

Online fraud exceeding €3 million halted in Ireland and Finland

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An organised crime group involved in extended online fraud and money laundering in several European countries was targeted by the Irish and Finnish national authorities with Eurojust's support. A coordinated investigative and prosecutorial strategy was agreed at Eurojust, which enabled the speedy execution of mutual legal assistance requests between the countries concerned to advance their investigations, as well as the collection and exchange of evidence to ensure solid prosecution. 3 suspects were convicted in Finland for aggravated money laundering and forgery, with sentences of between 1 year and 2 years and 3 months. Another 9 suspects were arrested in Ireland. Five people were charged, one of whom pleaded guilty. The remaining four were remanded in custody pending trial. The estimated amount of the illegal proceeds laundered by the criminal group exceeds €3 million.

The members of the organised crime group (OCG) used fabricated online platforms to offer to unknowing customers non-existent goods, including luxury cars, tractors, expensive jewellery and watches, or services, such as accommodation. To receive the online payments from the victims, the criminals created numerous bank accounts in Ireland and Finland, using forged documentation, *inter alia* identity cards, passports, working permits, rental contracts and utility bills. When the transactions were concluded, the suspects transferred the payments to other bank accounts and withdrew the money from cashpoints in various European countries.

Following several searches by the *Garda Síochána* (Ireland's National Police Service) and the Finnish Border Guard and Police in both countries, a large number of items were seized, including fake documentation, equipment for document forgery, laptops and cash. Europol assisted the national authorities in the cross-checking of data and identification of the victims of the fraud.

The OCG members are suspected of participation in a criminal organisation, fraud, money laundering, forgery of documents and registration offences. The national investigations are ongoing.