

OLAF's 25th Anniversary



Thomas Wahl

News

On 1 June 2024, OLAF celebrated its 25th anniversary. On 1 June 1999, Regulations (EC) No 1073/1999 and (Euratom) No 1074/1999 concerning investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office entered into force. They created a new independent body with strengthened powers to investigate fraud and irregularities damaging the EU budget. OLAF replaced UCLAF - a unit within the Secretariat-General of the European Commission. UCLAF worked alongside national anti-fraud departments and provided the coordination and assistance needed to tackle transnational organised fraud. The need for a new institutional architecture in combating and preventing fraud at the EU level emanated from the resignation of the Santer Commission which was confronted with corruption allegations.

Over the past 25 years, OLAF has closed a total of over 6000 investigations and uncovered around €16 million of irregularities and fraud. OLAF's main activities include:

- Detecting smuggling networks that evade customs duties and VAT or circumvent EU anti-dumping duties;
- Tracing fraudsters in a wide range of areas, such as agriculture, infrastructure, health, education, research, energy, the environment and digitisation;
- Tracking down counterfeit products, including toys, medicines, food and beverages, and cigarettes causing harm to European consumers;
- Uncovering scams in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Investigating misconduct by EU staff or MEPs thus ensuring accountability and trust in the European institutions;
- Issuing recommendations in view of the recovery of money, the launch of criminal proceedings, and the initiation of disciplinary actions;
- Giving expertise on anti-fraud legislation and strategies;
- Developing policies for the prevention of fraud.

On the occasion of the Office's 25th anniversary, OLAF Director-General *Ville Itälä* emphasised that OLAF was the first central entity in Brussels that has succeeded in establishing networks with authorities in the EU Member States and third countries and building up close cooperative relationships with international agencies and other relevant EU bodies and agencies, thus hampering criminals to operate across borders. He also said:

"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. [...] It is our job to keep up even as we face

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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."

A [dedicated website](#) on OLAF's 25 anniversary provides an overview of the key milestones in the Office's development and the Union's fight against fraud. For the 10th anniversary of OLAF → [special eucrim issue 3-4/2008](#).

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