

Lured into street prostitution: 19 arrests in latest hit against human traffickers

The family-based criminal group was forcing its victims to prostitute themselves on the streets of Girona in Spain

On 9 March, Europol supported the Spanish National Police (Policía Nacional) and the Service of Countering Organised Criminality Giurgiu within the Romanian Police (Poliția Română) in a hit against an organised crime group involved in sexual exploitation.

The suspects belonged to a family-based criminal group composed of Romanian nationals. They recruited the victims from Romania, luring them to Spain with the so-called 'loverboy method'. Once the victims reached Girona, the members of the criminal gang forced them into prostitution on the streets of the Spanish city. The victims endured harsh living conditions, cold and hunger. Some of them were forced to prostitute themselves while pregnant and at high risk of being infected by COVID in the current pandemic. To prove their 'ownership' over the victims, the criminal gang tattooed them. The suspects collected the money from the sexual exploitation and invested it in high-end vehicles, real estate, luxury goods and drugs. During the action day, officers in Romania discovered pornographic material including content depicting the sexual abuse of a minor.

The action day on 9 March 2021 led also to:

- 16 house searches (2 in Spain and 14 in Romania)
- 19 arrests (8 in Spain and 11 in Romania)
- 18 victims safeguarded (7 in Spain and 11 in Romania)
- Seizures include phones and stolen goods, including jewellery worth some €35 000.

Europol facilitated the information exchange and provided analytical support. During the action day, Europol hosted a virtual command post to coordinate the activities. Europol also deployed an expert to Spain to cross-check operational information in real-time against Europol's databases and to provide technical support with phone extraction capabilities.



In 2010 the European Union set up a [four-year Policy Cycle](#) to ensure greater continuity in the fight against serious international and organised crime. In 2017 the Council of the EU decided to continue the EU Policy Cycle for the 2018 – 2021 period. It aims to tackle the most significant threats posed by organised and serious international crime to the EU. This is achieved by improving and strengthening cooperation between the relevant services of EU Member States, institutions and agencies, as well as non-EU countries and organisations, including the private sector where relevant. Human trafficking is one of the priorities for the Policy Cycle.