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List of Acronyms

ADEP	Automation of Data Exchange Processes
AML	Anti-Money Laundering
AP	Analysis Project
ARO	Asset Recovery Office
BPL	Basic Protection Level
CA	Contract Agent
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
COSI	Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSE	child sexual exploitation
CT	Counter-Terrorism
DAP	Data Analysis Portal
DPF	Data Protection Function
EC3	Europol Cybercrime Centre
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECTC	European Counter Terrorism Centre
EDPS	European Data Protection Supervisor
EEAS	European External Action Service
EES	Entry-Exit System
EFECC	European Financial and Economic Crime Centre
EIS	Europol Information System
EMAS	Europol Malware Analysis Solution
EMAS	EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
EMSC	European Migrant Smuggling Centre
EPE	Europol Platform for Experts
EPPO	European Public Prosecutor's Office
ESOCC	European Serious and Organised Crime Centre
ETIAS	EU Travel Information and Authorisation System
EUCP	EU Crisis Protocol
EUIPO	European Union Intellectual Property Office
Eurojust	European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation
eu-LISA	European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit

Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GO	Guest Officer
HR	Human Resource
HRCN	High Risk Criminal Networks
HVT	High Value Targets
IAC	Internal Audit Capability
IAM	Identity and Access Management
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IM	Information Management
IRU	Internet Referral Unit
ISF	Internal Security Fund
J-CAT	Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
JRC	Joint Research Centre
LEA	Law Enforcement Authorities
MB	Management Board
MENA	Middle East and North Africa region
MS	Member State
MTIC	Excise and Missing Trader Intra Community
OAC	Operational and Analysis Centre
OAP	Operational Action Plan (under EMPACT)
OCG	Organised Crime Group
ODIN	Operational Data for Innovation
OLAF	European Anti-Fraud Office
OSINT	Open Source Intelligence
OSP	Online Service Providers
OTF	Operational Task Force
PERCI	European platform for takedown of illegal content online
PNR	Passenger Name Record
QUEST	Querying Europol's systems
R&D	Research and Development
SIENA	Secure Information Exchange Network Application
SIS	Schengen Information System
SNE	Seconded National Expert
SOC	Serious and Organised Crime
SOCTA	Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
TA	Temporary Agent
TFTP	Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme
THB	Trafficking in human beings
TP	Third Part(y)/ies: Third countr(y)/ies and/or international organisation(s)
UMF	Universal Message Format
VIS	Visa Information System

SECTION I – General Context

This section presents the current and future policy context that is expected to influence Europol's work in the coming years. Through the implementation of its Annual Work Programme 2026, Europol will contribute to the implementation of several EU policies in the JHA domain, as detailed below and under each specific Activity in Section III.

With the establishment of the new European Commission 2024-2029 and a number of EU Strategies and action plans concluding in 2025, Europol will follow closely the elaboration of new EU strategies and related action plans for emerging tasks falling within Europol's mandate, such as the EU Internal Security Strategy, the next Strategy to tackle Organised Crime, the next EU Cybersecurity Strategy, the next Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU, the next EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking, the next EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and the next EU Drug strategy. Once in place, the new strategies and action plans will be duly reflected in this section.

1. Security Union

1.1. Mission Letters of the President of the European Commission, Dr Ursula von der Leyen

The President of the European Commission, Dr von der Leyen, issued mission letters to the then Commissioners Designate in September 2024. Europol's work was most prominently featured in the mission letter to then Commissioner Designate for Justice and Home Affairs, Mr. Magnus Brunner, but relevant references can also be found in the mission letter to then Executive VP-designate for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, Ms. Henna Virkkunen.

Ms Virkkunen was asked to support the **strengthening of the EU's internal security**, foster **law enforcement cooperation** and support a tougher approach to crime with a particular focus on **organised crime and high-risk criminal networks**. Among others, Ms Virkkunen was also asked to coordinate efforts to ensure high standards of cybersecurity and look at **digital technologies and AI to enhance law enforcement capabilities**. The Executive VP will also guide the work **on anti-corruption**.

Mr. Brunner is asked to lead the efforts on the fight against **serious and organised crime** and is expected to present a **new European Action plan against drug trafficking**. Among key priorities mentioned in the letter is **a new European Internal Security Strategy**, updating law enforcement tools for **digital data access**, strengthening **law enforcement and judicial cooperation, child protection against sexual abuse, cybercrime, counter-terrorism**, renewing the **EU firearms action plan** and fighting **against migrant smugglers and people traffickers.**

Finally, Mr. Brunner is asked to enhance coordination and complementarity between Europol and other agencies and is expected to propose to "**make Europol a truly operational police agency and more than double its staff over time**", with a strengthened mandate and oversight.

1.2. European Commission's Communication: Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans

In February 2020, the European Commission adopted a communication on "Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans"[1], which foresees stronger commitments by the EU and the Western Balkans. Credibility should be reinforced through an even stronger focus on fundamental reforms, starting with the rule of law, the

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[1] COM/2020/57 final

functioning of democratic institutions and public administration as well as the economy of the candidate countries.

Ahead of the EU-Western Balkans Summit of 6 December 2022 and the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council on 8 December 2022, the Commission presented also an "EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans" aimed at strengthening cooperation on migration and border management with partners in Western Balkans. In December 2022, the European Council decided to grant the EU candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1.3. Joint Communication: Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all

The European Commission-EEAS joint communication Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020[2] was published on 18 March 2020 and comprises a new policy framework to strengthen resilience in partner countries in light of today's challenges, foster sustainable development and deliver tangible results for citizens. The EU, Member States and partner countries are invited to work together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security. In particular, the EU shall work to enhance its support to fighting corruption and economic crime and improve cross-border cooperation to better protect people against organised crime. On 23 June 2022, the European Council decided to grant the status of candidate country to Ukraine and to the Republic of Moldova.

1.4. Strengthening cooperation with CSDP missions and operations

In June 2020, the Council adopted conclusions on security and defence[3], which initiated the work towards a Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, adopted in March 2022. In the Strategic Compass, MS agreed to develop a new Civilian CSDP Compact by mid-2023.

On 22 May 2023 the Council adopted the new Civilian CSDP Compact[4] reaffirming its full commitment to strengthening civilian CSDP and calling for the enhancement of the civilian CSDP missions' effectiveness, impact, flexibility and robustness, enabling them to tackle more effectively current, emerging and future security challenges across the internal – external nexus. The implementation is taken forward by the EEAS and the Commission through a joint action plan, as well as through MS' own implementation plans. Reinforced cooperation between CSDP and JHA is an important element of the Strategic Compass.

2. Serious and Organised Crime

2.1. EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime

On 18 October 2023, the European Commission adopted the EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime[5], which aims to reinforce the EU action against the most serious security threats posed by the drugs trade and organised crime groups. It is composed of seventeen Priority Actions organised around four thematic areas: 1) The European Ports Alliance to strengthen the resilience of logistical hubs; 2) Action to dismantle high-risk criminal networks; 3) Prevention; and 4) International cooperation. Europol is mentioned extensively in the Roadmap and is actively involved in the implementation of most of its actions, in cooperation with MS and other relevant EU Agencies and bodies.

2.2. Establishment of the European Union Drugs Agency

The regulation setting up the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) and replacing the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) entered into force on 1 July 2023 and became applicable on 1 July 2024. This new legal framework enhances the

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[2] JOIN/2020/7 final
[3] Council 8792/20
[4] Council 9588/23
[5] COM/2023/641 final

mandate of the agency, expanding its scope of actions to polysubstance use, strengthening its monitoring and threat assessment capabilities and giving the agency a clear mandate to analyse global and third countries developments with potential impact on the EU. Most importantly for Europol, the EUDA is now competent to address drug supply and drug market issues, which offers increased opportunities for collaboration. EUDA is exploring possibilities to deploy a Liaison Officer to Europol.

2.3. Revision of the Regulation on the import, export and transit of firearms

On 28 October 2022, the European Commission presented a proposal to revise the Regulation setting out rules on the import, export and transit of firearms to prevent the risk of diversion by improving the traceability of firearms and facilitating information exchange between national authorities. Key provisions for Europol include: the obligation for customs to share information on seizures with competent authorities via SIENA; the alignment of the scope of the regulation to the scope of the Firearms Directive; imposition of stricter rules and controls for deactivated weapons and alarm and signal weapons; stricter rules for the import of semi-finished firearms and essential components; creation of national firearms contact points; enhanced cooperation between LE (including customs) and licensing authorities; development of an EU electronic licensing system for manufacturers and dealers to apply for import and export authorisation, as well as the need to check SIS, ECRIS and the central system containing all refusals before granting import or export authorisations. On 14 March 2024, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on the text. The final adoption is pending.

2.4. New Pact on Migration and Asylum

On 23 September 2020, the European Commission presented the New Pact on Migration and Asylum[6]. Of relevance for Europol are the proposals for a Regulation introducing a screening of third country nationals at the external borders (Screening Regulation) and the Regulation on the revision of Eurodac (see section 6). Europol already participates in the regular meetings and reporting of the EU Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint, as well as the Situational Awareness and Forecasting project. The text was adopted on 14 May 2024.

2.5. EU Action Plans on the Central Mediterranean, Western Balkans, Western Mediterranean routes and a Migration Management Toolbox

On 21 November 2022 the European Commission presented the **EU Action Plan on the Central Mediterranean** in response to the large increase in migratory pressure. The Action Plan proposes 20 measures to fight migrant smuggling and human trafficking in close cooperation with EU Agencies (in the context of the Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnerships as presented in the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling).

On 6 December 2022, the Commission presented the **EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans**, where the fight against migrant smuggling also features, including making full use of Europol's Operational Task Force(s) in the region and enhancing the participation of Western Balkans partners in EMPACT, as well as ensuring implementation of the regional anti-smuggling programme with cooperation of relevant EU Agencies.

On 6 June 2023, the Commission presented the **Action Plan on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic migration routes**, with 18 operational measures, of which those in the domain of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings are relevant for Europol. In the context of anti-smuggling operational partnerships, the promotion of structured cooperation between Europol and Morocco in the form of a Working Arrangement is underlined, as well as the implementation of a regional programme (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt) to fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in cooperation with relevant EU Agencies. Further emphasis was placed on consolidating and ensuring synergies

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[6] COM(2020)609 final

between existing Common Operational Partnerships and Joint Investigation Teams with West and North African countries, as well as promoting their participation in EMPACT.

Also on 6 June 2023, the Commission put forward a new **toolbox of measures to address the increasing misuse of commercial transport by criminal networks to facilitate irregular migration to the EU**, with a focus on airways. In this context, Europol's contributions to an improved situational awareness of relevant transport operators and to flag emerging trends is expected within the Migration and Crisis Preparedness Blueprint Network.

On 17 September 2023, in view of the recent increase in the migratory flows on the Central Mediterranean route directed to Italy, the Commission presented the **10-Point Plan for Lampedusa**. The Plan lays out a set of actions to be exercised, in full respect of fundamental rights and international obligations, to, inter alia: reinforce the support to Italy by the EUAA and Frontex; step up returns; take measures to limit the use of unseaworthy vessels and against migrant smuggling; step up border surveillance; support the prevention of departures by establishing operational partnerships on anti-smuggling with countries of origin and transit.

On 18 October 2023, in response to the call of the European Council, the Commission, in consultation with the EEAS, presented the **Action Plan for the Eastern Mediterranean**. This Action Plan identifies twenty-nine operational measures with an emphasis on stepping up prevention of irregular migration and enhancing management of flows. It foresees, amongst others, enhancing the cooperation between Europol, Frontex and Eurojust, in accordance with their respective mandates, notably by increasing active participation and information sharing of all relevant partners in the EMPACT.

2.6. Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling

On 28 November 2023, at the International Conference on a **Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling**, the Commission opened a new era of cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination. The Global Alliance aims to bring relevant actors together to join forces in identifying, arresting, and convicting high-value targets, including those residing/situated/operating outside of the Union. The Global Alliance will promote and ensure enhanced practical cooperation at a global level of law enforcement and judicial authorities, with the involvement of relevant EU Agencies, in line with EU foreign policy objectives. The 'Call to Action' was launched on all relevant actors, governments, international organisations and online service providers to work collectively in three main areas: (i) the prevention of migrant smuggling; (ii) the response to migrant smuggling and the alternatives to irregular migration, including addressing the root causes and, (iii) facilitating legal pathways.

2.7. European Commission's legislative initiative to prevent and fight migrant smuggling

On 28 November 2023, the European Commission announced a new legislative package to strengthen the EU legal framework to prevent and fight migrant smuggling, including a Regulation and a Directive. The proposed **Regulation on enhancing police cooperation in relation to the prevention, detection, and investigation of migrant smuggling**[7] is particularly relevant for Europol. It aims to prevent and combat migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings by reinforcing: 1) inter-agency cooperation; 2) the steering and coordination of Member States, EU Agencies and other relevant stakeholders at EU level; 3) information sharing amongst all stakeholders; 4) Member States' resources; and 5) Europol's support through the use of Operational Task Forces (OTF) and of Europol deployments for operational support. Additional resources for Europol are included in the Legislative Financial Statement of the proposed Regulation.

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[7] Commission proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on enhancing police cooperation in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and on enhancing Europol's support to preventing and combating such crimes and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/794, COM(2023) 754 final of 28.11.2023 (hereinafter the 'Regulation on countering migrant smuggling').

2.8. Schengen Strategy and the Multiannual Strategic Policy for European Integrated Border Management

The 2021 Schengen Strategy pointed to Europol's renewed mandate as an element expected to reinforce the Schengen area internally. [8] The agency also features in the Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism and is an important contributor to the Schengen Cycle, especially to Schengen Barometer. Europol shall, according to its mandate, provide expertise, analysis, reports, and other relevant information to support the implementation of the Schengen Cycle and Schengen evaluation activities. Its experts regularly participate in all relevant evaluation missions and contribute to Schengen evaluation training activities.

On 16 May 2023, the Commission presented the second State of Schengen report[9] with enhanced internal security of the Schengen area to fight against organised crime and drug trafficking featuring as one of the seven priority areas for the coming year. In this context, SIENA as the default law enforcement information exchange channel will reinforce Europol's position as the EU's law enforcement information hub. Moreover, Europol also contributes to the thematic evaluation on identifying best practices of MS in fighting drugs trafficking.

Following the Commission's Policy document on developing a multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management (EIBM), the first such policy was put forward in March 2023. Europol and law enforcement authorities feature as relevant partners in several policy priorities and strategic guidelines for the next five years, including: border control; analysis of risks for internal security; cooperation amongst relevant Union institutions, bodies, offices and Agencies, including through regular exchange of information; cooperation with third countries in the areas covered by the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation; technical and operational measures within the Schengen area related to border control and designed to address irregular migration and counter cross-border crime; and research and innovation activities. Frontex adopted the technical and operational strategy for EIBM 2023-2027, and Europol may be involved in implementing relevant actions.

2.9. Joint Investigation Teams (JIT) collaboration platform

On 1 December 2021, the European Commission issued a legislative proposal for a regulation to establish a dedicated JIT platform, to be used on a voluntary basis, to support the functioning of Joint Investigation Teams. To improve and speed up collaboration, the new proposal will set up a collaboration platform for easy and secure exchange of information and files, including evidence, within the joint team and between it and other bodies (e.g. Eurojust, Europol and the European Anti-Fraud Office). The final act was published in the EU Official Journal on 17 May 2023.

2.10. Revised Environmental Crime Directive

The revised EU Directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law, otherwise known as Environmental Crime Directive, entered into force on 20 May 2024. It introduces new criminal offences, a wider range of sanctions and obligations for MS to provide adequate training and resources to law enforcement. The new Directive also calls on Member states to cooperate through EU agencies, in particular Eurojust and Europol, as well as with EU bodies, including the EPPO and OLAF, in their respective areas of competence.

2.11. EU Action plan on cultural goods trafficking

On 13 December 2022, the European Commission presented an EU Action plan against trafficking in cultural goods, to deter criminals effectively, to address evolving security threats and to protect cultural heritage within and beyond the EU. The action plan builds on existing EU activity and addresses ongoing challenges through: improving prevention and detection of crimes by market participants and cultural heritage institutions; strengthening law

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[8] COM(2021) 277 final of 2.6.2021, p. 13.
[9] COM/2023/274 final

enforcement and judicial capabilities; and boosting international cooperation, including with source and transit countries of cultural goods in conflicts and crises. The document establishes a list of key actions to strengthen the capabilities of law enforcement and the judiciary in that field, including several references to Europol's role and supporting the reinforcement of CULTNET by seconding appropriate staff to Europol.

In this context, on 8 June 2023, the Council adopted **Conclusions on the fight against trafficking in cultural goods[10]**, welcoming the Commission's action plan and encouraging further actions, several of which including direct references to Europol or EMPACT, such as the creation of an EU CULTNET contact point at Europol; the creation, in cooperation with the Innovation Lab, of a specific search engine to detect trafficking in cultural goods; or the need to take full advantage of Europol's and Eurojust's support for cross-border law enforcement and judicial cooperation.

2.12. 10-Point Plan - For stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war from Ukraine

On 28 March 2022, the European Commission presented the 10-points action plan, which among others, calls for closer cooperation in the area of preventing human trafficking and helping victims. The plan addresses the specific challenges emerging from the Ukrainian war. Furthermore, with a view to addressing the internal security implications of the war in Ukraine, the EMPACT community and Europol should support MS cooperation and investigations, and sustain the sharing of relevant security information. MS should ensure the enforcement of EU sanctions against Russian and Belarussian individuals and entities and take immediate appropriate action at national level concerning sanctioned persons. In this regard, Europol is part of the "Freeze and Seize" Task Force set up by the Commission to ensure EU-level coordination on the implementation and enforcement of sanctions.

2.13. Council Conclusions on Action Plan for the European Forensic Science Area 2.0

On 9 March 2023, the Council approved Conclusions on the Action Plan for the European Forensic Science Area 2.0[11]. The Action Plan aims to shape the future of forensics by 2030, and is organised in three pillars, each addressing specific areas and outlining appropriate actions and responsible stakeholders. Europol's role in the implementation of the action plan has been identified in several areas, e.g. biometrics, artificial intelligence, digitalisation, and emerging technologies.

2.14. High-Level Expert Group on access to data for effective law enforcement

To contribute to the further consolidation of an effective Security Union, in June 2023 the European Commission set up a High-Level Expert Group (HLEG) on access to data for effective law enforcement, guided by the input provided by the Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI). The HLEG is tasked to explore the problems that law enforcement practitioners face in their daily work, and to define potential solutions to overcome them. Specific focus is on the need for law enforcement practitioners to have adequate access to data. The Group will map, assess, and prioritise the relevant issues and will identify, in a comprehensive manner, the legal, technical, and operational challenges, both current and potential future ones, and assess the practical impact of the lack of access to data on law enforcement's ability to perform their function. The Group is composed of high-level representatives of the EU MS and the European Commission, relevant EU bodies and agencies (including Europol, Eurojust, ENISA, FRA and CEPOL), the Joint Research Centre of the Commission and the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator.

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[10] Council 10249/23
[11] Council 7152/23

3. **Cybercrime**

3.1. **European Commission's e-evidence package**

On 12 July 2023, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a legislative package aiming at improving law enforcement and judicial cross-border access to electronic evidence. The objective is to establish a consistent legal framework and avoid conflicting obligations with the law of non-EU countries, as well as to protect the fundamental rights of individuals. Conceived as a judicial cooperation tool, the e-evidence legislation could have implications for Europol, since the SIRIUS capability is mentioned as a possible platform to transmit and facilitate the authentication of orders and as a de-confliction tool. The EU Package entered into force in August 2023 and will start applying as of 2026.

3.2. **Regulation laying down rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse**

On 11 May 2022 the European Commission proposed a Regulation laying down rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse (CSA Regulation) in order to replace the interim regulation which was set to expire in August 2024. The proposal introduces i.a., detection and reporting obligations for online service providers, which will inevitably increase the number of referrals to be handled by Europol. The regulation also aims to establish a European centre to prevent and counter child sexual abuse, in the form of an EU decentralised agency, which should cooperate closely with Europol; the new Centre would "rely on the support services of Europol (HR, IT including cybersecurity, communication)". In light of this ongoing legislative process, the interim regulation was extended until 3 April 2026 to ensure the continuation of the voluntary regime for the detection and reporting of CSA online to the competent authorities.

3.3. **Proposal Directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse material (recast)**

On 6 February 2024, the European Commission published a proposal revising the 2011 European directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children[12]. The aim is to adapt EU definitions and criminal offenses to constant digital change, including technological developments. The proposal also introduces, inter-alia, details on investigative tools available to law enforcement, Member States cooperation with Europol and Eurojust, as well as cooperation with third countries to investigate and combat child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. It creates new structures and processes in Member States, sets-up multi-stakeholder mechanism for the development and implementation of measures to prevent and combat CSA, and promotes CSA training for law enforcement and the judicial.

3.4. **Digital Services Act**

On 15 December 2020 the European Commission adopted the Digital Services Act (DSA), a legislative proposal to set harmonised new rules for all digital services that operate in the EU. The proposal puts forward measures for countering illegal content online and introduces i.a. obligations for hosting service providers (HSP) to report suspicions of criminal offences to law enforcement or judicial authorities of the MS(s) concerned, once the HSP becomes aware of a threat to the life or safety of person or persons; should the MS concerned be unclear, the HSP must report it to the authorities of the MS in which the company is registered in the EU, or to Europol, or both. Europol continues working on fine-tuning its work processes in order to accommodate this new flow of information from HSPs. The DSA entered into force on 16 November 2022 and its rules became fully applicable from February 2024.

3.5. **EU's Cybersecurity Strategy for the Digital Decade**

The EU's Cybersecurity Strategy for the Digital Decade[13] adopted on 16 December 2020 seeks to enhance the EU's resilience to cyber threats. Initiatives include enhancing cooperation and

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[12] COM(2024) 60 final
[13] JOIN(2020) 18 final

information-sharing amongst the various cyber communities and the establishment of the Joint Cyber Unit. Furthermore, special attention should be given to preventing and countering cyberattacks with systemic effects that might affect EU supply chains, critical infrastructure and essential services, democratic institutions and processes and undermine economic security. The European Commission will, together with the EU Intellectual Property Office, Europol, ENISA, MS and the private sector, develop awareness tools to increase the resilience of EU businesses against cyber-enabled intellectual property theft.

3.6. Regulation laying down measures for a high common level of cybersecurity at the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union

In March 2022, the European Commission adopted the proposal for a regulation that introduces common binding rules on cybersecurity for all EU Institutions, Bodies and Agencies (EUIBAs). The new mandatory measures include i.a., baseline budget allocation towards cybersecurity and standards, procedures for incident response and maturity assessment. It also proposes the reallocation of resources and staff from relevant EUIBAs to CERT-EU, the EU Computer Security Incident Response Team. Classified environments are broadly excluded from the regulation, but the regulation implies adjustments to Europol's internal cybersecurity procedures, create new reporting channels and have some impact on resources. The regulation also opens the possibility for cooperation and information exchange between CERT-EU and the European Cybercrime Centre. The regulation entered into force on 7 January 2024.

3.7. Proposal for a Regulation on information security in the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union

Together with the Cybersecurity draft Regulation, the Commission proposed common information security rules for all EUIBAs that will be mandatory across all EU administration. These aim to create a baseline of security standards applicable to all information handled within the EU entities, both non-classified and classified, as well as to relevant communication and information systems. This Regulation will likely require some adjustments in the current procedures related to information security at Europol. Negotiations are ongoing.

3.8. Cyber Crisis Task Force

In March 2022, the European Commission established the Cyber Crisis Task Force to ensure coordination at operational and executive levels regarding cybersecurity crisis management. The Task Force is comprised of relevant Commission Services and EU bodies and agencies, including Europol and is mandated to support operational coordination and informed political decision-making, improve crisis management communication flows between civilian, law enforcement, diplomatic and defence cybersecurity communities, and coordinate the implementation of the Joint Cyber Unit.

3.9. Cyber Resilience Act

The European Commission adopted the Cyber Resilience Act[14] on 15 September 2022, which introduces mandatory cybersecurity requirements for hardware and software products. The proposed regulation will apply to all devices and software that are connected either directly or indirectly to another device or network, and aims to address the impact of cybercrime, in particular ransomware. Once it enters into force, it will likely have an impact on the ability of law enforcement to counter cybercrime, Europol's procurement of technology and potentially on Europol's role as technology provider for law enforcement. The European Parliament endorsed the compromise text on 12 March 2024. Final adoption is pending.

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[14] COM(2022) 454 final

3.10. European Commission Cyber Package

On 18 April 2023 the European Commission adopted a Cyber package, which seeks to strengthen cybersecurity capacities in the EU and contains two main initiatives of relevance for Europol and/or EU MS law enforcement agencies.

- The *creation of a Cybersecurity Skills Academy,* which seeks to help increase the number of skilled cybersecurity professionals in the EU and to increase synergies across cyber communities to fight cybercrime. The academy puts forward new ways for cooperation between Europol, CEPOL, the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and the European Cybersecurity Competences Centre, to establish an operational trainings' need analysis to address cyberattacks. Moreover, cooperation between Europol, CEPOL, the Commission and the EEAS is foreseen for defining specific profiles and respective skills for law enforcement.

- *The EU Cyber Solidarity Act*, which is a regulation proposal to strengthen solidarity at Union level to better detect, prepare for and respond to significant or large-scale cybersecurity incidents. The proposal includes i.a. the creation of a Cybersecurity Emergency Mechanism.

The regulation proposal also establishes an EU Cybersecurity Reserve, comprised of a pool of cybersecurity services from trusted providers to support response to and immediate recovery from significant or large-scale cybersecurity incidents. As an EU agency, Europol would qualify as recipient of such support, should it suffer a significant cyber incident that goes beyond the agency's cybersecurity capabilities. The European Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement on 6 March 2024. Final adoption is pending.

3.11. AI package

On 21 April 2021, the European Commission presented the so-called "Artificial Intelligence (AI) Package". The main component of the AI Package is the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act adopted on the 21 May 2024, that constitutes the first step in regulating Artificial Intelligence in the Union and has a significant impact on how law enforcement agencies and Europol will be able to harness the potential of AI. The AI Act takes a four-tiered risk-based approach (from low risk to unacceptable risk) and sets different levels of safeguards to mitigate the risks posed by specific uses of AI for safety and fundamental rights. Certain uses related to law enforcement are labelled as "high-risk" and therefore additional obligations are imposed on the developers and deployers of the respective Artificial Intelligence systems. Significant work remains for the smooth implementation of the AI Act so to prevent that any additional burden is placed on law enforcement authorities and on Europol.

3.12. Commission Recommendation on a Coordinated Implementation Roadmap for the transition to Post-Quantum Cryptography

The European Commission adopted on 11 April 2024 a recommendation to foster the transition to Post-Quantum Cryptography for the protection of digital infrastructures and services for public administrations and other critical infrastructures in the Union[15]. In this regard, Member States are encouraged to coordinate their actions through a dedicated forum, to define and develop the Post-Quantum Cryptography Coordinated Implementation Roadmap. The recommendation encourages Member States to engage in discussions with other relevant bodies, such as Europol and NATO in order to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure a cohesive approach to addressing emerging challenges. The outcome of this policy process will likely have an impact on cybercrime in general, as well as on Europol's information systems and digital support services.

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[15] C(2024) 2393 final

4.   Terrorism and radicalisation

4.1. A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond

On 9 December 2020, the Commission presented a new Counter-Terrorism Agenda[16] for the EU to step up the fight against terrorism and violent extremism and boost the EU's resilience to terrorist threats. In the framework of its implementation, the Commission, in cooperation with Europol, developed further guidance for the implementation of the revised EU Crisis Response Protocol.

4.2. Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism

On 15 June 2020, the Council adopted Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism[17]. Key areas include the Western Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East, Sahel and the Horn of Africa. The misuse of the internet and new technologies for terrorist purposes are specifically addressed, as well as the need to cut off sources of terrorism financing. Furthermore, the Council recognises that Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) will remain a major common security challenge which should be better tackled through enhanced and timely cooperation and information sharing among MS, INTCEN, Europol, Eurojust and Interpol.

4.3. Council Conclusions on protecting Europeans from terrorism

On 10 June 2022, the Council adopted Conclusions on protecting Europeans from terrorism[18]. The conclusions focus on: the persistent high level of terrorist threat; the need to strengthen the use of SIS to monitor, detect individuals posing a terrorist threat, and better coordinate national entry bans and expulsion measures; the need to combat the threat stemming from actors contributing to radicalisation leading to terrorism; and access to essential data to fight terrorism.

4.4. Council Conclusions on released prisoners and terrorism threats

On 4-5 December 2023, the Council adopted Conclusions on released prisoners and terrorism threats[19]. The Council invites Member States to share, in accordance with national law, and in a timely manner before their possible release, information within the EU on prison inmates who are assessed as posing a terrorist threat, by entering their data into SIS, and if such inmates are monitored in a law enforcement framework, using the Europol Information System (EIS) and the Europol Analysis Projects. Europol is also foreseen to support the exchange of good practices between MS.

4.5. Policy recommendations in counter-terrorism

Every semester, the Terrorism Working Party (TWP) is tasked, if required by changes to the terrorist threat picture, to prepare conclusions and policy recommendations or to adjust the existing ones, based on INTCEN's assessments and Europol's biannual reports on the terrorism threat to the EU. The latest report[20] was presented to the TWP on 4 March 2024 and the exercise for the update of the CT policy recommendations is currently ongoing. The latest update was endorsed by COSI on 22 November 2023[21], including, i.a.:

- Continuous monitoring by EU MS, with the support of INTCEN and Europol, of the impact of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine on terrorist activities and narratives;

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[16] COM(2020)795 final
[17] Council 8868/20
[18] Council 9997/22
[19] Council 15404/23
[20] Council 7177/24
[21] Council 15044/23

- Continuous development and use of EU IRU capabilities to support MS' actions to prevent the dissemination of all types of terrorist content; the EU IRU should continue its efforts to flag violent extremist and terrorist content online;
- Further development of the cooperation with key third countries and international partners on access to battlefield information;
- Call for the use of innovative tools and new technologies to counter terrorist threats and funding of research, innovation and development activities at EU level.

Moreover, in February 2023, COSI endorsed a **Revised coordinated approach**[22] - Defining a process for Evaluating information on third - country nationals suspected to be jihadist terrorists received from third parties or a Member State for possible processing in the Schengen Information System, replacing the Protocol endorsed in 2020. This new approach reinforces the role of Europol in supporting MS with processing data it has received from third countries or international organisations on persons involved in terrorism.

4.6. EU Crisis Protocol (EUCP)

On 7 October 2019, the EU Internet Forum committed to a common approach in addressing the online dimension of terrorist and violent extremist attacks as set out in the EU Crisis Protocol (EUCP). The EUCP requires the EU IRU to assume a central role in the coordination of the emergency responses in the event of a terrorist attack with a significant online component. Furthermore, the EUCP points out that a designated platform is needed that would enable two-way communication among Europol, MS authorities and hosting service providers (HSP). The EUCP was updated in May 2023, including improved interoperability, a stronger protection of fundamental freedoms, and a clarification between legislative and voluntary obligations for Online Service Providers.

4.7. Regulation on preventing the dissemination of Terrorist Content Online (TCO)

The TCO Regulation entered into application on 7 June 2022. It provides a legal framework to ensure that hosting service providers will take down terrorist content online within one hour and requires MS to inform and cooperate with each other and make use of structures set up by Europol, including the PERCI platform. The aim is to ensure coordination and de-confliction with regards to removal orders and referrals. The evaluation of the TCO regulation, initially foreseen by 7 June 2024, is still ongoing.

4.8. Violent right-wing extremism and terrorism

On 8 October 2019, the Council endorsed four work strands to combat the threat stemming from violent right-wing extremism: 1) Creating a better situational overview of violent right-wing extremism and terrorism; 2) Developing and sharing good practices on how to strengthen the prevention, detection and addressing all forms of violent extremism and terrorism; 3) Addressing the spread of unlawful right-wing extremist content online and offline; and 4) Cooperating with key third countries, including by addressing the topic in counterterrorism dialogues. COSI endorsed an update of the four work strands to provide a common ground for continued work to handle the constantly evolving threat of violent right-wing extremism and terrorism on 16 May 2023.

4.9. Digital information exchange in terrorism cases

On 1 December 2021, the European Commission adopted a new initiative on the digital information exchange in terrorism cases. In December 2022, co-legislators reached an agreement on a proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1727 of the European Parliament and the Council and Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, as regards the digital information exchange in terrorism cases ('CTR'). According to the compromise text, each MS shall take the necessary measures to ensure that at least the information concerning

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[22] Council 5606/23

criminal investigations for terrorist offences which affect or may affect two or more MS, gathered by the relevant authority, is transmitted to Europol, in accordance with national law and with the Europol Regulation. The final Act was published in the Official Journal on 11 October 2023.

4.10. Directive on the exchange of information and cooperation concerning terrorist offences

On 1 December 2021, the European Commission published a Proposal for a Directive amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA on the exchange of information and cooperation concerning terrorist offences, as regards its alignment with Union rules on the protection of personal data. The Council Decision covers information exchange between Europol and MS, as well as between MS related to terrorist offences. Transmission of personal data to Europol is foreseen for the purpose of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of terrorist offences and other criminal offences in respect of which Europol is competent, as listed in Annex I of the Europol Regulation. The final Act was published in the Official Journal on 11 October 2023.

5.   Financial crime

5.1. Revision of the Directive on freezing and confiscation of the proceeds of crime.

On 12 April 2024, the European Council adopted the Directive on Asset Recovery and Confiscation. The Directive will better equip MS in their fight against organised crime and the associated illegal profits. It will also oblige MS to ensure that authorities have the resources they need for their activities. The rules will also apply to violation of sanctions.

Key provisions for Europol:

- **SIENA**: MS shall ensure that asset recovery offices have direct access to SIENA.
- **Cooperation between asset recovery offices (AROs)/asset management offices (AMOs) and Europol**: AROs and AMOs shall cooperate with Europol and Eurojust, for the purposes of facilitating the identification of instrumentalities and proceeds, or property that may become or is the object of a freezing or confiscation order made by a competent authority in the course of proceedings in criminal matters, to facilitate the management of frozen and confiscated assets.
- **Cooperation network on asset recovery and confiscation**: The Commission will establish a cooperation network on asset recovery and confiscation to facilitate cooperation among AROs and AMOs and with Europol, and to advise the Commission and enable the exchange of best practices. Representatives of Eurojust, EPPO and AMLA may also be invited.

5.2. Revision of Directive 2019/1153 laying down rules facilitating the use of financial and other information for the prevention, detection, investigation or prosecution of certain criminal offences

On 30 May 2024, the Council adopted the amended Directive 2019/1153, to allow designated competent authorities responsible for the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences to access and search MS' centralised bank account registers through a single access point. This would enable them to establish almost immediately whether an individual holds bank accounts in other MS and identify to which MS they should make a formal request for additional information. The new Directive will also enable FIUs to invite Europol to support them in the joint analysis, within the context of the AMLA, with the agreement of all FIUs and within Europol's mandate.

5.3. EU's anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism legislative package

On 30 May 2024, the Council adopted the Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing Package (AML package). The AML package consists of: a regulation establishing a **new EU Authority for Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism** (AMLA); a regulation recasting the regulation on transfers of funds which aims to make transfers of crypto-assets more transparent and fully traceable (which was adopted in May 2023); a regulation on anti-money-laundering requirements for the private sector; a directive on anti-money-laundering mechanisms at national level. The new AMLA is expected to start operations in mid-2025.

Key provisions for Europol:

- **AMLA Joint Analysis:** Europol will be able to **support FIUs** when carrying out joint analysis, subject to the agreement of all participating FIUs and will also **receive the results of the joint analysis,** upon explicit consent of all FIUs participating, and where the results indicate that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a criminal offence has been committed.
- **Hit/no-hit system**: upon consent of all FIUs participating in the joint analysis, the AMLA staff shall be authorised to cross-match, on the basis on a hit/no-hit system, the data of those FIUs with data made available by other Union Agencies (including Europol).
- Europol can be invited, as an observer, to attend the **AMLA General Board** meetings, in its FIU composition.
- **Working arrangement**: The AMLA and Europol shall conclude a working arrangement, setting out the details of their cooperation, including the **possibility of posting liaison officers** at each other's premises.

5.4. Tax Package

The European Commission adopted on 15 July 2020 a new Tax Package to ensure that EU tax policy will boost the fight against tax abuse, curb unfair tax competition and increase tax transparency. The most relevant initiative for Europol would be a mutual communication channel with Eurofisc, the network of MS liaison officers facilitating multilateral efforts against cross-border VAT fraud.

5.5. New customs reform

On 17 May 2023, the European Commission adopted the Customs reform[23], which seeks to establish a more cost-efficient and effective cooperation framework governing the Customs Union. The Commission proposes to set up two key enablers:

- The EU Customs Authority, to pool expertise and competences that are currently scattered across the EU, to steer, coordinate, and support national customs authorities in the EU. EU Customs Authority is expected to assume its tasks on 1 January 2028.

- The EU Customs Data Hub to gradually integrate and replace the existing Customs IT infrastructure and enhance interoperability with related policy fields. It will collect, process, connect and store all relevant data, and also run EU-level risk analysis, to better protect the EU's external border for goods.

The European Parliament's first reading position was adopted on 13 March 2024. The file will be followed up by the new Parliament.

Furthermore, the Council resolution on customs cooperation in the area of law enforcement[24] adopted on 8 June 2023 highlights the vital contribution of customs and other competent authorities of MS to the internal security of the EU through the prevention, detection and investigation of activities involving irregular or illegal cross-border movements of goods and

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[23] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee: Customs reform: taking the Customs Union to the next level.
[24] Council 10247/23

money laundering. Active cooperation between customs authorities and Europol, as well as other relevant EU agencies, was noted with satisfaction.

5.6. Update of the anti-corruption legislative framework

The European Commission adopted a new anti-corruption legislative proposal on 3 May 2023. The package consists of 1) A Communication on the fight against corruption in the EU, which provides an overview of existing EU anti-corruption legislation and policies, takes stock of challenges and reflects on how to step-up EU action; and 2) A Directive on fighting corruption. The proposal establishes rules which update and harmonise definitions and penalties for corruption offences to ensure that high standard criminal law tools are in place to better fight and prevent corruption and to improve enforcement. Specific focus is given to cooperation between MS authorities, the Commission, Europol, Eurojust, OLAF and EPPO. The European Parliament and the Council adopted their negotiation positions in February and June 2024, respectively. Trilogues are expected to start soon.

5.7. Commission Recommendation on measures to combat and enhance the enforcement of intellectual property rights

On 19 March 2024, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation to combat counterfeiting, both offline and online, and enhance the enforcement of intellectual property rights. The Recommendation, also known as the EU toolbox against counterfeiting, aims to foster collaboration between rights holders, service providers, and law enforcement, while encouraging best practices and the use of modern tools and technologies. It consists of strategic initiatives to combat counterfeiting and strengthen the enforcement of intellectual property rights, setting out dedicated tools to increase companies' resilience and ability to better protect their intangible assets, including against cyber-theft.

The recommendations encourage MS to "share intelligence and data on new counterfeiting and piracy trends, seizures, risk assessments, lists of websites that have been held by competent authorities to have carried out IP-infringing activities (infringing websites), and good practices to tackle IP-infringing activities, as foreseen by Union law. They should share these with EU bodies working in the area such as OLAF, Europol, the EUIPO, and the Commission, making the best use of the available legal and technical tools." It also suggests continued cooperation between EUIPO and Europol, Eurojust, Frontex and CEPOL to support and streamline the fight against IP-infringing activities.

6. Information exchange and interoperability

6.1. Regulations establishing a framework for interoperability

On 20 May 2019, two Interoperability Regulations were adopted to set up a framework for interoperability between EU information systems in the field of borders and visas, police and judicial cooperation, asylum and migration. The regulations established:

- A common identity repository (CIR) that would create an individual file for each person recorded in the EES, the VIS, the ETIAS, Eurodac or the ECRIS-TCN;
- The European search portal (ESP) to enable the simultaneous querying of EES, VIS, ETIAS, Eurodac, SIS, the ECRIS-TCN as well as of Europol's and Interpol's databases;
- A shared biometric matching service (shared BMS);
- A multiple-identity detector (MID);
- A central repository for reporting and statistics;
- A new framework for MS law enforcement authorities' and for Europol's access to the EES, VIS, ETIAS provided by the CIR and ESP.

6.2. Entry-Exit System (EES)

The Regulation establishing the EES was adopted on 30 November 2017. The EES will replace the stamping of passports and will apply to third-country nationals admitted for a short stay in the Schengen area. The system's objective is to improve the management of external

borders; prevent irregular immigration and facilitate management of migration flows; detect over-stayers and support the identification of undocumented persons. Europol will be able to request access to the EES under specific conditions and process. Despite some delays in MS implementation, the Commission is planning to start using the system in November 2024.

6.3. European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)

On 12 September 2018, the Regulation establishing ETIAS was adopted, which will allow visa-exempt third country nationals to obtain a travel authorisation prior to their travel to the Schengen Area. The data provided by applicants will be automatically cross-checked, amongst others, against Europol data. The agency is expected to provide a reasoned opinion to the ETIAS National Units on hits against Europol data and its entries in ETIAS Watchlist. Additionally, Europol will be able to request access to data stored in the ETIAS Central System. ETIAS is expected to be fully operational in Q2 2025, and its functioning will start with a transitional period during which the travel authorisation will not be mandatory yet.

6.4. ECRIS-Third Country National (TCN) system

Established in 2012, the European Criminal Records Information system (ECRIS) enables national judicial authorities to receive information on previous criminal convictions in other MS. On 17 April 2019, the Regulation establishing a centralised system for the identification of MS holding conviction information on third-country nationals (TCN) was adopted to supplement ECRIS. Europol is granted direct access to ECRIS-TCN data in order to identify the MS holding information on previous convictions of third-country nationals. ECRIS-TCN is expected to enter into operation in 2025.

6.5. Recast of the Visa Information System

The VIS Regulation Recast was adopted on 7 July 2021 and foresees the extension of the scope of the VIS to include data on long-stay visas and residence permits. The data provided by visa applicants will be automatically cross-checked against Europol data and Europol will provide a reasoned opinion on the hits that occur against its data and against its entries in ETIAS Watchlist. The system is planned to enter into operation in 2026.

6.6. Recast of Eurodac Regulation

The revision of the Eurodac Regulation was adopted on 14 May 2024, with the aim to improve the control of irregular migration and the detection of unauthorised movements. The scope of the Regulation is broadened to provide law enforcement authorities with access to the Eurodac database. Europol will have an access point and will be able to access Eurodac for consultation when, after consultation of the Central Identity Repository (of biometric or alphanumeric data), this indicates that data is stored in Eurodac. The updated system is expected to become operational from 2026.

6.7. Screening regulation

The Screening Regulation introduces searches against the European databases for the purpose of security checks; this includes searches against Europol data, for all persons who do not fulfil the entry conditions to the EU. When a query provides a match against Europol data, an automatic notification is sent to Europol, in order for the agency to inform, where needed, whether the person could pose a security risk. In the LFS of the proposed Regulation, there are no additional resources foreseen for Europol for this purpose, even if this promises to be a resource intensive task. The Regulation was adopted on 14 May 2024 and will be fully applicable two years after its entry into force (i.e. mid-2026).

6.8. Revision of the Advance Passenger Information Directive

On 13 December 2022, Commission published the Advance Passenger Information (API) proposals that provide for the mandatory collection of API data for the purposes of border management and for countering serious crime and terrorism. On the latter, the mandatory

collection of API data on intra-EU flights will strengthen the reliability and effectiveness of PNR data as a law enforcement tool.   A provisional political agreement on the two proposals was reached on 1 March 2024. The agreed wording further clarifies amongst others the methods for selecting intra-EU flights and extending the collection and transfer of data from carrier to Passenger Name Record (PNR) data. The progressive entry into application is expected to begin in 2028.

6.9. Prüm II Regulation

The Prüm II Regulation was adopted on 13 March 2024 and intends to reinforce and modernise the existing Prüm framework by improving the technical architecture, introducing new categories of data, enhancing the follow-up communication process, and involving Europol. The involvement of Europol aims to enable (1) MS to search and cross-check the third country biometric data held by Europol in an automated manner and (2) Europol to cross-check data received from third countries with the MS' databases. Europol is also tasked to develop and maintain EPRIS (European Police Record Index System) by 2027, which forms the technical basis for the exchange of police records.

6.10. Directive on information exchange

The Directive on information exchange entered into force on 12 June 2023. The Directive is highly relevant for Europol and will have a significant impact on Europol's resources since it intends to establish SIENA as the mandatory channel for the exchange of criminal information by default and by introducing a provision to put Europol in copy for every information exchange concerning crimes falling under its mandate. MS have 18 months from the entry into force to transpose it into national law (with the exception of the provision on secure communication channel, which has to be transposed four years after entry into force).

6.11. Council Recommendation on operational police cooperation

The Council Recommendation on law enforcement cooperation[25] was adopted on 10 June 2022 and aims at creating shared standards for operational cross border cooperation between MS. This includes a common list of crimes for which hot pursuits across borders are possible and secure messenger tools for police officers to communicate with their counterparts when conducting operations in other EU countries. The proposal emphasises use of the different possibilities Europol offers to support operational cooperation between MS, especially with regard to secure communication tools, such as SIENA or the Virtual Command Post (VCP).

7.   **EMPACT 2026-2029**

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[25] Council 8720/22

SECTION II - Multi-annual programming 2026 – 2028

1. Multi-annual programme

This section references the **Europol Strategy "Delivering security in partnership"**, endorsed by the Management Board in June 2023, following several consultations with Member States, Europol's Management Board and its Working Groups, the HENUs and Europol's management. The renewed Strategy paves the way to further improve Europol's performance, while benefitting from new opportunities introduced by the amended Europol Regulation, in order to better address the operational needs of the Member States and the security threats they are facing. To do so, it builds further on the five strategic priorities of the previous Europol Strategy 2020+, which remain relevant, and adds an additional priority aimed at addressing the increased complexity of law enforcement cooperation, and strengthening the role of Europol in bringing relevant partners together for international cooperation.

As a result, the following strategic objectives will continue guiding the work of the agency in the years 2026-2028 to:

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

The areas of specific focus for the years 2026-2028 are presented below:

Strategic Objective 1: Be the EU criminal information hub, including for data acquisition

Europol's function as the EU criminal information hub will be further expanded to enable compliant access to data stored outside Europol's own data repositories, within legal and practical possibilities. This includes operational use of EU databases (such as SIS, VIS, EES, ETIAS, and Eurodac) and the provision of support for the exchange of information involving national repositories (e.g. Prüm, ADEP-EPRIS).

Data gathering at Europol should be aimed at minimising criminal intelligence gaps and focus on data from live, complex investigations. The latter goes hand-in-hand with the prioritisation of Europol's support to coordinated action against High-Value Targets (HVTs) and Operational Task Forces (OTFs), including those with a regional focus.

Europol will prioritise the acquisition of data that fulfils this purpose, such as real-time data from large and complex investigations, lawfully-intercepted and decrypted communications of criminal networks, and seized darknet servers used for criminal purposes. The agency will also focus on data concerning crime hubs, hotspots and key crime enablers, as well as priority areas, such as financial crime, migrant smuggling, drug trafficking, cybercrime, the illicit weapons trade and large-scale fraud schemes.

Member States will have access to more self-service tools, including for data and operational contributions.

Highlights:

- Conducting targeted data collection with specific interest for Europol's focus areas;
- Facilitating instant communication, swift transfers from national data repositories, and integration with (joint) case management capabilities;
- Enhancing the intake of information through short-term on-the-spot deployments of frontline support officers;
- Enabling smooth data intake from private parties in relevant sectors (e.g. online service providers, the banking sector, crypto-currency exchangers), in consultation with Member States;
- Furthering Europol's role in EU information exchange by implementing related policies and enabling new initiatives, including the creation of a dedicated unit to coordinate Europol's work concerning interoperability and travel intelligence;
- Defining criteria for operational deployments to increase relevance and effectiveness, including for data collection.

Strategic Objective 2: Deliver agile, real-time operational support

Europol's operational support to Member States' investigations consists of several elements, chief among which are operational analysis, specialised capabilities, and the facilitation of operational coordination. Increasing the operational relevance of Europol calls for continued efforts and investments in such areas.

Europol's capabilities should, wherever possible, be targeted towards the kind of investigations and operations, on which Europol can have most impact and added value. These investigations and operations are primarily large and complex cross-border investigations requiring real-time support.

Highlights:

- Furthering the OTF and HVT concepts for operational support;
- Supporting the investigation of all aspects of the criminal business model, including criminal finance, logistics, communication, corruption and intimidation;
- Creating an analysis training and coaching programme to increase the number of qualified operational and strategic analysis at Europol and in Member States, while promoting harmonisation of methodology;
- Expanding the flexible deployment of short-term SNEs/guest experts;
- Optimising internal coordination of OSINT monitoring across Europol's centres;
- Stepping up support for migrant smuggling cases with essential partners for data collection outside the EU, with additional support coming through regional OTFs;

- Nurturing (new) partnerships for combating corruption and environmental crime through dedicated alliances, including relevant private parties;
- Specialised and coordinated support in financial investigations, crypto-currency tracing and online crimes through knowledge management among experts.

Strategic Objective 3: Be a platform for European policing solutions

Europol's role of offering a platform for competent authorities to develop and use policing tools and expertise has benefitted from the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) and Operations Network Experts Platform (ONEP). These will be further developed in line with user needs and technical developments.

In addition, Europol will seek, where relevant and possible, to invest in platforms that can contribute to operational coordination between partners. These may also serve joint capacity building and the sharing of expertise and tools.

Highlights:

- Enabling the coordination of the collective response to the criminal threats through EMPACT and, where relevant, by suitable means for counter-terrorism;
- Creating a coordination and de-confliction solution for HVTs;
- Facilitating rapid crisis response mechanisms;
- Providing guidance for Member States' users to find the right products and services, including technical tools and extended support services to manage their expected growth;
- Creating a single digital portal for accessing Europol's processing systems, specialised tools, services, data, contacts and expertise;
- Rolling out in-built translation tools to facilitate communication for users in Member States' competent authorities and other partners.

Strategic Objective 4: Bring the relevant partners together for cross-border cooperation and joint action

Operational support to Member States often involves the facilitation of contacts with law enforcement from non-EU countries, with Interpol and other international organisations, and increasingly with private parties. In the interest of coordination at EU level, the engagement with EU Agencies in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) is also indispensable.

Since its establishment, Europol has developed into a strong enabler that brings the relevant partners together, with the significant and valuable community of Liaison Officers at its heart. The agency intends to foster this evolution in the coming years to maximise operational results, first and foremost for the Member States, but also for our other partners. Europol will especially invest in its partnerships with the Schengen Associated Countries, Interpol, and key JHA agencies such as Frontex.

Highlights:

- Intensifying the cooperation with the Schengen Associated Countries, as essential partners of the EU Internal Security Architecture;
- Seeking practical solutions for a more targeted operational cooperation with strategic third parties within the applicable legal frameworks;
- Assessing roles and competences that will enable cooperation between Europol and Interpol, with a view to address Member States' needs for products and services in relation to Third States;

- Coordinating with other EU JHA Agencies, to offer an aligned set of products and services to Member States;
- Stepping up cooperation with other (non-EU) Agencies and international organisations, including operational cooperation where possible;
- Developing a dedicated strategy for cooperation with private parties, including NGOs and academia, to optimise their engagement, both for operational interests and to nurture potential innovation.

Strategic Objective 5: Be at the forefront of law enforcement innovation and research

The Innovation Lab and its structured connection to Member States serves as a solid foundation for well-coordinated, collective innovation in the coming years. The operational relevance of innovation is a leading principle in the Lab's work. As a consequence, the connection to the operational needs of the Member States, JHA partners, as well as within Europol, has to be fostered and promoted.

The extended legal possibilities for the processing of personal data for research and innovation purposes are to be explored and acted upon in an adapted development environment.

Highlights:

- Identifying the innovative tools and processing capabilities Member States need most, and enabling their development together with specialised law enforcement services, as well as research and industry partners;
- Pursuing the rapid development of tools supporting data collection and processing, including through data science and artificial intelligence;
- Expanding the Europol Tool Repository with new cutting-edge technology;
- Optimising the possibilities for funding and priority attribution for grant schemes;
- Engaging proactively with private sector, academia and research institutes, including through Industry & Research Days;
- Stimulating a culture of innovation across Europol.

Strategic Objective 6: Be the model EU organisation for law enforcement cooperation

The operational mission of Europol must stand out in all aspects of its work. This applies also to the internal support functions that should fulfil their tasks with operational delivery in mind. The consideration for the specific needs of the law enforcement context in which Europol operates will be made a priority throughout the agency, optimising our performance and output.

Highlights:

- Investing to attract, train and retain specialists in relevant domains of expertise;
- Increasing the encouragement of personal development, talent management and empowerment;
- Work with the Management Board and Member States to address legal and administrative impediments to operational delivery;
- Creating an Operational Readiness Function, including relevant internal support services, for rapid operational response to crises and emergency situations;
- Identifying possibilities for a more flexible incorporation of tools and services within the ICT environment;
- Acting on our environmental responsibility to minimise carbon emissions;

- Creating a dedicated change management capability across the organisation, in which in particular the applicable requirements are structured and applied for every technical solution, process or work practice;
- Fostering continued engagement with former Europol staff by investing in the Europol community, even after their employment with the agency has ended.

Table: Key Performance Indicators for measuring multi-annual performance of the agency

Key Performance Indicator	Target 2026	Indicative targets	
		2027	2028
Number of Accepted Contributions by Europol[26]			
Number of Operations Supported by Europol			
Number of Operational Task Forces supported by Europol			
Number of Operational Analysis Reports produced by Europol			
Number of Action Days organised/supported by Europol			
Satisfaction with Operational Support delivered by Europol			
Number of Cross Match Reports and SIENA hit notifications produced by Europol			
Number of searches through EIS and QUEST			
Number of SIENA messages exchanged			
Number of Strategic Analysis Reports produced by Europol			
Satisfaction with Strategic Analysis Reports produced by Europol			
Satisfaction with Operational Training delivered by Europol			
Implementation of Audit Recommendations[27]			
Vacancy Rate			
% Female staff			
Budget Commitment Rate			
Emissions (CO2)[28]			

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[26] The responsibility for this indicator is shared by Europol and its partners (MS, TP). As such, the target is indicative and used to monitor the trend of accepted contributions.

[27] % of pending critical/very important audit recommendations implemented within the timeline committed to by Europol and agreed with the auditing body.

[28] It should be noted that measurement of this indicator is done on a yearly basis with results for year N being available well into year N+1; despite this time lag, Europol considers it important to monitor this KPI.

2. Human and financial resource outlook for the years 2026-2028

2.1 Overview of the past and current situation

Since its establishment, Europol's role in the security landscape of the EU has been growing and, as a result, the agency has been entrusted with several important functions, such as the European Cybercrime Centre, the European Migrant Smuggling Centre, the European Internet Referral Unit, within the European Counter-Terrorism Centre, and most recently, the Innovation Lab and the European Financial and Economic Crime Centre. Although resources were provided to perform new and additional tasks, Europol has always had to rely on the shifting of posts from support functions to the Operations Directorate or internal re-allocation of operational staff. In June 2022, the revised Europol Regulation entered into force; the Europol Regulation Recast reinforced Europol's financial and human resources, beyond the initial MFF 2021-2027. In addition, from 2024, some additional posts were transferred from Frontex to Europol, based on an agreement between the two Agencies, for implementing, in particular, tasks related to ETIAS. Finally, some additional resources were foreseen, as of 2024, in the Prüm II Regulation and, as of 2025, as a reinforcement received by the Budgetary Authority in the context of the 2025 EU Budgetary process and in the new legislative proposal for preventing and fighting migrant smuggling (subject to legislative process).

Consequently, for a few years now, Europol has been faced with an increased number of responsibilities that have inevitably exacerbated the pressure on resources, both staff and financial.

2.2 Outlook for the years 2026 - 2028

As detailed in section I – General Context of Europol's Programming Document 2026-2028, a significant number of new and expanded tasks are foreseen for Europol, stemming from Union policies and legislation. However, additional resources to perform these new tasks have not been allocated to Europol in the Legislative Financial Statements (LFS) of these initiatives – only some resources were allocated to the Agency in the Interoperability Regulations, the Prüm II Regulation and the legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling, the latter still under negotiation. While a significant number of resources were provided to the Agency as part of and for the purpose of implementing the amended Europol Regulation, some priority projects are expected to have a significant multi-year impact on the resources of the agency. In addition, inflation pressures affecting mainly staff costs, as communicated by the European Commission on 16 December 2024[29], are expected to further compress the existing budget in 2026. As a consequence, Europol will continue not to be able to absorb fully its additional tasks without an adequate reinforcement to its resources.

Consistent with the request for additional resources included in the PD 2025-2027, as endorsed by the MB in January 2024 and submitted to the budgetary authorities, and considering the limited reinforcement of resources included in the final budget 2025, Europol continues to put forward a request for additional resources as part of the EU Budget 2026 process.

The request concerns the five high-priority projects identified in 2024, i.e. Digital Services Act (DSA); Interoperability (I/O); Second Data Centre, Information Exchange Directive (IED); and Strategic Housing Roadmap (SHR). In addition, the agency requests funding to offset the impact of inflation on staff costs, as estimated in the Budget Circular for 2026.

The additional funds currently proposed by the European Commission for Europol in the LFS of the new legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling have been provisionally included in the PD 2026-2028, in line with the Budget Circular for the preparation of the draft budget 2026. In this respect, it is worth highlighting that the additional resources proposed

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[29] Budget Circular for 2026 – Agency Instructions Ref. Ares(2024)8946927 - 13/12/2024

by the Commission in the LFS are significantly lower than the resources estimated by Europol for the full implementation of the proposed new Regulation, especially with regard to the final number of TA posts. Therefore, subject to the outcome of the ongoing negotiations, Europol will be able to support the implementation of this new initiative to the extent covered by the final number of additional resources, or by de-prioritising and delaying other activities. Nonetheless, Europol acknowledges that part of the funds foreseen is intended to support the agency's work on biometrics and SIENA integrations, which can also partially serve the objectives of Interoperability and the Information Exchange Directive - as such; those funds have been deducted from the final total additional budget requested. The reinforcement received through the 2025 Budget has also been taken into account in the agency's request.

A summary of the agency's outlook for 2026-2028 is presented in the tables below:

Human Resources (TA, CA, SNE)[30]	Yearly increase	
	2026	**2027**
Establishment plan (TA) - TOTAL	**52**	**72**
Amended Europol Regulation	9	5
Prüm II Regulation	(2)	-
Proposal on a Regulation to prevent and fight migrant smuggling	4	3
Additional agency Request	41	64
Contract Agents - TOTAL	**29**	**6**
Proposal on a Regulation to prevent and fight migrant smuggling	9	6
Additional agency Request	20	-
SNE - TOTAL	**8**	**5**
Proposal on a Regulation to prevent and fight migrant smuggling	6	3
Additional agency Request	2	2

Financial Resources (€)	Yearly increase	
	2026	**2027**
TOTAL	**43,815,377**	**52,032,744**
Proposal on a Regulation to prevent and fight migrant smuggling	19,679,000	13,456,000
Additional agency Request[31]	24,136,377	38,576,744

Additional information per initiative for the period 2026-2027

Relevant justifications for the additional resources needed for each of the five initiatives for the period 2026-2027 are presented in the following paragraphs.

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[30] Temporary agent numbers are approved by the Budgetary Authority (establishment plan). Contract Agent and SNE numbers: approved by the MB within budget availability - numbers are included in the agency's request and COM provides recommendation. If additional budget is necessary, this is approved by the Budgetary Authority.
[31] For 2025, including EUR 13.1 to cover the inflation effects affecting mainly staff costs, as estimated in the COM's Budget Circular 2025.

Digital Services Act (DSA)

The Digital Services Act (DSA) entered into force on 16 November 2022 and its rules have become applicable in full since February 2024. In its Article 18 ("Notifications of suspicions of criminal offences"), the DSA stipulates a role for Europol as an authority which can be notified, if hosting service providers (HSPs) cannot identify with certainty the concerned Member States related to threats to life or safety. Given its experience with the implementation of the Terrorist Content Online Regulation, Europol has been heavily involved, since the preparatory stages, in supporting MS law enforcement and the regulator for the DSA implementation. A **DSA Focus Group** for Member States, supported by Europol, was established in December 2023 to ensure a streamlined and harmonised EU MS approach for the implementation of Article 18 DSA as far as the law enforcement domain is concerned.

Moreover, **cooperation with DG CNECT** has intensified in the past year. As a result, Europol signed, on 19 December 2024, a Contribution Agreement of €1.24 M with DG CNECT to initiate the technical developments for an automated workflow in PERCI to facilitate the intake, handling and distribution of threat to life or safety of persons notifications received by Europol.

Between August 2023 and mid-December 2024, Europol received **664 notifications** from OSPs, most of which arrived during the night or in the weekends. In line with resource availability, Europol has put forward the minimum number of additional operational resources to ensure the handling of Article 18 notifications and the 24/7 intake process. However, current manual processes and the growing support required by OSPs are increasingly resource intensive and affect OSINT/IRU capabilities.

In terms of ICT development, the requested additional resources are needed for expanding the functionality of PERCI to support referrals and removal orders; for granting direct access to PERCI by HSPs and managing their workflow on the platform; for adjusting the reporting functionality and the access requirements and for working on PERCI's infrastructure (incl. storage and processing power, interconnections, network, security, auditing, scalability and availability requirements). A phased roll-out of the functionalities over the next years will prioritise the implementation of the workflow of Article 18 DSA notifications, the identity/access management and the integration of PERCI with other Europol systems.

Since a part of these additional resource needs has been covered by the recently signed Contribution Agreement, the final total request has been adjusted accordingly.

Interoperability (I/O)

The *EU Interoperability@Europol* Programme includes the necessary activities for Europol to implement and operate the tasks related to six EU large-scale IT systems (SIS, VIS, Eurodac, EES, ETIAS and ECRIS-TCN) and the interoperability components (European Search Portal (ESP), shared Biometric Matching Service (sBMS), Common Identity Repository (CIR), Common Repository for Reporting and Statistics (CRRS)). Additionally, the Screening Regulation and the Prüm II Regulation will also bring new tasks to Europol.

EU Interoperability is the biggest endeavour undertaken in recent years in the Justice and Home Affairs domain. Europol's role is particularly relevant as automated checks against Europol data and, in case of hits, the provision of reasoned opinions (ETIAS, VIS Recast) will allow the identification of potential and actual security risks posed by third country nationals prior to their arrival to the EU. Access to millions of records in the EU IT systems will allow for a more comprehensive and complete criminal analysis to support the Member States. New possibilities for (biometric) identification will enhance the identification of criminals and the detection of identity fraud. At the same time, short deadlines, the scale of changes and the need for resources both in the development phase and after the entry into operation of the EU IT systems make the EU Interoperability Programme a challenge for the organisation.

The Management Board specifically discussed in 2022 the resource needs of Europol related to interoperability. The figures provided in this note are based on the 2022 estimates, revised to:

- Reflect the current EU Interoperability timeline i.e. ETIAS – 2025, ECRIS-TCN – 2025, VIS and Eurodac – 2026, Prüm II and Screening Regulation – 2026/2027;

- Take into account the resources already allocated to the new Integrated Operational Services Unit in 2024 as a result of the agreement with Frontex for the transfer of 25 posts;

- Take into account the experience gained from SIRENE.

Moreover, in line with its Biometrics Roadmap[32], Europol has started working on the establishment and strengthening of its capabilities related to biometrics, taking into account:

- the milestones and requirements of the EU Interoperability Programme, particularly in the framework of the revised VIS Regulation and Prüm II;

- the support required by Member States in implementation of the EU large scale IT systems;

- the possible implications of the legislative initiative to prevent and fight migrant smuggling, expected to be adopted in the course of 2025.

Additional ICT resources are requested to manage and develop the necessary systems, including update of the current AFIS, FACE and EIS solutions for scalability, functionality (i.e. access, search and processing functionalities for fingerprint, DNA and facial images) and data review and retention requirements across solutions. In the course of 2025, as the first interoperability systems will become operational, Europol will start experiencing the actual impact and will be able to assess more accurately its full effect on IM processes, ICT systems and operational resources.

Second Data Centre

A new (hot) data centre is envisaged and expected to:

- Increase resilience – the power issues in August 2020 that led to unavailability of both data centres at Europol HQ emphasised the need to position the data centres in two separate areas (geo-redundancy). This minimises unavailability due to local power grid issues / shared power infrastructure.

- Ensure compliance – in line with the Interoperability programme, Europol is requested to implement the recommendations for geo-redundancy for ETIAS and the communication equipment for SIS/VIS. Furthermore, it is expected to provide uninterrupted service (availability of 99.9% or more) for ETIAS searches via Quest. Europol's current infrastructure - that incorporates the location of the data centres - is designed for an availability of 98%.

- Increase availability – enable the implementation of near-zero downtime for solutions with this strict requirement. It should be noted that the geo-redundant data centre principle does not guarantee such requirement on its own; the entire solution should be designed and built accordingly, for instance using on-premise cloud native services. For this to work, the data centres should be close enough to minimise any communication delays, but far enough to meet the geo-redundancy requirement.

- Efficient use of equipment – At this moment, due to the design and distance, the Austria site is used as a backup location. It however contains equipment that potentially can be used in case of disaster (under normal conditions, this equipment is not used).

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[32] Strategic Roadmap for Europol capabilities on the processing of biometrics, EDOC#1343065

Implementing the new data centre at closer vicinity gives the opportunity to implement the so-called hot/hot data centre principle where all equipment is used continuously at both sites to host Europol's ICT services. In this case, the Austria site will be further scaled down for backup purposes only, reducing the need for equipment which is not actively used.

Increased resilience, availability and compliance are considered mandatory as part of the interoperability tasks of Europol.

The project is a multi-year one with several phases and costs related to buildings, hardware and software, services and training. Discussions on the identification of an appropriate location are being finalised with the Host State and the setting up and implementation of the data centre is foreseen to start in 2026.

Information Exchange Directive

The Directive on information exchange entered into force on 12 June 2023. The Directive is highly relevant for Europol and will have a significant impact on Europol's resources, since it intends to establish SIENA as the mandatory channel for the exchange of criminal information by default. Moreover, under the IED, each Member State (MS) and Schengen Associated Country (SAC) shall establish or designate a SPOC. This central entity will coordinate and facilitate information exchanges and operate continuously, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. SPOCs are required to maintain a Case Management System interoperable with SIENA, enabling the recording and tracking of all requests and responses, and are required to keep Europol systematically informed, insofar as the exchanges concern crimes falling under the scope of Europol's mandate as specified in the Europol Regulation. As of 12 December 2024, the Directive is fully applicable in the MS, with the exception of the provision on the secure communication channel, which has to be transposed by June 2027.

It is estimated that the number of SIENA messages received by Europol will increase to reach up to 1 million messages in 2027 (by comparison, Europol received around 185,000 messages in 2024). The increase in the volume of data will have an impact on both the Operational & Analysis Centre and the crime Centres at Europol, with needs for additional duty officers, analysts and specialists for data review and data quality. Taking into account the current and expected rate of implementation in the Member States and potential efforts by Europol to optimise further the internal processes, the level of additional operational resources estimated in this area has been kept to the minimum level for the next two years. In the course of 2025, as Europol will start experiencing the actual impact of the application of the IED in the MS on its information flows, it will be able to assess more accurately the full effect on IM processes, ICT systems and operational resources. It should be noted, however, that the expectation is that Europol will face resource needs of up to 100 additional operational staff to meet the increased needs for operational support and criminal analysis.

Due to the lack of sufficient resources and given that there are projects of higher priority, as described before, it was agreed to focus in 2025/2026 mainly on the technical preparatory activities for IED, whilst its operationalisation will be postponed to 2027. As such, in the coming two years, Europol will continue prioritising the support to Member States with the design and further development of SIENA and with the relevant integrations with Member States systems.

While a small part of the ICT resource gap for 2025 has been covered with the funds included in the final budget 2025, additional resources will still be required in 2026 in terms of ICT investments to cover scalability, availability and functionality requirements, the expected impact on other Europol systems due to the increased volume of data intake (e.g. Data Analysis Portal, Case Management, Unified Search Engine, Large File Exchange tool, IAM), security and compliance requirements and support services, such as providing a helpdesk for users and training.

Strategic Housing Roadmap (SHR)

The Strategic Housing Roadmap is a multi-year programme comprised of several projects with significant budgetary consequences for Europol. In 2026, the following work is envisaged:

- Advance with the implementation of the Mid-Term Housing Solution (MTHS) project in the HQ to increase workplace capacity, provide additional meeting rooms and other related facilities, and strengthen the building according to the applicable governmental building regulations.

- Prepare for the plank floor slabs' strengthening process at HQ.

- Temporary Satellite Building 3 (TSB 3) project: create additional workplaces, meeting rooms and other related facilities to support organisational growth and new business demands, until the delivery of HQ2. The second phase of the project is completed and the full building is operational for use.

- Long-Term Housing Measures (LTHM) project: advance with the implementation of the project to secure and deliver a second permanent headquarters (HQ2).

- Hot Data Centre (HDC) project: develop the HDC to ensure Europol's business continuity, in accordance with business requirements.

- Low-rise Toren van Oud project: finalise the project to relocate the Medical Centre and Gym & Fitness facilities, in order to create space in the HQ for the implementation of the MTHS (forecasted delivery Q1 2027).

- Alternative Temporary Housing: progress on establishing alternative temporary workplaces and meeting spaces to support organisational growth and new business demands until the delivery of HQ2.

Costs include consultancy fees, both for facilities and ICT, one-time investment costs, security personnel and network connectivity for workspaces and meeting rooms.

2.3   Risk considerations

As outlined in the Europol Programming Document 2025-2027[33], the identified corporate risks in terms of threats to Europol's objectives are expected to impinge on the organisation's development and performance in 2026. All five high priority development initiatives listed in this cover note are therefore assessed to be affected by Europol's identified corporate risks. While the estimates presented in this cover note for 2026 onwards have been developed in a prudent manner, these hold several elements of uncertainty[34], influenced by:

- external developments, including with regard to emerging technical evolution and innovation (Artificial Intelligence (AI) data science etc.); the

- ability to acquire and availability of the needed competencies and skills, in particular with respect to externally contracted services; the

- delivery of the 2025 ICT Work Plan;

- dependencies with regard to Member States and (operational) cooperation partners, the Host State as well as collaboration with private parties; the

- development of ongoing legislative and regulatory initiatives, as well as the related scope, complexity and modalities of their translation into technical requirements for the corresponding solution design (to inform detailed project planning prior to implementation and deployment).

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[33] EDOC#1340002-Europol Programming Document 2025-2027 - Annex XIV Corporate Risks 2025, adopted by the Management Board (MB) on 10 December 2024.
[34] Europol is satisfied that the resource estimates are the result of a conservative and robust assessment process across the organisation; however, a fairly high degree of uncertainty is inherent to the process.

From an overall perspective, the five high priority development initiatives outlined in this section will be subject to continuous re-assessment and are expected to extend well into 2028, therefore resulting in further anticipated investment need for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

2.4 Resource programming for the years 2026 - 2028

The text in this section focuses on the resource programming for 2026, which forms the agency's input to the budgetary process for the EU Budget 2026. Indicative programming figures are also provided for the year 2027. In the absence of a new EU multi-annual financial framework (MFF) as of 2028, no figures are presented for that year.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Temporary agents
Starting from the 2025 Establishment Plan of 791 posts, the net number of posts in 2026 is envisaged to increase by 52 Temporary Agent (TA) posts, including: a reduction of 2 posts foreseen in the Prüm Regulation, an increase of 9 posts stemming from the amended Europol Regulation (2022), 4 posts from the new legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling and additional 41 posts to adequately perform new tasks as presented in section 2.2.

The following allocation of grades is envisaged for the new posts, based on the approach of having most resources dedicated to non-managerial tasks:

	2026	2027
AD7	9	7
AD6	43	65
Total	**52**	**72**

Contract Agents
In line with the new legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling and the Agency's request, the number of CAs in 2026 is envisaged to rise by 29[35], to a total number of 289.

Seconded National Experts
The number of Seconded National Experts (SNEs) in 2026 is foreseen to increase to 140, with additional 6 from the new legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling and two for the Interoperability programme.

For detailed data and numbers per staff category, see Annex IV.

Staff financed with Grant Agreements / Contribution Agreements / Service Legal Agreements (SLAs)
For 2026 Europol will continue having a number of Contract Agents (CAs) and SNEs directly funded via grants, contributions or service legal agreements. For detailed information and numbers per agreement and staff category, see Annex XI.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Revenue (payment appropriations):

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[35] 9 CAs from the LFS of COM(2023)754 and 20 CAs as detailed in section 2.2.

The main financial source of Europol is the regular Community subsidy. The revenue for 2026 is envisaged to € 284M, including the resources foreseen in the LFS of the legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling and the agency's request, as detailed in section 2.2.

Expenditure:
The total Europol Estimate 2026 comes to € 285.5M as Commitment Appropriations[36] and € 284M as Payment Appropriations, which is an increase of 15.5% (+€ 38.2M) of Commitment Appropriations compared to the Final Budget 2025 of € 247.3M. The Estimate highlights the growth in operational needs of the organisation and an increased number of tasks. An Estimate of € 24.1M is put forward as the agency request in excess of the current MFF, as detailed in section 2.2.

Title 1 – Staff expenditure:

Staff expenditure in 2026 amounts to € 153.1M and represents 53.6% of the total budget. It foresees € 10.5M increase compared to the Final Budget 2025. The main budget in Title 1 (Chapter 11 – Staff in active employment), is reserved for the salary, allowances and other staff costs for TAs and CAs and comes to € 138.1M, which is an increase of € 7.4M compared to the Final Budget 2025.

The Estimate foresees the staff and salaries expenditure for 843 TAs and 289 CAs in total, (additional 52 TAs and 29 CAs when compared to 2025). The Estimate is based on several assumptions which will be closely monitored during the year such as: a salary increase of 4%, no envisaged change in the weighting coefficient for the Netherlands[37], a "budgetary" vacancy rate of 3.5% and expected recruitment of new posts in Q2-Q3 2026.

The Estimate for Socio-medical infrastructure such as catering, medical service and social & sport activities (Chapter 13) and Training for personal development (Chapter 14) is foreseen at € 1.8M in 2026.

The Estimate for Other staff-related expenditure (Chapter 15) is envisaged to reach € 13.1M, which will be used to cover external services costs related to external security, hospitality, and consultancy services, required for the new developments of the Strategic Housing Roadmap (SHR). The budget is also envisaged to cover for interim services, internships, PMO management service and yearly fee for the European school.

The Estimate in Chapter 16 (Entertainment and representation expenses) amounts to € 0.1M.

Title 2 – Other Administrative Expenditure:

The Estimate for administrative activities comes to € 15.3M and represents 5.4% of the total Europol Estimate 2026. It foresees € 2.4M increase compared to the Final Budget 2025. The budget included in this Title supports the operational efficiency and effective functioning of the agency's infrastructure and administrative processes. This budget title typically covers associated buildings costs, administrative ICT expenditure and other governance, administrative and statutory expenditure.

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[36] Due to the Differentiated Appropriations (DA), the presentation of the budget is split into commitment and payment appropriations. In fact: Commitment Appropriations (CA) – cover the total cost of the legal obligations entered into during the very first financial year of the call or invitation to apply; Payment Appropriations (PA) – cover the expenditure arising from commitments entered into in the current and/or earlier financial years.
[37] The weightings coefficients refer to the level known at the time of finalising the draft Programming Document 2026-2028 (as of November 2024, 111.4 for The Netherlands).

The Estimate of € 11.7M is planned for buildings, security and associated utility costs (Chapter 20). It envisages a substantial budget for SHR developments and regular preventive and corrective maintenance of the current buildings.

The budget for administrative ICT expenses (Chapter 21) amounts to € 1.2M and is foreseen for regular ICT software renewals as well as consultancies related to ICT projects of administrative nature.

An amount of € 2.5M is foreseen for the continuation of other governance, administrative and statutory expenditure (Chapter 22 – 25). These Chapters include budget for various activities related to open source, legal and other administrative expertise, uniforms, furniture, car fleet, office supplies, postal and courier services, as well as statutory expenditure, for activities of the MB and its Working Groups.

Title 3 – Operational activities:

The Estimate for Operational activities comes to € 117.1M and represents 41% of the total Estimate. It foresees € 25.3M increase compared to the Final Budget 2025. This budget partially consists of differentiated appropriations (DA) related to grants (€ 18.3M) included in Chapter 39.

The Estimate for Operations (Chapter 30), focuses on the agency's direct operational activities and projects. It is designed to fund Europol's core operational activities, which include supporting Member States in combating various crimes by organising operational and strategic meetings, conferences and training, funding staff missions and deploying guest officers, enhancing capabilities of forensic tools and enhancing communication and public awareness as part of the operational WEB campaigns, and audio-visuals services. In 2026, the Estimate in this area sums up to € 17.4M, which is in line with the 2025 budget.

Under Title 3, the budget for operational ICT services and programmes (Chapters 31 and 32) comes to a total of € 70.9M, which is an increase of € 15.4M compared to 2025. It is envisaged to continue the multi-annual delivery of numerous projects in the area of ICT and Information Management, such as Interoperability, the Biometrics Roadmap, the Data Analysis Portal, the Joint Operational Analysis Case and New Collaborative Environment, supporting the Member States in their SIENA integrations related to the Information Exchange Directive etc.

An amount of € 9.1M is foreseen under Chapter 33 (Seconded National Experts - Operational) to support the regular SNE and short-term SNEs in the area of GE/OTF (Guest Experts/ Operational Task Force). The Estimate included in this area is foreseen to cover the allowances for 90 SNEs (including 8 new) and 50 short-term SNEs (SNE-GE/ OTF)[38].

The budget under Chapter 34 and 35 is foreseen for high-level external stakeholder meetings and events (Heads of Europol National Units (HENUs) and the Europol Police Chiefs Convention (EPCC)). The Estimate for 2026 amounts to € 0.5M, which is in line with the 2025 budget.

An amount of € 1M[39] is envisaged in 2026 under Chapter 38 – for the Decryption Platform, to cover for the operational running costs of the platform, mainly electricity and gas, but also some maintenance and surveillance security services.

With respect to the differentiated appropriations in Chapter 39 – Grants, the Commitment Appropriations (CA) sum up to € 18.3M while the Payment Appropriations (PA) sum up to € 16.8M. The estimate (CA) includes € 10M for EMPACT grants, € 5M for the continuation of the

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[38] Part of the cost of deployed SNE-OTF will be covered from the mission budget (Chapter 30).
[39] Provisional – subject to Steering Committee (JRC and Europol) discussions.

support provided to OTF activities, € 3M for the ATLAS network and € 0.3M for the Euro Counterfeit Grants. In particular, regarding grants for EMPACT and for support against Euro counterfeiting, the Estimate provides for the multi-annual calls (2 years implementation).

		Estimate 2026 (CA)	Estimate 2026 (PA)
B3-920	EMPACT grants	10,000,000	9,262,500
B3-930	SA Euro CF Grants	300,000	180,000
B3-940	OTF Grants	5,000,000	4,200,000
B3-950	ATLAS Grants	3,000,000	3,000,000
B3-960	Innovation Grants		150,000
Total		**18,300,000**	**16,792,500**

2.5 Efficiency gains and savings

Europol is undertaking improvement initiatives and practices on a continuous basis to achieve efficiency gains and savings. Some examples are presented below.

Optimising resources allocation to align with strategic priorities by:

- Implementing proactive budget management, robust monitoring of budget implementation and regular forecast exercises to ensure the most efficient use of financial resources, together with the implementation of new automated reporting tools for a faster data analysis as well as enhanced cost allocation capabilities;

- Optimising operational deployments and streamlining the recruitment of (short-term) SNEs;

- Exploring synergies with partners incl. in the external relations domain;

- Descoping and/or outsourcing non-core activities;

- Establishing an "Initiative Reserve List", including purchases which can be compliantly brought forward from the year N+1 as to ensure highest implementation of the yearly budget at year end;

- Establishing of an ICT reserve list, to ensure faster uptake of new projects to optimise resource use;

- Using ICT leasing and regularly reviewing the costs of maintaining the (growing) ICT landscape ("run the business" costs) with a view to identifying savings;

- Closely monitoring the vacancy rate in an effort to maximise the use of resources made available to the agency;

- Implementing the HR Strategy 2020+, incl. digitalisation of services, work-life balance through teleworking/smart working and ensuring the right skills for Europol's workforce, utilising e-recruitment and appropriate training and development programmes.

Promoting energy efficiency and sustainability by:

- Optimising missions to maintain EMAS certificate and achieve environmental vision targets;
- Increasing remote working;
- Using green energy and long-term replacement plan reducing cost for maintenance and risk of equipment failure;
- Optimising office space to the core minimum (hot-desking).

Further streamlining activities to enhance efficiency by:

- Combining meetings with similar topics and same participants;
- Optimising use of interpretation for Management Board and its Working Groups;
- Combining trainings with similar topics and same participants;
- Optimising budget implementation for Grants;
- Increasing the use of multi-annual calls/invitations to reduce administration/resource efforts involved with creation and publication of calls/invitations.

Leveraging technology for operational improvements by:

- Using videoconferencing where possible, limiting increases to the mission and meeting budgets;
- Using more online trainings, thus reducing missions;
- Further extending the use of automated administrative tools (e.g. Sysper, Tagetik, FMIS etc);
- Investing in a set of administrative ICT solutions such as e-procurement, e-signature, etc.

Further streamlining administrative and procurement processes by:

- Exchanging and implementing best practices with/from other agencies (via engagement with EUAN and its sub-networks);

- Utilising multiannual commitments/orders to allow better pricing negotiations and potential savings, in particular in the ICT sector for the acquisition or renewal of software licenses;

- Using procurement templates and systems (e-procurement tools) common to all EU contracting authorities to familiarise the market with European procurement rules, streamlining new purchases and renewals;

- Developing long-term relationships with vendors, to facilitate negotiations and increased flexibility and collaboration;

- Participating in Interinstitutional procurement procedures for the acquisition/renewal of standard products and services (such as off the shelf Hardware and Software products), and for sharing tender effort in terms of market knowledge and resources needed;

- Standardisation and alignment of contractual terms in line with the EU Financial Regulations (such as in terms of right of audit, liability, escalation procedures and handling of personal data).

2.6 Negative priorities/decrease of existing tasks

No substantial negative priorities or decrease of existing tasks is foreseen. On the contrary, the agency's tasks are expected to increase beyond the level of the resources currently available. Consequently, the agency is requesting additional resources to fund adequately a number of initiatives and tasks, as detailed above.

ANNEXES

Annex II: Resource allocation per Activity 2026-2028

Annex III: Financial Resources 2026-2028

      Table 1 – Revenue

      Table 2 – Expenditure

      Table 3 – Budget outturn and cancellation of appropriations

Annex IV: Human resources - quantitative

      Table 1 – Staff population and its evolution; Overview of all categories of staff

      Table 2 – Multi-annual staff policy plan year 2026-2028

      Table 3 – Recruitment forecasts 2026

Annex XI: Grants

Annex XII: Strategy for cooperation with third countries and/or international organisations

Annex XIII: Research and innovation activities 2026

Annex II: Resources allocation per activity 2026 – 2028

	Year 2025			Year 2026 Resource estimates			Year 2027 Resource estimates			Year 2028[40] Resource estimates		
	TA	CA & SNE (FTE)	Budget Allocated	TA	CA & SNE (FTE)	Budget allocated	TA	CA & SNE (FTE)	Budget allocated			
A.1. Development of operational ICT and IM capabilities	174	55	81,166,592	173	55	80,184,795	173	55	81,439,053			
A.2. Operational Coordination	75	34	21,041,102	75	35	19,208,970	76	35	19,028,978			
A.3. Combating Serious and Organised Crime	112	78	24,630,866	115	78	31,088,025	116	78	28,579,478			
A.4. Combating Cyber Crime	84	23	17,705,013	88	23	20,382,701	89	23	19,454,191			
A.5. Counter-Terrorism	91	23	20,826,837	90	23	21,584,431	91	23	25,571,880			
A.6. Combating Financial and Economic Crime	59	10	11,723,179	62	10	14,522,169	63	10	13,220,696			
A.7. Strategic and Analysis Coordination	55	10	10,696,810	54	9	10,457,601	54	9	10,780,487			
Total Operational Activities	**650**	**233**	**187,790,399**	**657**	**233**	**197,428,693**	**662**	**233**	**198,074,762**			
A.8. Governance, support and administration (incl. MBF)	**138**	**143**	**43,759,204**	**138**	**143**	**44,273,610**	**138**	**143**	**45,026,225**			
Anti-migrant smuggling regulation COM(2023) 754(AMS)[41]	3	16	15,758,000	7	31	19,679,000	10	40	13,456,000			
INITIATIVES 2026-2027												
Digital Services Act (DSA)				8		2,184,000	13		5,055,840			
Interoperability (I/O)				23	2	6,596,000	60	4	9,447,800			
Second Data Centre				2		7,556,000	2		7,878,720			
Information Exchange Directive				12		9,460,000	26		6,632,960			
Strategic Housing Roadmap (SHR)				4	20	9,727,377	6	20	13,381,024			
Governance/administration				7		504,000	13		1,468,800			
Adjustment for synergies with AMS						(10,871,000)			(4,248,000)			
Adjustment for additional 15TA from 2025				(15)		(3,060,000)	(15)		(3,121,200)			
Request for high salary increase						2,040,000			2,080,800			
TOTAL Additional resources				48	53	43,815,377	115	64	52,032,744			
Total	**791**	**392**	**247,307,603**	**843**	**429**	**285,517,680**	**915**	**440**	**295,133,731**			

[40] In the absence of a new EU MFF (as of 2028), figures for 2028 are not presented.
[41] Subject to the conclusion of the legislative process.

Annex III: Financial Resources 2026 – 2028

Table 1 - Revenue
General revenues

REVENUES (Payment Appropriations)	2025	2026
	Revenues estimated by the agency	Budget forecast
EU contribution	246,025,103	284,010,180
Other revenue		
TOTAL REVENUES	**246,025,103**	**284,010,180**

REVENUES	General revenues						
	Executed 2024	Estimated by the agency 2025	2026		VAR 2026/ 2025(%)	Envisaged 2027	Envisaged 2028
			Agency request	Budget forecast			
1 REVENUE FROM FEES AND CHARGES	220,230,599	246,025,103	284,010,180		1.15	293,303,731	
2 EU CONTRIBUTION							
- Of which assigned revenues deriving from previous years' surpluses	10,314,092	6,283,397	3,450,520[42]				
3 THIRD COUNTRIES CONTRIBUTION (incl. EEA/EFTA and candidate countries)							
- Of which EEA/EFTA (excl. Switzerland)							
- Of which candidate countries							
4 OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS							
5 ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS							
- Of which interest generated by funds paid by the Commission by way of the EU contribution (FFR Art. 58)							
6 REVENUES FROM SERVICES RENDERED AGAINST PAYMENT							
7 CORRECTION OF BUDGETARY IMBALANCES							
TOTAL	**220,230,599**	**246,025,103**	**284,010,180**		**1.15**	**293,303,731**	

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[42] Reflects the draft surplus for 2024 and may be subject to changes or adjustments.

Additional EU funding: grant, contribution and service-level agreements

REVENUES	2025	2026
	Revenues estimated by the agency	Budget forecast
TOTAL REVENUES	**3,234,393**	**3,067,293**

REVENUES	Additional EU funding: grant, contribution and service-level agreements						
	Executed 2024	Estimated by the agency 2025	2026		VAR 2026/2025 (%)	Envisaged 2027	Envisaged 2028
			Agency request	Budget forecast			
ADDITIONAL EU FUNDING STEMMING FROM GRANTS (FFR Art.7)	528,008	167,100		-	-	-	-
ADDITIONAL EU FUNDING STEMMING FROM CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENTS (FFR Art.7)	1,400,967	1,744,793		1,744,793	1.00	1,124,793	450,000
ADDITIONAL EU FUNDING STEMMING FROM SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS (FFR Art. 43.2)	1,616,113	1,322,500		1,322,500	1.00	1,322,500	146,250
TOTAL	**3,545,089**	**3,234,393**		**3,067,293**	**0.95**	**2,447,293**	**596,250**

Table 2 - Expenditure

Expenditure	2025		2026	
	Commitment appropriations	**Payment appropriations**	**Commitment appropriations**	**Payment appropriations**
Title 1 - Staff expenditure	142,601,813	142,601,813	153,107,033	153,107,033
Title 2 - Infrastructure and operating expenditure	12,950,575	12,950,575	15,342,293	15,342,293
Title 3 - Operational expenditure	91,755,215	90,472,715	117,068,354	115,560,854
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	**247,307,603**	**246,025,103**	**285,517,680**	**284,010,180**

EXPENDITURE	Commitment appropriations						
	Executed Budget 2024 (COMMITTED)[43]	**Budget 2025**	**Estimate 2026**		**VAR 2026/2025**	**Envisaged 2027**	**Envisaged 2028**
			Agency request	**Budget forecast**			
Title 1 Staff Expenditure	**125,050,799**	**142,601,813**	**153,107,033**		**1.07**	**168,135,146**	
11 Salaries & allowances	115,869,200	130,681,000	138,123,603		1.06	153,568,349	
- of which establishment plan posts	97,553,235	108,191,000	114,371,603		1.06	127,699,709	
- of which external personnel	18,315,965	22,490,000	23,752,000		1.06	25,868,640	
13 Sociomedical infrastructure	904,134	1,280,200	1,486,000		1.16	1,486,000	
14 Training	88,500	258,613	291,691		1.13	291,691	
15 Other staff-related expenditure	8,077,566	10,277,800	13,104,539		1.28	12,687,906	
16 Entertainment and representation expenses	111,400	104,200	101,200		0.97	101,200	
Title 2 Other administrative expenditure	**12,849,848**	**12,950,575**	**15,342,293**		**1.18**	**19,903,293**	
20 Rental of buildings and associated costs	9,173,928	9,172,600	11,655,764		1.27	16,216,764	
21 Administrative information technology	1,240,225	1,218,275	1,218,275		1.00	1,218,275	
22 Movable property and associated costs	1,037,727	879,200	1,096,518		1.25	1,096,518	
23 Current administrative expenditure	667,230	831,900	521,724		0.63	521,724	
24 Postal charges and telecommunications	51,300	70,600	72,012		1.02	72,012	
25 Statutory expenditure	679,437	778,000	778,000		1.00	778,000	
Title 3 Operational activities	**82,132,415**	**91,755,215**	**117,068,354**		**1.28**	**107,095,292**	
30 Operations	13,568,390	17,557,862	17,390,058		0.99	16,083,387	
31 Operational information technology	46,145,856	53,532,553	68,971,496		1.29	62,727,905	
32 Telecommunication costs for operational activities	1,346,033	1,892,800	1,892,800		1.00	1,892,800	

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[43] It reflects the preliminary Executed CA Budget for 2024 and may be subject to changes or adjustments.

EXPENDITURE	Commitment appropriations						
	Executed Budget 2024 (COMMITTED)[43]	Budget 2025	Estimate 2026		VAR 2026/2025	Envisaged 2027	Envisaged 2028
			Agency request	Budget forecast			
33 Seconded National Experts (Operational)	6,405,887	7,962,000	9,054,000		1.14	9,581,200	
34 EPCC	289,504	300,000	300,000		1.00	300,000	
35 Heads of Europol National Units	145,500	160,000	160,000		1.00	160,000	
38 Decryption Platform	512,648	1,000,000	1,000,000		1.00	1,000,000	
39 Grants[44]	13,718,597	9,350,000	18,300,000		1.96	15,350,000	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	**220,033,062**	**247,307,603**	**285,517,680**		**1.15**	**295,133,731**	

EXPENDITURE	Payment appropriations						
	Executed Budget 2024 (PAID)[45]	Budget 2025	Agency request	Budget 2026 Budget forecast	VAR 2026/2025	Envisaged 2027	Envisaged 2028
Title 1 Staff Expenditure	**124,018,489**	**142,601,813**	**153,107,033**		**1.07**	**168,135,146**	
11 Salaries & allowances	115,854,768	130,681,000	138,123,603		1.06	153,568,349	
- of which establishment plan posts	97,538,803	108,191,000	114,371,603		1.06	127,699,709	
- of which external personnel	18,315,965	22,490,000	23,752,000		1.06	25,868,640	
13 Sociomedical infrastructure	818,621	1,280,200	1,486,000		1.16	1,486,000	
14 Training	31,843	258,613	291,691		1.13	291,691	
15 Other staff-related expenditure	7,228,328	10,277,800	13,104,539		1.28	12,687,906	
16 Entertainment and representation expenses	84,929	104,200	101,200		0.97	101,200	
Title 2 Other administrative expenditure	**8,890,128**	**12,950,575**	**15,342,293**		**1.18**	**19,903,293**	
20 Rental of buildings and associated costs	6,266,326	9,172,600	11,655,764		1.27	16,216,764	
21 Administrative information technology	1,169,646	1,218,275	1,218,275		1.00	1,218,275	
22 Movable property and associated costs	469,159	879,200	1,096,518		1.25	1,096,518	
23 Current administrative expenditure	513,537	831,900	521,724		0.63	521,724	
24 Postal charges and telecommunications	38,446	70,600	72,012		1.02	72,012	
25 Statutory expenditure	433,015	778,000	778,000		1.00	778,000	
Title 3 Operational activities	**61,839,310**	**90,472,715**	**115,560,854**		**1.28**	**105,265,292**	
30 Operations	10,755,425	17,557,862	17,390,058		0.99	16,083,387	
31 Operational information technology	33,034,961	53,532,553	68,971,496		1.29	62,727,905	
32 Telecommunication costs for operational activities	1,181,446	1,892,800	1,892,800		1.00	1,892,800	
33 Seconded National Experts (Operational)	6,405,887	7,962,000	9,054,000		1.14	9,581,200	
34 EPCC	160,415	300,000	300,000		1.00	300,000	
35 Heads of Europol National Units	116,173	160,000	160,000		1.00	160,000	
38 Decryption Platform	512,648	1,000,000	1,000,000		1.00	1,000,000	

[44] Including for 2026, among others, differentiated commitment appropriations amounting to EUR 18 300 000 (EUR 10 000 000 for EMPACT, EUR 300 000 for fighting EURO counterfeiting, EUR 5 000 000 for OTF and EUR 3 000 000 for ATLAS).
[45] It reflects a preliminary Executed PA Budget for 2024 and may be subject to changes or adjustments.

Europol Unclassified – Basic Protection Level

EXPENDITURE	Payment appropriations						
	Executed Budget 2024 (PAID)[45]	Budget 2025	Budget 2026		VAR 2026/2025	Envisaged 2027	Envisaged 2028
			Agency request	Budget forecast			
39 Grants[46]	9,672,356	8,067,500	16,792,500		2.08	13,520,000	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	**194,747,927**	**246,025,103**	**284,010,180**		**1.15**	**293,303,731**	

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[46] Including for 2026, among others, differentiated payment appropriations amounting to EUR 16 792 500 (EUR 9 262 500 for EMPACT, EUR 180 000 for fighting EURO counterfeiting, EUR 4 200 000 for OTF, EUR 3 000 000 for ATLAS and EUR 150 000 for Innovation grants).

Table 3 Budget outturn and cancellation of appropriations 2021-2024 (N-4 – N-2)

Budget outturn	2021	2022	2023	2024[47]
Revenue actually received (+)	177,370,336	201,325,849	217,166,022	232,154,735
Payments made (-)	(148,871,757)	(165,414,326)	(191,340,681)	(206,265,223)
Carry-over of appropriations (-)	(37,028,367)	(40,478,220)	(30,754,730)	(31,921,235)
Cancellation of appropriations carried over (+)	2,926,585	3,802,497	3,737,470	1,715,169
Adjustment for carry-over of assigned revenue appropriations from previous year (+)	10,702,251	11,078,105	7,475,344	7,767,303
Exchange rate differences (+/-)	(428)	186	(28)	(228.57)
Total	**5,098,619**	**10,314,092**	**6,283,397**	**3,450,520**

Descriptive information and justification on:
Budget outturn

The overall preliminary draft budget result for the financial year 2024 comes to EUR 3 450 520. This includes the following:
- An amount of EUR 197 538 of not committed and lapsed commitment appropriations for non differentiated appropriations (NDA);
- An amount of EUR 1 538 041 of not used payment appropriations (DA)
- An amount of EUR 1 715 169 of not used payment appropriations (NDA) carried forward from 2023 to 2024;
- An amount of EUR -228.57 the loss of the exchange rate difference in 2024.

Cancellation of payment appropriations carried forward

The carry forward of payment appropriations to 2024 came to a total of EUR 22 987 428 to cover existing commitments. The final implementation rate of the carry forward was 92.5% at the end of the year. A total of EUR 1 715 169 was not used and is thus incorporated in the final budget outturn.

- EUR 154 260 relates to Title 1, which is 13.3% of the carried forward amount under Title 1 (EUR 1 161 642);
- EUR 105 223 relates to Title 2, which is 2.3% of the carried forward amount under Title 2 (EUR 4 629 539); and
- EUR 1 455 686 relates to Title 3, which is 8.5% of the carried forward amount under Title 3 (EUR 17 196 247).

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[47] Reflects the draft surplus for 2024 and may be subject to changes or adjustments.

Annex IV: Human resources quantitative

Table 1: Staff population and its evolution; Overview of all categories of staff

A.   Statutory staff and SNE

Staff	Year 2024			Year 2025	Year 2026	Year 2027	Year 2028
ESTABLISHMENT PLAN POSTS	**Authorised Budget**	**Actually filled as of 31/12/2024**	**Occupancy rate %**	**Authorised staff**	**Envisaged staff**	**Envisaged staff**	**Envisaged staff**
Administrators (AD)	731	722	98.8%	768	820	892	
Assistants (AST)	23	23	100.0%	23	23	23	
Assistants/Secretaries (AST/SC)							
TOTAL ESTABLISHMENT PLAN POSTS	**754**	**745**	**98.8%**	**791**	**843**	**915**	
EXTERNAL STAFF	**FTE corresponding to the authorised budget**	**Executed FTE as of 31/12/2024** [48]	**Execution rate %**	**Headcount as of 31/12/2024**	**Envisaged FTE**	**Envisaged FTE**	**Envisaged FTE**
Contract Agents (CA)	255	214.9	84.3%	217	289	295	
Seconded National Experts (SNE)	121	93.8	77.5%	90	140	145	
TOTAL EXTERNAL STAFF	**376**	**308.7**	**82.1%**	**307**	**429**	**440**	
TOTAL STAFF	**1130**	**1053.1**	**93.2%**				

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[48] CA financed from the EU contribution: 217 Headcount (214.9 Annual average FTE); CA financed from other sources: 16 Headcount (16.29 Annual average FTE). SNE financed from the EU contribution at 31/12/2024: 52 Headcount (53.39 Annual average FTE) and Short-term costed SNE: 38 Headcount (40.42 Annual average FTE). SNE financed from other sources: 7 Headcount (7.67 Annual average FTE). Cost free SNE: 33 Headcount (29.7 Annual average FTE); SNE Guest Officers: 50 Headcount (58.1 Annual average FTE).

B. Additional external staff expected to be financed from grant, contribution or service-level agreements

Human Resources	Year 2025	Year 2026	Year 2027	Year 2028
		Envisaged FTE	Envisaged FTE	Envisaged FTE
Contract Agents (CA)	15	12	12	
Seconded National Experts (SNE)	8	8	8	
TOTAL	**23**	**20**	**20**	

C. Other Human Resources

Structural service providers[49]

	Actually in place as at 31/12/2024
IT	163
Facilities	53
Security	26
Other	3
TOTAL	**245**

Interim workers

	Total FTEs in year 2024
Number	**6**

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[49] Service providers are contracted by a private company and carry out specialised outsourced tasks of a horizontal/support nature. At the EU Commission, following general criteria should be fulfilled: 1) no individual contract with the EU Commission 2) on the EU Commission premises, usually with a PC and desk 3) administratively followed by the EU Commission (badge, etc.) and 4) contributing to the added value of the EU Commission. Similarly, Europol reports on the number of contractors with IT access.

Table 2 – Multi-annual staff policy plan 2026 - 2028

Function group and grade	Year 2024 Authorised budget		Year 2024 Actually filled as of 31/12		Year 2025[50] Authorised budget		Year 2026 Envisaged		Year 2027 Envisaged		Year 2028 Envisaged	
	Permanent posts	Temporary posts	Permanent posts	Temporary posts	Perm. posts	Temp. posts	Perm. posts	Temp. posts	Perm. Posts	Temp. posts	Perm. posts	Temp. posts
AD 16		1		1		1		1				
AD 15		1		1		2		3		4		
AD 14		2		2		1		1				
AD 13		3		1		4		2		4		
AD 12		11		13		11		11		12		
AD 11		11		6		15		16		19		
AD 10		24		22		29		35		41		
AD 9		51		47		62		72		86		
AD 8		105		92		133		148		168		
AD 7		239		235		246		263		269		
AD 6		276		293		242		261		283		
AD 5		7		9		22		7		6		
AD TOTAL		**731**		**722**		**768**		**820**		**892**		
AST 11												
AST 10												
AST 9												
AST 8		1		1		1		2		1		
AST 7		3		1		3		3		3		
AST 6		5		8		6		5		6		
AST 5		3		1		2		3		2		
AST 4		3		3		3		3		3		
AST 3		3		3		4		3		4		
AST 2		5		6		4		4		4		
AST 1												
AST TOTAL		**23**		**23**		**23**		**23**		**23**		

[50] In accordance with Article 38, paragraph 1, of the Decision of the Europol Management Board on the adoption of the Financial Regulation applicable to Europol (EDOC#1032027v6), the Management Board hereby agrees with a modification of the establishment plan, should the interest of the service so require (e.g. in the context of the reclassification exercise), by up to 10% of posts authorised subject to the following conditions:
a)   the volume of staff appropriations corresponding to a full financial year is not affected;
b)   the limit of the total number of posts authorised by the establishment plan is not exceeded;
c)   Europol has taken part in a benchmarking exercise with other Union bodies as initiated by the Commission's staff screening exercise.

Function group and grade	Year 2024				Year 2025[50]		Year 2026		Year 2027		Year 2028	
	Authorised budget		Actually filled as of 31/12		Authorised budget		Envisaged		Envisaged		Envisaged	
	Permanent posts	Temporary posts	Permanent posts	Temporary posts	Perm. posts	Temp. posts	Perm. posts	Temp. posts	Perm. Posts	Temp. posts	Perm. posts	Temp. posts
AST/SC 6												
AST/SC 5												
AST/SC 4												
AST/SC 3												
AST/SC 2												
AST/SC 1												
AST/SC TOTAL												
TOTAL		754		745		791		843		915		
GRAND TOTAL	754		745		791		843		915			

External personnel

Contract Agents

Contract agents	FTE corresponding to the authorised budget 2024	Executed FTE as of 31/12/2024	Headcount as of 31/12/2024	FTE corresponding to the authorised budget 2025	FTE envisaged 2026	FTE envisaged 2027	FTE envisaged 2028
Function Group IV	79	55.3	65	84	98	104	
Function Group III	118	108.2	104	118	122	122	
Function Group II	58	51.4	48	58	69	69	
Function Group I							
TOTAL	255	214.9	217	260	289	295	

Seconded National Experts

Seconded National Experts	FTE corresponding to the authorised budget 2024	Executed FTE as of 31/12/2024	Headcount as of 31/12/2024	FTE corresponding to the authorised budget 2025	FTE envisaged 2026	FTE envisaged 2027	FTE envisaged 2028
TOTAL	121	93.8	90.0	132	140	145	

Table 3 - Recruitment forecasts 2026 following retirement/mobility or new requested posts

(information on the entry level for each type of posts: indicative table)

Job title in the Agency	Type of contract (Official, TA or CA)		TA/Official Function group/grade of recruitment internal (brackets) and external (single grade) foreseen for publication		CA Recruitment Function Group (I, II, III or IV)
	Due to foreseen retirement/mobility	New posts requested due to additional tasks	Internal (brackets)	External (brackets)	
Allocation of new posts / replacement of staff members due to resignation / contract expiry and definition of profiles will be done in line with Europol's mandate and business priorities and on the basis of the MASPP.	Number of anticipated compulsory retirements: 5 (4 TAs and 1 CAs) End of 2nd contracts: - TA contracts: 43 (restricted) + 48 potentially (non-restricted – pending outcome of different indefinite contract procedures) - CA contracts: 16 (2 FGII, 8 FGIII and 6 FGIV)	52 TA posts. This includes 9 posts stemming from amended Europol Regulation, 4 from legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling COM (2023) 754 final and 41 as agency request to fulfil tasks for Interoperability (incl. establishing a second data centre), Digital Services Act, Information Exchange Directive and to implement the Strategic Housing Roadmap. 29 CA positions. This includes 9 posts stemming from the legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling COM(2023) 754 final and 20 as agency request to implement the Strategic Housing Roadmap – the latter is not part of the budgetary authority's decision on the establishment plan and corresponding budget for the agency.	Most internal recruitments will be in the brackets AD5-AD12 and AD7-AD12	Most recruitments will be AD6/Specialist or AD7/Senior Specialist	No significant change expected vis-à-vis current CAs.

Number of inter-agency mobility Year 2025 from and to the agency (to be included in final PD):

To Europol (in)		To other Agencies (out)	
TA	CA	TA	CA

Annex XI: Grants

A. Grant, Contribution and Service-level Agreements resulting in revenue and additional budget

	General information						Financial and HR impacts							
	Date of signature	Total amount	Duration	Counterpart	Short description		N-1 (2025)		N (2026)		N+1 (2027)		N+2 (2028)	
Grant agreements														
1. 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 167,100	PA 167,100	CA -	PA -	CA -	PA -	CA -	PA -
						Number of CAs	3		0		0		0	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
Total grant agreements						Amount	CA 167,100	PA 167,100	CA -	PA -	CA -	PA -	CA -	PA -
						Number of CAs	3		0		0		0	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
Contribution agreements														
1. EaP EMPACT Contribution Agreement number 700002208	5/12/2024 (starting date 1/1/2025)	1,800,000	48 months	European Commission DG Near	Fighting against organised crime in the Eastern Partnership region II	Amount	CA 450,000	PA 450,000	CA 450,000	PA 450,000	CA 450,000	PA 450,000	CA 450,000	PA 450,000
						Number of CAs	2		2		2		2	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
2. SIRIUS phase 3 New Agreement number 700002618	6/12/2024 (starting date 1/1/2025)	3,500,000 (2,024,377.60 Europol, 1,475,622.40	36 months	European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments	Fighting against organised crime in the Eastern Partnership region II	Amount	CA 674,793	PA 674,793	CA 674,793	PA 674,793	CA 674,793	PA 674,793	CA -	PA -
						Number of CAs	5		5		5		0	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
3. Perci workflow Article 18 DSA LC-03708278	19/12/2024 (starting date 1/1/2025)	1,240,000	24 months	European Commission DG CONNECT	Initiation of the development of a "Threat-to-life notifications" workflow in PERCI	Amount	CA 620,000	PA 620,000	CA 620,000	PA 620,000	CA -	PA -	CA -	PA -
						Number of CAs	0		0		0		0	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
Total contribution agreements						Amount	CA 1,744,793	PA 1,744,793	CA 1,744,793	PA 1,744,793	CA 1,124,793	PA 1,124,793	CA 450,000	PA 450,000
						Number of CAs	7		7		7		2	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	

	General information					Financial and HR impacts							
	Date of signature	Total amount	Duration	Counterpart	Short description		N-1 (2025)		N (2026)		N+1 (2027)		N+2 (2028)	
Service-level agreements														
1. EUIPO - IP Crime and Fraud	26/07/2023 (starting date 1/1/2024)	maximum 4,120,000 (1,030,000 per year)	48 months	The European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO)	To support law enforcement authorities preventing crime and fraud related to Intellectual Property Rights	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA
							1,030,000	1,030,000	1,030,000	1,030,000	1,030,000	1,030,000		
						Number of CAs	2		2		2		0	
						Number of SNEs	8		8		8		0	
2. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (funded via Contribution Agreement with DG Near)	01/04/2024	390,000	48 months	The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training	Western Balkans Partnership Against Crime and Terrorism - WB	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA
							97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	24,375	24,375
						Number of CAs	1		1		1		1	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
3. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (funded via Contribution Agreement with DG Near)	01/07/2024	390,000	48 months	The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training	Training and Operational Partnership against Organised Crime	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA
							97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	48,750	48,750
						Number of CAs	1		1		1		1	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
4. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (funded via Contribution Agreement with DG Near)	01/10/2024	390,000	48 months	The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training	EUROMED Police VI (Contract No. 700002160)	Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA
							97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	97,500	73,125	73,125
						Number of CAs	1		1		1		1	
						Number of SNEs	0		0		0		0	
Total service-level agreements						Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA
							1,322,500	1,322,500	1,322,500	1,322,500	1,322,500	1,322,500	146,250	146,250
						Number of CAs	5		5		5		3	
						Number of SNEs	8		8		8		0	
TOTAL AGREEMENTS						Amount	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA	CA	PA
							3,234,393	3,234,393	3,067,293	3,067,293	2,447,293	2,447,293	596,250	596,250
						Number of CAs	15		12		12		5	
						Number of SNEs	8		8		8		0	

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B. Grants to be awarded

In 2026, Europol plans to establish seven grant funding instruments to support EU MS in the fight against organised crime. While Europol integrated differentiated appropriations into its financial management system in 2023 to enable the publication of calls or invitations spanning two years, budget constraints may limit the implementation of such multi-annual schemes across all areas.

1. **Restricted call for proposals to support the implementation of activities identified by the Council – EMPACT High Value Grants 2026/2028**

Legal basis
Article 4 and Article 61 of the REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA.
Council conclusions on setting the EU's Priorities for the fight against organised and serious international crime between 2026 and 2029, *once adopted*.

Budget line
3920 EMPACT Grants

Priorities of the years, objectives pursued and expected results
Enhancing the fight against serious and organised international crime within the new EMPACT Cycle 2026-2029.

The call is restricted to EMPACT participants, while all relevant documents are published on the Europol Platform for Experts – a communication tool with EMPACT participants used to reach all potential applicants. In accordance with the Europol legal basis, the Europol National Unit (ENU) shall be the liaison body between Europol and the competent authorities of the Member States. Thus, the applications must always be submitted via the ENU of the Lead Applicant.

The objective of the call is to provide support to Operational Actions laid down in Operational Action Plans (OAPs) as adopted by the Council. EMPACT 2026-2029 addresses the following crime areas: *To be added once the Council conclusions are in place.*

It is expected that the support will provide for improved cooperation between Member States law enforcement agencies, EU Institutions, EU Agencies and relevant third parties, while delivering coherent actions targeting the most pressing criminal threats facing the EU.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals
Transnational operational and non-operational activities addressing in each of the EMPACT Priorities at least one of the following objectives: awareness raising and exchange of best practices; improving data gathering and intelligence sharing, providing strategic support for current or proposed operational activities; enhancing operational support and cross-border cooperation.

Grants may not be awarded for activities that are funded under another EU programme or from Europol's budget. In this respect, it is noted that Europol is active in an environment which has undergone a proliferation of EU funding sources. A statement to ensure respect for the principle of no double funding from EU sources must be made by applicant(s) in the Application form. Europol is entitled to perform checks in this respect, including by liaising with external partners (e.g. DG HOME, Eurojust).

Calls will be designed with the aim of promoting one or more of the following outcomes which projects applications should aim at achieving:

- fostering communication and coordination amongst participants of OAPs;
- sharing of experiences and best practices between EU Member States;
- improving intelligence gathering and analyses;
- expanding data sharing with Europol information systems and prioritising the use of SIENA (secure line) as an operational communication tool;
- establishing support frameworks to implement operational activities, including where relevant with third countries or the private sector;
- enhancing cross-border/transnational operational cooperation between EU Member States and, where relevant, with third countries or the private sector;
- establishing joint investigations, joint operations or joint action days.

To take into account the specificities of the law enforcement operations, Europol may allow use of contingency budget for unplanned actions ("red-envelope procedure") in addition to planned actions ("blue envelope"). This is justified based on the need for law enforcement to respond quickly to opportunities and challenges and is further specified in the Call documentation.
Europol may award using simplified costs or unit costs options, provided that a decision has been adopted by the Responsible Authorising Officer.
In addition, where duly justified for operational purposes, financial support may cover the full investment costs of equipment and infrastructure, subject to the following conditions:
- the equipment is required to ensure cross border cooperation and absence of tools would jeopardise the international investigation involving more than one Member State;
- renting or leasing the equipment would not be possible as it could jeopardise the operation;
- applicants provide assurance that the equipment will be fully dedicated to the action.

Essential eligibility, selection and award criteria
Eligibility criteria:
I. In order to be eligible the Applicant must be a public body established in an EU Member State participating in the OAP in question (i.e. the particular EMPACT crime priority) and in the law-enforcement cooperation under Europol Regulation.
No differentiation is made in Europol's constituent act between different Member States. However, the opt-in structure used for JHA under the TFEU creates a varying degree of participation of Member States. Europol pays due regard to the status of EU Member States with regard to the Europol Regulation and/or Justice and Home Affairs matters as regards eligibility to be a (lead) Applicant.

II. The Co-Applicants must be:
• An entity explicitly mentioned as a participant in the OAP;
• If the entity is not explicitly mentioned in the OAP, any of the following entities may be Co-Applicants, provided their participation is justified by the nature of the action:
   - A public body established in an EU Member State or in a third country OR
   - A profit or non-profit-oriented organisation established in an EU Member State or in a third country, OR
   - An International Organisation.

As regards co-applicants, even non-opting-in Member States could be eligible as co-applicants on the same basis as third countries and third parties provided that their participation is justified by the nature of the action. Their meaningful participation has however to be possible having due regard to Europol's legal obligations on exchange of information with third countries.

III. Applications must involve at least two (2) public bodies established in two (2) different EU Member States.
Law Enforcement applicants may involve non-LE entities for the purpose of managing a grant provided that the manner and degree of their involvement satisfies security and confidentiality concerns. Costs incurred by other types of bodies could be eligible, provided that these can be justified by the aims of the action and respect the principle of sound financial management.

IV. The proposed activities must be mentioned in the respective OAPs as approved by COSI Council decisions.

Selection criteria:

In accordance with Article 198 of the Financial Regulation, proposals for action shall be evaluated on the basis of the following selection criteria:

- Financial capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the activity is being carried out and to participate in its funding.

- Operational capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have the professional resources, competences and qualifications required to complete the proposed action.

The verification of the financial and operational capacity shall not apply to public bodies and international organisations in accordance with Article 198(5) and (6) of the Financial Regulation.

Award criteria:

In accordance with Article 199 of the Financial Regulation, proposals for an action shall be evaluated on the basis of the quality and expected results and cost-effectiveness of the proposed action. Applications will also be assessed with regard to their impact on the implementation of the OAPs concerned, European added value and involvement of Europol.

Ex-post publicity for award of grants (in particular their publication in accordance with Article 189 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046) and the financial verification of the payment requests, including the required supporting documentation, shall take into account the confidentiality and security of the operational and classified information.

Indicative timetable and indicative amount of the call for proposals

Date	Amount
Publication: Q4 2025 Award of grants: Q1 2026 Implementing period: April 2026 – March 2028	EUR TBC, following strategic guidance received from COSI

Maximum possible rate of co-financing of the total eligible costs
95%

2. **Ad-hoc low-value grants invitation in support of operational activities as laid down in the Operational Action Plans implementing the EMPACT Priorities.**

Legal basis
Article 4 and Article 61(3) of the REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA.
Council conclusions on setting the EU's Priorities for the fight against organised and serious international crime between 2026 and 2029, *once adopted*.

Budget line
3920 EMPACT Grants

Priorities of the years, objectives pursued and expected results
Enhancing the fight against serious and organised international crime within the new EMPACT Cycle 2026-2029. These grants are focussed on supporting Member States' cross-border operations and investigations as well as joint investigation teams as per Europol's tasks under Article 4(1)(h) of the Europol Regulation. Applications from eligible applicants can be submitted throughout the period indicated below rather than on any fixed deadline(s).

The objective of the low-value grants is to provide support tailored to operational activities integrated in the Operational Action Plans (OAPs) adopted by the Council. They target activities that are developed on an ad-hoc basis rather than as a result of a long-term planning, due to their investigative nature or other quickly changing aspects of crime phenomena and crime-countering measures. EMPACT 2026-2029 addresses the following crime areas: *To be added once the Council conclusions are in place.*

It is expected that the support will provide for effective cooperation between Member States law enforcement agencies, EU Institutions, EU Agencies and relevant third parties while delivering coherent operational actions targeting the most pressing criminal threats facing the EU. The funded measures should achieve concrete, quantifiable / measurable operational results. This scheme shall take due consideration of the existence of a separate grant scheme supporting actions against euro-counterfeiting.

Description of the activities to be funded through low-value grants
Transnational short-term operational and/or investigative activities within the EMPACT Priorities, with a budget not exceeding EUR 60,000 (in line with the threshold defined in the EU Financial Regulation), aiming to enhance operational cross-border cooperation, establish joint investigations, joint operations or joint action days.
Grants awarded under this Article have a maximum duration of 9 months with the possibility of an extension at Europol's discretion for an additional period of 3 months, if operationally justified. The overall grant duration shall not exceed 12 months.
Europol may award using simplified costs or unit costs options, provided that a decision has been adopted by the Responsible Authorising Officer.

In addition, where duly justified for operational purposes, financial support may cover the full investment costs of equipment and infrastructure, subject to the following conditions:
- the equipment is required to ensure cross border cooperation and absence of tools would jeopardise the international investigation involving more than one Member State;
- renting or leasing the equipment would not be possible as it could jeopardise the operation;
- applicants provide assurance that the equipment will be fully dedicated to the action.

Essential eligibility, selection and award criteria
Eligibility criteria:
I. In order to be eligible the Applicant must be a public body established in an EU Member state participating in the OAP in question (i.e. the particular EMPACT crime priority) and in the law-enforcement cooperation under the Europol Regulation.
No differentiation is made in Europol's constituent act between different Member States. However, the opt-in structure used for JHA under the TFEU creates a varying degree of participation of Member States. Europol pays due regard to the status of EU Member States with regard to the Europol Regulation and/or Justice and Home Affairs matters as regards eligibility to be a (lead) Applicant.

II. The Co-Applicants must be:
• An entity explicitly mentioned as a participant in the OAP;
• If the entity is not explicitly mentioned in the OAP, any of the following entities may be Co-Applicants, provided their participation is justified by the nature of the action:
    - A public body established in an EU Member State or in a third country OR
    - A profit or non-profit-oriented organisation established in an EU Member State or in a third country, OR
    - An International Organisation.

As regards co-applicants even non-opting-in Member States could be eligible as co-applicants on the same basis as third countries and third parties provided that their participation is justified by the nature of the action. Their meaningful participation has however to be possible having due regard to Europol's legal obligations on exchange of information with third countries.

III. Applications must involve at least two (2) public bodies established in two (2) different EU Member States.

IV. The proposed activities must be mentioned in the respective OAPs as approved by COSI Council decisions.

V. The requested grant cannot be higher than 60,000 EUR, or in line with the current threshold for low-value grants established by the EU Financial Regulation.

Selection criteria:
In accordance with Article 198 of the Financial Regulation, proposals for action shall be evaluated on the basis of the following selection criteria:
- Financial capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the activity is being carried out and to participate in its funding.
- Operational capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have the professional resources, competences and qualifications required to complete the proposed action.
- The verification of the financial and operational capacity shall not apply to public bodies and international organisations in accordance with Article 198(5) & (6) of the Financial Regulation.

To ensure that the operational needs are met, a pool of evaluators shall be duly appointed by the responsible authorising officer. In each evaluation at least 2 evaluators from that list (with complementary expertise in law enforcement and finance) shall perform the evaluation (without a separate ad hoc appointment).
To allow for fast processing, applicants must use the templates to apply and reply within maximum 24 hours to any questions raised during evaluation.

Award criteria:
In accordance with Article 199 of the Financial Regulation, proposals for an action shall be evaluated on the basis of the quality and expected results and cost-effectiveness of the proposed action. Applications will also be assessed with regard to their impact on the implementation of the OAPs concerned, European added value and involvement of Europol.
Ex-post publicity for award of grants (in particular their publication in accordance with Article 189 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046) and the financial verification of the payment requests, including the required supporting documentation, shall take into account the confidentiality and security of the operational and classified information.

Indicative timetable and indicative amount

Date	Amount
Publication: Q1 2026 Award of grants: Q1 2026-Q4 /2027	EUR TBC (Two years budget), divided as follows: 1st instalment of EUR TBC available in 2026 and 2nd instalment of EUR TBC available in 2027) + internal assigned revenue[51] + 2,000,000 in 2026 and 2027 from the legislative proposal to prevent and fight migrant smuggling[52]

Maximum possible rate of co-financing of the total eligible costs
95%

3. Support for combatting Euro-counterfeiting

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[51] If operationally justified, the authorising officer may decide to increase the maximum amount for this scheme, subject to Europol budget availability.
[52] COM(2023) 754 final. Subject to adoption of the proposal and to the relevant funds becoming available.

Legal basis
Article 4(4) and Article 61(3) of the REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA.

Budget line
3930 Support against Euro Counterfeiting Grants

Priorities of the year, objectives pursued and expected results
Operational actions and support for coordination activities within the guidelines approved by the Europol Management Board with the objective of protecting the euro currency from counterfeiting activities.

Description of the activities to be funded through low-value grants
Applications from eligible applicants can be submitted throughout the period indicated below rather than on any fixed deadline(s). Applications submitted must involve at least one of the following activities, all designed with the objective of protecting the integrity of the Euro currency:
- Investigations into or related to euro counterfeiting. This means inquiries related to counterfeit euro banknotes and counterfeit euro coins, as well as the production and the distribution of them;
- Technical investigations using forensic and/or scientific analysis to identify, sites, raw materials and technical equipment used for the production of counterfeit euro notes and coins as well as measures to locate technical equipment used;
- Investigative measures carried out in compliance with the applicable national law and in accordance with these guidelines;
- Operational or technical investigations into euro counterfeiting involving cooperation with third countries.
In addition, the applicant must commit to a degree of involvement of Europol:
- as a minimum to ensure the role of Europol as the Central Office, the law enforcement information, including samples of any counterfeit currency recovered, must be shared with Europol via the appropriate channels;
- on the spot support where an application involves a production site(s).

Essential eligibility, selection and award criteria
This is not a general advertised call due to the restricted pool of potential beneficiaries. The possibility and funds available shall be made known to the entities foreseen under the Europol Management Board approved rules. Any ex-post publicity will also take this into account excluding operational, strategic and classified information.
Eligible applicants:
a)   A law enforcement public body established in an EU Member State;
b)   A law enforcement public body in a third country, where foreseen by Europol legal framework.
To ensure that the operational needs are met, a pool of evaluators shall be duly appointed by the responsible authorising officer. Considering the low value of individual awards made, a single evaluator shall evaluate based on objective criteria established to assess the award criteria. These criteria include: anticipated Quality of the Counterfeits, impact of proposed operational measure, involvement of Europol, value for money and involvement of National Central Office. To allow for fast processing, applicants must use the templates to apply and reply within maximum 24 hours to any questions raised during evaluation.

In addition, where duly justified for operational purposes, financial support may cover the full investment costs of equipment and infrastructure, subject to the following conditions:

- the equipment is required to ensure cross border cooperation and absence of tools would jeopardise the international investigation involving more than one Member State;
- renting or leasing the equipment would not be possible as it could jeopardise the operation;
- applicants provide assurance that the equipment will be fully dedicated to the action.

Indicative amount available

Date	Amount
Q1 2026-Q4 2028	EUR TBC (as integrated in the 2026 budget divided as follows: 1st instalment of EUR TBC available in 2026 and 2nd instalment of EUR TBC available in 2027) + internal assigned revenue

Maximum possible rate of co-financing of the total eligible costs
100% maximum

4. ATLAS Network grant

Legal basis
Article 4(1)(h) and (i) and Article 61(3) of the REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA. Terms of Reference signed between Europol, Atlas Chair and Austrian Ministry of Interior and entering into force on 10 October 2018.

Budget line
3950 ATLAS Grants

Priorities of the year, objectives pursued and expected results
The ATLAS Network is a cooperation structure between 38 Special Intervention Units (SIUs) that includes and supports different training platforms and sharing of best practices in terms of proficiency and tactics.
The main priority for the year 2026 is the execution of cross border operations and the implementation of trainings, workshops and exercises. These priorities as well as the overall ATLAS strategy are influenced amongst others by the tailor-made strategic document of the European Counter Terrorism Centre - "ECTC Outlook for ATLAS Commanders". The identified challenges need special attention and preparation on all levels and areas of competence: intervention in urban, rural and maritime areas; transport means and buildings are focal points as well as drone handling/robotics, sniper, communication, negotiation skills and others. In addition, the capability to render medical first aid during field operations needs to be trained, developed and improved.
Joint trainings, workshops, courses and project groups are the systematic approach to increase the readiness of involved units to handle possible terrorist attacks and/or incidents.
Another priority is the development of Common Training Centres, acting as "Centres of Excellence" (CoE). These structures serve as dedicated facilities to provide standardised training and knowledge transfer to the ATLAS member units. Thus, the quality of the delivered training can be kept consistently on the highest level. At the same time, the amount of the target groups/participants can be increased. Along with this structure, a dedicated programme for "Pooling and Sharing" of special equipment will be further developed.

Description of the activities to be funded

The allocation of funds will cover numerous activities which allow the different specialised groups to increase its operational proficiency and to aid in carrying out various training/tactical response building exercises and workshops.

The activities, dependent on budget availability, are:
- fostering communication and coordination amongst SIUs;
- delivery and/or design of training on:
  - o entry techniques
  - o silent techniques
  - o rural mountain operations
  - o buildings (assault tactics and knowledge)
  - o Rigid Hulled Inflatable Boats
  - o naval targets
  - o Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)
  - o sniper techniques
  - o urban rappelling
  - o first aid (intervening in cases of most serious crimes with a high risk of life threatening and/or mass injuries)
  - o specialised parachute use: "Silent Approach Tactics"
  - o K9 techniques: interventions with specialised dogs' assistance
- sharing of experiences and best practices between EU MS and third countries;
- further development of the secure information exchange tools;
- maintenance of the mock-ups set up as part of the Common Training Centre "Centres of Excellence" Aircraft;
- establishing support frameworks to implement operational activities;
- enhancing cross-border/transnational operational cooperation between EU Member States in the areas of competence of SIUs;
- establishing joint training and preparation for challenges impacting on several activities focussed on evaluation of training and cooperation results;
- exploring further development of secure communication tools;
- fostering cooperation with third countries: Police Special Intervention Units Conference (POLSPEC).

Where duly justified for operational purposes, financial support may cover the full investment costs of equipment and infrastructure, subject to the following conditions:
- the equipment is required to ensure cross border cooperation and absence of tools would jeopardise the international investigation involving more than one Member State;
- renting or leasing the equipment would not be possible as it could jeopardise the operation;
- applicants provide assurance that the equipment will be fully dedicated to the action.

Justification Direct Grant
Under Article 61(3) of the Europol Regulation, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals where the grant action is supporting specific tasks referred to in points (h) and (i) of Article 4(1) of the Europol Regulation. This grant provides support to the Atlas network that represents the Member States' special intervention units (via the legal entity of the country chairing Atlas on behalf of the network).
Europol may award using simplified costs or unit costs options, provided that a decision has been adopted by the Responsible Authorising Officer.

Indicative timetable and indicative amount of the grant

Date	Amount
Q1 2026 Expected implementing period: Q1 2026-Q1 2027	EUR TBC

Maximum possible rate of co-financing of the total eligible costs
95%

5. OTF grants

Legal basis
Article 4(1)(h) and (i) and Article 61(3) of the REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA.
Standard Operating Procedure - Standard Operating Procedure on the Selection of High Value Targets and Establishment of Operational Task Forces within O2-ESOCC, EDOC #901933v18A.

Budget line
3940 OTF Grants

Priorities of the year, objectives pursued and expected results
Priority: Europol will focus on the identification of High-Value Targets and the establishment of Operational Task Forces addressing the individuals and organised crime groups posing the highest serious and organised crime risk for the MS.
Objective: Creation and support of an environment for multi-disciplinary teams and transnational investigations aiming at having a stronger impact in destabilising activities of high risk organised crime groups and disrupting criminal markets.
Expected results: deliver qualitative operational support to OTFs, which are focusing on poly-criminal networks and their leaders posing the highest risk of serious and organised crime.

Description of the activities to be funded
Operational and/or investigative activities (e.g. travel and accommodation for operational meetings outside Europol HQ, direct operational costs such as informant rewards, buying/renting operational technical and forensic equipment, interpretation or deployments, etc.) implemented by the Operational Task Forces, established in accordance with the SOP with a budget not exceeding 60,000 EUR (in line with the threshold defined in the EU Financial Regulation), aiming to support MS investigations against individuals and criminal organisations constituting highest serious and organised crime risks to more than one MS and to intensify asset tracing and increase the rate of confiscation of criminal proceeds.
Each application, within the limit of 60,000 EUR, could cover a particular stage of the ongoing investigation. The operational stages will be pre-defined within the Operational Plan of an established OTF in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedure in place. If operationally justified, several subsequent applications could be submitted, enabling Member States to apply for funding throughout the lifetime of the operation.
Grants awarded under this Article have a maximum duration of 9 months with the possibility of an extension at Europol's discretion for an additional period of 3 months, if operationally justified. The overall grant duration shall not exceed 12 months.
Europol may award using simplified costs or unit costs options, provided that a decision has been adopted by the Responsible Authorising Officer.

In addition, where duly justified for operational purposes, financial support may cover the full investment costs of equipment and infrastructure, subject to the following conditions:
- the equipment is required to ensure cross border cooperation and absence of tools would jeopardise the international investigation involving more than one Member State;
- renting or leasing the equipment would not be possible as it could jeopardise the operation;
- applicants provide assurance that the equipment will be fully dedicated to the action.

Essential eligibility, selection and award criteria

Eligibility criteria:
I. In order to be eligible the Applicant must be a public body established in an EU Member State and in the law-enforcement cooperation under Europol Regulation. In addition, the Applicant must be a member of established Operational Task Force applying Standard Operating Procedure on the Selection of High Value Targets and Establishment of Operational Task Forces. No differentiation is made in Europol's constituent act between different Member States. However, the opt-in structure used for JHA under the TFEU creates a varying degree of participation of Member States. Europol pays due regard to the status of EU Member States with regard to the Europol Regulation and/or Justice and Home Affairs matters as regards eligibility to be a (lead) Applicant.

II. The Co-Applicants must be members of established Operational Task Force:
- a public body established in an EU Member State or in a third country OR
- an International Organisation.
As regards co-applicants, even non-opting-in Member States could be eligible as co-applicants on the same basis as third countries and third parties provided that their participation is justified by the nature of the action. Their meaningful participation has, however, to be possible having due regard to Europol's legal obligations on exchange of information with third countries.

III. Applications must involve at least two (2) public bodies established in two (2) different EU Member States.

IV. The proposed actions must be related to activities of established Operational Task Force, which carry out intelligence and investigative activities against selected HVT as defined within the Standard Operating Procedure[53] on Selection of High Value Targets and Establishment of Operational Task Forces.

V. The requested grant cannot be higher than 60,000 EUR, or in line with the current threshold for low-value grants established by the EU Financial Regulation.

Selection criteria:
In accordance with Article 198 of the EU Financial Regulation, proposals for action shall be evaluated on the basis of the following selection criteria:
- Financial capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the activity is being carried out and to participate in its funding.
- Operational capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have the professional resources, competences and qualifications required to complete the proposed action.
- The verification of the financial and operational capacity shall not apply to public bodies and international organisations in accordance with Article 198 of the EU Financial Regulation.

To ensure that the operational needs are met, a pool of evaluators shall be duly appointed by the responsible authorising officer. In each evaluation at least 2 evaluators from that list (with complementary expertise in law enforcement and finance) shall perform the evaluation (without a separate ad hoc appointment).
To allow for fast processing, applicants must use the templates to apply and reply within maximum 24 hours to any questions raised during evaluation.

Award criteria:
In accordance with Article 199 of the EU Financial Regulation proposals for an action shall be evaluated on the basis of the relevance, quality, cost-effectiveness and European added value of the proposed action.
Ex-post publicity for award of grants (in particular their annual publication in accordance with Article 189 of EU Financial Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046) and the financial verification

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[53] EDOC #901933 v13 "Standard Operating Procedure - Selection of High Value Targets and establishment of Operational Task Forces within O2-ESOCC".

of the payment requests, including the required supporting documentation, shall take into account the confidentiality and security of the operational and classified information.

Information for Applicants
The Invitation to submit applications shall be restricted to OTF participants only. Once an OTF is established, the Invitation, accompanied by the application package, shall be circulated to the targeted audience only. All OTF participants shall receive the information simultaneously, in accordance with the principle of equal treatment.

Indicative timetable for the direct award and indicative amount of the grant

Date	Amount
Publication Q1 2026	EUR TBC[54]
Award of Grants: Q1 2026-Q4 2027	+ EUR 3,000,000 in 2026 and 2027 from the legislative proposal for a Regulation to prevent and fight migrant smuggling[55].

Maximum possible rate of co-financing of the total eligible costs
95%

6. Ad-hoc low-value grants in support of Innovation

Legal basis
Article 4(1)(h) and (i) and Article 61(3) of the REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA.

Budget line
3960 Innovation Grants

Priorities of the year, objectives pursued and expected results
The objective of this scheme will be to support the cooperation in combating serious crime affecting two or more MS, by facilitating the delivery of innovative solutions addressing common security challenges.

Description of the activities to be funded
Operational and/or innovative activities (e.g. direct operational costs pertaining to Innovation such as the acquisition of Software licenses, equipment and materials and hiring of consultants).

Each application, within the limit of EUR 60,000, could cover a particular stage of an innovation project, as defined by the European Clearing Board (EuCB).
Grants awarded under this Article have a maximum duration of 9 months with the possibility of an extension at Europol's discretion for an additional period of 3 months, if operationally justified. The overall grant duration shall not exceed 12 months. Europol may award using simplified costs or unit costs options, provided that a decision has been adopted by the Responsible Authorising Officer.

In addition, where duly justified for operational purposes, financial support may cover the full investment costs of equipment and infrastructure, subject to the following conditions:

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[54] If operationally justified, the authorising officer may decide to increase the maximum amount for this scheme, subject to Europol budget availability.
[55] COM(2023) 754 final. Subject to adoption of the proposal and to the relevant funds becoming available.

- the equipment is required to ensure cross border cooperation and absence of tools would jeopardise the international investigation involving more than one Member State;
- renting or leasing the equipment would not be possible as it could jeopardise the operation;
- applicants provide assurance that the equipment will be fully dedicated to the action.

Essential Criteria
The new Scheme should not only acknowledge, but also strengthen the central role of the European Clearing Board (EuCB) for all matters related to research and innovation for law enforcement.

The EuCB is composed of at least one representative per EU MS and per Schengen-associated countries (larger countries have a larger delegation, the decision being taken at national level). These representatives are named "Single Points of Contact" (SPoCs) and are responsible, at national level, for disseminating and raising awareness about opportunities and benefits of cooperation with other European LEAs and with Europol in the field of research and innovation.

In principle, a grant application should be considered to be within scope if:
•   The related project is taking place as part of an EuCB Core Group;
•   It has a clear innovation focus and a well-defined scope;
•   The related result has a cross-border relevance, for example it addresses a need identified by more than one MS.

The new Scheme should deliver low-value grants only to Law Enforcement Authorities of EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries.
The grants should be presented by a partnership of LEAs, composed of at least two LEAs from two different MS.

Indicative timetable and indicative amount
Europol intends to initiate a multi-annual invitation to apply for the Innovation Grant scheme from 2025 onwards.

Date	Amount
Publication: Q1 2025	EUR 350,000 (from the 2025 budget)[56]
Award of grants: Q1 2025-Q4 2026	Possibly broken down into smaller calls.

Maximum possible rate of co-financing of the total eligible costs
95%

7. Second year of Ad-hoc low-value grants invitation for cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries

Legal basis
Article 4(1)(h) and (i) and Article 61(3) of the REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and replacing and repealing Council Decisions 2009/371/JHA, 2009/934/JHA, 2009/935/JHA, 2009/936/JHA and 2009/968/JHA.
Contribution Agreement between the European Commission and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation 700002208, Fighting against organised crime in the Eastern Partnership region II".

Budget line

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[56] If operationally justified, the authorising officer may decide to increase the maximum amount for this scheme, subject to Europol budget availability.

B-3600

Priorities, objectives pursued and expected results
Supporting the cooperation of the six Eastern Partnership countries with EU Member States and Europol for the fight against serious and organised international crime, including through their participation in EMPACT.

The Invitation to submit applications is directed to EU Member States and the Eastern Partnership countries collaborating in the framework of a specific action. In accordance with Europol legal basis, the Europol National Unit (ENU) shall be the liaison body between Europol and the competent authorities of the Member States. Thus, the applications must always be submitted via the ENU of the Lead Applicant.

It is expected that the support will provide for improved cooperation between Member States' and Eastern Partnership countries' law enforcement agencies, EU Institutions, EU Agencies while delivering coherent actions targeting the most pressing criminal threats facing the EU.

Description of the activities to be funded
Activities addressing at least one of the following objectives: (i) strengthening Eastern Partnership countries' institutional knowledge and capacity on EMPACT crime areas and increasing cooperation within EMPACT; (ii) enhancing criminal intelligence in the countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood region as well as the exchange of intelligence and information between EaP countries, EU MS and Europol; (iii) enhancing operational cooperation with of the EaP countries with the EU Member States and Agencies, including through EMPACT.

The activities to be funded include operational and/or investigative activities (e.g. travel and accommodation for operational meetings, direct operational costs such as informant rewards, buying/renting operational technical and forensic equipment, interpretation or deployments, etc.) as well as activities related to strategic or operational intelligence exchange (e.g. meetings and workshops) implemented by the targeted law enforcement agencies.

Furthermore, activities and equipment related to identification and setting of legal and technical requirements for the exchange of intelligence.

In case of larger investigations, if operationally justified, subsequently submitted applications, each within the limit of 60,000 EUR, could cover a particular stage of the ongoing investigation enabling the participating countries to apply for funding throughout the lifetime of the operation.

Grants may not be awarded for activities that are funded under another EU programme or from Europol's budget, including through EMPACT grants. In this respect, it is noted that Europol is active in an environment which has undergone a proliferation of EU funding sources. A statement to ensure respect for the principle of no double funding from EU sources must be made by applicant(s) in the Application form. Europol is entitled to perform checks in this respect, including by liaising with external partners (e.g. DG HOME, Eurojust).

Europol may award using simplified cost options provided that a decision by the Executive Director has been adopted.

The maximum duration of grants will be 6 months extendable by 3 months, if justified.

Grants awarded under this Article have a maximum duration of 6 months with the possibility of an extension at Europol's discretion for an additional period of 3 months, if operationally justified. The overall grant duration shall not exceed 9 months.

Europol may award using simplified costs or unit costs options, provided that a decision has been adopted by the Responsible Authorising Officer.

In addition, where duly justified for operational purposes, financial support may cover the full investment costs of equipment and infrastructure, subject to the following conditions:

- the equipment is required to ensure cross border cooperation and absence of tools would jeopardise the international investigation involving more than one Member State;
- renting or leasing the equipment would not be possible as it could jeopardise the operation;
- applicants provide assurance that the equipment will be fully dedicated to the action.

Essential eligibility, selection and award criteria

Eligibility criteria:

I. In order to be eligible the Lead Applicant must be a law enforcement or judiciary public body established in an EU Member State participating in EU law enforcement cooperation under Europol Regulation (EU) 2016/794 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol).

II. The Co-Applicants must be:
- a public body established in an EU Member State OR
- a public body established in one of the six Eastern Partnership countries[99] or, if relevant for the action, in a third country OR
- a profit or non-profit-oriented organisation established in an EU Member State or in one of the six Eastern Partnership countries or, if relevant for the action, in a third country, OR
- an International Organisation.
The meaningful participation of co-applicants based in third countries, has to be possible having due regard to Europol's legal obligations on exchange of information with third countries.

III. Applications must involve at least two (2) public bodies established in two (2) different EU Member States and at least one (1) public body of one of the six Eastern Partnership countries, which have a status of a law enforcement authority or judiciary.

IV. The requested grant cannot be higher than EUR 60,000, or in line with the current threshold for low-value grants established by the EU Financial Regulation.

Selection criteria:

In accordance with Article 198 of the EU Financial Regulation, proposals for action shall be evaluated on the basis of the following selection criteria:
- Financial capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period during which the activity is being carried out and to participate in its funding.
- Operational capacity - Applicants and co-applicants must have the professional resources, competences and qualifications required to complete the proposed action.

- The verification of the financial and operational capacity shall not apply to public bodies and international organisations in accordance with Article 198 of the EU Financial Regulation.

To ensure that the operational needs are met, a pool of evaluators shall be duly appointed by the responsible authorising officer. In each evaluation at least 2 evaluators from that list (with complementary expertise in law enforcement and finance) shall perform the evaluation (without a separate ad hoc appointment).

Award criteria:

In accordance with Article 199 of the EU Financial Regulation proposals for an action shall be evaluated on the basis of the relevance, quality, cost-effectiveness and European added value of the proposed action.

Ex-post publicity for award of grants (in particular their publication in accordance with Article 189 of EU Financial Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046) and the financial verification of the payment requests, including the required supporting documentation shall take into account the confidentiality and security of the operational and classified information.

Information for Applicants
The Invitation to submit applications and the relevant application documents are published on Europol website.

Indicative timetable and indicative amount

Date	Amount
Publication: Q1 2025 Award of grants: Q1 2025-Q3 2028	EUR 960,000 (4 years period) divided over 2 years invitations of EUR 480,000subject to the overall implementation of the Contribution Agreement.

Annex XII: Strategy for cooperation with third countries and/or international organisations

External Relations Strategy 2025+

1. INTRODUCTION

Europol has a **well-developed network of external partners** which has been steadily growing since the first cooperation agreements were signed with Iceland and Norway in June 2001. Europol has now concluded agreements with 37 third countries and five international organisations, guided by successive External Relations Strategies and decisions of Europol's Management Board.

Under the current strategy, Europol made considerable progress by signing new working arrangements with countries such as Ecuador, India and UK and international organisations such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). Significant investment in fostering cooperation with MENA countries was also made, and meaningful progress was achieved at bilateral and multilateral levels.

Despite challenges such as pandemics, shifting crime patterns and an unstable geopolitical landscape, Europol continues to invest in a balanced way in its external relations programme at both strategic and operational level to support the Member States' Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). This **investment has paid dividends**, notably in the rising number of international investigations involving third parties, such as SKY ECC, Encrochat and Operation Greenlight/Trojan Shield; coordinated takedowns and seizures in cyber and drug domains; and the detection and prevention of terrorism.

The latest Europol Strategy[57] "Delivering Security in Partnership" reflects the changes in the criminal landscape over the past few years and outlines how the Agency will increase its capacity to support complex, cross-border investigations in line with the needs of the Member States. The Europol Strategy puts a greater focus on external relations introducing an additional priority '***bringing relevant partners together for cross-border operational cooperation'***. This acknowledges the **need for a more collective and complementary approach** from law enforcement agencies in light of the evolving nature of serious organised crime which has become more transnational and more sophisticated, exploiting differences in legal systems and enforcement capabilities among countries.

In line with the Europol Strategy and the new strategic priority, this document presents a blueprint for Europol's external relations for the coming years. It is consistent with and draws upon the experiences of the former external relations strategies, including the assessment of the cooperation with third parties with which cooperation agreements have been signed; on the input of Member States and the European Commission collected during regular meetings, focus discussions and via the recent questionnaire and follow-up interviews; and on Europol's operational insights. The findings and lessons learned from the past years, as well as the current and foreseen policy and operational developments, shape the new **External Relations Strategy 2025+.**

1.1 Goal

The goal of Europol's external relations is to **enhance cooperation with external partners to support the Member States in preventing and combating serious organised crime**

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[57] Adopted by the Management Board in June 2023.

and terrorism. This support often involves cooperation with non-EU countries, INTERPOL and other international organisations, and increasingly with private parties. In the interest of coordination at EU level, the engagement with EU Institutions, Bodies and Agencies and CSDP missions is also indispensable. Europol will continue to support the Commission, the Council and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in advancing EU external priorities, particularly in the conclusion of International Agreements with key third countries.

Europol continues to analyse and respond to the changing criminal landscape and shifting geopolitical trends that impact the operational context of policing, such as war, instability, climate change, pandemics or natural disasters. To anticipate emerging threats, Europol is dedicated to building an **agile and flexible external relations framework** that enables law enforcement to cooperate with the global stakeholders involved in a **targeted, tailored** way, focussing on operational needs.

1.2 Priorities

In line with the Europol Strategy, the **External Relations Strategy 2025+ priorities** will be:
1. **To intensify the cooperation with existing key partners**;
2. To establish cooperation with other **third countries of operational interest** and **other (non-EU) Agencies and international organisations**;
3. To develop **practical solutions for a more targeted operational cooperation** with strategic third parties within the applicable legal framework.

1.3 Guiding principles

The Europol External Relations Strategy 2025+ builds on achievements from the past years and explores more agile ways of working, following relevant guiding principles:
- **Novel approach**: it ushers new tools and approaches to Europol's engagement with third parties in terms of prioritisation, focussing on operational aspects, innovation and agility.
- **Operationally-oriented:** it intends to be a support tool to Europol's operational work and to Member States' external relations, also based on Europol's extensive catalogue of products and services.
- **Flexible and targeted:** it explores flexible tools and formats for dedicated tailored-made engagement with some future or existing key partners.
- **Deepening Europol's engagement:** it puts emphasis on deepening Europol's existing network, while not excluding the possibility of selectively identifying additional partners.
- **Complementarity and added value:** it assesses roles and competences between Europol and other organisations, in particular INTERPOL, to further enhance complementarity. It takes into account the expected operational return for a proportional engagement with partners in order to add value to and to complement Member States' own network.
- **Fundamental rights:** it considers Europol Fundamental Rights Officer's opinions in the procedures for engaging with partners and it pursues compliance with fundamental rights, including data protection, in strategic and operational exchanges.

2. Priority 1: INTENSIFIED COOPERATION WITH EXISTING KEY PARTNERS

Europol will continue to **maintain and improve relations with its entire current network of partners,** which includes European Neighbourhood, Western Balkan Region, Middle East and North African countries, Eastern Partnership countries, Transatlantic and transpacific cooperation, Asia, Latin America and International Organisations and Regional Policing Bodies.

Beyond ongoing cooperation there are **some regions, countries and international organisations**[58] which require **particular consideration** in light of their strategic and operational importance to the Member States. **Europol will explore avenues to deepen existing relations and develop new areas of engagement**. At the same time, the entire Europol network remains relevant to prevent and counter serious cross border crime. Special attention goes to countries and regions neighbouring the EU, to jointly address criminal and security threats, including in the context of accession processes. Europol will continue to support **Ukraine and Moldova**, where information exchange and operational support remain crucial for the security of the EU. Developments in criminal trends and cooperation will be monitored and improvements will take place where needed.

2.1 Schengen Associated Countries (SACs)

Being part of the Schengen area, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland are of exceptional importance in securing the integrity of the EU's borders and in the fight against organised crime and terrorism in Europe. These countries have a long-standing relationship with Europol, participate in joint investigations and actions, and share strategic and operational information. Their own willingness to **deepen the cooperation further** is well established and expressed at the highest level.

The Europol Strategy commits to intensifying the cooperation with the Schengen Associated Countries as essential partners of the EU Internal Security Architecture. Europol encourages the countries to **make full use of the instruments and capabilities already available** to them at Europol. Europol endeavours to **eliminate any obstacles to efficient information exchange**, and invites Member States to do the same.

With Europol's increasing role in the Schengen-related instruments, such as SIS, ETIAS, EES and VIS, and the collective dependency on each other's ability to uphold security, cooperation with the SACs will only increase. Europol welcomes this development. A **deeper inclusion of these countries in the Europol framework**, and for the Agency and the Member States to be able to draw on the SACs' expertise, capabilities and information will benefit the Member States and the SACs alike. During the implementation of this strategy, Europol will explore possibilities to facilitate the access to operational information, to improve information sharing, to enhance the SACs' role in EMPACT and their participation in meetings, innovation and other matters.

> **Key action:**
> - **To prepare and implement a comprehensive plan for strengthening cooperation with the SACs in the short, medium and long term**

2.2 Western Balkans

The Western Balkans **remains a top priority area** for Europol's external relations. The region continues to function as an external hub for criminal activities affecting the EU being for example an important transit point for migrant smuggling and illicit commodities entering and leaving the EU via various corridors of the Balkan routes.

All Western Balkan partners recognise the importance of further enhancing cooperation within the EU, also with the support of Europol. Enhancing cooperation with the Western Balkan region has been a priority of the EU, striving to make tangible progress in the EU enlargement

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[58] Mention of partners in this section is based on this order.

negotiations and integration in the Union. In line with that and within its area of competence, Europol has supported and will **continue supporting the EU political dialogue with the Western Balkan partners**.

While the cooperation with the region continues to develop and expand, **enhanced engagement in some areas** could be foreseen, as for example cybercrime (internet related fraud, investment fraud) and financial and economic crime (asset recovery, money laundering, corruption) and better use of SIENA could be made including further rollout to additional competent authorities. Europol could also consider taking a more regional approach particularly in **targeted operations[59]**, where such a regional approach brings added value. In line with increased operational activities, possibilities to expand the network of already existing partners should be further explored.

Consideration should also be given to increasing Europol's involvement in **EU funded projects in the region** primarily those 1) providing adequate budgetary and human resources; 2) whose scope are fully aligned with the agency priorities; 3) with a strong operational component; with a view to building up Europol's visibility and enhancing the operational, analytical and technical capacities of law enforcement in the region.

Key actions:
- **To consider additional areas for cooperation, such as cybercrime and financial and economic crime**
- **To take a more regional approach regarding targeted operations, where such a regional approach brings added value**
- **To engage in EU funded projects of operational interest in the region subject to available resources**
- **To encourage the WB to make optimal use of SIENA and extend its use to more competent authorities**

2.3 <u>United Kingdom</u>

The UK is a unique partner of Europol given its former status as Member State. The objective remains to **retain and increase the high level of operational cooperation enjoyed before Brexit**, given the important contribution the UK makes to Europol's work and vice versa. **Reciprocity** is a key element for the cooperation, especially regarding operational data and information sharing. While the Adequacy decision [60] together with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement[61] allow for the continuation of pre-Brexit operational cooperation, the UK is no longer a member of the internal governance bodies and is unable to contribute to the more strategic aspects of Europol's work as a result. Therefore, in addition to the regular ongoing operational cooperation, Europol and the UK could **consider options for a more structured engagement on strategic aspects** of law enforcement cooperation. UK expressed a specific interest for a closer cooperation with Europol in the fight against irregular migration.

Areas where further engagement might be explored include:

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[59] Similar to what has been done in the context of the Joint Action Days "South East Europe", targeting firearms trafficking, migrant smuggling, drugs trafficking in the wider Balkan region or as in the case of the Referral Action Days (RAD) Western Balkans of 2020 targeting jihadi terrorist groups operating from/in the WB region.
[60] Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1773 of 28 June 2021 pursuant to Directive (EU) 2016/680 on the adequate protection of personal data by the United Kingdom (OJ L 360, 11.10.2021)
[61] Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the other part.

- Maintaining a regular structured dialogue at senior level on strategic and operational matters;
- Collaborating on Innovation and technical tools;
- Enhancing operational cooperation with other UK agencies dealing with security and terrorism in coordination with the NCA as appropriate.

Key actions:
- **To retain and increase the pre-Brexit high level of operational cooperation**
- **To explore further cooperation in specific crime areas (e.g. financial crime, terrorism, irregular migration)**
- **To explore options for regular structured strategic cooperation**

2.4 United States

The US remains a critically important partner of Europol and the **cooperation continues to grow at both strategic and operational level**. Through the representation of key law enforcement agencies at Europol HQ and the building up of cooperation at agency and national level, Europol and the Member States have benefited from a wealth of expertise, enhanced information sharing and joint efforts to target and disrupt OCGs, cyberthreats and terrorism. The posting of Europol liaison officers (LOs) in Washington continues to promote the agency in the US and has allowed for significant information sharing, outreach and networking opportunities.

Going forward, the main objective is to maintain the excellent cooperation while **exploring new opportunities for enhancing this cooperation** further in line with operational needs. This collaboration could include:

- Continuing to develop pilot projects with US agencies to ensure cooperation and joint action where needed;
- Continuing to develop the framework and model for information sharing to ensure the best use of battlefield data provided by the US;
- Enhancing cooperation in targeted crime areas such as Environmental Crime and Financial Crime;
- Increasing collaboration on technical tools and innovation;
- Work with other US partners such as the International Association of the Chiefs of Police (IACP) to further achieve strategic objectives.

Key actions:
- **To explore new opportunities for enhanced information exchange in key crime areas**
- **To increase strategic collaboration, for instance on technical tools and innovation**
- **To continue the successful use of pilot projects for information exchange in specific crime areas**

2.5 Türkiye

There is an operational need at Europol for increased cooperation with Türkiye across a wide range of crime areas, such as drug trafficking, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, terrorism, money laundering, and environmental crimes. In the absence of a full operational agreement the cooperation remains limited.

Europol will continue to support the European Commission in its negotiations for an international agreement between the EU and Türkiye on the exchange of personal data between Europol and the Turkish competent authorities for fighting serious crime and terrorism. In the interim, additional actions may be required to optimise the cooperation within the limits of the current legal framework, including:

- Promoting EMPACT and encouraging Türkiye's continued collaboration;
- Involvement of Türkiye in OTFs and other actions in coordination with the Member States[62];
- Greater participation in strategic and capacity building measures to support Turkish law enforcement;
- Encouraging Turkish competent authorities to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the legal framework in place including making full use of SIENA.
- Exploring practical solutions for a more targeted co-operation as outlined under point 4.

Key actions:
- **To continue the support to the European Commission in its negotiations for an international agreement between the EU and Türkiye**
- **To promote participation in EMPACT, OTFs and in strategic activities**

2.6 INTERPOL

Europol and INTERPOL have a close and strong partnership via an operational agreement in place since 5 November 2001, as well as under additional agreements on specific crime areas[63]. For many years INTERPOL has been a **key partner at both operational and strategic level,** with actionable Joint Key Operational Priorities (JKOPs) agreed biennially. Cooperation is based on the respective agencies' mandate and geographical scope and the desire to fulfil common objectives.

Europol and INTERPOL actively cooperate in the framework of Europol's Analysis Projects, OAPs under EMPACT, as well as in Joint Action Days (JADs) and Large-Scale Joint Action Days (LS-JADs) and **large-scale operations**. Both INTERPOL and Europol have posted Liaison Officers to each other's Headquarters to enhance **cooperation on a day-to-day basis**. Information is shared through the secure communication channels in each organisation, which unfortunately are not interoperable yet. **Strategic conferences and meetings** take place regularly at top management, senior official and working levels and **strategic reports** are contributed to and shared. In addition, cooperation regarding **innovation, knowledge-sharing and staff** exchanges is also part of Europol-INTERPOL engagement.

The existing legal framework that forms the basis of cooperation between Europol and INTERPOL is currently being revised, as part of the process of negotiating a cooperation agreement between the EU and INTERPOL. This reflects the need for a modern and tailored regime that caters for the specificities of each EU JHA agency and INTERPOL, while ensuring effective safeguards for the processing of information. Europol supports the overall goals of the envisaged EU-INTERPOL agreement and remains invested in ensuring **better complementarity and interoperability**, and fostering the operational dimension of this partnership even further.

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[62] Exchange of operational personal data within the OTF framework will depend on the possibilities enabled by the Europol Regulation.
[63] ICSE, i-ARMS.

To achieve further operational cooperation, the **challenging legal, technical and administrative issues** raising from the different legal frameworks and policies on issues such as Information Management need first to be solved. Europol relies on the **Member States and the European Commission** to resolve these current obstacles to making enhanced cooperation possible. Nonetheless, until Europol can make full use of the provisions of the future EU-INTERPOL cooperation agreement, it will continue to explore possibilities to enhance cooperation with INTERPOL under the existing legal framework.

Consideration could be given to:
- Developing best practices leading to enhanced operational cooperation such as building upon successful experiences (JKOPs, EMPACT);
- Fostering top level engagement in view of the future legal framework in order to jointly tackle implementation challenges;
- Exploring additional access to INTERPOL's databases in line with operational interest;
- Considering the establishment of an interface between i24/7 and SIENA;
- Exploring the complementary use of INTERPOL's services and global outreach;
- Enhancing strategic cooperation under the INTERPOL-led "*Dialogue on effective multilateral policing architecture against global threats*"[64];
- Seeking synergies between the EU Innovation Lab and INTERPOL's Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore.

Key actions:
- **To explore new opportunities for enhanced information exchange**
- **To design targeted JKOPs, which allow for expanded operational cooperation**
- **To explore access to additional INTERPOL's databases of operational interest**
- **To increase strategic collaboration, for instance on technical tools and innovation**

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3. Priority 2: COOPERATION WITH OTHER THIRD COUNTRIES, (NON-EU) AGENCIES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

In a rapidly changing criminal landscape which is increasingly transnational and evolving, Europol needs to keep its external relations network under review. Europol shall continue in its efforts to establish cooperation with **countries and agencies already prioritised by the Member States**[65] in the framework of the Europol External Relations Strategy 2021-2024. The existing priority list serves as a baseline in order to assure continuity. The Member States operational needs and the **Management Board decisions will continue to guide and determine the new key partners for Europol**.

In order to remain agile and operationally focussed, Europol will continue to monitor the criminal landscape to **identify new and emerging threats** through SOCTA, IOCTA, TE-SAT, EFECTA and other analytical products. The results of these assessments together with

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[64] The Dialogue includes high-level delegates from the following organisations: AFRIPOL, AMERIPOL, ASEANAPOL, the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC), CARICOM IMPACS, the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), EUROPOL, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency – Frontex, and the Gulf Cooperation Council-POL (GCCPOL), as well as INTERPOL. There are two observer organisations: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

[65] EDOC #1262066: Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, Singapore, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Iraq, Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, NATO, UNCTED, UNOCT, UNITAD, UN IIIM, EUGENDFOR, AFRIPOL, AMERIPOL, ASEANOPOL, OSCE, OPCW, Intra-European Organisation of Tax Administrations, EUBAM Libya, EUNAVFOR Somalia, EUAA, EBA, EU SatCen, EUCAP SAHEL Niger, ELA.

operational work may lead to the identification of new priority partners. When there is a necessity to establish formal relations with a new partner, Europol will prepare a **business case for the Management Board's approval**. The need for an agile and targeted cooperation could result in **different tailored-made possibilities with different partners**, based on operational needs.

3.1 Middle East, North Africa and other African countries

Europol considers in line with the feedback received by the EU MS and the EU COM the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a priority. The region has featured in Europol's external relations for more than a decade. The findings of the European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment and other analytical reports produced by Europol, show an intertwined security nexus of criminal threats and common challenges between the EU and Middle East and North African (MENA) countries.

The identification of mutual interests reinforces the need to build stronger cooperative relationships between MENA countries and Europol. While Europol experienced some **success in establishing partnerships in the Middle East** and the Gulf, having established structured cooperation through means of Strategic Agreement and Working Arrangements with the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and more recently with Qatar, engagement with North African countries could further improve.

Conscious of the diversity comprising the MENA region, Europol has focused on enhancing and/or establishing relations with its partners at both multilateral and bilateral levels through the support of a resource-neutral tool: the **Policing Partnership concept**. This project is a tool that develops tailored-made strategies to enhance cooperation with each country in the region while maximising EU resources and inter-agency cooperation. The project has already generated successes in the dialogue with Egypt, Morocco and Jordan.

Europol will continue to actively progress formalising bilateral cooperation with other MENA and African **countries previously prioritised by the Management Board including Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Nigeria**. Europol will also support the European Commission in any future negotiations on International Agreements with mandated partners in this region.

Seeking direct cooperation at regional level, Europol actively participates in several regional fora, such as AIMC and MENA-focused INTERPOL and UN initiatives, and has built up engagement with GCCPOL and AFRIPOL. While pursuing enhanced cooperation with North African countries, Europol could assess on a **case-by-case** basis whether to extend its outreach to **other African countries** where targeted cooperation could be justifiable due to emerging criminal trends, for instance regarding migrant smuggling, drug trafficking and cybercrime.

Going forward, the targeted approach could include:
- Expanding the Policing Partnerships;
- Engaging in relevant regional initiatives in the fight against serious and organised crime on the basis of operational interest e.g., migrant smuggling; and subject to available resources.
- Making better use of Member States Liaison Officers in the Region and engaging with INTERPOL for strategic purposes;
- Creating more opportunities to cooperate with AIMC, AFRIPOL and GCCPOL.

Key actions:
- **To further improve engagement with North African countries**

- **To enhance the Policing Partnership concept**
- **To explore a targeted approach to the region**

3.2 Latin America

Engagement with Latin American partners should be **sustained at both bilateral and multilateral level**. Latin American countries represent a priority geographical area for Europol to tackle many areas of transnational crimes. Europol has already concluded several bilateral agreements with countries in the region and will continue to support the Commission in International Agreements negotiations in order to support efforts to tackle issues, such as drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, cyber threats, or financial and environmental crimes.

At regional level Europol will continue to seek **engagement via AMERIPOL**, Europol's natural counterpart in the region once legal personality is acquired. In a similar vein, Europol will continue to develop relations with CLASI (Latin America Internal Security Committee) and support the work of EL PAcCTO (Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime). Besides, **multilateral cooperation** with relevant operational partners such as MAOC-N will be explored.

Other possibilities for cooperation could be considered such as:
- Enhancing Europol's visibility in the region;
- Making use of Member States and third country's networks in the region for strategic cooperation;
- Establishing ties with CARICOM IMPACs if the crime patterns continue to shift.

Key actions:
- **To sustain and enhance bilateral engagement with key operational partners in the region**
- **To engage with AMERIPOL in order to facilitate a more efficient regional outreach**

3.3 Regional Policing Bodies and International Organisations

In addition to AMERIPOL, AFRIPOL and AIMC, Europol should continue to **foster closer ties with other regional policing bodies** such as ASEANAPOL, SCO-RATS, and CARICOM IMPACS, particularly in the context of the INTERPOL-led Dialogue on effective multilateral policing. This offers the possibility to engage at regional level with law enforcement agencies and to build a network of partners. It could be explored if Europol's partner networks could be a way to engage with countries where there is no structured cooperation established. Europol should continue to explore **targeted cooperation** with relevant UN bodies, NATO, the Council of Europe, OECD and ICC in line with the operational and strategic needs of the Member States, respecting the legal requirements for the exchange of personal data.

Key actions:
- **To foster closer ties with other regional policing bodies**
- **To explore targeted cooperation with other international bodies**

4. Priority 3: PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR A MORE TARGETED COOPERATION

The provisions for Europol's relations with partners are laid down in **Chapter V of the Europol Regulation** which governs Europol's cooperation with Union bodies, third countries, international organisations and private parties[66].

Although the current possibilities for the exchange of non-personal data have been fruitful so far, some limitations and difficulties have taken place with regards to operational information-exchange. While the practice of **law enforcement requires a quick and flexible response to the threats of organised crime and terrorism**, the exchange of personal data is subject to numerous limitations, which in turn can prolong the process.

4.1 Operational cooperation

Europol will continue to rely, as necessary, on **the legal options set out in Article 25** of the Europol Regulation and will **support the European Commission in its negotiations of International Agreements and Adequacy decisions** with relevant third countries and bodies.

In addition, Europol could also **seek to utilise** the existing possibilities provided by the **Europol Regulation**, such as **Article 25(4a), Article 25(6), while increasing** the **exceptional transfer procedure under Article 25(5) where required**.

Article 25(4a) – Transfers based on appropriate safeguards

Article 25(4a) is the novelty of the amended Europol Regulation offering a new and additional legal basis to transfer personal data to third countries and international organisations, namely "transfers based on appropriate safeguards", a possibility which is also available to other Union bodies and Member States' law enforcement authorities. This is a new legal basis which can be considered for establishing **structured and regular cooperation with countries which do have certain level of data protection in their national law**, but not sufficient to pass the strict requirements for an Adequacy Decision.

Article 25(5) – Exceptional transfer with authorisation of Europol's Executive Director

Article 25(5), the exceptional transfer decided by the Executive Director, requires a careful and detailed assessment of operational, legal and data protection related considerations. This procedure has broader application and should be considered in other situations for instance for several transfers in the same case or in other types of cases.

Article 25(6) - Exceptional transfer based on a decision of the MB and the EDPS

Article 25(6) provides that, in the absence of dedicated international cooperation arrangements under Article 25(1), the MB may, in agreement with the EDPS, authorise for a period not exceeding one year, which shall be renewable, a set of transfers in accordance with the safeguards set out in Article 25(5).

Key actions:
- **To further assess the possibilities of Article 25(4a) and Article 25(6) – particularly for countries with a proven high level of data protection in other sectors**
- **To make better use of the exceptional clause provided for by Article 25(5)**

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[66] A separate strategy is being developed on Europol's cooperation with private parties.

4.2 Strategic cooperation

With regards to **cooperation limited to the exchange of non-personal data**, the conclusion of a standard **Working Arrangement** is reflected in the Europol Regulation. The Working Arrangements are concluded where the Parties are expected to engage in a structured and regular cooperation. The added-value of using a standardised model for all partners is to ensure uniformity in the applicable rules.

Given the need for a more flexible approach, **alternative and lighter means and frameworks of cooperation could be considered for those third countries and international organisations with which the envisaged strategic cooperation will not be structured or systematic, but rather occasional** (for example, in the context of cooperation for a particular sport event or for a specific case only).

In case of a clearly identified need to formalise the engagement with a third party, Europol could consider for example the conclusion of **a Memorandum of Understanding** or other instruments outlining the basic principles of cooperation and providing sufficient guarantees in terms of data protection. Such an instrument would be approved by the Executive Director while the Management Board would be subsequently informed. This option would also not entail formal negotiations and hence provide for much quicker finalisation and adoption for those **partners with which cooperation is needed for specific purposes**.

Key action:
- **To explore more flexible and lighter frameworks for strategic cooperation**

4.3 Cooperation through EU Member States' networks

While Europol will continue to develop and enhance its strategic relationships with external partners, there is an opportunity to make better use of the Member States established networks to optimise existing resources and avoid duplication and inefficiencies.

New possibilities for strategic cooperation could be explored taking into account **useful instruments or mechanisms at Member State level**, for instance Member States' bilateral agreements with third countries and their Liaison Officers network[67]. Some Member States have long standing cooperation with third countries of particular operational interest with which Europol does not have any cooperation agreement in place. While this approach would not allow for the exchange of personal data, optimising these existing frameworks could greatly assist with the common goal of combatting cross-border crime and terrorism from a strategic perspective. These networks could also help facilitate contacts with relevant law enforcement agencies in third countries. **Decisions** on whether these mechanisms could be used **will rest with the Member State(s) concerned**, who will also determine the nature, criteria and extent of the use of these networks.

Besides, sharing common resources responds to the scarcity of staff and financial or technical resources that law enforcement agencies are confronted with, and follows the **principle of solidarity**. While respecting the autonomy of Member States to manage their own resources, there is a collective responsibility to work together at EU level to deal with common challenges.

Key action:
- **To explore strategic cooperation through EU Member States' networks**

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[67] Some Member States have experiences with this, for instance the Nordic Cooperation and the Benelux shared pool of Liaison Officers.

4.4 Cooperation through EU Mechanisms

The European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) is a key tool for strengthening and establishing cooperation with third countries in the fight against serious organised crime and terrorism. EMPACT could be used for strengthening and establishing cooperation with third countries both within and outside of Europol's network, in consultation with EMPACT drivers and EU Member States. The EMPACT network can provide, on demand, valuable operational feedback on the level of EMPACT involvement of third parties and **information on their readiness and preferred way to cooperate** with the EU. The level of involvement could be a basis, among others, for evaluating the operational need for closer cooperation with the respective third partners.

Another possibility is offered by EEAS – Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Missions. Improving links and cooperation between CSDP missions/operations and JHA agencies has been considered a component in achieving cooperation in both EU defence and security matters. Several priorities for actions have been identified over the years, from countering migrant smuggling to counterterrorism, among others. Europol has been working on setting a structured dialogue with CSDP missions, adjusting, with a coherent plan, to the implementation of the Compact CSDP. Given the **interest of the EU Member States in monitoring neighbouring countries and creating synergies between CSDP missions and JHA agencies**, from both a strategic and operational perspective, Europol will continue to develop **relations with the most relevant missions**, particularly those covering countries with which Europol does not have an agreement.

Europol should **continue to engage in EU-funded initiatives and projects** covering key regions in line with operational need and strategic value and subject to the available resources. Greater participation in capacity building can promote and increase trust in the Agency and deepen relations with third countries and regions. Upskilling and supporting law enforcement in third countries can build capacity and lead to better operational outcomes.

> **Key action:**
> - **To support the Commission in its role for structured operational cooperation and continue the strategic engagement through EU avenues**

4.5 Other types of cooperation

Europol should continue to make use of **targeted action days and events** involving third countries and organisations. These events not only lead to operational results, but can serve to increase resilience of third country partners against terrorism, online radicalisation and other forms of crimes.

4.6 Technical enablers

The Information Exchange Directive [68] introduces SIENA as the "default channel" of communication for cross border cooperation between law enforcement of Member States and the Schengen Associated Countries. As such, **SIENA remains the "preferred channel" for communication when it comes to third parties** where it is already available and for future strategic partners where a long term and permanent relationship is envisaged.

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[68] Directive (EU) 2023/977 on the exchange of information between the law enforcement authorities of Member States.

When, however, SIENA is not available for a third party and there is an **exceptional and urgent need** to cooperate, **Large File Exchange (LFE)** could be the solution. LFE is a well-established solution (complementing SIENA whose attachments are limited to 55 MB) allowing to transfer large volume data sets (e.g. video files) between Member States, third parties and Europol. LFE is currently undergoing a significant change. A specific change, Internet facing, could be considered for exchanges with third parties when SIENA is not available and there is an urgent operational need.

Key action:
- **To elaborate a policy for the use of LFE with third parties.**

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5. ASSESSMENT OF NEW COUNTRIES FOR COOPERATION - METHODOLOGY

Europol continuously monitors the criminal landscape to identify new and emerging threats. This provides an **overview of the most relevant third countries for different crime areas**. For some of these countries, operational or strategic cooperation possibly already exists bilaterally or multilaterally; for some others, new ways of cooperation might be needed **to assure the security of Europe or to support EU Law Enforcement Agencies at national level**.

The main principle for proposing new countries or partners with which Europol can conclude a Working Arrangement is the **operational need** identified by the Member States and Europol.

More specifically the criteria to be used for assessment includes:
- References to the third countries in analytical products such as SOCTA, IOCTA, TE-SAT and EFFECTA;
- Presence of the third countries in ongoing investigations;
- Assessment of the third countries situation regarding organised crime
- An 'Operational Input' by the Operations Directorate outlining the operational prioritisation it attaches to the proposed candidate;
- Potential 'EMPACT Actions' which the candidate could be associated with (subject to the approval of the other participants);
- Real possibilities of operational return;
- Policy-related and fundamental rights considerations;
- Experiences related to flexible cooperation.

The need for cooperation with a new partner will be presented to the Management Board as a **business case**.

6. REPORTING

Europol's External Relations Strategy 2025+ explicitly sets an open timeline because of evolving operational needs and developments. Europol will report **annually on cooperation** with third countries and international organisations, outlining the level of engagement with each partner and region and highlighting trends and evolution, including feedback from the third parties.

The annual report will include quantitative and qualitative elements to allow the Management Board to assess and discuss from Member States' perspective the current and future level of engagement with each partner via Europol. The Management Board will reflect on the cooperation and decide together on reprioritisation of third countries and international organisations according to the Member States' needs.

Annex XIII: Research and innovation activities 2026

Innovation Lab
Objectives and actions

Further implement Europol's Innovation Strategy.

o Increase the capacity and performance of the ODIN Sandbox (a separate, isolated and protected data processing environment within Europol for the sole purpose of carrying out and supporting research and innovation projects), and explore possibilities for remote connectivity for designated Member State authorities.

o Identify, receive and exploit datasets for the explicit purpose of pursuing research and innovation projects. Make use of the ODIN environment to accelerate the co-creation and prototyping of AI-based solutions by European Law enforcement, by providing a consistent and controlled space for all stakeholders to collaborate seamlessly.

o Develop further the Research and Innovation Pipeline so that proofs of concept and prototypes can be developed into fully-fledged solutions, using the new ODIN environment and disseminated via the ETR, to support Europol and MS investigations.

o Factor in fundamental rights compliance throughout the innovation process, in cooperation with the Fundamental Rights Officer.

o Further develop the foresight and horizon scanning activities of the Europol Innovation Lab's Observatory function, in cooperation with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and other partners. Produce regular reports on technology foresight, offering thought leadership on emerging technologies for law enforcement. Contribute to Europol's strategic analysis reports.

o Act as the secretariat for the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security and lead the Hub Team in collaboration with other JHA agencies, and implement the tasks and functions adopted in 2020 and 2023[69] and annually endorsed by COSI. Lead the Hub's AI Cluster and contribute to the Hub's clusters on encryption, biometrics, and technology foresight and key enabling technologies. Play a leading role in organising the Hub's events and producing its reports.

o Act as the secretariat of the European Clearing Board (EuCB), which channels Member States' needs and operational requirements to the Lab, creates and monitors core groups and coordinates efforts on agreed innovation priorities.

o Establish new EuCB Core Groups in order to foster co-creation of innovative tools with Member States.

o Maintain the Innovation Low Value Grants scheme, in order to provide targeted financial support to Member States in their efforts to co-create innovative tools.

o Continue to develop and promote the Europol Tool Repository (ETR) as an arsenal of advanced digital investigative tools for the EU LEA community.

o Continue to feed the ETR with innovative tools developed by EU MS, external partners and Europol and explore synergies with the Europol analysis toolbox.

o Manage the Europol Code Repository (ECR) in support of Core Group projects and Europol's projects.

o Further develop networks of relevant partners in the industry and academia and organise Industry and Research Days focusing on technology gaps and operational needs identified by Europol and Member States.

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[69] EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security main principles for establishment, Council Secretariat reference 7829/20 LIMITE COSI 77 ENFOPOL 109 CYBERE 69 JAI 341; Multi-Annual Plan endorsed by COSI in February 2023.

o   Subject to the developments of 2025, temporarily embed academic experts within innovation projects. Continue to explore new resourcing models, for example, the temporary insourcing of skillsets and the clarification of intellectual property rights (IPR) when co-creating new solutions.

o   Assist the European Commission in identifying key research themes, drawing up and implementing the Union framework programmes for research and innovation that are relevant to Europol's objectives. Act as a liaison between EU-funded research projects, DG Home and European law enforcement community via the EuCB.

o   Provide, when possible, Europol evaluators to the EU framework programmes for research and innovation; support the dissemination and uptake of projects' outcomes, taking into account the needs of national law enforcement authorities; establish clear rules of engagement for EU projects with the Sandbox environment.

o   Maintain dedicated Innovation EPEs (Lab, Hub, EuCB, etc.).

o   Facilitate the training of law enforcement in the field of innovation in close cooperation with CEPOL.

o   Ensure that Europol can identify and adopt innovative and novel technologies, to improve the efficiency and added value of Europol's services to the EU MS LEAs.

o   Based on the work of the European Clearing Board, Core Groups and Europol Innovation Lab, develop a process to facilitate the rapid embedment of emerging technology solutions in Europol's overall information management landscape in line with architecture and compliance standards.

Expected results:	Europol contributes to the development of artificial intelligence and machine learning tools, and other research and innovation projects based on datasets provided by Member States.
	A substantiated overview of the risks, threats and opportunities of emerging technologies.
	Coordinated efforts in research and development leading to greater realisation of technical solutions.
	Alignment of Europol's innovation activities with MS law enforcement needs and priorities. Alignment of EU funding for security research with the needs of law enforcement.
	Europol contributes to the objectives of relevant EU policies.