

EXPERTS GATHER FOR CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL PICKPOCKETING GANGS

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Pickpocketing has established itself as an ubiquitous phenomenon, driving crime numbers and affecting the perceived security of citizens all over Europe. Although sometimes still considered petty crime, a huge share of the offences are committed by highly professional groups, who use their mobility across borders to challenge established law enforcement practices and often gain millions of illegal profit. While the group leaders use this money to finance a luxury lifestyle, many of the acting pickpockets, among them also minors, are exploited “foot soldiers” and not seldom victims of trafficking of human beings.

It has, more than ever, become necessary for law enforcement to coordinate and cooperate on an international level, focussing on the structures of the groups, including instigators and facilitators as well as carrying out financial investigations with the aim to identify beneficiaries and recover assets.

As a follow-up to previous conferences, Europol once again hosted and supported the European Pickpocketing Conference, organised and conducted by Germany's Munich Police Headquarters, from 6 to 8th of May at Europol's headquarters in The Hague. More than 170 experts from police, prosecution offices and universities, representing Europol as well as the following 23 European countries participated in the event: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Chile also sent two delegates to support the European countries in tackling this phenomenon. More and more offenders are travelling to Europe from outside the continent to commit property crime, which is why the Chilean presence was of great value for the European pickpocketing investigators.

In an effort to combat organised pickpocketing crime, participants shared experience gained from investigations conducted against mobile organised crime groups in their respective countries. Several operations against specific groups of pickpockets were presented, displaying not only the need for, but also the success of tight collaboration between the European states affected. The participants also exchanged knowledge in several workshops on different pickpocketing-related issues. Among the topics were best practice tactics, prevention and technological innovations, but also more abstract subjects focussing on psychological aspects, such as new approaches to behavioural science. Along with the presentations and discussions, some officers took part in a hands-on workshop that was carried out in the streets Amsterdam.

The aim of the conference was to facilitate and encourage an even stronger international cooperation. All participants agreed to further strengthen existing networks for exchanging information and to support each other in investigations, operations and regarding strategic approaches.

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