

OLAF's fight against fraud continues amid COVID-19 crisis

As people and organisations in all corners of the world are grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, fraudsters regrettably continue their illegal activities, sometimes also unscrupulously taking advantage of the situation. The coronavirus outbreak has offered new opportunities for fraudsters, for example, as demand has soared for medical, personal protection and hygiene products. Based in a locked-down Brussels, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) nevertheless remains fully operational and committed to fighting fraud in order to protect the financial and other interests of the European Union, and its citizens.

With most of the staff of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) working remotely, the Office continues to deliver results. Since **16 March 2020**:

- **48 new selection cases** were opened based on information of investigative interest.
- **82 selections were closed** resulting in 23 new investigations, in 5 coordination cases and in 54 dismissed cases. During the first three months of 2020, OLAF opened a total of 104 new investigations, which is a historical record.
- **19 investigations were completed**, out of which 12 were closed with recommendations to relevant authorities.
- **2 coordination cases were concluded.**
- In a fast-track procedure, OLAF developed specific rules for conducting interviews during times when travelling is not recommended.
- Already on 19 March 2020, OLAF launched coordination activities spanning the world, where together with international customs authorities OLAF actively counters the illicit traffic of counterfeit products used in the fight against the COVID-19 infection. The investigation already discovered illicit trade in masks, medical devices, disinfectants, sanitisers and test kits. OLAF's initiative led to successful seizures of fake items, which demonstrates concretely the success of the European Union in the protection of its citizens and the health of all of us.

As a response to the continuously extending spread of the Coronavirus on a world-wide scale, business continuity measures were promptly initiated at the beginning of March to ensure that OLAF remains fully operational also in a situation where a majority of its staff would have to work remotely. Working closely with other European Commission services, OLAF quickly adapted its IT infrastructure and other critical processes, ensuring continuous and secure remote access of OLAF investigators and analysts to its case

management system, databases and other working tools, including all systems allowing communication via secure channels.

The operational work of OLAF was by no means stopped by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the activation of OLAF's business continuity plan, starting from Monday 16 March all staff in non-critical functions have been teleworking. The OLAF Continuity Management Team (CMT) is continuously monitoring the situation and ensuring the Office remains virtually open and active.

OLAF Director-General, Mr Ville Itälä said:

"OLAF is committed to ensure that, also in these exceptional times brought upon us by the global COVID-19 crisis, fraud is uncovered and fraudsters are brought to justice. OLAF reacted swiftly alongside other parts of the European Commission to answer promptly to the measures put in place by the Belgian authorities in response to the worsening situation. Our colleagues quickly adapted to the reality of teleworking, ensuring continuity of all operational activities. I am proud to say and show that we remain committed to fighting fraud under any circumstance, working tirelessly to protect EU citizens and our common budget against fraudsters. Despite the global health crisis, OLAF's important work continues."



How to report fraud:

Should you have any information on suspected fraud concerning EU financial interests or on misconduct of staff of the EU institutions, you can inform OLAF through the following secure web form: <https://fns.olaf.europa.eu/>.

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.

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