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## 133 people detained in global action tackling airline fraud

The Hague, the Netherlands  
6 November 2015



On 3 and 4 November 2015 law enforcement agencies from across the world, supported by Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3), joined forces with the airline, travel and payment card industries in a major concerted operation to combat online fraud in the airline sector. The operation was organised globally through coordination centres at Europol in The Hague and AMERIPOL in Bogota (National Police of Colombia – Cybercrime Centre Police and Federal Police of Mexico ) and Canada. Some 35 airlines and 32 countries<sup>[1]</sup> were involved in this initiative, which took place at 109 airports across the world.

The coordinated Global Airline Action Day targeted criminals suspected of fraudulently purchasing plane tickets online using stolen or fake credit card data. Rapid increases in this Internet – facilitated crime have left millions of innocent people affected every year whilst the banking, airline and travel industries have suffered huge financial losses as a direct result.

In many cases it was revealed how credit card fraud is linked to other forms of serious crime such as drug trafficking and human trafficking. The increasing role of fake online 'travel agencies' as a facilitating factor (crime-as-a-service) was also reported.

Representatives from airlines, online travel agencies and major payment card companies<sup>[2]</sup> worked at Europol's operational centre with experts from Europol's EC3 and law enforcement officers from across the EU, Latin America, US and Canada to identify suspicious airline ticket transactions resulting from the use of fake or stolen credit cards via the Internet.

On receipt of alerts from airlines, credit card company representatives confirmed suspicions using their own financial data systems, and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) provided fraud intelligence from its databases. Notifications were sent to transport hubs across the world as waiting law enforcement officers intercepted and detained criminals attempting to travel using fraudulently obtained flight tickets.

Further support was received on the day from Frontex and Eurojust. Playing a pivotal role in the

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operation, Europol deployed specialists and equipment to locations across Europe and to the Command Post in Bogota. In addition, a dedicated team of analysts working from the Europol operational centre provided live access to centralised criminal intelligence databases, whilst INTERPOL assisted with information from its databases.

During the operation more than 162 suspicious transactions were reported and 133 individuals were detained under suspicion of fraud.

Europol Director Rob Wainwright said: "This operation was the culmination of many months of meticulous planning between Europol, law enforcement, prosecuting and border control agencies, airlines and credit card companies, and is a perfect example of how our combined forces can track down the criminal syndicates responsible for committing large scale fraud and other offences. Europol is grateful to all its partners for the excellent cooperation in making cyberspace as crime free as possible for citizens across the world."

Aleks Popovich, IATA Senior Vice President, Financial and Distribution Services, stated: "Industry Fraud Prevention is not simply the name of a multi-faceted programme started by IATA in 2015, but also one of the strategic priorities on our agenda for years to come. IATA is aware of the extent of fraud touching its members, and strongly believes that the airline industry by itself will not be able to put a stop to this fast growing trend. This is why we are proud to be counted time over time amongst Europol's trusted partners in planning and rolling out these successful, global operations." Meta Backman, the Chair of the European Airline Fraud Prevention Group commented: "

An operation involving so many parties across the globe working together to fight fraud takes a lot of effort. I'm grateful for the support Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) is showing the travel industry by putting together these operations. With every operation we learn more and can focus on areas that need improvement. The procedures and contacts used during the action help us in our everyday work." This global operation against airline fraudsters is part of [Operation Blue Amber](#), a series of international actions tackling organised crime which took place in various locations across the world. Europol will continue to support EU Member States, working closely with the private sector and other international organisations, to improve security at the airports by fighting this type of online fraud.

[Check our infographic](#)

#### **[1] Countries involved in the initiative**

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Iceland, Turkey, United States of America, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Canada.

#### **[2] payment card companies worked at Europol's operational centre**

American Express, Visa Europe, Visa, MasterCard Discover, Diners.

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