The Code of Conduct of Europol

1. Introduction

In accordance with Article 88 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ("Treaty"), the mission of Europol is to support and strengthen action by the Member States’ law enforcement services and their mutual cooperation in preventing and combating serious crime affecting two or more Member States, terrorism and forms of crime which affect a common interest covered by a Union policy.

The cultural diversity at Europol requires a Code of Conduct ("Code") to support highest levels of professional and personal integrity.

The nature of Europol as a law enforcement authority delivering a public service entails EU citizens having confidence that Europol acts effectively, efficiently, transparently and in a respectable manner, in accordance with the principles of good governance (as stipulated in Article 15 of the Treaty) and good administration (as provided for in Article 41 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union).

This Code also embodies the EU public service principles, namely commitment to the EU and its citizens, integrity, objectivity, respect for others and transparency as defined by the European Ombudsman, with a view to meeting expectations of the general public towards the bodies and entities of the EU.

Europol works in a collaborative and non-competitive fashion, bringing together a wide range of skills, experiences and competencies to deliver unique services.

This Code therefore aims to help create an organisational culture across the agency that is committed to the promotion of ethical and professional performance and to contribute to upholding a corporate identity that is consistent with the vision, mission and values of Europol. It illustrates the high standards of integrity and of personal and professional conduct that Europol staff are expected to meet in discharging their responsibilities, individually, towards colleagues and on behalf of Europol.

The Code is applicable to all Europol staff members who are subject to an employment contract awarded under the respective staff rules applicable to Europol, Seconded National Experts (SNEs), interns and trainees. Europol also expects that all other persons working for or at Europol act in conformity with the principles of this Code.

This Code represents an overall complementary framework, in addition to the specific duties and responsibilities set out within the applicable legal rules, acts, decisions, policies, guidance documentation etc.

2. Statement of Europol’s Values

Europol fulfils its commitments through the efforts of its staff. In line with its mission and vision, it attaches utmost importance to the following five values which best characterise the culture of Europol and the work of its staff:

1. Service;
2. Integrity;
3. Accountability;
4. Initiative; and
5. Teamwork.
The Europol Values represent what the organisation stands for and guide the implementation of Europol’s goals as set out in its Strategy 2016-2020:

- Europol will be the European Union criminal information hub, providing information sharing capabilities to law enforcement authorities in the Member States.
- Europol will provide the most effective operational support and expertise to Member States’ investigations by developing and employing a comprehensive portfolio of services.
- Europol will be an efficient organisation with effective governance arrangements and a positive reputation.

In line with Europol’s Values, the agency adheres to the key principles of good governance, as promoted by the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour: Lawfulness; Absence of discrimination; Proportionality, Absence of abuse of power; Impartiality and independence; Objectivity; Legitimate expectations, consistency, and advice; Fairness and Courtesy.

Europol upholds and continuously improves a data protection and security regime of the highest standard, in order to foster trust in Europol’s support activities on a daily basis.

3. Europol’s Code of Conduct

Given the role and activities undertaken by Europol staff who is subject to this Code (hereinafter referred to as ‘all staff’ or equivalent), Member States, cooperation partners, other interested stakeholders and the public have a right to expect the highest standards of behaviour as a result of the principles set out in this Code.

The following reflects these expectations and provides a general guide to the behaviour expected from them. It is obvious that not all circumstances can be covered in this document but it is expected that the general principles can and will be applied across the agency.

Three basic areas of responsibility exist in relation to this Code:

1. Individual conduct;
2. Conduct towards colleagues and the public;
3. Conduct towards Europol.

Each area will reflect the Europol Values and EU public service principles established by the European Ombudsman, respecting the differences between people, maintaining confidentiality, remaining fit for duty and being prepared to challenge inappropriate behaviour where it is exhibited.

3.1. Individual Conduct

- Everyone covered by this Code is required to behave in accordance with the highest standards of professional ethics, honesty and integrity at all times when carrying out their duties, as well as during events, functions or social activities held at or organised by Europol.
- All staff shall fulfil their work in a skilled manner with care, discipline, courtesy and efficiency.
- Human dignity shall at all times be respected and everyone shall maintain and uphold fundamental rights.
- Everyone shall respect the law. Europol staff may be immune from legal proceedings solely in respect of acts performed by them in their official capacity.
- Where anyone believes that he or she is being required to act in a manner which he or she deems to be illegal, unethical or which raises a fundamental issue of conscience, he or she should raise it in accordance with the established reporting lines.
- Anyone placed under a criminal investigation shall immediately inform the Executive Director or respective national authorities, based on the corresponding reporting lines.
- Everyone must prevent and avoid any potential conflict between their personal and work related interests. Europol’s specific guidance on conflict of interest must be observed.
Everyone is expected to behave so as not to interfere with their official duties at Europol, in particular by avoiding dubious associations and refraining from activities, including those related to social media presence, which might reflect adversely upon the position of Europol, discredit the agency or cause reputational damage to the organisation.

Any political or public activity outside the scope of professional duties shall not be such as to harm the confidence in the impartial performance of duties.

Subject to Europol’s specific security and confidentiality framework, no-one shall disclose to any person or third party outside Europol information which has been obtained in the performance of duties.

No-one shall appear for duty or be on duty, while being unfit, in particular, due to the consumption of intoxicants (such as alcohol), medication or hazardous substances.

3.2. Conduct towards colleagues and the public

Interpersonal contact shall at all times be governed by fairness, respect, politeness and tolerance. In line with Europol’s values, teamwork shall be promoted as a mutual effort and cultural diversity shall be respected.

All colleagues and all persons with whom those covered by the Code interact in a professional context are to be treated equally in a respectful and professional manner so as not to cause offence either in language, appearance or behaviour.

No-one shall subject others to discriminatory behaviour, particularly that based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

Any form of psychological or sexual harassment and any sort of physical and verbal violence are not to be tolerated.

Everyone shall follow established reporting lines, accept responsibility for own actions and remain in all aspects accountable for their behaviour and for the performance of their duties.

In accordance with the confidentiality regime and with full respect for privacy, information shall be shared to the extent necessary in order to create a transparent working environment.

3.3. Conduct towards Europol

In carrying out their duties, all staff must, at all times, conduct themselves with loyalty to the agency and regardless of personal interests.

All staff shall neither take nor seek instructions from any government, authority, organisation or person outside Europol regarding the performance of duties.

All staff must perform their duties impartially and without favouring any particular individual, group, organisation or country and must avoid any conflict of interest in line with Europol’s specific guidance documentation.

Europol follows a ‘no gift culture’. No-one shall accept any gift item (gifts, favours or rewards, or payments of any kind) offered in relation to his/her professional capacity, except for the cases established in Europol’s specific guidance documentation.

No-one shall misuse his or her authority or position at Europol to obtain any personal benefit or privilege. This shall also apply to former Europol staff members who were subject to an employment contract awarded under the respective staff rules applicable to Europol, SNEs, interns or trainees previously working for Europol.

All media requests and contacts shall be addressed to and resolved only by duly authorised Europol staff.

When interacting with cooperation partners or the public, anyone representing Europol must behave in a manner befitting his or her position and in accordance with this Code.
Expenditure on behalf of Europol may only be committed with due authority; bearing in mind that at all times the most economical use must be made of Europol’s resources, in order to reflect sound financial management.

Europol facilities and equipment are to be used with respect and due care by all staff.

4. Interpretation and implementation

Living up to the principles of this Code is the responsibility of all individuals covered by this Code. The Directorate and all line managers shall provide direction and guidance to all staff while serving as an example in line with the principles of this Code.

Decisions and actions shall be explained as openly as possible and only be restricted for legitimate reasons.

Any Europol staff member, SNEs, interns or trainees, within the scope of the applicable rules, bringing personal issues to the attention of the agency, shall be supported as far as possible to resolve these. The concerned line manager bears principal responsibility to support staff in this regard.

Especially in light of the Europol’s Anti-Fraud Strategy adopted by the Europol Management Board, Europol follows a zero-tolerance approach to fraud. The Security Department is the responsible organisational entity for coordinating and implementing anti-fraud actions across Europol.

Europol’s guidance on whistle-blowing provides a framework to deal with potential illegal activities or instances of a serious failure to comply with professional duties that are identified by staff. Europol will support anyone reporting a breach of this Code, through the established reporting lines, unless such reports are found to be malicious or otherwise in bad faith. If required, breaches against the principles of the Code will lead to action by the Internal Investigations Service (IIS) in the Security Department. Intentional misconduct will lead to an administrative inquiry or an internal investigation with subsequent disciplinary action where applicable. The IIS will be supported by the Europol Human Resources Unit, especially in relation to suspected instances of psychological and sexual harassment, as well as through confidential counsellors across the organisation, in line with Europol’s respective corporate policy.

Europol may detail the outlined professional standards and principles of this Code in specific policies, decisions or guidance documentation in order to facilitate adherence to the Code.

The Internal Audit Capability (IAC), in its consultancy role, periodically reviews the overall framework related to the implementation of this Code, the concerned instruments and applied practices, taking into account the principles laid down by the IAC Charter.