

Successful Crackdown on Pharmaceutical Crime (Operation SHIELD VI)

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News

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On 25 February 2026, OLAF and Europol informed of the [results of the joint law enforcement operation SHIELD VI](#). Now in its sixth year, this operation resulted in the prosecution of over 3,350 individuals, and the seizure of illicit medicines and doping substances worth over €33 million. Authorities from 30 countries, supported by OLAF, the EU Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), Frontex, INTERPOL, and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), carried out the joint operation between April and November 2025

The operation focused on counterfeit and falsified medicines, the trafficking of anabolic-androgenic steroids and other doping substances, illegal food and sport supplements, and counterfeit sanitary products and medical devices. A total of 907 investigations were launched, 43 organised crime groups were investigated, and 66 websites were taken down.

Europol observed the following trends as a result of Operation SHIELD VI:

- An increased threat of poisoning and overdose due to abnormal medicine consumption outside a medical framework, such as the proliferation of counterfeit semaglutide-based products used as fat burners and the increasing availability of fake medicines containing potent synthetic substances.
- Criminals exploit the growing demand for medicines by these behaviours. Europe faces challenges due to the misuse of prescription and over-the-counter medicines for non-therapeutic purposes as well as the proliferation of online trafficking channels, particularly through unregulated websites.
- Social media and online marketplaces, both on the surface web and on the dark web, continue to be central to the trade of counterfeit pharmaceuticals, as they provide anonymity and target large audiences.
- Criminal networks typically operate one or more underground laboratories where they manufacture illicit pharmaceuticals and doping substances using raw ingredients.

Giving examples of operational success stories, Europol concluded that a multi-faceted approach is essential to effectively combat pharmaceutical crime. This approach should integrate health regulation, criminal justice cooperation, and public awareness campaigns.

OLAF Director-General, [Petr Klement](#), emphasised the critical role of cross-border cooperation and interinstitutional cooperation with Europol in tackling counterfeit goods before they reach consumers: "The trade in illegal medicines represents a persistent and evolving threat, not only to public health but also to the integrity of the legal supply chain. By combining efforts, OLAF, Europol, and national customs authorities have safeguarded European consumers from dangerous health products".

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