20 THINGS YOU ALWAYS WANTED (BUT NEVER DARED) TO ASK EUROPOL

We already have an FAQ page, but for the occasion of our 20th anniversary, we thought of adding a few more, a bit more casual and some things you might have thought of already but never had a chance to ask.

**HOW AND WHERE DID IT ALL START?**

We started life as the Europol Drugs Unit way back in 1993. We're celebrating our 20th birthday this year because Europol officially came to be in 1999 when the Maastricht Treaty (Article K3, to be precise) came into force.

In fact, 1999 was a big year for us: we published the first annual Organised Crime Trend Report, predecessor of the Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) and we launched one of our first tools for gathering, exchanging and processing information and intelligence: the catchy ‘analysis work file’ (today, ‘analysis work project’).

In 2001, we welcomed cooperation with non-EU countries – Iceland and Norway were our first ‘third parties’. From 2010 things changed quickly for Europol, we became an EU Agency in 2010, set up the European Cybercrime Centre in 2013, the European Migrant Smuggling Centre and the European Counter Terrorism Centre both in 2016, and the European Serious and Organised Crime Centre and the EU Internet Referral Unit in 2017.

**THERE ARE 27 COUNTRIES IN THE EU, BUT HOW MANY ARE REPRESENTED AT EUROPOL?**

We have staff from all 27 EU Member States – and more! As we are active in many crime areas, countries across the globe are eager to share and benefit from our tools and expertise. In 1999, Europol had 170 staff members from 15 countries. Now the Europol building hosts around 1,400 staff members from 42 different countries.

**ARE YOU SPREAD OUT ACROSS THE EU OR BASED IN ONE PLACE?**

Our headquarters are in The Hague in the Netherlands. But we haven't always been based here. Back in 1993, when we were the Europol Drugs Unit, we were actually housed in makeshift containers in Strasbourg, France. We moved to more watertight premises in 1994 – an old Catholic boys’ school. With rising staff numbers, we soon outgrew that building and so have been operating out of our purpose-built headquarters since 2013.

The international criminal landscape has changed dramatically over the past 20 years and so have our offices. We now have representations in Brussels, Lyon, Singapore and Washington DC with one or two Europol staff members stationed there.

**WHAT DOES EUROPOL ACTUALLY DO?**

Europol deals with crimes that threaten EU citizens and the common interests of the EU; this includes serious and organised crime and terrorism. In a nutshell, we make Europe safer. A simple concept, but actually challenging in practice.

If a crime affects two or more Member States, we can assist law enforcement in joining the dots and help investigators in their work. The EU has 27 Member States, but each Member State has a number of law enforcement authorities (in the EU alone there are around 90 separate authorities). Europol brings them together to fight crime as one. This makes Europol the EU hub for criminal intelligence.
EUROPOL... INTERPOL... WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

While the names may sound similar, Europol and INTERPOL are different, separate organisations.

Europol sets up and coordinates cross-border operations against the most dangerous criminal groups in the EU. We facilitate direct communication between investigators from national law enforcement authorities. Europol analysts and experts support investigators in real-time and often on-the-spot while taking an active part in complex operations. In other words, we make cross-border investigations more efficient.

INTERPOL is a global organisation, which helps law enforcement authorities across the world to improve their capacities by the exchange of information and best practices. INTERPOL is also known for its red notices (a wanted fugitive is on the run) and yellow notices (alert for a missing person).

That doesn’t mean we don’t work together – we collaborate on different operations and host an annual joint cybercrime conference.

CAN EUROPOL STAFF MEMBERS ARREST CRIMINALS?

Sorry to shatter the illusion, but it’s not like in the movies. Europol staff members do not have the power to arrest suspected criminals. Instead, our analysts provide valuable information to national authorities, so they can shut down criminal groups, identify perpetrators and arrest them.

While having no powers of arrest, we are active in on the ground, so you may see Europol staff members with police when they knock on your door at 5 o’clock in the morning!

Our experts are often deployed on-the-spot to perform checks and speed up operations with real-time data analysis. Our analysts facilitate the exchange of information between investigators in different countries. This is how information on suspects can cross borders even faster than the criminals themselves.

CAN I SEE EUROPOL STAFF WEARING UNIFORMS ON THE STREET?

No, Europol staff members do not wear a uniform. But we may wear a jacket with the Europol logo to distinguish ourselves from Member State law enforcement when in the field. If you pay a visit to our headquarters, you can also see our security officers in uniforms and bulletproof vests.

WOULD A EUROPOL STAFF MEMBER EVER CALL ME AND ASK FOR PERSONAL INFORMATION, IF I AM A VICTIM OF A CRIME OR OFFERING ME CERTIFICATES?

No! If you get a call from someone claiming to work at Europol (and asking you to pay a fine or give personal details), it is a scam.

Unfortunately, these scams are all too common, so we’ve listed some tips on how to protect yourself from these vicious cyber fraudsters.

DOES EUROPOL OWN MY PERSONAL DATA?

No. Europol provides technical tools and capabilities to national authorities to exchange personal data of suspected criminals securely. However, the national authority sharing this data with Europol and other national authorities remains the owner. This data exchange allows the detection and identification of criminals operating across EU borders.

WHICH CRIMES TRIGGER THE BIGGEST OPERATIONS?

As you may already suspect, the most dangerous crimes are of particular interest to us. We have made a list of ten crime areas to focus our efforts on - we call these our ‘priority crime areas’.
But how do we choose ten crime areas? We listen to what EU Member States want and need and analyse crime trends in the EU. It usually consists of crimes that require an international approach and cooperation between several countries, inside and outside the EU. These ten crime priorities shape how we work for the following four years. We call this EMPACT.

For 2018 - 2021, our ten crime priorities areas are:

- cybercrime;
- drug trafficking;
- facilitating illegal immigration;
- trafficking in human beings;
- organised property crime;
- illicit firearms trafficking;
- excise and MTIC fraud;
- environmental crime;
- criminal finances and money laundering;
- document fraud.

**HOW MANY CRIMINAL GROUPS ARE THERE IN EUROPE?**

The latest SOCTA report stated that there are at least 5 000 organised criminal groups currently under investigation. Around 70 % of them are typically active in more than three countries; 45% are involved in more than one criminal activity; 24% of them have up to five members; and 76% have six or more members. The members of these groups are active in the EU and from 180 countries, but 60% of the people involved in serious and organised crime in the EU are actually EU nationals.

**DO EUROPOL STAFF MEMBERS CARRY GUNS?**

No. Europol staff members do not carry firearms. Intelligence is our weapon.

Even when Europol staff members are deployed to operations on the ground they are unarmed. Instead, we carry laptops and other fancy electronic devices linked to databases with millions of criminal data entries. Since 2010, we've used these devices 1 527 times.

Europol's Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA) is used to quickly exchange operational and strategic crime-related data in a secure way. Over one million SIENA messages were sent between Europol and Member States in 2017 alone.

Europol Information System (EIS) is used to store and query information about offences, offenders, suspects and other key crime-related data. In 2010, there were 147 345 EIS searches. In 2018, that number stands at over 4 million. In the same year, there were 213 023 persons and 1.3 million objects entered into the EIS. That's a 600% and 750% increase respectively since 2010.

Safe to say we are kept quite busy!

**CAN EUROPOL STAFF BE DEPLOYED TO OTHER COUNTRIES TO HELP OUT? WHAT DO THEY DO THERE?**

Our experts can support EU Member States and third parties in the field on their request. We help investigators connect and use information stored in our databases. We can provide expertise and tools which may not be otherwise available.

Forensic examination, for example, is one way we can help investigations. We have forensic labs in our headquarters, but we can also deploy drug labs for forensic analysis to support drug trafficking investigations. We did this 15 times in 2018.

We can also help recover and analyse operational information extracted from digital devices, computers and digitally stored media. Our mobile device extraction kits were used 155 times in 2018. This is complemented by our in-house cyber forensic tools, housed in Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3).
Our experts are also active in migrant smuggling investigations. Experts frequently visit migration hotspots. In 2015 and 2016, Europol counter terrorism experts were deployed to identify movements of suspected terrorists through these hotspots. If you add up all the hours we spent working in these hotspots in 2018, it would be 1,551 working days!

Europol is also asked to support special international events, such as G7 meetings or the UEFA Euro football tournament. These on-the-ground operations are supported by our 24/7 Operational Centre back in The Hague.

**CAN EUROPOL INVESTIGATE SERIAL KILLERS?**

We work with Member States to support investigators from national authorities. Europol does not investigate crimes alone. If a serial killer committed a series of murders across Europe, Europol could help the countries concerned, if we were requested to do so.

**ARE EUROPOL STAFF SPECIAL AGENTS?**

Thinking of 007? Think again. Agent 007 works for the intelligence services and we are law enforcement. In fact, we have hundreds of law enforcement officers in the building. More than 250 of them are here as liaison officers – that means they have an office in our building, but work for their respective national authorities. They come from police, gendarmerie, customs and other authorities. Working in such close quarters has revolutionised police work - a Greek officer only needs to cross the corridor to talk to their Irish counterpart.

We are also a team of analysts and specialists. Europol analysts evaluate operational data and cross-check data provided from operations against Europol databases. This helps investigators discover the international connections of criminal groups and dangerous perpetrators.

Specialists combat different forms of crime by helping partners better respond to current and future criminal threats. They analyse criminal trends, coordinate cross-border investigations, provide training to officers working on the field, forensic expertise and so on.

**ARE ONLY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ALLOWED TO WORK AT EUROPOL?**

No. We also have many civilians working at Europol. They offer important support, but also hold operational posts.

IT professionals are crucial to Europol’s mission and activities. They make sure that the robust analytical and communication systems are up and running to ensure cross-checks and criminal intelligence can be carried out quickly. Translators and civilian investigators are part of a team, which scour the web for terrorist propaganda and refer it to relevant platform moderators. Policy advisors support the coordination of national policies. This means Member States have a unified response to crime. Audio-visual technicians, conference staff, human resources specialists ensure that our work can be done in the best possible conditions, whether it be a conference or an operational meeting or a field deployment. Security officers make sure Europol’s headquarters is one of the safest and more secure buildings in the world, thereby preserving the EU’s criminal intelligence databases. Communication specialists reach out to EU citizens and promote what Europol does. They also make the public aware of how they can avoid becoming a victim of crime themselves.

**ARE THERE ANY FEMALE COPS WORKING AT EUROPOL?**

Yes! Law enforcement and civilians combined, 33% of all Europol staff members are women. We strive to motivate more women to help us make Europe a safer place for all.

Our current Executive Director, Catherine De Bolle, is actually the first woman to hold the post. She became our fourth Executive Director in 2018, after serving as Belgium's Police Commissioner.

**SO... HOW CAN I JOIN?**
Check out our website for vacancies. Europol offers paid internship opportunities and positions for both civilians and members of law enforcement authorities.

I THINK OF MYSELF AS A BIT OF A SUPER DETECTIVE. CAN I HELP FIGHT CRIME WITH EUROPOL?

Yes – you can even help us from the comfort of your own home.

Want to help us save children from sexual abuse with a simple click? We post objects from the background of child abuse images in our Stop Child Abuse, Trace an Object campaign. If you recognise an object then your tips could be the missing piece of the puzzle in a complex case. investigators will have more clues to identify perpetrators and save children victims of sexual abuse.

How about catching the most dangerous criminals on the run? Take a look at our EU Most Wanted fugitives website. These are some of the most violent criminals currently at large in the EU. If you have any information, immediately contact your local authorities. Your action can prevent them from committing these heinous crimes again.

CAN I REPORT A CRIME TO EUROPOL?

No. Europol does not handle crime reports from citizens directly. All crime reports must be addressed to the relevant national competent authority.