

## **Annual report: OLAF investigations uncover over €600 million affected by fraud and irregularities**

**In 2022 the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) protected €600 million of EU taxpayers' money by recommending the recovery of over €426 million to the EU budget from fraud and irregularities, and by safeguarding a further €200 million. OLAF also stopped a number of smuggling, counterfeiting and customs fraud schemes, helped enforce EU trade defence measures, and continued to devise policies to prevent and counter evolving fraud patterns. As every year, OLAF also investigated suspicions of misconduct by staff and members of EU institutions. In total, OLAF concluded over 250 cases last year.**

The OLAF Report 2022 published today provides insight into the main trends and operations last year, ranging from the fight against counterfeiting and smuggling to the protection of EU funds – including the Recovery and Resilience Facility – and fraud prevention mechanisms to protect EU financial assistance for Ukraine. For the first time, the report is presented in an interactive virtual format.

OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä emphasised: *"OLAF's accumulated knowledge, expertise and operations provide tangible results – we protect both the EU budget and EU citizens. The protection of EU taxpayers' money for infrastructure and digitalisation, the seizure of 531 million illicitly traded cigarettes, an international action against adulterated honey, and the recovery of almost €3 billion to the EU budget from a customs undervaluation case are just a few examples of the spectrum of OLAF's impact.*

*Prevention remains the most effective tool to tackle fraud. OLAF strives to ensure that the EU's financial assistance and investments in Member States and third countries are spent as intended. We strongly believe that cooperation is key to our success and in 2022 OLAF has intensified its engagement with national authorities, international organisations and EU partners. OLAF's ability to join the dots for multiple players and to provide the bigger picture remains our unique and distinguishing quality that adds value to the fight against fraud in the European Union and beyond."*

### **OLAF'S investigative performance in 2022:**

- OLAF concluded 256 investigations, issuing 275 recommendations to the relevant national and EU authorities.
- OLAF recommended the recovery of €426.8 million to the EU budget, and prevented the undue spending of €197.9 million.
- OLAF opened 192 new investigations, following 1,017 preliminary analyses carried out by OLAF experts.

- OLAF reported 71 cases with possible criminal offences to the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), 16 of which on behalf of the European Commission.

### **Protecting EU funds**

Similarly to previous years, OLAF investigations on the spending of EU funds involved allegations of collusion, manipulation of procurement procedures, conflicts of interest, and inflated invoices. Some increases in fraud committed digitally have also confirmed a pattern that OLAF observed in recent years. In 2022, OLAF set up an *ad hoc* expert group focusing on the anti-fraud IT tools for the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and started investigating cases of potential misuse of RRF funding.

### **Stopping counterfeiters and smugglers**

The fight against counterfeiting and smuggling continues to be a central part of OLAF's operations. In 2022, OLAF co-organised or provided support to several joint customs operations and other operational actions. These actions helped ensure that millions of counterfeit and dangerous items were seized before they could be used. Some examples include: fake medicines, counterfeit and potentially dangerous toys, 531 million illicitly traded cigarettes and 14.7 million litres of illicit wine, beer and spirits.

### **Supporting Ukraine and enforcing the sanctions against Russia**

2022 witnessed Russia's invasion of Ukraine. OLAF has long-standing cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities both on the expenditure side of the EU budget (protection of EU funds) and on the revenue side (customs cooperation). Since the beginning of the war, OLAF has been offering assistance to Ukraine's anti-fraud agencies, to help strengthen and improve the country's structures to deal with fraud and corruption and to protect current and future EU funding. OLAF has also played an important role in countering the circumvention of sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia and Belarus following the invasion of Ukraine, as further explained in the OLAF report 2022.

### **Fighting misconduct**

Even one case of irregular or fraudulent behaviour by EU staff or members of the EU institutions would be one too many. EU citizens rightfully expect the highest standards of conduct from their institutions, members and staff. OLAF closed 38 investigations last year into fraudulent or irregular behaviour by staff and members of the EU's institutions. These cases ensure that EU taxpayers' money is properly spent and, by ensuring the highest standards of conduct, help defend the reputation of the EU as a whole.

The OLAF report 2022 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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