



The Benefits of Using INTERPOL's Criminal Databases – The Hungarian Perspective



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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this article is to give an overview of the benefits of INTERPOL's databases and to present the related Hungarian experiences. The article was written for the centenary celebration of INTERPOL.

Methodology: The article is based on the relevant professional literature, statistics and the author's professional experience.

Findings: The INTERPOL serves as a vital partner in Hungary's efforts to combat crime, ensure public safety, and protect national security.

Value: The article serves as an explanation of worldwide used law enforcement products and gives unique picture on a national practice.

Keywords: INTERPOL, databases, International Law Enforcement Cooperation Centre

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century has ushered in an era of unprecedented interconnectivity and globalisation. As borders blur and information traverses the globe in milliseconds, so do criminal activities that exploit this interconnectedness. In this dynamic landscape, the need for international collaboration to combat transnational crime has become utmost important. This is where INTERPOL, the International Criminal Police Organization, emerges as a pivotal player, demonstrating the remarkable potential of united efforts in maintaining global security, justice, and harmonious international relations.

The Hungarian version of the publication was published in *Belügyi Szemle* 2023/11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38146/BSZ.2023.11.5>. The publication was submitted to the Editorship in English.

INTERPOL's mission revolves around fostering international cooperation to combat a wide range of cross-border crimes, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, cybercrime, terrorism, and organised crime. Established in 1923, INTERPOL has evolved from its early origins into a sophisticated and efficient organisation that bridges the gaps between nations and law enforcement agencies. Its primary objective is to facilitate information exchange, coordination, and collaboration among its 195 Member States, each contributing unique insights, resources, and expertise to a collective effort ([URL1](#), [URL2](#)).

INTERPOL's origins can be traced back to the early 20th century when its initial focus was on facilitating communication and collaboration among police forces from different nations. However, it wasn't until after World War II that INTERPOL truly began to expand its scope and impact. The post-war era brought about significant shifts in the global landscape, including the rise of transnational crime and the need for coordinated international responses. As criminal activities increasingly transcended national borders, the limitations of traditional law enforcement mechanisms became evident. INTERPOL recognised the need to evolve beyond its original function and adapt to these changing dynamics. In the latter half of the 20th century, INTERPOL underwent a transformation from a primarily European-focused organisation to a truly global network. With the expansion of its membership to countries from around the world, INTERPOL's mission and role broadened substantially. This evolution was driven by the recognition that criminal enterprises were no longer confined within national boundaries. The dawn of the digital age presented both challenges and opportunities for the organisation. As criminal activities began to exploit the global connectivity facilitated by technology, INTERPOL recognised the need for advanced tools to counteract these threats. This marked a turning point in the organisation's history, prompting it to invest heavily in cutting-edge technologies, databases, and communication systems. The expansion of its membership brought together law enforcement agencies from diverse legal systems, cultures, and languages. This diversity became a strength as it fostered a culture of collaboration and mutual support. INTERPOL's partnerships extended beyond law enforcement agencies to include international organisations, governments, and private sector entities, amplifying its reach and impact ([URL1](#)).

The complexities of modern crime extend beyond the capabilities of individual nations to address effectively. Criminal networks operate across borders, exploiting jurisdictional limitations to evade justice. This necessitates a cohesive global response that transcends national boundaries. International cooperation is not merely advantageous; it has become an imperative for maintaining the

rule of law, safeguarding human rights, and ensuring the safety and security of citizens worldwide.

INTERPOL fills a critical gap in international law enforcement. It functions as an intermediary, a facilitator, and a catalyst for collaboration. Unlike any other organisation, INTERPOL provides a platform where countries, irrespective of their political affiliations, can engage in dialogue, share intelligence, and coordinate operations. The organisation's neutrality and commitment to justice and human rights make it a trusted partner for countries with divergent ideologies.

INTERPOL's efforts in tackling transnational crime transcend geopolitical rivalries, facilitating dialogue and understanding among Member States. Through shared training programmes, joint operations, and information exchange, law enforcement agencies learn to work together effectively. This cooperation extends beyond individual cases, contributing to a more secure global environment and reducing the potential for conflict.

The main objective of the organisation is to assist law enforcement agencies from different countries in tackling international crime and maintaining global security. INTERPOL achieves its goals through various means, including the use of sophisticated databases and communication networks that enable information sharing and collaboration among member countries ([URL3](#)).

INTERPOL's Communication Network

INTERPOL's communication network is a vital component of its operations, enabling Member States to collaborate effectively on various law enforcement matters. The organisation utilises a range of technological solutions to facilitate communication and information sharing among its Member States. The I-24/7 Secure Global Police Communications System not only provides access to INTERPOL's databases but also allows law enforcement agencies to communicate securely with each other. It supports quick messaging, information exchange, and coordination on cross-border cases ([URL3](#)).

The I-24/7 system stands as a testament to INTERPOL's commitment to real-time collaboration. This advanced communication platform provides authorised law enforcement agencies with unparalleled access to the databases and secure channels for information exchange. Operating 24/7, it ensures that law enforcement officers have instantaneous access to critical information regardless of time zones or geographical distances. This real-time access empowers officers on the field to make informed decisions, apprehend suspects, and solve cases more efficiently.

The system's secure communication channels allow for instantaneous exchange of information, evidence, and updates among Member States. Officers can communicate directly, ensuring that vital details are shared seamlessly without compromising data security. This system has proven instrumental in breaking down barriers that traditionally hindered international cooperation, allowing law enforcement agencies to respond swiftly to emerging threats and criminal activities.

The I-24/7 system boasts a range of features that enhance its effectiveness in combating crime:

- Real-time access to databases. One of the system's standout features is its direct link to INTERPOL's comprehensive databases. Law enforcement officers can query and retrieve information related to criminals, stolen property, and criminal activities in real time, enhancing their ability to identify and track down criminals, and detect cases.
- Secure communication. In the digital age, secure communication is paramount. The I-24/7 system employs state-of-the-art encryption and security protocols, ensuring that sensitive information remains confidential and protected from unauthorised access.
- Instant messaging. The system facilitates instant messaging between law enforcement agencies. This streamlined communication fosters collaboration and allows for quick exchanges of information, updates on ongoing operations, and coordination of efforts.
- Coordination in cross-border cases. With the I-24/7 system, law enforcement agencies can collaborate seamlessly on cases that span multiple jurisdictions. The communication network erases the obstacles that once hindered effective international cooperation.
- Real-world impact. The successes facilitated by the I-24/7 system range from capturing high-profile criminals to preventing terrorist acts and recovering stolen property. These real-world outcomes underscore the tangible benefits of INTERPOL's communication network.

This communication network has redefined global cooperation in law enforcement. By providing a secure and efficient platform for information exchange, the organisation empowers law enforcement agencies across the world to collaborate effectively, transcend borders, and combat crime collectively.

INTERPOL's Databases

INTERPOL's databases serve as a powerful arsenal against crime. The organisation maintains a comprehensive set of databases containing crucial information about criminals, weapons, travel and identity documents, forensics, stolen property and criminal activities. These 19 databases containing almost 130 million records provide law enforcement agencies worldwide with real-time access to critical information ([URL4](#)).

INTERPOL's Nominal database is an integral component of the organisation's mission to facilitate international police cooperation. It functions as a centralised repository that houses data on a wide range of individuals, including suspects, fugitives, missing persons, and even witnesses of crime. This includes personal details, photographs and biographical data. The database can also hold information about criminal history, known associates, and modus operandi. Perhaps one of the most prominent features associated with the Nominal Database is the notice system. INTERPOL's colour-coded notices are categorised based on the type of information they convey and the objectives they serve. The most widely recognised of them is the red notice. It is a request to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending extradition and are issued for fugitives who are wanted for prosecution or to serve a sentence for a serious crime. Other colour-coded notices are issued among others to collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities concerning a crime; to help locate missing persons; to provide warnings and criminal intelligence; to seek information on unidentified bodies or to provide information on new methods used by criminals. The database has played a key role in the successful capture and extradition of countless fugitives. By providing law enforcement agencies with accurate and up-to-date information, it increases the likelihood of locating and bringing criminals to justice. Beyond apprehending criminals, the Nominal Database also aids in locating missing persons. It serves as a valuable resource for reuniting families and providing closure in cases of disappearances. Member States continually contribute to and access this repository, ensuring that its contents are up-to-date and useful ([URL5](#)).

Picture 1
INTERPOL Notices



Note. URL5.

The Stolen and Lost Travel Document Database (SLTD) was born out of the growing recognition of the need to address the misuse of travel documents for criminal purposes, including illegal immigration, human trafficking, drug smuggling and terrorism. INTERPOL, in collaboration with its Member States, embarked on the mission to create a centralised database that would contain detailed information about stolen and lost travel documents. The goal was to enable law enforcement agencies and border control authorities worldwide to quickly identify fraudulent or compromised travel documents. The database houses information on stolen, lost, revoked, or invalidated travel documents, including passports and identity cards. Each record typically includes details such as document numbers, issuing authorities, and type of document. Law enforcement agencies, border control authorities and immigration officers from INTERPOL's Member States can access the database in real-time. This instant access enables them to verify the authenticity of travel documents presented at border crossings or during routine checks. The SLTD database's significance in enhancing global security is multifaceted and extends to various aspects of law enforcement and border control. By providing real-time access to information about stolen and lost travel documents, the database helps prevent individuals from using fraudulent documents to cross borders. This is a critical component in combating international terrorism or other forms of serious and cross-border crime. As the world continues to

face evolving security challenges, the SLTD database remains an essential tool in safeguarding international travel and protecting nations from potential threats. While the SLTD database is a powerful tool, it is not without its challenges. Ensuring that the database remains up-to-date and that member countries promptly report stolen and lost travel documents is an ongoing concern. Additionally, the database must continually evolve to keep pace with advancements in document forgery and identity theft techniques ([URL6](#)).

Officers performing first-line checks have few seconds to determine if a document is authentic or potentially forged. As a result, they must be aware of the warning indications. The Frontex INTERPOL Electronic Library Document System (FIELDS) provides clear visual information to police officers and border guards on the essential markers that can detect a counterfeit or forged document. It combines and upgrades INTERPOL's former Dial-Doc platform to make Frontex Quick Check Cards available to frontline border control personnel via INTERPOL's secure global police communications system, I-24/7. The Quick Check Card is a visual decision aid. It displays a sample of the document being inspected and underlines the essential security characteristics to inspect. The visuals are compiled by document experts based on risk assessments, known alarms, and the document's vulnerability assessment. Real-time access to FIELDS during frontline border checks will make checking the legitimacy of travel and identification papers faster and easier, with more accurate findings. The FIELDS system enhances INTERPOL's existing SLTD database by addressing counterfeits and forgeries ([URL7](#)).

The EDISON (Electronic Documentation and Information System on Investigation Networks) stores examples of genuine travel documents, in order to help identify fakes. It contains images, descriptions and security features of genuine travel and identity documents issued by countries and international organisations, perfectly completing SLTD and FIELDS. This collaborative approach ensures that criminals cannot easily exploit vulnerabilities in one country to enter another undetected ([URL4](#)).

Due to their ability to disclose connections between people as well as crime scenes, fingerprints, DNA profiling, and facial recognition can all be extremely helpful in the investigation of crimes. The effectiveness of science in resolving crimes that take place in several different countries is demonstrated by the INTERPOL's DNA database. With the use of this database, which combines DNA profiles from crime scenes, suspects and instances involving missing individuals, law enforcement agencies all around the world are given an exceptional tool for identification and crime resolution. Law enforcement agencies can identify links between crimes and possibly solve cold cases by comparing

DNA profiles from other cases. This database enables agencies to quickly determine if a suspect wanted in one country matches DNA evidence found in another. The database assists in identifying victims of human trafficking and locating missing persons. DNA analysis helps confirm identities, enabling the reconnection of families and bringing closure to unresolved cases. INTERPOL's DNA database facilitates international collaboration by providing a central repository where Member States can share and access DNA profiles, thereby aiding investigations that extend beyond national boundaries ([URL8](#)).

INTERPOL's Fingerprint database is another critical component in the fight against transnational crime. This database compiles fingerprint records from crime scenes, suspects and convicts, allowing law enforcement agencies to identify individuals linked to various criminal activities. The benefits of this database are substantial as fingerprints are unique to each individual, making them a powerful tool for positively identifying suspects and connect them to specific crime scenes. It allows for the comparison of fingerprints from unsolved cases with new evidence, potentially leading to breakthroughs in investigations that have remained stagnant for years. The database also aids border control agencies in identifying individuals attempting to use false identities or evade authorities ([URL9](#)).

The INTERPOL Facial Recognition System is a unique global database that relies on facial images received from most of the Member States and a combination of advanced biometric technologies to identify individuals of interest. Almost 1,500 terrorists, criminals, fugitives, or missing persons have been identified since the launch of the system ([URL10](#)).

Child sexual exploitation is a heinous crime that transcends borders, making it challenging for individual countries to combat it effectively. The International Child Sexual Exploitation database aggregates information from Member States, enabling law enforcement agencies to share intelligence and work collaboratively. This unified approach empowers authorities to track down offenders and rescue victims across jurisdictions. By facilitating the swift identification of offenders, the database prevents further victimisation and ensures that justice is served ([URL11](#)).

INTERPOL's databases exemplify the organisation's commitment to utilising advanced technologies for the betterment of global security and justice. These databases not only expedite investigations and identify criminals but also promote international collaboration among law enforcement agencies. Looking ahead, INTERPOL will likely continue to enhance its databases and communication network to keep pace with technological advancements and changing crime landscapes.

The Hungarian Approach

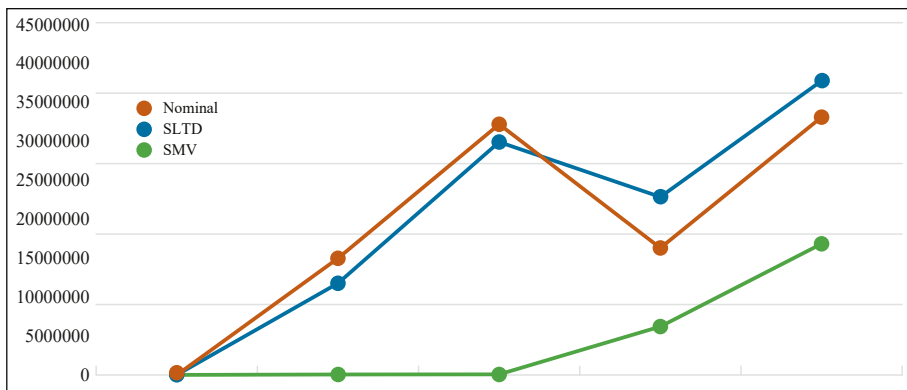
Hungary's association with INTERPOL not only dates back to its inception in 1923, but our representatives also participated in the first International Criminal Police Congress, held in Monaco in April 1914. Hungary, recognising the importance of collaboration in combating crime, became one of the original 20 countries that signed the agreement establishing INTERPOL. Although our membership faded during the post war era, we officially became members again in 1981 ([URL1](#)).

Hungary is a landlocked country at the heart of Europe and this strategic geographic location makes it attractive to organised crime networks. The role of INTERPOL's National Central Bureau (NCB) in Budapest is central to protecting national and regional security. The NCB is part of the International Law Enforcement Cooperation Centre (ILECC) which is the lead agency for international police cooperation involving Hungary ([Mogyoródi, 2021](#)). ILECC has always been keen on implementing new technical solutions offered by INTERPOL that increased the effectiveness of the fight against transnational crime.

With the FIND solution (Fixed INTERPOL Network Database) INTERPOL was offering countries the opportunity to give their front-line officers at borders instant access to its many databases. Hungary fully implemented this web-based solution in 2016, increasing the yearly number of searches from a few thousands to over 35 million in the nominal and stolen lost travel documents database, and over 6 million in the stolen motor vehicles database (SMV). These databases are widely accessible to authorised law enforcement personnel.

Diagram 1

Number of Searches between 2015 and 2022



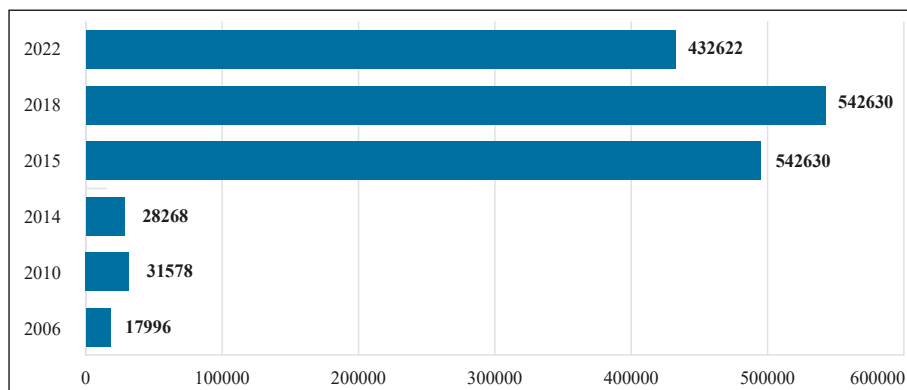
Note. Diagram made by the author, data from INTERPOL.

The COVID–19 epidemic in 2020 prevented most individuals from traveling, fewer checks were conducted (Mogyoródi, 2021). Implementing a systematic search regime resulted in more hits in INTERPOL’s databases, the arrest of more globally sought fugitives, and the detection of more stolen vehicles and documents. It contributes significantly to the public safety not only in Hungary but also in the region.

Data quality refers to the reliability, accuracy, completeness and consistency of data. It is a critical aspect of data management and plays a vital role in the success of any data-driven action. INTERPOL has been continuously working on improving the quality of its databases contents and developed Web INTERPOL Services Data Management (WISDM), a complete and up to date 24/7 tool which allow Member States to manage their data (insertion, update, deletion or visualisation) in SLTD and SMV databases. Hungary was among the first countries implementing this solution making high quality police information internationally available just seconds after the data being registered in our national database.

Diagram 2

Number of SLTD records

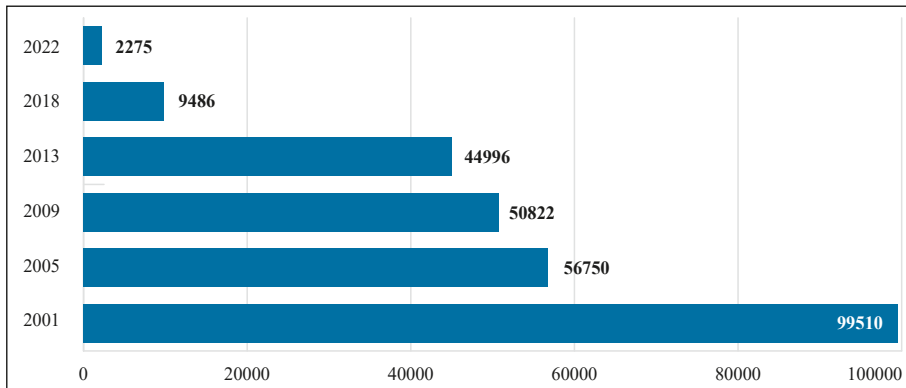


Note. Diagram made by the author, data from INTERPOL.

Using state-of-the-art data management tool resulted higher number and more accurate Hungarian data in SLTD. All types of travel and identity documents that are registered lost, stolen, stolen blank, revoked or invalid in the Hungarian database are immediately visible for the international law enforcement community.

Diagram 3

Number of SMV records



Note. Diagram made by the author, data from INTERPOL.

In the case of SMV higher data quality ended up less but more accurate data erasing the obsolete mass. Beside that lower numbers in vehicle crimes also contributed to a modest data quantity.

Hungarian law enforcement authorities and forensic institutions actively populate and query almost all criminal databases of INTERPOL.

Conclusion

INTERPOL is the global organisation that brings together law enforcement agencies from around the world to combat transnational crime and enhance international security. INTERPOL offers a multitude of advantages that contribute to its vital role in maintaining global peace and security. One of its most significant advantages is the ability to facilitate the sharing of critical information among the Member States. Law enforcement agencies in different countries can exchange intelligence, criminal profiles, and investigative leads swiftly and securely through INTERPOL's worldwide communication channel. INTERPOL maintains a comprehensive set of global databases. The databases are invaluable resources that enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement work across the globe. In today's world, the threat of terrorism knows no boundaries. INTERPOL plays a crucial role in assisting Member States in countering terrorism. It provides a platform for sharing intelligence related to terrorist activities, identifying potential threats and coordinating efforts to prevent terrorist attacks. INTERPOL's

counterterrorism initiatives help Member States improve their security measures and protect their citizens from this global menace. INTERPOL offers specialised support in combating cyber threats. Member States benefit from INTERPOL's expertise in cybercrime investigations, capacity-building programmes, and access to a global network of cybersecurity professionals. This collaboration strengthens a country's ability to protect its digital infrastructure and combat cybercriminals effectively. INTERPOL delivers a wide range of training programmes and capacity-building initiatives designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of law enforcement officers. These programmes cover various aspects of crime prevention, investigation techniques, and the use of advanced technology. Member States can leverage INTERPOL's resources to ensure that their law enforcement personnel are well-prepared to tackle modern forms of crime effectively.

INTERPOL serves as a vital partner in Hungary's efforts to combat crime, ensure public safety, and protect national security. Through enhanced cross-border cooperation, access to a global database, support in counterterrorism and cybercrime mitigation, assistance in human trafficking investigations, and capacity-building initiatives, INTERPOL strengthens Hungary's ability to respond to a wide range of security challenges. As Hungary continues to work closely with INTERPOL, it can leverage the organisation's resources and expertise to create a safer and more secure environment for its citizens while contributing to global security efforts.

Reference

Mogyoródi, G. (2021). The Impacts of COVID-19 Epidemic on the Daily Work of SIRENE Hungary. *European Law Enforcement Research Bulletin*, (21), 25–35. <https://bulletin.cepol.europa.eu/index.php/bulletin/article/view/439>

Online links in the article

URL1: *1923 – how our history started*. <https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/INTERPOL-100/1923-how-our-history-started>

URL2: *Member countries*. <https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/Member-countries>

URL3: *What is INTERPOL*. <https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/What-is-INTERPOL>

URL4: *Our 19 databases*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Databases/Our-19-databases>

URL5: *About Notices*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Notices/About-Notices>

URL6: *SLTD database (travel and identity documents)*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Databases/SLTD-database-travel-and-identity-documents>

URL7: *FIELDS database*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Border-management/FIELDS-database>

URL8: *DNA*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Forensics/DNA>

URL9: *Fingerprints*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Forensics/Fingerprints>

URL10: *Facial Recognition*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Forensics/Facial-Recognition>

URL11: *International Child Sexual Exploitation database*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Databases/International-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-database>

Reference of the article according to APA regulation

Kővári, P. (2023). The Benefits of Using INTERPOL's Criminal Databases – The Hungarian Perspective. *Belügyi Szemle*, 71(SI3), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.38146/BSZ.SPEC.2023.3.5>