

## **OLAF joins EU-wide Operation Sentinel to safeguard EU recovery funds**

**15 October marks the launch of an EU-wide operation codenamed Sentinel, aiming to safeguard the EU's post-pandemic recovery efforts. The operation, coordinated by Europol, sees OLAF join forces with Europol, Eurojust, the EPPO and 19 Member States to ensure that the funds made available under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) are spent in the interest of EU citizens and not lost to fraudsters.**

[Operation Sentinel](#) is a new framework operation that will gather together the efforts of the EU and member states authorities in order to stop criminal attempts to exploit the NextGenerationEU recovery funds. The operation aims in particular to coordinate and provide any necessary operational support to actors conducting criminal and administrative investigations targeting criminal infiltration and fraud offenses affecting the RRF.

Ville Itälä, OLAF Director-General said, *"OLAF is proud to take part in Operational Sentinel on behalf of the European Commission. This action is an excellent example of EU cooperation and coordination at its best. Not only will the collective efforts of all partners involved ensure the protection of EU taxpayers' money, but the operation will also constitute an extraordinary opportunity for gathering and sharing of best practices, risk indicators, intelligence and other strategic data to support fraud prevention measures."*

In addition to its own administrative investigations to ensure financial recovery of misappropriated EU funds, OLAF has a key role in supporting the European Commission and national authorities in the development and implementation of sound fraud prevention and detection policies. OLAF will use its expertise to assist with the analysis of intelligence to understand fraud patterns and risk indicators involved, and share with the participating partners.

### **Background:**

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is a key initiative of the European Commission amounting to €672.5 billion in loans and grants to fight the economic and social impact of the Covid-19 crisis, to support EU citizens and businesses. OLAF has been strongly involved in protecting the RRF from fraud since the adoption of the facility, closely following the development of the anti-fraud provisions included in the legal act that created the facility.

OLAF has also been actively engaged in the screening of the national plans submitted by the Member States, assessing whether the requirements on control and anti-fraud measures are met.

Paying particular attention to the control and audit mechanisms, which will be under the responsibility of Member States directly, so that they are solid enough to ensure sound financial management and prevent fraud.

**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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