

OLAF investigations find over €1.2 billion affected by fraud and irregularities

In 2023, investigations by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) established that over €1 billion of EU taxpayers' money should be recovered from misuse. OLAF's investigators detected a further €209 million before they could be unduly spent and they closed 265 cases. The OLAF report 2023, published today, provides an insight into OLAF's main results, examples, trends and operations last year.

In addition to EU funds that had ended up in the wrong hands, OLAF followed the traces of smugglers, counterfeiters and customs fraudsters, helped enforce EU trade defence measures and sanctions in support of Ukraine, and continued to develop policies to prevent and counter evolving fraud patterns. OLAF also investigated suspicions of misconduct by staff or members of the EU's institutions.

OLAF's investigative performance in 2023:

- OLAF recommended the **recovery of €1.04 billion** to the EU budget.
- OLAF **prevented €209.4 million from being unduly spent** from the EU budget.
- OLAF closed **265 investigations**, issuing **309 recommendations** for follow-up to the relevant national and EU authorities.
- OLAF opened **190 new investigations**, following **1178 preliminary analyses** carried out by OLAF experts.
- OLAF reported **79 cases with possible criminal offences** to the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO).

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä commented: *"2023 was about fighting fraud on all fronts. This report contains numerous examples of cases where OLAF and partners have worked together to help protect the EU's financial interests, citizens, economy and rule of law."*

And alongside its independent investigative mandate, OLAF has an important policy role – in 2023, OLAF coordinated the new action plan of the European Commission's Anti-Fraud Strategy. Because we believe that prevention remains the most effective tool to tackle fraud.

As we present this report, OLAF celebrates its 25th anniversary. During that time OLAF has tracked down billions of euro that would have otherwise been lost to fraud and irregularities. It is important to stress that none of the achievements in the report, or over the last 25 years, would have been possible without the work performed by OLAF

staff. Our most valuable asset are our investigators, IT experts, forensic analysts, data analysts, lawyers and legal experts, policy experts."

OLAF looked into allegations of collusion, manipulation of procurement procedures, conflicts of interest, and inflated invoices. The trend of more fraud and irregularities being committed digitally also continued. Examples of OLAF's investigations to protect EU taxpayers' money span across all areas of EU expenditure, from regional funding to agriculture and research. OLAF investigated in all EU Member States and in third countries.

On the customs side, OLAF detected attempts to abuse customs transit procedures, evasion of anti-dumping duties, origin fraud, undervaluation of goods. OLAF has also worked with partners to stop trafficking of various kinds: fake medicines, half a million counterfeit and potentially dangerous toys, 6 million litres of illicit wine, beer and spirits, thousands of tonnes of illicit waste. In 2023 OLAF was presented with an international award by the United Nations and the World Customs Organization in recognition of the work in targeting the illegal trade in climate damaging F-gases.

Last year OLAF also closed 44 investigations into irregular behaviour by staff or members of the EU's institutions. These investigations ensure that everyone is held accountable to the highest standards of conduct, as EU citizens rightfully expect, and help protect the EU's reputation as a whole.

OLAF works closely with its partners in fellow EU organisations, in national authorities in the EU and in third countries, and with international organisations. Connecting the dots is key as fraud does not stop at borders and jurisdictions. OLAF's network of partners reaches all corners of the globe and grows every year – new agreements have been signed in 2023 with authorities in the U.S., in Ukraine, and with the World Bank Group.

The OLAF report 2023 is available on [OLAF's website](#), in its full interactive version and in its short version.

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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