

FINANCIAL COLLEGE

RESEARCH GROUP

“ILLICIT TRADE AT ESTONIA’S SEAPORTS”

Contact:

Dr Indrek Saar, Professor
indrek.saar@sisekaitse.ee

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To offer insights on the situation of illicit trade in the seaports of the Baltic region

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do law enforcement agencies, customs, port operators, and other security stakeholders at Muuga Port perceive the threats and vulnerabilities associated with illicit trade?
2. Which governance, logistical and human factors create or contribute to those threats and vulnerabilities?

METHODOLOGY

1. Qualitative research approach, involving 20 semi-structures interviews with individuals from the law enforcement authorities and private sector professionally connected to Muuga Port
2. The analysis of open-source information: media, public reports, legal acts, statistical data on vessel traffic and trade volumes

RESULTS

1. Even with all the standard security measures—aligned with the ISPS code—and frequent presence of customs, police and border guard officers or private security operators, the port remains vulnerable to illicit trade
2. The presence of illicit trade is perceived as an inevitable phenomenon—despite its limited visibility and the apparent absence, or a very low visibility, of organized crime groups
3. The study identified various logistical, human, and infrastructure factors, as well as social and historical ones, that may contribute to the port’s vulnerability

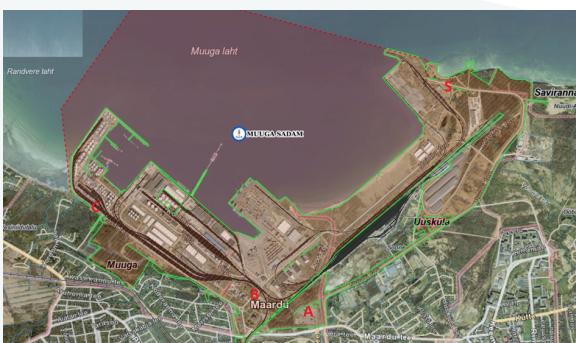
FUTURE RESEARCH

It is important to analyse not only the visible hotspots but also seemingly secondary spaces – those shaped by history and culture - which may reveal new dimensions of illicit trade

LIMITATIONS

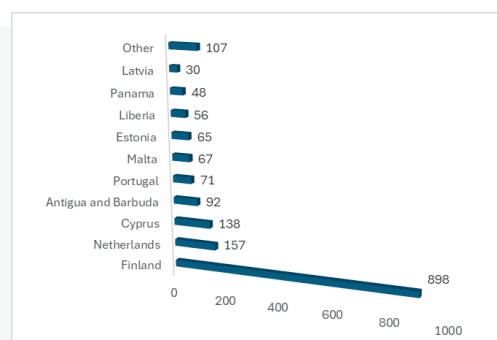
Most of interviewees were law enforcement officers, primarily mid-level managers. While they might have a broad and comprehensive perspective of the overall situation, some operational details crucial for understanding the realities on the ground might not be fully known to them

Muuga Port on the map



Source: Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board

Number of visits by ships of different flag states in 2024



Source: Electronic Maritime Information System

