



Cu sprijinul:



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PRESS RELEASE

Following initial information received from the [RoOmenia Association – Volunteers](#) in Europe and data collected from online research, [ECLER](#) contributed, together with INTERPOL, to the dismantling of an international trafficking network of people exploited for illegal egg retrieval and as surrogate mothers.

On Tuesday, August 8 of 2023, 9 people were arrested in Crete, including a Romanian woman, and others are under international investigation on suspicion of committing at least 10 offenses: forming and joining an organized criminal group, **human trafficking, mediation for illegal adoption of a minor, violations of the laws on the implementation of medically assisted reproduction**, offenses against the family, deceiving patients with false medical procedures, fraud, forgery of public documents, bodily harm and violation of medication legislation.

30 young women from Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Albania, Bulgaria, and Georgia were identified in Crete as trafficked for the purpose of exploitation for egg retrieval and surrogacy, many of whom were already pregnant and some in the last weeks of pregnancy.

A medical clinic in Crete and its staff are under investigation amid suspicions that they may have acted as front men and intermediaries for illegal adoptions. Among the 9 people arrested are a 73-year-old well-known gynecologist from Chania who coordinated the criminal group, doctors, clinic staff, a woman from Romania and two women from Georgia. Two other Moldovan women are wanted internationally, while investigations to establish the extent of the criminal activities continues.

The group had a specific hierarchical structure, with long-standing illegal activity in egg trading, in vitro fertilization, and illegal adoption of babies. The organized crime group recruited brokers who in turn had to recruit young women from abroad and transport them to Crete where they were to be exploited for illegal egg retrieval and as surrogate mothers. The group acted as an intermediary in illegal adoption of babies in exchange for large sums of money, while systematically deceiving victims by falsely claiming to have undergone an embryo transfer procedure.

The young women were kept in at least 14 houses, in a closed and controlled environment, where they became pregnant and then, for a fee, gave birth to the babies. By exploiting the young women, the clinic catered to clients from around the world who were infertile couples, single men, or same-sex couples who did not meet the legal requirements for in vitro fertilization. Most clients came from Greece, Italy, Turkey, and several Balkan countries. To achieve their goal, the members of the criminal group carried out a series of criminal acts by drawing up false supporting documents for the purpose of issuing a court order for people who did not meet the legal requirements and, in cooperation with other clinics or medical laboratories and doctors, forged medical documents and birth certificates, as well as other administrative documents. In the

cases of parents from countries where the process of obtaining a child through a surrogate mother was prohibited, the criminal group helped to declare the births as international adoptions.

The organized crime group's income from each surrogate mother was between 70,000 and 100,000 euros, reaching in some cases 120,000 euros, with a net profit of at least 70%. The brokers received between 3,000-5,000 euros for each surrogate mother they brought in and a monthly supervision fee of between 300-600 euros until birth.

The Greek authorities estimated that at least 182 cases of exploitation had been recorded since December 2022, but evidence suggests the network had been operating since 2021.

During 2022-2023, ECLER provided trainings and information campaigns for more than 3,700 Ukrainian refugees and representatives of national and international actors who can identify potential human trafficking situations. Under the protocol concluded with RoOmenia, ECLER will offer online trainings for several thousand Romanian volunteers active in all European countries where Romanian communities are present.

[RoOmenia-Voluntari în Europa](#) is an organization that believes in the power of good. The association created the VOLUNTARI IN EUROPE Facebook group for all Romanians in EUROPE who need support in special situations. The group organizes recurrent social and health actions, with the hashtag #RoOmenia and participatory democracy activities. The association is actively involved in the fight against human trafficking. With a firm apolitical stance, the association promotes inclusion, with a special sensitivity to the emotions experienced by anyone alienated from the country.

Project financed by Care - a global confederation that has been fighting for over 75 years against poverty and social injustice and is coordinated and implemented at the national level by the SERA Romania Foundation (a non-governmental, non-profit, private organization that has been active for 26 years in the field of protection of the child and the promotion of children's rights in Romania) with the support of Care France and FONPC (Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Children).