

Europe and organised crime

Tackling the challenge together - containing organised crime together

2026 Concerted Action of Justice and Peace Europe

Europe is currently facing many threats to its security, integrity and cohesion, both from within and from outside. In the wake of these threats, which are visible to everyone, a partially hidden danger is operating and growing: organised crime.

The social and political perception of the potential threat posed by organised crime varies greatly across Europe. While in some countries the problem is almost obvious and there are numerous governmental and social approaches to tackling the problem, awareness-raising in other countries has not yet been sufficiently developed. There may often be a prevailing feeling that organised crime is someone else's problem. However, this is a serious misjudgement. Organised crime is a global and therefore also a (growing) European problem and no state can absolve itself of the task of tackling the challenges posed by organised crime - especially as one of the outstanding characteristics of this form of crime is that it operates transnationally.

A Christian perspective leads us to see organised crime not only as a political and social challenge, but also as a manifestation of structural sin. Scripture reminds us that “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim 6:10). The Church, therefore, is called to bear witness that combating organised crime is a matter of conversion, justice, and solidarity. This perspective shapes the following analysis and recommendations. As much as the containment of organised crime requires a joint effort by the entire European family of states, it does not have just one face. There are considerable differences in its characteristics, as the players in organised crime know how to exploit the different circumstances of their respective areas of activity, i.e. national and regional, rural and urban, border and inland areas. This also explains their breadth and depth of penetration in the societies concerned. This intermixing makes it very difficult to contain and combat organised crime because the criminal activities do not only take place in the so-called 'underworld'. Instead, perpetrators from the centre of society and the upper classes are also involved. Organised crime is often characterised by the fact that the boundary between the illegal and legal spheres, between the 'underworld' and the 'upper world', is blurred by creating dependencies or even forging alliances between the two areas. This interdependence often leads to the paradoxical situation that many societies suffer from the activities of organised crime on the one hand, while on the other, the players in organised crime are able to gain a certain degree of social toleration, approval or support by skilfully exploiting these alliances, presenting themselves as social benefactors or taking on original state duties such as security, protection and order.

The massive social destructive potential of organised crime becomes particularly clear against

the background of Christian social teaching: most forms of organised crime go hand in hand with the most serious human rights violations. This is obvious in the case of killings and murders that violate the right to physical integrity or the fundamental right to life. Drug trafficking disregards the right to health. This is also recklessly jeopardised in the case of illegal toxic waste disposal, counterfeit medicines, deliberate non-compliance with safety regulations in the construction industry or the forced prostitution of women and men or the commercial abuse of children or adolescents. The common feature is that it is always accepted that people come to harm - physically or emotionally, in the short term or permanently - and in extreme cases die. People are instrumentalised in the pursuit of profit or addiction, always in the case of the victims, but often also in the case of the perpetrators if they are coerced into committing their acts. For this reason, organised crime is almost always directed against the very heart of human rights, namely human dignity. However, it also massively violates the other fundamental principles that constitute Christian social teaching: the principles of justice, solidarity, orientation towards the common good, subsidiarity and sustainability.

Indeed, these violations must be seen in the light of the Magisterium as articulated in *Gaudium et Spes*, *Centesimus Annus*, and *Fratelli tutti*. Organised crime represents a direct assault on the dignity of the human person, the integrity of creation, and the vocation of societies to serve the common good. Following *Laudato Si'*, we also recognise that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are inseparably linked: the ecological devastation caused by criminal exploitation of resources is inseparable from the suffering inflicted on vulnerable communities.

All of this necessitates a broader understanding of security, which should be extended to include the central aspects of human security and must integrate a new relationship between internal and external security. The concept of human security in particular proves to be a suitable instrument for recognising the multidimensionality and complexity of the threats posed by this form of crime. This is because it is not just about the threat to individual security posed by direct physical violence, but also about security risks such as health hazards, environmental destruction or social problems that threaten or destroy human lives and the peaceful coexistence of people. Of course, this should not lead us to ignore or minimise the damage caused by organised crime to non-human creation. The world around us is affected or even destroyed, for example, by the trade in endangered animal and plant species, the illegal exploitation of natural resources or the exploitation of natural resources that appears to be legalised by corruption, poaching, the discharge of toxic waste water into rivers and lakes or the dumping of oil and toxic substances in the sea.

This shows that containing and combating organised crime must be a cross-cutting political and social issue. It is therefore also insufficient to leave the fight against this form of crime to the police or the courts alone. Instead, every affected society must honestly account for the ways in which it benefits from certain forms of organised crime, either without its knowledge or deliberately. This begins with undeclared labour in construction or the purchase of cigarettes without a band and ranges from visits to brothels or the illegal employment of domestic help to the purchase of performance-enhancing drugs or party drugs or stolen works of art. The social acceptance of tax evasion as a trivial offence differs only gradually from the massive tax fraud to which honourable bankers contribute. Insofar as organised crime largely functions

according to the market principle, it can only thrive if there is also a social demand. Without changing the culture of a society in which organised crime is active, it will fail.

For the Church, this cultural change must begin with conversion of heart and community. Parishes, dioceses, and Catholic institutions are called to become places of resistance to corruption, models of transparency, and schools of justice and peace. Prayer, catechesis, and liturgical witness should accompany social and political advocacy, so that the struggle against organised crime is firmly rooted in the Gospel.

For this reason, the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions is calling for broad national and European alliances against organised crime from politics, law enforcement agencies, society and churches. From our perspective, the following measures are urgently needed so that together we can effectively combat organised crime in Europe:

1. The basis of a joint commitment is a binding understanding of what organised crime actually is. Starting with the [UN definition of organised crime groups](#) a process should therefore be initiated within Europe to create such a definition on an interdisciplinary basis and regularly review its effectiveness.
2. It is still urgently necessary to expand and strengthen Europol. The [EU serious and organised Crime Threat Assessment 2025](#) (EU-SOCTA) offers a strategic insight in the dynamics of criminal networks and emerging trends.
3. What is needed is an overall European strategy that harmonises, integrates and bundles national and international efforts. The existing [EMPACT initiative](#) needs to be extended. The conditions for this are comparatively favourable at EU level, but there is a need for far more intensive cooperation and even stronger networking, not least to accelerate and improve the exchange of information between national authorities. The existing or newly created exchange platforms like the [European Judicial Organised Crime Network \(EJO CN\)](#) must be put in a position to record the dynamically changing forms of organised crime in order to be able to dynamically adapt political, police, judicial etc. reactions. This will enable us to flexibly adapt our political and police responses.
4. We call for the fight against organised crime to be considered more than before as a cross-cutting issue in national and European policy. This means that this issue should be systematically taken into account in the conceptual considerations on the orientation of development, economic, social, educational and integration policies, for example.
5. Specifically, we therefore propose the establishment of round tables that should bring together various groups and institutions at the relevant European and national policy levels that are familiar with or affected by the problem in order to exchange information and experiences, discuss necessary or helpful measures and initiatives and draw up appropriate recommendations for society, policy-makers and authorities.
6. Effective prevention includes information, education and awareness-raising. To this end, we need to fund and promote projects and institutions that are committed to this goal. In this context, organisations like the Libera Network are to be promoted that carry out personal development measures to build resilience in society as a whole in the medium and long term. Special attention needs to be given to associations in support

of the victims of organised crime.

7. Inspired by Pope Francis who stated that “organised crime attacks millions of men and women who have the right to live their own life with dignity and free from hunger and the fear of violence, oppression or injustice” we call on the churches and their organisations to make use of all opportunities, not only to raise awareness of the socially destructive significance of white-collar crime, but also to preach and teach consistently against corruption, to celebrate liturgical acts of repentance and intercession for victims, and to form consciences through catechesis and Catholic Social Teaching. The entrepreneurial activities of the churches must neither promote or enable organised crime nor bear criminal traits themselves. The high-level Vatican working group on organised crime should complete its work and establish a norm in canon law for the excommunication of mobsters.
8. Finally, the churches in their own structures must stand at all levels as allies on the side of those persons, initiatives or organisations that oppose organised crime. They must be informed about where they are vulnerable in the context of their activities and take precautions against criminal influence. This applies, for example, to the involvement of church aid organisations or other aid programmes. In addition, church banks may not invest in companies or economic sectors that are linked to organised crime.

In conclusion, opposing organised crime is not only a political necessity but a demand of discipleship. Justice and Peace Europe affirms that Christ’s call to justice and peace requires us to denounce structures of sin, accompany victims, and foster cultures of reconciliation. This Concerted Action seeks to combine practical advocacy with theological witness, grounding our common work in Scripture, Tradition, and the Church’s Social Teaching.