

18 June 2024

# **Consolidated Annual Activity Report**

## **2023**

# Europol Public Information

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### Acronyms and abbreviations

ABAC	Accrual Based ACcounting
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
DPF	Data Protection Function
DSC	Data Subject Categorisation
EC3	European Cybercrime Centre
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECTC	European Counter Terrorism Centre
EDPS	European Data Protection Supervisor
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFEC	European Financial and Economic Crime Centre
EIS	Europol Information System
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats
EMSC	European Migrant Smuggling Centre
EPE	Europol Platform for Experts
EPPO	European Public Prosecutor's Office
ESOCC	European Serious and Organised Crime Centre
EUIPO	European Union Intellectual Property Office
EUIRU	European Union Referral Unit
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HVT	High Value Target
IAC	Internal Audit Capability
IAS	Internal Audit Service
ICS	Internal Control Systems
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
JPSG	Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol
OAC	Operational and Analysis Centre
OLAF	European Anti-Fraud Office
OTF	Operational Task Force
OSINT	Open Source Intelligence
QUEST	QUery Europol SysTEms
SIENA	Secure Information Exchange Network Application
SNE	Seconded National Expert
WCO	World Customs Organization

### Management Board's analysis and assessment

The Management Board of Europol (MB) takes note of the Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) for the financial year 2023, submitted by the Executive Director of Europol in accordance with Article 16(5)(g) of the Europol Regulation and Article 48 of the Financial Regulation applicable to Europol.

In analysing and assessing the CAAR 2023, the MB notes that this Report contains a comprehensive account of the activities carried out by Europol in implementing its mandate during 2023.

The MB praises the Agency for its achievements in the first full year of implementation of the Europol Regulation as amended in 2022 and for the activities performed in connection to other legislative developments of crucial importance such as EU Interoperability and the Directive on Information Exchange.

- With regard to EU Interoperability and travel intelligence, the MB is pleased with the successful establishment of the new Integrated Operational Services Unit, tasked to provide essential operational services to internal and external stakeholders.
- Pertaining to the Directive on Information Exchange, the MB praises the activities carried out by Europol to support its implementation by the Member States and the Schengen Associated Countries, for instance the successful Topic Oriented Workshops initiative.

The MB commends the Agency for the overall progress made in implementing its Strategy, which was renewed in June 2023 by adding a new strategic priority of key operational importance, consisting in bringing relevant partners together for cross-border cooperation and joint action. The MB welcomes the setup of the Strategy Implementation Roadmap to ease and support the fulfilment of all strategic priorities in close coordination with the Member States.

The MB praises Europol for its achievements in a year which continued to be marked by major international crises. In particular, the MB notes the intense support provided by Europol to Ukraine, other third countries, and Member States in relation to the Russian war in Ukraine. In this context, the MB takes positive note of the following important steps:

- In October 2023, Europol became a participant in the Joint Investigation Team on alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine.
- Further, an Operational Task Force (OTF) comprised of OSINT experts from different countries, aiming at providing targeted support to ongoing investigations into war crimes, started its activities in November 2023.

With regard to other areas of Europol's work, the MB notes the significant results achieved in executing the annual Work Programme. Such results have further strengthened Europol's prominent role as the EU criminal information hub, leading centre offering agile operational support, and key Agency in the EU internal security architecture.

The MB wishes to highlight, for instance:

- The significant overall increase in Europol's operational delivery: the number of supported operations grew further in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching a total of 3,155, while the Agency maintained a strong focus on high-impact investigations leading to the establishment of 27 new OTFs.
- The number of SIENA messages grew to a significant 1.8M, including the messages exchanged by Third Parties, at an increasing level compared to 2022.

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- Further, almost 3,000 competent authorities were connected to SIENA at the end of the year, illustrating the future role of SIENA as the 'by default' EU communication channel for law enforcement authorities.
- The increase in the number of searches in the EIS and through QUEST, leading to more than 14M, a significant growth (6.5%) compared to 2022, although slightly below the yearly target, and the increase in the number of objects related to terrorism.
- The successful deployment of PERCI (EU Platform on Illegal Content Online) on 3 July 2023 thanks to the effective handling of issues relating to contractual arrangements and to the implementation of the recommendations issued by the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS). Further, the positive performance of the platform and its increasing use by Member States, making PERCI a future-proof collaborative system for the transmission of referrals and removal orders for illegal online content.
- The positive performance of the Europol operational centres, as also illustrated in the overview of "Notable operational results" provided for each centre. For instance:
  - o The number of operations supported by each of the Europol centres exceeded the yearly targets and the 2022 results.
  - o Overall, the users' satisfaction with the operational support delivered by Europol reached a higher level compared to last year and exceeded the yearly targets. Such results illustrate Europol's success in fulfilling its core mandate and the steadily increasing trust of the national competent authorities in its support capabilities.
  - o While in some specific areas the satisfaction levels with operational support and analysis were slightly lower than in 2022, they significantly increased or remained stable in others. Further, the number of strategic analysis reports grew compared to 2022 and exceeded the yearly target.

Pertaining to EU Interoperability, besides the establishment of the new Integrated Operational Services Unit, the MB commends Europol for the progress achieved in implementing its Roadmap, despite the re-scheduling of the official agenda impacting on the Agency's own planning.

- In this context, the MB notes that Europol was punctually ready for the entry into operation of the Schengen Information System (SIS) Recast, an important step enabling the Agency to perform searches in SIS with dactyloscopic data.

Further, the MB acknowledges the progress achieved by Europol in implementing its External Relations Strategy 2021-2024 and encourages the Agency to pursue preparations for the future External Strategy 2025+ in close coordination with the Member States.

Pertaining to budget implementation and human resources management, the MB takes note of the following elements:

- With a regular budget of € 207.2M in 2023, Europol reached a commitment rate of 99.8%, far above the yearly target (95%). Further, the payment rate (89%) almost reached the target (90%) and was significantly higher than last year.
- Thanks to important efforts and to an effective root cause analysis, the implementation of the Europol budget significantly improved compared to last year, as illustrated by the 1.75% budget outturn rate for 2023, far below the 2022 results (4.7%) and the 5% ceiling.
- The percentage of late payments represents in value 2.2% of the total payments: although the 2022 percentage was slightly lower, the 2023 results remain well below the ceiling (5%).

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- The vacancy rate reached 1.7%. Although this rate is still below the ceiling (2%), it has more than doubled since last year (0.6%).
- With regard to gender representation, the percentage of female staff was 34%, illustrating a slight increase from the previous year (32%), with a number of female staff in Head of Unit and equivalent or higher positions amounting to 22%, also higher than last year (18%).

With regard to audit management, discharge, and Internal Control, the MB notes the positive results achieved by Europol, as in previous years. Amongst others:

- The European Parliament granted discharge to the Executive Director for the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2021.
- Europol implemented 86% of the critical or very important Internal Audit Capability (IAC) recommendations planned to be implemented during 2023.

The MB commends Europol for its intense commitment in following up to the EDPS supervision. While such activities continued to be resource-intensive, they resulted in positive outcomes illustrating Europol's full compliance with data protection requirements. The MB also takes note of Europol's successful endeavour to keep a constructive and regular dialogue with the EDPS throughout the year.

Further, the MB congratulates Europol on other important governance-related achievements:

- The Europol Fundamental Rights Officer, designated by the MB in December 2022, took up duties in January 2023.
- The obtention, in June 2023, of the award for Good Administration by the European Ombudsman for the NextGenerationEU-Law Enforcement Forum.

The MB encourages Europol to:

- Pursue its efforts in implementing its amended legal framework, for instance with regard to Joint Analysis, in order to strengthen and optimise its operational capabilities in support of national law enforcement authorities.
- Keep up its efforts in the area of Biometrics, not only in relation to EU Interoperability, but also in its core operational support activities, as well as in the endeavours pertaining to Research & Innovation.
- Maintain its outstanding governance and management standards, for instance by reducing the vacancy rate and by continuing improving the budget outturn, as well as the staff gender representation.
- Continue to monitor its greenhouse emissions in order to reach the targets of its Environmental Vision 2030.

The MB congratulates the Executive Director of Europol, Ms Catherine De Bolle, on the significant results achieved by the Agency in 2023, as well as on her initiative to review the Europol Strategy 2020+, leading to the new Strategy "Delivering security in partnership", which has the potential to bring significant added value to the operations of the Agency and of its Member States.

In this context, the MB wishes to emphasise that it is crucial to secure Europol's budgetary needs by providing it with adequate resources, now and for the years to come.

As a matter of fact, Europol will continue to operate in a complex geopolitical context, amidst technological developments creating continuous challenges and opportunities to law enforcement authorities, and evolving global security threats that, more and more, make the internal and external dimension of the Union's Security closely intertwined.

Furthermore, Europol is called to play an active role in the implementation of several EU legislative instruments set up to enhance the protection of the Union's Security and to step up

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law enforcement cooperation. For instance, EU Interoperability, the new Prüm II Regulation, the Directive on Information Exchange, the Digital Services Act, and several other instruments directly impacting Europol's activities.

Therefore, notwithstanding the current and foreseeable budgetary constraints for the EU and its Member States, the MB calls upon the EU budgetary authority to resort to any possible option to ensure appropriate and sustainable financial and human resources to Europol.

Making sure that the Agency may continue to support effectively the national law enforcement authorities in fighting serious organised crime and terrorism shall remain a key priority, since the very security of our citizens is at stake.

To conclude on the CAAR, the MB takes note that the Executive Director has no critical issues to report, which would affect the presentation of the annual accounts for the financial year 2023 to the discharge authority.

The MB attaches its analysis and assessment to the CAAR 2023 for submission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the European Court of Auditors, the national parliaments and the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group, in accordance with Articles 11(1)(c) and 51(3)(d) of the Europol Regulation, and Article 48(2) of the Financial Regulation applicable to Europol.

For the Management Board,



**Peter De Buyscher**

Chairperson

18 June 2024

### Executive Summary

#### Europol Strategy

- The renewed Europol Strategy “Delivering security in partnership” was endorsed by the MB in June 2023. The updated strategy builds further on the five strategic priorities of the Strategy 2020+, which remain relevant, and adds one additional priority, i.e. to “bring the relevant partners together for cross-border cooperation and joint action”, aimed at strengthening the role of Europol in bringing relevant partners together in international law enforcement cooperation.
- A Strategy Implementation Roadmap was subsequently developed – as in previous years, its implementation will be monitored by the Strategy Implementation Steering Committee.

#### Operational delivery

- Europol accepted **107,856 operational contributions** in 2023 and supported **3,155 operations**.
- The speed of **SIENA first line response** averaged at 4.2 days in 2023, for a number of 21,096. The **SIRENE office** received 5,351 SIENA messages, with a response time of 1.5 days.
- During the reporting period, Europol coordinated **453 Action Days**, which led to **5,379 arrests**, **1,066 victims or witnesses safeguarded** and over **€ 1.4 billion** worth of cash, cryptocurrency and assets **seized**.
- In 2023, Europol established 27 **Operational Task Forces (OTFs)**. Out of these, 15 were established by ESOCC, six by ECTC, and three each by EC3 and EFECC. Europol supported 33 JITs during the year.
- The number of **operational reports** produced by Europol in 2023 was **23,012**. This number includes 275 Operational Analysis Reports and 14,407 Cross Match Reports and SIENA hit notifications. Europol also produced **34 Strategic Analysis Reports** during the year.
- A new **Integrated Operational Services Unit** was established in the Operational and Analysis Centre, with a focus on interoperability and travel intelligence, combining also expertise on biometric technologies.

#### Core Operational Information capabilities

- The **availability of core operational systems** reached an average of 99.6% during the year.
- Almost **1.8M SIENA messages** were exchanged in 2023. 21% of the SIENA messages received by Europol contained structured data. More than **2,950 Competent Authorities** from MS and TP were **connected to SIENA** at the end of the year.
- During the reporting period, **more than 14M searches** were performed in **EIS and QUEST**, over **1.5M large files** were exchanged via the **Large File Exchange (LFE)**, and **14,825** unique visitors connected to the **Europol Platform for Experts (EPE)**.
- On 19 October 2023, the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council endorsed the new high-level roadmap for the **Interoperability Agenda** at EU level. Despite the delays in the

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developments at EU level, Europol continued making good progress on a number of projects, which are carried out in parallel.

- The implementation of **PERCI** (EU Platform on Illegal Content Online) was finalised in the first half of the year, and the system was launched on 3 July.

### Financial and Human resources

- **Europol's budget** amounted to € 207.2M. The **commitment rate** was 99.8% or € 206.7M, while the overall **payment rate** was 89% or € 181.7M.
- The **carry over to 2023** came to a total of € 33M; the final implementation rate of the carry over was 89%.
- In 2023, Europol made a total of 4,055 payments.
- The **vacancy rate** at year-end was 1.7%.
- At the end of 2023, the percentage of **female staff** was **34%**; the percentage of female staff members in Head of Unit and equivalent or higher positions was 22%.

### Audit Management and Internal Control

- The **European Parliament**, based on recommendation by the **Council**, **granted discharge** to the Executive Director for the implementation of the budget for the **financial year 2021**.
- The **European Court of Auditors (ECA)** issued its overall assurance statement, setting out a positive opinion in relation to the **reliability** of the **2022 final annual accounts**, as well as the **legality and regularity** of the underlying financial transactions in all material aspects.
- Europol implemented **86% of the critical or very important Internal Audit Capability (IAC) recommendations** planned to be implemented during 2023. There were no critical issues raised by the Internal Audit Service (IAS), nor any material observations by the ECA. The European Ombudsman did not identify instances of maladministration at Europol.
- Europol assessed the **effectiveness** of its **Internal Control System (ICS)** for the year 2023 and concluded that the **internal control components operated together in an integrated manner**. The **overall cost of controls** in 2023 represented **2.2% of the established revenue**.

### Introduction

#### *Europol's mission*

Europol is the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation and its main goal is to help achieve a safer Europe for the benefit of all EU citizens by supporting law enforcement authorities through the exchange of information, analysis and a number of other operational support products and services. Europol's mission is to support the Member States in preventing and combating all forms of serious international and organised crime, cybercrime and terrorism.

Europol, with its headquarters in The Hague (The Netherlands), works closely with law enforcement agencies in the EU Member States (MS) and in other non-EU partner states.

The Agency uses its unique information capabilities and the expertise of its staff to identify and track the most dangerous criminal and terrorist networks in Europe. This has led to the disruption of many criminal and terrorist networks, to the arrest of dangerous criminals, to the recovery of millions of euro in criminal proceeds, and to the saving from harm of hundreds of victims, including children trafficked for sexual exploitation. Europol also acts as a major centre of expertise in key areas of law enforcement and as the European centre for strategic intelligence on serious and organised crime.

#### *Legal Basis*

This report covers the period from **1 January to 31 December 2023** and presents the progress made to achieve the objectives deriving from Europol's Strategy through the implementation of the 2023 Annual Work Programme<sup>1</sup>. An overview of the budget implementation and human resources, audits, risks and internal controls management activities are also included in this report.

This Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) has been prepared following the guidelines provided by the European Commission<sup>2</sup> and it is submitted on behalf of the Executive Director to the Management Board for assessment, in accordance with article 16 (5)(g) and 51 (3) (d) of the **Europol Regulation** and article 48 of the **Financial Regulation** applicable to Europol.

According to article 11 (1)(c) of the Europol Regulation, this report shall be adopted by the Management Board which shall send it, with its assessment, by 1 July 2024 to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Auditors and the national parliaments. Europol shall transmit the CAAR to the Joint Parliamentary Supervisory Group (JPSG) in accordance with article 51 (3)(d).

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<sup>1</sup> Included in Europol's Programming Document (PD) 2023-2025.

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission on the strengthening of the governance of Union Bodies under Article 70 of the Financial Regulation 2018/1046 and on the guidelines for the Single Programming Document and the Consolidated Annual Activity Report, 20 April 2020, C(2020) 2297 final, Annex 2.

### Part I. Achievements of the year

#### 1.1. Multi-Annual Strategic Priorities

The Europol Strategy 2020+ has guided Europol through a number of substantial internal and external challenges and developments since its adoption by the Management Board in December 2018. The changing and dynamic environment of Europol, an amended legal framework, and several new policy and legislative developments led to a revision of the Strategy 2020+ in order to have a future direction that is tuned to the new environment and offers the organisation and its stakeholders a clear perspective of the intended way ahead.

This revision was performed in 2022 and early 2023 following several consultations with Member States, Europol's Management Board and its Working Groups, the HENUs and Europol's management, resulting in the **endorsement of the renewed Europol Strategy "Delivering security in partnership"<sup>3</sup> by the Management Board in June 2023.**

The updated Strategy builds further on the five strategic priorities of the Strategy 2020+, which remain relevant, and adds an additional priority aimed at addressing the increased complexity of law enforcement cooperation at EU level, and strengthening the role of Europol in bringing relevant partners together for international cooperation.

As a result, the following strategic priorities will continue guiding Europol's work to further improve its performance and to better address the operational needs of the Member States and the security threats they are facing:



Be the EU criminal information hub, including for data acquisition



Deliver agile, real-time operational support



Be a platform for European policing solutions



Bring the relevant partners together for cross-border cooperation and joint action



Be at the forefront of law enforcement innovation and research



Be the model EU organisation for law enforcement cooperation

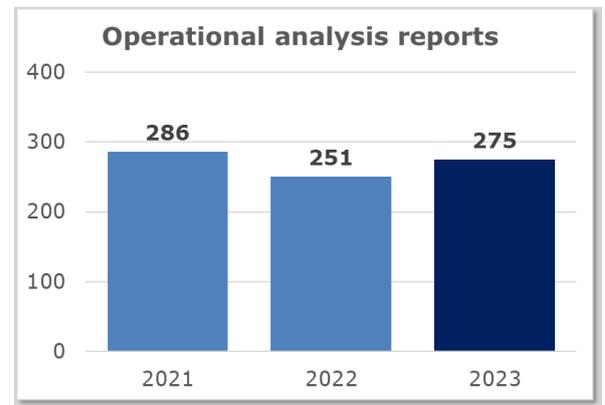
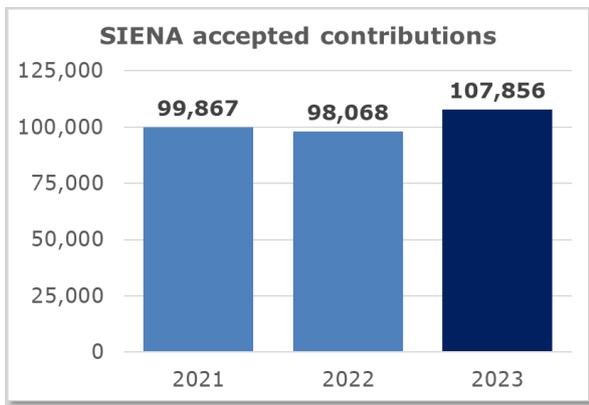
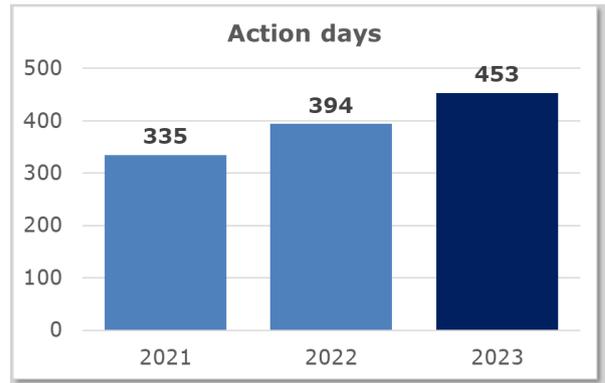
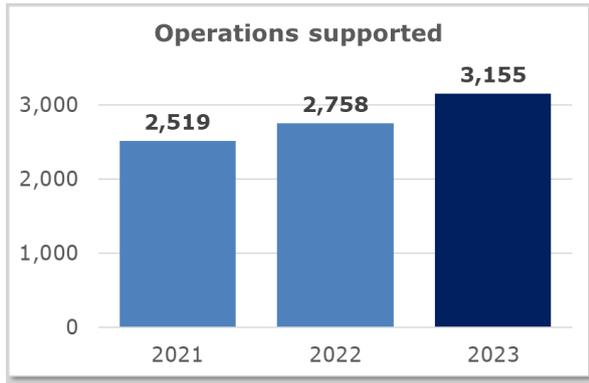
These strategic priorities, covering 40 strategic highlights, were translated into a Strategic Implementation Roadmap aiming to identify high level actions and allocating the responsibilities for their implementation, within a defined timeline, across the organisation. The Roadmap ensures that operational, governance and capabilities responsibilities are taken into account, while avoiding a silo implementation and fostering an integrated and collaborative approach.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/publications/europol-strategy-delivering-security-in-partnership>

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### Evolution of key operational indicators 2021-2023



### 1.2. Work Programme 2023

#### *Activity 1. Development of information technology and information management capabilities*



Europol’s **core systems availability** reached an average of 99.6% during 2023, above the target threshold of 98%. In terms of **core business project delivery**, based on the business value model for monitoring the progress of ICT delivery, Europol delivered 78.5% of the ICT Work Plan 2023 as defined at the beginning of the year. The result is above the annual target of 75%, and the 2022 result (78%). It must be noted that, during the year the baseline plan was revised; against the revised baseline of ICT activities, the execution rate reached 83.5%.

#### **Information Exchange, Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration**



The overall number of messages exchanged via **SIENA** amongst MS, Third Parties (TP) and Europol grew from 1.64 million in 2022 to 1.8 million in 2023, the highest number to date. In 2023, 151,318 new cases were initiated, result higher than both the annual target (140,000) and last year’s result (138,903). More than 2,950 Competent Authorities from MS and TP were connected to SIENA in 2023, including 50 CT units, 19 PCCC and 19 US Agencies. Compared to 2022, the number of connected Competent Authorities increased by 8%. In 2023, 21% of the SIENA messages received by Europol contained structured data, which represents an improvement compared to the 19% in 2022.

The **SIENA Basic Protection Level (BPL)** web application was released into production in January, followed by another release in March, which brought improvements in terms of usability. Several iterations of SIENA were released in 2023. In June, SIENA 5.0 brought the integration with a tool that provides automated translation to and from English. SIENA 5.2 and 5.3, successfully deployed in production in November and December respectively, introduced several user interface (UI) improvements, such as infinite scrolling, a new message grid ribbon with enhanced buttons, a new user interface language profile for Croatian, etc. During the reporting period, Brazil and Korea were successfully connected to SIENA; several training sessions for relevant key users were provided. The technical configuration of the hardware for the establishment of the secure line with San Marino was finalised in November. The hardware for secure lines arrived in Qatar and the initial configuration for secure lines with Mexico and the International Criminal Court (ICC) took place in Q3.

In 2023, 1,553,822 large files were exchanged via the **Large File Exchange (LFE)**. Compared to 2022, the number of the large files exchanged increased by 26% in 2023. In 2023, 1,883 ad-hoc file packages were exchanged bilaterally between MS and TP without the involvement of Europol. 303,291 gigabytes of large files were exchanged in 2023, out of which 145,145 were uploaded and 158,146 were downloaded by MS, TP and Europol. The number of individual, active user accounts reached 4,085 in 2023, which is an increase of 26% compared to last year. The LFE use and management policy was endorsed and published in 2023, introducing a simplified invitation mechanism which enables the MS and TP to invite their own LFE users without the involvement of Europol; the final approval of the accounts and folder access management resides with Europol.

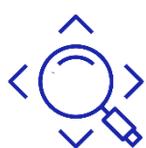


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In 2023, 14,825 unique visitors connected to the **Europol Platform for Experts (EPE)**, which represents around 75% of the registered members. In October 2023, a new version of EPE was released containing a number of bug fixes, as well as a new statistics portlet for the National Football Information Points (NFIP) community in view of the upcoming European Football Championships UEFA Euro 2024. On 1 December, a dedicated Office on Knowledge Management became operational, focused on the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE). The role of the Knowledge Management Office is to facilitate a structured approach to knowledge management to the benefit of internal and external users.

In 2023, an assessment took place on the possibility to use the existing **Video Conferencing for Operational Purposes – Basic Protection Level (VCOP-BPL)** solution to allow Liaison Bureaux to organise and host meetings without the involvement of Europol. Based on the positive feedback received during the pilot phase, the pilot will move into a business-as-usual capability.

### **Search, Cross-checking and Data Management**



In 2023, 14,238,667 searches were performed either in the **Europol Information System (EIS) Web Application** or through the **Querying Europol Systems (QUEST)**, which represents a 6.5% increase compared to 2022. New improvements to EIS were implemented in 2023, bringing additional technical and business improvements. In December 2023, a new version of the Querying Europol Systems (QUEST) was deployed in the MS test environment, to allow searching across *Means of Payment* entities stored in the EIS. During the reporting period, the **QUEST+** pilot project granting several pilot Member States access to Europol's Analysis Projects through QUEST (web service) on a hit/no-hit basis, was released into the operational environment, and is ready to be used operationally by the participating MS as soon as the national integrations, and respective tests, are completed.

### **Roadmap to EU Interoperability and Europol's Access to Large Scale EU Systems**

On 19 October 2023, the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council endorsed the new high-level roadmap for the **Interoperability Agenda** at EU level. Despite the delays in the developments at EU level, Europol has continued working and has made good progress on a number of projects under the EU Interoperability Agenda, which are carried out in parallel. On 7 March, the **Schengen Information System (SIS) Recast** entered into force. The most important change for Europol is the possibility to perform searches in SIS with dactyloscopic data. Additionally, in May 2023, an upgraded solution to perform searches with fingerprint data went live, significantly facilitating the process for the end-users.

The development of the **EES** central system entered a stable phase after eu-LISA had declared the successful deployment of the EES Minimum Viable Product at the end of July 2023. Europol has performed tests against eu-LISA's environments (made available since mid-August 2023) to the extent possible, considering the delays at EU level. Meanwhile, Europol continues to focus on related internal preparations. Due to general delays in the implementation of the **Entry Exit System (EES)** at the Central System level in 2023, Europol prioritised the development of the implementation of searches with fingerprint data in the current **Visa Information System (VIS)**. With regard to the implementation of the **VIS Recast** project, aiming at enabling automated searches against Europol data with alphanumeric and biometric data from all Schengen visa and residence permit applications and providing Europol's opinion in case of hits, the work on a high-level requirements analysis and design is ongoing. Meanwhile, Europol has been focussing on identifying internal development needs, independent of the VIS Central System developments, for example by describing the high-level requirements for the provisioning and management of biometric data via the EIS.

Regarding the **European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)**, in 2023, Europol continued the internal developments and reached good progress in the context of delays

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to the EU Interoperability Agenda. In Q3, progress was made on ETIAS Watchlist implementation and Interface Control Document for QUEST for ETIAS. During the reporting period, two workshops were organised: the first, between Frontex, Europol, eu-LISA, the Commission, some of the MS' ETIAS National Units and the Europol National Units, to discuss the ETIAS workflows, and the second, with the HENUs, regarding the ETIAS manual process at Europol. In October 2023, Europol hosted a joint meeting of HENUs, ETIAS National Units and ETIAS Central Unit (at Frontex) to discuss in detail, and based on operational use cases, the Europol related workflows in ETIAS. In December 2023, Europol and Frontex received guidance from the European Commission with regard to the interpretation of certain provisions in the ETIAS Regulation, providing the way forward to continue towards finalising the ETIAS related workflows between the ETIAS Central Unit at Frontex, Member States' ETIAS National Units and Europol National Units.

In 2023, Europol continued to support the **European Police Records Index System (EPRIS)** Pilot project to prepare for the new task of hosting and maintaining EPRIS at Europol, as foreseen under the PRÜM II Regulation proposal. The objectives of the EPRIS project are to preserve and to build on the specific expertise and technical knowledge of EPRIS.ADEP (Automation of Data Exchange Processes), to align with the new PRÜM automated data exchange framework, and to improve the visibility of EPRIS and its understanding among MS. The 3<sup>rd</sup> EPRIS Project plenary meeting took place on 22-23 November 2023, at Europol, to discuss the progress made on the project activities.

On 30 November 2023, a new Europol internal tool for managing **biometric** data, went live. Currently, as a Minimum Viable Product, the tool allows for streamlined ingestion of biometric data from SIENA and LFE into biometric capabilities and it is foreseen to be extended with new capabilities, for example ingestion of biometric data provided via the EIS, and several other functionalities, with a view to facilitating the work of biometric experts by reducing manual steps in the respective processes.



**Europol's Innovation Lab** has made significant progress since its establishment, fostering considerable momentum in terms of the relationships built, processes and policies developed, and projects underway.

Throughout the year, the Innovation Lab and Europol's Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) met on several occasions to discuss the activities of the Lab and how to best ensure fundamental rights compliance throughout all projects and activities of the Innovation Lab.

In February 2023, the Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation and Internal Security (COSI) endorsed the Multi-Annual Plan of the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security, which the Europol Innovation Lab hosts. In March 2023, the MB also approved the "binding document" describing the Research and Innovation projects that may be conducted within the "Sandbox" environment foreseen in Article 33a of the amended Europol Regulation.

In June 2023, Europol established a "Pool of Europol Horizon Europe experts", a list of staff members to be mobilised for the implementation of Art. 4a of the amended Europol Regulation, which gives Europol additional tasks in relation to Horizon Europe, the EU's Research and Innovation funding programme running from 2021 to 2027. Regarding the Horizon 2020 projects, AIDA, INFINITY and GRACE were concluded during the reporting period. The project STARLIGHT is proceeding as planned and the Innovation Lab continues to coordinate the input of the 15 LEAs involved in this research project.

The Observatory Function of the Innovation Lab published several reports in 2023; among these, its first "Tech Watch Flash Report" on the criminal abuse of Large Language Models, such as ChatGPT (March 2023) and "The Second Quantum Revolution: The impact of quantum computing and quantum technologies on law enforcement" (October 2023).

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The Innovation Low-Value Grant Scheme for EU MS, designed to support the work of the Core and Strategic Groups under the coordination of the European Clearing Board for Innovation (EuCB) was officially launched in September 2023. The Innovation Lab organised several online awareness sessions to promote the scheme. Three grants were awarded under this new grant scheme before the end of the year, amounting to € 125K.

Other initiatives under this Europol Activity include:

- The **Europol Catalogue of ICT Tools** was finalised in December. The catalogue includes a comprehensive overview of all tools used by Europol staff.
- In 2023, Europol implemented the **Topic Oriented Workshops (TOWs)** concept, aiming at enabling exchanges of experiences and discussions between MS on IM-related topics and Europol's developments; three TOWs are ongoing: National Law Enforcement Information Management (IM) Strategies (first meeting in May 2023), Information Exchange Directive (first meeting in July 2023), and Standardisation and Automation (first meeting in September 2023).
- The **Product Management Forum** was held at Europol, in a hybrid mode, on 6-7 December 2023, with the participation of 66 attendants from 36 countries. The two-day event allowed the Europol Business Product Managers to update the participants on the latest developments, and for MS and TP delegates to share their national experiences on their respective implementation and use of Europol solutions.

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### Activity 2. Operational Coordination



In 2023, Europol accepted 107,856 **operational contributions** sent via SIENA, above the annual target of 93,500 contributions, and last year's result of 98,068; 21% of all accepted contributions contained **structured data**, compared to 19% in 2022.



The **speed of first-line response** to SIENA requests, measured as the number of days to reply to 80% of the requests received, averaged at 4.2 days, achieving the annual target of maximum 5 days, for a total of 21,096 first-line requests closed in 2023. The **SIRENE office** reply time in 2023 was 1.5 days for 80% of the requests. 5,943 SIENA messages were received from the **SIRENE** Bureaux and 5,593 sent to them.

On 1 September, the **Integrated Operational Services Unit**, in the Operational and Analysis Centre, was established. The new unit will provide operational services to internal and external stakeholders, in the areas of interoperability and travel intelligence, combining also expertise on biometric technologies.

The review of the Terms of Reference (ToR) of **EMPACT** (European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats), aiming to further enhance coordination and support, was approved by the COSI in May 2023. Europol participated in the delivery of the CEPOL Drivers' workshop (20-22 June), and at the Conference of the EMPACT Support Network for National EMPACT Coordinators (NECs) of Western Balkans (WB) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries (22-23 June). Europol also contributed to the creation, by the EU Council, of a video on EMPACT 2022 achievements. Between 11 and 15 December, Europol contributed to the delivery of two training sessions of the CEPOL online course "Inter-Agency Law Enforcement Cooperation and information exchange within the EU". In Q4, the Operational Action Plans (OAPs) 2024-2025 were approved by COSI. The EMPACT Drivers' Day took place on 4 December. In 2023, Europol continued to support CEPOL in the development of a training module on EMPACT funding, and the implementation of the EMPACT funding mechanism. During 2023, seventeen EMPACT high value grants (HVGs), amounting to € 2.9M, and eighty-eight low value grants (LVGs), amounting to € 3.4M, were awarded. Only € 1M of the € 3.4M for the LVGs concerned the regular 2023 budget while the remaining € 2.4M consisted of € 0.6M returned unspent pre-financing from previous years, while € 1.8M was exceptionally made available by Europol via budget transfer.

In the framework of the EU funded project **WB Partnership against Crime and Terrorism (WBPACT)**, Europol took part in the delivery of several regional trainings: "Criminal investigations of poly-criminal groups", Vienna, 20-24 March, "Foreign Terrorist Fighters, trends and best investigative practices", Brussels, 27-31 March, and "International joint law enforcement investigations on serious and organised crime", The Hague, 24-28 April. The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> EMPACT Support Network Workshops took place in The Hague (19-20 April), Budapest (22-23 June), and Dubrovnik (22-23 November), respectively. The topics discussed ranged from the cooperation between police and prosecutors in serious and organised crime cases, to EMPACT latest developments, and lessons learned, to be further translated in the follow-up phase of the project.

In the area of **travel intelligence**, in February 2023, an Informal Working Group (IWG) meeting of the Passenger Information Units (PIUs) took place at Europol, with 120 participants (90 on-

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site, 30 virtually). Among the topics discussed were the state of play of the Advance Passenger Information (API) revision, aiming to harmonise the requirements for the collection of API data, and the state of play of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Travel Programme, which is supporting the UN MS in building up PIUs. At the meeting, Norway was also introduced as a new operational PIU. A second IWG meeting took place on 29 June in Brussels, and an application meeting on 30 June at Europol HQ, to discuss the processing of PNR data of intra-EU flights. In September 2023, Europol attended the Heads of PIUs meeting organised by Latvia; topics discussed included the Passenger Name Record (PNR) data exchange standardisation, SIS alert processing, training needs and opportunities, and operational cooperation with Third Countries. In December 2023, a workshop at International Training Centre (ITC) in Budapest took place, to agree on the new training concept for the analysis of travel related information.



Other initiatives under this Europol Activity include:

- At the end of the reporting period, the **deployment of Guest Officers (GO)** continued in ten countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Moldova), with 24 permanently staffed stations covering 30 deployment areas. 33 new GOs were trained in 2023.
- In the area of **Special Tactics**, an EU-wide informal expert network, based on Europol's ARGOS initiative, which set up links among the informal EU networks on covert surveillance, was established in 2023. During the reporting period, the Special Tactics team co-organised several events on Surveillance and Witness Protection: Workshop on "Technical Surveillance" with the European Surveillance Group and Norway; Europol - CEPOL International Advanced Witness Protection Training in Italy and the Conference of the Europol Network on Witness Protection, hosted by the Indonesian Agency for Witness Protection. On 29-30 November, Europol participated in the first Pan European Surveillance Conference organised by the European Surveillance Group (ESG), with 84 participants.
- On 17 November, The European Network of Fugitive Active Search Teams (ENFAST) and Europol launched the annual **EU Most Wanted campaign**. The theme for the 2023 campaign is that citizens can step into the story and be superheroes too. The campaign, including dedicated comic strips, was present at the Dutch Heroes Comic Con in Utrecht on Saturday, 18 November.

Activity 3. Combating Serious and Organised Crime

The European Serious Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC) in 2023

1,324

Operations supported

266

Action Days

5,685

Operational reports

15

Operational Task Forces (OTFs) established

During the year, the number of **operations supported** by the European Serious Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC) increased notably to 1,324 (+24% compared to 2022), exceeding the target set for 2023 (600 operations). The Centre coordinated/supported a total of 266 **Action Days** (compared to 233 in 2022), leading to 2,902 arrests, and seizure of assets amounting to more than EUR 690M. The **satisfaction with the operational support and analysis** provided by the Centre, measured through Europol’s User Survey, was assessed at 9.4/10. During the same period, the number of **operational contributions** received by the ESOCC reached 40,060, over the annual target of 37,500, and last year’s result (37,288).

Regarding **Operational Task Forces (OTFs)**, during 2023, the ESOCC established 15 OTFs, above the annual target and last year’s result (10); High Value Targets (HVT) were identified in 59 operational cases. During the reporting period, ESOCC supported an OTF, led by the Netherlands and Germany, which dismantled a crypto communication service. The results included the discovery of illicit synthetic drugs labs, the seizure of more than 3.5 tonnes of drugs and over EUR 5.5M cash, and the arrest of over 45 suspects. On 7 February, in the framework of an OTF, a coordinated action day took place in Belgium, Spain and Switzerland against an international sex-trafficking ring that held hundreds of Chinese women trapped in debt bondage across Europe. The investigation was led by Belgian authorities, and coordinated by Europol (AP Phoenix) and Eurojust. The action day led to 28 arrests (27 in Belgium and one in Spain), including five **high-value targets (HVT)**. On 5 October, 16 suspects were arrested as part of a major international operation, carried out in the framework of an OTF. The investigation involved authorities from Brazil, Cabo Verde, Serbia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Europol and the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N), and targeted a criminal group involved in the large-scale trafficking of cocaine from South America to Europe. The leader of the criminal network, a Serbian national residing in Brazil, was also arrested.

In the framework of the **HVT/OTF concept**, 39 short-term SNEs were seconded in 2023 in support of OTFs, in view of improving operational support for HVT and priority cases. During the reporting period, a series of awareness sessions concerning the use of short-term SNEs to reinforce OTFs, were provided to Europol staff and country delegations. In 2023, an OTF concept dedicated platform was launched on the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE). In the framework of the EMPACT High-Risk Criminal Networks (HRCN) priority, ESOCC continued working with MS and TP to develop the National Targeting System, a structured and standardised prioritisation mechanism to identify HVTs at national level; on 11 September, a meeting to identify existing systems and best practices, took place. During 2023, 59 OTF low value grants (LVGs) were awarded, amounting to EUR 2.7M.

In the area of **drugs**, between 22 May and 2 June, Europol (AP Drugs Crime), together with CEPOL, the Netherlands, Belgium and Poland, delivered a training on Dismantling Illicit Drugs Laboratories. The course, developed for LEA, forensic experts and judicial authorities, was attended by 35 trainees from MS, Iceland, UNODC and EMCDDA. During 2023, Europol collaborated closely with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and contributed to several modules of the EU Drug Markets



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Report. The 7<sup>th</sup> European Annual Drugs Conference took place on 7 and 8 December at Europol's headquarters. At the event, attended by high-ranking officials, experts and representatives from diverse law enforcement agencies, EU drug policy developments, emerging routes, logistical hubs such as port infrastructure, operational trends and threats, as well as key international cases were discussed.

During the reporting period, Europol supported several meetings in the framework of the Italian-led **@ON project**. Among these, a meeting on the changes in the organised crime landscape in the context of the war in Ukraine took place in Italy, on 15-17 February. On 23-24 May 2023, the @ON high level conference took place at Europol HQ, with the participation of high-ranking representatives from the participating countries. The second Operational Meeting of the EU MS Heads of Homicide Investigation Units was held from 6-8 June 2023 at Europol HQ, in the context of the @ON project.

The **4 Network Conference - Cooperation In Strengthening Environmental Enforcement** took place in Italy, on 28-29 September. At the event, EnviCrimeNet (Network of Police Officers Focusing on Tackling Environmental Crime), IMPEL (European Union Network for the Implementation & Enforcement of Environmental Law), ENPE (European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment) and EUFJE (European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment) discussed joint efforts to fight environmental crime.

In the area of **weapons & explosives**, the agreement between Europol and Interpol for Europol's access to Interpol's iARMs was signed in Q1 2023.



In 2023, the **European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC)** supported several OTFs in connection with migrant smuggling. The EMSC continued to contribute regularly to the EU Migration Preparedness and Crisis Management Mechanism Network (Blueprint Network) and participated on a weekly basis to the meetings chaired by the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) in the framework of monitoring developments related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the situation alongside the main entry routes. Likewise, the EMSC supported the bi-weekly meetings of the Joint Liaison Task Force on migrant smuggling, at Europol HQ, with the participation of MS and third countries' liaison officers, Eurojust, Interpol and Frontex. Operational interaction with Frontex took place regularly, as Frontex is an important data contributor to the EMSC.

Between 18 and 22 September, Europol supported an operational action (Hackathon) targeting online criminal activities that enable human trafficking. The **2023 Hackathon**, organised in the framework of EMPACT, involved 85 experts: law enforcement officers from 26 countries, as well as representatives from the European Labour Authority, CEPOL, INTERPOL, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Justice Mission. The event focused on filling intelligence gaps in the recruitment of victims of the most frequently reported forms of human trafficking, namely sexual and labour exploitation.

### Notable operational results of the Centre in 2023, include:

- On 16 January, Europol supported Bulgarian authorities during a large-scale action day against organised crime groups involved in migrant smuggling along the Western Balkans route. The investigation, coordinated with authorities in Türkiye and Serbia, led to 624 locations, 4,202 vehicles and 7,019 persons checked, and 92 arrests.
- On 6 February, Europol supported Slovenian Police in an action day that resulted in the arrest of 13 people (Slovenian, Serbian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian) suspected of smuggling at least 212 irregular migrants. Seizures included weapons and ammunition, various illegal drugs, illegal doping substances, electronic devices and cash. The

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months-long operation was carried out in cooperation with law enforcement authorities in Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Romania.

- In Q1, law enforcement in Latin America and Europe took down one of Brazil's most active drugs trafficking organisations, which flooded Europe with multi-tonnes shipments of cocaine. On 30 March, simultaneous actions were carried out in Brazil, with Europol's support. A total of 15 individuals were arrested, and over EUR 80M worth of assets were seized. Over the course of the investigation, over 17 tonnes of cocaine linked to this criminal organisation were seized, with an estimated street value of several billions of euros.
- Europol and Eurojust supported the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovakia to take down an organised crime group (OCG) responsible for the production and distribution of at least 4.7 tonnes of methamphetamine in Europe. During the joint action days between 26 February and 2 March, 16 suspects were arrested and 3.3 million tablets containing raw material for the production of the drug were seized.
- Operation LAKE, a joint operation coordinated by Europol, involving law enforcement authorities across the globe, ran from October 2022 to June 2023 and led to the arrest of 256 persons responsible for the trafficking of 25 tonnes of live glass eels worth around EUR 13M. Among the 256 arrested were nationals of China, Malaysia, France, Spain and Portugal, including two high-value targets and 50 of their closest associates. Operation LAKE targets the trafficking of the protected European glass eel, one of the most devastating crimes against wildlife worldwide.
- On 8-15 May, a global action targeting human trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced begging and forced criminality took place in 44 countries (25 EU Member States and 19 non-EU countries). Operation Global Chain, which included the EMPACT Joint Action Days against human trafficking, was led by Austria, co-led by Romania and coordinated by Europol, Frontex and Interpol. The action days led to 212 arrests, the identification of 1,426 potential victims and the launch of 244 new investigations. During these joint operational actions, approximately 130,000 officers worldwide checked 1.6 million people, 25,400 locations, 153,300 vehicles and 72,850 documents.
- On 17 July, Europol supported Portugal to carry out a series of actions against a criminal network, which facilitated the illegal obtainment of Portuguese residence permits for Asian irregular migrants across Europe, with the use of fake documents. This action is the result of a joint investigation started one and half years ago between France and Portugal, with the support of Spain, Germany, Europol and Eurojust. To date, France reported the interception of 18 smugglers belonging to this network, apprehended while trying to cross the French-Spanish border on their way to Portugal in rented cars, with a total of 150 irregular migrants. The network rented at least 337 vehicles during that period, allowing the transport of as many as 6,000 irregular migrants.
- Europol supported an operation led by Spain, with the participation of France, Germany and Norway, in dismantling an organised criminal network involved in migrant smuggling from Syria to the EU, and the trafficking of drugs and firearms. The action day on 4 July led to 15 arrests, and the seizure of two speedboats, six vehicles, electronic equipment and over EUR 500,000 in cash.
- Europol supported an operation led by Serbia, with the participation of Brazil, Croatia, France, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia and the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N), which led to the dismantling of a large drug-trafficking organisation, investigated in the framework of an OTF. The action day on 24 August led to six arrests and the seizure of 2.7 tonnes of cocaine, two high-end vehicles, luxury watches and over EUR 550,000 in cash.
- An action day on 12 September, led by France, and supported by Europol, Interpol, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, led to the arrest of 13 members of a criminal network specialised in the theft and trafficking of cars to West Africa. The criminal network, which consisted mainly of French, Gambian and Senegalese nationals, also recruited minors to drive the valuable stolen vehicles to various European ports. From there, the cars were concealed in cargo containers and

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shipped to West Africa. In total, law enforcement identified more than 170 vehicles transported from Belgian, Dutch, French, German, and Spanish ports through this modus operandi.

- Between 13 and 18 November 2023, law enforcement authorities across Europe joined forces to target firearms trafficking, drug trafficking, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and high-risk criminal networks during coordinated EMPACT Joint Action Days South East Europe (EMPACT JAD SEE). In total, 26 countries across Europe, supported by Europol, Eurojust, Frontex, INTERPOL and a number of international partners, took part in these large-scale coordinated operational activities. Over 22,400 officers were involved in the action days, which saw 163 investigations initiated and over 288,000 entities checked. The results include 566 arrests (218 related to migrant smuggling, 186 related to drug trafficking, 69 related to firearms trafficking, 89 related to other crimes), and 310 weapons and almost one tonne of drugs seized.
- In October, Europol and INTERPOL supported an operation led by Frontex at the EU's external land borders, as well as border locations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The operation involved around 400 law enforcement officers from 25 countries, and resulted in the recovery of 505 stolen cars, around 2,000 stolen vehicle parts and 16 boats. In addition, the participating authorities identified 209 migrant smugglers.

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Activity 4. Combating Cyber Crime

The European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) in 2023



In 2023, the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) provided **support** to 451 **operations**, exceeding the target of 430 operations set for the year, and the 2022 result (446). The **satisfaction with the operational support and analysis** provided by the Centre reached an average score of 9.6/10, measured through Europol’s User Survey. During the year, the EC3 received 8,426 **contributions**, slightly under the annual target (8,500) and last year’s result (8,837), and produced 3,983 **operational reports**, above both, the annual target (3,200) and the 2022 achievement (3,601). The Centre established three **Operational Task Forces (OTF)** during 2023, and coordinated/supported 43 **Action Days** (42 in 2022), above the annual target of 30, leading to 1,561 arrests, and the seizure of assets amounting to more than EUR 180 M.

The **Internet Organised Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2023**, a strategic analysis report providing an assessment of the latest online threats and the impact of cybercrime within the EU, was published in July 2023. On 13 September, the spotlight report “Cyber Attacks: The Apex of Crime-as-a-Service”, examining developments in cyber-attacks and new methodologies and threats, was published.

The **EU Law Enforcement Emergency Response Protocol (EU LE ERP)**, which entails proactive OSINT monitoring and enhanced tactical coordination, remained partially activated in 2023, in relation to malicious cyber activities in the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. In 2023, the **Cyber Intelligence Team (CIT)** provided support to 23 investigations with OSINT services, and expertise and support with ETL (extracting, transforming or loading) activities to several others. On 29-31 March, the CIT attended the Estonian Financial Intelligence Unit Conference 2023, with a presentation on cryptocurrency use in CT cases.

On 18-19 October, Europol hosted the **Europol Cybercrime Conference 2023**, under the theme “10 years of joint support to operations against cybercrime: building tomorrow’s partnerships”. Almost 400 participants from LEAs, private parties, EU and international organisations, academia and NGOs, attended the event.

In November 2023, Europol hosted the second **InterCOP** (International Cyber Offender Prevention Network) conference. The InterCOP network consists of international law enforcement agencies that share expertise and jointly develop, implement and evaluate Cyber Offender Prevention (COP) interventions and prevention campaigns. Europol supports the InterCOP initiative as part of EMPACT. The network engages with public and private sector stakeholders whose skills, resources and reach are needed, alongside law enforcement efforts, to create a safer digital environment.

The 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the ENISA-EC3 workshop for cooperation between law enforcement and the **CSIRT (Cooperation with the Computer Security Incident Response Teams)** community took place in Greece, on 18-19 September, to discuss best practices in cooperation, as well as tools and techniques to investigate cybercrime and cybersecurity incidents; 51 participants attended the workshop.

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The 12th and 13th iterations of the **Victim Identification Taskforce against child sexual abuse (VIDTF)** were organised by Europol (EC3) in May and November respectively. In May, 30 specialists from 27 countries attended the event at Europol's headquarters and online, to identify victims and offenders depicted in child sexual abuse material. 460 sets of images and video files depicting unknown victims of child sexual exploitation, some as young as a few days old, were analysed. These efforts led to six children being identified and rescued from abuse, and one offender arrested. In November, 33 specialists from 26 countries and Interpol participated at the event, which resulted in two offenders being arrested and three children identified and safeguarded. Since 2014, Europol has been regularly bringing together victim identification experts from around the world to focus on unsolved cases of child sexual abuse. Over 695 children have been safeguarded and 228 offenders arrested as a result of operations based on the VIDTF.



In Q1, the **Dark Web** team released the Dark Web Landscape Report, providing an overview of the strategic criminal intelligence picture for the online trade in illicit goods and services, as well as a guide highlighting the possibilities of law enforcement cooperation with the AP Dark Web. On 4-5 October, AP Dark Web hosted the annual Dark Web Conference at Europol. The event focused on the most recent criminal trends and developments on the dark web, investigative methodologies and case presentations.

Two **Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT)** roadshows took place in 2023, in the United Kingdom (28 February – 1 March), with close to 500 participants from cyber LEAs, and Denmark (8-9 November), with close to 300 participants. The aim of the events was to explain the added value of the J-CAT and Europol to counter different forms of cybercrime, and the tools and services which Europol can deliver. On 11 April, upon request from the J-CAT, EC3 and the Innovation Lab organised a workshop on Metaverse and cybercrime. The annual J-CAT Board Meeting took place on 15-16 November in Norway; at the meeting, Czech Republic was formally included as a new full-time member. The **International Law Enforcement Ransomware Response Model (IRRM)** was developed jointly with the J-CAT, in view of reinforcing the operational and tactical response to ransomware. In Q1, the IRRM's pilot workstream led to the successful takedown of two of the top six HVTs identified as priority for the pilot; investigations were officially launched against the remaining HVTs. In March, Europol presented the IRRM to COSI, and received positive feedback from the MS. The second pilot workstream of the IRRM on HVT ransomware actors was launched in June 2023, under the J-CAT, and a joint operational action plan was produced and disseminated.

In the area of **Document and Digital Forensics**, in March 2023, Europol organised and hosted the biannual expert meeting on Technical Investigations on Printed Devices, with the participation of MS and Interpol. During the year, the **Document Forensics team** worked on a report on biometric vulnerabilities, in cooperation with the Innovation Lab. The team organised or supported a number of training courses during the reporting period including support to CEPOL on the Document Fraud investigators training, focused on document falsification and biometric vulnerabilities. Likewise, the team participated in several activities (conferences and workshops) to identify new areas linked to biometrics. During the reporting period, the **Digital Forensics team** developed 35 tools in the area of data extraction and decryption. Two training sessions, on document inspection and the use of forensic equipment, were provided to Guest Officers (GO). A **Vehicle Forensics** expert meeting was hosted on 25-26 May, with 30 experts and developers from EU MS. The new Vehicle Forensic tool is aimed at extracting digital traces of vehicles involved in criminal investigations.

Other activities of the EC3 include:

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- The 9<sup>th</sup> **Virtual Currencies Conference** took place at Europol HQ between 24 and 26 April, with over 450 participants. Among the topics were case studies on best practices in law enforcement investigations and demos of crypto-tracing tools.
- The 6<sup>th</sup> Europol training course on **Payment Card Fraud Forensics and Investigations** took place on 26-30 June at the Spanish Police Academy in Avila, with 40 participants.
- The **AP Twins Annual Expert Meeting** took place on 30 May-1 June at Europol HQ, with the participation of around 150 experts from around the world. The event focused on best practices, threats and opportunities of new technologies, and on how to improve the common fight against the online sexual abuse of children.
- On 26 April, Europol launched **Cryptopol 2.0**, the second version of the cryptocurrency training game, available to all law enforcement cryptocurrency investigators around the world; access to the game can be requested from Europol.
- On 3-7 July, Europol (EC3) organised an **Advanced Workshop on Blockchain Deanonimisation and Decentralised Finance (DeFi)**; over 40 participants attended this training focused on DeFi and special techniques to deanonymise cryptocurrency transactions.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> **European Youth Day** at Europol took place on 7 February, with the participation of around 200 students aged 11 to 16. The event focused on the importance of data protection, privacy and online safety.
- On 4 October, EC3 launched the new **EU Child Abuse Referral Service (EU-CARES)**, a secure platform dedicated to the retrieval, enrichment and dissemination of child sexual exploitation (CSE) referrals. The system features a new Graphical User Interface, the automatic and ad-hoc download and dissemination of referrals, as well as the creation and dissemination of cross-match reports to MS and operational partners.

### Notable operational results of the Centre in 2023, include:

- Europol supported an operation led by German and US authorities, with the participation of Belgium, Poland and Switzerland, targeting ChipMixer, a cryptocurrency mixer well-known in the cybercriminal underworld. On 15 March, national authorities took down the infrastructure of the platform for its alleged involvement in money laundering activities and seized four servers, about 1,909 Bitcoins in 55 transactions (approx. EUR 44.2M) and 7 TB of data.
- An operation led by French and US authorities, and supported by Europol, targeted the crypto exchange platform Bitzlato, a globally operating Hong Kong-registered cryptocurrency exchange, suspected of facilitating the laundering of large amounts of criminal proceeds and converting them into roubles. The operation, which also involved law enforcement and judicial authorities from Belgium, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands, resulted so far in five arrests, the takedown of the digital infrastructure of the service and seizures of crypto wallets worth about EUR 18 M; in addition, 100+ accounts at other crypto exchanges, representing a total of EUR 50M, were frozen.
- Europol supported the German, Dutch and US authorities in taking down the infrastructure of the prolific HIVE ransomware. Since June 2021, over 1,500 companies from over 80 countries worldwide have fallen victim to HIVE associates and lost almost EUR 100M in ransom payments. During the operation, which involved authorities from 13 countries, law enforcement identified the decryption keys and shared them with many of the victims, helping them regain access to their data without paying the cybercriminals. This effort prevented the payment of more than EUR 120M of ransom payments.
- During an action day on 4 April, Genesis Market, one of the most dangerous marketplaces selling stolen account credentials to hackers worldwide, was shut down

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and its infrastructure seized. The operation was led by the US and the Netherlands, with another 15 countries involved, and was supported by Europol, including with a command post set up at its headquarters on the action day. On 4 April, simultaneous actions were also carried out across the globe against the users of this platform, resulting in 208 property searches and 119 arrests.

- Europol coordinated an operation, involving nine countries, which led to the seizure of the illegal dark web marketplace 'Monopoly Market'. The results include the arrest of 288 suspects involved in buying or selling drugs on the dark web as well as the seizure of EUR 50.8M in cash and virtual currencies, 850 kg of drugs and 117 firearms.
- An action day on 11 August, coordinated by Poland, and supported by Europol (EC3), the United States and the Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT), took down LolekHosted.net, a bulletproof hosting service used by criminals to launch cyber-attacks across the world. Bulletproof hosting is a service in which an online infrastructure is offered, and operators will generally turn a blind eye to what customers use their rented domains for. As a result of the action day, five of its administrators were arrested, and all of its servers seized.
- Europol supported the coordination of a large-scale international operation against Qakbot malware, which targeted critical infrastructure and businesses across multiple countries. The malware was used to steal financial data and login credentials, as well as to commit ransomware, fraud and other cyber-enabled crimes. The investigation, also supported by Eurojust, involved judicial and law enforcement authorities from France, Germany, Latvia, Netherlands, Romania, the United Kingdom and the United States. The action day on 30 August took down the infrastructure of Qakbot, and led to the seizure of nearly EUR 8M in cryptocurrencies.
- An action day on 20 September, led by Finland and supported by Europol (AP Dark Web), Eurojust, Germany, Lithuania and private sector partners, led to the closure of Piilopuoti, a dark web marketplace that facilitated sales of large quantities of drugs and other illegal commodities.
- Between 16-20 October, Europol and Eurojust supported an action targeting the Ragnar Locker ransomware group, responsible for numerous high-profile attacks against critical infrastructure across the world. The action took place in the framework of an investigation led by France together with Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and the United States of America. At the end of the action week, the main perpetrator, suspected of being a developer of the Ragnar group, was arrested, the ransomware's infrastructure was seized in the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden, and the associated data leak website on Tor was taken down in Sweden.
- Law enforcement agencies from 26 countries, in collaboration with Europol, Eurojust, INTERPOL and several private industry partners, joined forces for the ninth edition of the European Money Mule Action (EMMA 9). In June, October and November 2023, Europol supported several operational phases which resulted in the identification of 10,759 money mules and 474 recruiters, leading to the arrest of 1,013 individuals worldwide, and nearly EUR 32M prevented losses.
- In October and November, Europol, law enforcement authorities from 16 countries, private partners and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), supported Greece in an operation fighting digital skimming attacks. With the support of national Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRT), the two-month action enabled Europol and its partners to notify 443 online merchants that their customers' credit card or payment card data had been compromised.
- Between 6 and 17 November, in the framework of a joint operation against child sexual exploitation in the Balkan region, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary carried out a series of enforcement actions, which led to the identification of 39 suspected child abusers and the safeguarding of 2 of their victims. The operation, led by Slovenia and coordinated by Europol in the framework of EMPACT, aimed to identify and arrest people using online forums and messaging applications to share and distribute child sexual abuse material.

Activity 5. Counter-Terrorism

European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) in 2023



During 2023, the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) supported a total of 1,012 **operations**, 14% more than in 2022, and above the annual target set at 800. The **satisfaction with operational support and analysis** provided by the centre was rated at 9.2/10. In 2023, the ECTC established six Operational Task Forces (OTF). The Centre also coordinated a total of 39 **Action Days** (30 in 2022), leading to 78 arrests, and seven victims/witnesses safeguarded, among other results.

The number of **operational contributions** sent to the ECTC increased compared to the previous year, 4,357 to 4,557, however remained under the annual target of 5,000. The number of **operational reports** produced in 2023 sat comfortably at 2,012, above the target of 1,440 and 32% above the 2022 result (1,526).

Regarding information exchange in the area of counter-terrorism, the number of **SIENA messages exchanged by CT units** increased from 52,749 in 2022 to 65,595 in 2023. It is important to note that the total number of **SIENA messages exchanged related to terrorism** reached 130,957 in 2023 (118,481 in 2022). At the end of the year, the EIS contained 502,453 **objects related to terrorism** (487,148 at the end of 2022).

The **EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU)** continued to monitor content on online platforms, assessing a total of 20,054 pieces of content in 2023. During the reporting period, the EU IRU supported 336 operations, and delivered 670 operational reports, both results higher than in 2022 (298 and 487 respectively).



The **European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2023**, was published in June. The report presents figures, major developments and trends in the terrorism landscape in the EU in 2022, based on data provided to Europol by EU Member States, on terrorist attacks and terrorism-related arrests in the European Union.

In 2023, Europol (ECTC) continued to support the **Counter Terrorism Program Board (CTPB)**, and assist the drivers setting up the workshops to implement the CTPB work plan. The renewal procedure for the Chair and Co-Chair of the CTPB took place in Q1, with Spain and Italy volunteering for the roles. The handing over meeting between Germany and Austria, and upcoming Chairs took place in Madrid, on 31 March. Two CTPB plenary meetings took place in 2023, on 18 April, and 24 October. In July, the Workshop on Chemical Precursors took place. On 7 November, Europol hosted the European Heads of Counter Terrorism meeting. During the operational session, the CT operational priorities and the proactive approach towards the CT threat were discussed. The meeting also included a strategic session, attended by external stakeholders, such as the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home), the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (EU CTC), which provided an insight on CT developments from the policy level perspective.

During 2023, Europol continued to manage the **Counter Terrorism Joint Liaison Team (CT-JLT)** operational platform, ensuring its performance as an effective mechanism for accelerating

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the exchange of information and coordination. The platform counted for 28 members, 21 Member States (MS) and seven Third Parties (TP), at the end of 2023.

In the area of **Core International Crime (CIC)**, in 2023, AP CIC continued to be engaged in the gathering and processing of information at EU level for the facilitation of priority cases involving war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. In particular, the focus since 2022 has been the war of aggression of Russia in Ukraine in an attempt to streamline the cooperation with Ukraine and EU MS dealing with such cases. In October 2023, Europol became a participant in the joint investigation team (JIT) on alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine. Seven countries (Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine), Eurojust and ICC participate in this JIT. An OSINT OTF comprised of OSINT experts from different countries, aiming at providing targeted support to ongoing investigations into war crimes committed in Ukraine, started its operational activities in November 2023. Currently, the OTF works on prioritised OSINT requests, so far submitted by Germany, Lithuania, Ukraine and the International Criminal Court (ICC).



In the first half of 2023, Europol continued working towards finalising the development of the first iteration (minimum viable product – MVP) of the **EU Platform on Illegal Content Online (PERCI)** and establishing business needs for PERCI post-MVP. In June, EU IRU delivered a first series of training for the MS; the platform was launched on 3 July 2023. PERCI, developed by Europol, offers a collaborative system for the transmission of referrals and removal orders for online content, related to violent extremism and terrorism.

The **SIRIUS SPOC Network** meeting took place on 1-2 June in Madrid, Spain. Three new members joined the SPOC Network in 2023; 25 countries are now represented. With regards to Online Service Providers (OSPs), at the end of the year, 49 OSPs were represented in Open SIRIUS. The **Open SIRIUS** platform was set up on the EPE, to share general and practical resources on e-evidence with OSPs. On 20 September, in the framework of the **SIRIUS Capture the Flag Finale Event**, women OSINT investigators from 13 MS gathered at Europol to share investigative experiences, techniques and best practices in online investigations. The so-called 'Capture the Flag' challenges are real-life, competitive investigations, which take place at the end of the SIRIUS training sessions, to test and assess the learned skills. In total, Europol organised nine such sessions, all championed by women. The 5<sup>th</sup> annual **SIRIUS Conference** took place between 21 and 23 November, with over 900 participants. The annual **SIRIUS 2023 Codefest** was held at Europol, between 20 and 23 November, with 19 senior IT developers from MS, who developed an OSINT tool to retrieve data from online platforms for investigative needs. The **SIRIUS EU Electronic Evidence Situation Report 2023**, a joint effort by Europol, Eurojust, and the European Judicial Network, was published in November 2023. The report provides an overview of the EU's Electronic Evidence landscape through the lenses of law enforcement, the Judiciary, and Service Providers. In 2023, the **SIRIUS** platform continued to strengthen its position as a central repository for tools; by the end of the reporting period, it counted 52 tools submitted by Europol or MS, plus 32 OSINT tools; over 42,500 downloads of the tools took place during the reporting period. Likewise, the SIRIUS EPE platform reached over 8,000 users.

The 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> editions of the **Terrorist Identification Task Force (TiTF)** took place in 2023; the topics discussed included right-wing terrorist and violent extremist organisations and individuals active in disseminating propaganda and recruiting minors, CT cases linked to the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) terrorist group and financing of terrorism by means of cryptocurrencies and virtual assets.

The 4<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the **ECTC Advisory Network on Terrorism and Propaganda**, "Conceptualising terrorism today: expanding threat or widening the net?", took place at Europol HQ on 14-15 March, with the participation of more than 200 CT experts from MS, TP and EU

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institutions. On 22-23 June, Europol (ECTC), together with the U.S. Departments of State and Justice, organised the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Law Enforcement Coordination Group (LECG), at Europol HQ. Over 100 participants from more than 35 countries across the Middle East, South America, Central America, Europe, Africa, Indo-Pacific and North America participated in this session, along with INTERPOL and EUROPOL.

On 6-9 March, the **Atlas Support Office (ASO)**, together with the European Surveillance Group (ESG), held the cross-network exercise FIRESTORM 2023. More than 300 operators from nine countries (seven MS and two TP) were trained during the event, with a focus on handover/takeover procedures when crossing borders with intervention and surveillance forces. In December 2023, the **Atlas Common Challenge 2023** saw 38 special intervention units test their operational readiness in four large-scale exercises. This transnational event covered a wide range of operational scenarios, where communication, cooperation and mutual support are key to success. During 2023, one grant was awarded to the ATLAS network of Special Intervention Units, amounting to EUR 3.7M.

During the reporting period, the **CBRN & Explosives (CBRN-E) team** continued to provide input to the European Commission's policy initiatives and contribute to the work of the different Working Groups, as well as to attend to and/or support a series of events and training courses. In March and April 2023, Europol, organised the first sessions of the course "Explosive ordnance used in Ukraine" in Tallinn, Estonia, with the participation of over 120 bomb technicians. The training focused on theoretical and practical lessons to EU MS Bomb Disposal Units (EOD/IEDD) and Special Intervention Units (SIU) on explosive ordnances and military explosives currently used in Ukraine. Other events include: Information Exchange Meeting at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – Austria, 17-18 April, International Bomb Data Centres Working Group (IBDCWG) Conference – Norway, 8-12 May, Improvised explosive training – Hungary, 19-25 May and 29 September, UNICRI Regional workshop on countering trafficking of radiological and nuclear (RN) material – Georgia, 26-28 June, Global perspective on explosive precursors meeting – Spain, 16-17 November, Lectures on INTERPOL's Watchmaker Working Group meeting – Poland 21-23 November, Biological Awareness and Mitigation course (online) – Georgia, 27-30 November.

Other initiatives of the ECTC include:

- **Cooperation with the Western Balkans (WB)** – In 2023 the ECTC continued to support DG Home in the assessment of progress of the Implementing Arrangements of **Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans** (JAP CT WB). In this framework, the ECTC supported DG HOME in the assessment of reports from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania. In addition, Europol supported CEPOL in a training course organised in the scope of WB PaCT (the Partnership against Crime and Terrorism in the Western Balkans) regional project, "Foreign Terrorists Fighters – trends and best investigative practices", organised for all WB countries, in Brussels, Belgium, on 27-31 March 2023. Europol attended the Regional Network of National CT/CVE (Counter Violent Extremism) Coordinators (RNNC) of the WB, in Budva, Montenegro (26 April) and Skopje, North Macedonia (16-18 October).
- **Cooperation with the MENA countries** – On 22-23 May, the ECTC organised a study visit to Europol and the Workshop on "Joint Risk Analysis Networks" for the AIMC (Arab Ministers of Interior Council) member states. On 3 October, Europol organised the Sirius awareness session on cross-border access to e-evidence for countries in the MENA region. In 2023, Europol supported several CEPOL CT INFLOW activities; among these, the "Battlefield evidence to prosecute foreign terrorist fighters", in The Hague (16-19 October). On 19 October, Europol attended the 26<sup>th</sup> Arab conference for counter terrorism officials organised by the AIMC.
- **Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA):** On 11 July, Europol (ECTC) hosted a study visit organised in the framework of the ESIWA EU funded project.

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The event, titled "Connecting women police officers in CT units", was attended by participants from Indonesia and Malaysia.

### **Notable operational results of the Centre in 2023, include:**

- On 21 February 2023, a large-scale Referral Action Day targeting the misuse of dangerous chemicals by terrorist groups took place at Europol's headquarters in The Hague. During the action day, attended by CT units from ten MS and seven TP, over 120 individual pieces of content were referred to 21 online service providers in order to secure their swift removal. The referred content covered five languages and was disseminated by terrorist supporting networks, including jihadist, right-wing and left-wing terrorist groups.
- Between 6 and 9 March, Europol, together with the ATLAS network and the European Surveillance Group, coordinated a joint exercise of surveillance and intervention units across the EU. The exercise involved units from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Executed in real-life conditions, the coordinated exercise started in Ireland and culminated with several simultaneous interventions in Luxembourg and Maastricht, the Netherlands.
- On 28 September, EU-IRU coordinated a Referral Action Day, with the participation of 11 countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Croatia, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The participants tried to detect material glorifying past terrorist attacks and/or terrorist perpetrators on the video-sharing platform TikTok. Over 2,000 pieces of content, including items linked to jihadism and violent right-wing extremism (RWE) and terrorism, were assessed and flagged to TikTok for voluntary review.
- Europol and Eurojust supported competent authorities in Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Lithuania, Romania and Italy in an international operation against a right-wing organisation responsible for the dissemination of violent extremist propaganda and for sharing manuals of 3D printed weapons. During a joint action day on 9 November, five suspects were apprehended and an additional seven interrogated across the different countries.
- On 18 December, Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit coordinated a Referral Action Day on terrorist online content. The operational action also involved special units from Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom. The referral actions targeted online content, including instruction materials and manuals used by terrorists with various ideological motivations (jihadist, right-wing and left-wing extremist, anarchist, etc.). The actions focused on materials comprised of topics related to the means, but also the techniques of committing violent acts, e.g. how to prepare and carry out terrorist attacks. The action day resulted in the assessment and referral of 872 URLs on a dozen of platforms and websites.
- On 14 December 2023, Europol supported an action day coordinated by Spain, and involved law enforcement authorities from Austria, France, Germany and Italy, targeting violent hate crimes, both online and offline. Law enforcement authorities targeted 209 individuals, mainly right and left wing extremists, for their alleged involvement in serious offences related to the spread of violent hate speech, incitement to commit violent hate crimes, and death threats. The operational actions focused on combating and preventing the proliferation of hate crime, racism and xenophobia via social media, online fora and other online platforms. Law enforcement actions also targeted the dissemination of hate speech, which goes beyond the online world. As an example, French authorities took action against an individual who was targeting and dating gay men to scam them out of money.

Activity 6. Combating Financial and Economic Crime

European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) in 2023



The **European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC)** provided support to **421 operations** during 2023, which is higher than the previous year's result (402) and the 2023 target (390). The **satisfaction with operational support and analysis** provided by the Centre was assessed with a score of 9.7/10.

The EFECC organised/coordinated **107 Action Days** in 2023, over the annual target of 83 and the 2022 result (94), which led to operational outcomes such as 908 arrests, and seizure of assets with a total value of over EUR 530M. In addition, the EFECC established three **Operational Task Forces (OTF)** during the reporting period.

During the year, the Centre received **18,825 operational contributions** via SIENA, above the target of 14,000 contributions and the result achieved in 2022 (15,075). A total of **2,477 operational reports** were produced, well above the target of 1,700 (2,045 in 2022).

The **European Financial and Economic Crime Assessment (EFECTA) 2023**, "The other side of the coin: an analysis of financial and economic crime in the EU", Europol's inaugural threat assessment on financial and economic crimes, was published on 11 September 2023.

Cooperation with the **EUIPO** continued in 2023. On 24-25 May, Europol's **Intellectual Property Crime Coordinated Coalition (IPC3)** team organised, together with the EUIPO, the annual **Intellectual Property Units Network Meeting**, which took place at EUIPO HQ. The network agreed to discuss the proposal to have a new EMPACT operation on targeted cosmetics, and drew attention to the impact of fraud and intellectual property crime on the environment. Moreover, an **amendment to the SLA with the EUIPO**, extending its duration until December 2027, was finalised and signed in July. On 14-15 June, Europol participated in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the International IP Enforcement Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria. The event, co-hosted by the European Commission, the EUIPO and Bulgaria, focused on how innovation and cooperation can best tackle IP crime. On 26-27 October, IPC3 together with the EUIPO, the Portuguese Economic and Food Safety Authority (ASAE), and the Portuguese Public Security Police (PSP) hosted the **2023 Europol Intellectual Property (IP) Crime Conference** in Portugal. The conference, attended by LE and the private sector, focused on cooperation, on new trends in IPC, on the role of women in fighting IPC and on the impact of counterfeiting.

Cooperation with the **European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO)** continued to increase in 2023. During the year, the EFECC supported 47 EPPO-led operations. The EFECC met with relevant EPPO counterparts to discuss how to enhance operational cooperation in line with the requirements of the revised Europol Regulation.

**OLAF** also remains a crucial partner for Europol, particularly in connection with operational and strategic initiatives linked to the protection of the **NextGenerationEU** Funds and **Operation Sentinel**, the EU wide operation targeting fraud against COVID-19 EU recovery funds that Europol has been supporting since October 2021, in cooperation with EPPO, Eurojust, OLAF and several MS.

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Moreover, the EFECCE continued to support the activities of the **"Freeze and Seize" Task Force** established by the European Commission to coordinate EU MS enforcement of the sanctions adopted against Russia and Belarus in the context of the war against Ukraine. During the reporting period, Europol attended several meetings and presented the **Europol Financial Intelligence Public Private Partnership (EFIPPP)** typology report on Circumvention of Sanctions.

Three plenary meetings of the **EFIPPP** took place in 2023. On 11-13 April, the EFIPPP plenary meeting on circumvention of sanctions and emerging threats took place. The meeting on 12 October focused on the European Financial and Economic Crime Assessment (EFECTA) 2023, and the analysis of the EFIPPP Threat Radar 2023. The focus of the plenary meeting on 29 November – 1 December was on the topic of THB, and gathered over 130 participants; emerging trends on anti-money laundering (AML) and counter terrorist financing (CTF) were also discussed.

The EFECCE continued to plan, organise and chair the **Joint Financial Intelligence Group (JFIG)** monthly meetings, with all participating EU MS, to discuss topics of relevance regarding economic and financial crimes in Europe.

Additionally, Europol continued the cooperation with the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)**, which had a more operational focus in 2023. On 15 February, a meeting was held at Europol HQ, to update on mutual cooperation matters. IOC has also provided Europol with access to a newly created OSINT Hub managed by IOC, to access information related to integrity in sport.

In the area of **Countering the Financing of Terrorism**, the EFECCE, together with the ECTC, continued supporting the activities of the **CT network for Financial Investigators**, launched by DG HOME. During 2023, both Centres attended several meetings of the network, as well as bilateral meetings with DG HOME, to discuss how to most effectively shape and organise the activities of the network.

The **SIENA connection for the information exchange between anti-corruption authorities** was also established and announced to all MS in April. Anti-corruption units from several MS that have expressed interest to connect are gradually being connected to SIENA. At the end of 2023, 13 MS and three TPs were connected to this dedicated SIENA network, and three more MS were in the process to implement the connection.



Other initiatives of the EFECCE include:

- On 24 February 2023, Europol launched the **financial support exercise** to Member States' **Euro counterfeiting** operations. During 2023, ten grants were awarded for activities to support against Euro counterfeiting, amounting to EUR 141K.
- On 11-13 July, Europol (AP Corruption) attended the **UN GLOBE** (Anti-corruption Network for Law enforcement practitioners) 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting and presented its portfolio and support capabilities. The meeting took place in a hybrid format, at Vienna and online, with the participation of 214 attendees from 109 authorities coming from 71 countries and 12 international organisations.
- On 26-27 October, Europol and the Basel Institute on Governance organised the **7<sup>th</sup> Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Cryptocurrencies**. Participants from more than 100 countries attended the event, representing law enforcement, public and private institutions and academia.

### Notable operational results of the Centre in 2023, include:

- Operation Ludus III, targeting trafficking of counterfeit toys and other goods, was coordinated by the EFECG between October 2022 and February 2023. The operation was led by Spain and Romania with the involvement of LEAs from 21 countries, OLAF, EUIPO and WCO (World Customs Organisation) and resulted in the seizure of more than 19 million counterfeit toys worth nearly EUR 79M. Europol's Intellectual Property Crime Coordinated Coalition coordinated the operational activity and liaised with e-commerce platforms.
- EFECG (AP Sustrans) supported two investigations led by Spain, targeting two criminal networks involved in money laundering and large-scale drug trafficking activities from Morocco to Europe. Criminals transferred money through business bank accounts using fake invoices or loans among a network of companies involved in the transport of drugs. They also self-laundered money through the purchase of goods and services, and investment in luxury goods like cars, technology, watches and luxury property. An action day on 21 February led to 12 arrests and the seizure of assets of an estimated EUR 15.5M total value.
- A joint investigation supported by Europol led to the dismantling of a Franco-Israeli criminal network involved in large-scale CEO fraud. Fraudsters impersonated CEOs and CFOs requesting large, urgent and confidential transfers; the funds were transferred to different EU countries, then to China and finally to Israel. The operation, led by France, involved authorities in Croatia, Hungary, Israel, Spain and Portugal. The operational activities resulted in five action days, which took place between January 2022 and January 2023 in France and Israel, and resulted in eight arrests, including the main organiser in Israel, and seizures of about EUR 5.5M total value.
- An investigation led by France, and supported by AP Smoke, targeted a criminal network operating an underground factory for the production of counterfeit cigarettes. An action day on 12 January, led to nine arrests and to the seizure of more than 100 tonnes of illegal products (19.4 million cigarettes and 15 tonnes of cut tobacco), 50 tonnes of packaging materials, as well as 18 tonnes of waste from the cigarette production process, with a total estimated value of EUR 17M.
- Europol supported the Dutch authorities in taking down an illegal IPTV (Internet Protocol television) service serving over 1,000,000 users across Europe. On 23 May, a series of raids were carried out across the Netherlands as part of an illegal streaming crackdown. Several individuals were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the illegal streaming of premium content. Packages bought by subscribers gave them access to over 10,000 live TV channels, alongside a library of 15,000 films and TV shows. Europol supported this investigation with analytical support, and with the organisation of several operational meetings. Europol experts were also deployed in various locations in the Netherlands during the action day.
- Europol supported Spain in dismantling a criminal network involved in drug production and trafficking and laundering of criminal assets. The network, composed of Albanian and Chinese nationals, used the so-called hawala system (money transfer without money movement) of underground banking. An action day on 17 July led to 27 arrests, seizure of luxury watches and jewellery valued at more than EUR 400,000, as well as high-end cars, encrypted mobile phones and EUR 615,000 in cash.
- On 11 July, Europol supported Spain and Poland in targeting a criminal network active in the production of counterfeit cigarettes and the sale of turnkey illicit production lines. The network was also offering after-sale services, such as machinery maintenance. The operation resulted in five arrests, and the seizure of almost 10 tonnes of raw tobacco and machines for cutting and packaging. The action prevented the sale of 476,000 packages of cigarettes, estimated at over EUR 2M.
- Europol supported an operation led by Italy, with the participation of Germany, Spain and France, into a criminal network who operated by reintroducing expired food into the supply chain. The criminal network collected expired food and beverages for little

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to no cost and replaced the expiry dates with new ones to enable their resale. An action day on 11 July led to the arrest of three individuals and seized more than 500,000 food and beverage items as well as equipment used by the criminals. Many of the seized food items were not only expired, but already spoiled, highlighting the harm that could have been done to consumers.

- Europol supported an operation led by Spain, with participation of Romania and Interpol, targeting a match-fixing criminal organisation. The criminal organisation used satellites to capture the live feeds of competitions before it would reach betting houses; this allowed the network to place bets knowing the outcome of the matches. The execution of an International Arrest Warrant in September 2023, led to the extradition to Spain of the main organiser, a former Bulgarian table tennis player. The overall results of the operation include the arrest of 23 suspects, and the seizure of two properties, three luxury vehicles and 47 bank accounts.
- In November 2023, a number of actions were implemented by authorities from Albania, Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands and Portugal, during an action week against corruption, led by France and supported by Europol. The operational actions focused on corruption cases affecting politically exposed persons and public officials, as well as corruption cases related to public procurement and investigations involving law enforcement and judicial authorities. The global results of this action week include: 233 persons of interest interviewed, some of whom were arrested, 267 searches and EUR 5.5M of frozen assets.
- In a coordinated action between 27 November and 8 December, supported by Europol, authorities from Germany, Poland, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg, joined forces to take down a criminal network suspected of carrying out 'shock calls' to extort money. Around 1 000 law enforcement officers, including special intervention units, were involved daily in this operational phase which led to 27 suspects being arrested, and 74 'shock call' crimes were stopped, preventing around EUR 5M from ending up in the criminals' pockets.
- In the framework of Operation OPSON, Europol's coordinated effort to combat food fraud and counterfeiting, Europol supported a spin-off investigation into counterfeit olive oil. In a coordinated action in November 2023, Spanish and Italian law enforcement officials conducted searches in various locations – 11 suspects were apprehended and 12 barrels containing 260 000 litres of adulterated oil were seized.

### Activity 7. Strategic and Analysis Coordination



In 2023, Europol produced 34 **strategic analysis reports**, above the annual target of 30 reports and the 2022 result (32). The **satisfaction with the strategic analysis reports**, measured via the User Survey, was assessed with a score of 8.6/10. In terms of operational analysis, Europol's analysts provided a total of 275 **operational analysis reports** (260 annual target 2023), an increase compared to 251 in 2022. The quality of the reports remained high; the user **satisfaction with operational analysis** was assessed via the User Survey with an overall score of 9.4/10. Additionally, the User Survey measured the satisfaction with the **Operational Training** delivered to experts in the EU MS and TP, which reached 9.4/10 at the end of 2023.

The **European Police Chiefs Convention (EPCC) 2023** was jointly organised by Europol and the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, on 26-27 September at Europol HQ. The main themes discussed at this year's event were: criminal trade on Darknet market places; policing in partnership in the digital age, with attention on the Digital Services Act, access to data, and public-private partnerships; facilitated illegal migration, and the impact of organised crime. At the event, Europol announced the winners of the **2023 Europol Excellence Awards in Innovation**. The Dutch Police, the French National Gendarmerie and the Estonian Police were recognised for their achievements in three categories: Innovation initiative in ethics, diversity and inclusion; Innovative operation and Innovative Technical Solution.

Europol hosted two **SOCTA (Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment)** Advisory Group meetings in 2023, in March and October, to discuss the state of play of the EU SOCTA interim report 2023, the requirements, methodology and stakeholders engagement for the SOCTA 2025, as well as the data collection for a dedicated report on criminal networks in the EU. Other relevant meetings/events include: SOCTA Technical Workshops for MS, on the concept of criminal networks and SOCTA methodology (18 April) and the prioritisation mechanism (21 September), a SOCTA workshop with EU agencies, institutions, bodies and international organisations (7 June) and the EU SOCTA Academic Advisory Group (24 September).

The **EU Crime Analysis Conference (CrimACon)** took place at Europol on 6-7 September, under the theme "A new era for criminal analysis: ethics by design". Over 400 participants from more than 40 countries attended the event. In 2023, the **Data Analysis Portal (DAP)** saw several releases; among these, version 1.10 included a Dataset Import Module (DIM), which allowed the migration of users from the legacy system to the Europol Data Environment.

In 2023, 35 **specialised analysis training courses** were delivered to 145 Operations Directorate (OD) staff members. Related policies, guidelines and manuals were produced or updated, and included in training activities, including the newcomer e-learning sessions. On 18-22 September, a joint Europol and CEPOL Operational Analysis Training took place in Budapest, Hungary, with analysts from 25 MS.

On 21-25 August, the **Europol Summer School** took place, with 19 representatives of EU LEAs. The week of training focused on Europol various tools and services, including deep dives into operational and financial support, data handling and information exchange process. Participants were also introduced to Europol's strategic planning, monitoring and reporting, the network of Liaison Officers, among others.

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On 15 February, in the framework of the EU funded project **Euromed Police V**, Europol delivered the 5<sup>th</sup> Analysis Training (Analytical techniques – Report writing and dissemination) in Budapest, Hungary. The training was attended by ten Analysis Points of Contact (ANASPOCs) from Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine\*, Tunisia and AFRIPOL. On 8 June, in the framework of the Advisory Committee, the Southern Partners Countries shared views and perspectives on project implementation. The first drafting session of the EUROMED Threat Assessment took place on 13 June, at Europol, with the participation of Israel, Jordan and Tunisia, with the Steering Committee taking place on 15 June. Between 28 August and 1 September, in Tunisia, Europol supported CEPOL in organising a training on operational intelligence analysis to enhance the capacities of North African countries in the fight against criminal groups. On 5-6 September, in Brussels, Europol in partnership with CEPOL facilitated the third drafting session of the EUROMED threat assessment report. In December, the EUROMED Threat Assessment was finalised and sent for validation to the partner countries.

On 14 March, the 5<sup>th</sup> Analysis Training was delivered in the framework of the **Eastern Partnership (EaP) Training and Operational Partnership Against Organised Crime (TOPCOP)** project, to the Analysis Points of Contact (ANASPOC) from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, at Europol HQ. On 31 May, an online meeting was held with the TOPCOP ANASPOC to discuss the status of data collection for the upcoming regional threat assessment in September. On 5-7 September, Europol organised a drafting session and a study visit for the TOPCOP ANASPOC; first drafts on the topics of Drugs Trafficking and THB for the EaP Threat Assessment were prepared. As a study visit, the ANASPOC attended the EU CrimeACon, on 6 September. On 28 September, the third meeting of the TOPCOP Advisory Committee took place. The last drafting session of the year took place on 11-13 December, to focus on migrant smuggling and fraud, including excise fraud.

When it comes to enhancing **cooperation with Europol's stakeholders**:

- **Cooperation with EU neighbourhood countries** – The negotiations with Armenia on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the secure communication line and Liaison Agreement were finalised and signed on 27 June in Yerevan. On 5 October, a delegation from the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine and the Security Service of Ukraine visited Europol and discussed best practices related to internal audit, disciplinary measures and whistle-blowing. In 2023, Europol continued to contribute to the activities of the EU Security Hub in Moldova. 
- **Cooperation with Western Balkans countries** – On 22 June, the Joint National Contact Point (JNCP) of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was established, enabling direct cooperation between Europol and all law enforcement agencies in BiH. Europol was regularly invited and participated to EU high-level meetings focused on the WB region, such as the EU-WB Senior Official meetings and the EU-WB Ministerial meetings on Justice and Home Affairs. A strategic review of the cooperation with the Western Balkan countries was presented and approved at the MB meeting on 10-11 October 2023.
- **Cooperation with the MENA countries** – Europol attended the EU – MENA conference in Portugal, in February 2023, and the Arab Ministers of Interior Council (AIMC), in March 2023. On 30 May, the second coordination meeting between Europol and GCCPOL (an agency of the Secretariat General of The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf – GCC) took place at Europol HQ, to discuss common threats for the EU and GCC MS, and possible opportunities to enhance the partnership. Discussions towards a Working Arrangement (WA) with Egypt were initiated during the reporting period; a pre-negotiation meeting took place on 25 May, and a successful first negotiations round, in November. On

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\* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

## Europol Public Information

13 June, Europol joined the EU delegation to Cairo, for the 1st EU-Egypt meeting on security and law enforcement cooperation. In May 2023, Europol received comments from the Moroccan authorities on the draft WA with Morocco and assessed them as a basis to proceed with the negotiations. In September 2023, Jordan approved the launch of negotiations on a WA with Europol. Discussions with the United Arab Emirates on the SIENA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) continued.

- **Cooperation with Latin America** – The final signature of the LO Agreement and the MoU on the secure communication line (SIENA) with Mexico took place in January 2023. The secure communication line and the Liaison Bureau were established during the reporting period. The WA with Ecuador was signed and entered into force on 26 October 2023. In 2023, Europol continued to support the Commission to kick off the negotiations for the International Agreements with Ecuador, Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia and Peru.
- **Cooperation with Asian Countries** – The Liaison Agreement with South Korea was concluded, and the SIENA connection established during the reporting period. The first SIENA message was sent in June. On 13 July, the first negotiation round on the WA with Singapore took place.
- **Cooperation with other countries** – The Working and Administrative Arrangement between Europol and New Zealand Police, implementing the International Agreement, was signed on 27 November 2023. The Strategic Review of Cooperation with the United Kingdom for the period 2020-2023, with recommendations for future cooperation, was endorsed by the MB in December 2023.
- **Cooperation with EU institutions, bodies and agencies and international organisations:**
  - o **Frontex** – In Q3, Europol supported the initiative to set up a joint working group with Frontex to look into EDPS' recommendations of shared interest for both agencies, in relation to Frontex's PeDRA (Processing personal data for risk analysis) programme. Under the guidance of senior management from Frontex and Europol, the working group drafted a concept note, which opened the door for resuming the transfer of information from Frontex to Europol, under certain conditions, e.g. by Europol providing contextual information enabling Frontex to assess the necessity and proportionality for the transfer of operational personal data.
  - o **European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)** – The Executive Directors of Europol and EUAA met on 24 May 2023 to discuss existing and future cooperation. In a follow-up, Europol shared a list of contact points with EUAA, on various areas of cooperation.
  - o **European Labour Authority (ELA)** – Following the addition of ELA to the priority partners list in December 2022, preparatory work in view of launching negotiations for a WA continued in 2023.
  - o **Interpol** – In 2023, Europol continued to provide technical support to the negotiation team of DG HOME, in the framework of the EU-Interpol cooperation agreement negotiations. On 1 February, Europol hosted a technical meeting at the request of DG HOME. The meeting, attended by DG HOME, Interpol and Europol experts, focused on data protection topics, including operational considerations on data processing and information management aspects. Europol has also supported DG HOME with the preparation of several negotiation meetings in this framework during the reporting period. In October, Europol attended the 7th INTERPOL Dialogue on an Effective Multilateral Policing Architecture against Global Threats. The Executive Director of Europol attended the 91st INTERPOL General Assembly, where she delivered a keynote speech on the topic "Together towards a global strategic alignment for an integrated security architecture".

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- **International Criminal Court (ICC)** – The Working Arrangement was signed on 25 April 2023.

Other initiatives under this Activity include:

- In terms of **information exchanged by Third Parties (TP)**, a total of 258,662 SIENA messages were exchanged by TPs, above the target set at 222,000, and 19% more than in 2022 (216,677).
- During 2023, Europol supported 33 **Joint Investigation Teams (JIT)**. Europol received 25 invitations to join JITs, 21 of which were approved during the reporting period.
- In the area of **Liaison and Stakeholder Coordination**, in 2023, the Liaison Officers (LO) community at Europol was enlarged with three new bureaux, Mexico, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina; with these arrivals, the number of LB at Europol reached 52. On 16 July, a second Ukrainian Liaison Officer was deployed at Europol. Frontex nominated its LO to Europol in December, acting remotely from Warsaw at the end of 2023. On 15 March, Europol deployed its Liaison Officer (ELO) to Interpol (Lyon); a new ELO started their deployment to Washington DC, as of 1 October.
- Under a **Contribution Agreement with DG NEAR**, to support law enforcement collaboration with Eastern Partnership countries, sixteen grants were awarded, amounting to € 783K.

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### Activity 8. Governance, support and administration

**99.8%**

Budget commitment  
rate

**34%**

Female staff

**1.7%**

Vacancy rate

**90%**

User satisfaction

Following the finalisation of the review of the Europol Strategy 2020+, in June 2023, the Management Board endorsed the **renewed Europol Strategy “Delivering security in partnership”**. As detailed in section 1.1, the updated Strategy builds further on the five strategic priorities of the Strategy 2020+, which remain relevant, and adds one additional priority aimed at strengthening the role of Europol in bringing relevant partners together for international law enforcement cooperation. A Strategy Implementation Roadmap was developed during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the MB adopted several Decisions implementing legal obligations stemming from the **amended Europol Regulation**. Four MB Decisions concerning the processing of personal data, implementing Articles 18(2), 18(6), 18(6a) and 18a were approved at the 21-22 March meeting, The MB Decision specifying the criteria on the basis of which Europol may issue the proposals for possible entry of information alerts in the Schengen Information Systems was approved at the 7-8 June meeting. At the same meeting, the MB Decision further specifying procedures for processing of information in accordance with Article 20(2a) ER, was approved for prior consultation with the EDPS. The MB Decision laying down Implementing Rules concerning the Data Protection Officer was adopted by the MB at its meeting of 12-13 December. The draft MB Decision laying down guidelines implementing Europol’s external relations with EU bodies, third countries and international organisations was presented to the MB at its December meeting.

The final **Europol Programming Document (PD) 2023 – 2025** was published in January 2023, following approval by the MB in November 2022 while the PD 2024 – 2026 was adopted by the MB in November 2023. The **Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) 2022** was presented and adopted by the MB at its June meeting, and published on Europol’s website in line with the applicable Regulations.

In 2023, the overall user satisfaction, measured through the six components in the **User Survey**, was assessed at 9/10, with 698 users providing their feedback.



Covered in more detail in section 2.3 of this report, Europol implemented its budget in 2023 with a **commitment rate** of 99.8%, above the target set at 95%, and last year’s result (96.6%); the **payment rate** at the end of the year was 88.6%, slightly below the target set at 90%. Compared to 2022, this is 11.1 percentage points above that year’s performance (79.7%) and EUR 28.3 million more in absolute amounts. The **budget outturn rate** was 1.75%, comfortably below the 2022 performance 4.7% and the ceiling of 5%. At the end of 2023, Europol complied with the target set for **late payments**, which represented only 2.2% of the total value, well below the ceiling of 5%. A **Root Cause Analysis exercise** on the budget performance of 2022 took place in February 2023. The exercise resulted in a set of actions to improve budget implementation in 2023.

The **vacancy rate** reached 1.7% at the end of 2023, below the ceiling set at 2%. The percentage **of female staff** was 34%, an increase from 32% reached in 2022. In 2023, 36% of applicants to Europol’s vacancies and 38% of the selected candidates were women (31.1% and 34.9% in

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2022, respectively). The percentage of female staff members in Head of Unit and equivalent or higher positions was 22% (eight staff members), compared to 18% in the previous year.

**Europol's Fundamental Rights Officer** took up duties in January. In 2023, the monitoring activities of the FRO, both in house and on mission, did not uncover any violations. During the reporting period, the working arrangements with New Zealand and Ecuador went through a fundamental rights assessment. The FRO also provided advice on innovation projects, this included advice on a project concerning child sexual exploitation image classification, and four written recommendations on other activities of the Innovation Lab. In addition, the FRO assessed ten innovative tools presented to the Member States through the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) – no substantial issues were noted. The FRO also provided input on the new Europol Strategy – “Delivering Security in Partnership”. The assessment revealed that the risk of fundamental rights violations is very low and that a specific objective on fundamental rights in the overall strategy is not necessary. Likewise, a procedure was put in place for major public reports such as the Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) and the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TESAT), to ensure that these reports are checked from a fundamental rights perspective, prior to their publication.

Finally, the FRO participated in the “March of the Living”, an event dedicated to the history of the Holocaust, focused at examining the roots of prejudice, intolerance and hatred.

The **Implementation Plan of the Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Strategy 2022+** was approved in January, comprising a set of key actions, and proposed tasks and responsibilities, in line with each objective of the D&I Strategy. In May, representatives from each Directorate and from the Corporate Affairs Bureau were appointed to the newly established D&I Advisory Group, under the lead of HR, and a call for volunteers was launched in June to all staff. The first meeting of the fully established D&I Advisory Group (AG) took place on 12 October, welcoming the newly selected volunteers and setting the intentions of the group towards enhancing the agency's commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

On 27 October, Europol was recognised with the prestigious **Certificate of Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion**, under the mention of "Change and Challenge", at the EU Agencies Network (EUAN) D&I Awards 2023.

On 28 June 2023, Europol received the award for **Good Administration** by the European Ombudsman for the **NextGenerationEU - Law Enforcement Forum**. This EU-wide law enforcement cooperation platform - launched by Europol **in partnership with the Italian authorities** in 2021 - focused on sharing intelligence to counter criminal infiltrations that threaten the proper distribution of EU recovery funds. The initiative won the 'public vote' category, which saw members of the public vote for their favourite out of more than 50 projects.

Europol implemented 86% of the pending **critical and very important audit recommendations** planned for implementation during the year, above the annual target of 85% (more details about audits can be found under 2.8, “Follow up of recommendations and action plans for audits”). The **corporate risks for 2023**, as identified in the Programming Document (PD) 2023-2025, were **mitigated in line with the identified response actions**<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding Europol's **environmental performance**, a feasibility study for the development of Europol's Environmental Vision was completed in Q1 2023. The **Environmental Vision 2030**, was approved by the MB at its meeting in July 2023. The approved action plan foresees a decarbonisation scenario whereby the Agency will reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 2018 by, inter alia, limiting the number of business travel by air, with an average reduction of ten flights per month. An external audit performed during the reporting period concluded that Europol is performing exceptionally well in terms of its environmental management practices and compliance with the requirements of International Standard ISO

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<sup>4</sup> Europol Programming Document 2023-2025, Annex XIV: Risks 2023 (EDOC-#1192222)

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14001:2015 and the EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) Regulation. As a result, in October 2023, Europol's EMAS and ISO14001 certifications were renewed. Europol's environmental strategy is detailed in 2.10.

The implementation of the **Strategic Housing Roadmap (SHR)** continued in the reporting period with significant developments, as outlined below.



- **Temporary Satellite Building 1 (TSB1):** In August 2023, the Host State and Europol agreed on defining the interim duration of the extension of the current lease, taking into account the availability timeline of a Temporary Satellite Building 3 (TSB3). The lease extension was signed on 22 December, with a validity of two additional years as of 1 January 2024.
- **Temporary Satellite Building 2 (TSB2):** In February, the Host State and Europol endorsed the "Definition Document", which includes the Spatial, Functional and Technical Programme of Requirements obligatory for the development process. The preliminary design was finalised, and endorsed by the SHR Programme Board, in September 2023, after which the final design process started. The delivery of the building is forecasted by the Host State for Q4 2024.
- **Temporary Satellite Building 3 (TSB3):** The Host State was successful in establishing a provisional lease agreement for an office building in the vicinity of HQ and TSB1; the proposal was presented at the MB meeting, on 10 October.
- **Mid-Term Housing Solution (MTHS):** Once the TSB2 and 3 become available, the construction activities in the HQ can start, forecasted for mid-2025. The Host State has established a new "Risk Control Measures Instrument", to be used to monitor the live loads on the floors in the HQ, until the floors are reinforced to their original design specifications.
- **Long-Term Housing Measures (LTHM),** the security assessment gap analysis for the future HQ2 office building was finalised in September 2023. The Host State initiated a new study, to be elaborated by the University of Amsterdam, on the cultural heritage of the building, to have certainty on the building elements that should be preserved and/or can be detached and relocated elsewhere.

The proposal for the **Workplace Allocation Plan (WAP)**, based on Hybrid Working and a flexible office concept, was endorsed by management and presented to all staff at the beginning of 2023. Since February, the reallocation and rationalisation of several workplaces between HQ and TSB took place, to maximise the use of the available office spaces. Phase 2 of the WAP, aimed at facilitating the housing needs of the Liaison Community, is ongoing.

Other initiatives under this Activity include:

- From a communications point of view, Europol appeared in 6,459 **high-impact web-based media**, similarly to last year (6,509 appearances in 2022).
- In the area of **Learning & Development**, 399 training activities delivered to staff were evaluated in 2023 (compared to 327 in 2022), with an average satisfaction of 8.2/10.

## Part II. Management

### 2.1. Management Board

Pursuant to Article 9 of the Europol Regulation, the **Management Board** (MB) constitutes, along with the Executive Director, the administrative and management structure of Europol. It is the **Agency's primary governance body** and its most important stakeholder environment. It ensures strategic guidance, oversees the implementation of Europol's tasks and performs other functions as mandated by the Europol Regulation. The MB is comprised of one representative of each Member State and one of the Commission. It takes decisions by simple majority, except for specific matters requiring a two-thirds majority, with each MB member having one vote. Denmark, which does not take part in the Europol Regulation, is represented in the Board in an observer capacity.

During 2023, the MB held four ordinary meetings and one topical meeting dedicated to planning matters. Two ordinary meetings were held at Europol's Headquarters and two were hosted by the respective EU Presidencies, namely Sweden and Spain. The **MB Working Groups** on Information Management (WGIM) and on Corporate Matters (WGCM) held four meetings each.

In the context of the scrutiny of Europol's activities by the European Parliament together with the national parliaments, the MB Chairperson presented the activities of the Board to the March and September 2023 meetings of the **Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group** (JPSG).

Pursuant to Article 14(4) of the Europol Regulation, a representative of the JPSG attended the June 2023 MB meeting in an observer capacity for matters of strategic and political interest.

Annex X to the CAAR outlines the main decisions taken by the Board at each meeting and the main topics discussed. Furthermore, Annex X includes a list of the main decisions taken by the MB through written procedure.

### 2.3. Budgetary and financial management

#### 2.3.1. Revenue

The revenue of Europol is almost fully covered by the Community subsidy (fund source IC1), amounting to € 207.2M in 2023. During the year, the subsidy was amended (and published) by € 5.8M under fund source IR1 for the 2023 contribution from Denmark (€ 4.7M)<sup>5</sup>, fully cashed, and for other grants, contribution agreements and Service Level Agreements (SLA's) for an additional € 1.1M<sup>6</sup>, fully cashed by the end of the year.

An amount of € 3.1M was established as internal assigned revenue (fund source IC4/IC41) of which € 2.5M was also cashed (paid). This cashed revenue was linked to expenditure budget items and the outstanding amount (non-cashed recovery orders) of € 602K was carried over to 2024. Also included in the revenue cashed under fund source IR1/ IR11, was an amount of € 18K relating to bank credit interest for the Europol Pension fund.

#### 2.3.2. Expenditure

The outcome of the main financial performance indicators for 2023 is as follows:

- The implementation of commitment appropriations was 99.8% or € 206.7M, 3.2 percentage points (pp) and € 19.1M above 2022.

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<sup>5</sup> EDOC# 1299717, Amending Budget II 2023 - Agreement with Denmark - Cover Note

<sup>6</sup> EDOC# 1278407, Amending Budget I 2023 - EUIPO IP, EUIPO Acquisition Fraud - Cover Note

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- The overall payment rate was 89% or € 181.7M, 8.8 pp and € 28.3M above the same period in 2022.
- The cancelled carry-over commitments amounted to 11%: a total of € 3.7M was not used and was incorporated in the final budget result. The amounts not used were due to operational activities not implemented, mainly in the areas of Grants (€ 1.7M, of which € 1.1M for EMPACT grants, € 272K for OTF grants and € 348K for ATLAS), meetings (€ 586K), deployments/missions (€ 318K), operational ICT expenses (€ 294K), Management Board meeting costs (€ 256K) and building and facilities related expenditure (€ 193K).

### **Title 1 – Staff related expenditure**

The final budget under Title 1 amounted to € 114.3M with an implementation rate for commitments of 100% and for payments of 99%.

A number of transfers in Title 1 (Staff) increased the total budget by € 2M (or 1.8%). The budget transferred to Title 1 was mainly due to a higher weighting coefficient for The Netherlands.

1% or € 1.2M of the payment appropriations under Title 1 was carried over to 2024, mainly for expenditure relating to the Strategic Housing Roadmap (€ 875K), as well as for recruitment, catering, medical services and training of staff (€ 287K). An amount of € 21K of the actual budget remained unused and lapsed.

### **Title 2 – Other administrative expenditure**

The final budget under Title 2 amounted to € 15.4M with an implementation rate for commitments of 99% and for payments of 69%.

During the year, transfers for a total of € 871K were made out of Title 2. The amounts transferred were the result of savings from activities not performed as originally planned for the Strategic Housing Roadmap building project due to delays in the implementation on the side of the Host State, partially offset by higher transfers towards electricity costs.

€ 4.6M was carried over to 2024, representing 30% of the budget under Title 2. In this area, the payment implementation for building-related expenditure is normally slower as it requires the involvement of (sub-) contractors before the Host State can issue invoices. This results in high amounts carried over each year. Commitments carried forward were mainly for building-related expenditure (€ 3.5M) such as replacement and maintenance works both in the Headquarters and Temporary Satellite Building 1 (€ 1.6M), replacement of the Security Information System phase 4B (€ 762K), preventive and corrective maintenance (€ 650K) as well as adjustments of light fixtures in the Headquarters (€ 445K). In addition, € 377K was carried over for various administrative and governance activities, € 310K for water, gas and electricity, € 297K for the December Management Board meeting and its Working Groups' activities and € 152K remained open at the end of the year for administrative ICT costs. An amount of € 86K of the actual budget remained unused and lapsed.

### **Title 3 – Operational activities**

The final budget under Title 3 amounted to € 77.5M, with a commitment rate of 100% and a payment rate of 77%.

100% or € 77.2M of the budget available under Title 3 was used to support operational activities, amongst which, € 5.8M for the EMPACT grants, € 3.7M for the ATLAS network, € 2M for Operational Task Force grants, € 124K for the Innovation grants and € 113K for the Euro Counterfeiting Grants. Moreover, € 41.3M of the budget available under Title 3 was implemented for ICT strategic priorities (e.g. the Interoperability programme, PERCI, New Forensics Environment, Visualisation and Analysis Toolkit), as well as other operational activities, telecommunication and sustainment costs. The remaining € 24.1M was implemented mainly in support of seconded national experts and short-term seconded national experts (€ 6.5M),

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deployments (€ 5.2M), operational meetings (€ 4.3M), missions (€ 3.3M), operational training (€ 1.2M), the decryption platform (€ 1.1M), external expertise (€ 937K) and operational equipment (€ 930K), web services (€ 239K), the European Police Chiefs' Conference (€ 251K) and Heads of Europol National Units' meetings (€ 127K).

During the year, a total of € 1.2M (or 1.5%) was transferred out of Title 3 mainly for the need of salaries. Beside covering a high demand for deployment and mission budget, which was increased by € 1.9M during the year, and a transfer in for the EMPACT grants (€ 1.8M), significant budget was reduced in the operational ICT budget (€ 3.1M) in order to cover for these additional needs.

Overall, an amount of € 348K lapsed mainly in the areas of meetings (€ 124K), missions (€ 80K), operational ICT expenditure (€ 49K), operational equipment (€ 41K) and seconded national experts (including short-term) (€ 30K).

€ 19.3M was carried over to 2024, representing 25% of the budget available under Title 3. This was € 8.1M less compared to 2022. Areas with carry-over amounts were mainly: operational hardware/software and telecommunications (€ 13.7M), operational grants (EMPACT, ATLAS, OTF and Innovation Grants) (€ 2.1M), operational meetings (€ 1.4M), operational equipment (€ 669K), deployments (€ 434K), external expertise (€ 319K), operational trainings (€ 212K), missions (€ 143K) and the European Police Chiefs' Conference (€ 134K).

### **2.3.3. Implementation of appropriations carried over to 2023 (C8)**

The carry over to 2023 came to a total of € 33M to cover existing commitments established during 2022. The final implementation rate of the carry over was € 29.3M or 89%. The cancelled carry over commitments amounted to 11%. A total of € 3.7M was not used and was therefore incorporated in the final budget result. The unused funds were mainly related to the following:

- € 203K for Title 1, which was 19% of the amount carried over under this Title (€ 1.1M). The unused funds were related to staff expenditure (e.g. recruitment, medical service and training), catering and external services.
- € 535K for Title 2, which represented 13% of the total amount carried over under this Title (€ 4.1M). The unused funds were related to building-related expenditure (e.g. energy, cleaning, car fleet, office supplies etc.), administrative ICT purchases and maintenance and statutory expenditure.
- € 3M for Title 3, which was 11% of the amount carried over under Title 3 (€ 27.9M). The unused funds were related to EMPACT grants (€ 1.1M), OTF grants (€ 272K), ATLAS (€ 348K), ICT expenditure (€ 308K), deployments/missions (€ 318K) and meetings (€ 586K).

### **2.3.4. Implementation of assigned revenue (C4, C5 and R0)**

With regard to the implementation of internal assigned revenue, there is a distinction between funds established in 2023 (fund source C4) and funds carried over from 2022 (fund source C5).

C4: This type of revenue relates to refunds and other revenue, such as re-payments, tax reimbursements, revenue from third parties, unspent pre-financing by MS etc. During the year 2023, an overall amount of € 2.5M was established and cashed. Only € 467K (or 19%) was implemented of which only € 45K (or 2%) was paid. An amount of € 2.1M of commitment appropriations and € 2.5M of payment appropriations were carried over to fund source C5, in order to be implemented in 2024.

C5: The C5 budget relates to cashed and unused assigned revenue from the previous year (under C4 funds). Appropriations carried over from 2022, amounting to € 1.3M, were fully committed mainly in the areas of EMPACT (€ 557K), OTF grants (€ 258K) and ICT (€ 271K). Payment

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implementation reached 99% and € 12K remained unpaid at the end of the year and carried over (to fund source C8), to be paid in 2024.

R0: With regard to the implementation of external assigned revenue, there is a distinction between the funds that were established in 2023 (e.g. new agreements) and the funds from before 2023 for which the implementation continued into the year.

External assigned revenue included in the budgetary accounts came to € 13.7M, of which € 6.2M was carried over from 2022 and the remaining € 7.5M was established and cashed in 2023. € 10.6M (or 77%) was committed during the year, of which € 8.4M (or 61%) was also paid. € 3.1M of commitment appropriations and € 5.3M of payment appropriations were carried over to 2024.

The external assigned revenue was implemented for the following activities:

- Following the agreement between Europol and Denmark, a contribution amounting to € 4.7M was received in 2023. The full amount was implemented.
- An amount of € 1.8M was carried over from 2022 for the further implementation of the Europol Pension Fund during 2023. Of this amount, € 227K (or 13%) was committed and € 123K (or 7%) was paid under budget item 1184, Pensions under the Europol Convention.
- Several agreements were implemented during the year under budget item 3600, Operational expenditure related to subsidies and grants or 3700, Operational expenditure related to research and development projects, all carried over from 2022: EUIPO, SIRIUS2, H2020, EMPACT, EaP and CEPOL.

### **2.3.5. Appropriations carried over to 2024**

With regard to the carry over of appropriations from 2023 to 2024, there is a distinction between the funds corresponding to carry over of payment appropriations and carry over of commitment appropriations. All appropriations have been carried over in accordance with Article 12 of the Europol Financial Regulation.

An amount of € 25.1M was carried over from fund source C1 to C8. This represented 12% of the overall budget (€ 207.2M). Out of the € 25.1M carried over:

- € 1.2M concerned Title 1 (Staff), which was 1% of the total Title 1 budget (€ 114.3M).
- € 4.6M concerned Title 2 (Administrative Expenditure), which was 30% of the total Title 2 budget (€ 15.4M).
- € 19.3M concerned Title 3 (Operational Expenditure), of which € 17.2M for non-differentiated open commitments and € 2.1M of differentiated open commitments related to chapter 39 (Grants) specifically:
  - o € 17.2M was automatically carried over to C8 in 2024 as payment appropriations to cover for existing commitments, relating to ICT operational consultancies and hardware/software purchases/maintenance, operational meetings, operational equipment, deployments, external expertise, operational training, missions and the European Police Chiefs' Conference.
  - o € 2.1M related to chapter 39 (Grants) was carried over automatically to the following year, under C8 commitment appropriations, without the payment appropriations. The open grants (EMPACT, ATLAS, OTF and the Innovation grant) will be paid from the payment appropriations forecast for 2024 under fund source C1.

Appropriations arising from internal assigned revenue carried over to fund source C8 amounted, at the end of the year, to € 12K mainly for legal expenses and meetings. These funds will be further implemented in 2024.

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For internal assigned revenue, an amount of € 2.1M of commitment appropriations and € 2.5M of payment appropriations under fund source C4 was carried over to 2024 to fund source C5. In addition, the outstanding payment appropriations of fund source C4 to cover existing commitments of € 422K was carried over to C8 for further implementation in 2024.

For external assigned revenue, the carried over payment appropriations of € 5.3M were related to:

- € 1.7M - Europol Pension Fund;
- € 1.6M - contribution agreement for EMPACT EaP;
- € 889K - contribution agreement for SIRIUS Phase2;
- € 583K - grant agreements under Horizon 2020;
- € 351K - SLA for EUIPO IP Crime;
- € 63K - SLA for EUIPO Fraud;
- € 176K - SLA with CEPOL.

### **2.3.6. Budget Transfers**

Throughout the year, a total number of 34 transfers for fund source C1 (excluding two transfers relating to internal assigned revenue transfers and two relating to payment appropriations were made, for a total amount of almost € 13.4M (or 7% of the budget).

In Title 1 (Staff), a total of € 2M (or 2%) was transferred in, due to a higher weighting coefficient for The Netherlands and additional needs of budget.

In Title 2 (Other Administrative Expenditure), a total of € 871K (or 5%) was transferred out, due to savings realised from activities not performed for the Strategic Housing Roadmap, partially offset by higher transfers towards electricity costs.

In Title 3 (Operational activities) overall € 1.2M (or 2%) of budget was transferred out mainly for the need of salaries. Beside covering the high demand in the deployments and mission budgets, which was increased by € 1.9M during the year, and a transfer in for the EMPACT grants (€ 1.8M), significant budget was reduced in the operational ICT budget (€ 3.1M) in order to cover these additional needs.

All transfers were approved by the Executive Director in accordance with Article 26(1) of the of the Financial Regulation applicable to Europol, except one, the transfer for the EMPACT grants, which was approved by the Management Board in accordance with Article 26(2) of the Financial Regulation applicable to Europol.

### **2.3.7. Budget Outturn 2022**

The overall budget result (surplus) for the financial year 2023 came to € 6.3M. This included the following:

- An amount of € 455K of the 2023 budget, which was not committed and lapsed.
- An amount of € 14K of not paid payment appropriations relating to differentiated appropriations in the 2023 budget;
- An amount of € 3.7M of appropriations carried over from 2022 to 2023, which was not used;
- The revenue of € 2.1M which was cashed for the differentiated appropriations, but was not used for the related payment appropriations;
- The exchange rate difference in 2023 was a loss of € 28.

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### 2.3.8. Accrual rate

The accrual rate in 2023 decreased to 25% (compared to 28% in 2022), with € 6.4M accrual (amount of products/services already delivered in 2023 but not yet paid) and carry forward commitments of € 25.5M<sup>7</sup>.

### 2.3.9. Late payments

In 2023, Europol made a total of 4,055 payments (682 more than in 2022). The 20% increase in the number of transactions was mostly attributable to the increased Europol budget and the increased payment implementation. Albeit the number of payments increased by 20% in 2023, the total of invoices paid late decreased from 7.2% in 2022 to 5.2%. Such double-digit growth was processed without any addition in human resources.

In 2023, a total of € 2.4K were paid to cover interest costs related to six late payments. This is significantly less than the interest Europol incurred in 2022 for a total € 7.1K on late interest costs due to nine late payments.

### 2.3.10. Procurement

The table below contains an overview of the different procurement procedures run by Europol in 2023, for contracts above € 15,000<sup>8</sup>:

Type of procedure applied	Number of procedures resulting in contracts	Value (EUR)	% of total value
Open/ restricted	4	4,192,000	13.78%
Low / middle value	2	259,000	0.85%
Competitive with negotiation/ competitive dialogue	0	0	0%
Negotiated without prior publication of a contract notice based on points 11.1 (a) to (f) of Annex I of the FR	4	25,898,811.88	85.11%
Negotiated without prior publication of a contract notice based on points 11.1 (g) and (i) of Annex I of the FR	1	80,000	0.26%
Negotiated without prior publication of a contract notice based on points 11.1 (h), (j), (k), (l), and (m) of Annex I of the FR	0	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>30,429,811.88</b>	<b>100%</b>

Pursuant to Article 74(10) of the Financial Regulation (FR) applicable to Europol, each authorising officer by delegation must draw up a list of the negotiated procedures under points 11.1 (a) to (f) of Annex I FR, i.e. negotiated procedures without publication of a contract notice and, if the trend shows a significant increase of this type of procedures, to report on measures taken to reverse such a trend.

In 2023, the total number of negotiated procedures under points 11.1 (a) to (f) of Annex I FR was higher compared to the average of the last four years. The value of the contracts awarded

<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of calculating accruals, fund sources C1, C4 and C5 are used.

<sup>8</sup> This overview does not include specific contract/orders awarded under framework contracts. This overview does not include inter-institutional contracts. This overview includes only procurement procedures initiated by Europol and resulting in contracts.

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under points 11.1 (a) to (f) of Annex I FR in 2023 was significantly higher than the average of the previous four years (as outlined in the table below).

Year	Number of procurement procedure under points 11.1 (a) to (f) of Annex I FR	Value in Euro	Proportion (%) of the yearly value of awarded procedures
2019	1	24,623	0.16%
2020	2	230,000	2.98%
2021	1	405,000	0.69%
2022	1	411,000	2.65%
2023	4	25,898,811.88	85.11%

The reasons for the increase in negotiated procedures under points 11.1 (a) to (f) of Annex I FR and the measures taken to reverse the trend are listed below:

- Two (2) negotiated procurement procedures (with an aggregated estimated value of €21,200,000) were necessary to increase the budget ceilings of two ICT framework contracts initiated in 2020. The possibility of using such negotiated procedures was transparently communicated in the relevant procurement documentation. Europol's needs for ICT services (especially consultancy services) proved substantially higher than forecasted in 2020. While the forecast was prepared in good faith using the data available in 2020, it appeared that the ICT needs changed faster than anticipated. As a measure taken to avoid a future similar situation, the forecasting for new ICT consultancy procedures was strengthened by involving the Budget Planning and Reporting Team.
- One (1) negotiated procedure for mobile telephony services (with an estimated value of €4,500,000) was necessary after the underlying open procedure failed due to the absence of suitable tenders received. The negotiated procedure offered to Europol the possibility to check the access to market of the pre-selected candidate before sending the invitation, reducing the risk of unsuitability of the offer.
- One (1) negotiated procedure (with an estimated value of €198,811.88<sup>9</sup>) was conducted for the provision of Dutch Pension Rights for (former) Local Staff members. Before the negotiated procedure was launched, Europol had three unsuccessful procedures with prior publication of contract notices. Due to the specific market for the Dutch Pension Rights services, economic operators were not responsive to Europol's calls for tenders. The negotiated procedure without prior publication of a contract notice proved to be the only feasible way for awarding the contract. This contract is not a recurrent contract so it is not likely to be repeated in the future.

In addition, point 3.2 of Annex I FR stipulates that the negotiated procedures under points (g) (building contracts) and (i) (contracts to be declared secret) of point 11.1 shall be included/annexed to the Consolidated Annual Activity Report. The other grounds of negotiated procedures referred to in points 11.1 (h), (j), (k), (l), and (m) of Annex I FR are subject to separate publication (i.e. publication in the Annual List of Contractors on Europol's website). Therefore, these procedures are not included in this report.

In 2023, the following contracts were concluded under points 11.1 (a) - (f), (g) and (i) of Annex I FR:

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<sup>9</sup> Of which €912.88 is an administrative fee and the rest is payment for actual pension rights.

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Point of Annex I to the FR	Brief indication of the circumstances justifying the use of procedure	Subject of the tender	Procedure ref.	Maximum value (EUR)	Contractor
point 11.1 a	Where tenders which are irregular or unacceptable, by reference in particular to the selection or award criteria, are submitted <u>in response to an open or restricted procedure, or a competitive dialogue</u>	Mobile communication carrier services	EUROPOL/2022/NP/0001	4,500,000	Vodafone Libertel BV
		Dutch pension rights	2216/C2/N	198,811.88	Zwitsersleven PPI en Zwitsersleven
point 11.1 e	For new services consisting in the repetition of similar services or works entrusted to the economic operator to which the same contracting authority awarded an original contract	ICT Consultancy framework contract budget ceiling increase	EUROPOL/2023/NP/0008	12,750,000	1. European Dynamics Luxembourg SA 2. Unisystems Luxembourg S.A.R.L. (Group Leader); Unisystems Information Technology Systems Commercial S.M.S.A; Network Research Belgium (NRB) 3. Nederlands Centrum Voor Interim-Management BV 4. ARHS Developments S.A. (Group Leader); Unisys Nederland N.V.; ARHS Technology N.V.
		ICT Security Systems framework contract budget ceiling increase	EUROPOL/2023/NP/0007	8,450,000	Motiv IT Masters BV
point 11.1 i	For contracts declared secret or for contracts whose performance must be accompanied by special security measures	Provision of Facilities (police academies or similar) and related services for Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children (COSEC) Course	EUROPOL/2023/NP/0001	80,000	Landesamt für Ausbildung, Fortbildung und Personalangelegenheiten der Polizei NRW (LAFP)

Pursuant to Article 163(3) FR, publication of certain information on a contract award may be withheld where its release would impede law enforcement or otherwise by contrary to the public interest, would harm the legitimate commercial interest of economic operators or might prejudice fair competition between them. Europol did not identify any reason to withhold information based on Article 163(3) FR.

### **2.3.11. Cost and benefits of internal controls**

To assess the **cost effectiveness of controls**, Europol assessed their **benefits**, level of **efficiency** and their **cost**.

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With respect to **benefits**, the system of internal controls ensures the compliant, effective and efficient implementation of the budget entrusted to Europol and the achievement of corresponding objectives. Europol's activities are subject to oversight, supervision and scrutiny to ensure the Agency delivers on its mandate in a compliant way.

Since Europol became an EU Agency, the ECA has issued an **unqualified audit opinion** on the reliability of the accounts and on the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts. The ECA observations concerning the previous financial years were addressed by the end of 2023. The **European Parliament** granted the Executive Director **discharge** on the implementation of the budget for each financial year.

The established controls resulted in an **adequately reduced risk of financial fraud**, including based on the implementation of Europol's financial model and Europol's Anti-Fraud Strategy, relying on clear guidance to staff on the expected behaviour, as well as, in particular, preventive and detective controls, next to recurrent reporting arrangements and the prevention of conflict of interest situations.

There were no critical risks identified ad hoc and no major deficiencies regarding the **effectiveness, efficiency and cost of controls (economy)**.

In 2023, the **value of exceptions** and instances of **non-compliance** concerning Europol's financial transactions was **below the 2% materiality threshold** (i.e. 1.8%), the **budget commitment implementation rate** reached 99.8%, the **payment rate** was 88.6%, the **vacancy rate** was below the threshold of 2% (i.e. 1.7%), and the **implementation of critical and very important recommendations** was above target (i.e. 86% vs. 85%). Budgetary performance further improved in 2023, in particular concerning the budget outturn and carry-forward to 2024, as a result of dedicated measures, including the establishment of a reserve list of initiatives.

Concerning the **economy of controls**, the **overall cost of controls in 2023** represented **2.2%** of the **established revenue**. The ratio is considered **reasonable** to uphold a compliant financial model, while mitigating the risk of financial fraud, in particular in light of Europol's position as a law enforcement agency at EU level, the renewed mandate under the Europol Regulation and the complexity of (operational) activities, the evolution of the budget and the number of establishment plan posts as well as other staff financed from the funds entrusted to Europol<sup>10</sup>.

The **calculation method** to estimate the cost of controls was developed based on the guidance of the European Commission and specific guidelines developed by the Internal Control Working Group of the Performance Development Network (PDN)<sup>11</sup>, while taking into account Europol's specific situation. To calculate the cost of control, the salary costs (based on the average full time equivalent costs for each concerned staff member) were included for ex-ante and ex-post control activities concerning the implementation of the established revenue of Europol. The salary costs were estimated for the activities for financial and operational initiation and verification as well as authorisation, budget planning and monitoring, procurement and grants management, next to accounting activities. In addition, external audit costs for 2023 were taken into account. Costs for information technology controls, planning and performance, maintaining the Internal Control Framework (ICF), internal assurance (e.g. data protection, internal audit and system accreditation) and anti-fraud measures, and so-called overhead costs (e.g. building related running costs, ICT administration) were not included.

Europol will continue to **closely monitor** the development of the **cost ratio for internal controls**, also in anticipation of the developments to digitalise the management of EU funds with the implementation of SUMMA as a new state-of-the-art system replacing the Accrual Based Accounting System (ABAC).

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<sup>10</sup> Contract Agents (CAs) and Seconded National Experts (SNEs)

<sup>11</sup> The PDN is a sub-network of the EU Agencies Network (EUAN).

### 2.4. Delegation and sub-delegation of the powers of budget implementation

In accordance with the provisions of Article 59(1) of the Europol Regulation and Article 39(1) of the Financial Regulation (FR) applicable to Europol, the Executive Director performs the duties as **Authorising Officer (AO)** for **the implementation of revenue and expenditure of the budget assigned to Europol**. In 2023, the Executive Director continued to delegate the powers of budget implementation to the Deputy Executive Directors, the Head of the Corporate Affairs Bureau and the Secretary of the Management Board (MB), and their alternates, for the budget allocated to their respective areas.

**Sub-delegation** for the implementation of revenue and expenditure requires prior agreement by the Executive Director, in accordance with Article 41(2) of the FR. The duties and responsibilities of the Authorising Officer (AO) including the Europol controls and checks for financial transactions also apply to Authorising Officers (AOs) by delegation or sub-delegation, who possess the necessary professional skills for the implementation of budget.

The implementation of the budget is performed following the **principles of sound financial management, transparency and segregation of duties**. Arrangements and internal controls are in place for the prevention and management of conflict of interest situations, as well as the identification and reporting of irregular and suspected illegal activity, including instances of financial fraud, supported by ex-ante and ex-post financial controls, next to the safeguarding of records of the underlying financial transactions. The delegations and sub-delegations are not governed by a time-limit and are amended/revoked based on business needs. They are subject to an annual validation of user access rights in the Accrual Based Accounting System (ABAC), performed by Europol's Internal Audit Capability (IAC), cross-checking whether these are in line with the delegations, tasks and responsibilities entrusted to staff.

**The delegations and sub-delegations are maintained as part of Europol's Financial Model**, last revised in December 2023 in light of organisational changes and related business needs. The financial model delegations, summarised in the "Delegation Matrix" of Europol – approved by the Authorising Officer (AO) and available to all staff for internal transparency, are maintained and updated on a continuous basis, with a view to ensuring efficient, effective and compliant budget implementation.

**Monthly, quarterly and yearly financial monitoring and reporting** mechanisms are in place. Instances of financial exceptions and non-compliance are logged in a central record and the revised approach for management of financial deviations was implemented in 2023.

Concerning the performance of financial delegations for implementing the revenue and expenditure at Europol, there was no information identified which would have led to the initiation of an administrative inquiry by Europol's Internal Investigation Service (IIS) or an internal investigation by OLAF.

### 2.5. Human Resources management

#### 2.5.1. Staff figures and Establishment Plan

The 2023 Establishment Plan had a total number of 716 TA posts, with 30 additional posts compared to the 2022 Establishment Plan, in line with the adopted Budget 2023.

On 31 December 2023, the total number of staff employed by Europol was 911: 671 staff in Establishment Plan (TA) posts and 240 Contract Agents (including 17 funded by grants/agreements); the number of non-Europol staff (Seconded National Experts, Liaison Officers and staff of Liaison Bureaus, Interns and Contractors) was 790.

During 2023, 129 new staff joined Europol (99 Temporary Agents and 30 Contract Agents), while 69 staff left the Organisation (43 Temporary Agents and 26 Contract Agents).

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### **2.5.2. Main changes in HR policies**

In 2023, the Management Board adopted its revised Decision on the secondment of national experts to Europol. The main changes aimed at extending the maximum duration of short-term secondments, reducing the maximum duration of consecutive secondments as short-term SNE and introducing an exception to the rule, whereby annual leave not taken by the end of the period of active secondment shall be forfeited, in order to capture the specificities relating to cases whereby (short-term or not) SNEs would end their secondment altogether and a new (short-term or not) secondment would start the first day following the end date of the immediately preceding secondment.

Additionally, the Executive Director adopted its revised Decision on internships. The main changes concern the extension of the maximum duration of internships, the increase in the amount of the maintenance grant due to the increase of living costs in the Netherlands and the cases in which deductions to such grant should be made, the documents that can be taken into account in order to verify the level of education of interns. Additionally, clarifications as to the powers of approval and signature in the context of the selection procedure and the appointment of the interns have been made.

A revised Decision of the Executive Director implementing Commission Decision C(2022) 1788 on working time and hybrid working has also been adopted, aiming at allowing pregnant staff/SNEs to submit a request to telework from outside the place of employment for exceptional circumstances and clarifying the interactions between authorised telework from outside the place of employment and missions, the applicable time-zone and the consequences of prolonged debit hours carried over for more than six months. Finally, with regard to the lump sum, it introduces clarifications as to the administrative statuses that are not considered as satisfy the condition of 'active service' and set a benchmark in order to be considered 'continuously' in active service/secondment for the purpose of the lump sum.

The Reclassification Manual was amended to reflect the process of the reclassification exercise, which as of 2023 is run in SYSPER, and in order to reflect a change in the deadline to obtain the confirmation on the validation of the diploma or on the successful participation in a test demonstrating the ability to work in a third language of the European Union.

### **2.5.3. Implementing rules adopted in 2023**

In 2023, no implementing rules of the **Staff Regulations** were adopted by the Management Board.

The following **implementing rules of the Europol Regulation** were adopted in 2023 by the Management Board:

- Decision of the Management Board of Europol of 21 March 2023 on the secondment of national experts to Europol.

### **2.5.4. Vacancy rate**

The vacancy rate at the end of 2023 was 1.7% (671 out of 716 posts were in post and 33 appointment letters had been sent), while the target was a vacancy rate of maximum 2%. The vacancy rate in 2022 was 0.6%.

### **2.5.5. Gender representation**

At the end of 2023, female staff represented 34% of all staff working for Europol and occupied 30% of established (TA) posts filled. This is in line with the previous year. Women occupied 17% of Senior Specialist / Senior Analyst positions (i.e. 35 out of 206 staff in these posts), similarly

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to 2022. The percentage of female staff members in Head of Unit and equivalent or higher positions was 22% (eight staff members), compared to 18% in the previous year.

The aspect of equal opportunities for women and men is emphasised by Europol in all vacancy notices. This is also highlighted in the Europol Recruitment Guidelines, published on Europol's website. Women, in particular in the law enforcement sector, are encouraged to apply for posts at Europol.

### **2.5.6. Member States representation**

The countries with the largest representation among staff were the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Romania, Greece, Germany, France, Portugal and Belgium.

Comparing Europol's staff nationality share to the EU MS population share, Germany, France and Poland are still underrepresented<sup>12</sup> while the Netherlands, Greece, Romania and Portugal are overrepresented.

Detailed graphs can be found in Annex V-d.

### **2.5.7. Annual Assessment and reclassification**

The Annual Appraisal Exercise 2023 was launched on 16 January 2023 and closed on 28 April 2023, with a completion rate of 89%, compared to 81% the previous year.

Europol's Reclassification Exercise 2023 was launched through an Administrative Notice published on 23 June 2023, following the closure of the Annual Appraisal Exercise 2023.

The budgetary limit for the Reclassification Exercise 2023 was set at a maximum of 30% of eligible Temporary Agent staff and 20% of eligible Contract Agent staff, taking into account the Staff Establishment Plan, the budgetary resources available and the need to respect the multiplication rates for guiding average career equivalence as regards Temporary Agent staff or the average time spent in the grade for Contract Agent staff.

The exercise was completed on 23 November 2023 and the total number of staff reclassified was 107 (74 Administrators (AD), 4 Assistant (AST) and 29 Contract Agent (CA)) which is 11.7% of the staff population (posts filled at year-end).

### **2.5.8 Other developments**

On 7 September 2023, Europol's Security Coordinator was informed about administrative personnel paper files of Europol staff being unaccounted for. Europol immediately treated the reported incident as a serious security and personal data breach. A corresponding security investigation was launched, following which eight (8) administrative personnel paper files were verified as unaccounted for in the physical storage location of Europol's Human Resources (HR) Unit. Operational information of Europol's core business activities was never affected by the incident.

Europol informed and involved all relevant stakeholders, including the competent authorities in the Netherlands, the Management Board (MB) and the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), while the individual eight (8) staff members affected by the incident were also notified. The European Parliament also received a dedicated briefing by Europol's Security Coordinator.

At the time of completing the CAAR, the security investigation into the incident is ongoing. In addition, proceedings to establish the facts and circumstances in relation to non-compliance by Europol staff with professional obligations are being finalised, for subsequent decision-making in the course of 2024. This concerns in particular the access control to the concerned administrative

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<sup>12</sup> With a gap  $\geq 2\%$  when comparing the population share in Europol and in the EU.

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personnel paper files and the timeliness of the incident reporting. In parallel, organisational improvement measures in the HR Unit have been initiated.

### 2.6. Internal audit management

#### 2.6.1. Internal Audit Capability (IAC)

In accordance with its Work Programme, the IAC completed the following audit engagements in 2023:

- **Audit of Europol's budget processes**

The audit of Europol's budget processes focused on addressing high carry-over rates to 2022 and 2023, lapses in the 2022 budget and subsequent actions taken by Europol to enhance future budgetary performance. The engagement aimed to improve future budget performance and also included checks on ICT's budget processes, as this was the budget with the highest carry-overs from 2022 to 2023. The audit identified a number of strengths, such as the prompt investigation into the 2022 budget underperformance, proposing actionable measures and swift implementation. However, organisational uncertainties concerning budget tasks and over-planning were also noted and the IAC issued ten (10) audit recommendations for ICT's budget processes, rating those processes as marginally satisfactory. The audit report highlights the need for better alignments between planned and actual expenses for enhancing budget management across the organisation.

- **Consultancy on the integration of short-term personnel, organisational security and induction-related controls**

The purpose of this consultancy was to assess the adequacy of the measures taken by Europol to ensure the proper integration of short-term personnel in their teams, compliance to the security aspects established by the organisation as well as awareness of and conformity to Europol's ethics guidance. Short-term personnel considered in this exercise were Guest Officers, short-term SNEs in support of Operational Task Forces and ICT consultants, as these categories of personnel work at Europol for shorter periods than Europol staff, can perform their tasks from outside Europol's premises and are subject to different recruitment/selection processes and HR procedures than Europol staff.

The consultancy concluded that although Europol does not have a structured on-boarding process description for short-term personnel, the practices followed starting from the first contact with the selected professional until the first few weeks of their employment, facilitate their prompt start of employment. Overall, the mechanisms in place ensure an adequate integration of short-term personnel, allowing them to perform their duties swiftly upon their arrival at the agency. Nevertheless, some adjustments could enhance the alignment of short-term personnel with the agency's culture, help to better comprehend their role and responsibilities, and increase their level of engagement and productivity while developing a sense of community within their teams. In its report, the IAC highlighted the good practices noted and provided specific guidance for further improvements.

- **Review of the implementation of recommendations issued by the IAC during the period 2016-2021**

In 2023, the IAC assessed the implementation of recommendations it had issued between 2016 and 2021. The majority of recommendations (72 out of 94) were fully implemented to mitigate the identified risks; 11 recommendations remained pending, categorised as ongoing or partly implemented, while 11 were deemed irrelevant due to evolving circumstances. Notable benefits emerged from the fully implemented recommendations, for example, the Europol Catalogue of Products and Services facilitated essential information access for law enforcement officers; the Policy on Inventory Management and the Strategic Asset Management Plan 2023-2025 enhanced Europol's asset management framework;

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improvements in the contract renewal process through integrated internal controls has increased efficiency within this process; workload assessments in 24/7 Operational Support mitigated staff overload to ensure continued Member States' service provision. These achievements - resulting from the implementation of IAC's recommendations - signify effective risk mitigation and operational enhancements.

### - **ISO 14001:2015 internal audit of Europol's Environmental Management System (EMS)**

Europol was certified to operate an EMS complying with the requirements of International Standard ISO 14001:2015 in November 2021 and obtained the EMAS registration from the competent Dutch authority SCCM (Stichting Coordination Certification Management Systems for the Environment and Healthy and Safe Working) in February 2022. According to requirement 9.2.1 of ISO 14001:2015, the Agency needs to conduct internal audits at planned intervals (at least annually) and the IAC was called to perform this task.

On the basis of the audit findings, the IAC concluded that the EMS related activities conducted at Europol are performed in a controlled manner and in compliance with the requirements of International Standard ISO 14001:2015 and the EMAS Regulation. Nevertheless, the IAC noted a number of shortcomings and identified one (1) non-conformity, three (3) observations and three (3) opportunities for improvement.

### - **ISO 17020:2012 internal audit of Europol's Document Forensics**

The purpose of the ISO 17020:2012 internal audit of Europol's Document Forensics is to verify that its activity "comparative forensic examination of Euro banknotes with an unclear authenticity, for determining whether they are genuine or counterfeits" fulfils the requirements of International Standard ISO/IEC 17020:2012 for which Document Forensics is accredited. In addition, the audit verifies and that the relevant Quality Management System is effectively implemented and maintained.

The IAC performs the ISO 17020:2012 internal audit of the Document Forensics on an annual basis, based on the method as laid down in the forensic laboratory ISO 17020 Internal Audit process, which deviates from the established audit process of the IAC.

Following the audit, the IAC concluded that while non-conformities to the ISO norm were not identified, two (2) observations were issued, one (1) of which qualified as Opportunity for Improvement.

### - **Validation of user access rights granted in the ABAC and MobileXpense systems**

In line with internal budget regulations, every year the Commission seeks validation from the Executive Director to confirm the alignment of ABAC user access rights with delegations assigned to Europol staff. Towards this end, the IAC verified that the names and financial roles of staff in the ABAC system corresponded to their official appointments. Similar checks were also done in the MobileXpense (MXP) system. The IAC confirmed the formal appointments and accepted delegated authority by the financial actors; alignment of records, so that official appointments align with records in ABAC and MobileXpense; and compliance with the segregation of duties principle.

As part of this exercise, a series of checks was also performed in view of the security authorisations in ABAC to mitigate risks related to user access rights. Six (6) audit recommendations were issued, including: one (1) marked as "Very Important," three (3) as "Important", and two (2) as "Desirable".

The IAC graded the existing controls regarding appointments under the Europol FR as being managed at a strong level; appointments under the Europol Guide to Missions and Authorised Travel and implementation of these appointments in MXP as being managed at an adequate level; and the management of security authorisations in ABAC as being managed at an adequate level.

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### 2.6.2. Data Protection Function (DPF)

The workload of the DPF remained at a very high level in 2023, with significant support required by the data controller. Furthermore, data protection advice regarding the processing of administrative personal data and, in particular, in relation to the processing of sensitive personal data by Europol's Medical Service, contributed to the increased workload together with a continuously high number of full hits on data subject access requests.

In 2023 the major part of DPF activities focussed on **operational data protection matters**. The workload remained high *inter alia* due to prior consultations of the EDPS according to Article 39 of the Europol Regulation (ER) including the implementation of the changes introduced to the process, as a result of the amendment of the ER (2022).

In the **administrative data processing** area, 2023 saw a very significant increase of DPF involvement and guidance. Notably, the processing of personal data with regard to new or renewed software purchases required DPF input on the compliance of the intended processing activities and the provider of the services. In addition, the DPF provided timely advice on ensuring data protection compliance of new processing activities and establishing data protection safeguards in the area of events organisation. Additional workload was also encountered in the handling of inquiries, complaints, advice on the handling of personal data breaches and data protection guidance on the processing of health data.

In addition, the DPF, as a central point for the exercise of **data subject access rights** at Europol, handled the incoming data subject access requests under Article 36 ER and requests for erasure under Article 37 ER. In 2023, there were in total 459 requests, for 59 of which Europol held data. [The overall number of requests increased by 44% compared to 2022<sup>13</sup> \(318\), and the number of requests concerning which data was held, increased by 59%.](#)

In 2023, the DPF continued to foster the data protection culture within the organisation by **training** staff members as well as addressing external stakeholders by sharing knowledge and expertise. The newcomers' induction session reinforces the knowledge acquired with the e-learning module by focusing, among others, on data protection principles and processing purposes, data subject access rights, prior consultation process, personal data breaches, transfer of personal data to third countries and international organisations and data protection supervision. Throughout 2023, the DPF provided the induction programme on data protection to 176 newcomers.

In 2023, six **Guest Officer (GO) Data Protection training sessions** were provided to 33 Guest Officers deployed at hotspots across Europe. The aim of the training is to provide a comprehensive overview of the main issues at stake concerning the processing of operational personal data in the context of the migration crisis and the hotspots. It focuses on the applicable data protection regime and the specifics of hotspots data by emphasising human rights of asylum seekers and refugees as well as the specifics of the GO role in supporting national competent authorities. The training elaborates *inter alia* on operational data processing activities in the hotspots including referrals, queries of Europol systems and relevant analysis projects.

The **Europol Data Protection Experts Network (EDEN)**, within the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE), is an online collaboration platform which has been developed with the aim of involving stakeholders from various backgrounds including law enforcement as well as representatives of relevant private parties, academia and NGOs. EDEN is used as a channel to present projects, best practices and events linked to data protection in a law enforcement context. It is an "on invitation only" network not suitable for the exchange of operational personal data or classified information and has currently more than 380 active members.

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<sup>13</sup> After careful review, the figures presented in the CAAR 2022 were found to be incorrect. The CAAR reported 273 DSARs for 2022, while the actual number received was 318.

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The main focus throughout 2023 was to prepare the 11<sup>th</sup> EDEN event held on 18-19 September in Madrid, which was co-hosted by the European Law Academy (ERA) and the Spanish law enforcement authorities. Under the title 'Whisperers of Contrasts', the conference reflected that some topics in data protection are hard to hear of, especially when the subject is so vast and complex. The conference confronted that challenge by approaching data protection in law enforcement across different jurisdictions and contexts, and by addressing the tension between security concerns and individual rights. In particular, the event addressed key vulnerabilities of smartphones, smart home devices and wearables, and the potential impact on individuals and law enforcement as well as complexities and wider implications of new developments in technology such as artificial intelligence, its intersection with cybercrime, and the potential impact on security. Furthermore, key challenges faced by DPOs in law enforcement organisations, best practices, and strategies in the context of handling data in a compliant way and balancing access and use of personal data with the privacy rights of individuals were discussed.

### 2.7. External audit management

#### **2.7.1. Internal Audit Service of the European Commission (IAS)**

The IAS' Strategic Internal Audit Plan (SIAP) for Europol for the period 2022-2024 covers three audit topics: Coordination and working arrangements between Europol and the Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission, key controls in Europol's Information Management Strategy and the work of the Innovation Lab.

The audit report on coordination and working arrangements with DG HOME, containing two audit recommendations (graded as 'important') on multiannual planning and coordination with DG HOME, was issued in 2023.

The IAS initiated the audit on the key controls of the Information Management Strategy in Q4 2023. This audit will also cover the work of the Innovation Lab and is envisaged to be completed in 2024.

#### **2.7.2. European Court of Auditors (ECA)**

Europol received a positive audit opinion on the financial implementation for the financial year 2022, namely on the reliability of the annual accounts as well as the legality and regularity of the underlying financial transactions in all material aspects<sup>14</sup>. The ECA also reviewed, as a horizontal topic across EU Agencies, the agencies' response to the current energy crisis and sustainability reporting in relation to energy and climate.

For the financial year 2023, the ECA carried out its regular financial audit in January 2024, including a review of a sample of financial transactions and procurement measures. The report of the ECA on EU agencies for the financial year 2023 is expected to be published by Q4 2024.

#### **2.7.3. European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)**

In 2023, Europol invested a lot of efforts in engaging the supervisory authority both formally and on a working level. Two high-level meetings with the EDPS took place on 05 May and 07 November 2023.

The EDPS was also consulted on several MB Decisions adopted in accordance with Art. 11(1)(q) and 18(7) of the Europol Regulation (ER). This includes the MB Decisions on the Articles 18(2); 18(6); 18(6a) and 18(a) ER, that were handled jointly in regard to the processing of operational personal data, and on Article 20(2a) ER as regards joint analysis.

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<sup>14</sup> [https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SAR-AGENCIES-2022/SAR-AGENCIES-2022\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SAR-AGENCIES-2022/SAR-AGENCIES-2022_EN.pdf)

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The four Decisions related to Article 18 ER were part of the discussions at the meeting between Europol and the EDPS that took place on 07 November 2023. The EDPS appreciated that most of the observations had been taken on board, but noted that the remarks concerning the scope of Article 18a ER had not led to amendment. While the MB Decision specifies the scope of Article 18 ER as applicable to non-DSC data only, the EDPS perceives that the Article applies to all data in a case processed under this article.

Both at the meeting of 07 November 2023 and via a dedicated letter to the Chairperson of the MB, the EDPS informed that they had not changed position. Any practical application of Article 18a ER whereby the scope is limited to the non-DSC data would hence be perceived by the EDPS as a possible infringement of the Europol Regulation.

On 13 November 2023, the EDPS responded to the consultation on the MB Decision on Joint Analysis. As concerns Article 20(2a) ER, the EDPS is of the opinion that Joint Analysis as provided for by the legal provision, combined with the MB Decision, would qualify as a form of joint controllership. The implementation of such a concept would require the conclusion of a specific arrangement between the partners in a joint analysis case, in which the respective roles and responsibilities are divided between the parties. Europol is currently assessing the way forward with regard to the EDPS opinion.

In 2023, the EDPS conducted an on-site visit to the Hotspot at Lesvos, Greece, which included an operational visit to the Europol representation. The visit took place on 13 July 2023, and was perceived as positive and successful. As a follow up, on 16 February 2024, the EDPS informed Europol by means of a letter of the decision to close the case (2023-0644) concerning Europol's involvement in the secondary checks.

In 2023, in the realm of prior consultation, Europol received four EDPS prior consultation opinions, namely on: NCMEC automation, QUEST+, the Data Refinery and on Facial Recognition. The EDPS recommendations are considered manageable as concerns implementation without causing disproportionate delays or resource implications.

### **2.7.4. Independent external audit of the annual accounts**

The aspect of the reliability of the information provided in the provisional accounts 2023 was audited by an external auditor in March 2024, as provided for in Article 104 of the FR applicable to Europol. All audit activities performed in relation to the financial year 2023 serve as input to the ECA audit activities, with a view to expressing a formal opinion on the closure of the financial year 2023, for the final accounts, including the opinion of the MB, to be issued by 1 July 2024.

At the end of 2023, no issue of a material nature had been identified in relation to the closure of the financial year 2023 by Europol, and the provisional annual accounts were issued on time before the end of February 2024.

## **2.8. Follow up of recommendations and action plans for audits**

In 2023, Europol diligently responded to the audit findings of the different assurance providers. **No audit findings graded as critical or very important were pending in relation to the IAS.** Concerning the pending IAC recommendations at the end of 2023, further implementation activities were on-going.

In 2023, the **IAC issued 16 new recommendations**, including one graded as 'critical' and seven as 'very important'. The IAC also issued three opportunities for improvement and one minor non-conformity and made three observations on the environmental performance and the effectiveness of the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) at Europol. One opportunity for improvement was issued as part of the ISO 17020:2012 internal audit of Europol's Document Forensics regarding the examination of Euro banknotes.

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Overall, during 2023, good progress was noted in relation to the follow-up of IAC audit recommendations with **86% implementation rate of critical and very important recommendations** that were foreseen for completion in 2023. The pending 'critical' (i.e. 1) and 'very important' (i.e. 12) IAC audit recommendations (see Annex XI), are being implemented in line with the envisaged planning for 2024 onwards.

As part of the **audit for the financial year 2023**, the ECA also reviewed the actions to respond to the observations made for the previous year, which Europol had duly addressed<sup>15</sup>.

In relation to recommendations issued by the **IAS**, there were **two open recommendations**, from the audit on Coordination with DG HOME, both graded as 'important', the implementation of which has been initiated in line with the action planning agreed with the IAS.

**OLAF closed a pre-selection case in August 2023** concerning the eligibility of a successful candidate with respect to professional qualifications, given that the **allegations** reported to OLAF **could not be corroborated**. In addition, **OLAF closed one investigation in December 2023** regarding potential favouritism and conflict of interest in a recruitment procedure. While no evidence corroborating potential favouritism was ascertained, OLAF found that the chair of the selection committee and one of the candidates should have disclosed their previous acquaintance which occurred at the beginning of their career at the national level. The **decision-making** on the case will be taken **in the course of 2024**.

The implementation of pending recommendations from annual inspections by the **European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)** was directed in line with the guidance received from the Supervisor.

For the period from 2017-2019, the implementation focused on the two domains highlighted by the EDPS on previous occasions as main areas of concern: Data retention and archiving, and the implementation of the New Environment for Operations (NEO), especially as regards the replacement of the Computer Forensics Network (CFN). For both domains a dedicated meeting was held with the EDPS in 2023 to discuss the progress and to determine further actions to fulfil the recommendations.

Several recommendations on **data retention and archiving** were addressed by the adoption of a new data retention and archiving policy for operational data. The policy was adjusted to comments previously received from the EDPS, and entered into force on 1 December 2023.

The replacement of the CFN has further progressed in 2023. Prior consultation of the EDPS on essential elements paved the way for the full development and delivery of the **New Forensic Environment (NFE)** to which data and users will be migrated, once it has been deployed. Work on the completion of the NFE continues in 2024.

While technical changes to the CFN itself are not intended in anticipation of the replacement of the environment by the NFE, several concrete measures, including processes, templates and guidance, have been adopted and implemented to address a number of recommendations while the CFN is still in use. These were communicated to the EDPS in December 2023, along with supporting documentation.

As regards the recommendations of the **annual inspection of 2021**, the EDPS was informed in September 2023 (and in January 2024) on progress made as regards prior consultation, machine learning and the logging of Europol's access to national systems.

The **annual inspection of 2022** focused on the processing of personal data received from third countries on data subjects qualified as 'suspect' below the age of 15 years. The state of play and remaining actions were presented in January 2024 to the EDPS, where feasible with an indication of the anticipated timelines. The EDPS requested to have all 10 recommendations implemented

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<sup>15</sup> Annex XII. European Court of Auditors (ECA) observations and follow-up

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by 6 March 2024, which is 6 months after the issuing of the inspection report. The work on the implementation was initiated in 2023 and will continue in 2024.

On the basis of the updates Europol presented on the **achievements in 2023**, the EDPS acknowledged that progress was made in relation to data retention and computer forensics. As part of the periodic review, the EDPS decided to close 20 of the pending recommendations: one from 2017 (six remaining); seven from 2018 (two remaining); six from 2019 (nine remaining) and five from 2021 (11 remaining). As a consequence, at present 138 of the 166 recommendations from the inspections from 2017-2021 were closed (83%). The ten pending recommendations of the 2022 annual inspection were not assessed by the EDPS as the term for implementation was still on-going at the time of the review. The recommendations from 2017-2019 that are currently still pending, mostly depend on the realisation of complex technical solutions that require time to be implemented properly.

### 2.9. Follow up of observations from the discharge authority

The **European Parliament (EP)**, based on recommendation by the Council, **granted discharge** in May 2023 to the Executive Director of Europol with respect to the **implementation of the budget for the financial year 2021**.

Europol provided an update to the EP concerning the **follow-up actions taken by Europol** in relation to the **EP's discharge decision** for the financial year 2021. This was also shared with the ECA during the audit on the financial year 2023.

Europol followed-up on the **discharge observations** and implemented actions concerning the observations made on financial performance, data protection, and the ECA's observations made to Europol in the annual report. Further activities are ongoing concerning cooperation on cybersecurity, gender diversity and digitalisation, external communication as well as the follow-up to audit recommendations, in line with corporate planning.

On 12 March 2024, the **Council** adopted the recommendation to the EP to grant discharge to Europol in respect of the implementation of the budget for the **financial year 2022**<sup>16</sup>. On 4 March 2024, the **Budgetary Control (CONT) Committee** adopted the draft resolution accompanying the discharge decision by the European Parliament on the **closure of the financial year 2022, including the proposal to grant discharge to Europol**<sup>17</sup>. The final version was adopted by the European Parliament Plenary in April 2024, granting discharge to Europol for the implementation of the financial year 2022.

### 2.10. Environmental Strategy

In line with Europol's strategic priority<sup>18</sup> of being the model EU organisation for law enforcement cooperation, Europol commits to its **Environmental Policy**. Europol recognises its responsibility for making a positive contribution to sustainable development and is committed to protect the environment, by limiting the environmental impact of its activities and to continuously improve its environmental performance.

Europol implemented an Environmental Management System (EMS) in 2018, which was certified against the ISO 14001: 2015 standard in 2021. The Environmental Management System (EMS) contains the environmental governance structure and process landscape, the environmental

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<sup>16</sup> Council recommendation on the discharge to be given to the bodies set up under the TFEU and the Euratom Treaty in respect of the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2022, 9 February 2024, Council Secretariat file no. FIN 119 PE-L 4/6180/24 + ADD 1 (adopted by COREPER on 12 March 2024)

<sup>17</sup> Draft report on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) for the financial year 2022 (2023/2169(DEC)), 15 January 2024

<sup>18</sup> Europol Strategy "Delivering security in partnership", Strategic Priority 6: Be the model EU organisation for law enforcement cooperation.

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performance data, the objectives and action plan, which gives Europol the reliable and consistent method to measure and continuously improve the environmental performance of the Agency.

In February 2022, Europol obtained the **Eco-management and Audit Scheme** (EMAS) registration which will further support Europol in its commitment to contribute to the EU Green Deal's main objective of a climate neutral Europe by 2050.

Following a successful external audit by the certification body in October 2023, and the verification of Europol's third (updated) Environmental Statement, the EMAS registration was renewed for another year by the SCCM (Stichting Coördinatie Certificatie Management). The European EMAS Register of the Commission was updated accordingly. Europol's updated environmental statement was published on the agency's website.

Europol is committed to maintaining the EMAS certification as a sustainable mechanism for environmental and organisational improvements. During 2023, EMAS process descriptions and the EMS documentation were updated as deemed appropriate. In addition, the annual activities of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle of Europol EMS were duly performed, e.g. update of the register of applicable environmental legislation, management review, internal and external audits. Both the environmental performance data collection for 2022 and the environmental performance evaluation were completed, and the respective performance indicators were established.

Furthermore, the Feasibility Study project for the development of Europol's Environmental Vision 2030 was concluded. This study formed the basis for the Environmental Vision 2030, which was presented to the Management Board in June 2023. The Environmental Vision 2030 summarises Europol's ambitions and objectives on environmental issues and presents key actions to be implemented by 2030. The Environmental Vision 2030 sets the Agency's long-term target related to the reduction of its carbon footprint. As per the vision, Europol commits to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 55% until 2030, compared to 2018.

Additionally, the Environmental Vision 2030 defines targets for the next EMAS scheme perspective (2023-2025) related to the environmental areas of energy efficiency, water, waste, paper, biodiversity, sustainable procurement and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### **2.10.1. Environmental performance**

Europol has implemented a systematic approach for monitoring and reviewing its environmental performance on an annual basis. The Agency focuses on its performance in the following key environmental areas reflecting the scope of its activities, defined in line with the EMAS Regulation:

- Emissions (carbon footprint);
- Energy (energy efficiency);
- Water (water consumption);
- Waste (waste generation);
- Material (paper consumption); and
- Land use respecting biodiversity (biodiversity).

In addition to the environmental areas identified under the EMAS Regulation, Europol defined environmental performance indicators related to **green public procurement**, to fully cover the areas of its environmental impact.

The evaluation of Europol's environmental performance, in particular the core performance indicators and planned actions, demonstrated that the Agency successfully completed the implementation of the targets and objectives set for 2022, defined in the Environmental Objectives and Action Plan 2020-2022. Almost all of the targets set were not only met but

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exceeded. The only area where the target has not been achieved is waste separation. The waste separation rate in 2022 reached 48.7%, while the target was 49.1%. This means, though, that, in practice, the result achieved was only slightly below the target by 0.4 percentage points. Still, when compared to 2018, a growth of 4.6 percentage points was achieved, which can be considered as a very good result. Overall, all the measures taken had a positive impact on Europol's environmental performance with regard to most of the core performance indicators.

The results of the environmental performance are presented in Annex IX.

### 2.10.2. Environmental Targets for the 2023-2025 period (EMAS Perspective)

Europol defined new targets and objectives along with the measures within the Environmental Management System for the next EMAS perspective, which is 2023-2025. These address the Environmental Vision 2030 target, as well the additional obligatory performance indicators required by the EMAS regulation. In particular, the 2023-2025 EMAS targets are presented in table below.

Area	Core indicator (Description and unit)	Target performance in 2025 compared to 2018
Emissions	Total CO <sub>2</sub> eq footprint (tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> eq)	<b>2,804</b>
Energy efficiency	Implementation of recommendations from energy audit wherever applicable	Implementation of recommendations from energy audit
Water	Water consumption (m <sup>3</sup> /FTE)	<b>17.5%</b> reduction of water consumption per FTE
Waste separation	Separated waste (%)	Improvement of waste separation rate by <b>8.8 percentage points</b>
Waste generation	Waste generation per FTE (kg/FTE/year)	Keeping waste generation per FTE (kg/FTE/year) at a level of maximum <b>90 kg/FTE/year</b>
Paper	Daily paper consumption (sheets/FTE/day)	<b>50%</b> reduction of paper consumption expressed as A4 sheets/FTE/working day
Sustainable procurement	Applying EU Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria and/or environmental considerations in all public procurement procedures with a value of EUR 15,000 and more, wherever applicable	Applying EU GPP criteria and/or environmental considerations in all public procurement procedures with a value of EUR 15,000 and more, wherever applicable
Biodiversity	Sustaining current proportion of total land that is nature-oriented (76.4%) with a 10 p.p. margin (+/- 10 p.p.)	Relevant KPI (proportion of total land that is nature-oriented) was calculated within the Environmental Statement 2022 as required by EMAS regulation.

### 2.10.3. Actions to improve and communicate Environmental Performance

During the course of 2023, the following activities and products were finalised and/or initiated:

- EMAS and ISO14001:2015 certification activities:
  - o EMS Internal Audit 2023 (by Europol's Internal Audit Capability);
  - o Certification audit by the accreditation body (BSI) – ISO14001:2015;

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- EMAS registration audit by the accreditation body (BSI);
- Renewal of EMAS Registration with the Dutch national body;
- Europol's 3<sup>rd</sup> (updated) Environmental Statement (performance 2021) published and available for public on Europol website (in English and Dutch);
- EMAS and ISO14001:2015 certification audit.
- Update of compliance register of applicable environmental legislation.
- Annual environmental performance reporting by EMAS Actors.
- Environmental Performance Evaluation – performance 2022.
- Environmental Review 2023:
  - Context and Stakeholders Analysis – review and update 2023;
  - Environmental Aspects Analysis – review and update 2023
  - EMS Manual - review and update 2023.
- Integration of EMAS requirements into SHR Projects.
- Improvement Actions (EMAS Actors):
  - Analysis of increased energy consumption;
  - Energy efficiency - Implementation of specialised filters on seven air handling units / dry coolers;
  - Energy efficiency - Adjustment of the set point of the boilers during low demand, which have led to a reduction of gas consumption at HQ of around 80%, implemented since November 2022;
  - Energy efficiency - Replacement of the lighting fixtures for LED (Europol HQ) (6000 lighting fixtures);
  - Building maintenance - LON project: The Local Operational Network (LON) is part of the Building Automation System (BAS) that controls all building related systems e.g. lights, climate, blinds and sunscreens in the building. The LON was successfully replaced by a Local Area Network (LAN) throughout the entire office environment;
  - Waste separation – On-site physical scan of generic waste followed by a waste separation campaign to ensure better waste separation;
  - Waste separation – Removal chrome bins in HQ;
  - Sustainable Summer Party - Reusing compostable plates, cups and cutlery from previous events, disposing of them in the correct containers, and distributing water in cans (instead of plastic bottles);
  - Introduction of a new EMAS Trainings section on the EMAS page enabling the learning and development of skills on environmental topics in an easily accessible way.
- Participated and exchanged notes on best practices via the EU Agencies Greening Network.

### Part III. Assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control systems

#### 3.1. Effectiveness of internal control systems

##### 3.1.1. Europol Internal Control System

Europol assesses the effectiveness of its **Internal Control System (ICS)** in line with the Internal Control Framework (ICF). The assessment of the Europol ICS is based on **continuous monitoring** and an annual assessment, using both quantitative and qualitative measurements. The assessment is carried out at principle and component level and the ICS as a whole. Based on the analysis of the results at component level, Europol assesses whether the components are operating together in an integrated manner.

The **quantitative measurements** cover 76 internal control indicators and identified instances of non-compliance and or deficiencies. A self-assessment is conducted for the selected internal control indicators by comparing actual performance against defined targets, which are set for each of the 17 principles. The monitoring of the internal control indicators is logged in the quarterly corporate performance reporting as an integral part of the annual planning and performance reporting cycle and the set of indicators was reviewed in 2023.

**Qualitative aspects** comprise of strengths and weaknesses reported internally, reporting on potential internal control deficiencies, including qualitative information resulting from the application of Europol's whistle-blowing and management of potential conflicts of interest arrangements, ongoing monitoring of the implementation of the Anti-Fraud Strategy, audit findings and recommendations, and identified internal control weaknesses and strengths, including the aspect of cost and benefit of controls.

The **assessment of the 17 internal control principles shows** that the **principles are present and functioning well with some minor improvements needed**. Actions to address identified weaknesses were devised through monitoring and implementation of dedicated measures, including the mitigation of risks, under the lead of senior management.

##### 3.1.2. Risk management

At Europol, a risk is an uncertain event or set of events that, should it occur, would have an effect on the achievement of objectives related to the annual business planning (i.e. Programming Document, Work Programme) and the Europol Strategy from an overall perspective<sup>19</sup>. Europol's risk management policy, published in 2022, sets out **universal principles** for **corporate risk management**, with a view to identifying and managing risks in a continuous and systematic manner across the organisation. To facilitate risk management, the **corporate risk management process** provides practical guidance for assessing risks, describes the roles and responsibilities, as well as the workflow for assessing risks across the organisation, which represents an integral part of Europol's quarterly performance reporting cycle. In addition to the risk reporting on a quarterly basis, Europol's corporate risk management approach also addresses corporate risks with an organisational-wide impact which are identified and reported ad hoc.

In **2023, Europol's corporate risk profile** was in particular characterised by the following **key elements**:

- **Expanding mandate and tasks**, as well as the **demand directed at the organisation** not being **sufficiently sourced** with the **required staffing levels** (in particular in ICT and Operations Directorate), for meeting **Europol's obligations and stakeholder expectations** (in particular with respect to the implementation scope and operating costs

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<sup>19</sup> Risks are thus twofold: Threats (expected negative effect on a business objective) or opportunities (expected positive effect on a business objective)

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exceeding resource estimates or available provisions in the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) or legislation affecting Europol, including the amended Europol Regulation, EU Interoperability, the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Directive for Information Exchange between law enforcement authorities of Member States<sup>20</sup>;

- **Persistently high demand to successfully deliver key ICT infrastructure solutions** for the processing of operational information and fulfilling Europol's mandate, with **external dependencies** beyond Europol's control, such dependency on the Host State with respect to establishing a **second external data centre in support of 24/7 delivery capability requirements**, especially for the implementation of Europol's EU Interoperability tasks, but also with a view to meeting Member States' expectations on operational response times in case business continuity scenarios materialise;
- Europol's response to **security and law enforcement implications and demands related to the war of aggression against Ukraine** and the **escalated conflict in the Middle East**, especially in the Operations Directorate;
- **Increasing supervisory** and related **scrutiny** as well as **compliance response activities**, generating a risk profile which impacts operational responsiveness and available resources, delaying innovation opportunities and affecting reputational aspects (e.g. due to the complexity of prior consultation under the Article 39 of the Europol Regulation, the timeliness of related actionable guidance, increasing Data Subject Access Requests (DSARs) and reporting requirements overall).
- Europol's **ability to absorb** the **volume and complexity** of **change** in compliance with the organisation's **continuously evolving regulatory requirements and corresponding demand**.

On the side of **opportunities**, enhanced public awareness of the **added value of Europol in times of crises**, together with **visible joint cooperation with JHA Agencies**, has contributed to responding to the expectation of citizens in terms of public security, which represents a connecting and cohesion factor across EU Member States.

From an overall perspective, **Europol's corporate risk profile concurs** with the outcome of the **Home Affairs Agencies peer review risk assessment exercise** (chaired by Europol in Q4 2023 for the Home Affairs Agencies), concerning which **Europol's response actions** have been taken forward from 2023<sup>21</sup> into **2024**<sup>22</sup>.

### 3.1.3. Anti-fraud strategy

The **Anti-Fraud Strategy** for the period 2022-2024, adopted by the MB in 2022, continued to be implemented in 2023, to expand the anti-fraud culture, manage sensitive positions and fraud risk scenario process improvements. Dedicated actions have been brought forward concerning anti-fraud awareness and training, management of sensitive staff positions and process improvements in the area of human resources management, procurement and contract management, as well as conflict of interest management. A next revision of the Anti-Fraud Strategy will take place in 2024.

To coordinate issues related to fraud or irregularities, Europol has an Internal Investigations Service (IIS) in place, which also serves as a contact point for OLAF. In 2023, there were **no instances of financial fraud** confirmed by Europol, OLAF or the ECA. Three OLAF investigations were closed in 2023 (please refer to Section 2.8 above).

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<sup>20</sup> The risk profile concerning EU Interoperability is mitigated through the reallocation of staff to Europol as a result of an agreement with the EBCGA (Frontex) to temporarily transfer 5 TA posts and 20 CA positions to Europol for the period 2024-2027. Resource estimates have been included in the 2025-2027 Programming Document (PD).

<sup>21</sup> Europol Programming Document 2023-2025, Annex XIV: Risks 2023 (EDOC-#1192222)

<sup>22</sup> Europol Programming Document 2024-2026, Annex XIV: Risks 2024 (EDOC-#1258316)

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Europol has policies and procedures in place for the management of conflict of interest, including for recruitment, procurement and grant related procedures. No conflict of interest situation materialised during 2023.

### 3.2. Conclusions of the assessment of internal control systems

Based on the analysis of the **five internal control components and 17 principles**, monitored in the course of 2023 using both quantitative and qualitative elements and including a set of 76 internal control indicators, it is assessed that **the components of the internal control framework were present and functioning in an integrated manner across the organisation**. The assessment concluded that the internal control system effectively reduced, to an acceptable level, the risk of not achieving the (multi-) annual objectives – relating to operations, reporting, and compliance – of the organisation.

### 3.3. Statement of the Deputy Director in charge of risk management and internal control

I, the undersigned, Deputy Executive Director in charge of risk management and internal control, declare that with reference to the Europol Internal Control Framework, adopted by the Management Board of Europol at the end of 2018, my assessment - on the basis of internal management reporting available to me and my professional judgement - is that the elements of the Europol Internal Control System (ICS), seen as whole, are effective to enable Europol to achieve its objectives. On the basis of the annual assessment of the ICS on the financial year 2023, I have reported my advice and recommendations on the overall state of internal control in Europol to the Executive Director.

I hereby certify that the information provided in the present Consolidated Annual Activity Report of Europol, and in its annexes, for the financial year 2023 is, to the best of my knowledge, accurate, reliable and complete.



**Jürgen Ebner**

Deputy Executive Director

18 June 2024

### Part IV. Management assurance

#### 4.1. Review of the elements supporting assurance

Europol's building **blocks of assurance** are founded on 6 key elements:

1. A **strong financial model**, integrating the principles of sound financial management, segregation of duties and transparency with: (a) up-to-date appointment authorisations of financial actors, (b) a charter for authorising officers which promotes accountability, transparency and informed decision-making, (c) a central financial initiation function, (d) a central financial verification function and (e) clear guidance to all staff on the expected behaviour (Code of Conduct etc.).
2. A robust **planning and performance monitoring capability** at corporate level, covering all aspects of Europol's delivery, including core business performance and the related stakeholder management, with regular reporting and management supervision at Directorate level.
3. A **central contact point** for ensuring that the guidance by **external assurance providers** (in particular the ECA and the IAS, as well as the EDPS) and the discharge authority are communicated and followed up within the organisation.
4. A **Data Protection Function** which upholds the highest standards of data protection, in particular in view of Europol's role as a law enforcement agency, alongside the **Europol Security Committee** in terms of information security assurance.
5. An experienced **Accounting Officer** who is functionally independent to perform the respective duties foreseen by the Financial Regulation applicable to Europol.
6. An **Internal Audit Capability**, which provides an additional element of assurance to the Authorising Officer of Europol throughout the year.

Europol's overall assessment is that **Europol's building blocks of assurance**, next to Europol's **Internal Control Framework (ICF)** and the related assessment of the **Internal Control System (ICS)** provide sufficient input for the **Executive Director's statement of assurance** as well as the **statement of assurance of the Deputy Executive Director in charge of risk management and internal control** as contained in this consolidated activity report.

#### 4.2. Reservations

No issues requiring a reservation were identified by the end of the financial year 2023.

## **Part V. Declaration of Assurance**

### **Declaration of Assurance of the Authorising Officer (AO)**

I, the undersigned, Executive Director of European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), in my capacity as Authorising Officer for Europol, as defined in the Financial Regulation applicable to Europol,

- Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view;<sup>23</sup>
- State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the Europol Internal Control System (ICS), including the control procedures put in place, gives the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions;
- Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of Europol.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the assessment of the Europol Internal Control System, performance monitoring including financial verification controls, the work of the Internal Audit Service, the Internal Audit Capability of Europol, the annual accounts for the financial year 2023 and the reporting of the European Court of Auditors, including for years prior to the year of this declaration.

I hereby certify that the information provided in the present Consolidated Annual Activity Report of Europol, and in its annexes, for the financial year 2023 is, to the best of my knowledge, and on the basis of the assurance given to me, accurate and complete.



**Catherine De Bolle**

Executive Director

18 June 2024

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<sup>23</sup> True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view of the state of affairs in Europol.

## Europol Public Information

### Annex I. Key Performance Indicators

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	SOURCE	RESULT 2022	RESULT 2023	TARGET 2023
Number of Searches through EIS and QUEST	EIS & QUEST	13,374,862	14,238,667	15,000,000
Number of SIENA Messages Exchanged	SIENA	1,636,115	1,798,810	1,700,000
Number of Operations Supported by Europol	Internal Overview	2,758	3,155	2,300
Number of Accepted Contributions by Europol	SIENA	98,068	107,856	93,500
Number of Action Days organised/supported by Europol	Internal Overview	394	453	295
Number of Operational Analysis Reports produced by Europol	SIENA	251	275	260
Number of Cross Match Reports and SIENA hit notifications produced by Europol	SIENA	14,737	14,407	14,000
Number of Strategic Analysis Reports produced by Europol	SIENA	32	34	30
Satisfaction with Operational Support delivered by Europol	User Survey	9.6	9.7	8.5
Satisfaction with Strategic Analysis Reports produced by Europol	User Survey	8.9	8.6	8.5
Satisfaction with Operational Training delivered by Europol	User Survey	9.8	9.4	8.5
Emissions (tonnes CO2)	Internal Overview	2,854	n/a	3,182.6
Vacancy rate	Internal Overview	0.6%	1.7%	2%
% of Female Staff	Internal Overview	32%	34%	35%
Budget Commitment Rate	ABAC	96.6%	99.8%	95%
Implementation of Audit Recommendations	Internal Overview	89%	86%	85%

## Europol Public Information

### Annex II. Work Programme Indicators

EUROPOL ACTIVITY	WORK PROGRAMME INDICATOR	SOURCE	RESULT 2022	RESULT 2023	TARGET 2023
A.1. Development of information technology and information management capabilities	Core Business Project Delivery	Internal Overview	78%	78.5%	75%
	Operational Stability - Uptime of Core systems	ICT monitoring tools	99.7%	99.6%	98%
	% of Active EPE Users	EPE	43%	38%	50%
	Number of Searches through EIS and QUEST	EIS & QUEST	13,374,862	14,238,667	15,000,000
	Number of SIENA Cases initiated	SIENA	138,903	151,318	140,000
	Number of SIENA Messages exchanged	SIENA	1,636,115	1,798,810	1,700,000
A.2. Operational Coordination	Speed of first-line response to MS requests	SIENA	3.1	4.2	5
	Number of accepted SIENA contributions by OAC	SIENA	32,523	35,993	28,500
	Number of deployments of Guest Officers (Number of deployment months)	Internal Overview	716	838	600
A.3. Combating Serious and Organised Crime	Number of accepted contributions by ESOCC	SIENA	37,288	40,060	37,500
	Number of Operational Task Forces established	Internal Overview	18	27	10
	Number of Operational Reports delivered by ESOCC	SIENA	4,064	5,685	4,250
	Number of Operations supported by ESOCC	Internal Overview	1,069	1,324	600
	Number of Action Days coordinated/supported by ESOCC	Internal Overview	233	266	150
	Satisfaction with Operational Support and Analysis provided by ESOCC	User Survey	10	9.4	8.5
	Number of Operational Reports delivered by EMSC	SIENA	1,213	1,231	1,300
	Number of Operations supported by EMSC	SIENA	195	223	160
	Number of Action Days coordinated/supported by EMSC	Internal Overview	53	68	55
	Satisfaction with Operational Support and Analysis provided by EMSC	User Survey	10	9.6	8.5
A.4. Combating Cyber Crime	Number of Accepted contributions by EC3	SIENA	8,837	8,426	8,500
	Number of Operational Reports delivered by EC3	SIENA	3,601	3,983	3,200
	Number of Operations supported by EC3	Internal Overview	446	451	430
	Number of Action Days coordinated/supported by EC3	Internal Overview	42	43	30
	Number of Decryption platform successes	Internal Overview	20	37	20
	Satisfaction with Operational Support and Analysis provided by EC3	User Survey	9.6	9.6	8.5

## Europol Public Information

EUROPOL ACTIVITY	WORK PROGRAMME INDICATOR	SOURCE	RESULT 2022	RESULT 2023	TARGET 2023
A.5. Counter-Terrorism	Number of Accepted contributions by ECTC	SIENA	4,357	4,557	5,000
	Number of Operational Reports delivered by ECTC	SIENA	1,526	2,012	1,440
	Number of Operations supported by ECTC	Internal Overview	891	1,012	800
	Number of Action Days coordinated/supported by ECTC	Internal Overview	30	39	30
	Satisfaction with Operational Support and Analysis provided by ECTC	User Survey	8.6	9.2	8.5
	Volume of content assessed by EU IRU related to terrorism and violent extremism	IRMa	22,516	20,054	22,000
A.6. Combatting Financial and Economic Crime	Number of Accepted contributions by EFECC	SIENA	15,075	18,825	14,000
	Number of Operational Reports delivered by EFECC	SIENA	2,045	2,477	1,700
	Number of Operations supported by EFECC	Internal Overview	402	421	390
	Number of Action Days coordinated/supported by EFECC	Internal Overview	94	107	83
	Satisfaction with Operational Support and Analysis provided by EFECC	User Survey	9.7	9.7	8.5
A.7. Strategic and Analysis Coordination	Number of Strategic Analysis Reports	SIENA	32	34	30
	Satisfaction with Strategic Analysis Reports	User Survey	8.9	8.6	8.5
	Satisfaction with Operational Analysis	User Survey	9.7	9.4	8.5
	Satisfaction with Operational Training delivered to MS/TP	User Survey	9.8	9.4	8.5
	Number of SIENA messages exchanged by Third Parties	SIENA	216,677	258,662	222,000
A.8. Governance, support and administration	Budget Outturn Rate	ABAC	4.7%	1.75%	5%
	Budget Commitment Rate	ABAC	96.6%	99.8%	95%
	Budget Payment Rate	ABAC	79.7%	88.6%	90%
	% of Late Payments (in value)	ABAC	1.9%	2.2%	5%
	Vacancy rate	Internal Overview	0.6%	1.7%	2%
	% of Female Staff	Internal Overview	32%	34%	35%
	Emissions (tonnes CO2)	Internal Overview	2,854	n/a	3,182.6
	% of pending critical/very important audit recommendations implemented within the timeline committed to by Europol agreed deadline with the auditing	Internal Overview	89%	86%	85%
	Total number of News Articles mentioning Europol (high-impact web-based media)	Internal Overview	6,509	6,459	4,000
User Satisfaction	User Survey	91%	90%	85%	

## Europol Public Information

### Annex III. Budget implementation 2023

#### Revenue 2023

	Initially adopted	Amending budget	Established revenue	Cashed revenue	Open amount
A-9000 IC1 - Regular subsidy	207,176,212		207,176,212	207,176,212	
A-9200 IC4 - Internal assigned revenue			2,654,515	2,253,413	401,101
A-9200 IC41 - Internal assigned revenue carry-over			465,207	264,213	200,995
A-9010 IR1 - External assigned revenue (Grants)		950,000	2,654,277	2,654,277	
A-9010 IR11 - External assigned revenue carry-over		80,000	80,000	80,000	
A-9101 IR1 - External assigned revenue (contribution from Denmark)		4,719,597	4,719,597	4,719,597	
A-9200 IR1 - Other external assigned revenue (Europol Pension Fund)			18,310	18,310	
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>207,176,212</b>	<b>5,749,597</b>	<b>217,768,118</b>	<b>217,166,022</b>	<b>602,096</b>

#### Expenditure 2023

	Initial budget 2023	Budget (CA)	Commitments	Comm rate (com/bud CA)	Lapsed budget	Budget (PA)	Payments	Paym rate (pay/bud PA)	CO to 2024
Title 1: Staff	112,219,112	114,255,365	114,234,450	100.0%	20,914	114,255,365	113,072,808	99.0%	1,161,642
Title 2: Other Administrative Expenditure	16,267,400	15,396,050	15,310,202	99.4%	85,848	15,396,050	10,687,663	69.4%	4,622,539
Title 3: Operational Activities	78,689,700	77,524,797	77,176,709	99.6%	348,088	75,447,997	57,893,943	76.7%	19,282,766
<b>Total</b>	<b>207,176,212</b>	<b>207,176,212</b>	<b>206,721,361</b>	<b>99.8%</b>	<b>454,851</b>	<b>205,099,412</b>	<b>181,654,414</b>	<b>88.6%</b>	<b>25,066,947</b>
Difference previous year		14,795,439	20,851,997	3.2%			28,277,924	8.8%	

#### Implementation of carry over to 2023

	Carry Over	Payments	Paym rate (pay/CO bud)	Lapsed C8
Title 1: Staff	1,059,629	856,989	80.9%	202,640
Title 2: Other Administrative Expenditure	4,078,648	3,543,683	86.9%	534,966
Title 3: Operational Activities	27,864,599	24,864,734	89.2%	2,999,864
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,002,876</b>	<b>29,265,407</b>	<b>88.7%</b>	<b>3,737,470</b>
Difference previous year	7,052,614	7,117,642	3.3%	-65,027

## Europol Public Information

### Implementation of assigned revenue

#### Internal revenue

	Initial Carry Over	Actual budget 2023	Commitments	Payments	Comm rate (com/bud)	Paym rate (pay/bud)	CO of CA to 2024
C4 - Internal assigned revenue		2,517,626	467,067	44,909	18.6%	1.8%	2,050,559
C5 - CF internal assigned revenue	1,271,366	1,271,366	1,271,366	1,259,781	100.0%	99.1%	0
R0 - External assigned revenue (Non Grants)	1,787,109	6,525,016	4,947,001	4,842,610	75.8%	74.2%	1,578,016
R0 - External assigned revenue - (Grants)	4,416,869	7,151,146	5,603,596	3,538,967	78.4%	49.5%	1,547,550
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,475,344</b>	<b>17,465,154</b>	<b>12,289,029</b>	<b>9,686,267</b>	<b>70.4%</b>	<b>55.5%</b>	<b>5,176,125</b>

#### External revenue

	Initial budget 2023	Actual budget 2023	Commitments	Payments	Comm rate (comm/bud)	Paym rate (paym/bud)	Available Budget	Grant value	Duration	
									From	To
EUIPO - Fraud	11,533	91,533	91,533	28,503	100.0%	31.1%	0	80,000	01/01/2023	31/12/2023
EUIPO - IPC	153,198	1,103,198	1,103,198	752,443	100.0%	68.2%	0	950,000	01/01/2023	31/12/2023
SIRIUS Phase 2	454,668	2,022,668	1,870,673	1,133,763	92.5%	56.1%	151,995	3,491,892	01/01/2021	30/06/2024
Horizon 2020 - AIDA	478,666	478,666	478,666	478,666	100.0%	100.0%	0	935,800	01/09/2020	28/02/2023
Horizon 2020 - INFINITY	319,107	319,107	93,677	93,677	29.4%	29.4%	225,430	481,100	01/06/2020	31/05/2023
Horizon 2020 - GRACE	147,539	147,539	144,494	137,293	97.9%	93.1%	3,045	747,550	01/06/2020	30/11/2023
Horizon 2020 - STARLIGHT	361,479	425,479	363,298	78,245	85.4%	18.4%	62,180	891,200	01/10/2021	30/09/2025
EMPACT - Eastern Partnership	2,103,223	2,105,501	1,046,760	555,179	49.7%	26.4%	1,058,741	2,500,000	01/07/2020	30/06/2024
CEPOL EUROMED	176,283	176,283	152,950	79,257	86.8%	45.0%	23,333	320,000	01/04/2020	31/03/2024
CEPOL WBPACT	111,494	111,494	110,000	100,222	98.7%	89.9%	1,494	140,000	20/10/2020	19/10/2023
CEPOL TOPCOP	99,679	169,679	148,346	101,718	87.4%	59.9%	21,333	380,000	01/07/2020	30/06/2024
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,416,869</b>	<b>7,151,146</b>	<b>5,603,596</b>	<b>3,538,967</b>	<b>78.4%</b>	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>1,547,550</b>	<b>10,537,542</b>		

## Europol Public Information

### Annex IV. Activity Based Costing (ABC)

The activity based costing (ABC) provides in-depth analysis on how the resources (staff and budget) are used per activity<sup>24</sup>, as defined in the Europol Programming Document 2023-2025<sup>25</sup>. The ABC method assigns all direct and non-direct expenses, such as staff and overheads expenses, to Work Programme (WP) activities where costs actually incurred. In addition, only staff in post (excl. vacancies), which are assigned to WP Activity, are recognised as resources in use. The outcome provides the implementation per activity based on a total of needed resources, regardless of the budget title as reported in the traditional way. The final budget and staff outturn per activity<sup>26</sup>, shows that 82% the budget was executed for operational activities (A.1 – A.7 and grants) and 72% of the staff (TA, CA, SNE and grants related staff) was deployed to operational activities. Only the remaining 18% of the available budget in 2023 was related to governance, support and administrative activities of Europol. Compared with the traditional presentation, the ABC approach splits Europol's expenditure per activity as follows:

- 82% for operational expenditure and grants instead of 37% in Title 3;
- 18% for non-operational expenditure, i.e. governance, administration and support, instead of 63% as per budget Titles 1 and 2.

	Heads	In post	% in total	Staff impl.	Budget (in M)	Impl. (in M)	% in total	Impl. rate
A.1 Development of operational ICT and IM capabilities	207	198	20.9%	95.7%	70.94	70.85	34.3%	99.9%
A.2 Operational coordination	82	74	7.8%	90.2%	16.09	16.08	7.8%	99.9%
A.3 Combating Serious and Organised Crime	133	119	12.5%	89.5%	28.37	28.28	13.7%	99.7%
A.4 Combating cybercrime	104	81	8.5%	77.9%	15.60	15.54	7.5%	99.7%
A.5 Counter-Terrorism	108	99	10.4%	91.7%	18.70	18.66	9.0%	99.8%
A.6 Combating Financial and Economic Crime	66	62	6.5%	93.9%	11.27	11.22	5.4%	99.5%
A.7 Strategic and analysis coordination	57	54	5.7%	94.7%	8.42	8.41	4.1%	100.0%
<b>Total operational activities</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>687</b>	<b>72.4%</b>	<b>90.8%</b>	<b>169.38</b>	<b>169.04</b>	<b>81.8%</b>	<b>99.8%</b>
A.8 Governance, support and administration	247	244	25.7%	98.8%	33.83	33.79	16.3%	99.9%
MBF Management Board Functions	18	18	1.9%	100.0%	3.97	3.89	1.9%	98.0%
<b>Total Govern., Support and Adm incl MBF</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>27.6%</b>	<b>98.9%</b>	<b>37.80</b>	<b>37.68</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>99.7%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,022</b>	<b>949</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>92.9%</b>	<b>207.18</b>	<b>206.72</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>99.8%</b>

<sup>24</sup> A.1 Development of operational ICT capacities, A.2 Information Exchange and Cooperation, A.3 Combatting Serious and Organised Crime, A.4 Combating Cyber Crime, A.5 Counter-Terrorism, A.6 Combating Financial and Economic Crime, A.7 Provision of cross-cutting operational capabilities, A.8 Governance, support and administration, and Management Board Functions.

<sup>25</sup> EDOC #1192222 – Europol Programming Document 2023-2025

<sup>26</sup> The final implementation also includes the external assigned revenue (fund source RO) received from Denmark.

## Annex V. Establishment Plan and Human Resources Management

### Annex V-a. Establishment Plan

#### Temporary Agents

Grade	Establishment Plan 2023	Posts filled 31.12.2023 <sup>27</sup>	Posts vacant <sup>28</sup>	TOTAL <sup>29</sup>
AD 16	1	1		1
AD 15		1		1
AD 14	3	2		2
AD 13	2			
AD 12	11	14		14
AD 11	10	4		4
AD 10	21	20		20
AD 09	47	46	3	49
AD 08	92	79		79
AD 07	216	225	6	231
AD 06	282	281	10	291
AD 05	8	9		9
AST 08	1	1		1
AST 07	2	1		1
AST 06	5	5		5
AST 05	4	4		4
AST 04	3	3		3
AST 03	2	3		3
AST 02	6	5		5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>723</b>

#### Contract Agents

Grade	Authorised Budget 2023	Headcount 31.12.2023	Headcount funded by Grants/Agreements	Total Headcount 31.12.2023
FG IV	59	62	12	74
FG III	118	109	5	114
FG II	58	52		52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>240</b>

<sup>27</sup> Appointment letters sent counted as posts filled. Includes 33 vacant posts for which selections were completed and appointment letters sent.

<sup>28</sup> Vacant posts are shown in the grade allocated to the vacancy or the grade allocated to the previous post holder in cases when the decision on recruitment has not been made yet.

<sup>29</sup> Discrepancies between the grades in the Establishment Plan and the grades actually filled result from the general approach to replace those staff members that leave in lower (entry) grades. 7 additional TA posts are presented (the Establishment Plan 2023 includes 716 TA posts) as job quota assigned in excess for a limited period to keep the number of vacant posts to a minimum.

## Europol Public Information

### Seconded National Experts

	Authorised Budget 2023	Headcount 31.12.2023
SNE costed <sup>30</sup>	121	89
SNE funded by Grants		7
SNE Guest Officers		63
SNE cost free		26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>185</b>

### **Annex V-b. Information on the entry level for each type of post**

#### Types of post

Type of post	Function group / Grade	Post title
Director-General <sup>31</sup>	AD 15 – AD 16	Executive Director
Director <sup>32</sup>	AD 14 – AD 15	Deputy Executive Director Principal Adviser
Adviser or equivalent	AD 13 – AD 14	Adviser Senior Expert
Head of Unit or equivalent	AD 9 – AD 14	Head of Department <sup>33</sup> Head of Unit
Administrator	AD 5 – AD 12	Senior Specialist/Senior Analyst <sup>34</sup> Specialist/Analyst <sup>35</sup>
Senior Assistant	AST 10 – AST 11	Senior Assistant
Assistant	AST 1 – AST 9	Officer <sup>36</sup> Support Officer <sup>37</sup>
Secretary/Clerk	SC 1 – SC 6	Secretary/Clerk

<sup>30</sup> Including short-term SNEs.

<sup>31</sup> This is without prejudice to a different classification of the head of the agency according to the founding regulation and/or the establishment plan.

<sup>32</sup> This is without prejudice to a different classification of the deputy head of the agency according to the founding regulation and/or the establishment plan.

<sup>33</sup> Posts of Head of Department are filled from grades AD 12 to AD 14.

<sup>34</sup> Posts of Senior Specialists/Senior Analysts are filled from grades AD 7 to AD 12.

<sup>35</sup> Posts of Specialists/Analysts are filled from grades AD 5 to AD 6.

<sup>36</sup> Posts of Officer are filled from grades AST 4 to AST 9.

<sup>37</sup> Posts of Support Officer are filled from grades AST 1 to AST 3.

## Europol Public Information

### Transitional types of post

Type of post	Function group / Grade	Post title
Assistant in transition	AST 1 – AST 9	Officer in transition Support Officer in transition Technical Officer in transition
Administrative Assistant in transition	AST 1 – AST 7	Administrative Assistant in transition

### **Annex V-c. Benchmarking exercise**

Europol continues to strive towards being a more operational EU Agency. In 2023, the results of the job screening exercise showed a stabilisation in all categories, with marginal deviations compared to the previous year.

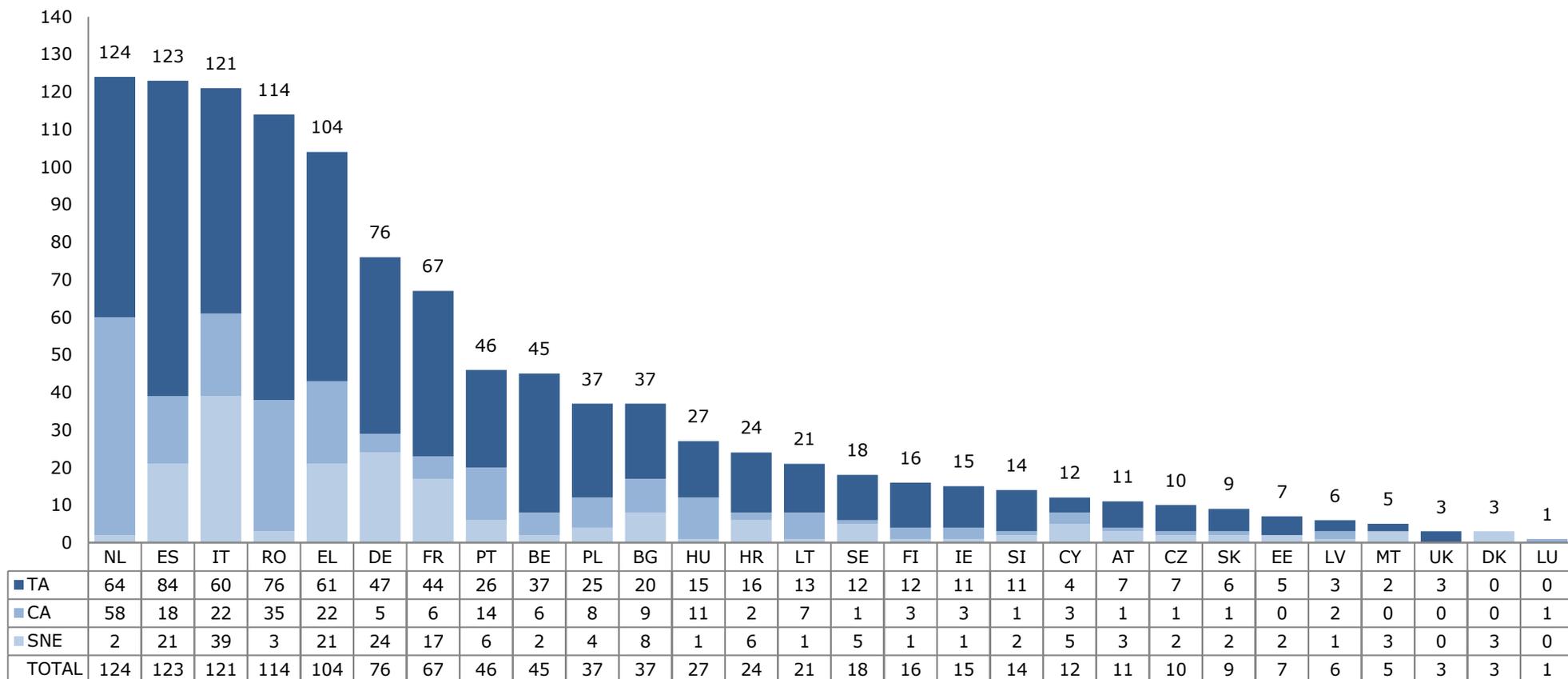
The job screening exercise was performed in December 2023, according to the guidelines defined by the EU Agencies Network and based on all personnel working at Europol premises on 15 December 2023. This not only includes Temporary Agents, Contract Agents and SNEs but also Europol Liaison Officers, Interns, Law Enforcement Trainees and external service providers based at Europol’s premises.

Job Type category	2022 Jobs	2022 (%)	2023 Jobs	2023 (%)	Δ 2023
<b>Administrative support and Coordination</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>0.02%</b>
Administrative support	178	12%	182	12%	-0.11%
Coordination	57	4%	61	4%	0.14%
<b>Operational</b>	<b>1207</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>1245</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>-0.08%</b>
General Operational	908	60%	902	58%	-2.28%
Programme Management	251	17%	298	19%	2.50%
Top level Operational Coordination	48	3%	45	3%	-0.29%
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>0.06%</b>
Finance	65	4%	68	4%	0.06%
	<b>1507</b>		<b>1556</b>		

## Europol Public Information

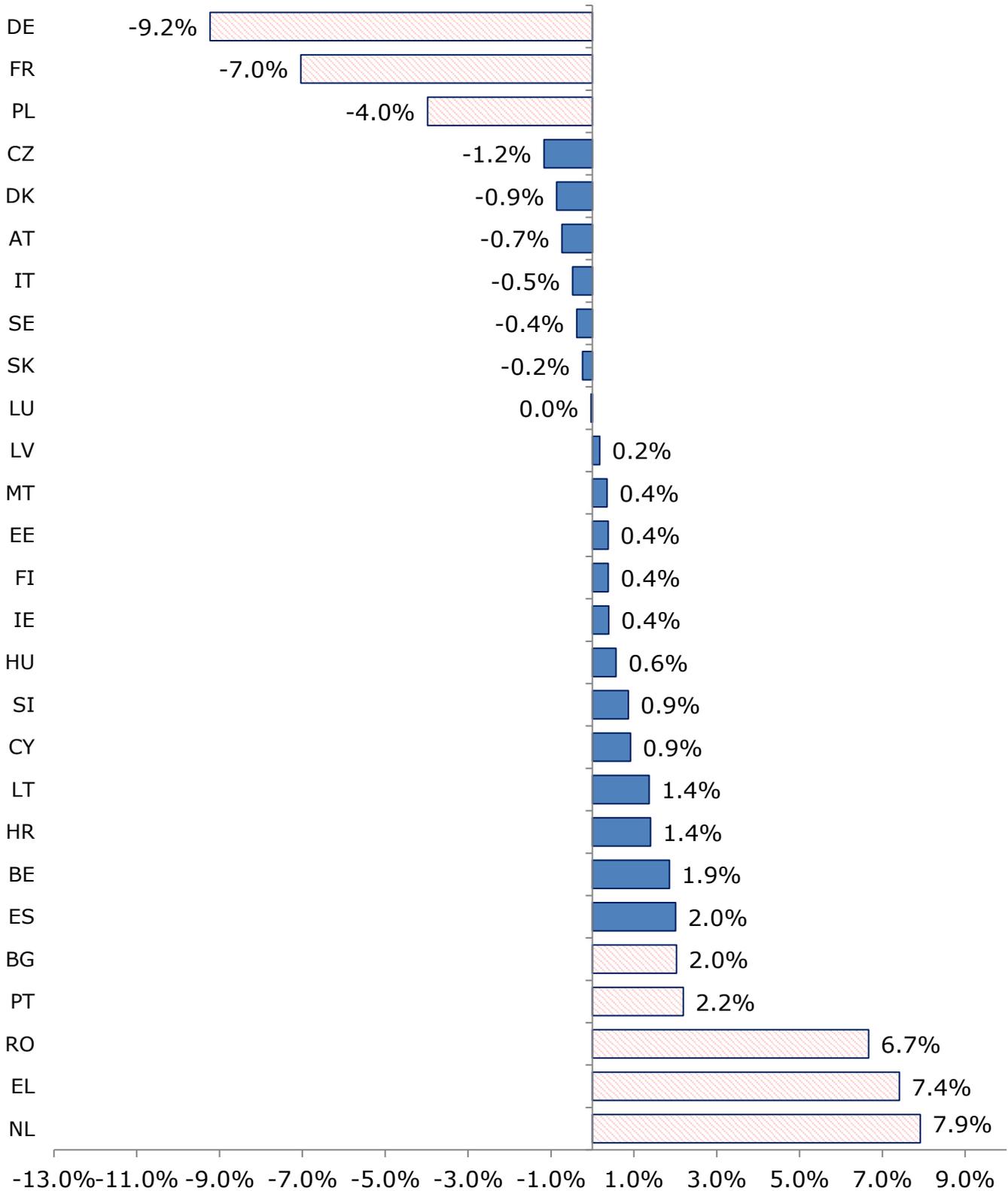
### Annex V-d. Member States representation at Europol

A - Europol staff (in post) per nationality (27 Member States + UK) and type of contract



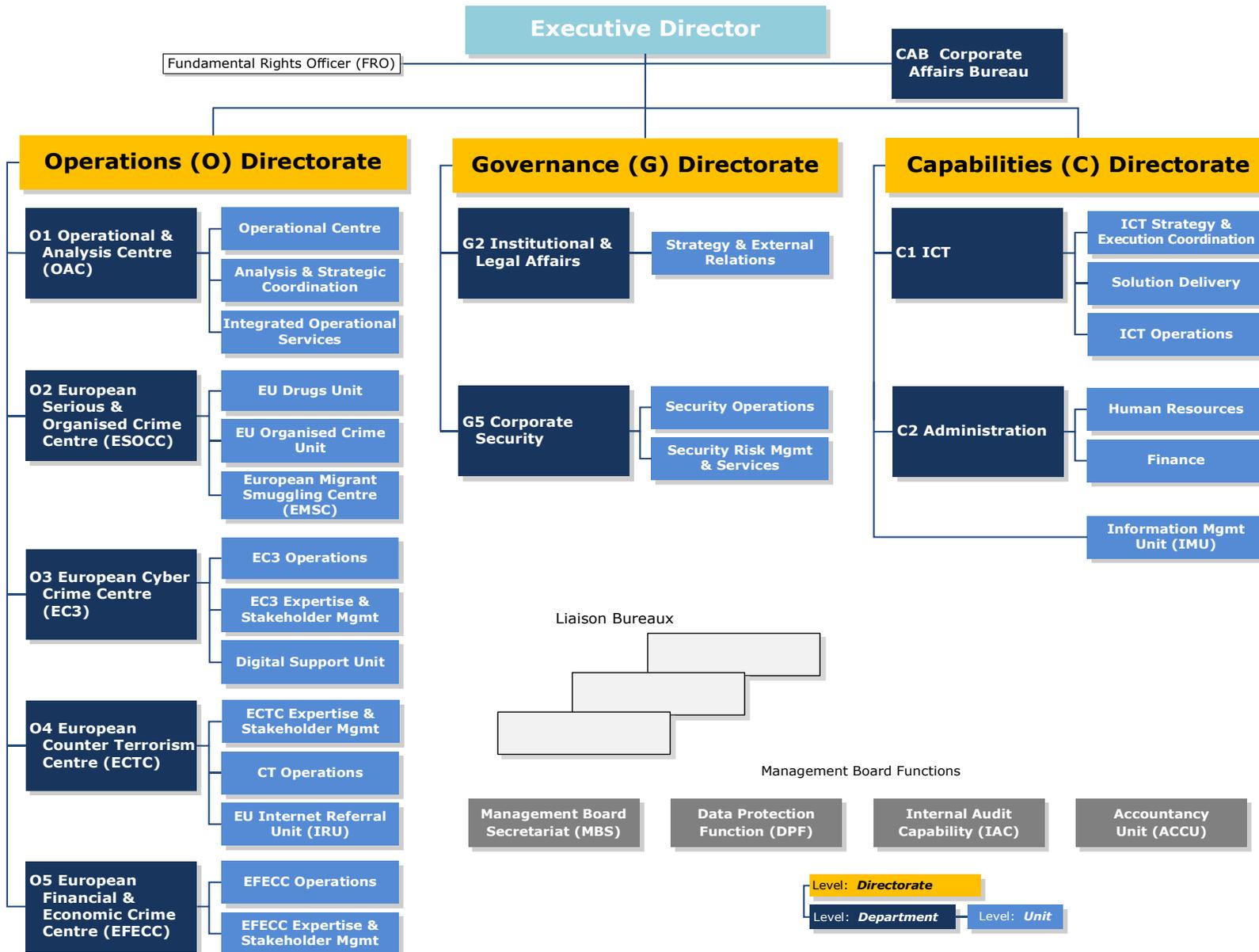
## Europol Public Information

B- Europol staff (in post) vs. EU population share per country



# Europol Public Information

## Annex VI. Organisational Chart 2023



## Europol Public Information

### Annex VII. Grant and Service Level Agreements

	General information					Financial and HR impacts				
	Date of signature	Total amount	Duration	Counterpart	Short description	N-1 (2022)		N (2023)		
<b>Grant agreements</b>										
1. H2020 - GRACE 883341 - part of consortium coordinated by Vicom, ES	18/05/2020 (starting date 1/6/2020)	6,823,512.50 for the consortium of which 747,550 for Europol	42 months	European Commission Research Executive Agency	Global Response Against Child Exploitation based on big-data technologies supported by advanced AI powered algorithms	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							213,586	213,586	195,787	195,787
						Number of CAs	3		3	
						Number of SNEs	0		0	
2. H2020 - INFINITY 883293 - part of consortium coordinated by Airbus, FR	11/05/2020 (starting date 1/6/2020)	6,866,503.75 for the consortium of which 481,100 for Europol	39 months	European Commission Research Executive Agency	A project that revolutionises how LEAs view, analyse and share information to combat crime and terrorism	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							148,031	148,031	98,687	98,687
						Number of CAs	1		1	
						Number of SNEs	0		0	
3. H2020 - AIDA 883596 - part of consortium coordinated by Ingegneria Informatica, IT	20/05/2020 (starting date 1/9/2020)	7,690,272.50 for the consortium of which 935,800 for Europol	30 months	European Commission Research Executive Agency	Artificial Intelligence and advanced Data Analytics for Law Enforcement Agencies	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							374,320	374,320	62,387	62,387
						Number of CAs	5		5	
						Number of SNEs	0		0	
4. H2020 - STARLIGHT 101021797 - part of consortium coordinated by CEA, FR	05/05/2021 (starting date 1/10/2021)	17,000,000 for the consortium of which 891,200 for Europol	48 months	European Commission Research Executive Agency	Sustainable Autonomy and Resilience for LEAs using AI against High priority Threats	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							222,800	222,800	222,800	222,800
						Number of CAs	3		3	
						Number of SNEs	0		0	
<b>Total grant agreements</b>						<b>Amount</b>	<b>CA</b>	<b>PA</b>	<b>CA</b>	<b>PA</b>
							<b>958,736</b>	<b>958,736</b>	<b>579,661</b>	<b>579,661</b>
						<b>Number of CAs</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>12</b>	
						<b>Number of SNEs</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>0</b>	
<b>Contribution agreements</b>										
1. EaP EMPACT ENI/2020 / 416-376	11/06/2020 (starting date 1/7/2020)	2,500,000	48 months	European Commission DG Near	Fighting organised crime in the EaP region	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							625,000	625,000	625,000	625,000
						Number of CAs	2		2	
						Number of SNEs	0		0	
2. SIRIUS phase 2 New Agreement	21/12/2020 (starting date 1/1/2021)	3,491,891.50 (2,226,456 Europol, 1,265,435.50 Eurojust)	42 months (staff for year 1 still in SIRIUS I)	European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments	International Digital Cooperation - Cross border access to electronic evidence	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							781,785	781,785	797,835	797,835
						Number of CAs	7		7	
						Number of SNEs	0		0	
<b>Total contribution agreements</b>						<b>Amount</b>	<b>CA</b>	<b>PA</b>	<b>CA</b>	<b>PA</b>
							<b>1,406,785</b>	<b>1,406,785</b>	<b>1,422,835</b>	<b>1,422,835</b>
						<b>Number of CAs</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>9</b>	
						<b>Number of SNEs</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>0</b>	

## Europol Public Information

	General information					Financial and HR impacts				
	Date of signature	Total amount	Duration	Counterpart	Short description	N-1 (2022)		N (2023)		
<b>Service-level agreements</b>										
1. EUIPO - IP Crime	07/11/2019 (starting date 1/1/2020)	maximum 3,800,000	48 months	The European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO)	To support law enforcement authorities preventing crime related to Intellectual Property Rights	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							950,000	950,000	950,000	950,000
						Number of CAs	3		2	
						Number of SNEs	6		7	
2. EUIPO - Fraud	13/08/2019 (starting date 1/1/2020)	80,000 per year	48 months	The European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO)	Preventing fraud against users of the European Union Intellectual Property Systems	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							80,000	80,000	80,000	80,000
						Number of CAs	0		0	
						Number of SNEs	1		1	
3. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (funded via Contribution Agreement with DG Near)	05/08/2020	850,000	Maximum duration until 30/9/2024	The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training	EUROMED POLICE V (Contract No. ENI/2020/414-940), WB PaCT (Contract No. 2019/ 413-822) and TOPCOP (Contract No. ENI/2020/415-941) projects	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							240,000	240,000	180,000	180,000
						Number of CAs	3		3	
						Number of SNEs	0		0	
<b>Total service-level agreements</b>						Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							1,270,000	1,270,000	1,210,000	1,210,000
						Number of CAs	6		5	
						Number of SNEs	7		8	
<b>TOTAL AGREEMENTS</b>						Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA
							3,635,521	3,635,521	3,212,496	3,212,496
						Number of CAs	27		26	
						Number of SNEs	7		8	

**Annex VIII. Extract from annual accounts**

**BALANCE SHEET**

<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>31.12.2023</b>	<b>31.12.2022</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>80,287,799</b>	<b>69,296,692</b>
<b>Intangible assets</b>	<b>53,426,406</b>	<b>39,875,105</b>
Computer software	25,975,964	16,871,703
Computer software under Financial lease	-	-
Under construction	27,450,441	23,003,402
<b>Tangible assets</b>	<b>26,816,827</b>	<b>29,421,587</b>
Land and buildings	6,073,078	6,630,647
Plant and equipment	342,985	353,039
Computer hardware	14,542,001	17,019,492
Furniture and vehicles	2,629,454	2,449,319
Other fixtures and fittings	3,136,400	2,772,119
Assets under financial lease	92,909	196,971
<b>Non-current receivables and recoverables</b>	<b>44,566</b>	<b>-</b>
Long-term receivables	44,566	-
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>50,308,497</b>	<b>64,208,337</b>
<b>Short-term pre-financing paid</b>	<b>3,703,650</b>	<b>4,388,201</b>
EMPACT and other grant beneficiaries	3,316,672	4,158,229
Consolidated entities	386,978	229,972
<b>Short-term Receivables</b>	<b>44,920,574</b>	<b>58,032,526</b>
Current receivables	35,419,026	48,932,406
Sundry receivables	289,078	581,816
Other receivables: Accrued exchange income <sup>38</sup>	1,506	43,620
Accrued non-exchange income	210,816	10,000
Deferred charges <sup>39</sup>	9,000,148	8,383,852
Receivables with consolidated EU entities	-	80,834
<b>Cash and cash equivalents</b>	<b>1,684,273</b>	<b>1,787,610</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>130,596,296</b>	<b>133,505,029</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>2,591,103</b>	<b>3,228,136</b>

<sup>38</sup> Includes accrued exchange income with consolidated EU entities.

<sup>39</sup> Includes deferred charges with consolidated EU entities.



## Europol Public Information

EXPENDITURE	3.2.	204,672,458	179,794,848
<b>Operational expenditure</b>		<b>51,843,811</b>	<b>46,014,430</b>
<b>Administrative expenditure</b>		<b>152,828,648</b>	<b>133,780,417</b>
Staff expenses		102,366,355	87,275,755
Finance expenses		20,190	39,188
Fixed asset-related		18,618,782	18,454,032
Expenses with consolidated EU entities		9,409,050	9,295,667
Other: Administrative and IT expenses		11,656,631	10,449,245
External service provider (non-IT)		3,672,083	3,262,651
Rent and IT operating lease		293,180	290,139
Building – maintenance, insurance and security		6,791,471	4,713,340
Exchange rate losses		906	401
<b>SURPLUS/DEFICIT FROM ORDINARY ACTIVITIES</b>		<b>5,096,339</b>	<b>11,353,207</b>
Extraordinary gains		-	-
Extraordinary losses		-	-
<b>SURPLUS/DEFICIT FROM EXTRAORDINARY ITEMS</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>ECONOMIC RESULT OF THE YEAR</b>		<b>5,096,339</b>	<b>11,353,207</b>

## CASH FLOW STATEMENT

	31.12.2023	31.12.2022
Economic result of the year	5,096,339	11,353,207
<b>Operational activities</b>		
Amortisation (intangible assets)	8,067,600	8,103,675
Depreciation (tangible assets)	10,475,788	10,349,778
Increase (-)/Decrease in provisions for risks and charges	-	-
Increase (-)/Decrease in short-term pre-financing	841,556	990,587
Increase (-)/Decrease in long-term receivables	-44,566	5,016
Increase (-)/Decrease in short-term receivables	13,031,119	-46,878,275
Increase (-)/Decrease in receivables related to consolidated EU entities	-76,172	-111,745
Increase(-)/Decrease in other long-term liabilities	-125,220	-1,232,792
Increase (-)/Decrease in accounts payable	-3,404,002	3,402,273
Increase (-)/Decrease in liabilities related to consolidated EU entities	-4,040,915	3,492,413
Other non-cash movements	-311,921	97,609
<b>Net cash-flow from operational activities</b>	<b>29,509,604</b>	<b>-10,428,255</b>

## Europol Public Information

<b>Investing activities</b>		
Increase (-) of tangible and intangible assets	-29,565,323	-27,915,509
Proceeds from tangible and intangible assets	75,394	578
<b>Net cash-flow from investing activities</b>	<b>-29,489,929</b>	<b>-27,914,931</b>
<b>Increase/decrease (-) in pension and employee benefits liability</b>		
	<b>-123,013</b>	<b>-647,986</b>
Net increase/decrease (-) in cash and cash equivalents	-103,337	-38,991,172
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	1,787,610	40,778,781
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at year-end</b>	<b>1,684,273</b>	<b>1,787,610</b>

## STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN NET ASSETS

	Accumulated Surplus/ Deficit	Economic result of the year	Net Assets (Total)
<b>Balance as at 31 December 2022</b>	<b>92,720,465</b>	<b>11,353,207</b>	<b>104,073,672</b>
Changes in accounting policies	-	-	-
<b>Balance as at 1 January 2023</b>	<b>92,720,465</b>	<b>11,353,207</b>	<b>104,073,672</b>
Re-measurements of employee benefit liabilities <sup>40</sup>	-644,745	-	-644,745
Allocation of the economic result of previous year	11,353,207	-11,353,207	-
Economic result of the year 2023	-	5,096,339	5,096,339
<b>Balance as at 31 December 2023</b>	<b>103,428,927</b>	<b>5,096,339</b>	<b>108,525,266</b>

## RECONCILIATION BETWEEN STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET RESULT

Description	Amount
Economic result (Statement of Financial Performance) 2023	5,096,339
Accruals/deferrals 2023	5,491,969
Accruals/deferrals reversed from 2022	-6,227,852
Adjustment for 2022 carry-over appropriations assigned revenue	7,475,344
Adjustment to employee benefit liability	-123,013

<sup>40</sup> This is the net result of changes to actuarial demographic and financial assumptions in accordance with EU Accounting Rule 12 (Employee benefits).

## Europol Public Information

Cancellation of unused payment appropriations from 2022	3,737,470
Cashed balance sheet recovery orders issued in 2023 <sup>41</sup>	1,542,889
Cashed recovery orders issued before 2023	30,998
Depreciation and amortisation of fixed assets	18,543,388
Fixed Asset acquisitions (excluding unpaid amounts at 31.12.2023)	-8,311,433
Internally-generated fixed assets	-21,618,900
Open pre-financing paid in 2023	-11,417,689
Open pre-financing received in 2023	8,915,397
Payment appropriations carried over to 2024	-30,754,730
Payments 2023 in Statement of Financial Performance 2022	-296,819
Payments made in 2023 from 2024 budget	383,950
Payments made from carry-over 2022	29,265,407
Pre-financing paid in 2022 and cleared in 2023	8,021,953
Pre-financing received before 2023 and cleared in 2023	-3,549,045
Uncashed revenue recovery orders issued in 2023	-11,892
Unpaid invoices at 31.12.2023	34,510
Value reductions (impact of the year)	55,156
<b>Total = Budget result 2023</b>	<b>6,283,397</b>

## BUDGET RESULT

	2023	2022
<b>REVENUE</b>		
European Union contribution, cashed	207,176,212	192,380,773
Other revenue, cashed	9,989,810	8,945,076
<b>TOTAL REVENUE (a)</b>	<b>217,166,022</b>	<b>201,325,849</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
<b>Title 1: Staff</b>		
Payments current year	117,919,305	104,047,454
Appropriations carried over to next year	2,845,289	2,850,626
<b>Title 2: Administrative</b>		
Payments current year	10,815,187	7,669,416
Appropriations carried over to next year	4,748,517	4,213,172
<b>Title 3: Operational</b>		
Payments current year	62,606,189	53,697,456

<sup>41</sup> Classed as revenue in the budget result, but booked to the balance sheet rather than the statement of financial performance. For example grant-related pre-financing claims.

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Appropriations carried over to next year	23,160,925	33,414,422
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE (b)</b>	<b>222,095,411</b>	<b>205,892,546</b>
<b>RESULT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR (a-b)</b>	-4,929,389	-4,566,697
Cancellation of unused PA carried over from the previous year	3,737,470	3,802,497
Adjustment for carry-over from the previous year – assigned revenue	7,475,344	11,078,105
Exchange rate differences	-28	186
<b>FINAL BUDGET RESULT</b>	<b>6,283,397</b>	<b>10,314,092</b>

## Annex IX. Environmental indicators

The yearly collection of performance data for 2023 will be completed in 2024. The table below shows Europol's environmental indicators for the years 2018-2022, the performance variation (expressed in %) from 2018 (baseline year) to 2022 and the performance target for 2022.

Core indicator (Description and unit)	2018	2022	Δ 2018-2022 (%)	Target 2022	
				Δ %	value
<b>Total CO<sub>2</sub>eq footprint (tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>eq)</b>	<b>4 128.7</b>	<b>2 854</b>	<b>-30.9</b>	<b>-4.5</b>	<b>3 943</b>
CO <sub>2</sub> eq footprint (tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> eq/FTE)	3.37	1.95	-42.1		
CO <sub>2</sub> eq buildings (kg CO <sub>2</sub> eq/FTE)	54.86	0.00	-100.0		
<b>Total energy building (MWh)</b>	<b>9 147</b>	<b>9 406</b>	<b>2.8</b>		
Energy buildings (kWh/m <sup>2</sup> )	281	289	2.8		
Energy buildings (MWh/FTE)	7.47	6.43	-13.9		
Non ren. energy use (buildings) %	3.42	4.13	20.7		
<b>Total water consumption (m<sup>3</sup>)</b>	<b>14 250</b>	<b>9 637</b>	<b>-32.4</b>		
Water consumption (m <sup>3</sup> /FTE)	11.63	6.59	-43.4	<b>-10.0</b>	<b>10.47</b>
<b>Total waste generation (tonnes)</b>	<b>91.30</b>	<b>92.32</b>	<b>1.1</b>		
Waste generation (kg/FTE)	74.53	63.11	-15.3		
Separated waste (%)	44.1	48.7	4.6 p.p.	<b>5 p.p.</b>	<b>49.1%</b>
<b>Total paper consumption (tonnes)</b>	<b>11.70</b>	<b>7.19</b>	<b>-38.5</b>		
Paper consumption (kg/FTE)	9.55	4.91	-48.5	<b>-5.0</b>	<b>9.07</b>
Daily paper consumption (sheets/FTE/day)	9.12	4.58	-49.8		
<b>Tenders/contracts &gt;15k with GPP/environmental considerations</b>	✓	✓	n/a	-	-
<b>Proportion of total land that is nature- oriented (%)</b>	76.4	76.4	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total land	9 970	9 970	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total land per FTE (m <sup>2</sup> /FTE)	8.1	6.8	n/a	n/a	n/a

In 2022, Europol outperformed all targets set. However, it should be considered that 2022 was still affected by the constraints related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their impact was considerably weaker than in previous years (2020 and 2021), but 2022 cannot be considered as a fully representative year. Although a rebound effect was evident in almost all areas in 2022, 2023 and further may bring further increases due to a return to pre-pandemic activity.

### Annex X. Main issues discussed and decisions taken by the MB

#### 130<sup>th</sup> MB meeting | 21-22 March 2023

##### Main decisions:

- **Europol Regulation implementation:** the MB adopted four Decisions pertaining to Articles 18(2), 18(6), 18(6a), and 18a of the Europol Regulation, as revised in light of the Opinion issued by the European Data Protection Supervisor on 17 November 2022.
- **Human resources:** the Board adopted a revision of the MB Decision laying down the rules on the secondment of national experts to Europol.
- **Research & Innovation (R&I):** the MB adopted a Binding Document establishing the general scope for R&I projects, as foreseen in Art. 33(3) of the Europol Regulation.
- **External relations:** the MB approved the Working Arrangement with the International Criminal Court in accordance with Article 11(1)(r) of the Europol Regulation.

The Board received an update on ongoing and upcoming Europol's activities related to the war in Ukraine, on the activities of the European Counter Terrorism Centre, and on the preparations for a pilot project to implement Article 21(1) of the Europol Regulation with regard to Eurojust.

#### 131<sup>st</sup> MB meeting | 7-8 June 2023

##### Main decisions:

- **Strategic and corporate matters:** the MB elected its Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson for the 18-month period running from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2024, and appointed the Chairpersons of the MB WGCM and WGIM for the same period.
- **Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR):** the MB adopted the CAAR 2022 and its own assessment thereof. The CAAR 2022 was published on the Europol website following its transmission to the relevant EU Institutions and the JPSG.
- **Europol's Strategy:** the MB endorsed the renewed Europol Strategy, 'Delivering Security in Partnership'.
- **Operational matters:** the Board decided on the establishment of a new unit tasked to provide operational integrated services to Europol's internal and external stakeholders in connection to EU Interoperability. In addition, the MB adopted the criteria based on which Europol may issue proposals for the possible entry of information alerts in the Schengen Information System.

The MB discussed Europol's Environmental Vision 2030 and welcomed the Agency's goal to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030.

Further, the Board took note of the main findings of the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT).

#### 132<sup>nd</sup> MB meeting | 10-11 October 2023

##### Main decisions:

- **Strategic and corporate matters:** the MB endorsed Europol's six-month activity report, commending the Agency for the progress made in all areas.

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Further, the MB welcomed a representative of the Host State (the Netherlands) and endorsed the offer made to Europol concerning the location of a third temporary building near its main Headquarters.

- **External relations:** the MB approved the Working Arrangement with Ecuador in accordance with Article 11(1)(r) of the Europol Regulation.

The MB was updated on ongoing and upcoming Europol's activities related to the war in Ukraine, as well as on the activities of the European Counter Terrorism Centre, including with regard to the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Israel.

The MB discussed the findings of the first European Financial & Economic Crime Threat Assessment (EFECTA), a new Europol flagship report of key operational relevance for the financial investigations carried out by the national competent authorities.

The Board commended Europol for the successful launch of PERCI, the EU platform for referrals and removal orders, aimed to facilitate the takedown of illegal content online and to enable a 24/7 real time crisis response to viral spread of terrorist content.

The MB welcomed the 2022 Annual Report of the Europol Data Protection Officer (DPO), commending the DPO and the Data Protection Function for their decisive support to the Agency in upholding a high-level of data protection compliance.

### 133<sup>rd</sup> MB meeting (topical) | 28 November 2023

#### Main decisions:

- **Europol Programming documents:** the MB adopted the Programming Document 2024-2026.

### 134<sup>th</sup> MB meeting | 12-13 December 2023

#### Main decisions:

- **Finance:** the MB adopted the Europol budget for 2024.
- **Audit:** the MB approved the Work Programme of the Internal Audit Capability for 2024 and decided upon the security accreditation of a number of Europol core systems.

The MB discussed the preliminary draft Programming Document 2025-2027.

Further, the Board took note of Europol's achievements and envisioned developments in the area of Information Management, including Europol's activities with regard to EU Interoperability and the implementation of the EU Directive on Information Exchange. In addition, the MB was presented with Europol's report on "The Second Quantum Revolution", outlining the foreseeable impact of quantum computing on national law enforcement authorities.

Pertaining to Europol's operational work, the Board was updated on the activities of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre and discussed in this context the legislative proposal of the European Commission for a regulation on enhancing police cooperation in relation to migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings and Europol's support thereof.

Finally, the Board was presented with the priorities of the then incoming Belgian Presidency in the area of Home Affairs.

### Written procedures

Through written procedures held in 2023, the MB:

## **Europol Public Information**

- Endorsed the draft Programming Document 2024-2026 with a few amendments. In accordance with the applicable legal framework, the draft Programming Document was transmitted to the relevant EU Institutions while its multiannual component was sent to the JPSG for consultation.
- Approved two amending budgets.
- Authorised a budget transfer to fund EMPACT Low Value Grants.
- Approved the minutes of its 13-14 December 2022 and 21-22 March 2023 meetings.
- Approved the Summaries of the meetings held during the year and agreed to their publication on the Europol website in accordance with Article 65(4) of the Europol Regulation.

## Europol Public Information

### Annex XI. Implementation overview of critical and very important audit recommendations<sup>42</sup> issued by the IAC

Year	Audit report	Total critical and very important			Addressed up to end 2023			To be addressed in full in 2024 and onwards		
		Total	C	VI	Total	C	VI	Total	C	VI
2015	Consultancy engagement on review of systems laid down by the Authorising Officer 2015 – 1st Report Accountancy: 2014 consolidation process	2		2	2		2	0		
2016	Review of the implementation of recommendations issued by the IAF in the period 2010-2014	13		13	11		11	0 <sup>43</sup>		
2016	Report on the review and assessment of the implementation of (ICS) at Europol	22	1	21	22	1	21	0		
2016	Review and assessment of the operational support provided by EC3	5		5	5		5	0		
2016	Audit on Europol Sports and Social Association (ESSA) regarding its accounts for the years 2012 to 2015	3		3	3		3	0		
2016	Validation of user access rights granted in ABAC	4		4	4		4	0		
2017	New operational support capabilities EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU)	1	1		1	1		0		
2017	Strategic analysis products and their alignment with the EU policy cycle	3	1	2	3	1	2	0		
2017	Missions' administration process audit	10		10	9		9	0 <sup>44</sup>		
2018	Information Communication Technology (ICT) project planning, management and change	4		4	4		4	0		
2018	Audit Report Learning, Training and Development	23	4	19	22	4	18	1		1
2018	Audit Report Operational support on-the-spot	1		1	0		0	1		1
2018	Validation of user access rights granted in ABAC	2		2	2		2	0 <sup>45</sup>		
2019	Audit report on operational analysis	14	2	12	11	2	9	3		3
2019	Audit Report Grants Management Process	7		7	7		7	0		
2020	Audit Report Contract renewal process	1		1	1		1	0		
2021	Audit report Asset Management	20	5	15	20	5	15	0 <sup>46</sup>		
2021	Audit Report Diversity, equality and inclusion practices at Europol	3		3	3		3	0		0
2021	Validation of user access rights granted in ABAC and MobileXpense	3	2	1	3	2	1	0		
2021	Audit report on Europol's 24/7 Operational Support	1		1	1		1	0		
2022	Validation of user access rights granted in ABAC and MobileXpense	2	1	1	2	1	1	0		
2023	Audit Report Audit of Europol's budget processes	7	1	6	0			7	1	6
2023	Validation of user access rights granted in ABAC and MobileXpense	1		1	0		0	1		1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>13<sup>47</sup></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>

<sup>42</sup> Grading of recommendations, as per the table, follows these codes: C=Critical, VI=Very Important.

<sup>43</sup> Of the 13 'very important' recommendations, two recommendations were assessed as 'not intended for implementation'.

<sup>44</sup> Of the ten 'very important' recommendations, one recommendation was assessed as 'no longer applicable'.

<sup>45</sup> Of the two 'very important' recommendations, one recommendation was assessed as 'no longer applicable'.

<sup>46</sup> Of the five 'critical' and 15 'very important' recommendations, two recommendations (one 'critical' and one 'very important') were assessed as 'no longer applicable'.

<sup>47</sup> Three 'very important' recommendations were assessed by the IAC as 'not intended for implementation' (two recommendations) or 'no longer applicable' (one recommendation).

### Annex XII. Extract from the European Court of Auditors (ECA) report

#### ECA observations on the legality and regularity of transactions on the financial year 2022

3.33.8. Between 2020 and 2022, Europol has paid the daily subsistence allowance to three Dutch nationals employed as seconded national experts (SNEs). As Europol is located in the Netherlands, the three SNEs were not entitled to these allowances under Europol's internal rules. Europol identified the issue in December 2022, and in February 2023 decided not to claim back the payments made to the three SNEs in the past. The amount waived was disclosed in the 2022 annual accounts (5.3.4. Accumulated overpayment). From December 2022, the payment of daily allowances to the three SNEs was stopped. The total associated payments to the three SNEs during the 2020-2022 period, amounting to €155,553, are irregular. The irregular payments for 2022 amounted to €90,605.

3.33.9. In 2022, Europol paid a grant of €3.3 million to fund the activities of a national police force in a member state, including €1.4 million as reimbursement for the purchase of five boats and a 7 % provision for associated overheads, including VAT. However, for the acquisition of boats for police operations, VAT should not be reimbursed pursuant to the provisions of Article 186(4)(c) of the Financial Regulation, because the beneficiary is a public authority, governed by public law, and engaged in activities as public authority. We conclude therefore that part of the grant, amounting to €0.2 million – which corresponds to the ineligible VAT and the related portion of the associated overheads – is irregular.

At our request, Europol identified other grants under which VAT was reimbursed for similar activities, for an additional €0.2 million.

#### The Agency's reply

3.33.8. At the end of December 2022, Europol identified and disclosed the overpayment of €155,553, with respect to the daily subsistence allowance for three seconded national experts (SNEs) from the Netherlands to the European Court of Auditors (ECA), and in the annual accounts for the financial year 2022. In line with the requirements set out in Article 101 of the Financial Regulation 2018/1046, Europol decided to waive the recovery of the overpayment, including in view of the interest to uphold the relationship of trust and cooperation with the sending authorities. Europol performed a series of thorough checks, with the result that no further instance of overpayment on the same grounds with respect to financial entitlements for SNEs was identified. On the way forward, enhanced ex-ante verification, drawing on expert knowledge and adequate resource allocation in the Human Resources Unit, will contribute to provide effective assurance on the legality of the corresponding financial entitlements prior to payment.

3.33.9. Europol takes note of the Court's observation. Article 5 of the Council Decision 2008/617/JHA on the improvement of cooperation between the Special Intervention Units (SIUs) of EU member states provides that SIUs shall ensure joint training and exercises. The operational grant concerned the activities of SIUs coordinated by one member state. Europol considered that, under Article 186(4)(c) of the Financial Regulation 2018/1046 and the corresponding specific implementation guidance of the European Commission on grant administration, Value Added Tax (VAT) was an eligible cost where it is not recoverable under applicable national legislation and where it relates to training, awareness raising or similar activities in the area of security, except for VAT paid by member states when acting as public authorities in their sovereign capacity, in particular where private companies could not provide the related services. On the way forward, Europol will assess the eligibility of VAT in operational grants in light of the ECA's observations.

## Europol Public Information

### Follow-up of previous years' observations

Year	The ECA's observations	Corrective action taken and / or other relevant developments (summary)	Follow-up status
2020	Europol had paid late in 33 % of cases. We observed similar levels of delays in 2019, 2018 and 2017. This recurrent weakness exposes Europol to reputational risk.	Compared to 2020 (32.8 %) and 2021 (7.8 %), in 2022 the late payment rate was further reduced to 7.2 %. The percentage of late payments in value was reduced from 4.6 % at the end of 2021 to 1.9 % at the end of 2022.	Closed <sup>48</sup>
2021	Between 2019 and 2021, Europol assessing one case of a potential conflict of interest in relation to a senior member of staff taking up a new job elsewhere, did not issue its decision within the deadline and thus effectively authorised the person concerned to take up the new job without any restrictions.	Europol has committed to respecting the statutory deadlines in the future. In 2022, there have been no instances of senior management leaving Europol.	Closed <sup>49</sup>
2022	Between 2020 and 2022 Europol has paid the daily subsistence allowance to three Dutch nationals employed as seconded national experts (SNEs). As Europol is located in the Netherlands, the three SNEs were not entitled to these allowances under Europol's internal rules. Europol identified the issue in December 2022, and in February 2023 decided not to claim back the payments made to the three SNEs in the past. The amount waived was disclosed in the 2022 annual accounts (5.3.4. Accumulated overpayment). From December 2022, the payment of daily allowances to the three SNEs was stopped. The total associated payments to the three SNEs during the 2020-2022 period, amounting to €155 553, are irregular. The irregular payments for 2022 amounted to €90 605.	Europol conducted an internal analysis of the controls in place for the establishment and review of financial entitlements by HR as well as the financial verification of the established amounts and introduced further preventive measures to reinforce the internal capabilities.	Corrective action taken - subject to validation by the ECA
2022	In 2022, Europol paid a grant of €3.3 million to fund the activities of a national police force in a member state, including €1.4 million as reimbursement for the purchase of five boats and a 7 % provision for associated overheads, including VAT. However, for the acquisition of boats for police operations, VAT should not be reimbursed pursuant to the provisions of Article 186(4)(c) of the Financial Regulation, because the beneficiary is a public authority, governed by public law, and engaged in activities as public authority. We conclude therefore that part of the grant, amounting to €0.2 million – which corresponds to the ineligible VAT and the related portion of the associated overheads – is irregular. At our request, Europol identified other grants under which VAT was reimbursed for similar activities, for an additional €0.2 million.	Europol reassessed the approach for considering the eligibility of VAT for the implementation of grants. For all grant calls and activities initiated after 1 November 2023 VAT is no longer considered eligible. For activities initiated and ongoing by 31 October 2023, Europol applied transitional measures.	Corrective action taken - subject to validation by the ECA

<sup>48</sup> As reported in the ECA report on the financial year 2022

[https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SAR-AGENCIES-2022/SAR-AGENCIES-2022\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SAR-AGENCIES-2022/SAR-AGENCIES-2022_EN.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> As reported in the ECA report on the financial year 2022

[https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SAR-AGENCIES-2022/SAR-AGENCIES-2022\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SAR-AGENCIES-2022/SAR-AGENCIES-2022_EN.pdf)