

# *Gang Forging Passports for Refugees Arrested in Greece*

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Athens, December 15 (RHC)-- Greek and British authorities say they have broken up an international criminal network suspected of supplying hundreds of illegal refugees striving to reach the UK and northern European countries with forged travel documents.

Police Lieutenant General Christos Papazafiris, of the Hellenic Police Security Division of Attica, and Chris Hogben, from Border Policing Command of the British National Crime Agency (NCA), made the announcement at a joint press conference.

The pair further said that 24 suspects had been arrested in the Greek capital of Athens over the past several days, all aged between 26 and 45, adding that nine other suspects, belonging to the British arm of the gang, had been taken into custody during a series of raids in the British cities of Glasgow, Manchester and Northampton.

The officials believed that the transnational ring would charge up to ?10,000 per person to supply desperate refugees with authentic, but fraudulently obtained, passports, as well as doctored and altered identity documents.

"This is a blow to organized crime," Papazafiris said, adding that in the past six months over 1,000 passports or travel documents were thought to have been smuggled from Spain to Greece.

Hogben, for his part, also praised the close collaboration and intelligence-sharing between British and Greek authorities against an organized crime group responsible for smuggling hundreds of refugees to the UK.

Four forgery factories, which had helped the criminals to obtain counterfeited documents, were also dismantled during the major operation, and forging equipment, some \$50,000 in cash and hundreds of false documents were also seized during the raids.

Since early 2015 over one million refugees and asylum seekers have crossed Greek borders into other European countries, but tens of thousands are still stranded in camps across the country after border closure throughout the Balkans blocked their long journey, making them a tempting target for organized criminals.

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