

## **OLAF, EU Member States and neighbouring countries meet to fight fraud**

**The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) held for the first time a joint conference bringing together national anti-fraud coordination services (AFCOS) from the EU's Member States and their counterparts in candidate and potential candidate countries. Around 100 representatives from the EU and beyond met in Brussels on 4 and 5 October 2022 to enhance cooperation as well as to exchange good practices.**

In his welcoming speech, OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said: *"Fraudsters do not have much regard for borders or jurisdiction. OLAF connects the dots of these multi-jurisdiction frauds in order to see the bigger picture and take action to end them. However, we would not be able to do that without the help of our partners in the Member States and in candidate and potential candidate countries."*

The conference – under the title: "Fighting fraud together" – comes at a topical moment for the protection of the EU's budget. Several risks exist, OLAF Director-General Itälä stressed: a cost-of-living crisis, an energy crisis, and a drastic rise in digital fraud that has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds of billions will be invested between now and 2027 under the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

OLAF and the AFCOS are working towards the same objective and share the same interests: to protect the financial interests of EU and interests of citizens to ensure that they can fully benefit from the opportunities provided by EU fund, in the EU and beyond. For OLAF, the cooperation with enlargement beneficiaries has always been a priority. Building this cooperation is an investment into the future of the EU.

One of the main topics of the conference was how to create a closer and more efficient cooperation between OLAF and the Member States, to protect the RRF money – and not only - from fraudsters. The world has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, so has the nature of fraud. OLAF has observed an increase in frauds taking place across multiple jurisdictions. The same fraud can start in a non-Member State, pass through a candidate country and end up in an EU Member State. Fraudsters do not respect borders and the rise of digital fraud has helped make these cross-border frauds more prevalent.

The numerous examples exchanged during the conference clearly showed the need of the whole anti-fraud community to act together, both at EU and national level. In order to achieve this outcome of more cohesion, sharing accurate and up-to-date information and data is vital.

Formal roundtables and informal discussions have laid the foundations for more investigative and policy cooperation between national authorities and OLAF as well as between different countries. Other topics discussed included recent changes to the EU's anti-fraud landscape, the reporting of irregularities, national anti-fraud strategies, OLAF financial support to national authorities, tools for intelligence analysis, information exchanges and mutual support during investigations. Adapting to a changing environment to protect taxpayers' money is a process that will continue beyond the event, OLAF and AFCOS representatives concluded.

The EU's Member States were represented at the conference, as well as third – candidate and potential candidate – countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. National authorities are at the forefront when it comes to protecting European taxpayers' money from fraud, within the EU and beyond.

## **Background**

EU Member States are required to designate an anti-fraud coordination service (AFCOS) in accordance with Article 12a of Regulation 883/2013 to facilitate effective cooperation and exchange of information, including information of an operational nature, with OLAF.

Member States are autonomous in deciding where to best place the AFCOS within their national administrative structure. The placement of AFCOS should provide for its visibility and importance in relation to other relevant authorities in the field of protection of the EU's financial interests. Some Member States placed their AFCOS either within the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Interior; others established it as an independent Government's service.

More information is available [on OLAF's website](#).

### **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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