurgency remain significant issues for law enforcement across Africa, and are major facilitators of organized crime through trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports on the continent.



## 2. Organized Crime at African Airports

In the last couple of years, African airports have experienced an increase in domestic and international traffic, putting them under a lot of pressure. Before that, African airports were already exposed to a wide range of risks due to the limited or lack of airport security measures. However, with the rise in the volume of passengers and cargo traffic, and connection of transportation networks in recent years, threats at airports in Africa have increased.

**African airports are exposed to a wide range of risks due to the limited or lack of airport security measures.**

One of these threats is the trafficking of illicit goods. African airports continue to be attractive targets for organized crime, as they are used as points of entry, transit and exit for trafficked goods. In addition to the increase in the volume of traffic, available information show that rampant corruption is still present at airports, technology is often dated, there are severe capacity issues, and law enforcement and customs airport agencies are overwhelmed, allowing trafficking of illicit goods to go more easily undetected.<sup>9</sup>

Traffickers benefit from current enforcement security measures at airports in Africa. Screening done at departure and in transit is generally carried out for security purposes, rather than identifying illicit goods. Whereas, screening upon arrival is carried out to intercept smuggling. Even so, this is done by customs officers who are usually more focused on revenue and identifying agricultural diseases, than intercepting illicit goods.<sup>10</sup> There have been instances where luggage and cargo have been taken directly from airplanes to VIP gates, without going through customs

inspection.<sup>11</sup> Sources indicate that aircrafts, such as private and charter planes, are not always physically checked by customs, and in some African airports, there are no checks on domestic flights, only on international flights. These issues imply a significant gap in control checks at airports in Africa to the benefit of OCGs who smuggle illicit goods.

Other challenges facing African airports include a lack of modern equipment, insufficient budget and limited training for law enforcement units and customs. Some airports in Africa do not conduct passenger profiling/targeting because of a shortage of staff and skills. Instead, they perform random checks, which is not as effective to detect potential smugglers. Furthermore, there were little or no seizures of precursors<sup>12</sup> at African airports in either 2017 or 2018, due to a lack of knowledge and expertise in identifying common chemicals used in drug production.

Moreover, the legal frameworks in several African countries play a key role in preventing deterrence for trafficking illicit goods at airports, as penalties can be too lenient. Traffickers can also be found guilty for a different crime instead of trafficking, which can lessen the punishment.

**Weak legal frameworks in certain African countries may even attract OCGs looking for lower-risk airports through which they can traffic illicit goods.**

All these conditions allow organized crime to continue exploiting airports in Africa to traffic illicit goods for their own gains.

## 2.1. General Findings

General findings have been identified concerning how OCGs operate in airports in Africa to facilitate the traffic of illicit goods. These findings should not be taken as an accurate measurement, but to provide insight into current and emerging trends and patterns at airports in Africa regarding the trafficking of illicit goods.

Both domestic and international OCGs are involved in trafficking of illicit products at airports in Africa, highlighting the transnational nature of this crime phenomenon. Non-state armed groups are also suspected of using the airports on the continent to traffic their illegal goods, both for funding purposes and/or to acquire equipment for their criminal activities.

In general, for OCGs to traffic illicit goods via African airports without being detected by authorities, advanced logistical coordination in both the source and destination countries is required, which would likely include airport workers with enhanced airport security access.

**Corruption is recognized as a major facilitator of trafficking of illicit goods and OCGs continue to rely on corrupt officials to assist in smuggling all types of illicit goods via Africa's airports to evade detection.**

Corruption at airports take many different forms. Cash or gift bribery can for example be used to obtain permits for export, to knowingly overlook or authorize false information on permits for export and to not conduct proper or no inspection on specific crew members and vessels.<sup>13</sup> Criminal actors may also be instructed to leave bags or packages at the destination airport upon arrival, where the bags will be collected from the luggage carousel by complicit airport workers.

## 2.2. Modus Operandi

### *Broken route*

Before trafficking their illicit goods via airports in Africa, criminals first choose which airports and flight routes they should use. They take into account several factors when choosing an airport, such as its location, size, connecting flight routes, security measures, and its ability to intercept illicit products. Generally, large international airports with limited or poor screening procedures, with many connecting flights are at the highest risk of being exploited by OCGs. More vulnerable yet are those high risk airports that are in the process of expansion.<sup>14</sup>

Wildlife traffickers, for instance, are increasingly breaking up their journey with several transit points, in order to avoid law enforcement detection, targeting airports where security measures are less enforced, and to conceal the departure country and the destination consumer country.<sup>15 16</sup>

**OCGs tend to break the journey, through different airports and luggage drops, to make the trail confusing and diminish the chance of detection.**

### *Concealment*

A myriad of methods are used by OCGs to evade detection at airports in Africa. When it comes to the types of concealment, although these techniques varies from one type of illicit goods to another, they are typically hidden in suitcases, followed by ingesting/swallowing and hidden within licit goods. For instance, several types of concealment of illicit drugs have been detected in recent years by law enforcement at African airports. This includes drugs smuggled in luggage, through

swallowing, hidden with licit goods, in freight shipments and through body-packing.

Data demonstrates that although marine shipping tends to be the preferred method of transportation for wildlife commodities (due to the large bulky nature of many of them), smaller quantities of these commodities still accounted for a small percentage of all airport seizures in recent years, with a significant increase in wildlife seizures. Wildlife products are typically hidden in the luggage of the smuggler, and sometimes concealed in licit goods to hide the physical aspect and smell of the wildlife product. This includes toys, wine boxes, and hi-fi speakers. They have been wrapped for example in aluminium foil and coated with toothpaste, wax or shampoo, to name but a few.<sup>17</sup>

**Drop offs**

Drug traffickers are using transit airports to unload some of their drugs before reaching their destination. For example, in 2018, a national from Venezuela was arrested at Entebbe International Airport (Uganda). It was reported that the suspect swallowed 114 pellets of cocaine and flew from Sao Paulo (Brazil) transiting at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport (Ethiopia), before landing in Uganda.<sup>18</sup>

**Aircraft types and air postal services**

**Illicit goods are typically smuggled on commercial aircraft. However, sometimes private and cargo planes are used as it is suspected there is a lack of oversight in many African airports concerning private planes.**

When illicit goods are trafficked on commercial planes, OCGs tend to use African airlines more than foreign airlines, such as Air Maroc, Asky Airlines, Air Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopian Airlines and Kenya Airways.

Available data indicates that criminals are likely using African airlines more as there is a perception that African airlines check their passengers less. Even so, foreign airlines are also used to smuggle illicit goods in recent years.

**When illicit goods are trafficked on commercial planes, OCGs tend to use African airlines more than foreign airlines.**

Moreover, in recent years OCGs are increasingly favouring commercial courier services, such as DHL and Fedex, to smuggle drugs.<sup>19</sup>

**Couriers**

Couriers, also known as mules, are hired by OCGs to smuggle illicit goods on their body via airports. They are sometimes shadowed by facilitators, also hired by OCGs, as they transit airports. According to all sources of information, couriers trafficking illicit goods via African airports are typically male rather than female, and are usually young (between 30 and 49 years old). It should be noted, however, that in the last few years, there was an increase in the use of female couriers over male couriers.

**The biggest number of African couriers arrested in 2017 and 2018 were from West Africa, while the biggest number of non-African couriers were from Asia.**

Couriers are from Africa and overseas, highlighting the significant connectivity between Africa and many parts of the world regarding the trafficking of illicit goods via African airports.

### ***“Handing over” or “relay”***

An emerging modus operandi has been detected in Africa, in recent years, in several cases of cocaine trafficking involving drug mules, called “handing over” or “relay.” The new modus operandi consists of transferring the drug between two drug mules on a flight, in the transit area of an airport between connecting flights, or in a hotel located near the airport. The latter scenario is more common when the first drug mule is a swallower.

### ***Free trade zones***

Open sources information suggests that OCGs exploit free trade zones (as they have less regulations) for the smuggling of illicit goods. For example, cigarettes that are trafficked via airports in Africa often transit through free trade zones, such as Dubai (United Arab Emirates). By using these free trade zones, illegal cigarettes can be better hidden, the origin and/or destination of the illicit cigarettes can be better concealed through the relabelling of cigarette packs, and by not declaring the trafficked cigarettes for transshipment.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Forged or stolen identity***

It is possible that OCGs use forged identity documents or another individual’s identity to smuggle their illicit goods through African airports.

### ***Travel agencies***

Recent seizures have highlighted the use of travel agencies by drug traffickers when smuggling goods through Africa’s airports. Travel agencies are beneficial for OCGs as they prevent money trail, by paying cash to reserve flights, instead of online payment.

### ***Peak times***

OCGs have been found to take advantage of peak times at airports, when there is a rush of passengers or when they hope law

enforcement will be distracted, to traffic their wildlife products. Analysis suggests that this modus operandi could be used to traffic other types of illicit goods through African airports.

#### **CASE STUDY N° 1**

Two Vietnamese nationals were arrested at O.R. Tambo International Airport (South Africa), after attempting to smuggle 18 pieces of rhino horns minutes before the 2010 FIFA World Cup opening ceremony in South Africa. The two individuals hoped that customs at the airport would be distracted by the show on television.

*Source: ‘Pendants, powder and pathways: A rapid assessment of smuggling routes and techniques used in the illicit trade in African rhino horn’, September 2017.*

### ***Ant trafficking***

‘Ant trafficking’ is a modus operandi sometimes used by individuals and OCGs to smuggle cigarettes. It involves a multitude of individuals and an individual for every run. There are test pilots to decide if a route is viable to be exploited, allowing OCGs to determine strategies.

## **2.3. Regional Findings**

Findings are assessed following a regional approach in order to highlight, when possible, any emerging trend that concerns a particular region in Africa for the traffic of some of the most significant illicit commodities currently detected. It is very possible that some of the trends detected in one region could take place in another part of Africa without being detected yet. The ensuing analysis covers the methods OCGs use to deceive law enforcement detection at West, Central, East South and North African airports.

## West Africa

The West African region has seen important illicit cash trafficking in recent years. There has been cash seizures at airports in Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Nigeria in recent years. The airports are used as points of exit, transit and entry. OCGs are trafficking a range of cigarettes through airports in Africa to generate illicit gains. These include contraband genuine cigarettes<sup>21</sup>, illicit whites (also called cheap whites)<sup>22</sup>, counterfeit cigarettes and unbranded illicit cigarettes.<sup>23</sup>

**West African airports are hubs for cigarettes trafficking.**

Analysis indicates that West African airports are almost certainly hubs for cigarettes trafficking, including Felix Houphouet Boigny International Airport in Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), and Blaise Diagne International Airport in Dakar (Senegal). Typically, cigarettes are trafficked on commercial planes concealed in luggage or on private planes in bigger consignments.

Some OCGs smuggle cocaine through island airports in West Africa, such as Cape Verde's Nelson Mandela International Airport. Some of the seizures are connected to flights that departed from Brazil. Information shows that cannabis was the most seized drug at the Cape Verde's Nelson Mandela International Airport in 2018.

**Nigerian airports are probably central in drug trafficking of all types through West Africa.**

Nigerian airports, in particularly Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos, are

probably central in drug trafficking of all types through West Africa.

Heroin and methamphetamine are smuggled via airports in West Africa such as Burkina Faso, Benin, Ghana and Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> The illicit trade of heroin in the region is suspected to be linked to West African and South Asian organized crime groups, via Iranian, Indian, and Pakistani organized crime elements, but also to Syria and other states in the Middle East, indicating different syndicates operating trans-continently.

Information also indicates that West Africa airports serve as a common transit point for khat coming from Eastern Africa, typically Ethiopia, with the final destination being the United States of America. Known West African transit points for khat include the airports of Accra (Ghana), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

All types of sources suggest the use of drug mules typically used by OCGs to move drugs via airports on commercial planes.<sup>25</sup> It has been reported that OCGs operating in West Africa deployed students as drug mules to smuggle cocaine in the region. As indicated previously, drug mules are usually male rather than female, and are young (between 30 and 49 years old).

**It is very likely that the West Africa region is a hub for the trafficking of wildlife products to Asia.**

There has been a very probably recent shift of aviation trafficking routes for wildlife species and products moving from East African airports

to West African airports. The recent shift from East to West Africa airports could be due to increased cooperation between authorities in China and various East African countries in the support of wildlife conservation. This seems to be a strong deterrence for OCGs involved in wildlife trafficking as they could face extradition to China where offenders could face harsher penalties, including the death penalty.

A recent trend has emerged where pangolin scales and ivory are smuggled together, mixed in the same air cargo shipment. These shipments typically depart from various West African airports destined for Asia. Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos (Nigeria) has been flagged as a likely exit point for such consignments heading to Kuala Lumpur International Airport (Malaysia) or via Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) and Europe to Noi Bai International airport (Vietnam) and Hong Kong (China).

### **Southern Africa**

OCGs exploit airports in Southern Africa region to traffic a wide range of licit and illicit goods.

Information suggests that cash has been smuggled, in recent years, via airports in the Southern African region.

According to Thomson Reuters and police data, Kamuzu International Airport (Malawi), Cape Town International Airport, and O.R. Tambo International Airport (South Africa), have been identified as possible hotspots for narcotics trafficking in the Southern Africa region.

Both African and non-African OCGs are involved in trafficking drugs via Africa's airports, showing the transnational nature of this crime phenomenon. Wealthy Europeans operating in South Africa are suspected of trafficking drugs into Europe, Canada and Australia via South African airports.

It is possible that airport personnel and crew members from the region cooperate with local

## CASE STUDY N° 2

In June 2016, two Rwandan suspects attempted to smuggle USD 87,450 at Robert Gabriel Mugabe Airport (Zimbabwe). South African airports are particularly targeted by organized crime groups to traffic cash. According to open sources, between 2016 and 2017, more than USD 4.5 million in cash was seized at airports in South Africa and this trend seems to be continuing. For example, in February 2018, United States dollars and British pounds worth R15M (around USD 800,000) were seized at OR Tambo International Airport (South Africa) en route to Dubai (United Arab Emirates). In May 2018, South African Rands and United States dollars, worth around R7M (around USD 370,000) were intercepted at O.R Tambo International Airport (South Africa) for destination Mauritius.

*Source: N.Davids, "More than R90m seized at SA airports since 2016", Times Live, 16 October 2017 <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-16-more-than-r90m-seized-at-sa-airports-since-2016/> (accessed on 17 March 2020) and D.Chambers, "You'll never guess what contraband tops the list of Customs seizures", Times Live, 13 July 2018, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-07-13-youll-never-guess-what-contraband-tops-the-list-of-customs-seizures/> (accessed on 28 February 2020)*

**Airport personnel and crew members are cooperating with local OCGs to smuggle drugs from the region to Europe.**

OCGs to smuggle drugs from the region to Europe. For example, in 2018, a former cabin crew member was suspected of smuggling heroin on an Air Namibia flight from Hosea Kutako International Airport (Namibia) to Frankfurt, (Germany) concealed in the crew member's check-in luggage.<sup>26</sup>

### CASE STUDY N° 3

In a seizure that took place on 8 February 2019, two individuals were arrested for importing a 500g package of heroin via an express delivery service company for delivery to a residence in Victoria (Canada). The package originated from an address in Johannesburg (South Africa) and was shipped via air cargo.

Source: "Up to 500 grams of heroin seized at Victoria home in multi-national bust", CTV News, 7 February 2019, <https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/up-to-500-grams-of-heroin-seized-at-victoria-home-in-multi-national-bust-1.4287824> (accessed on 19 February 2020).

**In recent years, OCGs are increasingly favouring commercial courier services, such as DHL and Fedex, to smuggle drugs.**

OCGs are probably increasingly trafficking wildlife products to Asia from airports in Mozambique instead of from airports in Tanzania. This reflects the technique of using different airports and luggage drops to diminish the chance of detection as described in the general findings section of this assessment.<sup>27</sup>

**Mozambique airports are increasingly being used to traffic narcotics.**

**It is very likely that OCGs are prepared to use children as mules in order to evade law enforcement inspection**

The "handing over" or "relay" modus operandi have been reported in the Southern Africa region. This methods involves at least two drug mules during transportation. It is inferred that the second mule, who is a national arriving from a "non-risk" country, hopes to avoid being inspected. It is very likely that OCGs are prepared to use children as mules in order to evade law enforcement inspection.

### East Africa

**Available information show that heroin from Southeast and Central Asia often enters the East African region through the international airports of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania where it is typically transhipped to West Africa or Europe.**

While passengers are usually the smugglers, information indicates that airport personnel and crew members also collaborate with crime syndicates to traffic drugs via African airports.

The consumption and transit of Captagon is also a newly identified trend that is rapidly growing.<sup>28</sup> Due to the limited training and knowledge of law enforcement officers in detecting precursors, drug dealers often choose to traffic specifically precursors in order to avoid detection and/or confuse police officers.

Analysis suggests that transnational organized crime groups are most probably collaborating with locals from the East Africa region to smuggle wildlife products out of Africa, in order to benefit from local knowledge and expertise and reduce law enforcement detection.

**Gold from Venezuela has been trafficked on charter jetliners to Entebbe international airport (Uganda), before being exported to Asia.**

According to open sources, gold originating from outside of Africa has also been trafficked via East African airports.

#### CASE STUDY N° 4

In March 2019, a charter jetliner from Caracas (Venezuela), landed in Entebbe international airport (Uganda), containing 3.8 tons of Venezuelan gold wrapped in brown cardboard. The parcels never passed through the airport's customs security checks and ended at the African Gold Refinery, a metal processing company near the airport. By the time Uganda's Minerals Unit arrived at the company's premises to check these consignments a few days later, one of the consignments had already left for Asia.

*Source: G. Steinhauser & N. Bariyo, 'How 7.4 tons of Venezuela's gold landed in Africa and vanished', Wall Street Journal, 18 June 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-7-4-tons-of-venezuelas-gold-landed-in-africaand-vanished-11560867792> (accessed on 30 October 2019)*

### North Africa

In Northern Africa, Egypt is suspected to be an important transit hub of heroin bound for Europe or Turkey. Heroin originating from Afghanistan enters the region mainly via Egypt's airports.<sup>29</sup> It is suspected that the heroin is destined for local consumption,<sup>30</sup> as heroin is often cited as the second or third drug most consumed by Egyptians,<sup>31</sup> and is suspected to be on the rise. Information suggests that Egyptian and Turkish syndicates are involved in heroin trafficking into Europe.

From all sources analysis, it appears that airports in the North African region, particularly Egypt, are hubs for the trafficking of a range of pharmaceutical products. Moreover, analysis suggests that public figures could be involved in pharmaceutical trafficking via airports on the continent. For example, in February 2019, six bags containing cancer medication, hidden in luggage, were seized at Cairo International Airport (Egypt). The traffickers departed from Addis Ababa Bole International Airport (Ethiopia) to Cairo. They are suspected of being African diplomats.<sup>32</sup>

**Egypt is also a destination for IP-infringing medicines coming from India and China, and transiting via Saudi Arabia.**

IP-infringing medicines from India and China are also going to Ethiopia via Yemen by air cargo / passenger traffic.

The trafficking cases below highlight this nexus with Egyptian airports:



## CASE STUDY N° 5

- In 2019, 400 boxes of cancer medication were intercepted at Cairo International Airport (Egypt). The boxes were hidden in the smuggler's clothes. The suspect arrived on a flight from Riyadh (Saudi Arabia).
- In 2019, 7,408 units of pharmaceutical products for abortion, epilepsy and anti-viruses were found in a luggage at Alexandria Airport (Egypt).
- In 2019, at Hurghada International Airport (Egypt), 5,500 of foreign medication worth around USD 60,000 were smuggled by a Russian passenger of Syrian origin coming from Istanbul (Turkey). An Egyptian national, suspected to be an accomplice of the smuggler, tried to bribe an airport custom official to facilitate the entry of the illicit goods without paying tax.

Source:

- جنبه مليون 1.5 بأدوية تهريب محاولتي ضبط' (صور) القاهرة بمطار Vetogate, 4 January 2019, <https://www.vetogate.com/3392758> (Accessed on 4 March 2019)
- تحبط الدولي العرب برج مطار جمارك.. صور'، والصرع للإجهاض أدوية تهريب محاولة، Youm7, 14 June 2019, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2019/6/14/>
- 'Al-Hurghada airport customs thwart attempt to smuggle drugs', el watan news, 18 January 2019, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/3937002> (accessed on 11 November 2019)

### Central Africa

As previously reported in this assessment, OCGs use complicated and broken routes in order to avoid detection, with particular emphasis on airports with lower screening

capacity. The following example showcases this modus operandi in the Central Africa region. In March 2019, 17.5kg of cocaine was intercepted at Ndjili International Airport (Democratic Republic of the Congo). The cocaine, hidden in cyclist helmets, departed from India, and transited via Dubai (United Arab Emirates) and Nairobi (Kenya), before being seized at Ndjili International Airport. The intended destination was either Europe or the United States.<sup>33</sup>

**Information suggests that both the international airports of Yaoundé and Douala (Cameroon) represent notable regional hubs for drug trafficking.**

Yaoundé Nsimalen International Airport (Cameroon) is suspected of being used by OCGs to smuggle tramadol, with Cameroonian typically involved in this type of trafficking.

### 3. Organized Crime at African Ports

**Globally 90 per cent of goods transiting are done via shipping containers, with less than 2 per cent of containers being physically checked at destination.**

The staggering volume of container shipping and the sophistication and evolution of concealments methods, coupled with ever-changing trafficking routes make detection today more difficult.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, as the world is becoming more and more interconnected and trade continues to grow across regions, goods transported via containerized shipping will continue to

increase. This trend is beneficial not only for legitimate businesses and countries, but also for transnational organized crime groups to move their illicit goods.<sup>35</sup>

Africa’s maritime routes encompass a considerable number of commercial ports and harbor facilities, as well as coastal nations, territories, and island states. They provide a series of vital links not only between Africa and other continents, but also between African coastal countries and islands and the continent’s landlocked countries. African ports are the getaways for the importation and exportation of goods from, to and within the continent. For example, the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania manages 90 per cent of the country’s international trade.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, in recent years, new projects have been set up to develop transport and trade infrastructure in many African countries. These projects include the expansion and modernization of ports as well as the construction of railways.

**The port of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) will double its cargo handling capacity, through the Dar es Salaam Maritime Gateway Project, from 13,8 million tons in 2016 to 25 million tons over the following seven years.**

The port of Tema, which is Ghana’s main port for the importation of goods and handles cargo traffic for Togo and Burkina Faso, has benefitted from a port expansion with a new container terminal. This new terminal has increased cargo capacity from one million twenty foot equivalent units to more than three million per year.<sup>37</sup> These developments will likely create new opportunities for OCGs for the transportation of illegal goods.

This crime phenomenon is further exacerbated by the limited resources most port, marine and customs authorities in Africa are experiencing, which prevents them from effectively combat trafficking of illicit goods at ports and informal landing sites. Equipment to monitor ports and coastlines are either outdated or non-existent, such as the absence of body scanners at several ports in Africa in order to scan cruise and ferry passengers. Customs and port authorities also lack training to help identify illicit goods such as drugs, counterfeit goods and wildlife species and flora.

### 3.1. General Findings

This section highlights some of the most serious and more significant illicit goods trafficking occurring at Africa’s ports and informal landing sites. These findings should not be taken as an accurate measurement, but to provide an insight into current and emerging trends and patterns at ports in Africa regarding the trafficking of illicit goods.

Through these port facilities, a great number of containers pass every day, where only a fraction of them are inspected.

**With high competition, African ports are under a lot of pressure to maintain throughput metrics and reduce turnaround times, which in turn compromises law enforcement oversight processes.**

In addition, there is rampant corruption, inadequate port security, and porous sea borders and importation tend to be more scrutinized than exportation as importation generates revenue. This is a major issue since a lot of goods from Africa are illegally exported such as wildlife and natural resources.<sup>38</sup>

Limited resources for the maritime transportation and customs in Africa are consequently taken advantage of by OCGs, giving them entry and exit points to smuggle illicit goods.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, in response to recent government measures put in place at ports on the continent, OCGs are increasingly turning to informal landing sites instead to traffic their illicit goods, including islands, remote inlets, beaches and coves. The obscurity and remoteness of African islands and certain coastlines on mainland Africa facilitate the dhow-based delivery system. These movements are masked by local fishing activities and the licit dhow trade especially coming from Asia.<sup>40</sup>

Organized crime exploits ports on the continent to traffic counterfeit goods for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is significant trading between Africa and China (where a majority of counterfeit goods come from). Secondly, Africa's porous borders, fragile legal frameworks, limited enforcement and lack of resources have facilitated this illicit trade. And finally, many African countries do not regard the trafficking in counterfeits as a crime priority.<sup>41</sup>

Regarding OCGs operating at ports and informal landing sites in Africa to traffic illicit goods, they are locals and from overseas, highlighting the connectivity between Africa and many parts of the world. For example, Senegalese have been arrested in both France and Senegal for stolen motor vehicles trafficking via the port of Dakar (Senegal), presumably between France and Senegal.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, traffickers are typically male rather than female, and are often African.

Many actors are suspected of collaborating with OCGs to traffic illicit goods via ports and informal landing sites in Africa. For example, various actors are suspected of being involved in cigarette trafficking via African ports,

including non-state armed groups, government officials, businessmen and the Italian mafia.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, local businessmen operating in Africa, who are also legitimate cigarette importers and distributors, are importing illicit cigarettes from Asia and Europe via free trade zones, such as Dubai (United Arab Emirates), to ports in West and North Africa.<sup>44</sup>

Non-African actors are also suspected of being involved in trafficking all types of goods in African ports. For example, many stolen motor vehicles originating from the United Kingdom and trafficked via ports in East Africa are likely connected to British crime syndicates.

It is very likely that international criminal organizations are increasingly resorting to the maritime route to convey larger quantities of drugs.

**International criminal organizations are increasingly resorting to the maritime route to move larger quantities of drugs.**

For example, in the past three years an increase in bulk cocaine seizures on land<sup>45</sup>, in ports and off the coast of Morocco has been reported. This increase in bulk sea shipments of cocaine arriving in and/or transitioning through Morocco, coincides with the emerging trend reported by the United States Department of State of cannabis resin being smuggled to South America and the Caribbean where it is being exchanged for cocaine.<sup>46</sup> Such a bartering exchange system would make it more difficult for law enforcement to trace the financial flows between the OCGs involved.

Analysis suggests that OCGs involved in drug trafficking at ports and informal landing sites on the continent are from North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Diasporas also play an important role in establishing links

between producers, cartels, exporters and dealers.<sup>47</sup>

Data gathered in the framework of this analysis suggests that Turkey is likely a departure and a transit point for illicit weapons shipped to African ports. For example, in 2017, a number of seizures of pump-action guns took place at these ports. All were shipped from Turkey.<sup>48</sup> In one case it was discovered that the firearms shipped from Turkey originated from the United States and Italy. In all seizures, the firearms were shipped in containers among legal goods.<sup>49</sup> For example, in one of the cases, 1,100 pump-action rifles were seized at Tin-Can Island port (Nigeria) coming from Turkey and were hidden in a container filled with wash basins.<sup>50</sup> The similarities between the seizures suggest that the same organized crime group is likely behind them.

**Russia is suspected of being a major departing point for illicit firearms entering the African continent via ports.**

Similarly, Russia is also suspected of being a major departing point for illicit firearms entering the African continent via ports, particularly ports in Mozambique, the Horn of Africa, Madagascar, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In recent years, seizures of firearms have taken place in Mozambique and all came from the same Russian districts, which leads to the belief that a chain of traffic has been operating between the two countries. Firearms have also been illegally smuggled to Ports in Lagos (Nigeria) from Russia. For example, in August 2018, a Russian vessel transporting weapons was intercepted at Port Elizabeth (South Africa). Its destination was the port of Lagos (Nigeria).<sup>51</sup>

Ports are constantly targeted by OCGs for the illicit trade of wildlife products. Most of the

protected wildlife species are trafficked through marine shipments, particularly in containers, via African ports and informal landings sites on the continent, generating large profits for OCGs. This crime is typically transnational, linking African countries together, and the continent to the world, and is often connected to corruption.<sup>52</sup>

One of the transnational organized crime groups that has been identified as being implicated in wildlife trafficking via ports in Africa is the Asian based Shuidong syndicate. This criminal syndicate was involved in illegal wildlife trading, substantial financial investment, shipment facilitation, and money laundering, and used sophisticated trafficking techniques and routes. The syndicate also heavily relied on relationships with locals and corrupt port officials to facilitate shipping and avoid detection. In addition, they would use complicit freight agents to submit fraudulent documents for Customs clearance such as altering bills of the lading in order to hide the real origin, transit and destination of the shipments, as well as the identity of the sender and recipient.<sup>53</sup>

**Motor vehicles stolen abroad enter the African continent, primarily, through major commercial sea ports, with a number of them identified as hotspots for stolen motor vehicle trafficking, including the Port of Mombasa (Kenya) and the Port of Dakar (Senegal).**

## CASE STUDY N° 6

In 2016, the syndicate smuggled 2.3 tons of ivory hidden in grey plastic pellets in a shipping container. It was declared as 960 bags of plastics in the bill of lading. The container departed from the Port of Pemba (Mozambique), on a cargo ship, transited through the Port of Mombasa (Kenya), the Port of Singapore, and the Port of Busan (South Korea), before arriving at the Port of Hong Kong (China), for final destination Shuidong in mainland China. The bill of lading was switched at the Port of Busan (South Korea) in order for Hong Kong Customs to believe the plastic pellets came from South Korea.

*Source: S. Suresh, 'China Customs disrupts major wildlife trafficking syndicate', World Customs Organisation News, <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-88/china-customs-disrupts-wildlife-trafficking-syndicate/> (accessed on 14 October 2019)*

Analysis suggests that acts of corruption take place at several stages of the exportation chain to move illicit goods via ports in Africa. The trafficking of small arms and ammunitions occurring at ports in East Africa is suspected of being facilitated through bribery.<sup>54</sup> Criminals operating at the port of Zanzibar (Tanzania) are believed to have threatened and bribed officials to move illicit ivory trophies through the port.<sup>55</sup> Acts of corruption includes forgery and miss-declarations of shipping documents. For example, Chinese officials have reported to the Gambian CITES Management Authority false Gambian export permits to export wildlife trophies to China.<sup>56</sup>

Corruption also covers the complicity of port and customs officials, such as not conducting proper or no inspection on specific shipments and vessels.<sup>57</sup> It has been reported that low

## CASE STUDY N° 7

In September 2016, members of a criminal syndicate were suspected by the Federal Bureau of Investigations of the United States for trafficking luxury vehicles to the Port of Dakar (Senegal). The criminal network, led by a Guinean national, is believed to have stolen over 100 high-end vehicles in the United States, the majority of which were then shipped to Senegal via the Port of Dakar (Senegal).

*Source: M.Kane, 'Is Senegal a new hub for the trafficking of stolen cars?', ISS, 2 May 2019, [https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/is-senegal-a-new-hub-for-the-trafficking-of-stolen-cars?fbclid=IwAR2nx72nqOe2-KEmTM3eB1G1i0ajtNQ\\_E6E5T5U6AOKKeGQBKUx2mVVp7EQ](https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/is-senegal-a-new-hub-for-the-trafficking-of-stolen-cars?fbclid=IwAR2nx72nqOe2-KEmTM3eB1G1i0ajtNQ_E6E5T5U6AOKKeGQBKUx2mVVp7EQ) (accessed on 17 October 2019)*

salary wages of law enforcement and customs officials are one of the driving factors for corruption at ports, OCGs would pay cash or give gifts, such as cigarettes and liquor, in exchange for their complicity.<sup>58</sup>

**Acts of corruption take place at several stages of the exportation chain to move illicit goods via ports in Africa.**

It is very possible that corruption at ports in Africa has also involved employees of cargo handling services. Corrupt cargo handlers play a key role in import and export, and are used as mules to remove illicit goods from containers.<sup>59</sup> For example, the Shuidong syndicate that was involved in wildlife trafficking via East African ports, most likely bribed cargo handlers to guarantee a smooth exportation process for the illicit loads.<sup>60</sup>

Ports on the continent are also vulnerable to corruption practices involving scanning

equipment. It is suspected that scanning equipment at ports, often managed by private companies, have been controlled or sabotaged by traffickers to smuggle heroin into containers. It is noted that this practice often takes the form of petty corruption to bribe port staff such as forklift drivers, security guards or clearing agents.<sup>61</sup> It is highly likely that this practice also takes place to smuggle all kinds of other illicit goods.

Furthermore, inefficiencies in container storage at ports can lead to corruption practices. For example, in Kenya, there has been reports of breakdowns of scanners that has led to backlog of freight trucks of sometimes several kilometres long. In response, port officials have let trucks pass, unchecked, in order to reduce traffic, enabling OCGs to take advantage of inefficiencies in container storage to avoid inspection, with the assistance of compromised customs officials.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.2. Modus Operandi

#### Broken route

Instead of using direct routes, criminals are often using complex trade routes with transshipment points to traffic counterfeit products. They are doing this for several reasons. Firstly, is that many ports in Africa are not connected directly with one shipping line. Therefore, many shipments need to be broken down and shipped in several “legs.” Another reason is to combine small shipments into a larger shipment (consolidation) or divide a large shipment into smaller ones (deconsolidation). And thirdly, OCGs use complex trade routes in order to reduce law enforcement detection.<sup>63 64</sup>

**Using Africa’s busiest commercial ports, such as the Port of Mombasa (Kenya), to traffic drugs is ideal for OCGs due to the high volume of containers being processed daily, which makes detection less likely.**

#### CASE STUDY N° 8

In June 2016, 100kg of cocaine was found in 10 shipping containers full of sugar at the Port of Mombasa (Kenya). The containers were shipped from Brazil for final destination Uganda, but transited via the ports in Valencia (Spain), Oman and Mombasa (Kenya) first.

Source: J. Sawadi, “Cocaine discovered in Mombasa sugar cargo linked to known drug baron”, 31 July 2016, Zipo, <http://zipo.co.ke/7401/cocaine-discovered-sugar-cargo-mombasa-linked-known-drug-baron>, (accessed on 14 October 2019)

Cigarettes, for instance, are often trafficked via various ports in different countries with falsified documentation. While in transit, the illegal goods are sometimes transferred onto another ship. The shipping of illicit cigarettes across various countries make retracing the journey by law enforcement particularly challenging as this modus operandi facilitates the concealment of the origin of the illegal cigarettes.<sup>65</sup>

To avoid law enforcement detection traffickers also drop their drug loads at several points along the journey.<sup>66</sup>

**OCGs seem to have moved the exportation of wildlife goods from direct exportation between source and destination countries to using transit countries before reaching the destination countries.**

For example, wildlife shipments departing ports in Tanzania are transiting via ports in Kenya, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Philippines and Taiwan (China). These goods are typically destined for markets in China, Hong Kong (China) and Vietnam.<sup>67</sup>

Besides using the broken route strategy, it is very likely that OCGs also use local individuals in Africa to transport the illicit goods from one port to another. For example, the Asian based syndicate Shuidong would hire locals in Africa to collect and store the ivory to have as little contact as possible with the illicit merchandise. Instead, they would use multiple transit ports such as the port of Mombasa (Kenya), the port of Singapore, the port of Busan (South Korea) and the port of Hai Phong (Vietnam).<sup>68</sup>

### **Concealment**

OCGs continue to use and explore multiple methods to conceal their illicit goods in African ports. Counterfeit goods are often hidden in containers, concealed with legitimate goods to avoid detection.

**Goods are also falsely declared to hide the real origin of the product in order to undermine the targeting systems of law enforcement.**

Furthermore, parts of counterfeit products are sometimes shipped individually, and once at

## **CASE STUDY N° 9**

On 7 September 2017, the Customs Anti-Narcotics Section of the Mauritius Revenue Authority intercepted 3,200 cartridges of cigarettes, worth around USD 50,000, at Port Louis (Mauritius). The cigarettes were smuggled on board of a Maersk Skarstind vessel coming from China. The consignment was declared as containing flush doors, tiles, furniture, grinder, etc. However, upon inspection, the flush doors seemed to be unusually heavy, and were therefore scanned. It was discovered that the cigarettes cartridges were hidden within the doors

*Source: 'Illicit trade: Cigarettes worth RS 4 million seized at the port', Press Release, Mauritius Revenue Authority, 7 September 2017.*

the final destination, they are assembled. Final products are also shipped separately from their logos and packaging to evade detection.<sup>69</sup>

Drugs transported by maritime transportation are concealed in a myriad of ways such as in containers, ingested by a drug mule, and attached to the exterior of a vessel. However, often, the narcotics are hidden within the vessel's structure, such as in compartments, in the crew's cabin rooms, in the engine machine room, and even in the vessel's fire hose box.

**Fake or unauthorized pharmaceutical products for export are typically shipped in containers with legitimate goods, in order to conceal the physical aspect of the illicit products.**

## CASE STUDY N° 10

On 2 July 2018, the Customs Anti-Narcotics Section of the Mauritius Revenue Authority intercepted 4.2 kg of heroin worth around USD 800,000 on vessel Maersk Avon at Port Louis (Mauritius). The ship was registered in Hong Kong (China) and was used to transport containers between Mauritius and Madagascar. The vessel was flagged based on its voyage from a high risk port, Toamasina (Madagascar). The crew was composed of Filipino, Indian and Sri Lankan officers. The heroin was concealed in two black plastic parcels wrapped with black and brown cello tapes hidden in a fire hose box. Each parcel had a tracker attached to it. The trackers from both parcels were found to be similar to trackers discovered by Malagasy Customs from a drug seizure on 7 June 2018 in Antananarivo (Madagascar), implying that the same criminal syndicate is possibly behind both seizures.

*Source: "Seizure of 4.2 kg of heroin worth RS.63M on board vessel Maersk Avon", Press Release, Mauritius Revenue Authority, 3 July 2018.*

For example, in 2019, authorities intercepted a container at Dekheila port (Egypt), which contained 98,920 units of Xanax mixed with shoes.<sup>70</sup>

Data suggests that most stolen motor vehicles trafficked to African ports are typically concealed in containers.<sup>71</sup> To save space and money, the vehicles are often stored within the containers lifted up so that further vehicles can be stored underneath. Stolen motor vehicles are sometimes imported as consolidated cargo and miss-declared or under-declared on import documents. Cargo consolidation, popular in

international export, involves putting goods from several shippers into one shared shipping container. This helps to avoid paying substantial shipping costs.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, machinery and vehicle parts have been used as concealment to hide drugs. For example, in July 2019, 348kg of cocaine concealed in parcels were found inside an excavator machine in a container. The shipment departed from South Africa and arrived at port Kembla (Australia).<sup>73</sup>

OCGs are also trafficking stolen motor vehicles on ferries and roll on and roll off ships via Africa's ports. In North Africa, stolen vehicles have arrived into the region from Europe on board of ferries, driven by smugglers hired by crime syndicates.<sup>74</sup>

Arms traffickers use similar modus operandi as drug traffickers for the concealment of their illicit goods. These include concealing the weapons in sealed shipping containers, transporting them on ships that are involved in legitimate trade, and using circuitous maritime routes in order to avoid law enforcement detection.<sup>75</sup> Illicit weapons are also trafficked in combined illicit and licit shipments to hide the physical aspect of the weapons. For example, in 2019, a container containing 20,000 pistols was seized at the port of Misrata (Libya). The weapons were concealed behind boxes containing household products and toys.<sup>76</sup>

Typically, OCGs use container shipments to smuggle wildlife from African ports. They can vary in sophistication. Some would have specialized containers with hidden compartments while in others, less sophisticated, materials (usually legal) are used to conceal the wildlife product as well as its smell. For example, horns are hidden inside machinery, cow horns, electronic goods and toys, wrapped in foil and covered in toothpaste or shampoo, and wax has been melted on wildlife products hidden under timber. Other



legal materials include agricultural goods such as sunflower seeds, as well as metals and minerals.<sup>77</sup> For example, the Shuidong syndicate used legitimate goods, such as plastic pellets, sea shells, peanuts, and tea leaves, to hide tones of ivory in containers.<sup>78</sup> In addition, a new trend has been observed in recent years which is the use of tweak beams and logs to conceal ivory.

OCGs have also been found to miss-declare or mislabel containers in order to avoid detection from law enforcement.<sup>79</sup>

**Free trade zones**

Data gathered in the framework of this assessment suggest that OCGs use free trade zones to transport their illicit goods. For example, cigarettes trafficked via ports in Africa sometimes transit through free trade zones, such as Dubai (United Arab Emirates). OCGs exploit free trade zones as they have less regulations and the origin and/or destination of the illicit cigarettes can be better concealed by relabelling cigarette packs, and by not declaring the trafficked cigarettes for transshipment.<sup>80</sup>

**Postal services and “drop shipping”**

Increasingly, postal or express mail services are used by OCGs to traffic counterfeit goods via Africa’s ports. This is to reduce shipment costs associated to postage services and lower risk of bulk losses if seized, and because of the growing importance of internet and e-commerce in the international trade. In addition, traffickers are coming up with creative ideas to avoid detection at postal checks. For example, traffickers are using stamps from international postal services to trick customs to think that postal shipments are coming from a European Union country, when in fact they are coming from a non-European Union country. This modus operandi is known as ‘drop shipping’. To avoid detection, the goods are trafficked into a European Union member state which has less checks and the

shipment is then moved to another European Union member country with an EU postal stamp.<sup>81</sup>

**Informal landing sites**

**Informal landing sites, such as beaches, small coves, and islands, are increasingly being used by OCGs to traffic wildlife products to and from Africa to evade detection.**

In this instance, as available data highlighted, traffickers often use dhows. Moreover, drug traffickers seem to be using a decentralized model for trafficking drugs to East and Southern Africa, preferring isolated routes instead of official ports, which is a modus operandi followed by drug cartels in Latin America. Heroin trafficked across the Indian Ocean or Arabian Sea, for example, is typically transported by motorized wooden dhows, which are between 15m and 23m length and have compartments that can conceal between 100 kg to 1000 kg of heroin. The dhows are then met by small skiffs/boats, about 20 km and 100 km from the African coastline, to carry the drugs to beaches, islands, small coves, or into small commercial harbours. Using dhows and small boats allows traffickers to better evade detection from police patrols and satellite technology.<sup>82</sup>

**Vessel types**

**Various types of vessels are used to traffic illicit goods via Africa’s ports and informal landings, including dhows, ferries, cruise ships, semi-trucks, cargo ships, sailboats, speedboats, and fishing boats.**

For example, fishing vessels from Madagascar have transported drugs to Seychelles.<sup>83</sup> Cocaine is smuggled via ships in containers or private yachts from South America, notably from Brazil and Venezuela, to West Africa. Cocaine is also trafficked out of South America on ships before being transferred onto speedboats or sailing vessels where it is re-packaged in smaller units to Cape Verde before reaching mainland Europe.<sup>84</sup> If drug traffickers use speedboats to smuggle drugs, they make sure to use those with powerful outboard motors in order to travel the longest possible route in the shortest time and also use speedboats that are not equipped with automatic identification systems (AIS) so as not to be detected by authorities as recent cases have shown.

Furthermore, fishing vessels operating in Africa have been suspected of turning off their global positioning system (GPS) to traffic drugs and avoid detection.

OCGs have used small dhows to traffic weapons to Africa. It was noticed that cargo ships and dhows are typically used to traffic wildlife products. Nonetheless, other types of vessels are also used for wildlife trafficking.

*Bills of lading*

**To obscure illegal exportation, bills of lading are altered to hide the true origin/route/destination of the shipping container, and filled with inadequate or incomplete information concerning the consignor, consignee, ownership and business activities of the shipment. This puts legitimate maritime businesses, such as shipping companies and freight forwarders, at risk of being complicit in illicit trafficking without their knowledge.**

OCGs have been detected in using two bills of lading to conceal the origin and destination of the illicit shipment. The first bill of lading issued at the port of origin would incorrectly declare a transit port as the final port destination, and the second one, issued at the port of transit, would declare the correct final port destination.<sup>85</sup>

*Tampering of containers' seal*

Another modus operandi that has been identified recently to traffic wildlife at Africa's ports is the tampering of containers' seal. This entails removing (typically at night) the original seal of the container to smuggle the illicit goods into the container. The container is then locked with a new seal which is identical to the original seal with the same unique number. Once the container transporting the illicit goods arrives at the destination port, the seal is removed, the illicit goods are taken from the container and the container is then locked with a new seal which is again identical to the original one with the same number. This modus operandi has been detected in 10 African ports which implies that crime syndicates are present in all 10 ports.<sup>86</sup>

### Co-mingling of illicit goods

Available data indicates that there is mixing of illicit goods with other illicit goods in shipments, such as the mixing of drugs with wildlife products, or ivory with pangolin scales. Since 2016, a trend has emerged which is the combination of shipments containing ivory and pangolin scales, particularly departing from Nigerian ports, such as the port of Lagos, and destined for Asia.<sup>87</sup>

#### CASE STUDY N° 11

On 16 January 2019, a container coming from Nigeria and filled with 8,300 kg of pangolin scales and 2,100 kg of ivory tusks was intercepted at Hong Kong (China). The container was declared to be transporting frozen beef. This is not a new trend but has increasingly being used in recent years, and pangolin scales are now usually greater in volume than the volume of ivory in shipments that combine both goods. One explanation could be that due to the declining price in ivory (because of the ivory ban) criminals are forced to move more ivory to maintain profit margins.

*Source: 'Snapshot Analysis: Ivory smuggling 2015-2019 Concealment, routes and transportation methods', Wildlife Justice Commission, September 2019*

### Front companies

OCGs involved in wildlife trafficking have set up front companies to book shipments. The modus operandi of concealing their illegal activities behind front companies demonstrates that OCGs take advantage of legitimate businesses to support their criminal activities.<sup>88</sup>

### 3.3. Regional Findings

Findings are assessed following a regional approach in order to highlight, when possible, any emerging trend that concerns a particular region in Africa for the traffic of some of the most significant illicit commodities currently detected at ports. It is very possible that some of the trends detected in one region take place in another part of Africa without being detected yet.

The ensuing analysis covers the methods OCGs use to deceive law enforcement detection at West, Central, East, South and North African ports instead of the particularities of illicit good trafficking itself.

#### West Africa

According to available data, several ports in West Africa are suspected of being used as entry and exit points for counterfeit goods.

**Fake goods such as textiles and agricultural goods are trafficked to ports in the region on a large scale.**

Moreover, several ports in the region have been identified as major entry points for illicit cigarettes into Africa. Illicit cigarettes entering West African ports are then smuggled across the Sahara to North Africa by land. Local businessmen, operating as legitimate cigarette importers and distributors, are suspected of being involved.<sup>89</sup>

**Ndrangheta members exploit ports in West Africa.**

Information suggests that it is likely that the Ndrangheta has established ties with producers and distributors, and controls important cocaine trafficking routes from South America to Europe via West Africa,

including ports in Brazil, West Africa and Europe.<sup>90</sup> They also sometimes employ West Africans to manage cocaine shipments in West Africa, notably Ghanaian and Nigerian OCGs.<sup>91</sup> During a law enforcement operation, it was discovered that the Ndrangheta were using ports in West Africa, including the port of Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) to traffic cocaine to Europe via the port of Antwerp in Belgium.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, open sources suggest that South American drug cartels operating in Guinea-Bissau are using Nigerian waterways, including the Niger Delta, to distribute drugs to couriers in Nigeria who then traffic the drugs to Europe via air.

**Jihadist groups are suspected of being involved in drug trafficking via ports in West Africa to fund their terrorist activities.**

In 2019, 1.8 tons of cocaine hidden in bags of flour were seized at the port of Caio (Guinea-Bissau). The shipment came from Colombia destined for the Maghreb region, and the suspects were from Guinea Bissau, Colombia and Mali. According to police, the shipment was on its way to Al-Qaeda in North and West Africa. This is reported to be the biggest seizure ever made in Guinea Bissau.<sup>93</sup>

As described in the Modus Operandi section of this report, OCGs use several transit ports instead of direct routes to traffic their illicit goods in order to avoid law enforcement detection. According to open sources, a significant amount of cocaine shipments going through West Africa are transiting via Guinea-Bissau as an alternative route to avoid the strong police presence in the waters around Spain and Morocco.<sup>94</sup>

OCGs continue to use West African ports to traffic cocaine from South America to Europe, notably the port of Cotonou (Benin), the port

of Dakar (Senegal) and the port of Lomé (Togo). For example, between 26 June and 1 July 2019, customs at the Dakar port seized 1.3 tons of cocaine from two Italian flagged-ships. In one of the seizures, the cocaine was hidden in vehicles stored on the ship that had left the port of Paranagua (Brazil). Another seizure, in November 2019, saw nearly one ton being intercepted on a vessel heading to Dakar (Senegal). Some of these seizures involved corrupted port authority officials, freight forwarders and crew members.<sup>95</sup>

However, ports of the region are also used to traffic drugs using cargos destined for neighbouring countries, including Burkina Faso and Niger.

The port of Cotonou (Benin) is also known to be a hub for exportation and importation for a number of West African countries such as Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, and many shipping companies are using the port instead of the port of Lagos (Nigeria) as it is less costly, and has less security and bureaucratic concerns. Sources report that shipments coming from or going to these West African countries, are not always inspected at the port, leading to smuggling opportunities, including for drugs.

Moreover, a number of seizures in Cape Verde have shed light on the possible involvement of the Russian mafia in cocaine trafficking from Latin America to Africa. For example, law enforcement in Cape Verde seized 9.5 tons of cocaine on a Panama-flagged ship in 2019. All of the crew members were Russian. The ship was on its way to Tangiers (Morocco), but made an emergency stop in Praia (Cape Verde), following the death of a crew member. The drug was hidden in 260 packages.<sup>96</sup>

On the other hand, tramadol is entering West Africa via Lomé (Togo), Cotonou (Benin) and Nigeria, possibly through their main ports. For example, between November 2017 and April 2019, 45 containers with tramadol were

intercepted at several of Nigeria’s ports, namely Apapa Port, Onne Port, Tin Can Island Port and Kirikiri Lighter Terminal. One of the challenges that authorities faced during these seizures was to identify the importers since many of them gave fake identities and addresses on the declaration documents.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, tramadol from India is increasingly used by jihadist fighters in Trans-Sahara, Libya and Nigeria, which explains a rise in drug smuggling activities, including via Libyan and Nigerian ports, by Jihadist groups.<sup>98</sup>

**Major ports in the West African region are likely being exploited by OCGs for illicit fuel smuggling.**

All data sources show that refined petroleum products are being trafficked from one country to another by wooden boats before being re-exported using small tanker vessels. The traffic is possible due to insufficient surveillance of waterways around major ports, leading to many vessels entering and leaving ports unchecked. It is very likely that OCGs bribe personnel through a share in foreign currency of illicit crude oil or products to let the vessels pass. Illicit fuel smuggling is also a major concern for some countries of the region. In the last two years, vessels have been intercepted with illicit fuel on-board. Data suggests that politically exposed persons and businessmen are suspected of being involved in the fuel-smuggling activities. Nevertheless, efforts have increased to combat this illicit trafficking in some countries, with a special task force set up by the National Petroleum Authority in Ghana for example.

It is highly likely that ports in West Africa are used as destination and transit points for stolen motor vehicles. The port of Dakar, in Senegal, for instance is increasingly used as a transit point for stolen motor vehicles destined for Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. Using the port of Dakar more as a transit point is to

circumvent new detection strategies that were put in place by customs in recent years. Once the vehicles arrive in the destination countries, licenses are given to the owners before any vehicle checks, allowing traffickers to sell the vehicles and launder money.<sup>99</sup>

Stolen motor vehicles are also suspected of being used to smuggle other illicit goods via ports in West Africa.

**In recent years, there has been a shift in trafficking routes of ivory, moving away from East African countries to West and Central African countries.**

There seems to be a change in transit ports, moving from ports in Tanzania and Kenya to ports in Benin, Cote d’Ivoire and Nigeria, such as the port of Apapa (Nigeria).<sup>100</sup> For example, in 2019 a shipment containing 500 kg of ivory and over 1.5 tons of pangolin scales concealed in wooden crates was intercepted at the port of Lach Huyen (Vietnam), coming from the port of Apapa (Nigeria). The illicit shipment was declared as wood.<sup>101</sup>

Nigerian ports have also experienced significant volumes of rosewood departing its ports illegally. According to CITES Management Authority of Nigeria, from January to August 2018, 100 containers of rosewood were authorized to exit Nigeria each day during that timeframe. There is only one officer from the Forestry Inspection Unit that inspects containers exiting the port of Apapa and the port of Tin Can Island in Lagos (Nigeria), and only two officers to cover the port of Harcourt (Nigeria). In addition, according to CITES, scanners are normally only used for imports,

containers of timber are not unloaded, and there is limited scope and space storage to hold shipments. For instance, Nigeria’s Apapa port is owned by a private company, and the government has, therefore, to pay for container storage. All these factors lead to the belief that suspected containers of rosewood are not typically intercepted.<sup>102</sup>

**Southern Africa**

Analysis of all sources indicate that ports in the Southern Africa region are exploited by OCGs for the illicit trafficking of several types of commodities. Criminals resort to several modus operandi to traffic their illicit goods and avoid law enforcement detection in the region.

Data suggests that it is easier to traffic drugs from South African ports than from other African ports. Furthermore, South Africa has sophisticated financial services and international transportation connections.<sup>103</sup> According to open sources, the port of Durban, Johannesburg’s City deep dry port and Cape Town port are South Africa’s major heroin trafficking hotspots.

**It is easier for heroin traffickers to get containers from South Africa to Europe than from other African ports. This could be because there is a perception that freight leaving South Africa is seen at a lower risk of containing illicit goods than freight coming from other African ports, and there is a high volume of licit trade between South Africa and Europe.**

Some ports in Mozambique are highly likely to be exploited and controlled by OCGs for drug trafficking. The country offers opportunities for drug traffickers since it lacks resources to counter trafficking, and in recent years, there

**CASE STUDY N° 12**

A criminal network composed of Mozambican families with Asian origin is suspected of being involved in the heroin and hashish trade, dealing with bulk transshipments of heroin and hashish via dhows or container shipments. The suspected head, Mohamed Bachir Suleman, is accused by the United States of being an international drug trafficker. This drug cartel is believed to control around 700 km of Mozambican coastline (from the Tanzanian border to the town of Angoche), which includes small islands and deep container ports such as the port of Pemba and the port of Nacala (Mozambique), two major hubs of illicit trades. It is also suspected that scanners at ports in Mozambique do not check certain containers, including containers imported by Mohamed Bachir Suleman or his associates. Moreover, heroin is suspected to be transferred from dhows onto small fishing boats near Pemba and the Quirimbas Islands (Mozambique) before landing on beaches in mainland Tanzania.

*Source: “The heroin coast: A political economy along the eastern African seaboard”, ENACT, 2019, <https://enactafrica.org/research/research-papers/the-heroin-coast-a-political-economy-along-the-eastern-african-seaboard> (accessed on 17 June 2019).*

has been an increase in law enforcement operations in the waters near Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>104</sup>

Police information indicates that Southern Africa’s islands are not spared from its ports falling victim to drugs trafficking, notably cannabis.

It is very likely that Southern African ports are also used to traffic cocaine from South America to Africa.

Various actors are suspected of being involved in illicit trafficking via African ports, including non-state armed groups, government officials and businessmen. For example, in South Africa, cigarette smuggling appears to be connected to state actors, including individuals in the intelligence service.<sup>105</sup>

*East Africa*

**The port of Mombasa (Kenya) is the largest and busiest seaport for East Africa. In 2015, one million containers passed through the port.**

Since then the number of freights has continued to increase. With an increase in volume, the port does not have enough resources or equipment to monitor containers. It is reported that only one scanner screens a small fraction of the export cargo. These conditions at the port lead to opportunities for OCGs to illicitly traffic goods. For example, the Port of Mombasa in Kenya has been identified as a major point of entry for counterfeit and illegal medicines.<sup>106</sup>

Analysis of all sources of information suggests that kingpins are usually involved in the trading of larger volumes of heroin for transit in the region, operating typically by sea transportation, such as dhows or containers, to carry drugs. It is very likely that kingpins include prominent Nairobi (Kenya) based businessmen, and families based along Africa’s East coast who operate kinship-based businesses.<sup>107</sup>

Nationals from South Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius, Uganda, Tanzania and West Africa are also implicated in drug trafficking in Kenya via maritime transportation.<sup>108</sup> For example, Tanzanian OCGs are transporting small to medium sized drug shipments on Kenya’s coastline. They are also present in

**Smaller ports along Kenya’s coastline are used by OCGs to traffic heroin. These include the ports in Lamu, Kilifi, Malindi, Mombasa Old port, Vanga and Shimoni. The Kenya Maritime Authority concedes that these ports are not subject to international conventions and unlicensed boats that dock there are not monitored.**

Mozambique and South Africa where they also manage the heroin consumption market.<sup>109</sup>

In addition, it is suspected that private speedboats that serve private residences on Kenya’s coastline, particularly in Malindi, could be involved in heroin smuggling.<sup>110</sup>

Drug cartels also use landing sites in Tanzania, including its ports and islands to traffic heroin. Pemba, Zanzibar and Mafia Island in Tanzania are initial drop-off points, before the heroin load is transported by speedboat to mainland Africa. It is suspected that Zanzibar’s isolated inlets and beaches are ideal for OCGs to land their heroin shipments without detection,<sup>111</sup> and the port of Zanzibar is key for drug traffickers to smuggle their heroin onto the continent. Data suggests that the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania is also an important base for many drug cartels involved in heroin trafficking, and it is very likely that the deep port of Tanga (Tanzania) is also used by OCGs as it is close to landing locations in Tanzania and Kenya.<sup>112</sup>

**Counterfeit goods including household products, electrical equipment, clothes and shoes, are smuggled from China to the port of Victoria (Seychelles). OCGs are taking advantage of the legal gap in Seychelles, where laws banning fake goods, except for medicine and food, are absent.**

It is highly suspected that Iranian and Pakistani OCGs are trafficking drugs to East Africa with the help of OCGs operating in Africa.<sup>113</sup> For example, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of Iranians involved in drug-related offences in Seychellois waters, underlying the country's vulnerability to illicit activities at sea.<sup>114</sup>

**CASE STUDY N° 13**

On 22 February 2019, an Iranian dhow caught fire with 13 Iranian crew members onboard. The vessel was intercepted in the waters of Seychelles by the Coast Guard, the Defense Air Force and the National Information Sharing and Coordination Centre during a joint operation. It is suspected that the crew started the fire in order to cover their illicit drug load.

*Source: 'Iranian dhow catching fire in Seychelles waters', European Union's Critical Maritime Routes Programme, 22 February 2019, <https://criticalmaritimeroutes.eu/2019/03/06/iranian-dhow-catching-fire-in-seychellois-waters/> (accessed on 16 October 2019)*

Data suggests that OCGs control informal taxation at ports in the region to finance other illicit activities. The charcoal trade in Somalia is believed to be an important income for Al-Shabaab. According to a United Nations report, this trade generates at least USD 7.5 million for the terrorist group from informal taxation at ports.<sup>115</sup>

**OCGs as well as non-state armed groups, such as terrorist groups, are suspected of being involved in charcoal trafficking via African ports.**

A significant amount of charcoal is trafficked from Somalia to Gulf countries. Typically, exports from Somalia are falsely declared on certificates of origin as coming from other African countries, notably Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. These shipments are exported from ports in Somalia, such as the port cities of Kismayu and Bur Gaabo, and then transiting through ports in Iran, where the charcoal is then put into white bags that are labelled "Product of Iran." These white bags filled with charcoal are then transported onto Iran-flagged dhows for destination Al Hamriya port in Dubai (United Arab Emirates). Once at the port of arrival, traffickers use new certificates falsely declaring the country of origin of the charcoal as Iran. According to a United Nations report, illicit Somali charcoal exported to the United Arab Emirates is valued to be around USD 150 million per year and is usually used for cooking and smoking shisha.<sup>116</sup>

The East African region is neither spared from stolen motor vehicles passing through its ports. The port of Mombasa (Kenya) is a gateway for stolen motor vehicles with right-hand-drive entering the continent with destination the Kenyan market and other Eastern African countries, notably Uganda. Recent seizures at the port reveal that the United Kingdom is a major source for these stolen motor vehicles. Two major cases in 2019 at the port highlight this trend (see case study 14 and 15 below).



#### CASE STUDY N° 14

On 11 May 2019, two 20 foot containers arrived onboard a ship in the port of Mombasa (Kenya) from Oman. Upon inspection from authorities, the two containers were scanned and it was revealed that three Range Rover Sport cars were present in the containers. Through the INTERPOL Stolen Motor Vehicle Database, the stolen motor vehicles were found to be originating from the United Kingdom and were in transit to Uganda. The port of Mombasa (Kenya) was again used as a transit point for stolen motor vehicles trafficking concerning a seizure that took place on 30 July 2019, where two Range Rovers and Mercedes cars were intercepted at the port. These cars were suspected of being stolen in the United Kingdom, and through scanning, were found concealed in a 40 foot container. The container was declared to contain household goods and was destined for Kampala (Uganda).

*Source: W. Atieno, 'Interpol, Kenyan police probing theft ring after 3 cars seized', 13 August 2019, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Interpol-Kenyan-police-probe-car-theft-syndicate/1056-5234222-ahnb59/index.html> (accessed on 19 August 2019)*

This crime link to trafficking of stolen motor vehicles from the United Kingdom via East African ports is further reinforced with other law enforcement operations that took place in 2019 and 2020 (see case study 16 below).

In 2019, Kenyan and British authorities oversaw the re-exportation of 12 high-end vehicles after being stolen in the United Kingdom in 2018 and trafficked into Kenya as transit goods.<sup>117</sup>

#### CASE STUDY N° 15

On 23 January 2017, the Interim Jubba Administration (IJA) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) seized approximately 25,000 blank-firing pistols on board of a vessel docked in the Kismayo port, in southern Somalia. Prior to the seizure, the vessel docked at the port of Massawa (Eritrea). Given the ease with which blank-firing pistols can be converted to fire live ammunition, the consignment is considered to fall within the parameters of prohibited military materiel. The consignment entered and remained docked in Eritrean territorial waters, and therefore constituted a violation of the arms embargo on Eritrea. It was discovered that a company based in Turkey manufactured and sold the blank-firing pistols. In another seizure, on 11 March 2020, a container with 18,000 pistols, worth around USD 13 million, was seized at the port of Djibouti. Ethiopian authorities suspected that the pistols originated from Turkey and were smuggled into Ethiopia by international arms-trafficking groups. 24 suspects were reportedly arrested, with nationals from seven foreign countries including two Sudanese.

*Source: J. Lock, "\$13m Worth of Weapons Smuggled Through Djibouti Port Seized in Ethiopia; 24 Suspects Arrested", *Maritime Security Review*, 12 March 2020, <http://www.marsecreview.com/2020/03/13m-worth-of-weapons-smuggled-through-djibouti-port-seized-in-ethiopia-24-suspects-arrested/> (accessed on 13 March 2020)*

**In recent years, links between Turkey and the Horn of Africa regarding weapons smuggling have emerged.**

It is very likely that weapons trafficked via ports and informal landing sites in Africa involves both domestic and foreign OCGs. Somalians are suspected to be linked to weapons trafficking at ports in East Africa. For example, a Somali fisherman based in Aden (Yemen), who manages illegal fishing trawlers run by Somalia and Yemeni business networks, is believed to be an exporter of weapons from Somalia. He allegedly smuggles weapons on fishing dhows to Djibouti via the port of Saylac (Somaliland).<sup>118</sup>

**CASE STUDY N° 16**

On 6 February 2020, INTERPOL’s Stolen Motor Vehicles Unit conducted an operation at the port of Mombasa (Kenya), where three containers with cars were intercepted. All vehicles stored in the containers were found to be stolen in the United Kingdom and transited via the port of Jebel Ali in Dubai (United Arab Emirates) before arriving at the port of Mombasa (Kenya). The vehicles were believed to be destined for Uganda. A BMW X5, VW Tiguan, Audi Q7 and a Range Rover Evoque had shown a manipulated identity while two further Range-Rovers, a BMW 530 and 2 motorcycles had still their original numbers.

*Source: A.Olingo, “KRA seizes 5 high-end cars, 2 motorcycles stolen from UK”, Daily Nation, 7 February 2020, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/KRA-seizes-5-high-end-cars-stolen-from-UK/1056-5447124-view-asAMP-2knvc0/index.html> (accessed on 25 February 2020).*

Furthermore, unpopulated places along the Bari coastline in Somalia have boat docking facilities which traffickers have exploited to land illegal weapon shipments.<sup>119</sup> For example, Garacad (Somalia) is suspected of being a

major regional weapon shipments landing spot, as vessels disguised as fishing boats have landed their illicit weapons. The ports of El Hur and Harardhere along the Somalian southern coastline, are also likely hotspots where fishing dhows have smuggled Eritrean weapons.<sup>120</sup> In addition, it is reported that the ports of Bosasso and Caluula in Somalia are also used for illicit weapons trafficking.<sup>121</sup>

Iranians are likely to be involved in weapon trafficking from Yemen to Somalia where they are believed to unload their shipments at unpopulated locations along the Somalian coastline.<sup>122</sup> Non-state armed groups are also suspected of being implicated in weapon trafficking in Somalia. For example, in January 2017, a dhow was seized transporting weapons near the port of Kismayo (Somalia). Authorities believe that the weapons were destined for Al-Shabaab.<sup>123</sup>

Moreover, several public sector figures in Africa have been linked to the illegal trade of weapons via African ports. For example, it is suspected that PEPs in Djibouti are implicated in this type of trafficking at the Doraleh port terminal (Djibouti), which already experiences fragile customs checks. Open source information suggests that in Eritrea, it is also likely that military and senior officers are involved in the regional arms trade, facilitating shipments of weapons to Ethiopian rebel groups and to embargoed countries such as Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia via the Red Sea or Gulf of Aden from Yemen.<sup>124</sup>

**North Africa**

It is very possible that a number of OCGs, both foreign and locals, are trafficking oil and fuel from Libyan ports, including the Italian mafia.

**It is suspected that the Italian mafia are partnering with Jihadist groups to smuggle oil and fuel out of Libya to Italy.**

It seems that traffickers operating in North Africa are taking advantage of the current security gap in the Mediterranean Sea, where vessels transporting illicit fuel are rarely intercepted by law enforcement when crossing the sea.<sup>125</sup> The likely reason for the lack of inspection is that law enforcement capabilities are currently more concentrated on tackling illegal immigration flows crossing the Mediterranean.<sup>126</sup> Typically, tankers in the Mediterranean meet other vessels coming from Libya to transfer the illicit oil for onward transit.<sup>127</sup>

This Italian criminal connection to oil and fuel trafficking in Africa is further reinforced with a law enforcement operation that took place in October 2017, where the Italian police uncovered a criminal syndicate who was smuggling diesel with the help of an Italian mafia group. This Italian mafia group was involved in a fuel smuggling ring where diesel, around USD 35 million worth, ended up in gas stations in Europe. To steal fuel from Libya's National Oil Corporation in the port city of Zawiya, small boats were typically used. The fuel was then moved onto bigger vessels near Malta for destination Italy.<sup>128</sup>

Along with Italy, Malta has been identified as a destination for trafficked Libyan oil. Every year, around USD 750 million to USD 1 billion worth of Libyan oil is smuggled to Malta by moving the illicit oil from vessel to vessel about 12 miles off Malta.<sup>129</sup>

OCGs exploit North African ports for the illicit traffic of several commodities. For instance, data indicates that ports in the region are both departure and transit points for cigarettes trafficked to Europe, notably to Italy, France and Spain.<sup>130</sup> Ports in Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria are reportedly the most affected, with Italian ports, particularly the Tyrrhenian coast, being entry points into Europe. This is likely due to Italy having numerous commercial and touristic links with the North African region, facilitating the smuggling.<sup>131</sup>

The illicit smuggling of cigarettes through North African ports is also reported by government sources.

Illicit cigarettes are also smuggled from ports in Algeria to Europe, especially to France and Spain, as the price of cigarettes is much higher in those countries. The maritime link between the port of Algiers (Algeria) and the port of Marseille (France)<sup>132</sup> guarantees that illicit cigarettes have direct access to France through sea transshipments.<sup>133</sup>

#### CASE STUDY N° 17

During operation "Doge Vesuviano", launched in 2016, Italy's Customs Agency and the Guardia di Finanza intercepted at the port of Livorno (Italy), 36,000 cigarette cartons, worth around USD 1 million, from a container that was declared to be transporting glass wool. Many of the cigarette cartons were believed to contain highly toxic substances, and therefore, were to be sold at low prices and to the Italian youth. The shipment came from Tunisia for destination the southern region of Campania (Italy). Following an investigation, it was revealed that Italians (from Livorno and Campania) and Tunisians were involved in this trafficking.

*Source: C.Spada & F.Marone, 'The Impact of Illicit Trafficking and Jihadist Infiltrations Inside Italian Seaports: Looking Towards a Way Forward', Turtle Group Consulting, 2018.*

To traffic their illegal drug shipments to African ports, drug traffickers need ports to be permeable and their illicit goods to avoid being intercepted by customs or law enforcement. Therefore, it is suspected that they turn to public and private sector figures as they exert control over ports, customs and law enforcement.<sup>134</sup> The following case that took

place at the port of Oran in Algeria illustrates the involvement of public and private sector figures in the drug trade via Africa's ports. The port offers opportunities for drug traffickers as it is a large commercial and passenger port and is strategically located, situated at 200km from Spain.<sup>135</sup>

**CASE STUDY N° 18**

In May 2018, a container was found on a ship at the port of Oran (Algeria) containing 701 kg of cocaine hidden under frozen meat. The cargo came from Brazil and transited via the Ports of Las Palmas and Valencia in Spain before arriving at the port of Oran (Algeria). The destination of the drug is suspected to be Europe and the Middle East since the size of Algeria's market seems too small to absorb such a large volume of drugs. The suspects involved in this illicit shipment were Kamel Chikhi, his brothers, business associates, and the ship's crew. Kamel Chikhi, nicknamed 'El Bouchi' (the butcher), owns Dounia Meat which is the largest Algerian importer of frozen meat and runs real estate projects and import companies in Algiers (Algeria). In addition to the involvement of businessmen, political officials were also found to be implicated in this seizure, including prosecutors, the son of a former Algerian prime minister, and a driver for the national police chief. This case also implies that Algerian traffickers are likely to have established links with cartels in South America in order to facilitate these drug shipments.

*Source: J. Ben Yahia; R. Farrah, 'La saisie algérienne de cocaïne révèle des tendances alarmantes', Institute for Security Studies, 10 December 2018, <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/la-saisie-algerienne-de-cocaine-revele-des-tendances-alarmantes> (accessed on 16 May 2019)*

Seizures of cocaine via North Africa's ports in recent years imply that organized crime groups are changing their routes, transiting cocaine via North Africa's ports instead of West Africa's ports, to reach Europe and the Middle East. Furthermore, the ports also prevent the illicit shipments from transiting through the conflict-prone Sahel and Sahara regions. In addition, the United Nations, France and the United States are increasingly present in West Africa which might have led organized crime groups to divert their trafficking routes to North Africa. These factors seem to indicate that cocaine will increasingly be shipped via North African ports in the future. This finding is further corroborated by the 2018 Global Drug Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which stated that cocaine seizures in North Africa increased six-fold in 2016, accounting for 69 per cent of seizures in Africa.<sup>136</sup>

**The coast between Casablanca and Algiers is a golden opportunity for drug traffickers as the area is open to three continents, and the ports along that coastline connect the southern rim of the Mediterranean to the southern edge of Europe, with large volume of people and goods moving between the two continents every day.**

Information indicates that North African ports are not spare from the illicit traffic of tramadol. It is very likely that the drug is entering Africa through North African ports and coastal towns. For example, in 2018 around 25 million of tramadol pills were intercepted at the port of Tangiers (Morocco) hidden in cartons inside a container that came from Asia.<sup>137</sup>

In addition, tramadol from India is believed to be smuggled into Africa from Greece through the coastal town of Tobruk in Libya.<sup>138</sup> Egyptian ports are suspected of being transit and destination hotspots. For example, in 2018, tramadol tablets were seized from a 40-foot container coming from India at the port Said (Egypt), for destination Libya.<sup>139</sup>

When it comes to hashish trafficking, ports in North Africa are likely departure and transit hubs as Libya is suspected of being a storage point for hashish and Morocco is a hashish producing country. For example, the port of Tangiers (Morocco) is a major departing point for hashish trafficking to Italy, notably to ports on the Tyrrhenian Sea, such as Genoa, Civitavecchia, and Porto Torres in Sardinia.

**CASE STUDY N° 19**

During Operazione Caddy at the port of Genoa (Italy) in 2017, 734 kg of hashish was discovered in a car owned by an Italian couple on board of a ferry. The two suspects were believed to be travelling to Morocco on behalf of criminal syndicates. Other Italians and Moroccan citizens were also suspected to be implicated, highlighting the connectivity between Italy and Morocco for hashish trafficking.

*Source: C.Spada & F.Marone, 'The Impact of Illicit Trafficking and Jihadist Infiltrations Inside Italian Seaports: Looking Towards a Way Forward', Turtle Group Consulting, 2018.*

Ports in Egypt are suspected of being destination, transit and departure points to traffic pharmaceutical products to and from the Middle East, according to a number of seizures reported on open sources.

It is suspected that the port of Tangier (Morocco) is also being exploited by OCGs for the trafficking of stolen motor vehicles from

Europe. They are usually smuggled on passenger ships and on cargo ships and then driven to West and Central African countries where they are introduced into the licit market.<sup>140</sup>

**Central Africa**

OCGs take advantage of Central African ports to smuggle a range of commodities onto the continent, notably stolen motor vehicles, drugs, illicit pharmaceutical goods and wildlife products. For example, the Port of Douala (Cameroon) appears to be a hub for wildlife trafficking in the region, as it offers a way to connect the region to Asia while avoiding stricter controls at airports<sup>141</sup>.

**According to the World Customs Organization, the port of Douala (Cameroon), the port of Pointe Noire (Republic of the Congo) and the port of Matadi (Democratic Republic of the Congo) are hotspots for stolen motor vehicles smuggled into Africa from Europe and Asia.**

As previously stated in this report, there has been a shift in trafficking routes of ivory, moving away from East African countries to West and Central African countries. In the Central Africa region, ports in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola have been reported as major hubs for the trafficking of wildlife products.<sup>142</sup>

**4. Illicit Financial Flows**

Various illicit financial flows are associated with the trafficking of illicit goods at airports and ports in Africa. This section highlights three of them: cash trafficking at airports, which obscures or hides the origin of illicit proceeds,

illicit taxation at ports and airports, which allows OCGs to generate revenue through (licit and illicit) importation and exportation of goods, and the financial settlement scheme called Feiqian, which enables illicit trafficking of goods at ports on the continent.

### 4.1. Cash Trafficking

The smuggling of cash across borders is one of the oldest forms of money laundering.<sup>143</sup> Cash continues to be an important means of payment around the world, including in the criminal economy where it remains central. Cash is trafficked for several reasons: to fund other criminals activities such as pay for further consignments of illicit goods, to purchase an asset, to make sure that anyone investigating the criminal network’s activities is unable to trace its purchases, to complete a laundering process overseas and to move the laundered

**Cash trafficking is a major crime issue, particularly at airports in Africa.**

money to a location where it can be used, or maybe the country into which the cash is

imported has less diligent regulatory oversight and, therefore, it is easier to place the cash into the banking system there.<sup>144</sup>

#### Criminals

According to available data, domestic and transnational OCGs are suspected of being involved in cash trafficking at airports in Africa. Among the transnational OCGs being implicated are Asian OCGs. OCGs trafficking cash tend to be involved in other types of trafficking of illicit goods at African airports, such as gold and mobile phone smuggling.<sup>145</sup>

#### Modus Operandi

OCGs traffic cash via African airports in various ways in order to avoid law enforcement detection.

- By cash courier: It is an individual that has been recruited by a criminal network to traffic cash across international borders on their body. The courier conceals the cash within his clothes, his body, in his luggage or internally.
- Within a mean of transport: this involves concealing cash within the structure of the mean of transport, rather than in cargo. Means of transport can include aircraft, from small private planes to larger aircrafts such as cargo planes and commercial planes. The captain and/or crew may be fully aware of the concealed cash and complicit in the smuggling. Alternatively, the captain and crew may genuinely not know that the aircraft has cash concealed within it.
- In containers or other forms of air cargo: cash is heavy and bulky, and in order to smuggle a large amount of cash, which normally a courier cannot carry, the only option is to hide it in a cargo.
- In mail or postal parcels: cash has been found at airports within goods sent by mail and postal parcel services. The volume of cash within the mail or postal parcels is usually smaller in volume than those trafficked on the person of cash couriers or via cargo. Nevertheless, the use of high denomination banknotes can result in seizures of significant value.<sup>146</sup>

Generally, although a majority of countries have knowledge and understanding of cash trafficking by an individual and have measures in place to monitor and control this issue, many do not focus enough on the trafficking of cash via cargo and mail, although the amount of cash is typically much higher than when trafficked on an individual.<sup>147</sup>

## 4.2. Illicit Taxation

Illicit taxation at airports and ports involves receiving payments outside of sanctioned legal or political frameworks through exerting control over an aviation or maritime area. This usually happens when there are porous sea borders, and fragile airport/port security and it is often facilitated through corruption.<sup>148</sup>

**Illicit taxation is the third largest source of revenue for non-state armed groups operating in Africa to fund their criminal activities.**

Open sources suggest that illicit taxation is the third largest source of revenue for non-state armed groups operating in Africa to fund their criminal activities. These criminal actors are able to collect this income when they are controlling a territory where they impose taxes on the community, businesses and OCGs, including aviation and maritime industries.<sup>149</sup>

The amount of goods that goes through airports and ports makes extortion of maritime/aviation-centric businesses highly profitable. For example, it is believed that Al-Shabaab established a tax collection system that previously involved ports in Somalia. This included the city port of Kismayo (Somalia), which through taxation, allowed the group to generate millions of dollars with charcoal exports. Ship and barge owners were taxed on every bag of charcoal they were transporting and porters were employed to load and unload charcoal at the port.<sup>150</sup>

## 4.3. The Feiqian Scheme

Feiqian (also called Chinese “flying money”) is an ancient way of trade-based financial settlement scheme, which has been abused by

Chinese criminals for trafficking illicit goods via ports in Africa, notably wildlife.

Feiqian involves an individual who wants to send money to a recipient in Africa. In order to do so, the individual will pay a feiqian broker in China. For a commission, the broker will arrange that a counterpart in Africa pays the recipient, again for a commission. The two feiqian brokers later settle their account through, for example, the transfer of commodities of equivalent value, but also sometimes through less clean methods such as transfer mispricing or invoice manipulation.

This money exchange is suspected of being linked to tax fraud and the financing of the wildlife trade in Africa, more specifically to the drugs-for-abalone and rosewood trade. In practice, the system involves the systematic under-invoicing of Chinese imports going to Africa and a chain of payments where accounts are settled via the transfer of high-end goods, often illicit ones, notably abalone, rosewood, rhino horns and ivory, and sometimes through a criminal syndicate. In sum, goods are undervalued on the import documentation and they are then exchanged for money and this undeclared money is later channeled into high-end commodities, sometimes illicit, that are sent to China. In theory, by using the feiqian system, the money actually never leaves China, commodities are just moved around as part of a longer payment chain among the Chinese diaspora, with no paper trail.

Actors involved are suspected of being older, well-established women, who are key operators, working in a small group of trusted people, making the system more difficult to penetrate. These conditions make feiqian largely undetectable. Nonetheless, it could appear as a gaping hole in a country’s balance of payment accounts with China, as was the case with Namibia which led to an import-tax fraud investigation, where 8 suspects, including a prominent businessman, a former customs official and four elderly women, are

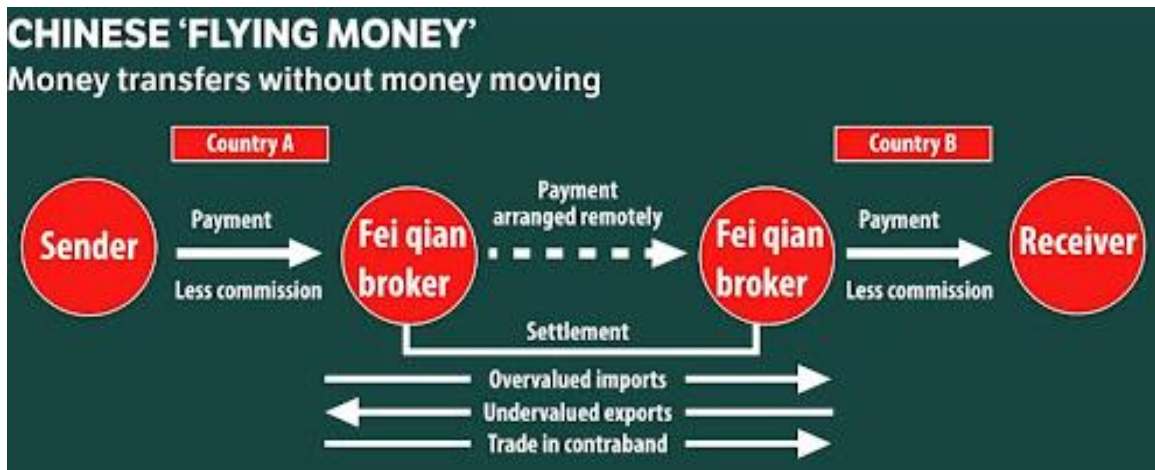


Figure 8. 'Flying Money' or Feiqian Model  
Source: Business Live

suspected of being key operators. They are facing charges of fraud and money laundering in Namibia that took place between 2013 and 2016. They allegedly imported and declared around USD 11 million in goods from China while remitting payments of more than USD 150 million in exchange, consequently defrauding Namibia.<sup>151</sup>

It is suspected that the former customs official used his knowledge and access so that his Chinese clients could evade taxes. His clients are suspected of importing clothes concealed as rolls of material instead of finished clothing products, as they are of higher value and are sold at a bigger price.

In response to the Feiqian scheme, several countries in Africa have adapted their oversight. In Angola, for example, exports of raw material going to China are forbidden unless the exporter can prove that the funds used entered Angola through a bank account.<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusions

The objective of this analytical report was to explore how organized crime exploits ports and airports in Africa to traffic illicit goods. It showcased the dynamics of OCGs and networks that continue to take advantage of ports and airport facilities in Africa and foster new trafficking opportunities wherever possible to maximize their illicit gains. This assessment also tried to identify and analyse the different types of trafficking taking place at ports and airports that are posing a direct threat to Africa's safety, security and development. It also took a closer look at current and emerging modus operandi and trafficking routes, highlighting wherever possible, the port or airport affected.

Whether wildlife, pharmaceuticals, drugs, stolen motor vehicles, weapons, cash, natural resources, cigarettes, counterfeit, or any other type of illicit good, OCGs will continue to exploit ports and airports on the continent as long as the socio-economic, geo-political and security landscape in Africa provides trafficking opportunities. They will constantly seek to adapt and expand their trafficking activities in an opportunistic manner and to gain greater profits.



Effectively combatting illicit goods trafficking across African ports and airports poses significant challenges.

In summary, this analysis suggests that most OCGs and networks operating at ports and airports in Africa have the intent and capabilities to continue exploiting these facilities for criminal gain and, to varying degrees, to build their illicit enterprises in their country, region and beyond. The impact that this is having on Africa's environment, safety, security and development is devastating.

Attempts to measure the scale and impact of trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports in Africa through intelligence analysis, such as this report, is intended to inform and empower decision makers when developing strategies to counter trafficking of illicit goods at ports and airports and to dismantle OCGs.

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