

# Calculating the risk

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**Cargo theft continues to be the central theme when security professionals discuss the various threats to European overland logistics. Still, while it is one of the costliest threats, numerous other types of activities and situations may directly impact the security of drivers and operations across the continent and the British Isles.**

**C**ombating the diverse forms of cargo theft remains a prime concern to logistics security professionals in Europe, with the large volumes of cargo crisscrossing the continent providing an abundant environment for plunderers. The reason why cargo theft is so widespread can be seen as a product of ample opportunity and the ease with which it can be carried out. For instance, many lorry drivers must eventually park at unsecured parking areas and lay-bys when their TACO runs out, with little-to-no access control, surveillance,

or other deterrence to ward off criminals. It creates a pick-and-choose occasion for the perpetrators, who can target thousands of shipments every night. Because many trailers are soft-sided, with a tarpaulin as protection only, crooks barely need a hobby knife to gain access to the load. Any inspection of soft-sided trailers parked in Europe will often show small yet noticeable cuts by which thieves have inspected the truck insides before deciding whether the snatch is worth their while.

Last-mile deliveries don't have it easier. It is pervasive in several European urban

areas and requires even less "skill" than stealing goods from a lorry. The theft usually happens in the middle of the day, made possible by often overworked drivers not locking their vehicles. Thieves approach the target and start taking as much as possible, either running off with parcels or putting it into a nearby car of their own. Some incidents show that thieves will follow a target until they can establish that the driver forgets to lock the doors or must deliver many parcels to one place, giving the perpetrators more time to breach the vehicle.

## Hijacking

Violent robberies and hijackings of lorries is another type of crime directly targeting freight. It takes place Europe-wide, but southern Italy's roads are probably the most notable hotspot. Much of this threat is exacerbated by the presence of organised crime groups, providing

perpetrators with access to criminal and fencing networks to facilitate the monetisation of the stolen cargo, not to mention weapons and robbery vehicles.

Two or more cars will attempt to box in the lorry to make it stop or potentially run it off the road. The perpetrators will

then often pull the drivers out to immobilise them or take the entire vehicle. Usually, the drivers will be threatened at gunpoint to comply with the demands, potentially even being held hostage for a short time while the perpetrators take what they can from the trailers.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

## Migrants

Stowaways and human trafficking are vivid problems in the north of France and Belgium, where large numbers of migrants are waiting for a chance to get to Britain. Many are staying near the cities of Calais and Dunkirk, which remain the anchor of the threat. The migrants here commonly target lorries they believe are headed for the UK, either because of their tractor or trailer carrying British license plates or proximity to ferry ports and direction of travel.

Some 11,000 attempted lorry boardings have been reported by late November 2021 alone. The threat directly impacts land-based logistics, much of the immediate impact resulting from delays and potential fines. Similarly, cargo can be contaminated, with entire loads destroyed, as is the case with pharmaceuticals.

Migrants have been increasingly reported to 'jump onto' lorries, trying to get between the tractor and trailer. Migrants usually hide near the road and then run alongside the trailer when it slows down. It is also where we have seen incidents of migrants getting killed if they mistimed their attempts.

Other violent episodes also happen. Throwing of stones was fairly common some years back and continues to happen today occasionally. A serious incident occurred on 14 May 2021 where a driver had his windscreen shattered, and 15 other lorries were targeted just outside the fortified section of the N216 motorway leading to the Port of Calais.

Mobbings of vehicles cannot be ruled out, especially with a significant migrant presence and increased coordination over

social media. The same holds for severe incidents like the storming of the Calais ferry terminal in 2019, all in a coordinated push to board a ship bound for Dover. There is also the possibility of clashes with the authorities. In November 2020, police forces were deployed in large numbers and used tear gas along several kilometres of the N216 to clear out migrants from the motorway.

The situation on the Poland-Belarus border has also led to concerns regarding migrant traffic into Europe. By end-November, most reports were primarily related to minor breaches at the border barriers. That said, a relatively permanent migrant presence could lead to stowaway incidents in the area of the Bruzgi-Kuźnica crossing in the future.

## Activism

Activism and protests predominately happen in urban centres near governmental buildings or major squares, where many people can congregate, causing local issues for logistics operations. Disruption-target activism has become increasingly popular over the past couple of years and will likely stay with us.

The most common disruptive protests are environmental groups blocking key traffic junctions or traffic lanes, with the

Insulate Britain protests in and around London over autumn 2021 being a prime example of this. Extinction Rebellion and similar groups regularly carry out other similar sit-ins. Other examples include the Black Friday blockades of Amazon distribution hubs. Such protests and blockades usually adhere to a strict non-aggression and civil disobedience code of conduct, meaning that protesters are not a direct physical threat.

On the other hand, Yellow Vests protesters, notorious for blockading roads and traffic crossways across France in late 2018 and 2019, had exhibited threatening behaviour and engaged in violent clashes with drivers or police. While this protest movement still exists, its footprint has diminished drastically with low turnouts for demonstrations. However, economic and social issues have fuelled Yellow Vests, and they may ignite anew within short notice.

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