



EUROPEAN ANTI-FRAUD OFFICE

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## Fighting fraud together

**The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) hosted the joint conference of the national Anti-Fraud Coordination Services (AFCOS) from the EU Member States and their counterparts in candidate countries and potential candidate. Around 100 representatives met in Brussels on 15 - 16 October 2024 to exchange best practices, learn about the latest anti-fraud investigative techniques and work towards stronger cooperation.**

OLAF and the AFCOS work together towards the same objectives of protecting the financial interests of the EU and ensuring that citizens can fully benefit from the opportunities provided by EU funds, in Europe and beyond.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä stressed the importance of a strong and effective cooperation for the success of all partners in the anti-fraud architecture. *"It remains crucial that we work together like never before to protect the financial interests of the EU. Fraudsters use new technologies without any legislative or ethical limitations, they do not respect borders and their criminal activities exploit any loopholes they discover in multiple jurisdictions. That is why we, in the anti-fraud community, need to make sure that we have procedures in place to respond quickly, collectively and as efficiently as possible."*

The conference, which focussed on the theme of 'Fighting fraud together', offered participants valuable insights into the legal and operational framework that OLAF operates in. The programme addressed the shift in perspective and design needed to fight fraud in performance-based financial instruments, such as the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) and the Ukraine facility. These new instruments represent huge amounts of funds and require innovative approaches to financial controls and investigations. Nothing proves the abuse of EU funds more tangibly than bank accounts transfers. This is why the recently acquired power of OLAF to access banking data in Member States and cooperating countries is so important and has already led to success stories on how to follow the movement of money across borders.

The discussion on Artificial Intelligence illustrated concrete examples where the use of AI to generate profiles for monitoring purposes, support language processing and machine learning played a key role in complex, transnational investigations. Fraudsters use AI recklessly, free from any legislative or ethical limitations, and it is the role of anti-fraud actors to think out of the box and develop joint, fast and creative countermeasures in a challenging regulatory environment.

The conference highlighted the central role that AFCOS play in key areas such as the recovery of funds, thanks to their specific insight on debtors located in their territories.

Discussions on the PIF report and its new features and the need of Irregularity Management System (IMS) reporting to fully exploit the potential of data mining and risk scoring, also emphasised the added value that AFCOS bring in the wider fight against fraud.

During the two days, participants from Member States, as well as candidate countries and potential candidate had the unique opportunity to reflect and report on their experiences within the EU anti-fraud community, for example on investigations into double funding and conflict of interest or practical difficulties with the confidentiality of data. From this perspective, the conference confirmed once again that OLAF is stronger when it works with others and that much of the success of the fight against fraud depends on a sustained, strong and efficient cooperation with AFCOS.

## **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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