JOINT ACTION TO TACKLE CHINESE HUMAN TRAFFICKING NETWORKS

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Press Release

With the support of Europol, law enforcement authorities from four European countries joined efforts on 16 and 18 March in an operation to combat the trafficking of human beings. The coordinated operation targeted Chinese criminal networks that are involved in sexual and labour exploitation across Europe.

According to provisional figures, more than 1154 persons, mainly women/men from China, were checked on 288 locations. 26 offenders were arrested and 14 potential victims of trafficking (mostly women/men from China) were identified, some of them linked to ongoing investigations. In addition, via cross-checks with Europol database, more than 10 persons were found to have links to criminal structures. As a result of the two days of action, Europol is supporting the launch of new investigations in several participating countries.

During the operation, restaurants, places of prostitution and restaurants were checked in Austria, Cyprus, Slovenia and Switzerland, while intensive checks were also conducted at major international airports which were assessed as being potential nexus-points or destination ports for victims of trafficking from China. In total 455 police officers took part in the operations.

In Austria the national and local human trafficking units of the Federal Criminal Police deployed police forces to Chinese restaurants and brothels in 240 locations, in the framework of operational activities coordinated with the tax authorities with the aim of detecting victims of human trafficking for sexual and labor exploitation. In Cyprus, the main international airport and various locations in Nicosia were subjected to police checks. Cyprus Police were supported by the Ministry of Labour to check Chinese restaurants in 7 different locations. In Switzerland, cantonal police forces and the Border Guard, supported by the Swiss Federal Criminal Police, carried out checks in 28 locations which included restaurants, brothels and trading companies. In Slovenia, activities were focused on 16 places where irregular migrants were being subjected to slavery and labour exploitation.

The objective of the operation was to identify people trafficked from China, and therefore enhance the intelligence picture of the organised crime groups and human traffickers involved. The results submitted by the countries participating in the operation are being analysed by Europol to help identify key figures in international human trafficking networks in Europe, and to establish crime patterns as well as possible criminal organisational structures.
Investigations so far show the existence of organised crime groups (OCGs) from China that are highly networked and embrace exploiters, facilitators, trafficked women (who are handed over for forced prostitution or forced labour), money launderers, and individuals involved in forging travel documents and visas. After being recruited in their home countries, the victims are trafficked to Europe and sent to work in brothels, massage parlours, nail studios or restaurants, facilitated by forged identity documents. The Chinese community is a very closed community with a great variety of cultures and languages, and the Chinese criminal groups use various and specific modus operandi which show strong cross-border activity. In this context, increased police checks continue to play an important role in the identification of victims of human trafficking and to shed light on previously undetected crimes.

Europol's support in this human trafficking operation involved facilitating information exchange throughout the investigation. In addition Europol experts in The Hague provided operational analytical support during the coordinated day of action, through real time cross-checks of all data gathered.