

Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange (TWIX), a tool designed to support collaboration between enforcement and management authorities to combat illegal wildlife trade, was first established by TRAFFIC and government partners in Europe in 2005 (EU-TWIX) and has since been replicated for a number of nations in the Central Africa region as comprised by COMIFAC (Central Africa Forest Commission) (AFRICA-TWIX) and, during 2019, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries (SADC-TWIX). The following provides a summary of progress in these different areas to date:

EU-TWIX network still going strong 14 years after its launch

EU-TWIX is a joint initiative of the Belgian Federal Police, Customs, the Belgian Management Authority of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), and TRAFFIC. The platform aims to facilitate information-sharing and international co-operation of European Union (EU) wildlife law enforcement and management officials dealing with CITES issues. At the time of the launch in 2005, it consisted of a mailing list and website containing a database of seizures and was available to 150 users from 19 countries restricted to the EU.

Over the last 14 years, the network has grown steadily, even beyond the EU, currently benefiting wildlife officials from 39 European countries¹. In January 2018, the number of users reached the “1,000 threshold” and currently stands at close to 1,200 (see Fig. 1).

Besides the mailing list and database, new features have been created on the EU-TWIX website (www.eu-twix.org): for example, over 250 identification guides and training materials are available to officials and it is possible to access the seizures data stored in the database thanks to a new feature that allows users to create charts for data visualisation.

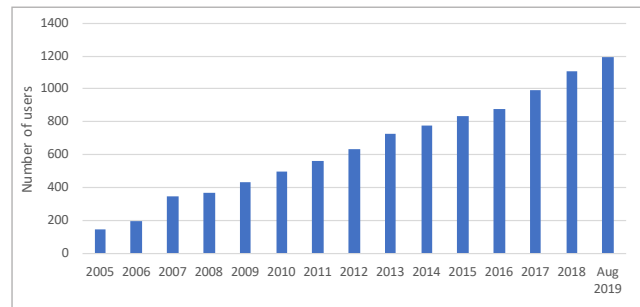


Fig. 1. Increase in the no. of EU-TWIX users over time.

TWIX: CONNECTING ENFORCEMENT

AFRICA-TWIX: an important tool for implementation of the Central Africa wildlife law enforcement action plan

AFRICA-TWIX is an internet tool developed to facilitate information exchange and international co-operation between law enforcement officials and CITES Management Authorities working within the Central Africa region as comprised by COMIFAC², with the aim to combat wildlife crime. This particular platform was officially launched in Central Africa in 2016 and based on the EU-TWIX structure. It was also designed to take into account the need for implementation of the Central Africa wildlife law enforcement action plan (*Plan d’Action sous Régional des Pays de l’Espace COMIFAC pour le Renforcement de l’Application des Législations Nationales sur la Faune Sauvage*, known as PAPECALF) which constitutes a tool for collaboration between law enforcement agencies at the national and transnational levels in efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade.

At the launch of this initiative, only Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon were part of the AFRICA-TWIX platform. They were

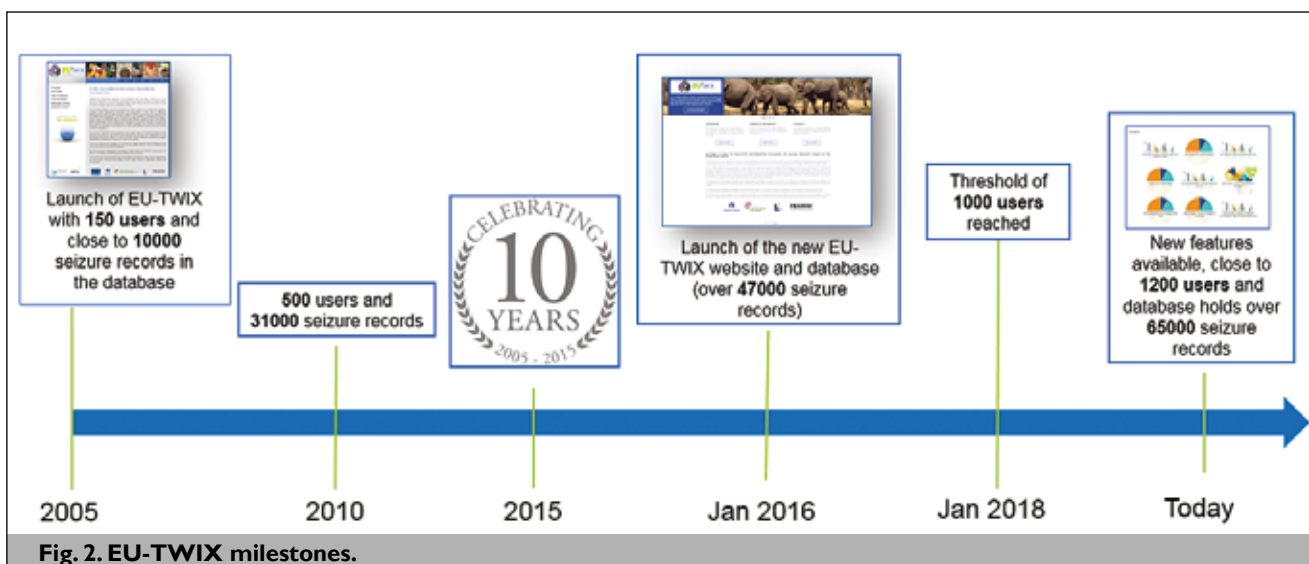


Fig. 2. EU-TWIX milestones.

joined by the Central African Republic in 2018 and by Chad (June 2019), connecting six (of 10) COMIFAC countries, and involving more than 135 law enforcement officials. In addition, in October 2019, Rwanda declared its official commitment to AFRICA-TWIX. It is worth noting that, since its launch, the platform has already triggered seven international investigations, at the same time improving the collaboration objective between law enforcement agencies that was a stated requirement in the aforementioned wildlife law enforcement action plan. One of the outstanding examples where the tool contributed to enhancing collaboration between the

Seizure in Campo'o Ma'an, Cameroon, of ivory marked as coming from Gabon, bound for Nigeria (2016). The case is an example of collaboration between law enforcement agencies using AFRICA-TWIX as a tool to help combat wildlife crime in Central Africa.



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CITES Management Authorities and law enforcement agencies in combating wildlife crime in Central Africa was the seizure in 2016 of 44 ivory tusks by Cameroonian law enforcement officials. This seizure took place in a boat flying the Nigerian flag that was travelling from Gabon to Nigeria via Cameroon's territorial waters.

Photos of the seizure posted on the AFRICA-TWIX mailing list showed a Ghanaian lady holding a parcel of ivory that had allegedly been stolen from government stocks in Gabon a few weeks prior to the seizure. The photos prompted the Gabonese authorities to contact law enforcement officials and prosecutors in Cameroon and to share intelligence that enabled them to carry out further investigations to dismantle the trafficking operation, a process which remains ongoing.

SADC-TWIX system operational

In order to maintain the momentum built during the three phases of scoping missions conducted during the course of 2018, and based on the high level of expectation and need for the TWIX system to become operational, a regional workshop to launch the SADC-TWIX system formally was convened on 9/10 April 2019 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The main objectives were to provide an overview of TWIX, to agree on its structure for the SADC³ region, and to build the capacity of officials on TWIX implementation.

The workshop brought together law enforcement agencies from 14 SADC Member States including Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia

and Zimbabwe. Through a Workshop Declaration, approved in plenary, it was agreed that the name of the system would be "SADC-TWIX", and the access rights of non-governmental organisations and related conditions would be decided by an Advisory Group adopted between 6–12 months after the system came into operation.

The SADC-TWIX system became operational on 21 May 2019 and currently close to 450 law enforcement officials from 11 SADC Member States are registered as TWIX users, including officials from Customs, police, CITES Management Authorities, forestry services, the judiciary, national security services, finance intelligence, and fisheries agencies.

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¹Current members include representatives from all EU Member States, plus Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, and the Ukraine.

²Established in 1999, the Central Africa Forest Commission (COMIFAC) is an intergovernmental organisation comprising 10 Member States: Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe. Member States recognise the protection of the Congo basin ecosystems as an integral component of the development process and are committed to work together to promote the sustainable use of the Congo basin forest ecosystems.³The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a Regional Economic Community comprising 16 Member States: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Established in 1992, SADC is committed to Regional Integration and poverty eradication within Southern Africa through economic development and ensuring peace and security. Source: <https://www.sadc.int/about-sadc/>