

106 ARRESTED IN A STING AGAINST ONLINE FRAUDSTERS

*20 September 2021
Press Release*

About € 10 million was stolen in just a year

The Spanish National Police (Policía Nacional), supported by the Italian National Police (Polizia di Stato), Europol and Eurojust, dismantled an organised crime group linked to the Italian Mafia involved in online fraud, money laundering, drug trafficking and property crime. The suspects defrauded hundreds of victims through phishing attacks and other types of online fraud such as SIM swapping and business email compromise before laundering the money through a wide network of money mules and shell companies. Last year alone, the illegal profit is estimated at about € 10 million.

Overall results:

- 106 arrests, mostly in Spain and some in Italy
- 16 house searches
- 118 bank accounts frozen
- Seizures include many electronic devices, 224 credit cards, SIM cards and point-of-sale terminals, a marijuana plantation and equipment for its cultivation and distribution.

This large criminal network was very well organised in a pyramid structure, which included different specialised areas and roles. Among the members of the criminal group were computer experts, who created the phishing domains and carried out the cyber fraud; recruiters and organisers of the money muling; and money laundering experts, including experts in cryptocurrencies. Most of the suspected members are Italian nationals, some of whom have links to mafia organisations. Located in Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain), the suspects tricked their victims, mainly Italian nationals, into sending large sums to bank accounts controlled by the criminal network. They then laundered the criminal proceeds through a wide network of money mules and shell companies.

Europol experts to support the field activities

Europol facilitated the information exchange, the operational coordination and provided analytical support for this investigation, which lasted over a year. During the operational activities, Europol deployed two analysts and one forensic expert to Tenerife, Spain and one analyst to Italy. Additionally, Europol funded the deployment of three Italian investigators to Tenerife to support the

Spanish authorities during the action day.

The Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT) at Europol supported the operation. This standing operational team consists of cyber liaison officers from different countries who work from the same office on high profile cybercrime investigations.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, Europol supports the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime, and other serious and organised crime forms. Europol also works with many non-EU partner states and international organisations. From its various threat assessments to its intelligence-gathering and operational activities, Europol has the tools and resources it needs to do its part in making Europe safer.