



European Migration Network (EMN)

EMN Inform on "Addressing and preventing the use of social media in migrant smuggling – exploring cooperation frameworks with social media and other relevant online service providers"

Concept Note

1 Introduction

As a direct outcome of the EMN/Netherlands Presidency organised meeting on "Promoting the Multidisciplinary Approach in Addressing Migrant Smuggling", the EMN has agreed to look into the ways in which social media is used by migrant smugglers and migrants themselves looking for migrant smugglers' services. The plan is also to look into the way in which practical cooperation with social media providers and internet search engine providers can help prevent the evolving modus operandi of migrant smuggling networks to recruit their "customers" online. The private companies in mind would be social media providers (facebook, twitter etc.), internet search engines (google, yahoo etc.) and social messaging services (viber, whatsapp, iMessage).

Recent media reports of Turkish authorities clamping down on migrant smuggling networks have also pointed to the fact that although recruitment for the services of migrant smugglers may be diminishing in certain neighbourhoods, this does not mean that the smuggling activities are reduced. It simply means that many smuggling networks are simply adapting and now looking for potential customers via online platforms and getting in contact via social messaging applications.

Once cooperation with relevant private companies has been duly established, the cooperation can also stretch wider than for the purposes of preventing migrant smuggling, for instance to help in the national information campaigns encouraging irregular migrants to return voluntarily. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) will develop tools in order to make these kind of information campaigns more effective, therefore the scope of the EMN Inform could feed into those tools too, especially in order to ensure synergies with the tools being developed by the JRC and the clear possibilities for cooperation with relevant private sector companies.

2 Concept

1) Analysis of how social media is being used in migrant smuggling (both by migrants and smuggling networks)

It would be useful to examine more carefully how social media is being used in the context of irregular migration and also how migrant smugglers use social media to actually recruit migrants and organise their facilitated travel. This would be important in order to be able to clearly define and identify what Member States and the EU would like social media and relevant internet providers to combat.

Some points to be explored would be:

- In the case of child sexual abuse, most companies clearly agree with the need to prevent such appalling content from being disseminated, however when it comes to migrant smuggling, not all activities are deplored unanimously. There is a need to define what is to be expected from these companies in the prevention of the use of social media and other relevant online platforms.

- What would be the best way to present a credible business case for these companies to prompt them into **pro-active cooperation** as opposed to being solely reactive and acting only on information received from other sources e.g. Europol's Internet Referral Unit?

2) Analysis and way forward on fostering practical cooperation with social media and other relevant online companies

The second part of the EMN Inform could focus on how to most effectively cooperate with private companies in order to prevent and counter the use of social media by migrant smugglers. Successful work done at national level already in the domain of cooperation with social media providers and also with internet search engines and social media messaging services could be disseminated further. Existing best practices in cooperation between Member State authorities and these private sector entities would be very useful also when it comes to identifying the main challenges for practical cooperation.

Having identified best practices and challenges, it would be important to develop a way forward for national authorities to work effectively with these types of private companies.

In this context the main points to be explored would be:

- How is work progressing in practical terms, in order to prevent migrant smuggling, between Member State authorities and social media companies (facebook, twitter etc.), internet search engines (google, bing, yahoo) and social messaging services (whatsapp, viber, facebook messenger, apple iMessage)?
- Are there existing best practices in some Member States when cooperating with these private companies in the fight against migrant smuggling networks?
- What practical hurdles exist in the current cooperation between Member State authorities and social media, internet search engines and social messaging services?
- How to best address these practical hurdles?

3) Multiple use of establishing cooperation with private companies in the field of irregular migration

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission will also develop tools in order to help Member States in transmitting information campaigns to the most relevant and widest possible audiences of irregular migrants. It would be highly valuable and important to create synergies between the way social media companies could cooperate and the tools that will be developed by the JRC.

Reaching out to irregular migrants can have two main target audiences, namely those irregular migrants in third countries intending to travel to the EU on the one hand, and irregular migrants already on the territory of EU Member States on the other hand. The latter group would also require the engagement of established diaspora communities.

3 Implementation

At the 77th EMN National Contact Points meeting on 11th February 2016, COM and the participants agreed that to develop an output on this topic would be useful, especially in order for the EMN to tackle really topical issues and bring added value in this respect. The idea was also supported at the Return Experts Group (REG) meeting of 10th March 2016.

A potential way forward was proposed, pending also the ability of the EMN Service Provider to take on the work. The following steps were proposed:

1. Ad-hoc query will be launched in cooperation with some Member States willing to participate and contribute by the beginning of April 2016 – the United Kingdom, Netherlands and Portugal have already put themselves forward, but other Member States are welcomed to contribute;
2. A Workshop to be organised on this topic, as well as on document fraud issues, involving social media companies and other relevant online service providers, possibly also relevant NGOs – most likely during the next EMN National Contact Points meeting in June 2016;
3. The outcome would be an EMN inform or EMN policy brief – to be finalised possibly by the end of July 2016.