OVERHAUL

EMEA: 2025 Annual Cargo Theft Report

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Executive Summary

Cargo theft remains a critical and evolving risk for supply chains across the EMEA region. Despite the ongoing threat, the true scope of the problem is obscured by significant data gaps: most European countries do not maintain official, granular statistics on transport crime, and industry reporting practices vary widely. The only official estimate (an €8 billion annual loss calculated by the European Parliament) is outdated and likely a vast underestimation, failing to capture inflationary increases, rising cargo values, and consequential losses such as supply chain disruptions and insurance costs.

PHARMACEUTICAL SHIPMENTS also remain uniquely vulnerable, due to the potential for high-value losses that can rarely if ever be recovered.

In this challenging context, EMEA's cargo criminals are rapidly adapting. Key trends include the emergence of fraudulent carrier activity and deceptive pickups, highly organized rolling thefts targeting moving vehicles, and persistent pilferage at unsecured parking locations. Pharmaceutical shipments also remain uniquely vulnerable, due to the potential for high-value losses that can rarely if ever be recovered.

Insurance risk is exacerbated by both the lack of reliable data and the growing sophistication of criminal tactics. Inadequate carrier vetting, ghost companies, and regulatory gaps further complicate prevention efforts. To address these urgent challenges, Overhaul's inaugural EMEA report delivers actionable intelligence, sector-specific insights, and practical recommendations tailored to the unique, evolving risks facing EMEA supply chains.

Introduction: Data Gaps & True Scope of the Threat

A foundational challenge for supply chain risk management in EMEA is the absence of reliable, dedicated cargo theft statistics. Unlike some other regions, European law enforcement rarely differentiates transport crime from general theft, vehicle theft, or burglary in their public reporting. This challenge is further compounded by the region's complexity: EMEA comprises dozens of countries, each with its own legal frameworks, law enforcement agencies, and official languages, making data collection and standardization extremely difficult. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the only official figure (€8 billion in annual cargo theft losses) has not been updated in over a decade and is almost certainly conservative given inflation, the increasing value of goods in transit, and the known economic impact of cargo theft in other areas of the world.

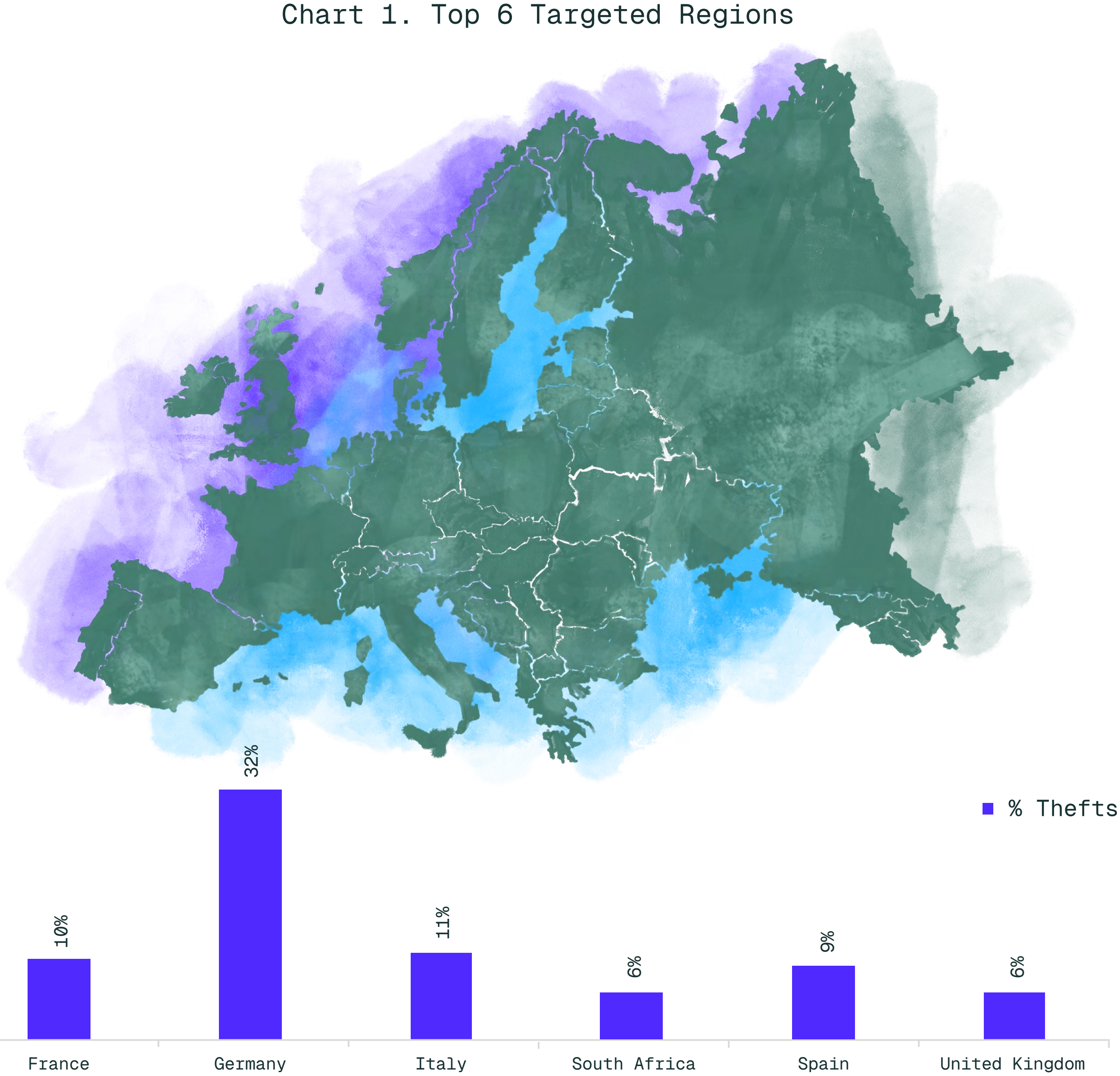
Moreover, this figure does not account for consequential losses including business interruption, insurance premium hikes, and reputational harm. The fragmented nature of incident reporting, combined with inconsistent diligence among industries, further obscures the true scale of the threat.

Ghost companies and fake carriers are enabled by lax registration requirements: transport businesses can operate from residential or mailbox addresses, and tens of thousands of inactive or fraudulent companies remain officially registered in major logistics hubs. This regulatory vacuum allows organized crime to exploit systemic weaknesses with relative impunity, and the varied regulatory systems, especially in the EU, create multiple favorable environments for fraudulent companies to set up.

Top 6 Targeted Regions

During 2025, the risk of cargo theft in EMEA was highly concentrated in a handful of regions where supply chain density, logistics infrastructure, and criminal sophistication intersect. Germany emerged as the most targeted country for theft overall, accounting for nearly 32% of reported incidents. It was also a hotspot for deceptive pickups, rolling thefts, and pilferages at unsecured parking areas, with industrial regions and highway networks presenting high-risk environments.

Chart 1. Top 6 Targeted Regions



Italy came in second for overall thefts, which is unsurprising, as its northern industrial zones and key north-south transit corridors make it a frequent target for both pilferage and pharmaceutical theft. France trailed closely behind, and was number one in terms of pharmaceutical theft, accounting for nearly 30% of pharma incidents. The country's northern regions and the area around Paris are particularly vulnerable, driven by the volume of shipments and the concentration of distribution centers.

The fourth riskiest country was Spain (which faces substantial threats from deceptive pickups, especially in transit points and urban distribution centers) followed by South Africa and the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom, with its robust logistics sector and major urban hubs, sees significant activity in rolling thefts and parking pilferages, particularly around London and the Midlands.

Each of these countries presents distinct challenges, but all share common vulnerabilities: high-value freight, complex supply chains, and a persistent threat from organized crime.

Temporal Patterns: Riskiest Days & Times

Cargo theft in EMEA exhibits clear temporal patterns that reflect both criminal strategy and operational routines. Fridays were the most dangerous day for shipments, with 18% of incidents occurring just before the weekend. This spike was likely due to increased shipment volumes and storage ahead of weekend closures. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays also showed elevated risk, while weekends tended to see slightly fewer incidents, possibly due to reduced freight movement and heightened security. However, the percentage difference between days of the week was relatively small, underscoring that cargo theft is a widespread risk and no particular day offers substantially greater safety for shipments.

18% of incidents occurred just before the weekend

The timing of most incidents was difficult to determine, reflecting challenges in incident reporting. However, the majority of documented thefts took place during the night or early morning hours, between midnight and 6 a.m., and again from 6 p.m. to midnight. These periods offer low traffic and reduced visibility, providing cover for criminal activity. This insight underscores the need for enhanced vigilance and real-time monitoring during overnight and evening periods, especially as criminals adapt their tactics to exploit operational lulls.

Chart 2. Cargo Theft by Time of Day

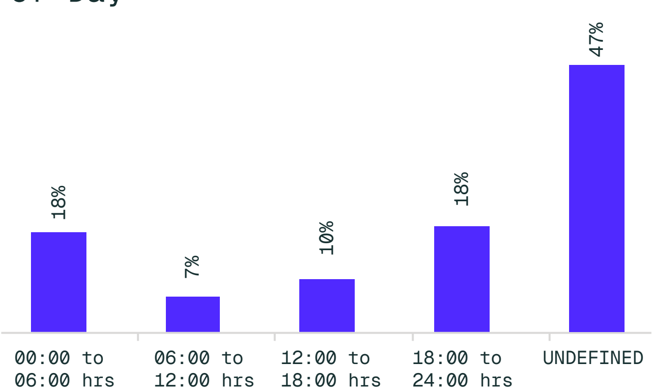
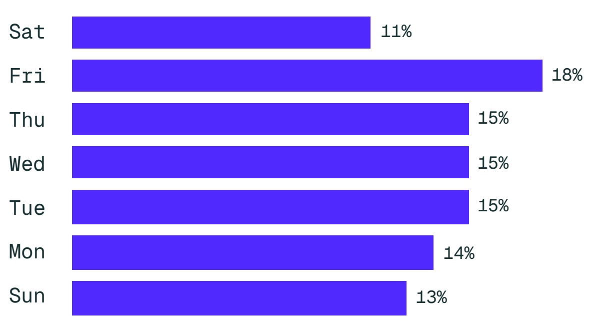


Chart 3. Cargo Theft by Day of Week



Most Targeted Products

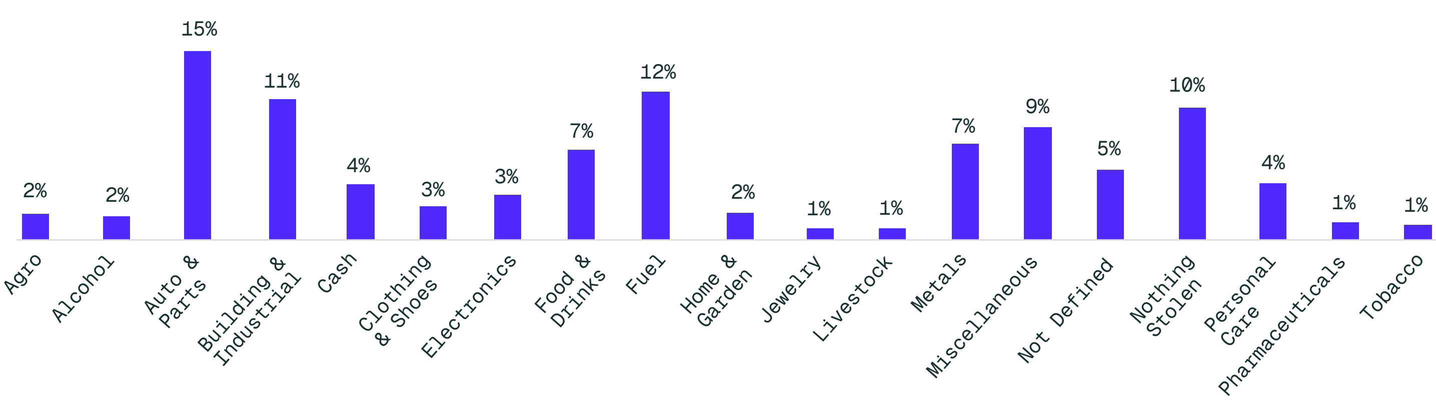
Criminals in EMEA are opportunistic yet discerning, prioritizing cargo that offers high value and ease of resale. ***Auto & Parts*** topped the list in terms of percentage of thefts, followed by ***Fuel, Building & Industrial, Miscellaneous,*** and ***Metals***. These categories are attractive not only for their market value but for their prevalence in supply chains.

Pharmaceuticals, however, represented the highest average loss per incident. The specificity of these products means that criminals often know exactly what they are looking for and which truck to target, suggesting possible insider involvement or access to sensitive shipment information. Their value, regulatory complexity, and supply chain sensitivity make them a prime target. To mitigate these risks, organizations should not only tighten security protocols during transport but also restrict access to crucial transport details within origin facilities, ensuring that sensitive information is protected from potential leaks.

Electronics also saw disproportionately high financial impacts relative to their theft frequency, indicating that criminals increasingly target shipments where a single loss can yield substantial profit.

Chart 4. Most Targeted Products

% Thefts



Theft Locations & Event Types

The location of cargo theft is a crucial determinant of risk, and the EMEA region demonstrates a wide spectrum of vulnerable environments. Unsecured parking areas are the most common site for general cargo theft, which is unsurprising given their widespread availability compared to secure parking areas.

UNSECURED PARKING areas are the most common site for general cargo theft

Warehouses and distribution centers came in second overall and were especially vulnerable for pharmaceutical shipments, accounting for 58% of incidents in this sector. The concentration of valuable stock and sometimes lapses in perimeter security make these locations attractive to criminals. Truck stops/fuel stations, company yards and premises, and in-transit thefts also presented opportunities for criminals, albeit at lower rates.

Theft events themselves were diverse. Facility theft and vehicle theft emerged as the most common modus operandi (MO), with criminals often exploiting gaps in tracking or response protocols. Pilferage, where thieves steal portions of a load rather than the entire shipment, was also frequently observed. While less frequent, violent and fraudulent practices, such as hijacking and deceptive pickup, also remained a persistent threat, especially for high-value shipments.

Chart 5: Cargo Theft by Location

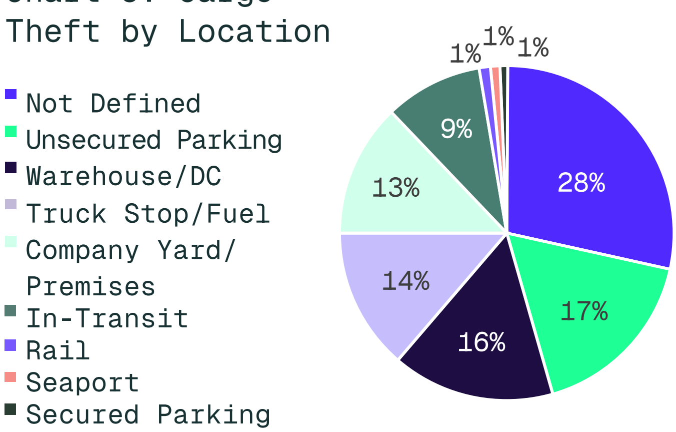
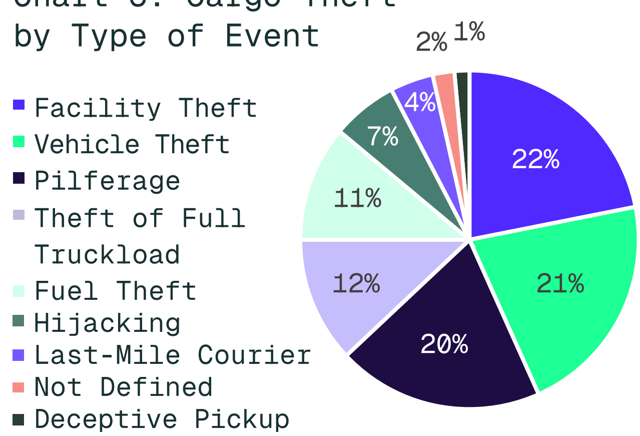


Chart 6: Cargo Theft by Type of Event



Unsecured Parking Pilferages

Unsecured parking is a longstanding vulnerability in EMEA logistics, and the persistence of this risk is evident from recent data. Drivers, often under pressure to meet schedules or lacking access to secure rest areas, park at unsecured service zones despite carrying high-value cargo. Incidents at sites such as Dresdner Tor Nord and Lutterberg in Germany illustrate the risks: curtain slashing, coordinated attacks, and targeted thefts of electronics and appliances during overnight hours.

The risk is exacerbated by the use of tarpaulin trailers for sensitive loads, which are easily breached, and by insufficient assessment of overnight stop safety. Criminals exploit these weaknesses, particularly during low-traffic periods.

Effective mitigation requires a shift in operational culture: drivers must prioritize secure, vetted parking facilities, logistics planners should enhance shipment visibility through GPS and real-time monitoring, and companies should continuously assess high-risk areas to inform routing and behavior. Training and awareness are crucial, as is the integration of actionable intelligence to prevent and respond to pilferage.

Rolling Theft

Rolling theft continued to represent a sophisticated and highly organized threat in EMEA, especially in countries with dense motorway networks like the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands. Criminals tailgate heavy goods vehicles at night, often with their lights off, and use modified cars to facilitate their attacks. While both vehicles are moving, offenders climb onto the rear of trucks, cut open tarpaulins, or force doors to access cargo.

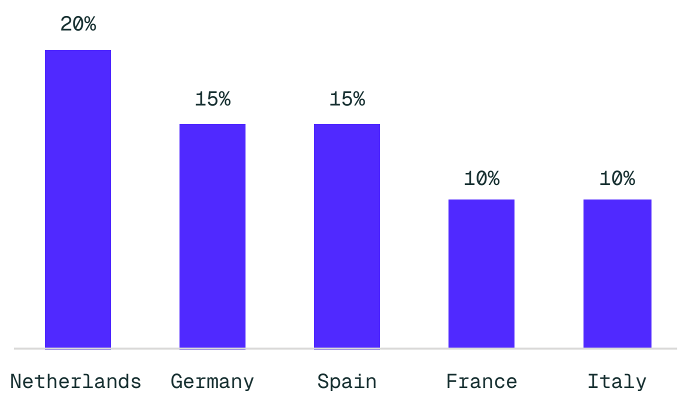
The timing of these incidents (early morning or late evening on quiet, straight stretches of motorway) reduces the likelihood of detection and intervention. In 2025, high-value goods such as electronics were the primary targets, underscoring the need for advanced in-transit monitoring and heightened driver awareness. Route planning that avoids known high-risk corridors, combined with real-time security support, is essential for mitigating this evolving threat.

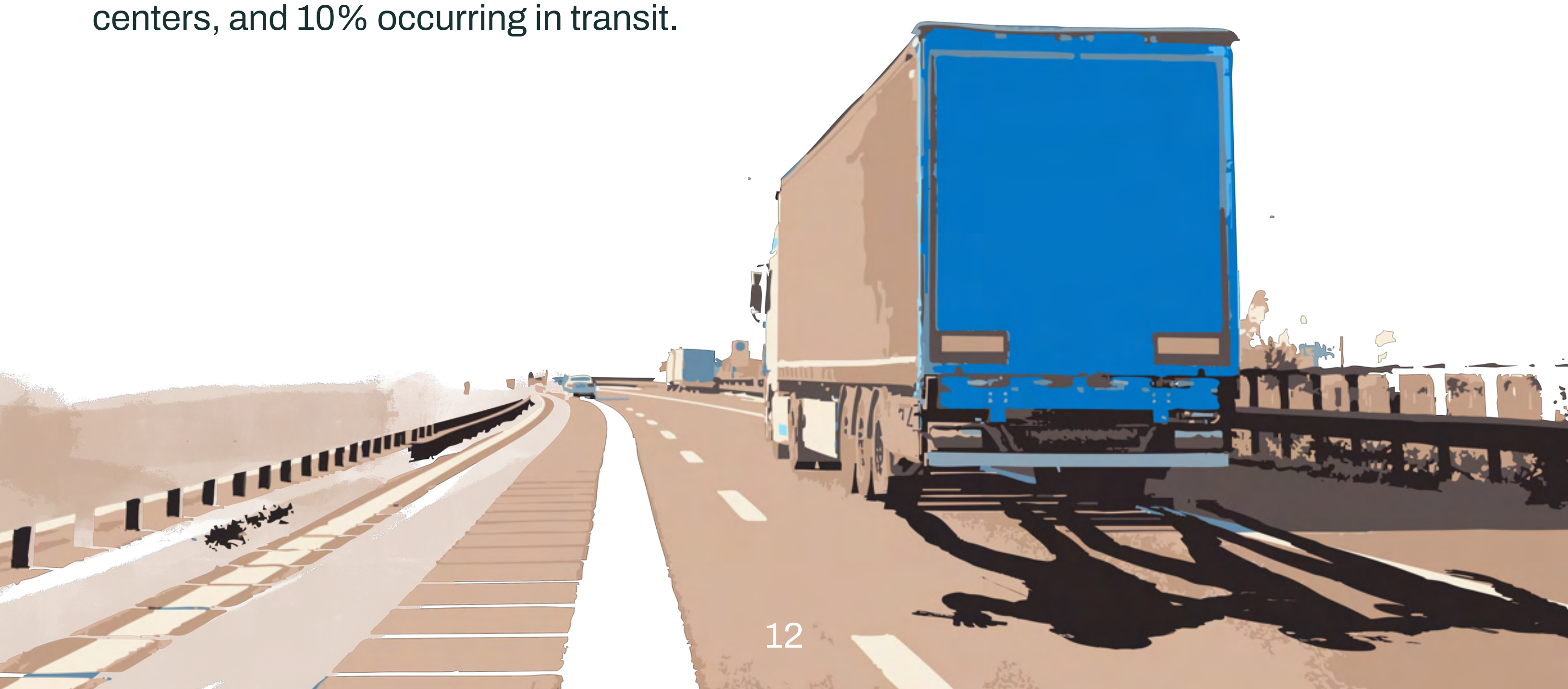
Fraudulent Carriers & Deceptive Pickups

The proliferation of fraudulent carriers and deceptive pickups across EMEA illustrates the adaptability of organized crime. Criminals routinely obtain counterfeit documents including driving licenses, transport permits, and insurance certificates on the Black Market. They further mimic legitimate transport companies by using slightly modified contact details and authentic-looking uniforms from major logistics brands, which are easily purchased online. These tactics allow fraudsters to blend in seamlessly during document checks, making deceptive pickups difficult to detect until after losses are incurred.

Statistical analysis underscores the scale of this threat. Deceptive pickups accounted for a significant proportion of cargo thefts in 2025, with the Netherlands (20%) reporting the highest rates, followed by Germany (15%), Spain (15%), France (10%), and Italy (10%). The most frequently targeted products included Miscellaneous (20%), Auto & Parts (15%), and Home & Garden (10%). In terms of location, 25% of deceptive pickups occurred at company yards or premises, with an additional 25% occurring at warehouses or distribution centers, and 10% occurring in transit.

Chart 7. Top 5 Targeted Countries





Industry discussions reveal tens of thousands of ghost companies officially registered in cities like Brussels, many with no real activity. This key structural challenge arises from the ease with which companies can register using residential or mailbox addresses, often disconnected from their actual logistics operations or parking locations. This regulatory gap makes carrier vetting difficult and increases vulnerability to fraudulent entities, and ultimately, stronger regulatory controls and active oversight are needed to address the root causes and ensure only legitimate, active companies operate within the supply chain.

Chart 8. Cargo Theft by Location

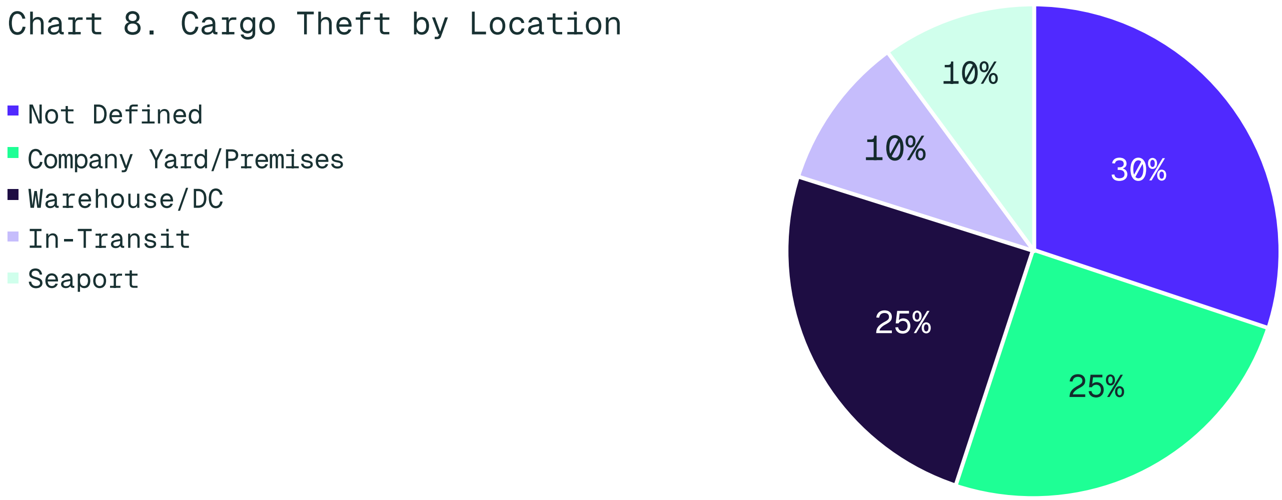
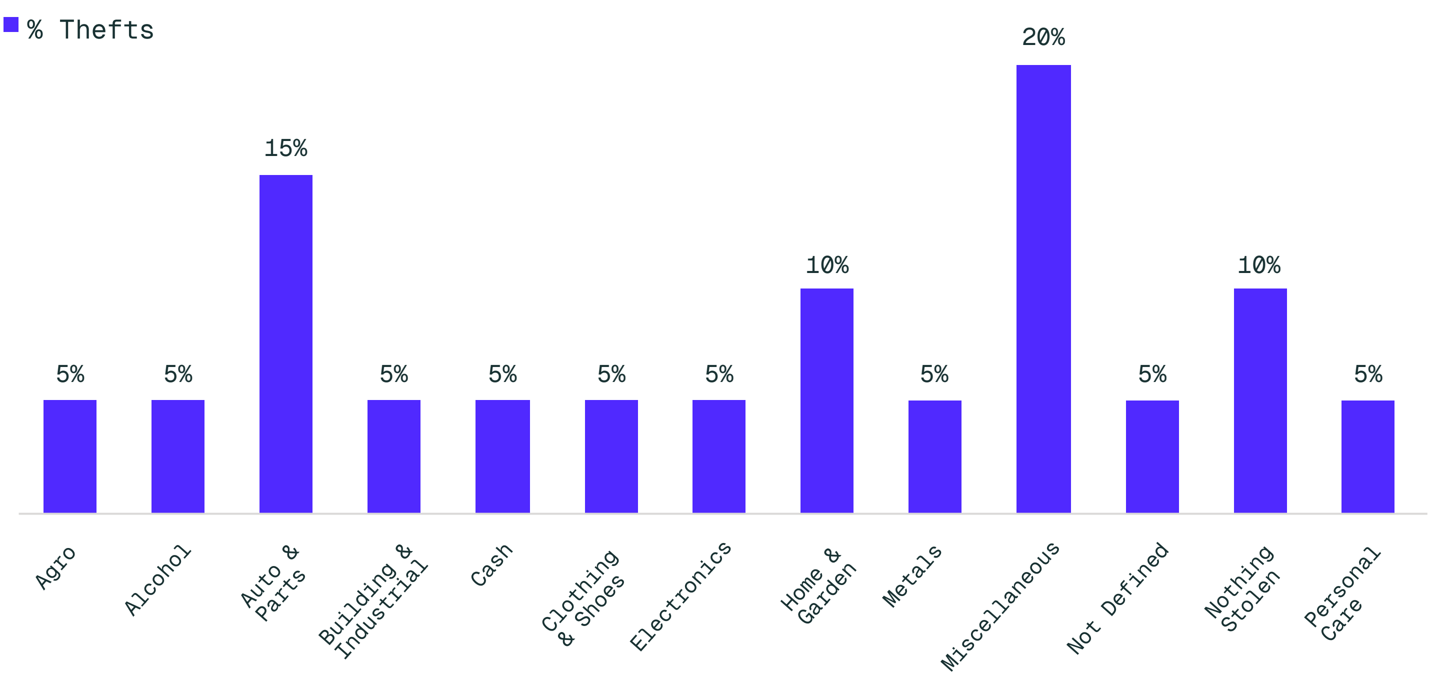


Chart 9. Cargo Theft by Product Type



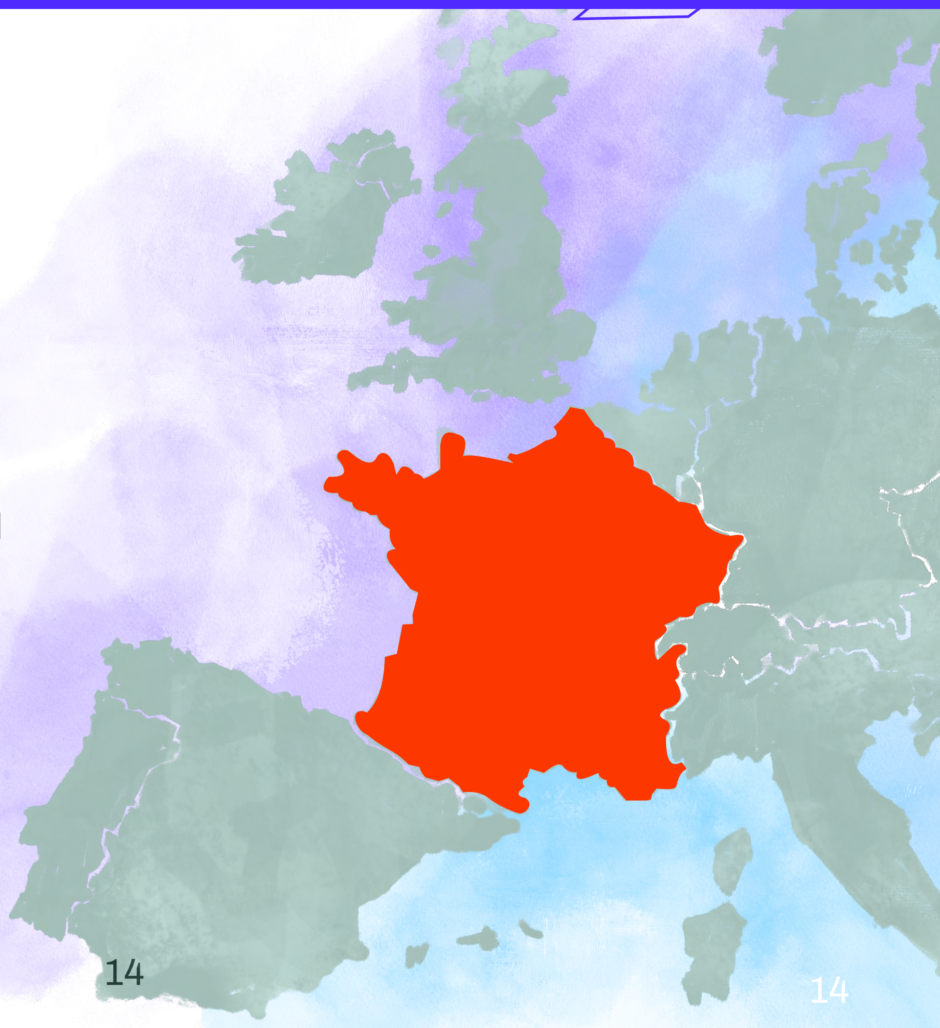
Pharmaceuticals: Risks, Patterns, and Losses

Pharmaceutical shipments in the EMEA region incurred the highest average losses per theft incident, driven by high product value, strict regulatory requirements, and supply chain complexity. While they were not the most frequently targeted cargo type according to available data, their specificity and sensitivity make each successful theft particularly costly.

Building on this context, Overhaul's route analysis for the period January 2024 to January 2026, based on incidents within a 25-kilometer radius of major routes, highlights several critical patterns and risk factors.

30% of reported pharmaceuitical thefts happened in France, making it the most targeted country

As previously mentioned, France stood out as the most targeted country, accounting for over 30% of reported pharmaceutical thefts. Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom each contributed between 8% and 12% of the total. Temporal analysis revealed that Friday was the most dangerous day for pharmaceutical cargo, responsible for 46% of theft incidents, while Monday also showed elevated risk levels. Most thefts occurred during the night and early morning hours, particularly between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. However, more than half of incidents lacked precise timing data, further reflecting gaps in incident detection and reporting.



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In terms of product types, Medical Products were the most frequently stolen, comprising 27% of pharmaceutical thefts. Oncology Drugs were also heavily targeted, accounting for about 19% of incidents, followed by Blood Units, Veterinary Products, Diabetes Drugs, and Ophthalmic Products. The location of theft was a crucial factor: Warehouses and distribution centers were the site of 58% of pharmaceutical cargo thefts, indicating significant vulnerabilities in facility security. Company yards and destinations each accounted for 8%, while thefts occurring in transit, at truck stops, or at unsecured parking locations made up a smaller share.

Modus operandi analysis shows that facility theft was the dominant method, responsible for 65% of pharmaceutical incidents. Last-mile courier attacks were the second most common event type, followed by vehicle theft, deceptive pickups, hijackings, and theft of full truckload. This distribution emphasizes the importance of robust access controls, surveillance, and staff screening at storage and distribution sites, as well as secure handover protocols and real-time monitoring throughout the supply chain.

Recommendations

Effectively combating cargo theft in EMEA requires a layered and proactive approach, blending physical security, technological solutions, and procedural discipline across all stages of the supply chain.

In-transit security should begin with the engagement of a proactive supply chain security provider capable of delivering real-time, actionable intelligence. When dual drivers are used, protocols must ensure that one person remains with the cargo at all times. Drivers should arrive at pickup locations fully prepared (fueled, fed, and rested) and travel a minimum distance before stopping, using only company-approved secure locations. Loaded trailers must not be dropped except at secure, vetted sites, and handover procedures between drivers or at delivery should be clearly documented to prevent deception.

Drivers must notify dispatchers of any unscheduled stops, providing the reason and location, and best practice calls for overlaying traditional security standards with electronic tracking and monitoring. Planned routes and stops must be assessed for risk and reviewed regularly, and during any stops, trucks should remain locked, alarmed, and in the driver's line of sight.

Security seals are another critical component. Tamper-evident seals should be applied to all trucks carrying high-value goods, checked at each point of transfer and whenever containers or trailers are left unattended.

When it comes to carrier vetting and fraud prevention, rigorous processes are essential. Transport companies should verify driver credentials, company addresses, and cross-reference logistics sites to ensure legitimacy. The proliferation of ghost companies and fraudulent carriers, as revealed in our findings, demonstrates the necessity for stricter government and industry oversight. Enhanced digital verification, multifactor authentication, and direct communication with trusted contacts can help mitigate risks associated with deceptive pickups and counterfeit carriers.

The EMEA cargo theft landscape is shaped by evolving criminal tactics, regulatory gaps, and persistent vulnerabilities in both operational and facility security. While data limitations continue to obscure the true scope of losses, actionable intelligence and industry collaboration remain crucial. Overhaul is committed to supporting supply chain stakeholders with advanced technology, data-driven insights, and best practice recommendations to reduce risk and protect valuable cargo across the region. By implementing our layered recommendations and leveraging our risk and visibility tools, companies can significantly reduce the risk of cargo theft and improve overall supply chain resilience.

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