

Police dismantle trafficking network making millions from illegal immigrants

Trafficking illegal immigrants into Europe from Afghanistan through Greece and Italy was a multi-million business for the criminal organization involved.

As a result of a two-year investigation, the police has identified the smuggling mechanism and closed the inquiry today with 37 people under investigation and 3 under arrest on charges of facilitating illegal immigration, money laundering, document forgery and illegal financial transactions.

The investigation called "Toman", after the name of the Iranian currency, started on February 15, 2012 in Ravenna, when 14 illegal immigrants were caught as they were walking in a line along the Romea road.

In March, the Police found 18 other illegal migrants in San Lazzaro di Savena (Bologna).

After these two events the police launched an in-depth investigation on multiple fronts.

The investigations conducted in Rome led to the identification of sites and buildings for the temporary housing of migrants, and uncovered the techniques they used to pass security checks at Fiumicino and Ciampino airports.

Two undocumented Afghan nationals were traced in Rome and ended up in jail.

The extensive Police investigations shed light on a transnational criminal association, made up of Afghans and Iranians, based in the two countries, with operational branches in Italy and Greece, and contact persons in other European countries seen as the immigrants' final destination.

The organization used both "passeurs" or people smugglers, who helped illegal immigrants reach their final destination, and planes or trains, providing them with false documents and temporary lodgings. The price of the journey ranged from 2,000 to 7,000 euros depending on the final destination. The suspects were organizing trips to Germany, Denmark, Austria, Norway and Sweden.

Investigators also traced international transactions worth tens of millions of euros carried out in violation of tax laws and money laundering regulations.

This unlawful mechanism relied on Italian entrepreneurs, acting as unlicensed international financial intermediaries, and on the "hawala", the traditional money transfer system used in the Middle East. Investigators observed members of the organization exchanging money in public places and even in railway station toilets.

More than 100 police officers from CIDs in Ravenna, Rome, Bologna, Trento, Milan, Florence, Modena, Siena, Turin, Teramo, Rieti, Venice, Verona, Ascoli Piceno, Ancona, and Caltanissetta took part in the operation. Officers from the Chioggia and Senigallia police stations also seized assets, including cash, bank accounts and valuables, worth several tens of thousands of euros.

