

PRESS RELEASE No 03/2024

13 February 2024

SHIELD IV: OLAF leads action against illicit medicines

Hundreds of thousands of illicit tablets and vials were seized by customs authorities under a targeted action led by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). The enforcement action specifically targeted illicit hormonal substances, food supplements and medicines for erectile dysfunction, as part of Europol's Operation SHIELD IV.

Operation SHIELD is an annual operation that targets misused or counterfeit medicines, doping substances, illegal food or sport supplements and counterfeit COVID medical supplies. For the fourth year in a row, OLAF participated and led a targeted action as part of the operation, coordinating the activities and cooperation of customs authorities of 14 EU Member States.

During the course of the action, national customs authorities detected illicit medicines mainly sold online and transported in small parcels by post and air courier shipments. They also intercepted small shipments of illicit medicines concealed in baggage and in passengers cars. A total of 625 170 tablets, 229 525 packages, 27 030 vials, 547.27 kg and 20.49 litres of different medicines were intercepted. Among the seized items were 186 754 tablets, 193 759 packages and 350.32 kg of erectile dysfunction medications, as well as 21 888 tablets and 1016 vials of anabolics.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said: *"It is regrettable to see how traffickers put people's health at risk in order to make a quick profit. We have to join forces to keep European citizens safe. By working together, OLAF, Europol and national customs and police authorities have protected European consumers from hundreds of thousands of dubious tablets and vials."*

The operation was carried out over six months, from April to October 2023. The participating countries in the targeted action were: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

For more information on Operation SHIELD IV, please see Europol's press release [[url](#)]

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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