



EUROJUST

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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The statistics on Eurojust cases included in this report were produced on the basis of data contained in the Eurojust case management system (CMS). The numbers were extracted in January 2024 and reflect the data available at that moment. Due to the ongoing nature of cases, possible discrepancies with previously reported numbers may exist, and statistics may be updated in the future.

Acronyms and abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence	eu-LISA	EU agency for operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of Freedom, Security and Justice
CATS	Coordinating Committee in the area of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters	ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training	EUROPOL	European Union Law Enforcement Agency
CIC	Core international crimes	FPI	European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
CICED	Core International Crimes Evidence Database	FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union	FTF	Foreign terrorist fighter
CMS	Case management system	ICC	International Criminal Court
CSO	Civil society organisation	ICPA	International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine
CTR	European Judicial Counter-Terrorism Register	IP	Intellectual property
DC	Digital Criminal Justice Programme	IPC	Intellectual property crime
DSA	Digital Services Act	JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
EAW	European Arrest Warrant	JHAAN	Justice and Home Affairs Agencies' Network
ECRIS-TCN	European Criminal Records Information System – Third Country Nationals	JIT	Joint investigation team
ECTC	European Counter Terrorism Centre	JIT MCS	Joint investigation team model case scenario
EIO	European Investigation Order	MLA	Mutual legal assistance
EJCN	European Judicial Cybercrime Network	MTIC	Missing Trader Intra-Community Fraud
EJN	European Judicial Network	NFT	Non-fungible token
EJTN	European Judicial Training Network	OCR	Optical character recognition
EL PacCTO	Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime	OAP	Operational Action Plan
EMJ	EuroMed Justice Programme	OCG	Organised crime group
EMJNet	Network of Contact Points for criminal justice authorities from South Partner Countries	OLAF	European Anti-Fraud Office
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats	OSINT	Open-source intelligence
EMSC	European Migrant Smuggling Centre	OSP	Online service providers
ENPE	European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment	PIF	Protection of the financial interests of the European Union
EPPO	European Public Prosecutor's Office	SIRIUS	Scientific Information Retrieval Integrated Utilisation System
ERA	Academy of European Law	SPC	South Partner Countries
EU	European Union	UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
EUIPO	European Union Intellectual Property Office	WBCJ	Western Balkans Criminal Justice project
		WB PaCT	Western Balkans Partnership against Crime and Terrorism

Forewords

Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission – European Commissioner for Values and Transparency

As the saying goes, *justice must be seen to be done*, and ever since its inception in 2002, Eurojust has been instrumental in helping to uphold in a visible way the rule of law across the European continent. As the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, Eurojust sits at the heart of international judicial cooperation. It serves as a hub where prosecutors and investigative judges from EU Member States and beyond ensure that criminals can and will be held accountable across international jurisdictions. As such, I am deeply grateful to Eurojust for its unrelenting dedication in promoting and safeguarding some of the values we hold most dear in the European Union.

From that perspective, 2023 was a crucial year at Eurojust. It saw record numbers in terms of its overall caseload, coordination meetings and newly established joint investigation teams. In supporting ongoing investigations in Member States, Eurojust's role is central in weaving a tight fabric among judicial authorities in our Union, and this part of its work will only gain in importance as the international dimension of organised crime continues to grow. Swindling and fraud, drug trafficking and money laundering – all transnational in nature – were among the main crime types for which Eurojust's support and assistance were required.

Yet the call on Eurojust has far exceeded the fight against serious and organised crime, as it has continued to take on an important role in the European Union's judicial response to the war of aggression against Ukraine. The fight for human values and against lawlessness is one in which we all have a role to play, and I welcome Eurojust's many efforts in 2023 to

put legislation and policies into practice. In light of the atrocities committed against Ukraine, 2023 was the year in which Eurojust launched its Core International Crimes Evidence Database (CICED) to which – in addition to Ukraine itself, the United States and Norway – 11 EU Member States currently contribute. I am hopeful that the number of contributing countries will continue to grow, and that together we will build an even stronger case against Russia's illegal and unjustified aggression in Ukraine. In addition, and with the help of the European Commission, 2023 was also the year in which the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA) saw the light of day and started its operations from Eurojust's premises in The Hague.

With all this in mind, I would like to warmly thank Eurojust and its entire staff for the excellent work we have seen in 2023 under the leadership of President Ladislav Hamran, which the Commission fully supports. I look forward to much more to come in the years ahead.



Ladislav Hamran, Eurojust President

The only constant in life is change, and 2023 has been a year for Eurojust which brought exactly that. Eurojust's role in the European Union's judicial response to the continuing war of aggression against Ukraine has been at the heart of much of our work in the past 12 months. The launch of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression in Ukraine (ICPA) in July 2023 and the establishment of the Core International Crimes Evidence Data Base (CICED) have been crucial, and we are keen to further support the fight against impunity for atrocity crimes. We expect our work in this field to grow substantially in years to come and to help close the security chain across borders and jurisdictions.

In June 2023, we launched Eurojust's Digital Criminal Justice Programme, which will lead to faster and closer collaboration between ourselves, EU Member States, partners and third countries. At the same time, 2023 was a year in which our casework rose to record levels. We are grateful for the confidence prosecutors and judges from across the continent and beyond continue to place in us. Eurojust last year supported 13 164 cases, representing a 14% year-on-year increase, and hosted 577 coordination meetings on ongoing investigations. In addition and possibly even more important, 5 710 files of our overall workload consisted of new cases, up from 5 227 in 2022. These figures bear witness to the ever-growing international dimension of organised crime and to the added value Eurojust and its work represent to judicial professionals not just in the European Union, but increasingly to those in partner countries too. In addition to the ten Liaison Prosecutors (LP) stationed at Eurojust from non-EU countries, the LP-network grew in 2023 with a prosecutor from the Republic of Moldova, and we look forward to its further expansion in 2024.

With all this in mind, let me thank all our partners for their continued support to Eurojust's mission and I look forward to an opportunity of meeting you in The Hague.



Eurojust Presidency 2023 (left to right):
Margarita Šniutytė-Daugėlienė, Vice-President; *Ladislav Hamran*, President; and *Boštjan Škrlec*, Vice-President

Eurojust at a glance



EUROJUST

WHAT IS EUROJUST?

Eurojust is the [EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation](#). We are a specialised [hub](#) providing tailor-made support to **prosecutors and judges** from across the EU and beyond.

To effectively tackle cross-border crime, we also host [networks](#) and run several [programmes and projects](#).



WHY EUROJUST?

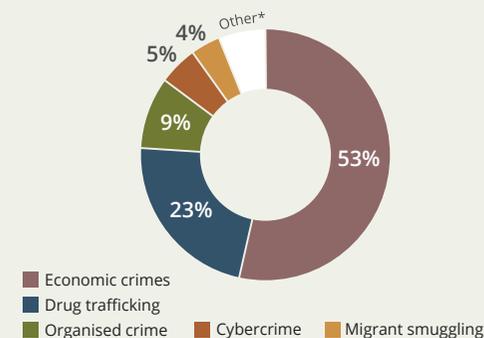
Working across 27 judicial systems is complex. Through our unique know-how, we ensure that national borders are no obstacle to prosecuting criminals and getting justice done. In addition to our **legal expertise**, we provide **secure meeting rooms** with **state-of-the-art IT systems** and **interpretation facilities**, as well as a [24/7 on-call service](#).

WHAT IS OUR IMPACT?

Each year, [Eurojust contributes](#) to the arrest or surrender of **thousands of suspects** and the seizure or freezing of **billions of euros** worth of criminal assets.

Moreover, we help to deliver **justice to thousands of victims**, ensuring their identification, rescue and protection.

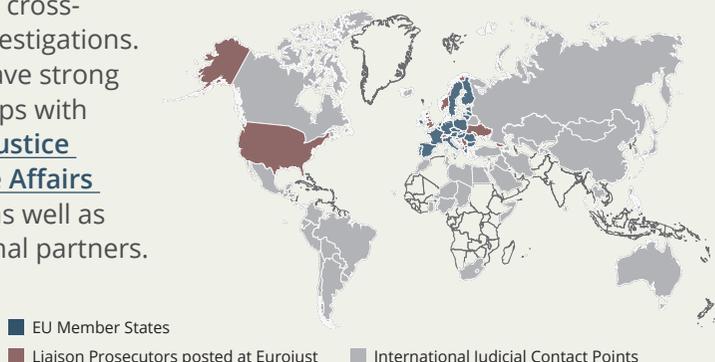
Top 5 crime types addressed by Eurojust in 2023



* Other crime types include trafficking in human beings, terrorism, core international crimes, environmental crime and intellectual property crime

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?

We have [Contact Points](#) in over 70 countries worldwide, as well as several [Liaison Prosecutors](#) from third countries posted at Eurojust. This global network works alongside EU Member States to provide support to cross-border investigations. We also have strong partnerships with other [EU Justice and Home Affairs agencies](#) as well as international partners.



HOW DO WE WORK?

We provide [our services](#) to national authorities throughout all stages of the criminal justice chain, from when a case is opened by a Member State until justice gets done in court:

- ▶ In [coordination meetings](#), we bring together prosecutors from all over Europe to work on cross-border crime cases.
- ▶ We support [joint investigation teams](#) – logistically, financially and with expertise.
- ▶ From our [coordination centre](#), joint action days against criminal networks are steered in real time, with arrests and searches taking place simultaneously in multiple countries.



2023 Highlights





Photos appearing in 2023 Highlights

Page 1 (Left to right starting from the top row)

- 1: Press briefing held at Eurojust to announce the start of Core International Crimes Evidence Database (CICED) operations, 23/02/2023
- 2: OLAF Director General **Ville Itälä** and Eurojust President **Ladislav Hamran** signing a new Working Arrangement, 29/03/2023
- 3: Visit of Minister of Justice **Rati Bregadze** of Georgia, 24/05/2023
- 4: Eurojust Vice-President **Boštjan Škrlec** welcoming State Secretary for European affairs **Marko Štucin** of the Republic of Slovenia, 13/07/2023
- 5: 60th plenary meeting of the European Judicial Network (EJN), marking its 25th anniversary, 12-14/06/2023
- 6: Conference held at Eurojust to mark the launch of the Western Balkans Criminal Justice Project, 15/05/2023
- 7: European Ombudsman Award for Good Administration presented to Eurojust, the Genocide Network Secretariat, and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for their joint publication of guidelines helping civil society document core international crimes and human rights violations, 28/06/2023 (photo: © Javier Bernal Revert)
- 8: Eurojust Vice-President **Margarita Šniutytė-Daugėlienė** welcoming Attorney General of the Republic of Colombia **Francisco Barbosa**, 19/10/2023

Page 2 (Left to right starting from the top row)

- 1: Launch of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine (ICPA) at Eurojust, 03/07/2023
- 2: 8th EU Day Against Impunity, co-organised by the Swedish Presidency of the Council, the European Commission, Eurojust and the Genocide Network, 22/05/2023 (photo: © Nebojša Tejić)
- 3: Members of the joint investigation team participating in the ICPA's first operational meeting (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Ukraine), 03/07/2023
- 4: Visit of Federal Minister of Justice **Alma Zadić** of the Republic of Austria, 06/11/2023
- 5: Annual meeting at Eurojust of EU Prosecutors General and Directors of Public Prosecutions, 5-6/10/2023
- 6: Appointment of Eurojust Administrative Director **Vincent Jamin**, 21/11/2022 (photo: © Europol)
- 7: Eurojust Open Day, 24/09/2023
- 8: Attorney General **Lateef Olasunkanmi Fagbemi-SAN** of Nigeria signing a Working Arrangement with Eurojust, 10/11/2023
- 9: Visit of President **Maia Sandu** of the Republic of Moldova, 16/10/2022

1. 2023 in figures

1.1 Operational outcomes

While Eurojust's work in 2023 continued to have a strong focus on supporting Member States' and partners' judicial response to the war in Ukraine, the Agency fully delivered on its mandate to fight all serious cross-border crimes, handling more than 13 000 cases.

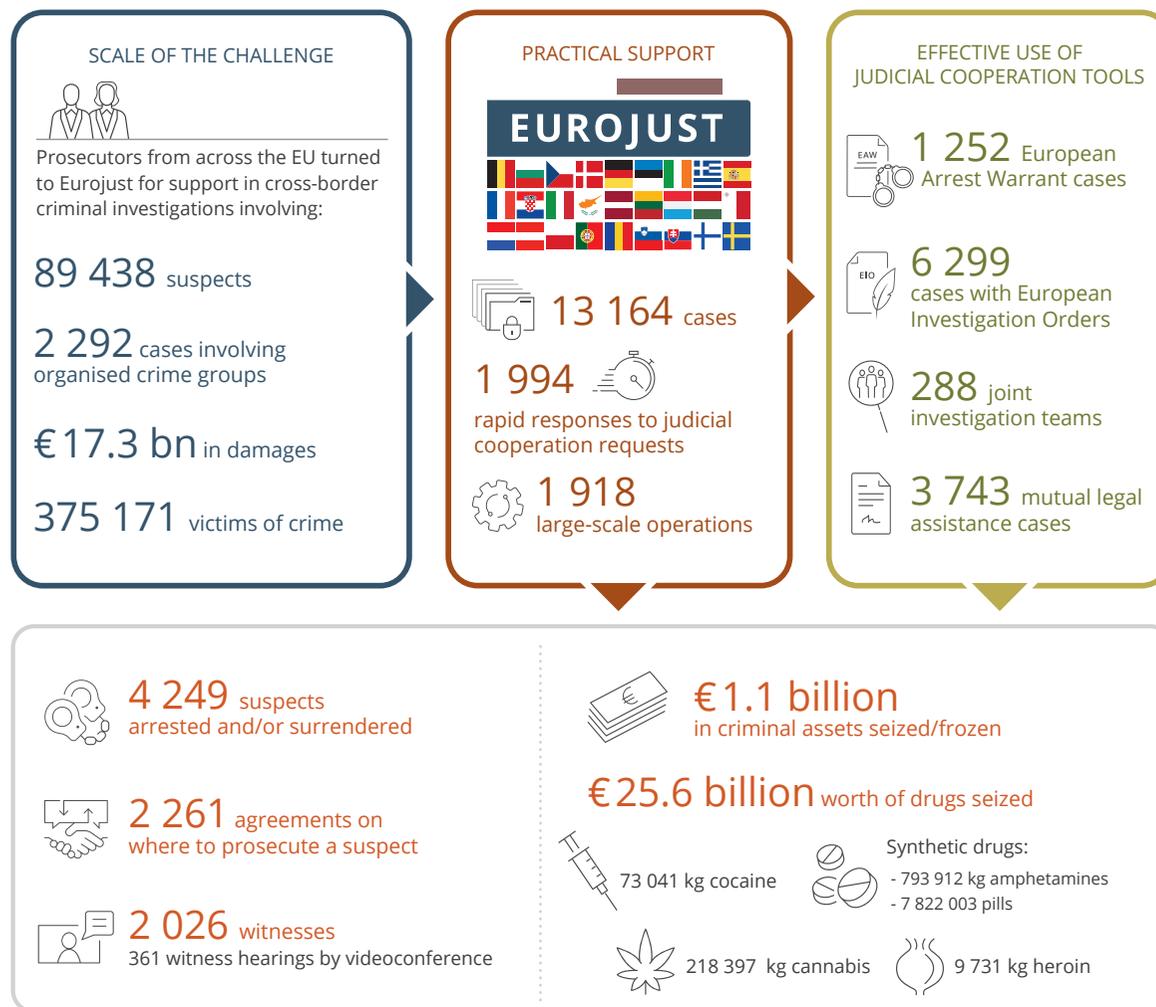
Eurojust contributed to the arrest of more than 4 200 suspects and the seizure and freezing of criminal assets worth over EUR 1 billion. The Agency also contributed to the seizure of drugs worth almost EUR 26 billion, which represents more than double the amount it helped seize in 2022.

Reflecting the growing scale of the challenge, the number of victims affected by the cases handled by the Agency in 2023 increased by 12% compared to 2022. The number of cases involving organised crime groups also increased by 12% compared to the previous year.

In 2023, Eurojust supported 9% more joint investigation teams than in 2022, illustrating national authorities' trust in and reliance on the Agency's services to facilitate judicial cooperation.

These impressive operational outcomes are the result of cross-border cooperation between judicial authorities enabled by Eurojust, in close cooperation with all actors in the criminal justice chain.

Justice Done – Operational Outcomes¹ in 2023



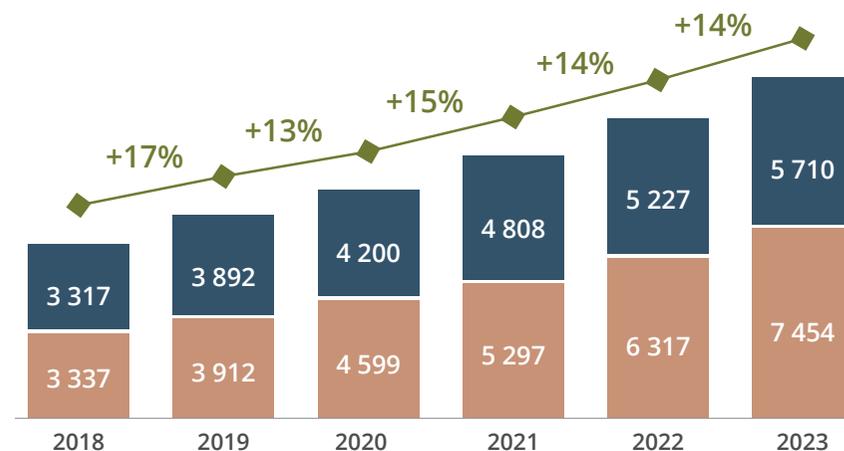
¹ It should be noted that these outcomes were also achieved through cases that were opened before 2023 and were included in the reporting on operational outcomes in Eurojust's 2022 Annual Report. The outcomes of these cases are included again for 2023 reporting purposes, since the cases were still ongoing.

1.2 Casework increase

Eurojust's casework continued to grow in 2023, with a 14% increase compared to the previous year. More than 5 700 new cases were opened in 2023, while more than 7 400 cases from previous years continued to receive legal, analytical, logistical and financial support from the Agency.

The high number of ongoing cases reflects the sustained assistance required over years by many of the increasingly complex investigations Eurojust supports.

■ New cases ■ Ongoing from previous years —◆— Growth rate



1.3 Overview of cases involving Member State National Desks

Overview of cases in 2023 involving Member State National Desks

MEMBER STATE National Desk	Cases initiated by the National Desk			Participation in cases initiated by other Desks		Participation in joint activities/meetings			
	New in 2023	No. of countries involved		Ongoing from previous years	New in 2023	Ongoing from previous years	Coordination meetings	JITs	Action days
		2	3 or more						
Belgium	126	97	29	225	355	618	95	31	5
Bulgaria	142	130	12	156	205	322	21	6	4
Czech Republic	118	100	18	255	145	246	43	34	3
Germany	899	811	88	902	744	1238	170	56	16
Estonia	53	37	16	86	64	134	27	11	2
Ireland	18	17	1	119	102	213	12	9	1
Greece	312	309	3	739	129	220	11	4	1
Spain	425	373	52	341	572	1000	77	18	5

MEMBER STATE National Desk	Cases initiated by the National Desk				Participation in cases initiated by other Desks		Participation in joint activities/meetings		
	New in 2023	No. of countries involved		Ongoing from previous years	New in 2023	Ongoing from previous years	Coordination meetings	JITs	Action days
		2	3 or more						
France	253	146	107	693	1113	1262	161	54	6
Croatia	68	65	3	30	116	169	6	0	0
Italy	602	500	102	645	420	677	101	55	10
Cyprus	99	98	1	149	65	213	8	0	4
Latvia	65	47	18	91	74	172	58	19	2
Lithuania	106	82	24	138	229	360	45	20	3
Luxembourg	13	10	3	72	77	192	10	1	1
Hungary	289	258	31	336	171	323	26	13	1
Malta	22	20	2	75	82	199	7	0	1
Netherlands	133	121	12	306	486	804	102	17	3
Austria	248	221	27	237	225	317	27	10	1
Poland	313	285	28	298	316	592	76	41	3
Portugal	160	150	10	153	177	238	32	7	2
Romania	224	191	33	168	316	358	68	39	3
Slovenia	265	234	31	146	66	115	8	3	2
Slovakia	97	93	4	132	110	220	30	15	1
Finland	75	68	7	101	47	107	24	13	0
Sweden	179	142	37	251	93	217	55	25	4
Denmark	54	47	7	101	56	157	11	11	1
TOTAL	5358	4652	706	6945	*	*	*	*	*

* These columns cannot be summed up, since more than one National Desk can be requested to participate in a single case, and coordination meetings, JITs and action days are often co-organised.

2. In focus in 2023

2.1 Eurojust's judicial work on the war in Ukraine

More than two years since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the war rages on with no clear end in sight. Serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continue to be committed. The war has triggered an unprecedented reaction from the international judicial community, with Eurojust's work sitting at the heart of the EU's judicial response.

In March 2022, only three weeks after the start of the war, Eurojust helped to set up a [joint investigation team \(JIT\) into alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine](#), in what is likely the fastest cross-border judicial response in history.

Because of the complexity of gathering evidence of core international crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes), it became clear that there was a need to amend Eurojust's Regulation to allow it to preserve, store and analyse such evidence. Following the adoption of the amendment in record time, [the Core International Crimes Evidence Database \(CICED\)](#) started operations in February 2023.

In the same month, the European Commission President announced the creation of the [International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine \(ICPA\)](#), which was launched at Eurojust in July 2023.



Since March 2023, Eurojust has been actively participating in the [EU Freeze and Seize Task Force](#) set up by the European Commission to ensure the effective implementation of EU sanctions against listed Russian and Belarussian oligarchs across the European Union (EU).

Also since March 2023, the Agency has been co-chairing the national investigations workstream of the [Ukraine Accountability Dialogue Group](#), together with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office.

In addition to the above activities, Eurojust hosts the [Genocide Network](#), whose unique expertise on the prosecution of core international crimes continues to guide practitioners working on Ukraine-related investigations through dedicated training sessions and publications.

“ Two years on since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we know that the road to justice is long and difficult – but we are determined to keep going, for as long as it takes. ”

Ladislav Hamran, Eurojust President

Joint investigation team into alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine

The [JIT](#), active since March 2022, consists of seven member countries (Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine), and since 2023 also involves other partners, either as participants or via a Memorandum of Understanding (see below). The JIT aims to facilitate investigations and prosecutions in the States concerned, as well as those which could be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The JIT enables close cooperation between all involved parties and includes benefits such as the swift exchange of evidence, quick and easy information sharing, and Eurojust's legal, analytical, logistical and financial assistance.

Eurojust ensures that the work of the JIT remains aligned with the various national Ukraine-related investigations currently ongoing in over 20 countries, including 17 EU Member States. Since 2022, 24 cases have been opened at Eurojust by national authorities in 10 Member States and 2 third countries in support of ongoing investigations related to war crimes and crimes against humanity following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine is involved in these cases through the Ukrainian Liaison Prosecutor at Eurojust.

(i) JIT developments in 2023

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the United States on 3 March, enabling practical arrangements for cooperation and the participation of US authorities in JIT coordination meetings.

Europol joined as a third participant on 10 October, following Eurojust and the ICC. Europol provides analytical and forensic assistance and supports the collection and analysis of data obtained from open sources, known as open-source intelligence (OSINT).

On 7 March 2023, the seven parties to the JIT amended the JIT agreement to reflect the role of the ICPA. The amendments to the JIT agreement define Eurojust's role in support of the ICPA.

During a coordination meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania on 13-14 April 2023, the JIT's members agreed to expand the JIT agreement to cover the crime of genocide, allegedly committed in Ukraine. JIT members also welcomed the U.S. Department of Justice's pledge to second a prosecutor to the ICPA and discussed the use of the ICPA to support its work.

During 2023, while efforts to collect evidence continued, JIT members also dedicated time to setting priorities in their prosecutorial strategies and actively building cases. This work will result in more cases moving from the investigation phase to the prosecution phase in the near future.

On 29 February, JIT members agreed to [prolong the JIT](#) until March 2026. This extension demonstrates not only the benefits that this form of cooperation brings, but also the strong partnership and trust between the JIT parties who, together with Eurojust, are determined to bring justice to Ukraine and its people.

(ii) Support to the JIT in 2023

Throughout 2023, Eurojust and the JITs Network Secretariat continued to provide critical support to all JIT parties. Since the establishment of the JIT, Eurojust has organised more than 20 large-scale coordination meetings between all parties involved, providing technical and logistical support. The Agency has also assisted the JIT by preparing legal and analytical reports on evidentiary and prosecutorial issues concerning core international crimes.

The JIT relies on the legal, analytical, financial, logistical, administrative and operational support of Eurojust and the JITs Network Secretariat. During 2023, the JITs Network Secretariat played an active role in supporting the JIT, including by assisting the JIT parties with a range of legal issues, as well as providing financial support and equipment to the JIT parties for secure communications.

In 2023, the JIT was awarded several grants amounting to approximately EUR 161 000. At the time of writing, the total amount awarded to the JIT since its establishment in 2022 is EUR 323 000. This funding has covered the JIT's costs related to travel, accommodation, translation, interpretation, specialist expertise and the purchase of low-value equipment.

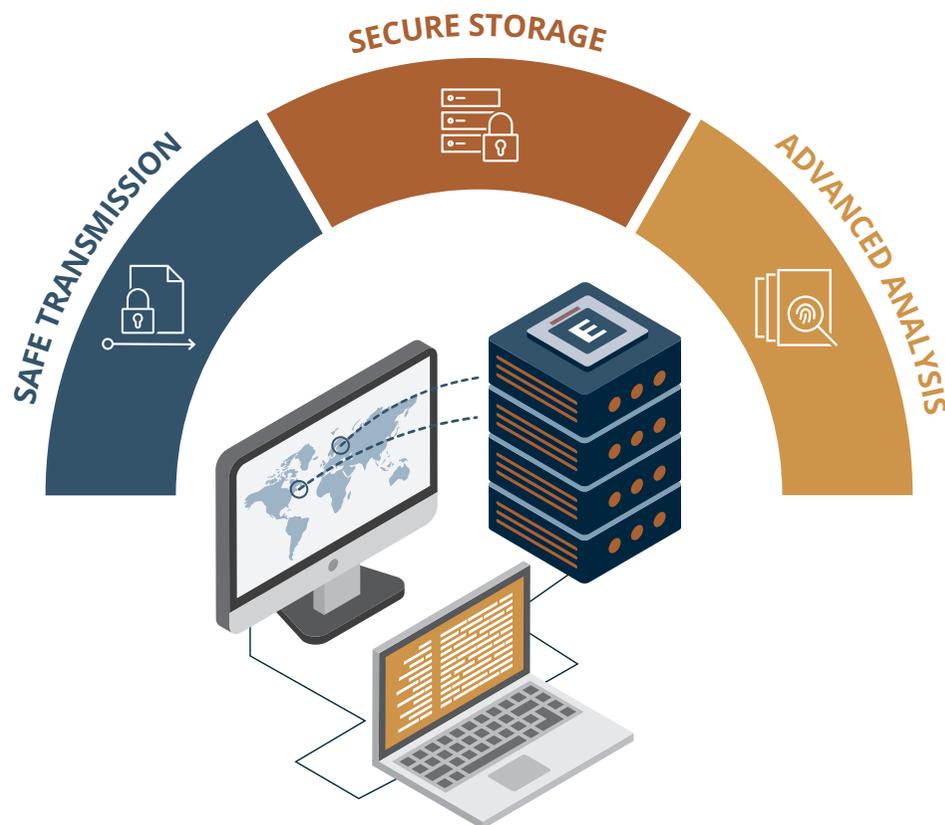
During 2023, the JIT was also awarded an additional loan for equipment (laptops, phones and printers) for secure communication. The JITs Network Secretariat assisted with delivering the hardware to the JIT members and providing access to a special application for encrypted communication. To respond to the JIT's specific needs, the JITs Network Secretariat has ensured agile support through its standard and urgent funding procedures under its 2023 JITs Funding Programme.

Core International Crimes Evidence Database (CICED)

On 23 February 2023, one year after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, Eurojust announced [CICED](#)'s start of operations. CICED is a unique, tailor-made judicial database to preserve, store and analyse evidence of core international crimes. CICED provides invaluable help to investigations related to the war in Ukraine by handling various pieces of evidence in different languages from multiple jurisdictions.

Centrally storing this evidence has many benefits, including the possibility to provide prosecutors with a detailed analysis of all the available evidence to help them develop effective prosecution strategies. CICED allows Eurojust to strengthen the coordination of national and international investigations, identify parallel investigations, and advise on investigation and prosecution strategies.

Since February 2023, CICED has received more than 2 000 files linked to evidence related to war crimes in Ukraine from the national authorities of 14 countries. On this basis, Eurojust's CICED team has started analysing the evidence and assisting with prosecutorial strategies and cases.



The database consists of three components: safe transmission, secure storage and advanced analysis of submitted evidence. The safe transmission component was implemented in December 2022, while the digital secure storage solution became available in July 2023.

The third component of the database was released in December 2023 and includes tools to enable the analysis of structured data, including persons, locations and dates. The new tool allows for relational and temporal analysis, and can also create graphical representations of the analytical data to visualise potential relationships. These developments allow for more complex and targeted searches for evidence as well as enriched analysis. This analysis of data is integrated into the structural and case bases analysis of the evidence in order to support national authorities and other stakeholders with their investigations.

To prove the scale and systemic nature of Russia's crimes in Ukraine, it is crucial that prosecution strategies rely on large sets of evidence. For this reason, national authorities are encouraged to submit evidence to the database in any format.

Eurojust continues to further develop the database. The next phase of implementation planned for 2024 includes the automation of optical character recognition (OCR) and translation, as well as making the evidence in CISED available to Eurojust's National Members.

International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA)

The ICPA is a unique coordination platform, [launched at Eurojust in July 2023](#), to support national investigations into the crime of aggression related to the war in Ukraine. Together with CISED, the ICPA is part of the support structure the Agency provides to the joint investigation team on alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine.

Thanks to the ICPA, independent prosecutors from different countries are able to work together in the same location on a regular basis, exchange evidence quickly and efficiently, and coordinate a common investigative and prosecution strategy. ICPA participants carry out their investigative activities in accordance with their national criminal procedure laws.

While discussions about a possible special tribunal are ongoing, the ICPA is working to ensure that crimes are well documented and crucial evidence is not lost. The work of the ICPA will prepare and contribute to future prosecutions of the crime of aggression. For this reason, translation of evidence is being considered, including into Ukrainian and English, to ensure that it can be used in various jurisdictions.

The ICPA currently consists of participants from six countries: Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. Furthermore, the United States has appointed a Special Prosecutor for the Crime of Aggression to support the ICPA's activities, and the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC has designated staff to participate in the ICPA. The Centre is funded by the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI). In November 2023, Eurojust welcomed a [financial contribution from the U.S. Department of State](#), via the European Commission's FPI Service, in support of the ICPA's work.



Participants in the ICPA benefit from Eurojust's tailor-made operational, technical, logistical and financial support. The Agency has a dedicated team of legal experts to assist the ICPA participants in their work. This team ensures optimal synergy between the work of the ICPA and CISED. It is possible to store evidence in CISED submitted for analysis by the ICPA participants' national authorities.

During 2023, ICPA participants made significant progress in determining the general approach to the investigative framework and principal components of cases on the crime of aggression. They also discussed the types of relevant evidence to focus on and the coordination of ongoing investigative efforts undertaken by individual ICPA participants at the national level. During the year, ICPA participants invited expert practitioners, legal scholars and other judicial experts to share their knowledge and experience.

The ICPA's work continues, in close cooperation with the JIT and CISED, and with the firm support of Eurojust.

Practical guidance and training for judicial practitioners

The Genocide Network, hosted by Eurojust, provides expertise on the investigation and prosecution of core international crimes to law enforcement and judicial practitioners, including those working on Ukraine-related investigations. It does this by producing expert reports, bringing relevant stakeholders together to exchange experiences, know-how and best practices, as well as conducting training and capacity-building sessions.

On 5-7 June 2023, in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Genocide Network, the European Judicial Training Network and the International Nuremberg Principles Academy co-organised a joint three-day executive training in Nuremberg for judges and prosecutors on investigating and prosecuting core international crimes. Judicial practitioners from across the European Union as well as Ukrainian prosecutors attended the training.

The training was delivered by international and national expert practitioners, who adopted a practical approach, combining a focus on legal frameworks and case-based exercises.

On 9 November 2023, the Genocide Network held its fourth ad hoc meeting on the war in Ukraine. The online event fostered an interactive and practice-oriented approach to facilitate cooperation and exchange of information on the respective activities of national authorities and civil society organisations. Participants included national authorities from EU Member States, the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Norway and Ukraine, as well as Eurojust, Europol and the ICC. As many as 20 civil society organisations from Ukraine, as well as those working at the international level, joined the meeting. The meeting was successful in building trust and cooperation between the national authorities and civil society organisations, resulting in bilateral contact and follow-up.

In October 2023, the Genocide Network published a paper entitled [*The crime of aggression in the national laws of EU Member States, Genocide Network Observer States and Ukraine*](#). It briefly presents the historical evolution of the crime of aggression under international law, examining how its main components have been shaped from the aftermath of the Second World War until the adoption of the 2010 Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute. It also provides an overview of the national criminal laws of EU Member States, Genocide Network Observer States and Ukraine and examines the English translations of domestic provisions defining the crime of aggression, highlighting common features and main differences. This publication provides valuable insights for practitioners currently working on crime of aggression cases related to the war in Ukraine.

EU Freeze and Seize Task Force

In 2023, Eurojust continued to exercise its coordinating role in the [*EU 'Freeze and Seize'*](#) Task Force, established by the European Commission to ensure the efficient implementation of EU sanctions against listed Russian and Belarusian oligarchs across the European Union, in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Eurojust continued to cross-check the list of individuals and companies sanctioned by the EU against Eurojust's data, identifying and confirming several new links. The Agency also supported cases of violation of EU sanctions and continued to collect relevant information at the national level

on past and ongoing investigations related to persons on the sanctions list, to facilitate criminal proceedings and to map out legal and practical obstacles that may hinder the confiscation of assets owned or controlled by the listed individuals and companies.

During Eurojust's first ever [meeting on Money Laundering and Asset Recovery](#) in June 2023, issues related to the criminalisation of the violation of the Union's restrictive measures were presented by the European Commission and discussed by the participants, with the input of Ukrainian practitioners. Eurojust's support to the EU Freeze and Seize Task Force since its inception was also presented by the Agency's Task Force Contact Point together with the Liaison Prosecutor for Ukraine at Eurojust.

In a meeting of the Task Force on 23 June 2023, Eurojust delivered a presentation on the circumvention of EU sanctions via third countries. During the year, Eurojust also participated regularly in the meetings of the Task Force subgroup on the exchange of best practices on criminal investigations and confiscation. In addition, Eurojust continued to participate in [Operation Oscar](#), led by Europol, to support the freezing of criminal assets owned by EU-sanctioned individuals and entities and provide judicial cooperation support to national authorities.

Ukraine Accountability Dialogue Group

The Ukraine Accountability Dialogue Group was launched by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs at the United for Justice Conference in Lviv, Ukraine in March 2023. The Dialogue Group is a coordination mechanism that offers countries, international organisations and stakeholders from civil society a platform to discuss and align national and international accountability initiatives.

Eurojust, together with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office, co-chairs the work stream on national investigations. The purpose of this work stream is to promote an understanding of key challenges in national investigations into core international crimes and human rights violations and, where possible, to identify solutions.

During 2023, the work stream focused on evidence-related challenges of a practical, cooperation-related, analytical and procedural nature. Eurojust has encountered these various challenges in the context of the Dialogue Group as well as in its daily work in supporting national investigations. While progress has been made, these and more challenges lie ahead. What is certain is that only a shared commitment will ensure justice is done, through a global, collective and well-coordinated effort.

² See <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/news/support-dutch-action-against-violation-export-sanctions-russia-three-arrests>

Two years on

A timeline of Eurojust's response to the war in Ukraine



24 February – Outbreak of war in Ukraine

1 June – Eurojust Regulation amended to include preservation, analysis and storage of evidence at Eurojust relating to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and related criminal offences

17 June – Eurojust publishes guidance on JITs with third countries



13 October – Romania becomes seventh JIT member

17 October – Launch of training sessions on prosecuting core international crimes for practitioners of JIT countries

2022

February

March

April

May

June

September

October

2 March – First coordination meeting on judicial cooperation initiated by Lithuania, involving 31 countries

11 March – Kick-off meeting of the Freeze and Seize Task Force



25 March – JIT agreement signed by authorities in Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine to facilitate investigations into alleged core international crimes in Ukraine



30 May – Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia become JIT members



21 September – Eurojust, the Genocide Network and the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor publish Guidelines for civil society organisations (receipt of European Ombudsman Award 2023)



ICPA

2 February – European Commission President announces International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression in Ukraine (ICPA) to be hosted at Eurojust

February

2023

March



3 March – National authorities participating in JIT sign Memorandum of Understanding with the United States

7 March – JIT agreement amended to reflect role of ICPA during United for Justice Conference held in Lviv



3 July – ICPA begins its operations at Eurojust

7 July – G7 Justice ministers meeting in Tokyo welcome start of ICPA operations

October

15 November – Financial contribution from U.S. State Department via the European Commission, in support of ICPA's work

November

2024

February

9 February – European Council underlines support for ICPA within Eurojust-supported JIT



23 February – Eurojust announces launch of Core International Crimes Evidence Database (CICED)



13-14 April – JIT members agree to also investigate alleged crimes of genocide

21 April – EU Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová visits Eurojust to discuss work on Ukraine



26 April – Eurojust's work in support of Ukraine presented at public hearing of the European Parliament



10 October – Europol becomes a JIT participant

29 February JIT agreement extended until 25 March 2026

2.2 Eurojust's progress towards digitalising criminal justice

Legislative and operational developments requiring the digitalisation of justice

Access to justice and facilitating cooperation between Member States are priorities for the EU to ensure freedom, security and justice. Access to justice needs to be maintained and keep pace with digital developments. This is the impetus behind the 2021 [proposal for a Regulation on the digitalisation of judicial cooperation and access to justice in cross-border civil, commercial and criminal matters](#). It outlines the need to establish a decentralised IT system comprising a network of national IT systems and interoperable access points. These systems should operate under the individual responsibility of each Member State, Union institution, agency or body, enabling secure and reliable cross-border exchange of information.

The latest [amendment to the Eurojust Regulation](#) provides for the development of a modernised Eurojust case management system (CMS) and establishes this decentralised IT system as the default channel for communication between Eurojust and the Member States. The amendment also reinforces the digital exchange of information in terrorism cases through the Counter-Terrorism Register (CTR) and simplifies the cooperation with third countries by providing an explicit legal basis for Eurojust's Liaison Prosecutors to access the CMS.

The Regulation requires the CMS to be connected to a network of IT systems and interoperable e-CODEX access points in the Member States. The Regulation provides for the semi-automated and structured transmission of information from national registers to Eurojust. The Regulation defines access to the CMS at the national level by the national correspondents for Eurojust, the national correspondents for issues relating to the competence of the EPPO and the national correspondents for Eurojust for terrorism matters.

In addition to these legislative developments, Eurojust's tasks have been evolving rapidly, incorporating new operational functions and resulting in a higher volume of information. Such information includes new types of data processed at Eurojust, for example in relation to the CICED, the hit/no hit

cross-matching with partners, the upcoming handling of requests from the European Criminal Records Information System – Third Country Nationals and data from other EU systems.

These operational and legislative developments are the driving forces behind the creation of Eurojust's Digital Criminal Justice (DCJ) Programme, which was launched in June 2023.

Eurojust's Digital Criminal Justice Programme

Eurojust's DCJ Programme steers the Agency's implementation of digitalisation requirements and related infrastructure, including the redesign of business processes, new technologies and change management. The vision of the DCJ Programme is to further strengthen operational efficiency and support to Eurojust's National Desks, facilitated by a modernised CMS and related systems.

The programme's objectives include:

- ▶ enhancing the support of Eurojust's National Desks to national authorities in the fight against cross-border crime by streamlining operations, sharing information and connecting cases;
- ▶ supporting faster and closer collaboration between Eurojust, Member States, partners and third countries;
- ▶ enabling Eurojust's National Desks and administration to adapt to working with the modernised CMS and exploit of its full potential.

The programme is governed by representatives from the Agency's College, National Desks, administration and the European Commission. This enables informed decision-making, effective stakeholder involvement and active communication across the organisation.

The programme will span several years and consist of various projects to deliver a modernised CMS, related IT infrastructure and business processes. It will be implemented in a phased approach, with an operational CMS by the end of 2025 as a first milestone.

BENEFITS OF THE DIGITAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAMME



Case Management

- Modernised **CMS** and related **new IT systems**
- Better identification of **links** between cases
- Better quality/accuracy of **data**



Seamless collaboration

- Increased **interoperability** of systems
- **Paperless** exchange of information
- Better identification of **coordination** needs

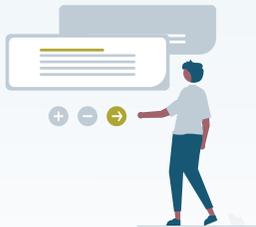


Best use of new IT systems

- Users ready to **adapt** to the new CMS and related systems
- **Time saved** on administrative and repetitive tasks
- **New skills** and competencies developed

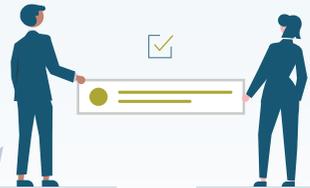
OBJECTIVES OF EUROJUST'S NEW CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

INCREASE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY



Define Eurojust's future way of working to meet growing demands through digitalisation

ENABLE CLOSE COLLABORATION & INTEROPERABILITY



Easily exchange and share information internally, and between competent judicial authorities and partners in an effective way

OPTIMISE THE USE OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION, TOOLS AND OTHER RESOURCES



Increase data quality to improve case link detection and provide data to the right people

ENSURE EASE OF USE



The new case management system is intuitive and adapted to the needs of the National Desks

SUSTAIN AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH IS TRUSTWORTHY & COMPLIANT WITH (DATA) REGULATIONS



Personal and operational data are processed according to the applicable data protection standards

The joint investigation team collaboration platform

Another project related to the DCJ Programme is the JIT collaboration platform, currently under development and aimed at improved and more efficient JIT cooperation between countries.

For years, JIT practitioners have been advocating for an online collaborative environment that would enable secure electronic exchange of information and evidence and secure electronic communication with other JIT members and participants.

The [Regulation \(EU\) 2023/969 establishing a collaboration platform to support the functioning of joint investigation teams](#) entered into force on 6 June 2023.

The purpose of the JITs collaboration platform is to facilitate the coordination and management of a JIT; the rapid and secure exchange and temporary storage of operational data (including large files); and secure communications between JIT members and participants. It will also contribute to the traceability of evidence exchange through logging and tracking mechanisms, and it will streamline JIT evaluations by providing for a collaborative evaluation process. Use of the platform will be voluntary.

During 2023, the JITs Network Secretariat, hosted by Eurojust, worked closely with the European Commission and its contractor to draft a business specification study for the implementation of the Regulation.

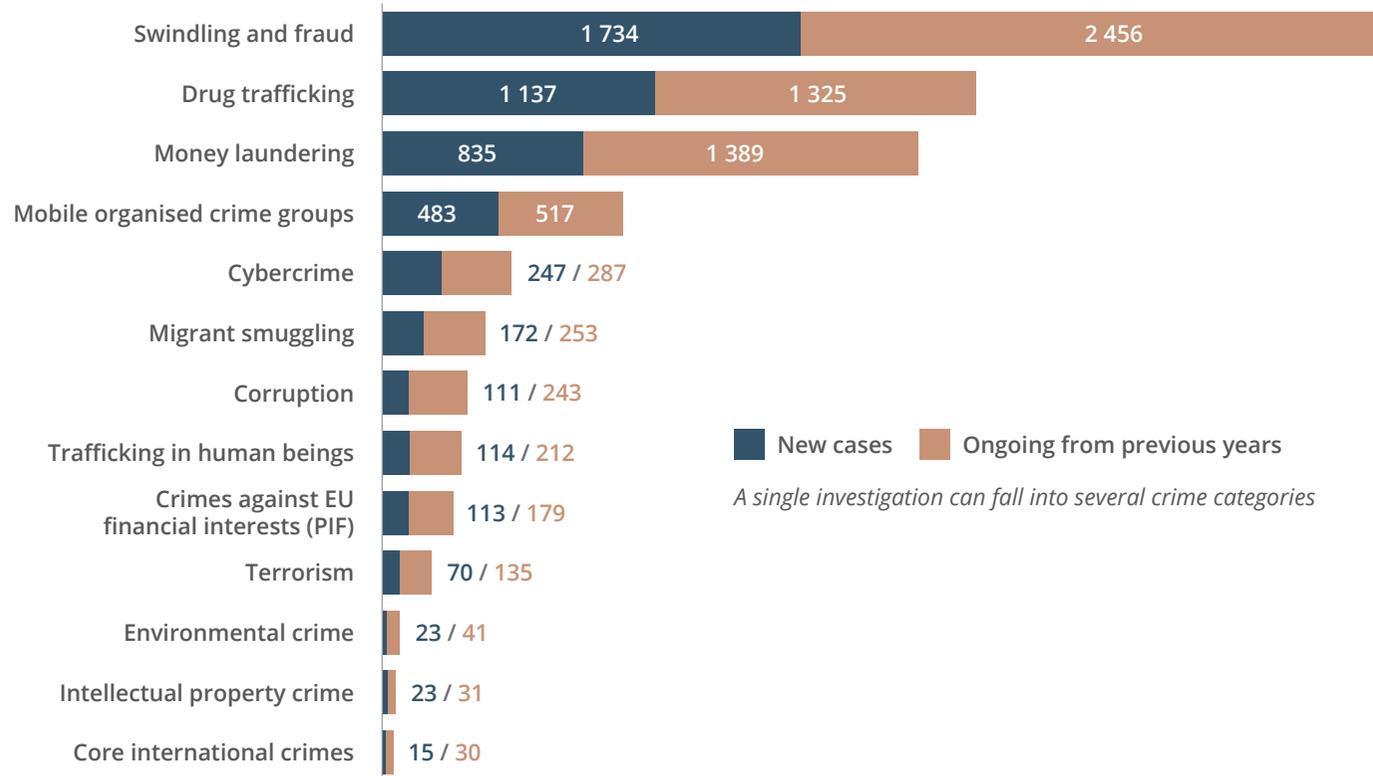
A working group composed of the European Commission, eu-LISA and the JITs Network Secretariat was set up. The working group met numerous times throughout 2023 and exchanged views on terminology, functionalities and data exchanges from a non-technical point of view, covering all processes that should be implemented in the future platform, including its modules, as well as online tools already managed by the JITs Network Secretariat.

Furthermore, an advisory group was set up, chaired by eu-LISA and composed of representatives from the EU Member States, the European Commission and the JITs Network Secretariat. The JITs Network Secretariat participated in three meetings of the advisory group in 2023, with the aim of preparing the business specification study and better understanding the needs of the collaboration platform's stakeholders.

During the process, interviews were conducted and a questionnaire was sent to the JIT National Experts and JIT practitioners to gather feedback on their needs and requirements to ensure the platform's usefulness and suitability. The business specification study was finalised in December 2023. Based on this, eu-LISA will work on implementing the technical aspects of the JITs collaboration platform in 2024, with a view to making it operational by December 2025.

3. Key crime areas

3.1 Overview of Eurojust-referred cases by crime type in 2023



During 2023, Eurojust dealt with more than 13 000 cases across 13 categories of serious cross-border crime, ranging from cybercrime and money laundering to trafficking in human beings and environmental crime.

The top three crime types handled by the Agency in 2023 continued to be swindling and fraud, drug trafficking and money laundering. Two thirds of all cases that Eurojust worked on in 2023 involved one of these crime types.

Over 4 000 cases in total focused on swindling and fraud crimes, while more than 2 400 cases dealt with drug trafficking and more than 2 200 cases with money laundering.

In addition to supporting a large number of ongoing cases from previous years across all crime types, the number of new cases referred to Eurojust increased in almost all crime categories in 2023 compared to 2022.

A significantly higher number of new cases were referred to the Agency in 2023 compared to 2022 in the areas of environmental crime (64%) and cybercrime (43%), although the overall number of cases referred to Eurojust in the former category remains low. Likewise, in 2023, national authorities requested Eurojust's assistance in a higher number of new cases related to terrorism, migrant smuggling and corruption, with a 30% increase compared to 2022. There was also an increase of around 20% in the number of new cases handled by the Agency concerning money laundering, organised crime and intellectual property crime.

Conversely, the number of new cases referred to Eurojust in 2023 concerning trafficking in human beings decreased by 8% compared to 2022. Overall, including ongoing cases from previous years, the Agency handled 5% fewer human trafficking cases in 2023 than in 2022. The number of new human trafficking cases referred to Eurojust has been decreasing consistently since 2020.

The number of new core international crime cases referred to the Agency also dropped in 2023 compared to the previous year. However, this should be understood in light of the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, when the number of new core international crime cases referred to the Agency more than tripled compared to the previous year. Therefore, considering both the ongoing cases from previous years and new cases, there was still an overall increase of 10% in the number of core international crime cases handled by Eurojust in 2023 compared to 2022. Moreover, comparing 2023 to 2021, before the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the number of new cases related to core international crimes has more than doubled, showing significant growth in this area.

3.2 Terrorism

Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is a key threat to the security and safety of EU Member States, as well as to democratic values and the rule of law. The cross-border nature of terrorist networks and activities calls for enhanced sharing of information and coordination to ensure a robust judicial response and bring perpetrators to justice.

- *The threat of jihadist terrorism in the EU remains significant.*
- *The various profiles of perpetrators and potential victims of violent right-wing extremism and terrorism bring additional challenges in effectively addressing the threat posed by individuals and groups motivated by such ideologies.*
- *The internet, social media and the darknet continue to be used to disseminate extremist and terrorist content, (self-) radicalise, incite and finance terrorist activities, and connect with individuals and groups abroad.*

Operational support to terrorism cases

Fighting terrorism remains an important pillar of Eurojust's operational work. In 2023, the Agency continued to support a large number of investigations and prosecutions in EU Member States and third countries, with a 30% increase in the number of newly registered cases in 2023 compared to 2022.

Eurojust's assistance was sought to facilitate (urgent) European Investigation Orders (EIOs) and European Arrest Warrants (EAWs), coordinate investigations, exchange information, avoid ne bis in idem situations and plan joint action days. The investigations and prosecutions coordinated by Eurojust



TERRORISM CASES IN 2023

205 CASES

(70 new cases,
135 ongoing from previous years)

9

JOINT INVESTIGATION TEAMS
(3 new JITs, 6 ongoing)

22

CASE-SPECIFIC
COORDINATION MEETINGS

concerned acts committed by terrorist groups, cells and individuals related to (planned) terrorist attacks, terrorism financing, training and/or recruitment for terrorism, public incitement or provocation to terrorism and radicalisation.

In some cases, in addition to terrorism, the investigations also addressed murder, kidnapping, money laundering, computer fraud, document forgery, illicit trafficking in arms, ammunition and explosives, drug trafficking, human trafficking, racism, xenophobia or other organised criminal activities.

- ▶ envisaging the use of handling codes to guide the possible further use and sharing of the information;
- ▶ determining the secure communication channels to be used for the transmission of information.

“ *The recent attacks in Belgium and France confirm that the threat of terrorism on European soil is still very much alive. Close coordination and early information sharing are crucial ingredients in the successful fight against this heinous crime, and this is precisely what we expect to achieve by reinforcing the Counter-Terrorism Register.* ”

Ladislav Hamran, Eurojust President

Enhanced digital information exchange in terrorism cases

On 31 October 2023, [Regulation \(EU\) 2023/2131](#) amending Eurojust Regulation (EU) 2018/1727 as regards digital information exchange in terrorism cases entered into force. As a result, the [European Judicial Counter-Terrorism Register](#) (CTR) has been reinforced. The Register, which was launched in 2019, aims to establish links between suspects and terrorist networks and ongoing and past investigations across the EU.

The Regulation enhances Eurojust’s ability to detect links between counter-terrorism investigations and prosecutions by:

- ▶ clarifying the obligation of national authorities to inform the Agency of any ongoing or concluded criminal investigations, prosecutions, court proceedings or decisions on terrorist offences;
- ▶ defining the specific categories of data to be shared, including information identifying the suspected, accused, convicted or acquitted natural/legal person, as well as information on the terrorist offence and national proceedings;
- ▶ setting out clear timelines for the initial transmission of information and for subsequent updates;

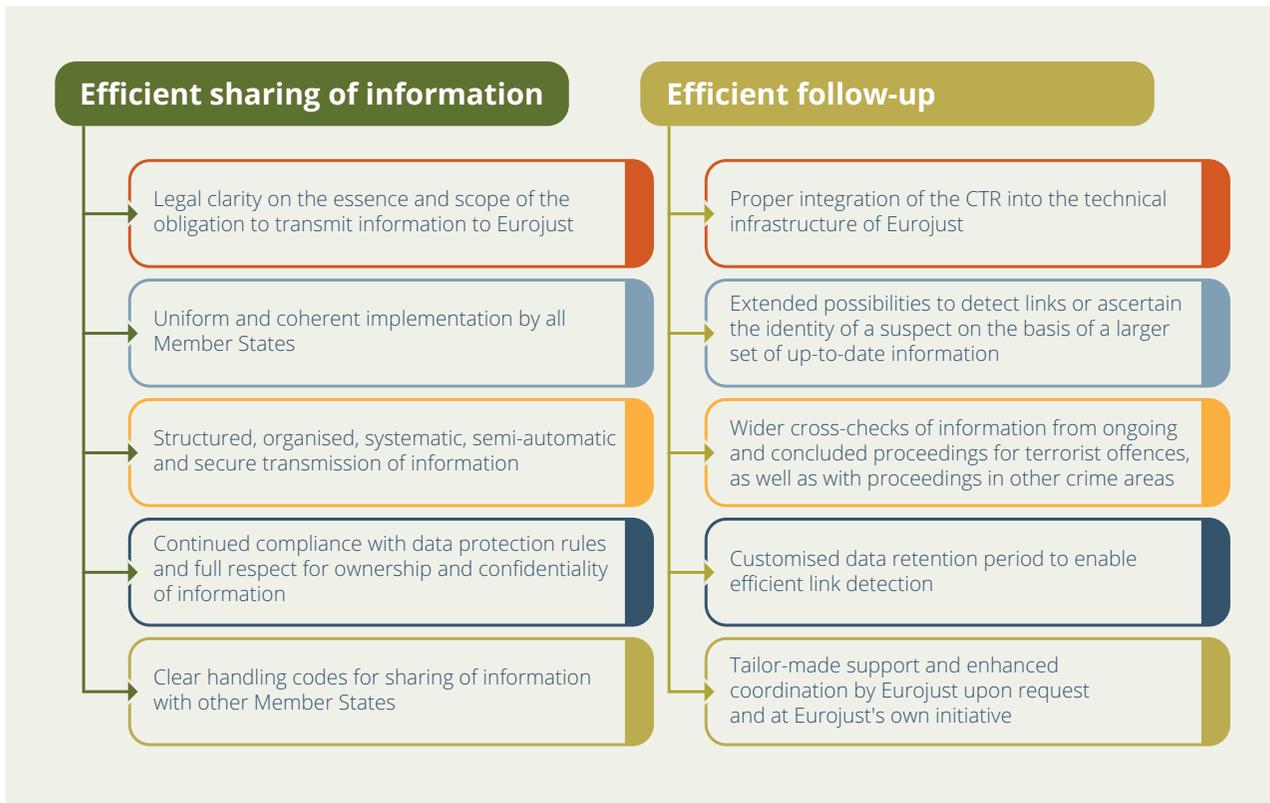
The CTR helps identify links between judicial proceedings that are not known to national authorities. The links between proceedings identified by Eurojust help national authorities to reveal the cross-border nature of terrorist cells and/or activities and better understand the connections to other serious crimes. Once a link is confirmed, national authorities may decide to follow up bilaterally or ask Eurojust for legal and operational assistance tailored to the specific needs of each case. Eurojust may also take a proactive role in coordinating cross-border cases and act on its own initiative, as provided for in the Eurojust Regulation.

The Regulation contributes to the European Union’s [digitalisation of justice](#) initiative (see chapter 2), and improves information exchange and coordination, as outlined in the [European Commission’s Counter-Terrorism Agenda](#).



Scan/click the QR code for more information
in the [CTR leaflet](#), available in all EU languages

EUROJUST REGULATION AMENDMENTS REINFORCING THE EUROPEAN JUDICIAL COUNTER-TERRORISM REGISTER – BENEFITS FOR MEMBER STATES



Insights from the 2023 Eurojust Meeting on Counter-Terrorism

In November 2023, Eurojust held its [annual meeting on counter-terrorism](#). The meeting brought together the national correspondents for Eurojust for terrorism matters, specialised prosecutors from both EU Member States and non-EU States, as well as representatives of EU institutions and agencies and international organisations.

between involved countries to safeguard victims' rights. EU Member States and partner third countries are encouraged to seek Eurojust's assistance to ensure the best possible protection and guarantee of victims' rights in cross-border cases.

Interesting verdicts and best practices were also on the agenda. The successfully concluded judicial proceedings on the Cataluña terrorist attacks in Spain in August 2017 were presented as a best practice. These proceedings

The amendments to the Eurojust Regulation regarding digital information exchange in terrorism cases and the strengthening of the CTR were an important point of discussion with participants during the meeting.

Victims' rights was another key issue. Participants shared their national experiences with mass trials with a focus on victims' rights, with particular reference to the trial concerning the terrorist attacks in Paris and Saint-Denis in France in November 2015 (see chapter 4 on victims' rights for more information). Victims should be protected and supported at all stages of the proceedings. Consulting and coordinating with all stakeholders (including civil parties, defence lawyers, journalists and police forces) at an early stage is key to establishing all necessary modalities before trial. In light of the cross-border nature of terrorism, the measures taken by national authorities should also take into account the specific needs of foreign victims. This can be facilitated by international cooperation, including through the involvement of Eurojust.

benefited from the early involvement of Eurojust, the setting up of a joint investigation team (JIT) through the Agency, and the effective use of EIOs and MLA requests among more than 10 countries, including EU Member States and third countries.

The meeting also addressed the dissemination of terrorist content online. The detection and referral of terrorist content is key in addressing the spread of terrorist propaganda online. Tools and platforms have been put in place to ensure efficient operational support so that law enforcement and judicial authorities can successfully conduct counter-terrorism investigations and prosecutions.

Hate speech and hate crime

Eurojust's coordination tools continued to be successfully used to support national authorities in investigating and prosecuting hate speech and hate crime. Eurojust facilitated the transmission and execution of EIOs, MLA requests and arrest warrants, and ensured efficient judicial coordination. The cases supported by Eurojust involved both EU Member States and third countries and concerned alleged offences committed online and offline. Depending on the facts of each case, hate speech and hate crime were investigated in relation to alleged terrorist offences, xenophobia and racism, or other types of criminal offences.

In 2023, Eurojust joined the High-Level Group on combatting hate speech and hate crime, as well as the dedicated EU working groups on reporting and data collection, hate speech online and victim support. During the year, Eurojust presented its work in support of hate crime investigations and prosecutions during several events in the framework of the working groups and participated in activities organised by the EU and UN.



Five right-wing terrorists arrested throughout Europe with the support of Eurojust and Europol



CRIME: Members of a right-wing organisation use an online platform for terrorism-related activities, including the dissemination of violent extremist propaganda, the active recruitment of new members and the sharing of manuals for 3D-printed weapons.

ACTION: The case is opened by Eurojust in July 2023 at the request of the Belgian authorities and is supported by Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC). Eurojust and Europol support the competent authorities in Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Lithuania, Romania and Italy in an international operation, including a joint action day on 9 November 2023.

RESULT: During the joint action day, five suspects are apprehended and an additional seven are interrogated. Data carriers and weapons are also seized.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: The Agency hosts two coordination meetings to facilitate judicial cooperation between the national authorities involved in the investigation. Eurojust supports the action day, together with Europol, to enable real-time coordination.



For more Eurojust cases and the latest developments in fighting drug trafficking, scan/click the QR code

3.3 Core international crimes

The crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes (known collectively as core international crimes), threaten the peace, security and well-being of our world. The escalation of nearby conflicts in the European Union's wider neighbourhood, combined with the influx of refugees to the Member States in recent years, has left States struggling to manage a growing number of challenging cross-border cases.

- *In 2023, the number of investigations and prosecutions of core international crimes opened before domestic jurisdictions of EU Member States continued to rise.*
- *This growing trend reflects the increasing willingness and ability of national authorities to play their part in the fight against impunity.*
- *These cases, mostly based on extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction, often represent the only hope for justice for victims and survivors living in all corners of the world.*

Operational support to core international crime (CIC) cases

The overall number of CIC cases handled by Eurojust increased once again in 2023, with a larger number of joint investigation teams supported by the Agency.

During 2023, Eurojust continued to support CIC investigations and prosecutions related to the armed conflict in Syria and various other countries, in addition to Ukraine. Support was requested in cases concerning all three categories of core international crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide), as well as related crimes.



CORE INTERNATIONAL CRIME CASES IN 2023

45 CASES
(15 new cases,
30 ongoing from previous years)

5
JOINT INVESTIGATION TEAMS
(2 new JITs, 3 ongoing)

20
CASE-SPECIFIC
COORDINATION MEETINGS

National judicial authorities sought the Agency's assistance to facilitate the establishment of JITs, the execution of (urgent) EIOs and MLA requests, the hearing of witnesses and the exchange of information with third countries.

Eurojust's [Core International Crimes Evidence Database \(CICED\)](#), which became operational in 2023, has been instrumental in enabling the Agency to support national judicial authorities in identifying evidence located in another country that may be relevant to their own investigation into one or more core international crimes.

Advanced Workshop on international humanitarian law and counter-terrorism

In April 2023, the Genocide Network and the Eurojust Counter-Terrorism Working Group organised an Advanced Workshop on international humanitarian law and counter-terrorism for national investigators and prosecutors. The workshop was designed around a fictitious case and focused on interlinkages between the two areas of law, exploring potential legal issues faced by investigators and prosecutors dealing with crimes committed during armed conflicts involving terrorist organisations.

33rd Genocide Network meeting on corporate criminal accountability for core international crimes

The [33rd Genocide Network meeting](#) in April 2023 was dedicated to the issue of corporate criminal accountability for core international crimes and associated challenges. Participants considered the general legal framework for such liability in various Member States, recent cases, experiences and trends, outstanding challenges, as well as expert views on how corporate liability can be addressed using creative accountability avenues.

Suggested approaches to hold companies headquartered or operating in the jurisdictions of Member States accountable as enablers of human rights violations or core international crimes were discussed. Investigating corporate crimes is complex and raises practical and legal challenges for law enforcement and prosecution services, but new online and open-source research tools can help investigators overcome some of these obstacles. Civil society can also play an important role in support of corporate liability cases.

34th Genocide Network meeting on core international crimes committed by ISIL against the Yezidi community

The [34th Genocide Network meeting](#) in November 2023 focused on the investigation and prosecution of core international crimes committed by ISIL against the Yezidi community in Iraq and Syria. With many ongoing investigations and prosecutions of crimes committed by EU nationals who joined ISIL, and with repatriations presenting possible new cases, the topic proved highly relevant and timely. Participants discussed the complexity involved in prosecuting the crime of genocide, including novel examples of how to prove criminal intent.

Specific issues discussed include the prosecution of perpetrators and bringing justice to Yezidi survivors, the relevance of the destruction of the Yezidi cultural and religious identity in the commission of genocide, strategies for prosecuting sexual violence and slavery, the role of women within ISIS, judicial cooperation between national authorities and access to evidence.

8th EU Day Against Impunity

In recent years, EU Member States have secured convictions for crimes committed as far back as 40 years ago in places such as Syria, Afghanistan or Rwanda. This demonstrates how universal jurisdiction has served as a powerful tool in the fight against impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The EU Day Against Impunity is an annual event that promotes national investigations and prosecutions into genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It recognises the efforts of the European Union and Member States to enforce international criminal law and addresses the position and

participation of victims in criminal proceedings. In 2023, the [EU Day Against Impunity](#) was co-organised by the Swedish Presidency of the Council, the European Commission, Eurojust and the Genocide Network. This edition was dedicated to stepping up the fight against impunity with national, EU and global responses.

“ 23 May marks the EU Day Against Impunity, but the quest for justice transcends national, continental and organisational boundaries. Core international crime investigations take place in a fragmented and complex operational landscape, and that is where Eurojust's contribution comes in. We pool expertise, gather evidence and ensure cooperation between prosecutors and judges so that justice can be delivered across borders. ”

Ladislav Hamran, Eurojust President

The EU Day Against Impunity 2023 took place in Ljubljana as part of the MLA Diplomatic Conference for the Adoption of the Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes and other International Crimes. The so-called Ljubljana-The Hague Convention was adopted during the [MLA Diplomatic Conference](#) and represents a landmark international treaty that will help to deliver justice to victims of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Convention ensures strengthened international legal cooperation and is expected to significantly reduce impunity for perpetrators of crimes.

The Convention also foresees that State parties should establish extraterritorial jurisdiction over core international crimes when the alleged offender is present on the State party's territory. More information is available in the Genocide Network's leaflet '[At a Glance: Universal Jurisdiction in EU Member States](#)', published on the occasion of the EU Day Against Impunity. The leaflet provides an overview of the current state of universal jurisdiction in EU Member States' legislations, and recent judgments from universal jurisdiction cases illustrating this legal principle in practice.



Scan/click the QR code
to access the publication

Application of the principle of legality, the right to a fair trial and other protected rights in core international crimes cases

This [report](#) published by the Genocide Network in October 2023 outlines the most prominent cases in which the European Court of Human Rights evaluated the application of Article 7 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The decisions presented in this report confirm that the retroactive application of domestic criminal law is, in certain cases, possible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide. The report also examines the application of universal jurisdiction regarding the right to a fair trial and the duty of a state to investigate these crimes effectively, as well as fair trial guarantees for the purpose of extradition.

The report offers national authorities comprehensive expertise and encourages them to explore the legal possibility of conducting investigations and subsequent prosecutions of core international crimes, even if the acts in question were committed before the relevant provisions in their national legislation were implemented.



Scan/click the QR code
to access the publication

The European Ombudsman Award for Good Administration 2023

The [Guidelines to help Civil Society Organisations](#) document international crimes and human rights violations for accountability purposes (jointly developed by Eurojust, the Genocide Network and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court) were nominated for the European Ombudsman's Award for Good Administration by the Slovak NGO, Human Rights League, in February 2023.

“ *The CSO Guidelines represent an outstanding example of a swift, needs-based, timely and rapid institutional reaction to fill the need for guidance, at the outbreak of the war, to ensure that information we collect is gathered in a way to be used as evidence in future prosecutions at the national and international level.* ”

Alexandra Malangone, Human Rights League

On 28 June 2023, the [Guidelines won the overall European Ombudsman Award for Good Administration](#). The Guidelines also received a separate award in the category of 'Excellence in Citizen-Oriented Delivery'.

The winning Guidelines are the result of extensive cooperation and bring together the expertise of Eurojust, the Genocide Network, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, civil society organisations (CSOs), national prosecutors and international partners. They empower CSOs to effectively collect and preserve information on international crimes and human rights violations, which may become admissible evidence in court. Concrete guidance is given on how to document information, including information collected on the ground during international conflicts, for the purpose of supporting future national or international prosecutions.

Around 1 000 copies of the Guidelines were printed in 2023 and distributed to CSOs during several events and round tables. The authors are working on an outreach strategy to ensure further dissemination of the Guidelines, including several technical briefings that started in 2023 for specific regions where the Guidelines will be particularly useful. The Guidelines are currently available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Ukrainian.



From left to right: Matevž Pezdirc, Head of Genocide Network Secretariat, Emily O'Reilly, European Ombudsman, Cristiana Ribeiro, Investigations Coordinator, Office of Prosecutor, International Court
28 June 2023 - Brussels, Belgium - European Ombudsman 'Award for Good Administration' 2023. © Bernal Revert / BR&U



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Belgium and Netherlands sign up to joint investigation team targeting crimes against Yezidi victims in Syria and Iraq



CRIME: During the armed conflict in Syria and Iraq, core international crimes are committed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) against the Yezidi population.

ACTION: The JIT targeting crimes against Yezidi victims in Syria and Iraq is extended. The JIT agreement, initially signed between Sweden and France in October 2021, is extended to judicial and law enforcement authorities in Belgium in October 2022 and the Netherlands in May 2023.

RESULT: The cooperation via the JIT leads to the identification of several suspects and victims relevant to national investigations. One example is the decision of the Stockholm District Court in March 2023 to issue a European Arrest Warrant for a Swedish citizen suspected of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity in Syria. In France, the identification of a Yezidi victim enables charges of genocide and crimes against humanity to be added to an existing case against a French jihadist couple. In the meantime, in Belgium, links have been made with the French investigations, and witnesses and victims of Belgian FTFs have been identified and interviewed thanks to the exchange of information within the JIT. In the Netherlands, an indictment has been issued for the crime of slavery committed against a Yezidi victim. The case against the accused, a Dutch citizen, is still pending in court.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust assists in setting up the JIT and organises five coordination meetings in 2023. The Agency also helps to determine possible conflicts of jurisdiction and avoid multiple interviews of the same victims. The Genocide Network Secretariat, hosted by the Agency, also supports by sharing knowledge, expertise and best practices between specialised Contact Points during the 33rd Genocide Network meeting, dedicated to CICs committed by ISIL against the Yezidi community.

3.4 Migrant smuggling

Migrant smuggling is a global criminal activity that often disrespects human life and impacts EU internal security in the pursuit of profit. Smuggling networks, often part of organised multinational criminal networks, frequently take advantage of migrants' vulnerability, leading to violence, abuse, exploitation and loss of life.

- In 2023, more than **280 000** irregular border crossings were detected at the EU's external borders³.
- More than **90%** of the irregular migrants who reach the EU arrive via smugglers⁴.
- Since 2014, over **60 000** migrants have lost their lives or gone missing during smuggling operations⁵.

Operational support to migrant smuggling cases

In 2023, Eurojust dealt with the highest number of migrant smuggling cases and JITs in this area in the Agency's history. Eurojust's casework covered migrant smuggling cases from the Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, the (North-) Eastern route, as well as the English Channel.

Through its casework, the Agency continued to execute the roadmap for the implementation of the [Renewed EU Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling \(2021-2025\)](#), adopted by its College in December 2021.

³ [Proposal for a Directive laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the Union](#)

⁴ [Proposal for a Directive laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the Union](#)

⁵ [The Project | Missing Migrants Project \(iom.int\)](#)



MIGRANT SMUGGLING CASES IN 2023

425 CASES

(172 new cases,
253 ongoing from previous years)

18

JOINT INVESTIGATION TEAMS

(8 new JITs, 10 ongoing)

31

CASE-SPECIFIC
COORDINATION MEETINGS

1

COORDINATED ACTION DAY

Greece opened the largest number of migrant smuggling cases at Eurojust during 2023, followed by Hungary. Bulgaria and Germany are the European countries that were most requested to participate in the Agency's cross-border migrant smuggling cases in 2023, while the United Kingdom and Serbia were the most requested third countries to contribute to international investigations in this area.

During 2023, Eurojust continued to be actively involved in the EMPACT Operational Action Plan on Migrant Smuggling, ensuring the judiciary's perspective is represented. Eurojust participates in nearly all operational actions in this area and co-leads 11 of them.

Cooperation with the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC)

In 2023, Eurojust stepped up its close cooperation with the EMSC through regular bilateral meetings and participation in the Europol Joint Liaison Task Force on Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings. This cooperation is important to ensure the judicial component of migrant smuggling and human trafficking cases. As a result, the information flow and operational cooperation between Eurojust and Europol significantly increased during 2023.

Eurojust Annual Meeting on Migrant Smuggling

In November 2023, Eurojust hosted its [annual forum](#) for judicial practitioners active in the fight against migrant smuggling. The meeting brought together more than 70 participants from Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and contributed to building mutual trust for judicial cooperation in this area.

Participants discussed the European Commission's legislative proposals on combatting migrant smuggling, as well as how to enforce UN sanctions in migrant smuggling investigations. Challenges and best practices in cooperation with third countries were also discussed with judicial practitioners from the Western Balkans Criminal Justice Project, the EuroMed Justice programme, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the West African Network of Central Authorities and Prosecutors. Eurojust's migrant smuggling casework was another focal point of the meeting, particularly from the perspective of the protection of victims' rights in migrant smuggling cases.

The Migrant Smuggling Focus Group of Prosecutors and Investigative Judges

The [Migrant Smuggling Focus Group](#) is an informal network of judicial practitioners specialised in migrant smuggling from all EU Member States and some non-EU States. It serves as an important hub to regularly connect national judicial actors working in this area.

Throughout 2023, Eurojust actively supported the Focus Group by providing practitioners with quarterly newsletters on the latest developments in migrant smuggling investigations, based on the Agency's casework. In April 2023, an online workshop for Focus Group members was held about challenges in judicial cooperation, based on a case study about a fictitious cross-border migrant smuggling investigation requiring international judicial cooperation. In July 2023, the Focus Group participated in a conference in Sarajevo dedicated to the challenges and opportunities for combatting migrant smuggling, with a focus on JITs between EU Member States and Western Balkan partners.

Members of the Focus Group provided expert input to Eurojust's overview of EU legislation on the [Legal Definition of Migrant Smuggling and/or Facilitation of Irregular Migration](#). This publication serves as a useful reference for judicial practitioners working on migrant smuggling cases.

In July 2023, Eurojust launched a new subgroup of the Focus Group dedicated to the Western Balkans. Members of the subgroup include EU Member States bordering the region and most Western Balkan countries. The goal

of the subgroup is to create mutual trust, enhance cooperation and enable personal contacts in each participating country. A kick-off meeting for the new subgroup was held in the margins of the Eurojust Annual Meeting on Migrant Smuggling in November 2023.

The EU's strengthened legal framework and Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling

In November 2023, the European Commission organised an international conference, attended by Eurojust's President, to launch a Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling. During the conference, proposals for new legislation to prevent and tackle this global crime were presented, to which Eurojust contributed.

On this occasion, the Commission put forward a [Proposal for a Directive laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the Union](#). This proposal has five key objectives, including: effectively prosecuting organised criminal networks responsible for migrant smuggling, harmonising penalties, expanding jurisdictional reach, reinforcing Member States' resources and capacities, and improving national data collection and reporting.

The European Commission also proposed a [Regulation on enhancing police cooperation in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings](#). This regulation aims to reinforce inter-agency cooperation in the fight against migrant smuggling and gives Eurojust an enhanced role within the [European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling](#) coordinated by Europol.

“ This legislation will allow Europol to work closer with EU agencies Eurojust and Frontex, and with Member State authorities. Our proposal will also allow for harsher penalties and a stricter definition of the crime of migrant smuggling. We are stepping up the fight against migrant smuggling and protecting people from falling into the hands of criminals. We are going after the smugglers, not the smuggled. ”

Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs

During the conference, the European Commission launched a call to action for a [Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling](#), involving EU institutions, Eurojust and other EU agencies, Member States, partner countries, international organisations and other stakeholders. A concerted and multi-dimensional Global Alliance is crucial to jointly ensure prevention, response, protection and alternatives to irregular migration, including addressing the root causes and facilitating legal pathways.



Network smuggling hundreds of migrants to Germany dismantled with Eurojust's support

CRIME: An organised crime group is suspected of smuggling more than 560 people to Germany and more than 300 people to Romania. The criminals charge the migrants between EUR 4 000 and EUR 10 000, depending on the route. Migrants travelling by lorry are forced to hide among cargo for several days in inhumane conditions, while others are required to cross borders on foot to avoid official border checkpoints. Many migrants are forced to stay in unhygienic, overcrowded temporary accommodation between the various parts of the journey.

ACTION: During a joint action day involving almost 200 officers, two suspects are taken into custody in Germany. Another nine individuals in Romania are taken to hearings. Fifteen places are searched, eleven of which in Romania.

RESULT: The law enforcement authorities in Germany, Romania and Serbia, supported by Eurojust and Europol, successfully dismantle the organised crime group. The authorities seize luxury cars, cash, several mobile phones and other evidence.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: To uncover and dismantle the internationally operating migrant smuggling network, Eurojust sets up a joint investigation team between the German, Romanian and Serbian authorities.



20 migrant smugglers sentenced to prison in Belgium with Eurojust support



CRIME: A criminal network is suspected of smuggling up to 10 000 Vietnamese nationals across the English Channel. Migrants are transported to the United Kingdom in small motorised boats supplied from Germany.

ACTION: An international operation is carried out by authorities in several countries, including Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, with the support of Eurojust and Europol. During the action day on 5 July 2022, 39 people are arrested and over 50 searches are carried out simultaneously in several countries.

Thanks to the intensive cooperation and exchange of information prior, during and following the joint operation, the authorities involved are able to deal a severe blow to one of the most significant crime groups involved in cross-Channel migrant smuggling.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust supports the investigation and plays a key role in facilitating judicial cross-border cooperation between all parties involved. The Agency hosts four coordination meetings to prepare for the joint action day. During the joint operation, Eurojust sets up a coordination centre to enable rapid cooperation between the judicial authorities.

JUSTICE DONE: On 18 October 2023, the Belgian Court of Bruges sentences 20 suspects to prison terms ranging from 30 months to 11 years for their involvement in migrant smuggling. They are ordered to pay fines of up to EUR 80 000.



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3.5 Trafficking in human beings

Human trafficking is a serious crime and a grave violation of fundamental rights. The war in Ukraine has further increased opportunities for traffickers to exploit vulnerable people fleeing the aggression. Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation remains the most prevalent form of exploitation in the EU, while labour exploitation has increased in recent years but remains underreported.

- Over **7 000** people become victims of human trafficking in the EU every year⁶.
- The annual cost of trafficking in human beings in the EU is estimated at up to **2.7 billion EUR**⁷.
- **87%** of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women and girls, while **66%** of victims of trafficking for labour exploitation are men⁸.

Operational support to human trafficking cases

Eurojust continued to assist national authorities with more than 300 human trafficking cases in 2023. Around one third of the total number of cases handled represent new cases referred to the Agency in 2023.

Romania opened the highest number of trafficking in human beings cases at the Agency during 2023, followed by France and Spain. Italy and Romania are the European countries that were most requested to participate in Eurojust's cross-border migrant smuggling cases in 2023, while the United Kingdom was the most requested third country to contribute to international investigations in this area.

⁶ [Proposal for a Directive on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings and protecting victims](#)

⁷ [Proposal for a Directive on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings and protecting victims](#)

⁸ [European Commission Report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings \(Fourth Report\)](#)



As in 2022, the number of overall cases and JITs dedicated to this crime area once again decreased. This may reflect the low number of prosecutions and convictions for human trafficking at the national level, due to the complex nature of judicial cooperation in this area.

Eurojust actively encourages national authorities to refer more cases to the Agency to identify or trigger parallel criminal proceedings in the European Union and beyond. Eurojust can assist with the coordination of such proceedings, the establishment of JITs, the successful prosecution of traffickers and the protection of victims.

The importance of digital evidence and financial investigations in human trafficking cases

Digital evidence and financial investigations were the central topics discussed at the second meeting of the Focus Group of prosecutors specialised in human trafficking in June 2023. The establishment of the Focus Group in 2021 was a key action of the [EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings \(2021-2025\)](#). The [meeting](#) focused on best practices based on investigations and prosecutions of complex human trafficking offences. The EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator underlined the need for a robust, coordinated criminal justice response to effectively tackle human trafficking cases.

Participants discussed the internet as an enabler of human trafficking and the importance of financial investigations for successful prosecutions and convictions. In approximately 95% of human trafficking cases, prosecutors identify the internet or social media as facilitators of human trafficking. The shift of human trafficking into the digital space necessitates regular

monitoring of the internet and social media in all Member States. However, this poses challenges in terms of the large volume of data, the lack of time, technical equipment and specialist knowledge.

Human trafficking is a crime mainly driven by the financial benefits for the perpetrators. Prosecutors agree that human trafficking investigations should therefore cover the financial aspects, not only to allow for the confiscation of assets and compensation of victims, but also to serve as evidence of the exploitation and to help dismantle the criminal network.

“ The fight against human trafficking has long been a high priority at the EU level. It requires very close cooperation and coordination across jurisdictions between key actors, including at the law enforcement and judicial levels. Only through joint efforts, can we successfully investigate, prosecute and convict traffickers as well as identify, assist and support victims. I value the close cooperation with the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator in supporting the networking of prosecutors specialised in this area. ”

Daniela Buruiana, Chair of the Eurojust Anti-Trafficking Working Group and National Member for Romania

European Parliament and Council agree on stronger rules to fight human trafficking

During 2023, the European Parliament and the Council reviewed the European Commission’s proposed amendments to the [Directive on preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings and protecting victims](#). In January 2024, they reached a political agreement on the proposed rules that will provide law enforcement and judicial authorities with stronger tools to investigate and prosecute new forms of exploitation, including those taking place online. The new legislation will also make it mandatory in all Member States to punish those who knowingly use services provided by victims of trafficking.

Eurojust contributed to the evaluation of the Directive based on the expertise gained through its casework. The Agency welcomes the expanded scope of the EU’s Anti-trafficking Directive, which will now include forced marriage, illegal adoption, exploitation of surrogacy and better support for victims. Based on its operational experience and strategic input, Eurojust contributed to the EU legislator’s decision to explicitly mention surrogacy in the Directive, as a potential type of exploitation, falling within the scope of the definition of human trafficking.

The Directive is expected to be formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in 2024. The new rules will come into force 20 days after their publication in the EU Official Journal, and Member States will have 2 years to implement the provisions.



EUROJUST

Action against criminal network dealing with human trafficking, pimping and money laundering

Since 2017: An organised crime group (OCG) recruits young Romanian women, some of them minors, and transports them to the United Kingdom and Ireland where they are sexually exploited. The prostitution service is advertised on dedicated escort websites and takes place in rented apartments in various cities. It generates large sums of money that are laundered through banks and other money transfer services to conceal their illicit origin.



December 2021 - The case is opened at Eurojust at the request of the Romanian authorities.

January 2022 – November 2023 - Four coordination meetings are hosted by the Agency to facilitate judicial cooperation and provide support for the coordinated investigative efforts.

May 2022 - A joint investigation team is set up between the Romanian, Irish and UK authorities, supported and funded by Eurojust.

April 2023 - During a joint action day on 19 April 2023, 12 suspects are charged in Romania, five of them are detained and four are put under judicial control. 19 house searches are carried out, 17 in Romania and 2 in Ireland. During the house searches, laptops, mobile phones and cards are seized. Six real estate properties, six premium and luxury vehicles and over EUR 22 500 in cash are frozen. With the support of Eurojust, judicial and law enforcement authorities in Romania, Ireland and the United Kingdom successfully dismantle the criminal network.

September 2023 - The Romanian authorities issue an indictment for setting up an OCG, trafficking in human beings, pimping and money laundering against 10 defendants (6 of whom are arrested and 4 of whom are under judicial control).

November 2023 - Eurojust hosts a coordination meeting dedicated to evaluating the JIT, and presenting the successful results including the reintegration of victims. Thanks to international judicial cooperation, victims are saved and provided safe shelter, as well as financial support.



For more Eurojust cases and the latest developments in fighting human trafficking, scan/click the QR code



Human trafficking network dismantled in the United Kingdom and Bulgaria



EUROJUST

November 2021 - The investigation into a human trafficking network begins in the United Kingdom (UK). The suspects approach vulnerable Bulgarian women and transport them to the UK, where they are forced to engage in prostitution and drug dealing in London and the surrounding area. The proceeds of the criminal activities are laundered through businesses and assets in the UK and Bulgaria.



January 2022 - The case is opened at Eurojust at the request of the UK authorities.

June 2022 - A joint investigation team is set up between the UK and Bulgarian authorities, supported and funded by Eurojust.

January – March 2023 - Two coordination meetings on 9 January 2023 and 7 March 2023 are hosted by the Agency to facilitate judicial cooperation and to prepare for the joint action day. Key issues are addressed, including the scope of the prosecution and jurisdiction. An agreement is reached that jurisdiction to prosecute all persons will be exercised in the United Kingdom.

April 2023 - During the joint action day on 26 April, nine suspects are arrested. Eight house searches are carried out, four in each country. Assets worth over EUR 1.1 million are seized, including cash, high-value vehicles and property. Five victims are identified and brought to safety.

October 2023 – JUSTICE DONE: The case is brought to trial at Southwark Crown Court and four defendants are given sentences ranging from six months custody to more than five years imprisonment.

3.6 Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking is one of the most serious security threats facing Europe today. The situation is escalating, with an unprecedented increase in illicit drugs available in Europe, particularly cocaine from South America. The drug trade continues to be one of the main profit-generating activities of organised crime, estimated to represent around one fifth of global crime proceeds⁹.

- **50%** of the most threatening criminal networks active in the EU are involved in drug trafficking¹⁰.
- **50%** of all homicides in Europe are directly connected to drug trafficking¹¹.
- **70%** of drug seizures take place in EU ports¹².

Operational support to drug trafficking cases

Drug trafficking was once again one of the top two crime types dealt with by the Agency in 2023. Eurojust handled almost 2 500 cases, of which just under half were new cases opened in 2023 and just over half were ongoing cases from previous years.

The number of drug trafficking cases addressed by the Agency continues to increase, with more than double the number of cases registered in 2023 compared to 2020. The number of joint investigation teams and coordinated action days dedicated to drug-related cases also increased in 2023 compared to previous years.



During 2023, Germany initiated the largest number of cross-border drug trafficking cases at Eurojust, followed by Italy. In 2023, France was the country most requested to participate in cross-border drug trafficking cases at the Agency, followed by Spain and the Netherlands.

Cocaine and cannabis cases on the rise

Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug in the European Union, with cocaine in second place. The number of cannabis and cocaine cases referred to Eurojust has been steadily rising over the last five years, with a significant increase in cocaine cases in 2023.

Large quantities of cocaine are trafficked through Europe's seaports, which has led to unprecedented availability of cocaine in the European Union and a growing consumer market. Record quantities have been seized in the European Union every year since 2017. Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain report the highest quantities seized, reflecting their importance as entry points for cocaine¹³.

Eurojust has always dealt with a smaller number of heroin cases, but since 2019 this number was steadily increasing. In 2023, however, Eurojust saw a dramatic drop in the number of heroin cases referred to the Agency. 2023 also saw a small decrease in the number of cases referred to Eurojust related to synthetic or other types of drugs.

⁹ [EU Drug Markets: In-depth analysis | www.emcdda.europa.eu](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu)

¹⁰ [Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks](#)

¹¹ [EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime](#)

¹² [EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime](#)

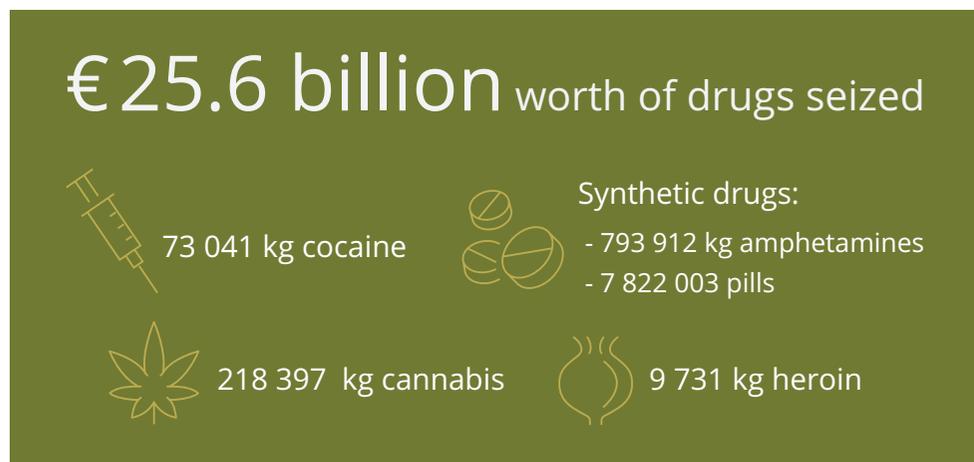
¹³ [EU Drug Markets: In-depth analysis | www.emcdda.europa.eu](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu)

Drug trafficking cases by drug type (2019–2023)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Trafficking in cocaine	174	219	303	423	526	1645
Trafficking in cannabis	144	174	333	456	478	1585
Trafficking in synthetic drugs	86	102	190	318	276	972
Trafficking in other types of drugs	117	141	202	252	222	934
Trafficking in heroin	44	57	85	115	47	348

EUR 25.6 billion worth of drugs seized in 2023

EUR 25.6 billion worth of drugs were seized during 2023 with the support of Eurojust – more than double the amount in 2022. Substantial amounts of cannabis, cocaine, heroin and synthetic drugs were seized, particularly at European ports, thanks in part to the Agency’s facilitation of judicial cooperation.



¹⁴ <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2832/03796>

Strengthening cooperation between European ports

Ports are crucial for the transport of goods across the EU and the proper functioning of the single market. They contribute to around 75% of the EU’s external trade volumes and 31% of the EU’s internal trade volumes¹⁴. However, the strategic role of ports makes them vulnerable to drug smuggling and exploitation by high-risk criminal networks.

In April 2023, a high-level delegation of [French magistrates from the Court of Appeal in Aix-en-Provence visited Eurojust](#) to discuss current trends in drug trafficking in ports with the Italian and Spanish judicial authorities. Following an analysis of the increase in narcotics trafficking through the Port of Marseille, the General Public Prosecutor's Office of Aix-en-Provence initiated contact with their Italian and Spanish counterparts to strengthen cooperation in the Mediterranean ports.

Following this first meeting, the French authorities plan to establish a task force for Mediterranean ports, bringing together judicial and law enforcement authorities to provide a stronger and more effective response to drug trafficking. Moreover, in October 2023, the European Commission proposed to strengthen the resilience of ports through a European Ports Alliance, of which Eurojust is now a member.

Encrypted communication as a facilitator of drug crime

Criminal networks are highly skilled at communicating secretly and concealing their plans, as shown by the dismantling of encrypted communication tools such as EncroChat, Sky ECC and ANOM, which have led to many arrests and seizures, thanks to the support of Eurojust and Europol. A significant proportion of Eurojust drug trafficking cases in 2023 were investigations linked to data coming from these encrypted communication networks.

In addition to the illegal use of encrypted communications, Eurojust’s casework illustrates that these high-risk criminal networks use corruption, infiltrate the legal economy, commit acts of violence and run parallel underground financial systems to hide their assets from detection.

Increased cooperation with third countries

Increasingly, drug trafficking investigations have a link to countries outside of the EU and, more and more, judicial practitioners are turning to these countries for cooperation. During 2023, Eurojust witnessed a rise in the number of requests for cooperation with third countries on drug trafficking cases. To enable this, Eurojust provided support through its Liaison Prosecutors posted at the Agency. Thanks to their involvement, the Agency led a series of very successful drug trafficking operations in 2023.

Countries with a Liaison Prosecutor located at Eurojust¹⁵ received 708 requests to participate in cases related to different crime types in 2023. 172 of these requests were related to drug trafficking cases, and led to more than 100 coordination meetings and almost 70 joint investigation teams. The United Kingdom, Serbia and Albania were the third countries most requested to participate in drug-related cross-border investigations during 2023. The Agency dealt with an increasing number of cases involving other third countries where Eurojust has Contact Points appointed by national authorities.

Eurojust has recently published guidelines for judicial practitioners on cooperation with third countries in drug trafficking cases. This practical guide highlights recurring issues and challenges in judicial cooperation on drug trafficking cases between EU Member States and countries with a Liaison Prosecutor posted at Eurojust.

Eurojust's contribution to fighting drug trafficking at EU level

Throughout the year, Eurojust continued to contribute to the implementation of the [EU Drugs Action Plan for 2021-2025](#). The Agency carried out its casework in this area in line with the actions set out in the Council Roadmap to combat drug trafficking, adopted in June 2022.

During 2023, Eurojust actively contributed to the two drug-related Operational Action Plans of [EMPACT](#) (the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats) by representing the judicial cooperation perspective in a significant number of operational actions.

The Agency also continued its strong cooperation with Europol, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) and the Council of Europe to ensure effective alignment and greater impact in this area.

New EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime

In October 2023, the European Commission presented a new [EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime](#). The roadmap establishes four priority areas: to strengthen the resilience of logistic hubs through a European Ports Alliance, to dismantle criminal networks, to increase prevention efforts and to strengthen cooperation with international partners. Eurojust is highlighted as a main EU actor across these priorities in 6 of the 17 actions listed.

Together with other EU bodies and Member States, Eurojust will continue to play a key role in strengthening law enforcement operations in ports, mapping the criminal networks that pose the biggest threats to society, facilitating digital and financial investigations, and boosting EU cooperation with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹⁵ [Albania, Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States.](#)



Crackdown on criminal network that produced and distributed methamphetamine in Europe

CRIME: An organised crime group uses a Romanian company to purchase raw materials and incorporate them into two pharmaceutical products, 50 and 120 milligram tablets of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. They use a formula that allows them to quickly extract these raw materials for the production of methamphetamine in clandestine laboratories.



Between January 2021 and February 2023, the members of the criminal group organise the transport and delivery of 168 788 870 tablets containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, from which at least 4.7 tonnes of methamphetamine is produced and distributed in Europe.

ACTION: Between 26 February and 2 March 2023, joint action days are organised to dismantle the criminal group. 16 suspects are arrested in the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, and over 3.3 million tablets containing raw material for the production of the drug are seized.

In Poland, 3 184 500 pills containing ephedrine worth approximately EUR 840 000 (PLN 4 012 470) and 121 776 pills containing pseudoephedrine are seized. Additionally, PLN 366 200 and EUR 177 215 are also seized. In Romania, approximately 3 tonnes of raw materials, several batches of medicines and approximately EUR 600 000 are seized. In the Czech Republic, EUR 148 163, CZK 711 082 and PLN 22 433 are seized, while in Slovakia, EUR 1 129 220 are seized.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust supports the establishment of a joint investigation team between the countries involved in November 2022. The Agency hosts three coordination meetings to facilitate judicial cooperation and support the coordinated investigative efforts.

JUSTICE DONE: During 2023, three of the five suspects prosecuted in Slovakia are convicted. One suspect is sentenced to three years and six months imprisonment and the forfeiture of the items recovered during the search. A second and third suspect are both sentenced to three years' imprisonment with probation for three years, along with the obligation to undergo psychological or psychiatric treatment, and required to forfeit items recovered during the search.



Most wanted Hungarian drug criminals arrested in Spain with Eurojust support



Between 2020 and 2021 - The suspects operate a professionally equipped and automated cannabis plantation and processing facility in Hungary.

May 2021 - The Hungarian authorities dismantle the facility. During the operation, the authorities seize 165 kg of marijuana and cocaine and assets worth over HUF 380 million (EUR 983 700). The authorities identify all 7 members of the criminal network responsible for importing 100 kg of marijuana and 10 kg of cocaine into Hungary on at least 10 occasions. Soon after the operation, two members are arrested, and the other five are placed on Europol's Europe's Most Wanted list. Meanwhile, three suspects flee to Spain.

18 July 2023 - The Hungarian authorities contact their Spanish counterparts to carry out a search of the suspects' hideout, where they are renting a house under false identities in the Spanish town of Calpe. The authorities request assistance from Eurojust for the execution of an EIO. On the same day, thanks to round-the-clock cooperation between the National Desks of Hungary and Spain at Eurojust, the Hungarian authorities are able to issue an EIO.

19 July 2023 - Just one day later, the EIO is executed in Spain. During the joint operation, the three suspects are arrested in Spain.



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3.7 Cybercrime

Cybercrime continues to grow and attracts criminals exploiting new opportunities offered by modern technologies. The prime threats to cybersecurity are ransomware, malware, social engineering, threats against data, denial-of-service attacks, internet threats, information manipulation and interference, and supply chain attacks.

- 2023 witnessed a significant increase in both the variety and quantity of cyberattacks and their consequences, with the ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine continuing to influence the cybersecurity landscape.
- Ransomware incidents surged in the first half of 2023 and remain the most prominent threat to international companies, public sector organisations, critical infrastructure and essential services.
- Social engineering attacks grew significantly in 2023 with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and new types of techniques, but phishing still remains the top attack vector¹⁶.

Operational support to cybercrime cases

In 2023, cybercrime was once again among the top five crime areas addressed by the Agency. Eurojust handled more than 500 cybercrime-related cases in 2023, with more than half representing new cases referred to the Agency.

The number of cybercrime-focused joint investigation teams and coordinated action days supported by Eurojust increased compared to 2022, while the number of related coordination meetings almost doubled.



In 2023, Eurojust's cybercrime casework was characterised by an increase in ransomware attacks, which continue to pose a major challenge for judicial and law enforcement authorities.

A key case in 2023 involved the dismantling of a [ransomware group in Ukraine](#), whose attacks affected over 1 800 victims in 71 countries, causing losses of several hundred million euros. Another significant case involved a major international operation against the [Ragnar Locker ransomware group](#), which has attacked 168 international companies worldwide since 2020. In both cases, the operations were successful thanks to Eurojust's facilitation of rapid cooperation between the judicial authorities involved.

Operational and strategic work related to cases involving encrypted communication platforms

Encryption is used by criminal organisations to evade investigation and prosecution. Judicial and law enforcement authorities often depend on access to encrypted digital data to carry out their investigative work. It is therefore crucial that digital data is gathered in a legal way so it can be admitted as evidence in court. Eurojust follows operational and strategic developments in this area by gathering and analysing relevant case-law for judicial authorities.

In 2023, the Agency continued to provide Member States with crucial assistance in cases related to encrypted communication platforms. Since Eurojust's support to the investigations related to the EncroChat communication platform in 2020 and the Sky ECC communication platform in 2021, the Agency has dealt with thousands of 'spin-off' cases related to drugs and organised crime, involving 30 countries. Since April 2021, Eurojust's

¹⁶ [ENISA Threat Landscape 2023 – ENISA \(europa.eu\)](#)

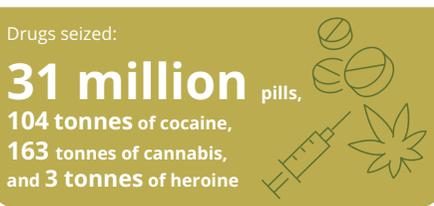
French Desk has processed around 2 700 requests for mutual legal assistance (MLA) and European Investigation Orders in ‘spin-off’ cases related to the decryption of Sky ECC communications. Moreover, in February 2023, judicial and law enforcement authorities in the Netherlands and Germany, supported by Eurojust, dismantled the [Exclu encrypted communication tool](#), which had an estimated 3 000 users, including members of organised crime groups.

During 2023, Eurojust contributed to two expert meetings of the [High-Level Group on access to data for effective law enforcement](#), launched by the European Commission in June 2023. The Group’s mission is to propose recommendations for the further development of Union policies to enhance and improve access to data for the purpose of effective law enforcement.

Cybercrime Judicial Monitor

In June 2023, Eurojust and the [European Judicial Cybercrime Network](#) published the eighth edition of their annual [Cybercrime Judicial Monitor](#), distributed to judicial and law enforcement authorities active in the fight against cybercrime and cyber-enabled crime.

RESULTS OF THE ENCROCHAT TAKE-DOWN AS OF JULY 2023



The report’s first section covers legislative developments in the area of cybercrime, cyber-enabled crime and electronic evidence in 2022, including adopted legislation (e.g. the Digital Services Act) as well as ongoing procedures (e.g. the Artificial Intelligence Act). The judicial analysis section presents summaries of court rulings from various EU Member States and non-EU countries. In 2022, several European countries reported court rulings on the culpability of persons operating darknet marketplaces and the use of captured encrypted communication data. The third section covers developments in data retention. In 2022, the Court of Justice of the European Union concluded three preliminary rulings, providing additional guidance on the implementation of (supranational) data retention rules in European countries. The final section is dedicated to the adoption of the EU legislation on European Production and Preservation Orders for electronic evidence in 2023.

EU and international legislative developments on cybercrime

The adoption of EU legislation on electronic evidence in 2023 marked a significant step forward for access to digital information in cross-border criminal investigations and prosecutions. The new legislation will bring ground-breaking changes to the process of cross-border gathering of electronic evidence. The EU Electronic Evidence legislative package was adopted in July 2023 and will apply as of mid-2026. Eurojust, together with the European Judicial Network (EJN) and the European Judicial Cybercrime Network (EJCN), contributed during the legislative process on the Electronic Evidence Regulation, by providing practitioners’ input on the European Production and Preservation Order certificates (EPOC and EPOC-PR) in annex to the Regulation.

The new legal powers created by the legislative package ([Electronic Evidence Regulation](#) and [Electronic Evidence Directive](#)) and the [Second Additional Protocol](#)¹⁷ to the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime ([Budapest Convention](#)¹⁸) will enable competent authorities to order the preservation

¹⁷ See also: <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/publication/second-additional-protocol-budapest-convention-cybercrime>

¹⁸ See also: <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/publication/budapest-convention-cybercrime-and-cross-border-access-electronic-evidence>

and production of electronic evidence directly from service providers, such as telecom companies, located abroad. The unprecedented procedures envisaged by this legislation are intended to work faster and in a more flexible way than the existing judicial cooperation instruments for the gathering of electronic evidence (i.e. EIO and MLA processes), as well as bring legal clarity on the process of gathering cross-border electronic evidence.

In September 2023, Eurojust and the Council of Europe co-organised a [workshop on international cooperation provisions of the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention](#). Discussions focused on the expedited disclosure of stored computer data in an emergency, as well as emergency mutual assistance, including the enhanced role of 24/7 Points of Contact established under the Budapest Convention.

In December 2023, the European Parliament and the Council reached a [political agreement on the Artificial Intelligence Act](#), later [endorsed by the European Parliament](#) in March 2024. The EU's AI Act is the first-ever comprehensive legal framework on AI worldwide. By guaranteeing the safety and fundamental rights of people and businesses, it will support the development, deployment and take-up of trustworthy AI in the EU, fostering responsible innovation. The [European Judicial Cybercrime Network](#), supported by Eurojust, discussed the misuse of AI by criminals during its 15th plenary meeting in November 2023. The network will continue to follow the developments in this area closely to identify challenges and share knowledge with judicial practitioners via the network's master classes for investigative prosecutors and judges working in this area.

Eurojust is closely monitoring all cyber-related legislative developments, including those in which it is not directly involved (such as the negotiations on the [CLOUD Act](#)¹⁹ or the [UN Convention on Cybercrime](#)), as they will have a considerable impact on the Agency's operational and strategic work. The [SIRIUS](#) project on cross-border access to electronic evidence, co-led by Eurojust, is developing [knowledge products](#) on the relevant legal instruments. It has and will continue to assist competent national authorities to navigate the increasingly complex legal framework and prepare them for the future application of these legislative developments.

¹⁹ See also: <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/publication/cloud-act>



Scan/click the QR code to watch this SIRIUS video explaining the new Electronic Evidence Regulation and its impact on the cross-border data acquisition process for EU authorities

Developments from the SIRIUS project on cross-border access to electronic evidence

The SIRIUS project, co-implemented by Eurojust and Europol, is a central reference point in the EU for knowledge sharing on cross-border access to electronic evidence. It offers a variety of services, such as guidelines, trainings and tools, to facilitate access to data held by service providers. SIRIUS serves a community of competent authorities from 47 countries, representing all EU Member States and a growing number of third countries, as well as the European Public Prosecutor's Office.



In 2023, the SIRIUS project celebrated its fifth anniversary, marking its evolution into a centre of excellence in the field of electronic evidence in the EU. On this occasion, the project updated its web presence on Eurojust's corporate website, which now features more than 20 legal and policy reviews on cross-border access to electronic evidence, made fully public for the first time.

In March 2023, the SIRIUS project held its annual [Advisory Board meeting at Eurojust's premises](#). Participants discussed the achievements of the project to date, as well as future plans for capacity building and further assistance to competent EU authorities in the gathering of electronic evidence across borders.

The [SIRIUS annual conference](#) took place in November 2023 and was attended by over 900 participants, including representatives from law enforcement and judicial authorities from 38 countries, as well as 20 representatives of service providers. The conference tackled topics such as novel legal instruments

for obtaining electronic evidence across borders, challenges concerning the clash between authorities' need for data versus data protection requirements, upholding content policies and respective privacy rights in the face of core international crimes.

In December 2023, the [SIRIUS EU Electronic Evidence Situation Report](#) was jointly published by Eurojust, Europol and the European Judicial Network. The report provides an overview of the EU's electronic evidence landscape through the lenses of law enforcement, the judiciary and service providers. From a law enforcement perspective, social media platforms, messaging apps and cryptocurrency exchanges are pivotal in investigations. While formal training on electronic evidence has been provided to officers, gaps in familiarity with the new legislation remain, emphasising the need for extensive training programmes. Judicial authorities face time-consuming hurdles when accessing data from foreign service providers, highlighting the need for enhanced legal powers and EU-wide legislative efforts to regulate data retention for the purposes of criminal investigations and proceedings. Service providers, on the other hand, grapple with authenticating requests and resource allocation, emphasising the benefits of centralising requests.

European Judicial Cybercrime Network developments

During 2023, Eurojust continued to work closely and provide support to the [European Judicial Cybercrime Network](#). The network consists of judicial authorities specialised in countering the challenges of cybercrime, cyber-enabled crime and investigations in cyberspace.

In June 2023, the network held its [14th plenary meeting](#). Participants discussed the challenges of the metaverse, joint investigation teams in cybercrime, spontaneous information exchange in relation to Article 26 of the Budapest Convention and cooperation with crypto asset service providers.

In November 2023, the Network held its [15th plenary meeting](#). Topics discussed by participants included the criminal use of AI, obfuscation methods including the use of crypto assets mixers, ransomware and issues related to victims' rights, as well as cybercrime prevention.

The challenges related to crypto assets were discussed in connection with victim remediation in ransomware and laundering the proceeds of online criminal activity, with reference to the Market in Crypto Assets Regulation, which will become fully applicable in December 2024.

In 2023, the Network continued to provide specialised training on cybercrime and digital evidence to practitioners by hosting dedicated master classes on how to obtain evidence from online service providers (in March and October 2023), encrypted networks (in cooperation with the Western Balkans Criminal Justice Project in June 2023) and ransomware (in December 2023).

US-EU expert group on obtaining (e-)evidence

In March 2023, Eurojust organised a second meeting of the US-EU expert group on obtaining evidence via MLA from the United States (US). The aim of the expert group is to facilitate the swifter execution of MLA requests for gathering evidence in the US. The meeting focused on the probable cause requirement in light of the case-law of the U.S. Supreme Court, and provided case examples and tips on drafting requests to the US.

In June 2023, Eurojust and US authorities organised a workshop focused on the free speech clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, including its implications on MLA requests submitted by foreign authorities to the US seeking electronic evidence, which generally require the US legal process.

In November 2023, a third meeting was organised to explain when an MLA request to the US is required in relation to witness/suspect interviews, and which information is essential to include in such a request.



Main administrator of iSpooof website sentenced to 13 years



August 2021 - August 2022 - Around 10 million fraudulent calls are made globally via iSpooof, a website that allows criminals to impersonate trusted corporations to scam victims for financial gain. The website has 59,000 registered users when it is shut down.

October 2021 - The case is opened at Eurojust at the request of the UK authorities. National authorities from 10 countries, including European Union Member States and third countries, support the investigation.

November 2021, September 2022 - Two coordination meetings are hosted by Eurojust to coordinate the national investigations and prepare for the joint action.

6 November 2022 - The main administrator of the website is arrested. He is believed to have made a profit of between GBP 1.7 million and GBP 1.9 million (over EUR 2 million) from running the iSpooof website.

8 November 2022 - In an international coordinated action led by the UK and supported by Eurojust and Europol, 142 users and administrators are arrested across the world. Judicial and law enforcement authorities in Europe, Australia, the United States, Ukraine and Canada support the operation. The website is taken offline and the servers are seized by US and Ukrainian authorities.

May 2023 – JUSTICE DONE: The main administrator of the website is sentenced to 13 years and 4 months of imprisonment by Southwark Crown Court in the United Kingdom.



Online marketplace selling stolen account credentials to criminals worldwide taken down in multi-country effort dubbed Operation Cookie Monster



CRIME: Since 2018, Genesis Market, a criminal marketplace accessible on the dark and clear web, sells packages of account access credentials – including usernames and passwords for email, bank accounts and social media. The credentials are stolen from malware-infected computers around the world and then used by cybercriminals to commit cyber-enabled fraud.

ACTION: The U.S. FBI works with its law enforcement partners to identify prolific users of Genesis Market who have purchased and used stolen access credentials to commit fraud and other cybercrimes. The U.S. Department of Justice also works with its judicial counterparts through Eurojust to ensure coordinated action. This effort results in hundreds of leads being sent by the FBI to law enforcement partners in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

RESULT: On 4-5 April 2023, in a major coordinated action supported by Eurojust and Europol, more than 100 suspects are arrested and 200 property searches are conducted in 13 countries. In addition, the infrastructure and main domains of the criminal website are seized and taken down.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust facilitates the cross-border judicial cooperation between the national authorities involved. The Agency hosts a coordination meeting in March 2023 to prepare for the joint action and a command centre on 4 April 2023 to resolve legal issues arising during the parallel operations in 13 countries.



For more Eurojust cases and the latest developments in fighting cybercrime, scan/click the QR code

3.8 Economic crime

Economic crimes pose a growing threat to the economy and integrity of financial systems. These crimes include fraud, money laundering, corruption and counterfeiting, and target individuals, businesses and public institutions.

- *Investment fraud (especially crypto investment) is among the most common types of fraud, targeting millions of victims worldwide.*
- *Almost **70%** of criminal networks operating in the EU use money laundering to fund their activities and conceal their assets.*
- *Corruption is a key enabler of most criminal operations, with **60%** of the criminal networks operating in the EU using corruptive methods to achieve their illicit objectives.*
- *The amount of assets confiscated from criminal networks by judicial and law enforcement authorities remains below **2%** of the annual proceeds of organised crime²⁰.*

Swindling and fraud

In 2023, swindling and fraud remained the top crime type addressed by Eurojust, with over 4 000 cases handled. The Agency dealt with a 15% increase in new cases in 2023 compared to 2022, in addition to almost 2 500 ongoing cases from previous years.

²⁰ [The Other Side of the Coin: An Analysis of Financial and Economic Crime | Europol \(europa.eu\)](#)



Eurojust facilitated a large number of coordination meetings (128) and JITs (69) related to swindling and fraud cases, as well as 8 coordinated action days.

Throughout the EU, thousands of victims are targeted by complex fraud schemes (e.g. investment fraud and food fraud) instigated by organised crime groups.

Protecting the financial interests of the EU within its mandate remains a priority for Eurojust. In 2023, the Agency achieved this in cooperation with EPPO and other partners, by supporting ongoing investigations, and participating in EMPACT and Operation SENTINEL (see below).

Fraud against NextGenerationEU recovery funds

During 2023, Eurojust continued to actively support Operation SENTINEL, an EU-wide operation launched in 2021 to ensure the lawful use of the NextGenerationEU recovery funds by detecting, investigating and prosecuting cross-border criminal activities such as fraud and money laundering. Eurojust continues to provide assistance whenever needed, in particular when cases emerge for which the EPPO or competent national authorities seek Eurojust's assistance.

Investment fraud

Defrauding victims via online trading platforms remains a trend in investment fraud cases registered at Eurojust. Particularly complex and challenging, these multilateral investment fraud cases involve an increasing number of victims throughout the EU. Such cases benefit from cross-border judicial cooperation facilitated by Eurojust on issues including the centralisation of proceedings at the national and international levels, avoidance of possible conflict of jurisdiction, priority to prosecute common suspects and victim compensation.

Directly linked to a case of investment fraud registered at Eurojust, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) delivered its [judgment \(case C-365/21\)](#) on ne bis in idem on 23 March 2023 (see also section 6.3). The CJEU noted that if a sentence is handed down solely on the basis of the acts of fraud committed against the injured parties residing in country A, and not on those that were detrimental to persons residing in country B, it cannot be concluded that the earlier decision in country A concerned the same acts as those covered by the prosecution in country B. At most, that earlier decision might be considered to have concerned similar acts, which, however, is not sufficient for the 'idem' condition to be regarded as being satisfied.

Missing Trader Intra-Community (MTIC) fraud

MTIC fraud is detrimental to the EU and national budgets, as well as complex to successfully investigate, prosecute and convict. Tackling this type of fraud is one of the aims of the fraud, economic and financial crimes priority of [EMPACT 2022-2025](#) in the fight against serious and organised crime.

Eurojust continued to be co-leader of the EMPACT Operational Activity on MTIC fraud during 2023, aimed at fostering the multidisciplinary cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experience among practitioners. The Swedish Economic Crime Authority and Europol continued to co-lead this activity with the Agency, while the Finnish Customs Department joined as co-leader in 2023.

During 2023, two key meetings took place. The first meeting took place in April in Sweden and was attended by a group of dedicated MTIC specialists from 13 Member States as well as OLAF and EPPO. The second meeting took place in October in Finland and brought together experts from tax, customs, police and prosecution authorities from over 29 countries, as well as specialists at the EU level from the EPPO and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union. Both meetings were instrumental in discussing cases, sharing experiences and developing joint strategies. They also led to over 10 additional EU countries officially joining the Eurojust-led EMPACT MTIC fraud operational activities in 2024/25.



PIF Crime

In 2023, Eurojust dealt with almost 300 PIF-related (crimes against the financial interests of the EU) cases (some involving the EPPO), which represents a 10% increase in the overall number of cases handled by the Agency in 2022. In addition to supporting 3 ongoing JITs in this area, Eurojust also assisted 3 new JITs opened in 2023, as well as 16 coordination meetings and 1 action day.

In May 2023, Eurojust's President was invited by the European Commission to provide input regarding PIF crimes committed in Ukraine, during its high-level meeting on the 'European anti-fraud architecture'. Following the meeting, Eurojust contributed to the European

Commission's concept note on the 'prevention and fight against fraud concerning EU funds to Ukraine and on the cooperation between the EPPO, Eurojust, Europol and OLAF in this context'.

As a follow-up to these developments, in October and December 2023, Eurojust attended the European Commission's meetings on 'EU anti-fraud in Ukraine'. Eurojust contributed to the establishment of a hit/no hit pilot project on the Ukraine Facility, a dedicated instrument that will allow the EU to provide Ukraine with up to EUR 50 billion in stable and predictable financial support over the period 2024-2027.



MONEY LAUNDERING CASES IN 2023

2 224 CASES

(835 new cases,
1 389 ongoing from previous years)

69

JOINT INVESTIGATION TEAMS
(16 new JITs, 53 ongoing)

136

CASE-SPECIFIC
COORDINATION MEETINGS

6

COORDINATED ACTION DAYS

Money laundering

As in previous years, money laundering featured among the top three crime types addressed by the Agency in 2023. 20% more money laundering cases were opened at the Agency in 2023 compared to 2022. Eurojust saw an increase in the use of all of its judicial tools and services in this area, including JITs, coordination meetings and action days, compared to the previous year.

The fight against money laundering continues to be essential to deny criminals the incentive to commit crimes and bring them to justice. Money laundering poses a serious threat to the integrity of the European Union's economy and financial system and the security of its citizens.

It is mostly a transnational offence that requires a coordinated response across multiple jurisdictions.

Some recurring issues addressed in Eurojust's casework in 2023 concerned dual criminality and predicate offence, the identification of beneficial ownership, evidentiary issues linked with specific money laundering schemes (e.g. money laundering as a service), asset recovery and cryptocurrencies.

Throughout the year, Eurojust continued to support and cooperate with national authorities, third countries and EU and international partners in numerous money laundering-related events. Among other events, in February 2023, the Agency presented the findings of the Eurojust Report on Money Laundering at the European Commission's meeting on the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime and contributed to the ERA Annual Conference on White Collar Crime in March in Trier.

High-level meeting on money laundering and asset recovery at Eurojust

In June 2023, Eurojust organised its [first-ever major meeting of high-level experts on money laundering and asset recovery](#). The meeting brought together a broad group of specialists to develop a common approach to take on the increasing crime of money laundering and to improve asset recovery. Participants expressed strong support to set up a dedicated focus group on money laundering and asset recovery, to be organised by Eurojust. The aim of this group would be to increase national and cross-border inter-institutional cooperation between the judiciary, law enforcement and other actors involved in the fight against money laundering and the recovery of criminally gained assets, in order to increase efficiency.

EU anti-money laundering package

During 2023, progress was made on the European Commission's package of legislative proposals to strengthen the EU's rules on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism.

In December 2023, the Council and the Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the [Regulation establishing the Anti-Money Laundering Authority](#) (AMLA), with the exception of its seat. The new European authority aims to protect EU citizens and the EU's financial system against money laundering and terrorist financing. Eurojust was consulted by the co-legislators on the content of the Regulation, and provided feedback grounded in its casework.

The AMLA will have direct and indirect supervisory powers over high-risk obliged entities (such as financial institutions, banks and real estate agencies) in the financial sector. Under the terms of the Regulation, the AMLA will share the results of financial intelligence analyses with Eurojust to enable the Agency to exercise its competence. The Regulation envisages the possibility of establishing a general working arrangement between Eurojust and the AMLA and a specific working arrangement to exchange operational and strategic information on money laundering and terrorism financing. These working arrangements would permit the Agency and Authority to post liaison officers at each other's premises.

The [Regulation on transfer of funds](#) was adopted in May 2023. Traceability of money transfers is a crucial factor in enabling national authorities to effectively prevent, detect and investigate and, where necessary, impose restrictive measures in cases of money laundering and terrorism financing. Adding crypto asset service providers to the scope of the existing Regulation will close loopholes in the financial system that allow criminals to use crypto assets to disguise the origin of illicit funds.

The European Commission's anti-money laundering package also includes proposals for a new Regulation on anti-money-laundering requirements for the private sector and a new directive on anti-money-laundering mechanisms. Negotiations on both proposals are ongoing.

Asset recovery

Organised crime groups generate substantial profits from various criminal activities, and the proceeds of crime are laundered and re-injected into the legal economy. Depriving criminals of the proceeds of crime is an essential part of disrupting organised crime. Against this backdrop, the confiscation and recovery of criminal assets is a very effective way to fight organised crime. Moreover, confiscation acts as a powerful deterrent by strengthening the notion that 'crime does not pay'. Eurojust has built up substantial institutional knowledge of solutions and best practices that can significantly improve the effectiveness of investigations, prosecutions and ultimately the recovery of criminal proceeds.

During 2023, the Agency continued to support national authorities, notably in the practical application of the Regulation on Mutual Recognition of Freezing and Confiscation Orders. Some issues addressed in Eurojust's casework in 2023 concern inter alia the direct applicability of the Regulation, the scope of the Regulation, restitution to victims, exceptional costs and concurrent certificates.

EU Directive on asset recovery and confiscation

In December 2023, the Council and the European Parliament reached a political agreement on the [EU Directive on asset recovery and confiscation](#). The new Directive sets out EU-wide minimum rules on the tracing, identification, freezing, confiscation and management of criminal property. It aims to boost Member States' capacities to fight organised crime. It will limit the capacity of criminals to maintain and expand their criminal activities, as well as engage in corruption and infiltrate the economy by investing illegal gains. The proposed rules will also cover the violation of restrictive measures, ensuring the effective tracing, freezing, management and confiscation of benefits derived from violating sanctions.

In a first for many Member States, a new rule on the confiscation of unexplained wealth will, under certain conditions, allow the confiscation of property identified in the context of an investigation in relation to criminal offences. This confiscation will be permitted only if a national court is satisfied that the identified property is derived from criminal activities committed within the framework of a criminal organisation, and that those activities have generated substantial economic gains. The agreement pays special attention to procedural safeguards. Member States will also be required to designate authorities (asset management offices) to manage the frozen or confiscated property.

Eurojust was invited by the European Commission to provide input to the proposal of this new Directive, based on its operational casework. This legal instrument will have a significant impact on the Agency's casework as Eurojust provides support to national authorities in all stages of the asset recovery process, from tracing, freezing and confiscation to recovery.



CORRUPTION CASES IN 2023

354 CASES

(111 new cases,
243 ongoing from previous years)

8

JOINT INVESTIGATION TEAMS
(2 new JITs, 6 ongoing)

13

CASE-SPECIFIC
COORDINATION MEETINGS

Corruption

In 2023, Eurojust supported 354 corruption cases, including more than 100 cases newly referred to the Agency during the year. The number of newly opened cases in 2023 increased by almost 30% compared to 2022.

Eurojust continued to support six ongoing JITs related to corruption cases from previous years, as well as two new JITs opened in 2023. The Agency provided its expertise and services to facilitate a series of coordination meetings in support of these cases.

In July 2023, Eurojust presented its corruption casework during an expert hearing on the EU's anti-corruption legislative framework organised by the European Economic and Social Committee to inform the Committee's opinion on the current legislative proposal on the Directive on combatting corruption (see below).

EU Directive on combatting corruption

In May 2023, the European Commission tabled a proposal for a [Directive on combatting corruption](#), which represents a milestone in the fight against this crime at the national and EU levels. Eurojust contributed to the proposal, which references the Agency's important role in countering corruption and cites the [Eurojust report on corruption](#).

The Directive envisages one legal act for all corruption offences and sanctions. The set of measures proposed includes new and strengthened rules criminalising corruption offences and harmonising penalties across the EU. Member States will have to ensure that law enforcement and prosecutors have the appropriate investigative tools to fight corruption and that privileges and immunity can be waived during corruption investigations.

The proposal is part of a wider legislative package from the Commission, including a _ which establishes a new EU Network Against Corruption, bringing together law enforcement, public authorities, practitioners, civil society and other stakeholders to act as a catalyst for prevention and to develop best practices and practical guidance. Eurojust is a member of the network and participated in its first meeting in Brussels in September 2023 to discuss how to maximise the coherence and impact of European anti-corruption policies. The Commission's communication highlights Eurojust's role as being central to fostering cooperation between Member States in the fight against corruption.

Euro counterfeiting

During 2023, Eurojust participated in six operational actions relevant to currency counterfeiting within the EMPACT Operational Action Plan on 'IP rights crime, counterfeiting of goods and currencies'.

Moreover, in 2023, Eurojust started participating in the work of the Euro Counterfeiting Experts Group – a platform of experts from Member States and relevant EU institutions and agencies set up by the European Commission Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs. For the Agency, the group serves as an important platform to promote Eurojust's tools and services to help combat euro counterfeiting and to exchange with relevant experts on the latest developments in the field.

In April-May 2023, Eurojust supported a study, at the request of the European Commission Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, conducted by RAND Europe on movie money, prop copies and other altered design banknotes. The aim of the study was to assess the impact of this phenomenon on the security of the euro and other currencies, also examining the existing judicial approaches and challenges in prosecuting this crime in Member States. Eurojust, through its Contact Point for euro counterfeiting and its National Desks, enabled the study's research team to reach out to relevant prosecutors and judiciary in selected Member States.



Takedown of fraudulent cryptocurrency network in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Serbia



2021 - A criminal network is responsible for setting up call centres that defraud numerous victims in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Australia and Canada of at least tens of millions of euros. Investigations into the cryptocurrency fraud network operating from Serbia, Bulgaria and Cyprus are launched by the Public Prosecutor's Office in Stuttgart and the State Office of Criminal Investigations of Baden-Württemberg in Germany.



November 2022 - The case is opened at Eurojust. The Agency organises a coordination meeting during which it is decided to establish a JIT between Germany and Serbia to prepare for a joint operation. Eurojust provides judicial, logistical and financial support to the JIT.

January 2023 - During a first action day, four call centres and 18 places are searched, and over 250 workplaces are identified in Serbia, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Germany. Fourteen persons are arrested in Serbia and one in Germany. More than 250 persons are interviewed and over 150 computers, various electronic equipment and data back-ups, three cars, two luxury apartments, one million US dollars in cryptocurrencies and EUR 50 000 in cash are seized.

February 2023 - Eurojust organises a coordination centre with Germany, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Serbia to facilitate a second joint action day. During the second action day, a further 16 suspects are arrested across Serbia for alleged computer fraud, money laundering and criminal alliance. Sixteen places are additionally searched and at least EUR 130 000 in cash and several cryptocurrency accounts and vehicles are seized.



33 arrests in action against globally active money laundering network



CRIME: An organised crime group launders the proceeds from drug trafficking via a global network active in China, Turkey and the United States and elsewhere. The group uses a money laundering service known as the 'Black Market Peso Exchange', in which payment for South American drugs are processed through an elaborate trading scheme. Profits from drug sales in Europe are transferred to electronics companies, which use the money to order goods. These goods are shipped to the United States before being transported to Colombia, where they are sold. This enables the South American cartels to receive cash as a veiled payment for the drugs they provide to European markets.

ACTION: A joint action day against the organised crime group suspected of large-scale money laundering is managed in real time from Eurojust's dedicated coordination centre.

RESULT: During the action day, supported by Eurojust and Europol, 31 suspects are arrested in Italy. Two European Arrest Warrants are executed in Spain, with one person being arrested and a second person, already serving a jail term, being notified.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust assists the investigations by organising three coordination meetings as well as the coordination centre from which the joint operation is led during the action day.



For more Eurojust cases and the latest developments in fighting economic crime, scan/click the QR code

3.9 Environmental crime

Environmental crime endangers entire ecosystems and poses a serious threat to human health. It is one of the most profitable forms of illegal activity in the world.

- *Since 2016, environmental crime has been the fourth-largest criminal activity globally, growing at a rate of between **5%** and **7%** per year²¹.*
- *In many countries, light sanctions for environmental crimes, alongside limited efforts to follow and remove the profits, make it a safe source of income for criminals²².*
- *The number of environmental crime investigations and prosecutions at the national and European levels remains low compared to other crime areas.*

Operational support to environmental crime cases

Although there was a 64% increase in the number of new environmental crime cases referred to Eurojust in 2023 compared to 2022, the overall number of cases handled by the Agency remains low.

Despite environmental crime being an [EMPACT](#) priority area in the previous and current policy cycle, the number of cross-border environmental crime cases initiated at the national level remains low. Moreover, depending on national legislation, prosecution strategies and the specifics of the case, criminal activities damaging the environment can be prosecuted as other crimes, such as fraud, corruption or money laundering. Although not conclusive, considering the need to improve national statistics on environmental crime investigations, these reasons may partially explain the overall low number of environmental cases referred to the Agency.



In view of the scale of the problem and the low number of cases the Agency deals with compared to other crime areas, national authorities are strongly encouraged to engage more actively in cross-border environmental crime investigations and prosecutions. The Council of the European Union has urged Member States to participate in the work carried out at the EU and international levels to enhance cooperation in tackling environmental crime, including via cooperation through Eurojust²³.

Within the EMPACT Environmental Crime Operational Action Plan 2023, Eurojust was a participant of the operational actions on waste, cooperation with Asia and training organised by the CEPOL. Eurojust also actively supported

the operational actions on financial investigations and glass eel trafficking. In September 2023, the Agency hosted an operational meeting on the illegal trafficking in glass eels, marking the first ever EMPACT Environmental Crime meeting organised at the Agency.

Consultative Forum of Prosecutors General of EU Member States

At the [meeting of the Consultative Forum of Prosecutors General and Directors of Public Prosecutions of the Member States of the EU](#), held at Eurojust in October 2023, environmental crime was a key item on the agenda. Participants discussed their national experiences in addressing environmental crime and the benefits of having specialised prosecutors and judges to deal with this specific crime area.

²¹ [The Rise of Environmental Crime \(2016\)](#), Interpol and United Nations Environment Programme

²² [Money Laundering from Environmental Crime \(fatf-gafi.org\)](#)

²³ [Final report of the eighth round of mutual evaluations on environmental crime](#)

The scale and complexity of environmental crime requires specialisation and a multidisciplinary approach. This has driven several EU Member States to set up dedicated units to tackle environmental crime within their national prosecution services. For example, Sweden has set up the National Unit for Environment and Work Environment Cases within the Swedish National Public Prosecution Department, while in Spain, the Spanish Prosecutor's Office has a Supreme Court Prosecutor in charge of a specialised unit for the coordination of environmental crimes.

Participants concluded that cooperation and collaboration in environmental protection, particularly across borders, are essential given the growing sophistication of environmental criminals and their defence strategies. To prevent investigative and prosecutorial efforts from being hindered or undermined, it is of utmost importance that domestic laws in the Member States adequately implement international standards, and that progress is made towards a harmonised legislative framework, especially regarding the definition of crimes, sanctions and investigative tools.

Training and awareness raising

In 2023, Eurojust continued to contribute to training, awareness raising and networking activities tailor-made for prosecutors and the judiciary working in the environmental crime area. These activities were carried out in cooperation with CEPOL, EJTN, the EU-funded project LIFE SWiPE ('Successful Wildlife Crime Prosecution in Europe'), the Academy of European Law and the French National School for the Judiciary.

Cooperation at EU level

During 2023, Eurojust continued to contribute to the activities of the [EU Environmental Compliance and Governance Forum's](#) Working Group on Sanctioning, the [EU Wildlife Trade Enforcement Group](#), and the [European Task Force on Forestry Crime](#).

The Agency also continued its cooperation with the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment (ENPE). In April 2023, Eurojust participated in the international conference '[The sea, the world's largest crime scene – the case of environmental crime](#)', organised jointly by the ENPE and La Rochelle University. Discussions focused on the legal and practical difficulties in detecting, investigating and prosecuting environmental crimes. Conference participants included experts from some EU Member States, Mauritius, Africa, South America, the United States and Ukraine. They concluded that effective prosecution, through national and international cooperation, is essential to prevent further damage by disincentivising the commission of these crimes.

EU-US Liaison meeting on environmental crime

Following the political commitment made in 2022 between the European Union and the United States to intensify cooperation in the fight against environmental crime, the second EU-US Liaison Meeting on Environmental Crime, involving Eurojust, took place in April 2023 in La Rochelle. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss the areas of environmental crime where EU-US cooperation is most needed. These areas include marine and maritime pollution, waste crime, wildlife crime and illegal timber trade, among others. Participants discussed cooperation in these areas, including identifying and exchanging intelligence on possible EU-US linked cases, with a view to initiating EU-US cross-border criminal investigations and prosecutions, supported by Eurojust and Europol. Participants also discussed taking stock of the legal and practical challenges faced by EU and US competent national authorities in dealing with environmental crime and exchanging best practices to address them.

Environmental Crime Directive and other policy developments

In November 2023, the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on a proposed EU law that would improve the investigation and prosecution of environmental crime offences. The [proposal for a new Environmental Crime Directive](#), replacing the previous 2008 Directive, aims to establish minimum rules on the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in order to better protect the environment. The proposed Directive adds new types of environmental criminal offences and also harmonises the level of penalties for natural persons and, for the first time, for legal persons in all EU Member States. These changes are expected to improve the investigation and prosecution of environmental crime offences and increase cross-border judicial cooperation in this area. To achieve this, the proposed Directive specifically promotes cooperation through Eurojust as well as other EU agencies.

Other relevant legislative developments that provide for effective enforcement including dissuasive sanctions, include the [Regulation on Deforestation-free products](#), which entered into force in June 2023, and the proposal for a [Directive on ship-source pollution and on the introduction of penalties, including criminal penalties, for pollution offences](#), issued by the European Commission in the same month.



For more Eurojust cases and the latest developments in fighting environmental crime, scan/click the QR code



Crackdown on a criminal network dealing with waste trafficking



CRIME: An organised crime group (OCG) deals with illicit waste trafficking (including uncleaned, unrecycled scrap iron and manipulated hazardous waste, such as tar), false invoicing and money laundering in several European countries. The OCG illegally acquires up to 165,000 tonnes of scrap iron through a network of iron recycling companies operating in Italy and abroad. A German bogus company connected to the leader of the OCG issues false invoices for the fictitious acquisition of the scrap iron.

The leader and other members of the criminal network bring up to EUR 70 million in cash into Italy from German bank accounts. The money is transferred between fictitious companies and the profits are invested in the illicit trafficking of waste or laundered through legitimate activities such as the acquisition of a football team in Italy.

ACTION: Eurojust sets up a coordination centre on its premises to facilitate rapid cooperation between the Italian and German judicial authorities. In a joint action day on 15 February, 14 suspects are detained in Italy and Germany. Forty searches are carried out, 26 in Italy and 14 in Germany.

RESULT: The preventive seizure of assets worth EUR 90 million is ordered.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust supports the authorities involved in setting up and funding a joint investigation team. The Agency also hosts seven coordination meetings to facilitate judicial cooperation and provide support to the coordinated investigative efforts.

3.10 Intellectual property crime

Intellectual property crime (IPC) damages the economy and can have a direct impact on public health and consumer safety. Physical counterfeiting and online piracy are hard to investigate, as most of the crimes are committed outside of the EU or involve online elements with digitally disguised perpetrators.

- *Approximately **86 million** fake items were intercepted in the European Union in 2022 with an estimated value of over **EUR 2 billion**. More than **72%** of the products seized were games, packaging material, toys, cigarettes and recorded CDs/DVDs²⁴.*
- *The digitalisation of trade and transport has shifted most of the distribution of counterfeit goods online, moving the place of perpetration of the crime from the streets to the homes of victims by means of online shopping and services.*
- *The commodity sectors most affected by physical counterfeiting in the EU are the automotive industry, clothing and accessories, cosmetics and perfumes, foodstuffs, labels and packaging material, pesticides, pharmaceutical products, piracy and toys²⁵. On the other hand, online media providers and the film industry suffer from online piracy.*

Operational support to IPC cases

In 2023, the number of new IPC cases referred to Eurojust increased by 20% compared to the previous year. The Agency also handled 31 ongoing cases from previous years and supported two new joint investigation teams to tackle this crime area.



During 2023, Eurojust handled various counterfeit cases. One ongoing case involves an individual residing in Germany who engaged in the illicit procurement of substantial quantities of unlicensed medical products from third countries. This person, devoid of any medical qualifications or licensing, distributed these products to individual consumers. The perpetrator's monthly revenue from this illegal operation has been estimated to be EUR 100 000. In 2023, Eurojust supported the establishment of a JIT to investigate this cross-border criminal activity involving multiple European countries.

Another case handled by the Agency in 2023, which is still ongoing, concerns a criminal network operating in Central Europe engaged in the production and distribution of counterfeit detergents. The criminal network acquired raw materials different from those used in legitimate products and then mixed, packaged and labelled these substances in containers mimicking the original brands. The production of these counterfeit washing products took place in highly unsanitary conditions, posing a potential health risk to consumers. Investigations have revealed that these counterfeit products were distributed throughout the European Union, both through unofficial markets and, in some instances, infiltrating the official supply chain. In 2023, in response to this widespread criminal activity, Eurojust organised a coordination meeting with the national authorities of the affected countries, laying the groundwork for establishing a JIT. The JIT, supported by the Agency, is now coordinating the judicial aspects of the investigations and forthcoming prosecutions.

²⁴ [EU enforcement of intellectual property rights: results at the EU border and in the EU internal market 2022 \(November 2023\) - EUIPO \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁵ [The Other Side of the Coin: An Analysis of Financial and Economic Crime | Europol \(europa.eu\)](#)

The IPC Project

In 2023, Eurojust, via its [IPC Project](#) (financed by the European Union Intellectual Property Office – EUIPO), sustained its commitment to supporting national and EU efforts to combat crimes related to the infringement of intellectual property rights.

The IPC Project actively collaborated with partners in EMPAC on a range of actions targeting both online and offline IP infringement. This collaboration was crucial in ensuring that IPC cross-border investigations received the necessary judicial support and were effectively coordinated to guarantee successful prosecutions.

Moreover, during 2023, the project continued to build new knowledge, capacity and awareness by fostering a deeper understanding of IP rights enforcement through its targeted publications and events for judicial authorities and other stakeholders.

IPC publications

During 2023, the IPC Project published various awareness-raising materials in the form of reports and flyers. These resources are designed to educate and update members of the judicial community about critical issues and emerging trends that affect the enforcement of IP rights, as well as highlight best practices.

The [study on generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) and its impact on IP crimes](#) examines the impact of generative AI tools, including Chat GPT, Midjourney and similar technologies, on copyright-protected content. It explores the complexities surrounding the creation of art, music, literature and other intellectual properties by these AI programs, and the potential for copyright protection of such AI-generated works. The paper examines the methodologies used to train generative AI programs, scrutinising whether this machine learning process could inadvertently lead to copyright infringement. The adaptability of criminals to such new technological advancements poses significant challenges for law enforcement and judicial authorities, particularly in the area of intellectual property crime.

The [IPC Case-law analysis](#) is the outcome of the monitoring efforts on national case-law conducted by the IPC Project in 2022. This compilation includes a curated selection of national judgments pertaining to IP crime and serves as a critical resource to show how courts across EU Member States address legal challenges in this field. Key aspects of this analysis include a diverse selection of judgments, insights into legal approaches and emerging trends in IP Crime.

The [Copyright Piracy Report](#) addresses the escalating threat of using advanced technologies to commit large-scale IP infringement. The report focuses on international copyright law, adaptation in EU Member States, interpretation by national courts, technological advancements and challenges, and best practices and recommendations. The report serves as a comprehensive resource for legal practitioners, law enforcement agencies and policymakers, providing valuable insights and guidelines for tackling copyright piracy in the evolving digital landscape.

The [flyer on advertising-funded online piracy](#) presents a detailed analysis of how the advertising industry inadvertently contributes to the proliferation of online piracy. It focuses on the role of advertisements in financially sustaining websites and applications that distribute copyrighted content, often at no cost to the user, without the authorisation of the rights holders. The flyer provides national case-law examples of criminal copyright infringement where the involvement of advertising played a significant role. It highlights the need for more stringent measures and greater awareness within the advertising industry to prevent their services from being exploited by piracy sites.

The [flyer on non-fungible tokens](#) describes the growing use of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) in the art world. These unique identifiers, recorded on the blockchain, are used to verify the ownership and authenticity of a work of art. While the use of NFTs by artists is increasing, so is the risk of criminal actions related to them. One example of such abuse is converting artworks to NFTs and selling them without the artist's authorisation. The flyer examines the consequences for copyright and trademark protection and provides an outline of recent court decisions affecting this area, which still lacks a legal regulatory framework.

IPC events

The IPC Project hosted and participated in a series of key events in 2023. These events brought together experts, practitioners and stakeholders from various fields to discuss and exchange views on matters pertaining to IP rights enforcement.

In May 2023, Eurojust, with the support of the Estonian General Prosecutor's Office, organised the first regional seminar on intellectual property crime investigations and prosecutions. The seminar, held in Tallinn, Estonia, gathered police investigators and prosecutors from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia to discuss regional challenges, opportunities and best practices in investigating and prosecuting IP crimes. The seminar also played a crucial role in reinforcing and broadening the network of IP crime practitioners, thereby enhancing collaborative efforts across the region.

In September 2023, Eurojust, in collaboration with EUIPO, organised the annual workshop of the European Intellectual Property Prosecutors Network. The event provided a valuable opportunity for practitioners to discuss recent instances of counterfeiting and copyright piracy. In addition, participants exchanged materials and updates on ongoing initiatives in the area of IP enforcement, thereby enhancing each other's capabilities to address the challenges posed by this crime.

In November 2023, Eurojust organised an online workshop on copyright piracy. The event brought together judicial and law enforcement practitioners from five jurisdictions who presented recent case studies and shared experiences in spearheading or assisting complex piracy investigations and prosecutions. The proliferation of unauthorised illicit internet protocol television and streaming services poses unprecedented challenges for judicial and law enforcement authorities who are faced with increasingly complex cases requiring technical skills and an understanding of technology. Furthermore, investigations have revealed that organised crime groups are not only involved in sophisticated counterfeiting and piracy operations but are also using the proceeds from these illicit activities to finance other criminal activities.

In 2023, the IPC Project, in association with the U.S. Department of Justice, initiated a series of monthly online lectures focusing on intellectual property enforcement. These lectures, featuring speakers from the EU and United States, examined an array of case studies, methodologies and tools essential in combatting criminal infringement of IP rights. The 2023 lecture series addressed topics such as trade secret violations, illicit internet protocol television, counterfeit pharmaceuticals, concealed hyperlink infractions and methodologies for calculating damages. This educational initiative will continue into 2024, with new themes and case studies to further enrich the collaborative effort in the fight against IP crime.

IPC policy developments

During 2023, two important legislative developments took place in the IPC area, both of which will help national authorities in the investigation of cross-border crimes.

The [Digital Services Act](#) (DSA), which came into force in February 2024, is a significant piece of legislation in the European Union aimed at regulating digital platforms and services. Key points of the DSA include increased accountability of online platforms, transparency requirements, protection of user rights, measures against illegal content, data access for researchers, risk management and independent audits, a crisis response mechanism and sanctions for non-compliance. The DSA aims to create a safer, more transparent online environment, balancing the regulation of digital services with the protection of fundamental rights. The DSA's new obligation for online service providers to cooperate with national judicial and administrative authorities and comply with orders to provide information received directly from them will enable national authorities to obtain essential information for their investigations. Other obligations, such as the necessity to identify users and preserve advertising data, will help to discover illicit content and take appropriate action more quickly.

In March 2024, the European Parliament adopted the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act, which is the first proposed regulation in this area, establishing uniform rules and requirements for the use of AI systems. Its key points include a risk-based approach, prohibition of certain AI practices, strict rules for high-risk AI systems, transparency obligations for certain AI systems, market surveillance and enforcement, a European AI Board, safeguards and accountability measures, and facilitation of innovation. The AI Act is part of the EU's broader strategy to harness the opportunities of AI while mitigating its risks, ensuring that AI systems are safe and respect EU laws and values. This is a significant step in establishing a comprehensive legal framework to oversee the development and use of AI systems. This will make it possible to identify the illegal use of AI and ensure that legal action is taken to address it.



For more Eurojust cases and the latest developments in fighting intellectual property crime, scan/click the QR code



Crackdown on a Lithuanian criminal network involved in large-scale food fraud and tax evasion



CRIME: In 2021, an OCG purchases millions of expired food products and some other perishable goods, such as cosmetics, in Germany and France. The OCG alters the expiry dates on these products and regularly supplies them to the Lithuanian market, where they are purchased by thousands of consumers. Estimates suggest that the OCG earns over EUR 1 million through this criminal activity. The suspects keep fictitious accounting records to hide the real purchase and sale values in order to avoid paying taxes.

ACTION: The case is opened in January 2023 at the request of the Lithuanian authorities. A joint action day involving the concerned judicial authorities and over 200 officers on the ground takes place on 23 May. Up to 70 searches and inspections of warehouses and other locations are carried out and over 30 witnesses are interviewed in Estonia, France, Germany and Lithuania.

RESULT: During the action day, 24 suspects are detained in Lithuania. Equipment for altering the expiry dates on products, including household solvents, printers and labels are found at several locations in Lithuania, as well as large quantities of expired products. The OCG is successfully dismantled by the national judicial and law enforcement authorities concerned, with the support of Eurojust and Europol.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust facilitates the communication, exchange of information and coordination between the national authorities and assists in the preparation of the joint action day. The Agency also hosts three coordination meetings and sets up a coordination centre to enable rapid cooperation between the judicial authorities involved in the operations.

3.11 Organised crime

The scale, sophistication and violent consequences of organised crime have become a serious threat to the EU's security. Organised crime groups (OCGs) continue to endanger the values and functioning of our society, the safety, well-being and fundamental rights of our citizens, and the preservation of our economies and the rule of law.

- *Organised crime profits from illicit activities are estimated at around EUR **139 billion** a year²⁶.*
- *More than **80%** of the criminal networks active in the EU use legal business structures to facilitate and disguise crimes, as well as launder criminal profits²⁷.*
- *More than **70%** of criminal networks operating in the EU use corruptive methods to facilitate criminal activity or obstruct law enforcement or judicial proceedings²⁸.*

Operational support to organised crime cases

During 2023, Eurojust handled a higher number of organised crime cases and arranged more coordination meetings to address this crime type, compared to the previous year. The Agency dealt with 1 000 cases, around half of which were newly opened in 2023.

OCGs are active in many crime areas, including property crime and money laundering, and move around quickly within and across multiple jurisdictions. Cross-border cooperation is therefore essential to detect them and build a solid prosecution case to achieve justice.

During 2023, Eurojust dealt with a variety of organised crime cases including drug trafficking, trafficking of human beings, money laundering, robbery and fraud.



'Ndrangheta's criminal activities on the rise

'Ndrangheta, one of the world's most powerful mafia-style criminal networks, is responsible for much of Europe's cocaine trade, combined with systematic money laundering, bribery and violence. In recent years, 'Ndrangheta's criminal activities have become increasingly widespread, with links to many countries in Europe and around the world.

A significant proportion of Eurojust's organised-crime casework in 2023 concerned 'Ndrangheta-related crime. In May 2023, the Agency coordinated a highly successful joint action day involving 10 countries, in which 132 members of 'Ndrangheta were arrested. Eurojust was instrumental in ensuring the successful outcome of this case by providing crucial support at the beginning of the investigations as well as beyond the joint action day. The agency provided legal advice on competing European Arrest Warrants and the implementation of European Investigation Orders, supported numerous coordination meetings, and set up joint investigation teams and coordination centres resulting, in the largest-ever hit against Italian organised crime.

EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021–2025

Throughout 2023, Eurojust continued to assist the European Commission in the implementation of the [EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021–2025](#). The Agency contributed to the meetings organised by the European Commission in February, July and November 2023 on progress made in carrying out the Strategy.

²⁶ [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0170 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁷ [Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks](#)

²⁸ [Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks](#)

The recovery of criminal assets and other cross-border dimensions of modern OCGs are areas where improvements are still necessary. This includes broadening the current legal instruments and enhancing the harmonisation of EU and national legislations.

New judicial network on organised crime

In October 2023, the European Commission presented a new [EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime](#). In line with Eurojust's experience, the roadmap recognises that to dismantle criminal networks across the EU, judicial authorities must exchange information early on and communicate regularly to ensure that investigative strategies are aligned and evidence from different countries is collected quickly.

One of the roadmap's key actions is to strengthen information exchange and cooperation between judicial authorities on complex cross-border investigations into organised crime by creating a network of specialised prosecutors and judges from Member States, with the support of Eurojust. The Agency is working closely with the European Commission and Member States to establish the network, which is expected to become operational in 2024. The network will actively promote the use of Eurojust's expertise in cross-border drug-related and other organised crime cases.

Stepping up the judicial role in major operations against organised crime

During the [17th Consultative Forum](#) in October 2023, the Prosecutors General and Directors of Public Prosecutions of EU Member States discussed how to enhance the role of judicial authorities in joint operations against major organised crime, through the [European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats platform \(EMPACT\)](#).

EMPACT is a security initiative, driven by the Member States and supported by the Commission and the Council, to identify, prioritise and address threats posed by organised and serious international crime. EMPACT brings together the judiciary, law enforcement authorities, EU agencies, customs and tax offices to take concrete actions against criminal networks.

Participants at the Forum stressed the need to improve awareness of EMPACT among judicial authorities and involve public prosecutors at an earlier stage in the planning and coordination of operational actions. Deeper and earlier involvement of the judiciary in the entire process will enable a more effective and coordinated approach to tackling major organised crime. This will maximise the impact of investigations into serious and complex crimes, such as drug trafficking, money laundering and migrant smuggling.

“ EMPACT has been operational for more than a decade and has proven to be a highly effective collaborative platform for law enforcement agencies. It is now time for the prosecution authorities in the Member States to step forward and further explore the possibilities for joint action against serious and organised crime through the platform. ”

Thomas Häggström, Director of Public Prosecution of Sweden

EMPACT Operational Action Plan on High Risk Criminal Networks

To enhance its operational support to national investigations and prosecutions, Eurojust is co-leader in several operational actions within the EMPACT Operational Action Plan for High Risk Criminal Networks. For the first time within EMPACT, the judiciary is leading operational actions, with the support of Eurojust.

This Action Plan aims to promote cooperation in the identification and investigation of high-value targets. Due to the poly-criminality associated with high-risk criminal networks, the Action Plan tackles a wide range of crime types.

Within the Action Plan, Eurojust participates in the Operational Action on Countering OCGs from Ukraine, Russia and other Russian-speaking areas. In June 2023, a dedicated meeting was set up to take stock of the situation in Ukraine and how it affects serious organised crime operating in Europe.

Eurojust's and Europol's analysis, based on the agencies' operational work, as well as insights from EU Member States, indicated that there has been no major impact on OCGs in the European Union since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Eurojust's organised crime casework has not changed significantly since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

Eurojust and Nigerian judicial authorities enhance cooperation against organised crime

Over the last two decades, organised crime affecting both Nigeria and European countries has structurally evolved, becoming more violent, sophisticated and increasingly transnational. In view of this rapid expansion of OCGs operating in Nigeria and Europe, a more structured and longer-term cooperation is required.

In November 2023, [Eurojust's President and the Attorney General of Nigeria signed a Working Arrangement](#) to enable closer cooperation in the fight against OCGs. Nigeria is the first sub-Saharan African country to sign a Working Arrangement with the Agency. This paves the way for the establishment of a Contact Point for Eurojust in Nigeria and closer communication for the swifter execution of judicial cooperation requests on both sides.

The signing took place during the Agency's two-day Conference on Transnational Organised Crime affecting West Africa and Europe. The conference was co-organised with the UNODC and the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights. It brought together judicial and law enforcement authorities from eight West African countries and the national authorities represented at Eurojust to discuss how to strengthen cooperation against global criminal networks.

“ *The Working Arrangement with Eurojust will enhance our cooperation. Let us work together to explore innovative solutions, best practices and new partnerships. Our collective strength and resolve are the keys to making a real difference in the fight against transnational organised crime.* ”

Attorney General of Nigeria, Lateef Olasunkanmi Fagbemi, SAN



132 'Ndrangheta mafia members arrested as a result of an investigation by Belgium, Italy and Germany



CRIME: The mafia-style organisation, 'Ndrangheta, based mainly in Reggio Calabria, is responsible for much of Europe's cocaine trade, combined with systematic bribery and violence. Members of the criminal network are also involved in firearms trafficking, illegal firearms possession, money laundering, fraudulent asset registration, tax fraud and tax evasion, as well as the aiding and abetting of fugitives, some of whom are on the EU Most Wanted list. The criminal group invests its profits in real estate, restaurants, hotels, car wash companies, supermarkets and other commercial activities.



ACTION: In the early hours of 3 May 2023, law enforcement authorities in Belgium, Germany, Italy, France, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Romania, Brazil and Panama raid multiple locations and seize several companies.

RESULT: During the action day, involving 10 countries and over 2 700 officers on the ground, 132 members of one of the world's most powerful criminal networks are taken into custody. This results in the largest-ever coordinated hit against Italian organised crime to date.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust supports the involved authorities by establishing and funding two joint investigation teams. The Agency also hosts 10 coordination meetings and facilitates the transmission and execution of European Investigation Orders. Eurojust sets up a coordination centre to enable rapid cooperation between the judicial authorities involved in the action day.



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4. Ensuring victims' rights

4.1 Protecting victims' rights in cross-border cases

Victims of crime in the EU are entitled to a number of rights, regardless of their nationality, residence, the type of crime and the place where it was committed. Victims' rights of particular relevance in cross-border cases include the right to information, the right to be heard, the right to protection/support and the right to compensation.

The complexity of cross-border cases makes it especially challenging for judicial authorities to protect victims' rights. Involving Eurojust early in the process helps to overcome these difficulties and ensure victims' protection. The Agency can provide assistance when a case impacts victims within the context of a cross-border investigation or involves victims of different countries in a national investigation.

4.2 The victims' rights dimension in Eurojust's casework

In 2023, Eurojust helped deliver justice to more than 375 000 victims of all forms of serious, cross-border crime.

The Agency continued to anchor the victims' rights dimension in all its operational casework. Through its dedicated [Working Group](#) consisting of representatives from all Eurojust crime-based Working Groups, the Agency contributes to ensuring an adequate level of victims' rights protection in cross-border criminal proceedings. The Working Group is responsible for compiling, monitoring and analysing victim-related issues reported by practitioners working on Eurojust cases.

Right to information

- Identify the victims.
- Ensure victims are made aware of their rights in a language they understand.
- Provide information and updates about the proceedings.

Right to be heard

- When conducting investigative acts, make sure that victims' needs are assessed and followed up on.
- Assess the type of consequences of the crime (physical, mental, emotional, financial).
- Use of the same interpreter and specialised personnel for interviews.

Right to protection/support

- Conduct individual assessment of victims to identify specific protection needs: during pre-trial investigation and after the completion of the proceedings
- Inform how to get support, including, for example, access of victim supporters to proceedings (victim support service, close family).
- Ensure necessary support is provided (e.g.: medical, practical, psychological) and protection measures are in place.
- Consider the use of video conferencing or written statements to minimise the risk of secondary victimisation.

Right to compensation

- Exchange information on assets for the purpose of confiscation.
- Inform victims in other jurisdictions that they can make claims in their country of residence.
- Communicate the standard [compensation form](#).
- Give victims information on the outcome of the criminal proceedings (including information on the compensation decision).

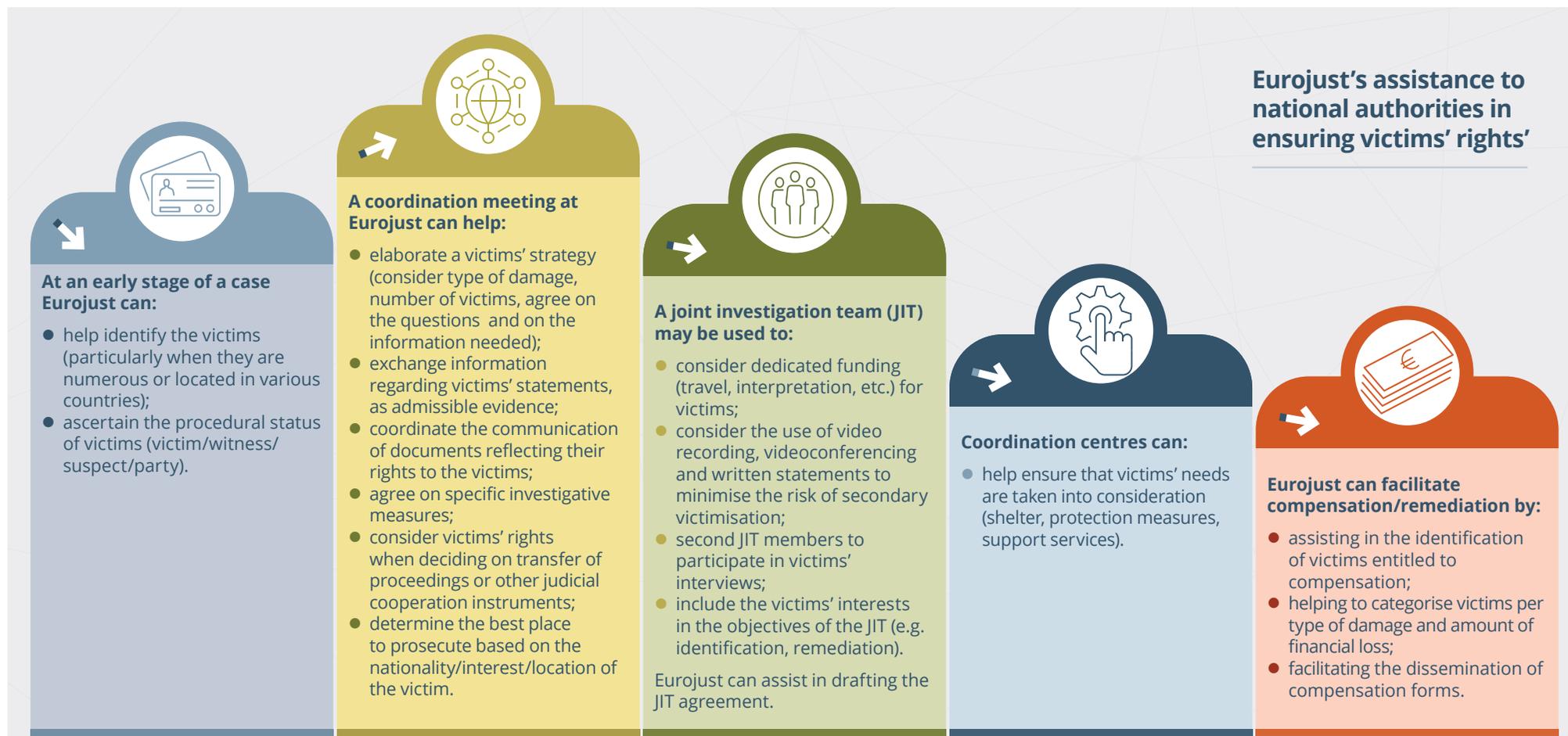
Eurojust aims to minimise the risks associated with the cross-border dimension of cases by ensuring timely and effective coordination between the various countries and actors involved to preserve victims' rights. The Agency is uniquely positioned to facilitate information exchange on victims to identify, rescue and protect them. Moreover, it is able to help prevent and resolve conflicts of jurisdiction and find concrete solutions for victims across the European Union, such as the right to compensation.

Eurojust promotes the victims' rights dimension in all of its casework, regardless of the crime. However, each crime area has its own specificities when it comes to effectively addressing victims' rights. In human trafficking cases, for example, the early identification of victims is key to ensure that they benefit from the support of specialised services at the soonest possible opportunity.

Coordination meetings at Eurojust enable practitioners to discuss the most appropriate ways to identify victims, ascertain their status and ensure that psychological and other forms of support, assistance and protection are available. In a case involving Romanian victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, the agenda of the first coordination meeting featured an item specifically dedicated to considering victims' rights. Such best practices are a testimony to Eurojust's promotion of the victims' rights dimension at an early stage of the case. This ensures that judicial authorities dedicate time and resources in determining, for example, the location, legal status and potential needs of the victims.

In this particular case, which involved the national authorities of a number of Member States, including Romania, Belgium and the Netherlands, participants exchanged views on the legal status of the victims. The investigations revealed that the victims had been deliberately moved from one Member State to others. The coordination meeting revealed that most of the legislation of the concerned Member States oblige practitioners to prove that the victims were forced to engage in prostitution, while others do not or have a lower threshold. As a result, the same individual can be recognised as a victim in one jurisdiction and not in another. Discussing the matter at Eurojust was

pivotal in this case to determine the facts that must be established to prove the constitutive elements of the offences in each country concerned. It was also important to determine the evidence required to satisfy the national legislations. These discussions enabled the national authorities to have a clear understanding of the legislative and operational approaches in each of the Member States where the exploitation of victims took place, and in the case of the Romanian authorities, to reconfigure and adapt their investigation strategy.



4.3 Safeguarding victims' rights across all crime areas

Throughout 2023, Eurojust organised a series of meetings on different crime types, in which dedicated sessions were held to examine the issue of victims' rights from the perspective of a particular crime area.

Trafficking in human beings – The [Focus Group of specialised prosecutors against human trafficking](#) in June 2023 highlighted the specific difficulties faced by judicial practitioners in relation to protecting victims' rights. For example, gathering admissible evidence can be particularly challenging when obtaining testimonies from victims of human trafficking. In some countries, such as Spain, it was noted that the consent of the victims can create further difficulties for prosecutors to prove the exploitation element in court.

Cybercrime – During the [15th Plenary Meeting of the European Judicial Cybercrime Network \(EJCN\)](#) in November 2023, the Netherlands Public Prosecution Service presented a ransomware case where they faced legal challenges in returning seized crypto assets to victims. Participants were able to discuss the case in depth and debate various solutions. This was followed in December 2023 by a ransomware training session for judicial and law enforcement practitioners organised by the EJCN in cooperation with the [Cyclopes Project](#). The training session focused on how practitioners can provide effective guidance to help victims properly assess the situation prior, during and after an attack.

Migrant smuggling – During the [Annual Meeting on Migrant Smuggling](#) in November 2023, a prosecutor and member of Eurojust's Victims' Rights Working Group presented the particular challenges posed by the deviating legal status of migrants in judicial proceedings, and the possible ramifications of migrants becoming victims of any type of crime. While in many EU Member States migrants carry the status of witness by legislation, they are also often victims of human rights violations in the course of their journey. Establishing the legal status of migrants as victims, witnesses or suspects is crucial to safeguard their rights in judicial proceedings, including in relation to re-victimisation through subjection to multiple statements and testimonies.

Terrorism – During the [Annual Meeting on Counter-Terrorism](#) in November 2023, the role of victims in mass trials was addressed, based on the recent trial of the Paris and Saint-Denis terrorist attacks of November 2015 in France. Given the large-scale nature of this trial, which involved 2 600 civil parties, 330 lawyers and 20 accused, ensuring victims' rights was particularly challenging.

Ahead of the trial, the victims' rights to information and protection were addressed by providing civil parties with practical information about the court building and how it functions, as well as the support that would be offered to them throughout the trial. Victim protection needs were met by engaging with the press and law enforcement authorities attending the trial. For example, military personnel and police officers agreed to make heavy weapons less visible to make victims feel more comfortable. Similarly, coloured badges were used to help journalists identify civil parties who agreed to be approached by the press. During the trial, efforts were made to ensure the best possible conditions for the participation of both national and foreign victims. Interpretation and a web radio were available for civil parties, enabling them to follow the whole trial.

The definition of a victim in this trial was a major challenge as the existing legislation showed its limitations when dealing with complex cases involving a high number of injured and deceased persons. The more than 2 600 persons who asked to be recognised as a civil party to the proceedings embraced a wide range of personal situations and damages suffered. In that context, the court found that the definition of a victim, whether a natural or a legal person, should be broad. A second major challenge was to ensure the effective exercise of victims' procedural rights – including the right to be heard, to call witnesses, to ask questions to the accused, to make submissions and to request damages – while ensuring the smooth and timely running of the hearing. Advance consultation with relevant stakeholders and innovative solutions were key to achieving this objective.

Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) related to any crime – In October 2023, the [19th annual meeting of the JITs Network Secretariat](#) dedicated a workshop to the 'Procedural rights of victims within the context of JITs'. Practitioners highlighted the importance of distinguishing between the different stages

of an investigation and the role of victims in each of them: identification, rescue and protection, trial testimony and finally, compensation. Participants also acknowledged that the best time and means to address victims' rights depends on the specific crime under investigation in the JIT. The importance of locating assets to compensate victims was also discussed. Participants confirmed that victims' rights are not addressed consistently enough between JIT parties and discussed how this could be improved. They also agreed to further promote funding opportunities to support JIT activities related to victims. Finally, the meeting participants recommended including a 'victims clause' in the JIT model agreement, disseminating information on the challenging aspects of national legislation on victims' rights and addressing practitioners' training needs.

4.4 Revision of the Victims Rights' Directive and cooperation at EU level

In July 2023, the European Commission adopted [a proposal to revise the Victims' Rights Directive](#). The revision is accompanied by an [impact assessment](#) following an extensive consultation process and [an evaluation of the Directive](#). The revision of the Victims' Rights Directive addresses problems identified in the evaluation. The amendments concern five main victims' rights: access to information, improved support and protection, improved participation in criminal proceedings and facilitated access to compensation.

Eurojust contributed to the evaluation exercise by participating in an interview and providing its expertise in a dedicated [report](#) published in February 2022. The report is based on the Agency's casework and identifies challenges faced by practitioners and best practices to overcome them.

During the revision process, Eurojust advocated for the recognition and strengthening of its operational role in the protection of victims' rights. The aim of the proposed amendment is to promote the referral of information to Eurojust in cases where victims' rights are at stake within the context of judicial cooperation. This information may, where appropriate, be shared by judicial national authorities with Eurojust, as per the Agency's Regulation.

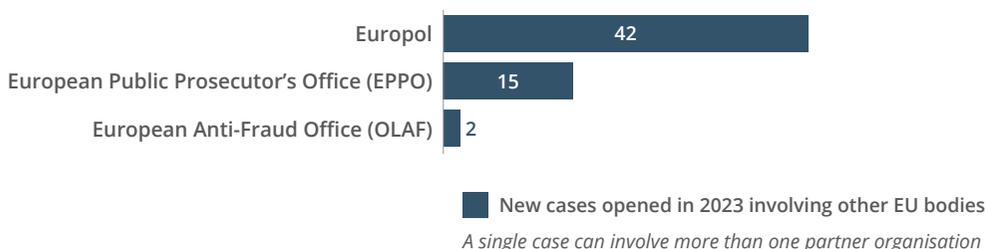
If adopted, the amendment will encourage Member States to refer to Eurojust cases in which victims' rights are identified as warranting specific coordination at judicial level. Eurojust calls on national authorities to refer cases involving victims to the Agency at an early stage to minimise the cross-border risks associated with such cases.

During 2023, the Agency continued to participate in the [EU Victims' Rights Platform](#) and exchange best practices and promote cooperation with the [European Commission Coordinator for Victims' Rights](#) and the [European Network on Victims' Rights](#). In particular, the Agency participated in the annual conference of the European Network on Victims' Rights in May 2023 and attended two online meetings of the EU Victims' Rights Platform dedicated to child victims in May 2023 and to victims of war crimes in July 2023.

5. Cooperation with partners

5.1 Cooperation with EU agencies

Operational cooperation with the main actors in the security chain is vital to ensuring justice gets done. Throughout 2023, Eurojust continued to cooperate closely with the European Justice and Home Affairs agencies, contributing judicial expertise in the common fight against cross-border crime. During 2023, the Agency handled a significant number of cross-border cases with Europol and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), as well as two cases with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).



Europol

During 2023, Eurojust continued its strong partnership with Europol in both operational and strategic areas.

In terms of operational cooperation, the agencies worked closely together on 42 cross-border cases in 2023, with Europol joining Eurojust in 96 coordination meetings as well as 8 coordination centres. Europol also participated in 14 joint investigations supported by Eurojust, including the joint investigation team into alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine, which [Europol joined as a participant](#) in October 2023 (see section 2.1).

On 1 May 2023, the two agencies launched a pilot project for the systematic and structural exchange of data on a hit/no hit basis for link detection purposes. This joint undertaking aims to implement a first solution for the hit/no hit data exchange set out in the agencies' respective founding regulations. The new process supports the cross-checking of information and the linking of ongoing investigations, thus providing further opportunities for cooperation. The follow-up on hits identified may include the establishment of contacts, sharing of further information and/or joint operational action. The pilot project will be reviewed in the first half of 2024 to evaluate the business processes, data retention periods, operational results and the impact on the respective agencies.

During 2023, the agencies participated in several meetings together to enhance strategic cooperation. A high-level meeting took place in June 2023 addressing topics such as the preparation of a proposal for a Core International Crimes Joint Platform between the agencies and the need to remind Member States working within EMPACT of the importance of early involvement of the judiciary. The annual Eurojust-Europol Steering Committee meeting took place in November 2023. The agenda included discussions on the cooperation of the agencies' in joint investigation teams, the future of the [SIRIUS project](#) (co-implemented by Eurojust and Europol, see section 3.7), and the state of play of the hit/no hit pilot project.

Also in November 2023, both agencies made presentations at the Eurojust Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting, which included a dedicated session on the agencies' cooperation. Using examples of joint cases and activities, Eurojust demonstrated to members of the European Parliament and national parliaments that the close cooperation between the agencies is a prerequisite for success in the fight against cross-border organised crime and terrorism.

In 2023, Eurojust and Europol carried out parallel assessments of the practical implementation of the Eurojust-Europol Cooperation Agreement, also taking into consideration the two agencies' revised mandates. The outcome of this exercise will be discussed at the joint meeting of the College of Eurojust and the Management Board of Europol in October 2024. An informal working group has been set up and meets regularly to identify business needs and opportunities to enhance cooperation in the years to come.

Eurojust also participated in the annual event of the [EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security](#) in October 2023, hosted by Europol, aimed at providing the latest innovation updates and effective solutions to support the work of internal security actors across the EU.

To improve operational cooperation, Eurojust colleagues participated in an exchange visit to Europol in June 2023, aimed at raising awareness among post holders of the agencies' working methods and enhancing the dialogue between specialists in the same field.

EPPO

Fifteen new cases were opened at Eurojust in 2023 to support the EPPO in its investigations involving non-participating Member States and third countries, mostly concerning large-scale organised VAT fraud involving several countries. During 2023, the EPPO was involved in 26 Eurojust cases and participated in six coordination meetings organised at the Agency. In one of these cases, Eurojust also supported the EPPO in setting up a joint investigation team (JIT).

In early 2023, the workflows for the opening and handling of Eurojust cases involving the EPPO were adopted by the Colleges of both agencies.

The EPPO participated in the Eurojust-led EMPACT Operational Action on Missing Trader Intra-Community (MTIC) fraud, which focuses on MTIC fraud involving intangible goods and services. Moreover, in March 2023, the EPPO also contributed to the US-EU expert group on obtaining evidence via mutual legal assistance (MLA) from the United States, as well as the [EU-UK meeting on MLA cooperation with the United Kingdom](#) in October 2023, both organised by Eurojust.

The Eurojust-EPPO Liaison Team's third meeting took place in December 2023. Issues discussed included the next steps for the implementation of the hit/no hit system, the joint evaluation of the agencies' working arrangement and Eurojust's support to JITs involving the EPPO.

Progress was also made during 2023 on the implementation of the hit/no hit data exchange system between the two agencies, in order to enhance the detection of links between cases, which will start in 2024.

OLAF

During 2023, OLAF continued to be a key partner in Eurojust's operational work, in line with the Working Arrangement signed by the two agencies in March 2023 to step up cooperation.

Eurojust worked with OLAF on two cases in 2023, including one on agro-pharmaceuticals, for which a coordination meeting was organised in September 2023.

During the year, OLAF participated in the activities of the EMPACT Operational Action on MTIC fraud, led by Eurojust.

At the strategic level, a high-level meeting between the two agencies focused on the implementation of the Eurojust-OLAF Action Plan 2022-2023 to fight crimes affecting the European Union's financial interests, and an exchange of views on the agencies' joint cases.

The Eurojust-OLAF Liaison Team met regularly in 2023 to discuss cooperation and operational matters, including the agencies' joint training workshop, which took place in January 2024 with a focus on JITs and environmental crime.

Cooperation with training partners

Throughout 2023, Eurojust continued to support the training activities of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN) and the Academy of European Law (ERA), in line with its mandate and Memoranda of Understanding. Eurojust supported 9 ERA, 13 EJTN and 16 CEPOL training activities (12 of which were co-organised with the EJTN). Eurojust's input to the training activities focused on the Agency's expertise on judicial cooperation instruments.

Eurojust also contributed to CEPOL's capacity-building projects, in particular the Western Balkans Partnership against Crime and Terrorism Project ([WB PaCT](#)) and the [CT INFLOW project](#).

In 2023, Eurojust and the EJTN celebrated 15 years of cooperation. On this occasion, the new Secretary-General of the EJTN visited Eurojust in February 2023 to discuss past joint achievements and projects for the future. The agencies' partnership includes study visits and training activities in which Eurojust delegates expert speakers.

In 2023, Eurojust experts participated in 13 EJTN trainings, including some practical case-based simulations on international fraud, counter-terrorism and human trafficking. A study visit was organised in June 2023, involving 30 participants from national judicial authorities, dedicated to participants' chosen topics of interest: cybercrime, anti-trafficking and asset recovery/ financial investigations, money laundering and economic crimes.

Moreover, in 2023, Eurojust hosted 23 EJTN trainees from 16 EU Member States for training periods of 3 or 4 months (for a total of 77 months). The trainees worked with their respective National Desks at Eurojust on cross-border cases and attended coordination meetings and coordination centres. Thanks to this unique opportunity, they acquired an in-depth insight into European criminal justice cooperation and supported their colleagues from other EU Member States.

Justice and Home Affairs Agencies Network (JHAAN)

In 2023, the activities of the JHAAN focused on five thematic priorities: digitalisation, the European Green Deal, information provision in mixed migration situations, cybersecurity, and the communication and promotion of the Network.

In July 2023, the JHAAN published a [Report on the survey of JHA Agencies' environmental and greening activities](#). The survey results show that JHA agencies are strongly committed to stepping up their environmental and greening activities, at a time when environmental protection and sustainability are high on the EU agenda. The report proposes recommendations for discussion and implementation by future JHAAN presidencies.

Under the JHAAN communication and promotion priority, an updated [JHAAN brochure](#) and a new [JHAAN promotional video](#) were produced in 2023 to raise awareness about the Network and the individual agencies, both internally and externally. An online open market event also took place in September 2023, targeting all JHA Agencies staff as well as colleagues from other EU institutions.

In March 2023, an [updated Joint paper on JHA Agencies' contribution to EU solidarity with Ukraine](#) was published, covering the period February 2022-February 2023. The paper describes the actions taken by the nine EU agencies cooperating within the JHAAN, which form an integral part of the EU's coordinated response to the war in Ukraine.

In November 2023, the nine JHA agencies, the Network's observers, the incoming Belgian Presidency of the Council, and the representative of the EU Agencies Network, gathered at the European Union Agency for Asylum's headquarters in Malta for the [Heads of JHA Agencies meeting](#). Participants discussed recent and upcoming developments in the Justice and Home Affairs field, including the Belgian Presidency's priorities to step up the fight against drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, and organised crime. The agencies took stock of the achievements accomplished with regard to the JHAAN's five thematic priorities in 2023, and focused on their upcoming objectives. Eurojust's digitalisation initiatives to modernise cross-border judicial cooperation were one of the priorities presented at the meeting.

5.2 Relations with EU institutions and Member States

Visit to Eurojust by the European Commission's Vice-President for Values and Transparency

In April 2023, the [Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, Věra Jourová, visited Eurojust](#) to discuss the Agency's work on accountability for crimes committed in Ukraine. Since the onset of the Russian invasion, Eurojust has been actively supporting international efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss Eurojust's and the European Commission's collaboration in the EU Freeze and Seize Task Force and the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA).

“ The Commission fully supports Eurojust in its pivotal role to help ensure accountability in the Russian war against Ukraine. Eurojust was key in setting up a joint investigation team to support the gathering, exchange and transmission of evidence of war crimes. Eurojust is on the right track to become a real hub for judicial cooperation and the investigation of war crimes. ”

Věra Jourová, European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency

Fourth Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting on the Evaluation of Eurojust's activities

The [Fourth Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting](#) on the Evaluation of Eurojust's activities took place in November 2023 at the European Parliament. The aim of this annual meeting is for the European Parliament and National Parliaments to evaluate the Agency's work, based on Eurojust's Annual Report.

The topics addressed included a discussion of Eurojust's work in 2023 as well as an outlook on its activities and challenges for future cross-border judicial cooperation in criminal matters. In addition, Eurojust's activities with regard to Ukraine, including the assessment of its extended mandate, were also discussed.

Justice and Home Affairs meeting of the Council of the European Union

During the [EU's Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting in December 2023](#), Eurojust's President was invited to provide an update on the Agency's work on accountability for Russian war crimes in Ukraine. Ministers were updated on the state of play of the Joint Investigation Team's work, the ICPA and the Core International Crimes Evidence Database (CICED).

European Criminal Records Information System – Third Country Nationals (ECRIS-TCN)

The ECRIS-TCN Regulation establishes a centralised EU hit/no hit central system to identify the Member State(s) holding information on previous convictions of third-country nationals. As set out in the [ECRIS-TCN Regulation](#), Eurojust will be the contact point for third countries and international organisations regarding ECRIS-TCN requests they wish to make in the context of criminal proceedings.

The new ECRIS-TCN information system will supplement the existing EU Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) with the data on non-EU nationals convicted in the European Union. Once operational, it will allow Member States, and also Eurojust, to see whether other Member State(s) have information on previous convictions of a non-EU national, thus contributing to the implementation of the principle of mutual recognition of sentences and judicial decisions. Third countries and international organisations will not have direct access to the ECRIS-TCN database, but may, with the consent of Member States ask Eurojust to process their ECRIS-TCN queries.

During 2023, Eurojust worked closely with eu-LISA and the European Commission on planning the implementation of the Agency's unique role towards third countries and international organisations in relation to ECRIS-TCN. The ECRIS-TCN database, to be hosted by eu-LISA, is expected to be operational in 2024.

17th Consultative Forum of Prosecutors General and Directors of Public Prosecutions of EU Member States

In October 2023, during the [17th Consultative Forum](#), the Prosecutors General and Directors of Public Prosecutions of EU Member States discussed how to enhance the role of judicial authorities in joint operations against major organised crime through EMPACT, as well as the judicial response to the war in Ukraine and the protection of the environment through criminal law.

The 17th Consultative Forum, organised by Eurojust with the Swedish and Spanish authorities whose countries held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2023, highlighted the necessity to improve awareness of EMPACT among judicial authorities.

“ EMPACT has been operational for more than a decade and has proven to be a highly effective collaborative platform for law enforcement agencies. It is now time for the prosecution authorities in the Member States to also step forward and further explore the possibilities for joint action against serious and organised crime through the platform. ”

Thomas Häggström, Director of Public Prosecution of Sweden

EMPACT is a security initiative driven by EU Member States. Operational Action Plans (OAPs) are developed to combat major crime in specific areas. Greater and earlier involvement of the judiciary in the entire process would enable a more effective and coordinated approach to tackling major organised crime. For the current EMPACT cycle running until 2025, ten priority areas for OAPs have been identified for major crime types, ranging from migrant smuggling and drug trafficking to environmental crime and cyberattacks. As the new OAPs are prepared for the next cycle, due to start in 2026, the Consultative Forum aims to further strengthen the role of judicial authorities.

Coordinating Committee in the area of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (CATS)

In May 2023, for the first time, Eurojust hosted an informal meeting of the Coordinating Committee in the area of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (CATS), composed of directors and directors general at the ministries of justice and home affairs of EU Member States. The meeting, which took place under the Swedish presidency, focused on the fight against impunity regarding crimes committed in connection with Russia's aggression against Ukraine and cooperation with third countries in the fight against organised crime.

5.3 Cooperation with third countries

Casework involving third countries

During 2023, 712 of the cases handled by the Agency involved one or more third countries. Eurojust's international cooperation continues to increase the number of registered cases at the Agency, with 351 new cases owned by third countries opened in 2023 alone. Countries with a Liaison Prosecutor located at Eurojust were requested to participate in cases 614 times in 2023. Moreover, 14 cases involved countries that have concluded a cooperation agreement with Eurojust but have not yet posted a Liaison Prosecutor at the Agency. Countries with appointed Eurojust Contact Points were requested to participate in 101 cases. The United Kingdom (UK) is the non-EU country with the most casework, with 275 cases in 2023, followed by Switzerland, Albania, Serbia and Ukraine.

Agreements on cooperation with third countries

Eurojust can only systematically exchange personal data if agreement concluded with a specific country allows for such transfers or if the European Commission has adopted an adequacy decision for the country in question in the law enforcement and judicial area. To date, Eurojust has 13 such agreements, with Albania, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the UK and the United States (US).

Experience has shown that an international agreement that allows for the systematic exchange of personal data and the subsequent secondment of a Liaison Prosecutor to Eurojust, enables a much smoother exchange of information and a considerable increase in cooperation.

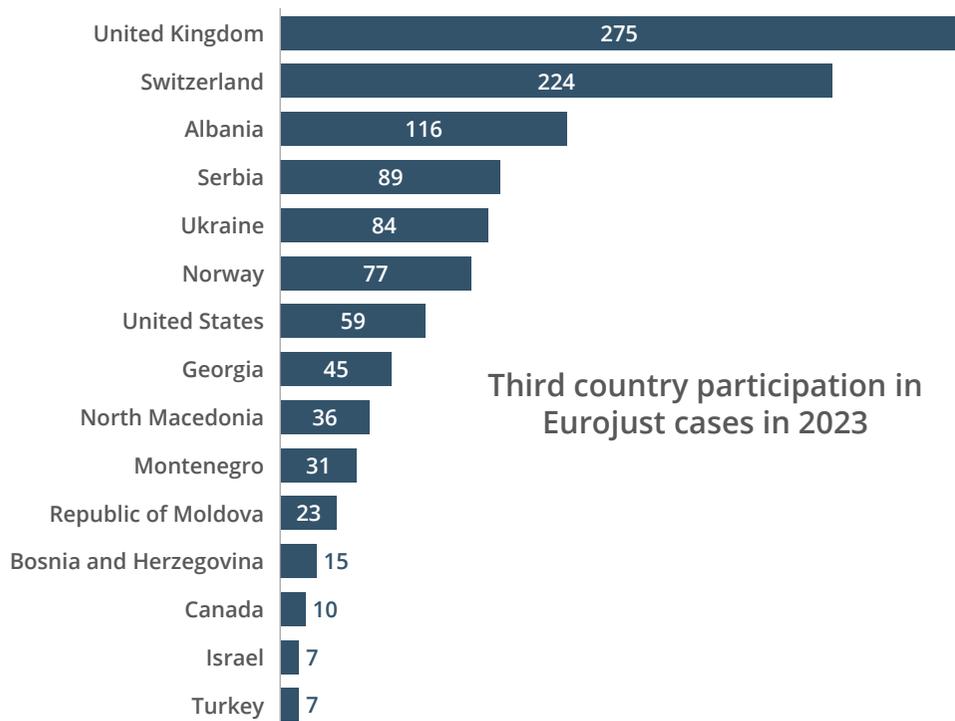
Under the previous cooperation strategy, Eurojust proposed the conclusion of international agreements with a number of non-EU countries, and the Council of the European Union authorised the opening of negotiations with 13 of them (Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey). During 2023, Eurojust continued to provide its technical expertise on these international agreements in close cooperation with the European Commission, and participated in the negotiation meetings as an observer.

Liaison Prosecutors

Hosting Liaison Prosecutors from non-EU countries at Eurojust’s premises in The Hague allows Member States’ authorities to cooperate closely with the judicial authorities in these countries. This enables direct operational cooperation between them, leading to more successful investigations and prosecutions.

Currently, 12 third countries have Liaison Prosecutors at Eurojust: Albania, Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the UK and the US. During 2023, 351 new cases were initiated by Liaison Prosecutors at Eurojust, with Switzerland and Albania opening the highest number of cases. The UK, followed by Switzerland, were the countries most requested to participate in new cases opened by National Desks at the Agency in 2023. Liaison Prosecutors were also actively involved in Eurojust’s meetings and instruments to tackle these cases, with the UK, US and Ukraine attending more than 50 coordination meetings, and the UK, Switzerland and Albania participating in more than 20 JITs in the same year.

During 2023, [Eurojust welcomed two new Liaison Prosecutors](#). For the first time, the Republic of Moldova has a prosecutor stationed at Eurojust’s headquarters in The Hague, which will strengthen cooperation with the Moldovan authorities in cases of serious cross-border crime. A new Liaison Prosecutor was also appointed for Norway to continue the strong judicial cooperation that dates back to 2005, when Norway became the first country to sign a cooperation agreement with the Agency. More recently, the [first Liaison Prosecutor for Iceland](#) also joined Eurojust, following a cooperation agreement signed by the Icelandic authorities and the Agency in 2005.



Overview of cases in 2023 involving Liaison Prosecutors

LIAISON PROSECUTOR	Cases initiated by the National Desk				Participation in cases initiated by other Desks		Participation in joint activities/meetings		
	New in 2023	No. of countries involved		Ongoing from previous years	New in 2023	Ongoing from previous years	Coordination meetings	JITs	Action days
		2	3 or more						
Albania	76	74	2	23	40	96	22	22	1
Georgia	30	30	0	11	15	47	4	3	0
Moldova	0	0	0	0	23	37	11	13	0
Montenegro	16	16	0	22	15	38	5	0	1
North Macedonia	14	11	3	15	22	44	5	1	0
Norway	42	33	9	152	35	83	14	13	1
Serbia	32	27	5	59	57	79	23	4	4
Switzerland	85	71	14	97	139	381	45	23	2
Ukraine	21	19	2	50	63	138	52	19	2
United Kingdom	30	24	6	64	245	661	71	29	2
United States	5	1	4	11	54	140	60	0	2
TOTAL	351	306	45	504	*	*	*	*	*

* These columns cannot be summed up, since more than one National Desk can be requested to participate in a single case, and coordination meetings, JITs and action days are often co-organised.

Eurojust's Contact Points

Eurojust has been steadily growing its Contact Points network in third countries, enabling direct contact with the competent authorities when a crime extends beyond the EU's borders. To date, the network has Contact Points in over 72 countries.

In 2023, nine new third countries joined Eurojust's Contact Point network: Chad, Ghana, Togo, The Gambia, Tajikistan, Philippines, Mozambique, Kyrgyzstan and Kuwait. During the year, the Agency held 22 meetings with Contact Points to explain the Agency's role in facilitating judicial cooperation with EU Member States. Moreover, during the year, cooperation with non-EU countries via Contact Points was streamlined thanks to bilateral meetings, a functional mailbox and a cooperation guide.

Eurojust cooperation with third countries

Agreements on cooperation



Agreements on cooperation provide the possibility of exchanging operational information, including evidence and personal data, between Eurojust and the national authorities of the country involved in a systematic way.

Eurojust can rely on agreements on cooperation concluded with 13 non-EU countries: **Albania, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom** and the **United States**.

Contact Point network

Eurojust is actively connected with **over 70 jurisdictions worldwide**. Contact Points appointed by national authorities enable prosecutors from Member States to get information on these legal systems and solve problems in judicial cooperation when a crime extends beyond the European Union's borders.



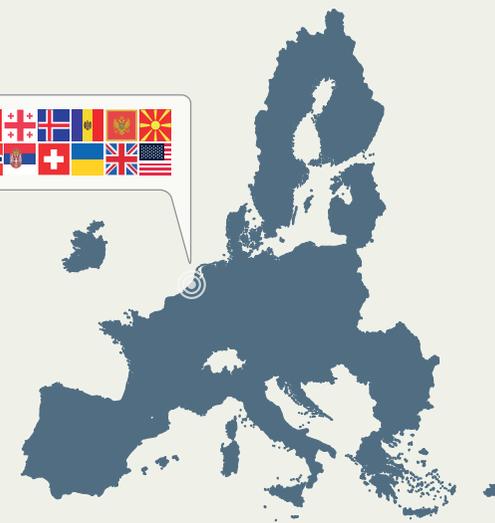
Contact Points also ensure that authorities in non-EU countries can swiftly communicate with Eurojust and obtain information on EU legal systems.

Liaison Prosecutors

Liaison Prosecutors from countries outside the EU are **posted at Eurojust**. They work side by side with their colleagues from the Member States to provide support in cross-border investigations involving their country.



Currently, twelve Liaison Prosecutors are seconded to Eurojust, from **Albania, Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom** and the **United States**.



Working arrangements

Eurojust concludes working arrangements with third countries and judicial networks and associations established outside of the EU to enable strategic cooperation in combatting serious crime.

These arrangements allow exchanging strategic information and sharing best practices, but are not a basis to share operational personal data.

Eurojust has working arrangements with the **Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors Offices (AIAMP), Nigeria** and **Panama**.



Cooperation with Latin America and the United States

In recent years, judicial cooperation in criminal matters between EU and Latin American countries has intensified. Latin American criminal networks play a major role in drug trafficking, often in collaboration with EU-based criminal groups. This has led to the establishment of the first four JITs involving Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador with the support of Eurojust. The [19th Annual Meeting of the Network of National Experts on JITs](#), in October 2023, explored how to step up judicial and law enforcement cooperation between EU Member States and Latin American countries in the fight against serious organised crime (see section 6.1).

During 2023, Eurojust welcomed various prosecutors and policy makers from Latin America to discuss matters of judicial cooperation. In March, the [Prosecutor General of the Federative Republic of Brazil met with Eurojust's President](#), and in October the [Attorney General of Colombia visited the Agency](#) to discuss stepping up cooperation against drug and wildlife trafficking. For the first time, representatives of the Caribbean Community also visited Eurojust, with the support of the [PACE Justice Project](#), which aims to strengthen the institutional capacities of judicial and law enforcement authorities in the Caribbean to effectively manage criminal cases.

Moreover, in November 2023, the Vice-Minister of Justice from the Republic of Colombia visited the Agency with a high-level delegation of officers from the Data Protection Authority, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice and the National Police. The European Commission also participated in the meeting to explain the benefits of concluding an international agreement between the EU and Colombia on cooperation with Eurojust.

[Eurojust and the Attorney General of the Republic of Panama signed a Working Arrangement](#) in January 2024, formalising Eurojust's existing Contact Points in Panama and ensuring closer communication to speed up the execution of judicial cooperation requests on both sides. Panama is the first Latin American country to sign a Working Arrangement with Eurojust.

During 2023, Eurojust continued its cooperation with the United States within the framework of the US-EU expert group on obtaining (e-)evidence, with two meetings organised in March and November, as well as a workshop in

June, focusing on the execution of MLA requests for gathering evidence in the United States (see section 3.7).

Cooperation with Southern Neighbourhood and other Middle Eastern countries

In May 2023, the Agency hosted a study visit of representatives of the Iraqi judiciary and the Ministry of Interior. The visit focused on migrant smuggling and was organised in the framework of the [UNODC GLO.ACT Asia and the Middle East initiative](#) (the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants).

In June 2023, Eurojust's President attended the Annual Conference of the Palestinian Public Prosecution, while in November 2023, he attended the 3rd Annual Meeting of the Arab Association of Prosecutors, held in Morocco.

In September 2023, two representatives from the Moroccan Advocate General to the High Court of Cassation and the Ministry of Justice visited Eurojust for two weeks to familiarise themselves with the Agency's work and its judicial cooperation tools and instruments for cooperation with non-EU countries.

Cooperation with Africa

A delegation from Nigeria and selected West African countries (Cabo Verde, Ghana, Niger and The Gambia), all members of the West African Network of Central Authorities and Prosecutors, visited Eurojust for two days in June 2023. The visit was jointly hosted by the EJM and was facilitated by the UNODC. The visit was instrumental in explaining the mandate and activities of the Agency and the EJM, as well as in learning more about Nigerian legal frameworks and those of other countries in Western Africa, while discussing further cooperation possibilities.

In November 2023, [Eurojust and the Attorney General of Nigeria signed a Working Arrangement](#) to enable structured and closer cooperation in the fight against organised crime groups. This paves the way for the establishment of a Contact Point for Eurojust in Nigeria, and makes Nigeria the first sub-Saharan African country to sign a Working Arrangement with the Agency.

The Working Arrangement was signed during a conference hosted by Eurojust on Transnational Organised Crime affecting West Africa and Europe, co-organised with UNODC and the Siracusa Institute (see section 3.11).

Cooperation with South East Asia

In May 2023, the Secretary of Justice of the Republic of the Philippines visited Eurojust. As a result of the visit, the authorities of the Philippines designated a Contact Point for the Agency.

Furthermore, in October 2023, a delegation from the South East Asian States, SEA Just, came to Eurojust for a study visit. The delegation learned about Eurojust's and the EJM's work and explored possibilities for strengthening international judicial cooperation.

Cooperation with Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus

In April 2023, Eurojust hosted delegations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (members of the Judicial Cooperation Network for Central Asia and Southern Caucasus launched by UNODC) for a study visit to discuss ways of enhancing cooperation between Eurojust and the region.

Cooperation with Moldova

The [President of the Republic of Moldova visited Eurojust](#) in September 2023 to discuss the country's cooperation with the Agency and its further integration into the EU's judicial cooperation architecture. She met with Eurojust's President, who underlined the importance of strengthening relations to effectively fight serious cross-border crime and explained the Agency's activities, including its support for accountability efforts in Ukraine.

Cooperation with the UK

In October 2023, a [meeting on Mutual Legal Assistance \(MLA\) cooperation between the European Union and the United Kingdom](#) was held at Eurojust. During the two-day meeting, practitioners learned how to deal effectively

and efficiently with requests for MLA involving the UK. Since 1 January 2021, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and UK became applicable, implying changes in judicial cooperation, including in relation to MLA. The MLA form (created in accordance with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement), became mandatory as of 1 September 2023 for all MLA requests to and from the UK, in relation to EU Member States.

EuroMed Justice Project

The EuroMed Justice Project (EMJ) strengthens strategic and operational cooperation among SPCs, EU Member States, Eurojust, the EJM and other EU judicial and law enforcement cooperation agencies. The Programme builds sustainable cross-regional mechanisms of cooperation, strengthens regional judicial training platforms and develops practical tools for cross-border cooperation.

In March 2023, the EMJ organised the 'EuroMed Environmental Justice Week'. A [Conference on Environmental Justice in the Mediterranean](#) was organised by EJM in Algiers, in cooperation with Algeria, Tunisia and France. Several international experts attended, including justice and environmental officials from Algeria, Egypt, France, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia, as well as representatives from Eurojust and the European Commission. In the same week, the EJM organised a training session for EU Member States and SPCs with a focus on environmental crime.

In May 2023, the EuroMed Justice programme jointly organised a [Conference on Joint Investigations](#) in Trier, Germany with the Academy of European Law aimed at improving judicial cooperation between SPCs and EU Member States. The conference identified concrete steps to help judicial authorities from SPCs organise joint and parallel investigations among themselves, with the support of the EMJ, and with EU Member States together with Eurojust's and the JITs Network Secretariat involvement. The Conference gathered nearly 60 officials from all 9 SPCs and 10 EU Member States, as well as representatives of Eurojust, Europol, the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, EPPO, UNODC, the Council of Europe, the Cybercrime Programme Office and the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center.

In June 2023, the [first meeting of the EuroMed Justice Network of Contact Points](#) (EMJNet) took place in Rome, during the 17th meeting of CrimEx (the coordination mechanism reuniting participating representatives from SPCs, EU Member States and the EMJNet). Participants discussed two priority areas for strategic cooperation: environmental crime and financial crime. In September 2023, the [Larnaca conference, 18th CrimEx and 2nd EMJNet meeting](#) took place in Cyprus and focused on the SPCs' cooperation with the EU to tackle migrant smuggling.

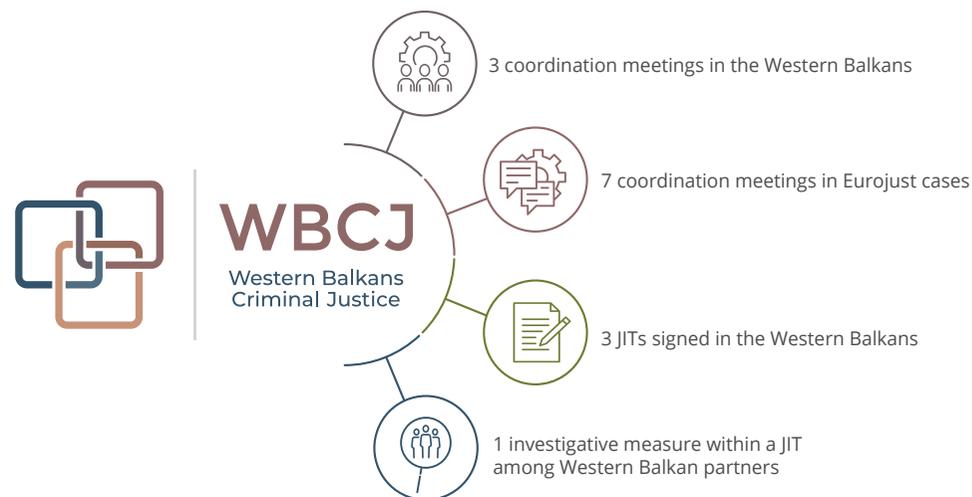
Throughout 2023, the EMJ continued to implement its 2022-2025 Strategy and the two related action plans on human trafficking and migrant smuggling and asset recovery. EMJ's fifth phase ended in December 2023, and a new contribution agreement was signed for the next four-year phase, starting in January 2024. The sixth phase of the project will focus on providing more operational support to concrete situations between the SPCs, as well as between them and EU Member States.

Western Balkans Criminal Justice Project

The [Western Balkans Criminal Justice \(WBCJ\) Project was launched in May 2023](#) during a conference attended by high-level representatives of the regional partners and several EU institutions. Funded by the European Commission and implemented by Eurojust, the initiative aims to strengthen judicial cooperation within the Western Balkans as well as between the region and the EU in the fight against organised crime and terrorism. The participating countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo²⁹, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

In March 2023, the WBCJ Project established the Contact Group of practitioners from the Western Balkans region in charge of the coordination of cross-border cases and organised five meetings of the Contact Group.

Following these meetings, the WBCJ Project funded three coordination meetings among Western Balkan authorities and one investigative measure within a JIT in the region. Moreover, the project supported the participation of Western Balkan practitioners in seven coordination meetings organised in relation to Eurojust cases. The project also supported the signing of three JITs in the Western Balkans.



In June 2023, the WBCJ Project organised a webinar on EU jurisprudence on admissibility of evidence obtained from Sky ECC and Encrochat networks, in cooperation with the European Judicial Cybercrime Network (EJCN). The webinar, attended by over 300 participants, informed Western Balkan practitioners about the latest trends in EU courts regarding the admissibility of evidence obtained from encrypted networks.

In July 2023, the WBCJ project organised a regional seminar on challenges and opportunities of JITs between EU Member States and Western Balkan Partners in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The seminar was organised in cooperation with the JITs Network Secretariat and the Focus Group on Migrant Smuggling. This first event organised by the project in the region was attended by more than 50 prosecutors and law enforcement officers from the six Western Balkan partner countries. The seminar highlighted successful case studies involving EU Member States and Western Balkan countries.

In September 2023, as part of its outreach strategy in each Western Balkan country, the WBCJ Project organised a seminar for Montenegrin practitioners on judicial cooperation tools offered by the Agency and the project in Budva, Montenegro.

²⁹ This designation is made without prejudice to positions on status and is in accordance with UNSCR 1244/ 1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

In October 2023, the project financed a training session delivered by the JITs Network Secretariat on JITs funding for Albania's National Bureau of Investigations and Special Anti-Corruption Structure.

In line with the project's objective to cooperate with EU networks, in November 2023, the WBCJ Project supported the participation of six prosecutors from the Western Balkan region in the [Eurojust Annual Meeting on Migrant Smuggling](#), as well as the participation of eight practitioners from the Western Balkans at the [61st Plenary Meeting of the EJN in Madrid](#).



EUROJUST

Successful takedown of drug trafficking network in Italy and Albania

CRIME: A criminal network is allegedly responsible for the large-scale trafficking of cocaine, cannabis and heroin, mainly from Albania to Italy.

ACTION: In January 2023, a joint action day involving the Italian and Albanian authorities is managed in real time from Eurojust's coordination centre. During the joint operation, supported by some 350 officers on the ground, 30 suspects are arrested and 31 locations are searched. Five rifles, one pistol and six vehicles are also seized. Property worth EUR 1 million (equivalent to the proceeds of the criminal offense) is seized in Albania.

RESULT: Eurojust and Europol successfully support judicial and law enforcement authorities in Italy and Albania in dismantling the drug trafficking network.

The case is sent to court for trial in December 2023. 21 defendants are charged with drug trafficking and participation in a structured organised crime group.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: The case is opened at Eurojust and Europol in 2019. The Agency supports the authorities by setting up and funding a joint investigation team. Eurojust organises two coordination meetings for the involved authorities to exchange information and agree on the prosecutorial strategy.



Actions across Europe against online fraud with cryptocurrencies



CRIME: Fraudulent call centres and websites of alleged financial trading companies in Ukraine and Georgia are uncovered, following a complaint by a victim to the Swiss authorities in October 2019. The perpetrators use over 100 websites, posing as serious investment companies, offering financial transactions in cryptocurrencies and trading options. After potential investors show interest, they are approached over the phone and lured into making considerable investments. Most of the victims are Swiss and German investors, who lose at least several million euros.

ACTION: In 2023, targeted actions are taken in several countries where searches take place and bank accounts and assets are frozen. Moreover, during a coordinated action day in April 2023, further judicial measures are taken in 13 countries, to freeze and seize the suspects' bank accounts and assets.

RESULT: During the action day, the simultaneous freezing of several accounts in several EU countries successfully prevents assets from being shifted to different bank accounts. Thanks to the effective and efficient coordination of this major case involving 13 countries, the investment scam is disrupted.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: The coordination of this large and complex case between EU countries and third States with Liaison Prosecutors would not have been possible without Eurojust's support. The Agency has provided crucial assistance to the case since December 2020, helping to set up a joint investigation team into the fraud between the Swiss and Ukrainian judicial and police authorities. Furthermore, Eurojust's Liaison Prosecutor for Georgia is instrumental in facilitating the shutdown of the infrastructure and criminal activities in the country. Eurojust also supports three coordination meetings to arrange the coordinated action day.

5.4 Cooperation with international organisations

In recent years, international developments have led Eurojust to intensify its cooperation with a number of international organisations. Relying on its unique expertise, partnerships and modern digital tools, the Agency ensures that national borders are no obstacle to prosecuting crime and getting justice done.

In 2023, Eurojust continued to engage with international organisations, as well as competent authorities of countries outside the European Union, to promote closer cooperation in the fight against serious and organised crime. The Agency has built strong ties with international organisations and countries that share the EU's desire for a more secure world in which equality, the rule of law and human rights are respected.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

Operational cooperation with the ICC continued to intensify in 2023, with the organisation participating in the Eurojust-supported joint investigation team for alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine. The ICC also participates in the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA), which was established by Eurojust to provide members with tailored operational, technical, logistical and financial support (see section 2.1).

The [Guidelines to help Civil Society Organisations](#) document international crimes and human rights violations (jointly developed by Eurojust, the Genocide Network and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court) is another excellent example of a recent collaboration which gained the [Award of the European Ombudsman for Good Administration](#) (see section 3.3).

Furthermore, the recent amendment to the Eurojust Regulation mandates the Agency to exchange evidence with, or otherwise make evidence directly available to, international judicial authorities, in particular the ICC.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

During 2023, Eurojust worked closely with the UNODC and organised joint events to support cooperation between Europe and West Africa in order to better fight transnational organised crime.

In June, Eurojust and the European Judicial Network hosted a study visit, facilitated by the UNODC, for officials from Nigeria and selected West African countries, while in November, Eurojust hosted a Conference on Transnational Organised Crime affecting West Africa and Europe, co-organised with UNODC and the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights (see section 5.3).

Cooperation with UNODC in preparation of these events was beneficial in facilitating Eurojust's contacts with Nigeria, and ultimately in promoting closer dialogue between Africa and Europe.

United Nations Investigative Mechanisms

Several international organisations, including the UN [OHCHR Sri Lanka accountability project](#), the [Independent Impartial Investigative Mechanism in Syria \(IIIM\)](#), and the [Independent Investigative Mechanisms for Myanmar \(IIMM\)](#) participated in the 33rd and 34th Genocide Network meetings in 2023 (see section 3.3).

During the 33rd Genocide Network meeting in April 2023, the UN OHCHR Sri Lanka accountability project presented its mandate, including collecting, analysing and preserving information and evidence related to gross violations of human rights. It presented available avenues to support judicial authorities in response to requests for assistance through the framework of the OHCHR and other UN procedures and parameters.

During the 34th Genocide Network meeting, the IIIM highlighted the various ways in which the mechanism may assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, in particular through its analytical work.

In addition, the [Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq \(UNITAD\)](#), an Associate to the Genocide Network, supported an ongoing JIT in 2023 between Sweden, France, Belgium and the Netherlands on ISIL crimes against Yazidis. Beyond this JIT, many cases have already led to successful convictions or are currently ongoing in several EU Member States where UNITAD evidence has proven indispensable.

Both the IIIM and UNITAD actively participated in the closed session discussions during both Genocide Network meetings in 2023, providing invaluable operational support to national authorities in ongoing cases.

Interpol

In addition to strategic cooperation, Eurojust also collaborates with international organisations in its operational work. A good example of this is the Agency's cooperation with Interpol in October 2023 in the coordinated arrest of a Swedish national in a cross-border drug trafficking case involving Sweden, Montenegro and Serbia.



Coordinated arrest of Swedish high-value target suspected of major drug trafficking



CRIME: A Swedish national, previously convicted for similar crimes, is suspected of aggravated narcotics and weapons offences, as well as illegal possession of explosives. Residing in the Balkans, he allegedly remotely controls his subordinates in an organised crime group involved in drug trafficking in Sweden. He directs them to carry out several criminal activities, such as the trafficking of vast quantities of narcotics and weapons.

ACTION: Eurojust supports the authorities in Sweden, Serbia and Montenegro in the arrest of the Swedish national suspected of being part of the organised crime group involved in drug trafficking. Following his arrest in Serbia, a procedure is initiated for his extradition to Sweden.

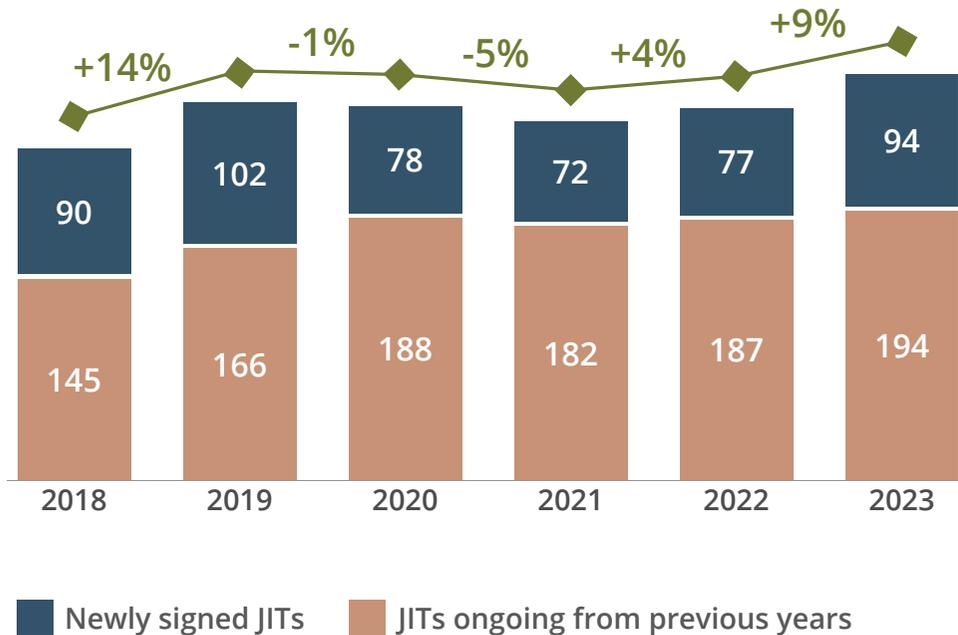
RESULT: During a joint action day also supported by Interpol, the authorities conduct house searches in Serbia and Montenegro and seize important evidence.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: At the request of the Swedish authorities, Eurojust organises a coordinated action day, with the involvement of the Agency's Serbian and Montenegrin Liaison Prosecutors. Support is also provided with the execution of an International Arrest Warrant and requests for mutual legal assistance.

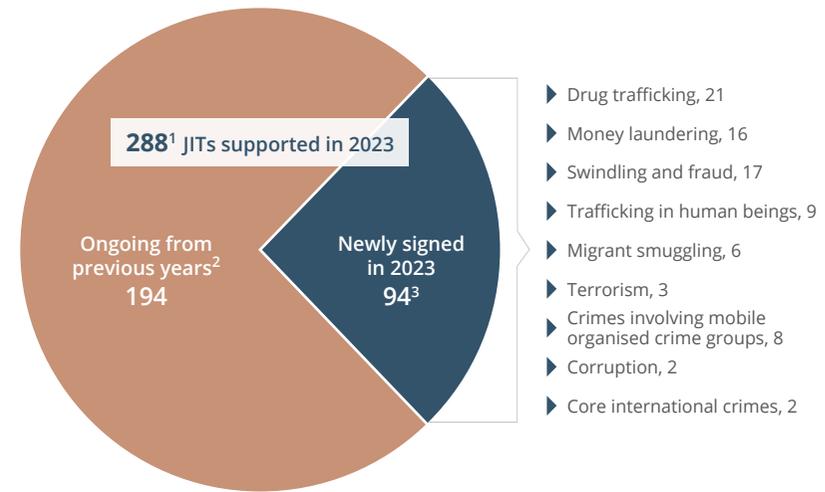
6. Judicial cooperation instruments

6.1 Joint investigation teams

Joint investigation teams (JITs) are an advanced tool for international cooperation at Eurojust. The Agency saw a 9% increase in the number of JITs it supported during 2023 compared to 2022. Eurojust facilitated almost 300 JITs throughout the year, around one third of which were newly signed in 2023.



JITs were used throughout the year in several major cross-border cases involving both EU Member States and third countries. The newly signed JITs in 2023 covered 9 out of 13 crime types addressed by the Agency, ranging from fraud to core international crimes. In 2023, the largest number of JITs were established to tackle drug trafficking (21) and money laundering (16).



¹ Eurojust support to JITs includes financial and operational support. Of the 288 JITs supported, 132 were funded by Eurojust.
² As of January 2024. Due to the ongoing nature of the cases, these figures may change after the reporting period.
³ A single JIT can deal with more than one crime type.

JITs funding programme

Eurojust funded 46% of the 288 JITs supported by the Agency in 2023. Throughout 2023, JITs continued to benefit financially and logistically from the JITs Funding Programme, including several high-level JITs, such as the JIT into alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine.

Support to JITs through the standard and urgent funding schemes continued throughout the year. The number of awarded applications under the standard funding scheme has been steadily increasing after the dip in figures in previous years caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The urgent funding scheme was widely used as well, in particular towards the end of the year.

In 2023, Eurojust awarded 257 grants to 132 JITs under both the standard and urgent funding schemes. Of these, 51 JITs were established in 2023. The final budget earmarked for JIT funding in 2023 was EUR 1.942 million.

During 2023, the JITs Network Secretariat worked on simplifying the reimbursement process for funding beneficiaries through a new IT tool.

The Claims Module, launched in December 2023, is an online tool for beneficiaries to submit their JIT funding reimbursement claims. The online tool is part of the JITs Portal and is also accessible to non-EU countries. The deployment of the first stage of the Claims Module was completed in 2023, and further technical improvements and functionalities will be introduced in 2024.

To help practitioners fully understand the processes involved in the JITs funding programme, a [list of frequently asked questions](#) was added to the Eurojust website in 2023 to provide answers to common questions and issues. Moreover, a JITs funding guide for participants from the Western Balkans region was also published in December 2023 and translated into Albanian for training purposes through the [Western Balkans Criminal Justice project](#) (see section 5.3).

19th Annual meeting of the JITs Network

The 19th Annual Meeting of the Network of National Experts on JITs took place in October 2023 and explored how to step up judicial and law enforcement cooperation between EU Member States and Latin American countries in the fight against serious organised crime. Latin American criminal networks play a major role in drug trafficking and often collaborate with EU-based criminal groups. To tackle this growing problem, practitioners explored the possibilities of establishing JITs with Latin American countries.

Prosecutors from Italy, Brazil and Chile presented case examples of successful judicial cooperation and shared their experiences on recurring challenges and best practices. Participants also discussed promoting joint initiatives such as common projects and training programmes to enhance cooperation.

During the dedicated workshop on ‘supporting JITs with Latin American countries’, participants underlined the importance of Liaison Prosecutors and Contact Points as key to facilitating judicial cooperation with Latin American countries. Efficiently establishing contacts with the relevant authorities in Latin American countries was highlighted as a crucial first step in establishing cooperation. Participants suggested creating model agreements, checklists and guides for setting up JITs as well as thematic workshops and seminars to raise awareness in this particular field of judicial cooperation.

Other key topics were addressed during a series of workshops, including one dedicated to the ‘procedural rights of victims within the context of JITs’. Participants discussed how to promote the victims’ rights dimension more systematically when discussing prosecution strategies in the context of JITs (see section 4).

Fourth JITs Evaluation Report

The [Fourth JITs Evaluation Report](#), published in June 2023, provides an overview of lessons learned and best practices, as shared by JIT practitioners. The report also focuses on Eurojust’s experience with multilateral JITs, recent developments in JITs, and JITs-related case-law. It is based on 82 evaluations completed by JITs practitioners between 2019 and 2022. A complementary [checklist for multilateral joint investigation teams](#) was also published to assist practitioners in setting up and operating complex JITs involving several countries.

Report on the Assessment of the JITs Network and its activities

The [Report on the Assessment of the JITs Network and its activities](#), published in December 2023, reflects on various aspects of the JITs Network’s operations. These include the functioning of a JIT National Expert in their Member State; relations and cooperation with Eurojust; JITs Network meetings; and the training of JIT National Experts. The report aims to improve the overall level of engagement and functioning of the JITs Network and provides an insight into JIT National Experts’ experiences, fields of expertise and expectations regarding their role and tasks. The action plan outlined in the report proposes future improvements and goals for the Network.

Involvement of the International Criminal Court in JITs

Following the International Criminal Court’s first involvement in a Eurojust-supported JIT (see section 2.1), the JITs Network Secretariat facilitated contact between the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC-OTP) and the JITs Network, which resulted in the ICC submitting a formal request to become an Associate Partner to the Network. The JITs Network granted the ICC-OTP Associate Partner status in July 2023.

Furthermore, the JITs Network Secretariat and the ICC-OTP published a joint [factsheet](#) presenting the ways in which the ICC may be involved in JITs, the benefits of its involvement, and the support that Eurojust and the JITs Network Secretariat can offer to JITs in which the ICC-OTP is involved.

JIT Collaboration platform

During 2023, the JITs Network Secretariat, supported by Eurojust, worked closely with the European Commission and its contractor to draft a business study for the development of the JITs collaboration platform, which aims to improve and make JIT cooperation more efficient between countries (see section 2.2).

Training activities

Throughout 2023, the JITs Network Secretariat organised a large number of training activities for JIT practitioners both at the regional and international levels. The Secretariat provided coaching at seminars on JIT leadership in April and on JIT implementation in September, co-organised by ERA, CEPOL and EJTN. During the JIT implementation session in September, the JIT model case scenario (developed in 2022) was used for the first time, and suggestions for improvement were discussed. The Secretariat also actively participated in various meetings organised by the Western Balkans Criminal Justice and EuroMed Justice projects. In addition, it participated in numerous study visits of delegations from both EU and national institutions as well as third countries hosted by Eurojust.

An award-winning JIT

Eurojust worked with judicial and law enforcement authorities in Latvia and Ukraine in an investigation concerning the kidnapping and murder of a Belarusian citizen. To facilitate cross-border judicial cooperation between the authorities, Eurojust supported the establishment and funding of a JIT and five coordination meetings. As a result of these efforts, two men were arrested and charged with hostage-taking, murder with aggravating circumstances and the preparation of large-scale fraud.

At a ceremony held in Rīga, Latvia in March 2023, the State Police of Latvia presented the highest [award](#) of the State Police and the Main Criminal Police Department to the National Member for Latvia at Eurojust, the Liaison Prosecutor of Ukraine and the representatives of the Ukrainian National Police involved in the case. The award recognised their significant contribution to the fight against organised crime and the facilitation of international cooperation.



Takedown of Belgian-Greek network smuggling migrants with fake documents by air

CRIME: A Belgian-Greek network smuggles irregular migrants through Belgian airports to other European countries, including Norway. Mainly Iraqi migrants travel from Greece to Charleroi and Brussels on falsified or stolen documents, paying at least between EUR 5 000 and EUR 6 000 per person.



Investigations in Belgium into the smuggling network start in April 2022, following the interception at Brussels Airport of a facilitator accompanying three irregular migrants. These investigations uncover an organised crime group responsible for smuggling small groups of irregular migrants from Greece to Belgium.

ACTION: During an action day in November 2023, with the active assistance of Eurojust and Europol, 11 people are arrested and 16 places searched, including two travel agencies in Athens.

RESULT: The national authorities in Belgium and Greece dismantle the migrant smuggling network.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: Eurojust supports the investigations by setting up and financing a joint investigation team between the Belgian and Greek authorities. The Agency also organises two dedicated coordination meetings and sets up an online coordination centre on the action day.

6.2 Coordination meetings and centres

Coordination meetings

In cross-border crime cases, Eurojust facilitates coordination meetings to bring together the judicial and law enforcement authorities of the involved countries to agree on their cooperation and the coordination of investigations and prosecutions at the national level. Prosecutors, investigative judges and law enforcement representatives meet to share information and agree on how to resolve legal and practical issues, what actions to take and which measures to apply. Coordination meetings are held at Eurojust's premises or via secure videoconferencing. These meetings are fully supported by Eurojust's expertise and infrastructure, and are a crucial tool offered to national authorities to help get justice done.

The number of coordination meetings facilitated by Eurojust each year has increased steadily over the past 4 years, with a total of 579 coordination meetings organised in 2023. During the year, the Agency organised coordination meetings to tackle all crime types. The highest number of coordination meetings were organised to discuss cases concerning money laundering (136), followed by swindling and fraud (128), drug trafficking (105) and cybercrime (80). The number of coordination meetings organised on cybercrime cases almost doubled from 42 in 2022 to 80 in 2023. There was also an increase in the number of coordination meetings facilitated by the Agency in 2023 compared to the previous year in the areas of fraud (11%), organised crime (44%) and intellectual property crime (50%).

Coordination meetings by crime type (2020–2023)

Crime types	Coordination meetings			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
ECONOMIC CRIMES *	165	185	211	221
• Swindling and fraud	91	111	115	128
• Money laundering	101	115	142	136
• Corruption	8	13	14	13
• Crimes against the financial interests of the EU (PIF crimes)	12	16	19	16
DRUG TRAFFICKING	87	107	126	105
TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS *	56	46	55	54
• Sexual exploitation	33	24	36	37
• Labour exploitation	15	16	16	16
• Other	12	12	8	5
CYBERCRIME	45	67	42	80
MIGRANT SMUGGLING	21	25	33	31
MOBILE ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS	19	19	25	36
TERRORISM	12	9	21	22
CORE INTERNATIONAL CRIMES	2	6	23	20
ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME	7	11	7	6
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIME	3	0	2	4

* These crime types cannot be summed up, since more than one sub-category may apply to a single case.

The data contained in this table were extracted from Eurojust's CMS on 19 January 2024. Due to the ongoing nature of cases, possible discrepancies with previously reported numbers may exist, and statistics may be updated in the future.



Eurojust supports international operation against tax evasion through sham contracts

CRIME: A group of suspects are allegedly involved in tax evasion. The perpetrators conclude sham contracts with subcontractors in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to conceal employment relationships in Germany. They also allegedly exploit the different minimum wage standards in the European Union Member States concerned to evade millions of euros in taxes.

ACTION: Eurojust supports the competent authorities in Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in a coordinated action.

RESULTS: During a joint operation in October 2023, 39 business premises and apartments are simultaneously searched in all countries involved, and several witnesses are questioned.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: The case was opened at Eurojust in May 2023 at the request of the German law enforcement authorities. The Agency hosted three coordination meetings and facilitated the execution of several European Investigation Orders (EIOs). Eurojust facilitated the communication, exchange of information and coordination between the national authorities in real-time during the joint action day.

Coordination meetings were crucial to the success of this operation. They were instrumental in discussing the criminal proceedings and the results of the execution of the EIOs. They also allowed the concerned judicial authorities to agree on the next steps in the exchange of information and cooperation, as well as on operational matters and logistic arrangements for the joint action day. These essential meetings allowed judicial authorities to agree on a common investigative strategy, on how to deal with any situations that might arise during the action day and on the necessary steps to be taken following the operation.

Coordination centres and joint action days

Coordination centres are a crucial component in Eurojust's judicial toolkit to tackle organised cross-border crime. They enable the coordination of joint action days organised against criminal organisations and terrorist groups, during which arrests, searches, interviews of suspects and witnesses, seizures of evidence and freezing of assets are executed in several countries simultaneously. They are key to achieving successful prosecutions and ensuring justice is done.

Coordination centres are set up from dedicated rooms equipped with state-of-the-art technology and/or virtually via videoconference facilities to ensure that evidence and information collected on the ground are swiftly exchanged between all involved national authorities in a secure environment.

This essential tool enables the timely transmission of judicial requests prior to and during the joint action day through Eurojust's National Desks and Liaison Prosecutors. Coordination centres allow the joint action day to be monitored in real-time, so that legal and practical advice can be given and new and/or additional judicial instruments can be provided as the operations progress. Moreover, they also enable the swift exchange of information on any legal or operational issues that may have a direct impact on ongoing operations and on the results of the action day.

In 2023, 42% of the coordination centres facilitated by Eurojust tackled economic crime. Drug trafficking represented the next crime type for which the most coordination centres (seven) were organised, followed by cybercrime, which increased from only one coordination centre in 2022 to five in 2023. One coordination centre was organised for a migrant smuggling case and environmental crime case respectively. The total number of coordination centres organised in 2023 remained the same as in the previous year.

Coordination centres by crime type (2020–2023)

Crime types	Coordination centres / action days			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
ECONOMIC CRIMES *	11	13	10	10
• Swindling and fraud	8	11	6	8
• Money laundering	7	5	7	6
• Corruption	0	0	2	0
• Crimes against the financial interests of the EU (PIF crimes)	2	3	2	1
DRUG TRAFFICKING	4	1	5	7
TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS *	2	3	4	0
• Sexual exploitation	0	0	4	0
• Labour exploitation	1	3	0	0
• Other	1	0	0	0
CYBERCRIME	1	5	1	5
MIGRANT SMUGGLING	2	0	4	1
MOBILE ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS	1	1	0	0
TERRORISM	0	0	0	0
CORE INTERNATIONAL CRIMES	0	0	0	0
ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME	0	1	0	1
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIME	2	0	0	0

* These crime types cannot be summed up, since more than one sub-category may apply to a single case.

The data contained in this table were extracted from Eurojust's CMS on 19 January 2024. Due to the ongoing nature of cases, possible discrepancies with previously reported numbers may exist, and statistics may be updated in the future.

Responsiveness is essential for coordination centres to be effective. In May 2023, Eurojust set a new record in the Agency's history of organising coordination centres by successfully setting one up in just three days. The establishment of the coordination centre was urgently requested by the Agency's Italian National Desk to prepare and carry out an action day related to money laundering. The action day against the organised crime group was managed in real-time from the Agency's dedicated coordination centre.

Another example of a Eurojust-supported case that made full use of the Agency's suite of judicial tools and services, including a coordination centre, is the [largest-ever coordinated hit against the Italian OCG 'Ndrangheta](#), in May 2023. In addition to establishing and funding 2 joint investigation teams, the Agency hosted 10 coordination meetings and set up a coordination centre that enabled rapid cooperation between the judicial authorities of the 10 countries involved in the action day. Thanks to the effectiveness and efficiency of the coordination meetings and coordination centre, the action day was successful in arresting 132 members of one of the world's most powerful criminal networks (see the case illustration in section 3.11).

6.3 Resolving conflicts of jurisdiction

Eurojust has considerable experience in preventing and resolving conflicts of jurisdiction and facilitating transfers of criminal proceedings from one State to another. The Agency is uniquely placed to detect linked and parallel proceedings and advise the judicial authorities from the Member States involved on how to reach a shared decision on which State is best placed to prosecute, based on [Eurojust's Guidelines on jurisdiction](#).

In 2023, the Agency continued to advise national authorities on which State is best placed to prosecute a case, how to overcome issues related to transfers of proceedings and how to prevent ne bis in idem issues.

Preventing infringements of the ne bis in idem principle

During 2023, Eurojust continued to monitor the case-law of the European Court of Justice (CJEU) on the ne bis in idem principle in criminal matters (according to which a person cannot be punished twice for the same acts). The Agency published an [updated overview](#) of the CJEU's case-law in February 2024. The overview provides guidance to judicial practitioners on the application of the ne bis in idem principle in a transnational context. It contains summaries of the CJEU's judgments categorised according to a set of keywords that reflect the main elements of the ne bis in idem principle. Three judgments issued by the Court of Justice on the ne bis in idem principle in 2023 stemmed from Eurojust cases³⁰.

In September 2023, Eurojust presented its role in resolving conflicts of jurisdiction and preventing infringements of the ne bis in idem principle in an academic conference on 'European law and the authority of judgments', organised by the University of Nantes in France.

³⁰ [Case C-365/21, Generalstaatsanwaltschaft Bamberg \(Exception au principe ne bis in idem\), Judgment of 23 March 2023](#); [Case C-27/22, Volkswagen Group Italia and Volkswagen Aktiengesellschaft, Judgment of 14 September 2023](#) and [Case C-147/22, Központi Nyomozó Főügyészség, Judgment of 19 October 2023](#).

Eurojust Report on the transfer of proceedings in the European Union

In January 2023, Eurojust published its first [Report on the transfer of proceedings in the European Union](#). The transfer of proceedings upholds justice by helping to resolve issues concerning concurrent jurisdictions in relation to the same offences, while also respecting the fundamental rights of the accused.

Despite its crucial function, there is currently no specific EU instrument regulating the transfer of proceedings. Multiple legal bases apply across the Member States involving different procedures and conditions, which poses various challenges. The report presents the main challenges encountered in Eurojust's casework, as well as the best practices identified to overcome them. It also outlines the main differences between national legislations concerning procedures and requirements for transferring proceedings to another Member State.

Given its crucial role in assisting national authorities in preventing and resolving conflicts of jurisdiction between Member States, Eurojust has gained extensive experience in facilitating transfers of proceedings across a wide range of case types. Based on this experience, the report also offers recommendations for practitioners and for the EU legislator, including a call for an EU legal instrument in this area.

In June 2023, Eurojust presented the findings of its report at an expert meeting of the European Economic and Social Committee, entrusted with providing an opinion on the proposal for a Regulation on transfer of proceedings (see below).

EU Regulation on transfer of proceedings in criminal matters

In April 2023, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a [Regulation on transfer of proceedings in criminal matters](#), a new judicial cooperation instrument that will be used very often in Eurojust cases in the future. The proposed legislation sets out rules that govern the conditions and procedures under which criminal proceedings initiated in one Member State may be transferred to another Member State. In the future, the authorities of a country will decide whether to request the transfer of proceedings on the basis of a list of common criteria. The Regulation also stipulates obligations with respect to the rights of suspects and accused persons as well as victims when deciding on a transfer.

The proposal incorporates all recommendations put forward by Eurojust in its [Report on the transfer of proceedings in the European Union](#) and explicitly provides for an advisory role for the Agency and the EJM. The European Commission's proposal addresses most of the key issues and best practices highlighted in Eurojust's report.

Based on its operational expertise on transfer of proceedings, however, Eurojust noted that some aspects of the proposal could raise practical issues. On this basis, the Agency provided comments on the proposal for the consideration of both the Council and the European Parliament. This feedback was duly taken into consideration, and in March 2024, the [Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement](#) on the new law, which was formally [adopted by the European Parliament](#) on 23 April 2024 and is now awaiting final adoption by the Council.

6.4 European Arrest Warrant

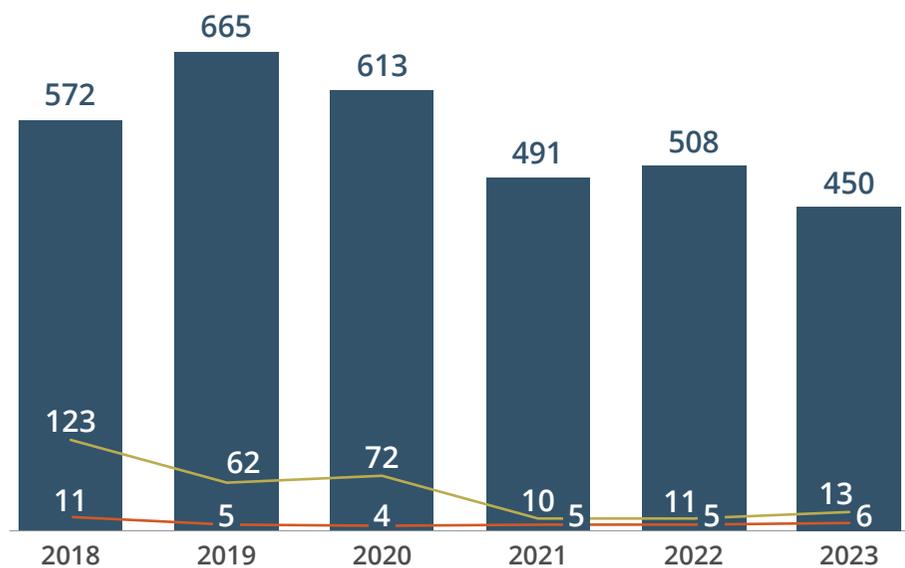
In 2023, 1 259 Eurojust cases (including 450 new and 809 ongoing from previous years) involved European Arrest Warrants (EAWs). The overall number of cases involving EAWs handled by the Agency in 2023 was similar to the previous year, with a slight decrease in the number of new cases.

Year	New cases involving EAWs	Ongoing from previous years	TOTAL
2023	450	809	1 259
2022	504	758	1 262

Eurojust support to national authorities with the drafting and execution of EAWs

During 2023, Eurojust continued to provide support and advice to national authorities throughout the full life cycle of the EAW, from the drafting to the execution phase. Some of the recurring issues that the Agency helped national authorities to address in its casework in 2023 concerned: overlaps and difficulties in the application of the EAW Framework Decision and the Transfer of Prisoners Framework Decision; issues with return guarantees for nationals and residents; prison conditions and the formulation of assurances; and questions surrounding in absentia judgments. Moreover, Eurojust helped address issues arising from practical difficulties in obtaining consent for the application of the speciality rule; competing requests for surrender and/or extradition and obtaining consent for subsequent surrender/extradition; and cases concerning extradition of EU citizens to third countries and the application of the 'Petruhhin' doctrine.

As in previous years, the chart below confirms that a very low number of Member States notify Eurojust about cases where they cannot observe the time limits and the reasons for this non-observance (Article 17 EAW Framework Decision). The chart also shows that the number of cases on competing EAWs for which Eurojust's support is requested (Article 16(2) EAW Framework Decision) also remains limited.



■ New cases involving European Arrest Warrants
 — Article 16 FD (multiple requests) — Article 17 FD (time limit exceeded)

From a strategic perspective, Eurojust’s Judicial Cooperation Instruments Team discussed legal issues emerging from recent Eurojust cases. They addressed, for instance, several questions surrounding competing requests for surrender and extradition, including differences between Member States’ national provisions regulating this matter, the competent authorities in charge of the decision-making and the added value of Eurojust’s involvement in the coordination process.

An opinion on competing EAWs

In the [largest ever coordinated hit against the ‘Ndrangheta](#) (the mafia-style organisation responsible for much of Europe’s cocaine trade), Eurojust supported the arrest of 132 members of the organised crime group (see the case illustration in section 3.11). Three linked cases related to this major international operation were opened at Eurojust at the request of the Italian, German and Belgian national authorities.

One of these cases specifically addressed the issue of competing EAWs. Italy had issued one EAW and Germany had issued four EAWs against the same person (the requested person) in relation to different offences. The Italian EAW was issued for the purpose of prosecuting money laundering by the organised crime group, ‘Ndrangheta. Two of the German EAWs were issued for the purpose of prosecuting fraud, while the other two were issued for the purpose of executing a custodial sentence for theft and causing material damage. The requested person was under arrest in Belgium (the executing Member State) based on these EAWs.

The Belgian Federal Prosecution Office asked Eurojust to provide a legal opinion on how to prioritise the Italian and German EAWs. Eurojust, applying its [Guidelines for deciding on competing requests for surrender and extradition](#), considered the specifics of the case and decided that the Italian EAW should be given priority. The seriousness of the Italian offence was considered greater than that of the offences mentioned in the German EAWs, particularly in the context of the wider Italian criminal proceedings. Neither the higher number of offences committed in Germany, nor the material damage suffered directly by the victims, were considered sufficient to outweigh the gravity of the money laundering offence, which supported the criminal activities of the ‘Ndrangheta suspects. The Belgian court followed Eurojust’s advice and executed the Italian EAW.

A legal note on a case involving a judgment in *absentia*

One of the topics that frequently triggers questions in Eurojust cases concerns EAWs for the purpose of executing a sentence imposed by a decision rendered in *absentia*, and the correct application of the related ground for refusal. In one such case, Polish authorities had issued an EAW to authorities in the Czech Republic for the execution of a sentence imposed in *absentia*. The case was brought to Eurojust as Polish and Czech authorities had diverging views on how to apply the optional ground for refusal under Article 4a of the EAW Framework Decision (in *absentia* ground). The Czech authorities argued that surrender could be refused unless Poland provided a guarantee that the requested person would be entitled to a retrial. The Polish authorities took the view that the EAW should be executed even without such a guarantee. The analysis carried out by Eurojust led to the conclusion that the EAW should be

executed. First, one of the key conditions under the relevant legal framework was met: the requested person was aware of the charges against him and was represented by a lawyer at trial. Second, even if this condition were not met, the same conclusion could be reached due to the existence of other circumstances from which it could be concluded that surrender would not infringe the rights of the defence. In the present case, the requested person, aware of the charges against him, had chosen to avoid prosecution by fleeing to another Member State and preventing his summons in person, thereby waiving his right to be present at the trial. Eurojust therefore considered that, in line with the CJEU's relevant case-law on this matter, surrender should not be refused in such cases. The Czech authorities followed the opinion of Eurojust and executed the EAW.

Case-law by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on the EAW

Throughout the year, Eurojust monitored the relevant case-law of the CJEU, and in October 2023 published an [updated overview](#). This latest issue includes summaries of nine new judgments compared to the previous edition and a list of eight pending cases. This current edition of the case-law overview by the CJEU on EAW now contains 77 judgments.

Some of the issues addressed in the recent case-law include: grounds for refusal (ne bis in idem; in absentia; nationals, residents and persons staying in the executing Member State); human rights issues; and postponement of the surrender (either for serious humanitarian reasons or due to ongoing investigations against the requested person in the executing Member State). Other issues addressed include: time limits; the speciality rule; and questions surrounding the extradition of an EU citizen to a third country to serve a custodial sentence.

In its most recent case-law, the CJEU has underlined the importance of requests for additional information before refusing an EAW to promote mutual trust between the national authorities of Member States.

6.5 European Investigation Order

Eurojust assisted national judicial authorities with over 6 000 cases involving an EIO in 2023. Compared to 2022, the number of new cases involving an EIO handled by the Agency increased by 10%. Overall, the number of cases involving an EIO referred to Eurojust increased by 16% in 2023 compared to the previous year.

Year	New cases involving EIOs	Ongoing from previous years	TOTAL
2023	2 972	3 327	6 299
2022	2 707	2 708	5 415

Eurojust support to national authorities with the drafting and execution of EIOs

During 2023, the Agency continued to provide support and advice to national authorities throughout the full life cycle of the EIO, from the drafting to the execution phase. For instance, Eurojust assisted in obtaining clarifications or additional information prior to the execution of an EIO. The Agency also facilitated the execution of urgent EIOs and, in multilateral cases, often ensured coordination between the execution of different EIOs in several Member States.

In addition, Eurojust supported several cases involving an EIO where legal or practical issues arose, such as requests for a hearing by videoconference. Several cases showed that in some countries it is not possible to hear an accused person by videoconference during the trial phase or that there are differences in procedures depending on the status of a person (witness, suspect or accused). Eurojust also continued to support cases with EIOs related to encrypted communication platforms and the cross-border exchange of such evidence.

EIO-related issues

Eurojust's Judicial Cooperation Instruments Team discussed EIO-related legal issues arising from Eurojust casework in 2023 and during the 10th Round of mutual evaluation visits. For example, they examined whether the rule of speciality also applies in the context of an EIO, as well as issues related to the interception of telecommunications and the conditions for using spontaneously exchanged information as evidence.

Evaluating the application of the EIO

The EIO is the instrument evaluated in the 10th Round of mutual evaluations. In 2023, Eurojust participated as an observer in all 20 of the evaluation visits organised. The remaining five visits are scheduled to take place in 2024. Despite the frequent use of the EIO, the visits so far have shown that several practical and legal challenges need to be addressed to further improve the smooth and consistent functioning of the EIO. These issues are reflected in Eurojust's casework. The final report on the 10th round of mutual evaluations is expected to be published by the Council of the European Union in 2024.

Case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union on the EIO

Throughout 2023, the Agency monitored the relevant case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union. In 2024, Eurojust plans to publish the first edition of a related overview as a useful tool for judicial authorities.



Suspect arrested for laundering money obtained from world-leading ransomware attack network, Hive

CRIME: A Cypriot resident, born in Russia, is suspected of laundering money obtained from Hive, one of the world's leading ransomware attack networks, to the detriment of 59 French victims. Globally, Hive is accused of targeting 1 500 entities in 80 countries and collecting more than USD 100 million in ransoms. The suspect is believed to have channelled millions of dollars through his wallets.

ACTION: Thanks to Eurojust's assistance with a swift execution of an EIO, more than EUR 570 000 in cryptocurrency is seized during a search of the suspect's Cypriot home. The suspect is arrested in Paris, France on 5 December 2023 by investigators from OFAC, the cybercrime unit under the Paris Public Prosecutor's Office.

RESULT: On 9 December 2023, the suspect is indicted for the offences of fraudulently accessing and remaining in an automated data processing system, fraudulently introducing and modifying such data, obstructing the operation of such a system and laundering these offences as part of an organised gang.

EUROJUST'S ROLE: The case is opened at the French Desk at Eurojust, which liaises closely with the Cypriot National Desk to facilitate the execution of the EIO, to request a house search in Cyprus with the presence of the French police. The Cypriot authorities are able to execute the EIO by organising and conducting the search in less than 96 hours, leading to the suspect's arrest and the seizure of the cryptocurrencies.



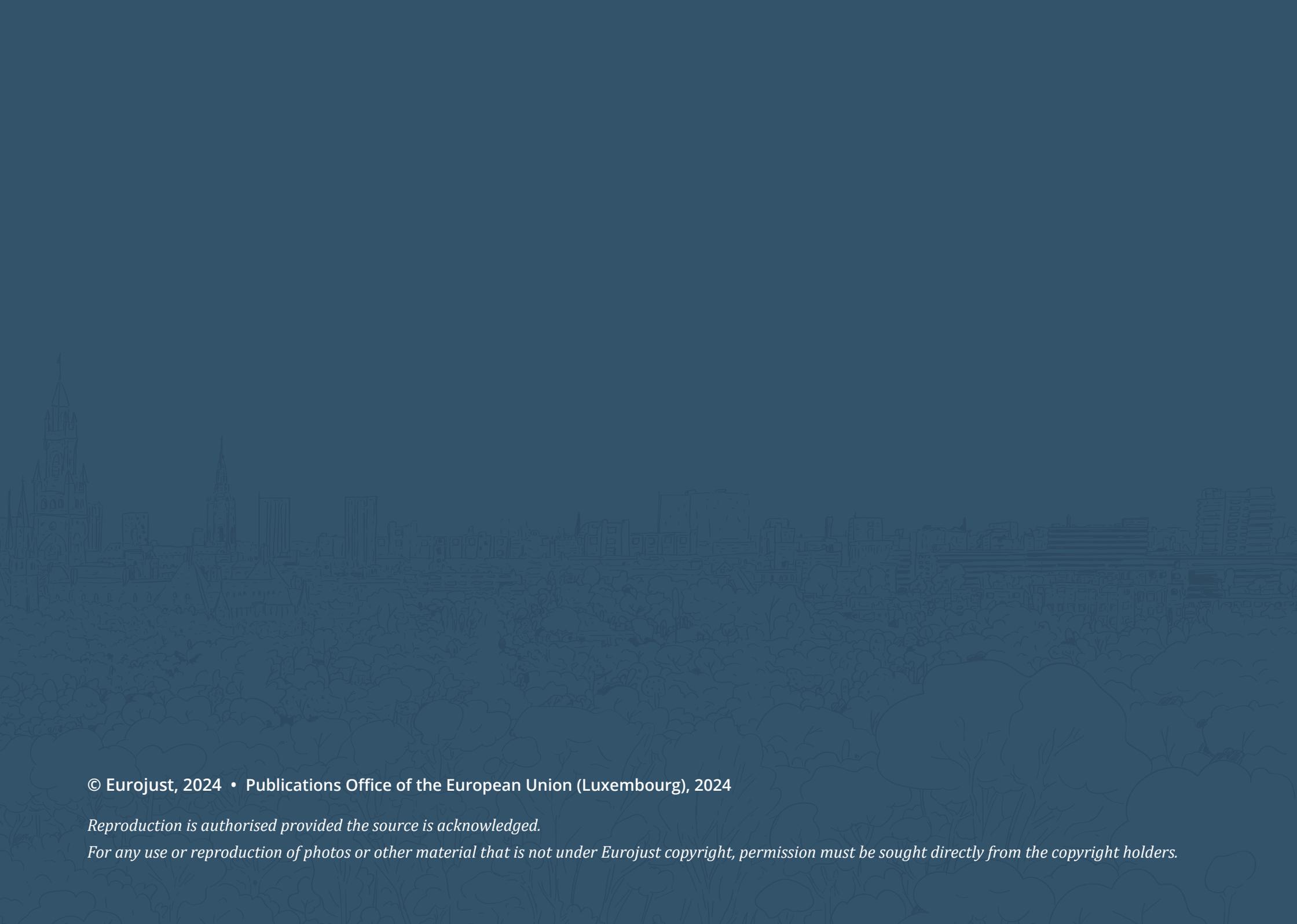
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