

## Communicating the fight against fraud

32<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the OLAF Anti-Fraud Communicators' Network

**The 32<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the OLAF Anti-Fraud Communicators' Network took place on 28-29 March 2023 in Brussels. The event brought together around 60 participants from across the EU anti-fraud community to discuss best communication practices and share some of their recent activities.**

During the two-day conference, communication experts working for anti-fraud public organisations discussed a range of pertinent issues, including the more than ever necessary protection of funds needed to ensure Ukraine's economic and military resilience, as well as examples of communication on enforcing EU sanctions against Russia, ways of using communication in support of national anti-fraud strategies and communication activities around projects financed by the Union Anti-Fraud Programme - a line of EU funding managed by OLAF to support national authorities in their fight against fraud by covering in particular technical support, operational support for investigations, specialised training and research activities.

Participants also formulated a new action plan for 2023 and the meeting concluded with a *tour de table* seeking members' views on how to raise awareness among the public of the anti-fraud and anti-corruption actions.

Speaking after the conference Deputy Director General of OLAF Andreas Schwarz, said *"Meetings such as the OAFCN are crucial gatherings which helps build communications and cooperation among a range of organisations across the EU. Communication and cooperation are vital components in the fight against fraud and it is important that they take place at every level. The meeting is also a chance for participants to learn from each other which leads to more effective and targeted messaging from anti-fraud organisations and institutions in the EU."*

### **Background:**

The meeting was an annual event organised by the OLAF Anti-Fraud Communicators' Network (OAFCN). The OAFCN was created over a decade ago and is a unique cross-European network of communication experts working on anti-fraud issues. The Network brings together Communication Officers and Spokespersons from OLAF's operational partners in the Member States (i.e. customs, police, law enforcement agencies, Member States' Anti-Fraud Coordination Services (AFCOS) and prosecutors' offices). It plays a pivotal role in communicating the threat of fraud to the public across all EU Member States, as well as the joint efforts made by national and European authorities to combat it. It is a key platform for raising awareness and reaching out to various audiences on fraud issues.

The objectives of OAFCN is to prevent and deter fraud through a permanent dialogue, reinforced cooperation, and joint communication initiatives bringing together communicators from all the European bodies dealing with anti-fraud issues.

**OLAF mission, mandate and competences:**

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

Once OLAF has completed its investigation, it is for the competent EU and national authorities to examine and decide on the follow-up of OLAF's recommendations. All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a competent national or EU court of law.

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