

Case 28

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Assessed case number: no number

Title: Blood Strawberries

- What type of trafficking/exploitation is being analysed?**

Sexual THB	Forced Labour	Forced Criminal Activities	Minor Exploitation and forced adoption	Polycrime	Other (Specify the type)	All the aforementioned
	X					

- Please provide a brief description of the case (about 500 words)**

Kuros is a Syrian 38 year old male who used to work in an agricultural company in his country. The civil war in Syria made him unemployed but he refused to leave his family and the last years he has working temporarily on whatever he could find. Since things have not changed at all, he has decided to leave at last Syria for a better future, while Europe is his final destination. Mehmet is a 34 year old Turkish male who is a member of migrant smuggling group active in Turkey. This criminal group is focused on Syria nationals who want to escape from their country and it has links with another criminal group in Greece which receives Syrian nationals for labor exploitation. Its modus operandi includes fake job advertisements on social media groups for easy deception and recruitment. Asterios is a 45 year old male in Athens who trades agricultural equipment. He has been the owner of a shop since 2000, as he received it from his father. Apart from this, Asterios has been dealing with migrants smuggling since 2015, as he has become a member of a criminal group which transfers mainly Syrian nationals from Turkey to Greece and then sends them to farmers/clients across Greece for labor exploitation. His criminal group has links with Mehmet’s criminal group. Dimitris is a 40 year old farmer in Pyrgos who cultivates acres of strawberries. He is a client of Asterios as he has received since 2015 10 Syrian nationals who have been working for him in Pyrgos receiving poor salary and living as slaves in one of his small safe houses across his land. Dimitris is currently in direct contact with Asterios as he immediately wants another “worker” for the annual harvest. Kuros checks some job advertisements on Facebook and Instagram after being informed by some friends in Syria. These advertisements speak about job opportunities in Greece in several sectors, including the agricultural. He sends a message on one of these on Instagram, whose user is Mehmet. The cost for the trip has to be covered from Kuros himself and is 3500 US Dollars which has to be loaded to an account in



Western Union. Kuros has no other choice than giving all his savings for a better future in Greece. After loading the money he texts Mehmet about it and the journey starts. He enters Turkey and reaches Tsesme, and from there he passes by boat to Ikaria island. When he lands on Ikaria island, he contacts Emre, a Turkish male, a smuggler who is the link between Mehmet’s and Asterios’ smuggling groups on Telegram. Kuros receives from Emre on Telegram the ferry ticket which will bring him to Piraeus, where Asterios will receive him. Emre informs Asterios via Signal about the departure of Kuros from Ikaria island. After his arrival in Piraeus, Kuros is delivered from Asterios to Dimitris in Pyrgos. Dimitris announces to Kuros that he will work for him receiving a decent montly salary with some extras and brings him to his accommodation next to the farms. There he threatens him with a gun and tells him that from now on he is a slave and he has to work truly hard to earn his daily food and water, locking him inside the safe house with the other “workers”, without any access on mobile phone.

Kuros realizes that his long journey has ended to a prison since he has been deceived but he has no other choice than work for Dimitris. His “colleagues” advise him not to do anything stupid as they are in the middle of nowhere with assistants of Dimitris monitoring them. They also tell him that even the local authorities are aware of the situation and they probably cooperate with Dimitris.

Hellenic Police, based on an anonymous information since 1 year ago from Kuros’ case and after a long lasting investigation and by using technical means, without any cooperation with the local authorities in Pyrgos, as well as EUROPOL and INTERPOL, are currently disrupting the above transnational criminal network. This cross-border police operation named “Blood Strawberries” leads to the arrest of Dimitris, Asterios and some other members of the smuggling network while Emre is arrested by the local authorities in Ikaria island. All coerced workers released and assisted by Hellenic authorities and NGOs. An international arrest warrant is now published through INTERPOL for Mehmet in Turkey while actions have started for the withdrawal of the fake job advertisements on Facebook and Instagram. The criminal network manipulated the underground banking system ‘Hawala’ and remittance companies to transfer the illicit proceeds. The “Blood Strawberries” is a forced labour case attracted wide publicity in national and international press.

All the arrested members in Greece are prosecuted and their sentence according to judicial sources is gonna be 10 years in jail.

• **Which is the *modus operandi* of the entities using cyber tools for trafficking and/or exploitation?**

MODUS OPERANDI	Yes/No	Description
Contact between perpetrators and victim through social media	Yes	Kuros communicates with Mehmet through Facebook and WhatsApp, and with Emre via Telegram
Contact between the smuggling networks	Yes	Emre and Asterios communicate via Signal.
Other		



• **Please provide more details on the perpetrator(s):**

Was/were the perpetrator(s) male or female?	Males
Which is the nationality of the perpetrator(s)?	Turkey and Greece
In which country was he/she, were they operating?	Turkey and Greece
Was it an individual or a group?	Group
Were there any preliminary indicators for early detection?	Yes, fake job advertisements on Social Media
Which other aspects are important?	Socioeconomical, Civil War

• **Which were the main characteristics of the victim(s)?**

THB Victims	Involved (x)	Please describe in more detail
Men	X	Kuros
Women		
Minors		
LGTBI		
Country of origin	X	Syria
Country of exploitation	X	Greece
Capturing Method		
Coercion Method (debt-bonded, victims' families threatened...)	X	Civil War in the country of origin, No travel documents available
Handing over the passport		
Other		
Unknown		

• **What were the money laundering mechanisms used by traffickers?**

Money Laundering Mechanisms	Involved (x)	Please describe in more detail
Checks and money orders to anonymous post office boxes	X	Western Union accounts are used by the smugglers/Kuros paid 3500 US Dollars while for this trip to Greece to a Western Union office.
Bank accounts in foreign countries		
Funnel account(s)		
Route cash from different cities		
Money Mules		
Hawala System	X	The members of THB organisation transferred the proceeds of crime through Hawala underground banking system.



Purchase of corporate vehicles or real estate		
Cash business entities such as restaurants or bars		
Other		
Unknown		

• **Has the case been tried or is it still under investigation?**

Legal Procedure	Yes/No	Please describe in more detail
Case with judgment	Yes	Dimitris was sentenced to 10 years in jail, after being arrested from the Hellenic Police authorities
Under investigation	Yes	Nevertheless, case is considered still open as Hellenic Police authorities are searching for the rest members of the smuggling network

• **What was the economic evidence of the crime?**

Economic evidence	Yes/No	Please describe in more detail
Money Transfers	Yes	Western Union remittances data
Banks Accounts	No	
Unjustified Financial Wealth	No	
Network Accountancy	No	
Financial Study of the Victim	No	
Wallet Cards	No	
Suspicious transactions	No	
Cryptocurrency exchanges or payments	No	
Cash payments	No	
Faster Payments Inwards (FPI) from the same entity	No	
Same mobile number or email address	No	
Hawala Payments	No	
Various bank accounts beneficiaries	No	
Others	No	
Unknown	No	

• **What activities in internet were considered suspicious?**

Internet Activities	Yes/No	Please describe in more detail
Online money transfers	No	
Purchases at online gaming sites	No	



Ads on Backpage.com or similar sites	No	
Social media to recruitment	Yes	Active accounts on Facebook and Instagram
Use of digital platforms to advertise deceptive job offers and to market exploitative services to potential paying customers	Yes	Fake job advertisements in Greece for Syrian nationals
Fishing potential victims by posting advertisements	Yes	The same as above
Use of video equipment to stream and broadcast exploitative services	No	
Used of multiple online profiles	No	
Use of specific apps: Please circle the relevant apps or add the name at the end if not listed	Recruitment Applications as Instagram and Facebook were used for fake job advertisements in order to deceive and recruit potential victims Communication Telegram and Signal were used for the communication of the different smuggling networks and the trip to Greece	Ex: 1) For Advertising: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.; 2) For Recruitment and Communication: FaceTime, IMO, Messenger, Signal, Signal, Skype, Viber, WA, WeChat, Zalo, etc. 3) For Logistic: video-sharing platforms distributing essential logistic instructions, satellite images and photos, planned routes, Google Maps waypoints, GPS data, etc.; Guidance, including mapping applications (Maps.me, Google Maps) for remotely guiding migrants across borders through tailor-made tutorials and YouTube videos containing detailed guides on how to navigate migrant routes, where to cross borders or buy fake documents, how to find smuggling hotspots, shelter or assistance, etc.; 4) For Payments, online transfer of fees and documentation of payment proof via messaging services, hawala, etc. 5) Countermeasures adopted by smugglers to anonymize their services, AppLocks, Secure Folders, burner applications, DiskDigger, private VPN connections, or clone apps, Fake GPS and modified display caller ID (Numberbook). 6) Other:
Others	No	

• **Other relevant information or important case specificities:**

		Please describe in more detail
Contacts saved on the perpetrators' mobile phones.	X	On Dimitris' mobile phone there are several phone numbers of other members of smuggling networks in Greece active in THB activities

