

25 years fighting fraud

OLAF marks 25th anniversary of its operations

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) began its operations on 1 June 1999. 25 years later, OLAF has closed thousands of investigations and hunted down billions of euro that had been stolen from European taxpayers. The world has changed deeply, and the fight against fraud has also evolved.

Since 1999, OLAF's investigators have uncovered around 16 billion euro that would otherwise have been lost to irregularities or fraud. On top of that, OLAF has been investigating cases of misconduct by EU staff or members, detecting smuggling networks, tracking down counterfeit products and developing policies that prevent fraud from happening in the first place.

OLAF has closed a total of over 6000 investigations over the past 25 years, with recommendations for further action that range from recovering money or improving administrative checks to launching criminal proceedings or initiating disciplinary measures.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä commented:

"Today is both a moment to glance back with pride at our achievements and a time to look forward into the future. We have shown that investing in the fight against fraud pays off – for every euro that OLAF's operations cost, we tracked down at least 10 euro to be recovered to the EU's budget. And this is without counting all the money that we have prevented from being diverted in the first place.

OLAF has now spent a quarter of a century protecting not just billions of tax money belonging to EU citizens but also their rights, safety, health, jobs and economy. We have cracked international schemes that were stealing money from agriculture, infrastructure, health, education, research, energy, the environment and digitisation. We have intercepted fake shampoos, unsafe toys, dodgy pills, dangerous gases and pesticides, adulterated honey, illicit waste, endangered species. We have averted scams at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have tracked down shady operators that were evading customs duties and VAT, and circumventing anti-dumping duties, harming European businesses and jobs. We have investigated inside the EU's institutions to ensure that everyone was accountable to the same rules and standards.

The result is that we have accumulated experience, knowledge, very diverse staff from every corner of the EU, a network of partners that spans from national authorities in the EU to every other corner of the world. Today is a milestone for OLAF as much as it is for European citizens and for all our partner authorities that create Europe's anti-fraud grid. I would like to express our gratitude to them. There is no fighting fraud alone.

25 years ago, fraudsters didn't have to worry too much about cross-border investigations. They could count on hiding in the gap between one border and the next one, between the phone line of one authority and that of its neighbour. Things are very different now. OLAF has built bridges and tightened the net.

But this is no time to rest. We no longer live in the same reality we knew at the turn of the millennium. The world is much more connected today, fraud and irregularities take place behind a screen, complex financial transactions and money laundering happen in an instant, criminal networks infiltrate new sectors. Europe faces increasingly assertive global competitors and reacts with new tools – including financial ones – to protect our way of life.

It is our job to keep up even as we face the challenge of matching a more complex, increased workload with the same resources. I want the key words for OLAF's future to be: enhanced investigations through data analysis and artificial intelligence, targeted fraud prevention and strong cooperation".

More information on OLAF's work is available on the [dedicated webpage](#).

Background

The first European anti-fraud body – UCLAF – was created in 1987 as part of the Secretariat-General of the European Commission. It worked alongside national anti-fraud departments and provided the coordination and assistance needed to tackle transnational organised fraud. Following the events that led to the resignation of the Santer Commission among allegations of corruption, the need emerged for a new investigative body with stronger powers and independence.

OLAF thus took over from UCLAF in 1999, with competences that included investigations within the EU's institutions. Regulations 1073/1999 and 1074/1999 concerning investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office entered into force on 1 June 1999. The acronym OLAF comes from the name of the Office in French: *Office européen de lutte antifraude*.

OLAF's current ground legislation is Regulation 883/2013 (as amended in January 2021). OLAF is fully independent in the conduct of its investigative mandate. OLAF's central offices are in Brussels, Belgium, and its staff comes from all across the EU. OLAF staff are investigators, forensic experts, data analysts, policy experts, former law enforcement officers and former prosecutors, lawyers and legal experts. Anyone can report fraud to OLAF in any of the EU's 24 official languages.

OLAF carries out independent administrative investigations. It works closely with national authorities in EU Member States and in third countries, with international authorities, and with fellow EU key partners such as the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the European Court of Auditors, Eurojust, Europol, the EU Intellectual Property Office, or the European Ombudsman.

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 irregularities, 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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