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Gardaí arrested three people and searched 14 airplanes as part of a major international crime-busting operation carried out over 11,000 locations worldwide.

The global Operation Ciconia uncovered **2.38 tonnes of cocaine** and identified 529 human trafficking victims.

A total of 386 people were arrested following the week-long operation.

Gardaí confirmed to Independent.ie that officers took part in Global Airport Action days on October 11-13.

A spokesman said the aim of the Action Days was to counter fraudulent flight bookings using compromised payment card data.

"Three persons were arrested, with two of those charged and a further three persons questioned during this operation."

A series of targeted interventions and examinations of selected flights at Dublin Airport were conducted on the same dates.

Gardaí say that an analysis of passengers on those flights was carried out with a view to identifying indicators and victims of human trafficking.

A spokesman said: "Over the course of the three days, 14 flights with approximately 150/160 passengers per flight were targeted each day.

"Information Leaflets on Human Trafficking (Blueblindfold leaflets) and contact details of human trafficking officers were given to any vulnerable persons identified."

No victims of human trafficking were identified during this exercise.

Requests were received by 9 member countries in relation to exchanging intelligence on human trafficking.

In an earlier statement Europol said 51 countries and four international organisations teamed up to deliver what has been described as a "major blow to organised crime groups operating across the European Union and beyond".

The operation was focused on disrupting the most dangerous criminal networks currently active in Europe but sources said this did not include major Irish crime gangs.

Investigators put an emphasis on cases related to facilitated illegal immigration, trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking (cocaine, heroin and synthetic drugs) and cybercrime.

Gardaí and other law enforcement officers in the field were supported from an operational coordination centre located at Europol's headquarters in The Hague.

Europol officers, liaison officers and national experts from the participating countries, working with specialists from other international partners, offered information exchange using Europol's secure channels, and constantly analysed intelligence gathered.

The statement said: "Simultaneously, 16 Europol specialists were deployed on the spot in several countries across the world. From there, they worked hand-in-hand with investigators to provide forensic support, analytical reports and live crosschecks against Europol's databases."

Among the areas searched were red-light districts, brothels, massage parlours, private apartments, airports and immigration reception centres. The nationality of the identified victims of human trafficking, and the suspects arrested during the operations, confirmed that trafficking networks originating in Nigeria, Asia and Eastern Europe are the most active in the EU.

In one case, Austrian authorities discovered a cannabis plantation while performing checks at a brothel to identify potential victims of sexual exploitation.

The officers ordered the closure of the premises, which was being run as an illegal brothel, and a new investigation was initiated.

In another case, Europol was able to establish links between a payment card fraud case and a case on facilitating illegal immigration.

This information was forwarded to colleagues from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) based at an airport in Athens, Greece. Following the lead provided by Europol, the officers intercepted four irregular migrants who were intending to travel to Italy. Four forged passports and four fraudulently-purchased flight tickets to Italy were found on them, and the individuals were arrested.

Also, a fake travel agency was discovered in Greece that was facilitating the trafficking of human beings and illegal immigration. The successful result was based on analysis of Europol information, notifications from airlines and the proactive approach of Greek police.

In addition, intelligence collected during the operations triggered the initiation of 449 new investigations.

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