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WORKING DOCUMENT

From: To:	Commission services Law Enforcement Working Party (Police)
N° Cion doc.:	ST 11158 2026 INIT
Subject:	Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1726 and Regulation (EU) 2024/982, and repealing Regulation (EU) 2016/794 – Final Report of the External Study: Abstract and Executive Summary

Delegations will find attached the abstract and executive summary of the final report of the 'Study supporting the evaluation and the impact assessment of Regulation (EU) 2016/794 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)' contracted by the European Commission to ICF S.A. under Specific Contract HOME-ISF-TF2_FW-EVA2-4047 implementing Framework Contract HOME-2023-OP-0001 Lot 2.

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. The Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this study. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive assessment of Regulation (EU) 2016/794 as amended by Regulation (EU) 2022/991 (Europol Regulation). It combines a retrospective evaluation of the performance of the Europol Regulation with a forward-looking impact assessment centred on a potential revision of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)'s mandate. The study is based on evidence from desk research, a call for evidence, a public consultation, six targeted surveys, targeted interviews with more than 130 stakeholders, three focus groups, six field visits and five case studies.

The study finds that the Europol Regulation has been effective, efficient, relevant, coherent, and delivers EU added value. The evolving security landscape, characterised by increasingly interconnected, transnational and digital crime, underscores the importance of robust European Union (EU)-level coordination, informative and timely operational and strategic analysis and advanced technical capabilities.

The impact assessment identifies persistent challenges, notably Europol's limited and fragmented operational support to and coordination with Member States and partners, and various legal, procedural and technical constraints that hinder data-sharing and processing.

Two policy options are considered: Option 1 strengthens the current model with targeted improvements, while Option 2 proposes a more ambitious reform aimed at transforming Europol's operational model. Both options are expected to enhance Europol's effectiveness and efficiency, with positive social and security effects and manageable fundamental rights risks. Further centralised EU capabilities would particularly benefit smaller and medium-sized Member States, while larger Member States would gain in complex cross-border investigations.

Executive summary

Introduction

Regulation (EU) 2016/794 established the mandate of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) to support and strengthen action by the Member States and their mutual cooperation in preventing and combating serious crime affecting two or more Member States, terrorism and forms of crime that affect a common interest covered by a Union policy. Over the evaluation period, Europol has become the European Union (EU)'s central criminal information hub and a key operational coordination platform, with the amendments introduced by Regulation (EU) 2022/991 reinforcing its analytical capabilities and introducing additional safeguards on data processing and fundamental rights.

The security environment has evolved significantly since the adoption of the Regulation (EU) 2016/794. Serious and organised crime and terrorism are increasingly interconnected, transnational and digital, and there is an increase in online criminal groups taking advantage of advanced technologies. In parallel, cross-border investigations are increasingly complex and data-intensive. These trends reinforce the importance of EU-level coordination and analytical capacity within the Union's internal security architecture.

Purpose and scope of the study

This study combines a retrospective evaluation of the functioning of Regulation (EU) 2016/794 as amended by Regulation (EU) 2022/991 (Europol Regulation), with a forward-looking impact assessment of potential revisions to Europol's mandate.

The evaluation covers the period 2017 to 2024 and assesses the extent to which the current Europol Regulation is effective, efficient, relevant, coherent and provides EU added value. It examines Europol's core areas of activity, including its role as an EU criminal information hub, its analytical and operational support functions, and its cooperation with Member States, EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies (IBOAs), third countries and, where relevant, international organisations and private and civil society actors. The analysis also considers horizontal aspects such as governance, human resources and data protection, recognising that these factors shape Europol's capacity to deliver its mandate in practice.

The impact assessment adopts a forward-looking perspective. It identifies the main problems likely to persist in the absence of further legislative action, defines general and specific policy objectives, and compares two policy options against a structured set of criteria, including feasibility, proportionality, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, subsidiarity and wider impacts, notably on society, fundamental rights and data protection.

Methodological approach

The study adopts a mixed-methods design, aligned with the EU Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox. The evaluation and impact assessment are based on the triangulation and synthesis of qualitative and quantitative evidence from multiple sources. Evidence was gathered through a call for evidence and a public consultation organised by the European Commission, alongside desk research, six targeted surveys, interviews with more than 130 stakeholders, three focus groups, six field visits and five case studies by the study team.

Evaluation findings were developed by triangulating documentation, operational and stakeholder evidence to assess performance and identify trends over time. For the impact assessment, the evaluation findings informed the problem definition, identification and screening of possible measures, and development and comparison of the policy options. Where possible, impacts were quantified or monetised; where this was not feasible, the assessment relied on structured qualitative judgement, stakeholder validation and comparative analysis.

The study acknowledges several inherent methodological limitations, notably gaps in comparable quantitative data, challenges associated with measuring system-wide outcomes, partial reliance on stakeholder evidence and opinion, and Europol reporting. The coverage of interview evidence also varies between Member States. These limitations were mitigated through triangulation across evidence sources, internal consistency checks and synthesis across consultation, documentation, operational and analytical evidence.

Results of the evaluation

Effectiveness

The Europol Regulation is effective in achieving its core objectives. Europol has strengthened Member States' capacity to prevent and combat serious crime and terrorism, enhanced the quality and intensity of cross-border cooperation and consolidated its role as the EU's central criminal information hub and operational coordination platform. It has made a significant and growing contribution to the prevention and investigation of serious crime affecting two or more Member States, terrorism and forms of crime affecting a common interest covered by a Union policy. Its analytical outputs help to shape Union-wide priorities, while its operational coordination supports investigations across the EU. At the same time, effectiveness is not uniform across all functions. Persistent constraints remain, such as uneven Member State engagement with Europol's services or contribution to its information hub, capacity pressures, increasing data volumes and technological limitations. As a result, Europol's performance continues to depend on the quality and completeness of information provided by national authorities. Overall, the framework functions effectively where cooperation is well established, but underlying structural and capacity constraints continue to limit the full realisation of its mandate.

Efficiency

The Europol Regulation has provided clear efficiency gains. By pooling specialised analytical, digital forensic and technical capabilities at EU level, Europol generates economies of scale that would be difficult and costly for Member States to replicate individually. These benefits are particularly pronounced for small and medium-sized countries, which rely on access to centralised expertise and infrastructure. These efficiency gains are moderated by several operational constraints. Fragmented data flows, manual processing requirements, cautious national procedures and resource-intensive data protection checks can slow the processing and use of information. In addition, administrative and governance requirements absorb capacity and may affect delivery speed. While the Europol Regulation generates net benefits, efficiency is not fully realised due to persistent system-level constraints.

Relevance

The Europol Regulation remains highly relevant to current EU security needs. The increasingly transnational, digital and data-intensive nature of serious and organised crime and terrorism reinforces the need for EU-level coordination and analytical capacity. Europol's core objectives thus remain well aligned with the operational realities faced by Member States and other stakeholders. This continued relevance is reflected in strong stakeholder demand and high levels of reliance on Europol's analytical tools, databases and coordination functions. Evolving threat patterns, including the growth of online criminal activity, advanced technologies and data-intensive investigations, have exposed limitations in the existing framework. While the objectives of the Europol Regulation remain valid, the means of achieving them require adaptation to ensure continued effectiveness in a changing security environment.

Coherence

The Europol Regulation is judged to be internally coherent and broadly coherent with the wider EU legal and policy framework. Internally, its objectives, tasks and data-processing provisions provide a structured and consistent basis for Europol's role as an information, analytical and

coordination hub. The amendments introduced by Regulation (EU) 2022/991 reinforce this coherence by aligning expanded analytical capabilities with strengthened safeguards for data protection and fundamental rights. Externally, the Europol Regulation complements other Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) instruments and the mandates of actors such as the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL). This cooperation is regarded positively by a majority of stakeholders, and the legal framework is viewed as sufficiently clear to maintain role separation. Nevertheless, in practice, the functioning of the framework is shaped by mandate boundaries, data ownership rules and sector-specific operational frameworks, which may constrain the fluid exchange of information and limit seamless cooperation across police, customs, border and judicial authorities. While the Europol Regulation is coherent in its design, further operational integration would enhance its effectiveness in practice.

EU added value

The Europol Regulation delivers EU added value. Europol enables structured multilateral cooperation that would not be possible at the same scale or coherence through bilateral or purely national arrangements. It creates a Union-wide criminal intelligence picture that underpins EU-level prioritisation and coordinated operational cycles. Europol's secure information systems, advanced analytical and digital forensic capacity also generates economies of scale that are particularly valuable for small and medium-sized Member States. Europol reduces fragmentation, strengthens cross-border trust and provides a common platform for coordination across Member States, EU IBOAs, third countries and other relevant stakeholders, such as companies. The core results achieved by the Europol Regulation could not realistically have been delivered to the same extent without an EU-wide legal framework.

Results of the impact assessment

Main problems identified

The impact assessment adopts a forward-looking perspective. It identifies the main problems likely to persist in the absence of further legislative action, defines general and specific policy objectives, and compares two policy options against a structured set of criteria, including feasibility, proportionality, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, subsidiarity and wider impacts, notably on society, fundamental rights and data protection.

The first problem is that Europol and national authorities face persistent legal, procedural and technical constraints and personal data processing, information-sharing and data quality issues when investigating cross-border crimes and identifying threats. Member States' diverse legal frameworks and cautious procedures impose significant limits on the sharing or exchange of crime-related data via Europol. This undermines Europol's role as a central EU information hub.

Another key driver of this problem is the legal and operational complexity of data subject categorisation (DSC). While those rules were introduced to protect privacy and prevent indiscriminate data processing, in practice they hinder the intake and analysis of large mixed or unverified datasets, especially in the early phases of investigations. Similar constraints arise from fragmented national legal frameworks, restrictive conditions on private sector information, and slow adoption of new analytical tools because of heavy compliance and resource demands.

The second problem area is Europol's operational support to and coordination with Member States and other partners, which remains fragmented. Operational and capacity constraints at national and EU level result in uneven and often delayed involvement of Europol in investigations and inconsistent uptake of its operational and technical support, limiting its ability to contribute effectively to a coordinated EU-level response to common criminal threats.

Regulatory and operational constraints embedded in Europol's legal mandate and cooperation frameworks limit its ability to effectively cooperate, support and coordinate with EU bodies, offices and agencies, third countries, and private parties, reducing the speed, depth and operational impact of joint responses to internal security threats.

Policy objectives

The general objective of a possible future EU intervention would be to strengthen Europol's role as a trusted and effective operational partner to Member States by providing effective operational and analytical support, facilitating information exchange, and contributing to a coordinated EU response to the detection, disruption and prevention of emerging and evolving criminal threats including serious and organised crime, cybercrime and terrorism. The ultimate objective would be to contribute to the overall security and safety of the EU to ensure the protection of its citizens. Specific objectives focus on: strengthening Europol as an operational information hub; strengthening its operational and investigative support services to Member States; and improving cooperation with EU IBOAs and external stakeholders, including third countries, international organisations and, where appropriate, private parties. These objectives are intentionally targeted in response to specific structural weaknesses that have become more apparent as threats and technologies have evolved.

Policy options

The baseline scenario assumes no further EU legislative intervention beyond the current framework. Under this scenario, Europol continues to rely largely on voluntary information-sharing by Member States and existing analytical tools, while facing increasing operational strain as data volumes grow. Two further policy options are defined:

- **Policy Option 1** reinforces Europol's existing model. It focuses on incremental but targeted improvements to data availability and processing, analytical capacity, operational support and cooperation mechanisms;
- **Policy Option 2** proposes a more structural transformation. It would move Europol towards a more integrated analytical, technological and operational service provider model, including more extensive access to data, simplified processing rules, shared digital infrastructure, enhanced operational interfaces at national level and dedicated support for EPPO.

Assessment of impacts

Both options are expected to improve Europol's effectiveness, albeit in different ways and at different scales. Policy Option 1 offers meaningful gains by strengthening the existing model and improving the quality, timeliness and scale of operational information. Policy Option 2 is more ambitious and could deliver stronger improvements in early threat detection, cross-border data-matching and operational coordination. These gains depend on Member State acceptance, successful implementation and the creation of new technological and organisational structures.

Both options are likely to produce net efficiency gains compared to the baseline. Policy Option 1 is a cost-efficient incremental improvement, relying on optimisation of existing systems, moderate staffing increases and information and communications technology (ICT) upgrades. Policy Option 2 could generate larger long-term efficiency benefits through structural change, including a digital police cloud and broader operational infrastructure, but these gains come with substantially higher upfront and recurring costs, as well as greater implementation risk.

The social and security effects are positive across both options, as each is intended to strengthen the EU's capacity to prevent and combat crime, support victims and reinforce resilience against cross-border threats. Policy Option 2 is likely to be most beneficial in enhancing security, especially in data-intensive investigations and where Europol can act more proactively. In turn, this increases the need for strong safeguards and clear accountability.

Fundamental rights risks are manageable under both options and increase with ambition. Policy Option 1 creates moderate risks linked to greater data processing, open source intelligence (OSINT) use and artificial intelligence (AI)-supported analysis. Policy Option 2 raises more pronounced concerns because it expands Europol's access to datasets, increases centralised processing and places analytical outputs closer to investigative and prosecutorial workflows. Accordingly, the study emphasises the importance of purpose limitation, human oversight, data protection and fundamental rights impact assessments, robust cyber-security, supervision by the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) and strong traceability.

Environmental effects are expected to be limited overall. The main environmental pressure point is higher energy demand from large-scale digital processing and AI-supported analytics, but the study characterises these impacts as low and manageable through efficient system design and greener procurement.

The assessment points to important distributional effects. Smaller and medium-sized Member States stand to gain most from further centralised EU-level capabilities because they are less likely to be able to sustain specialised analytical and technical capacities on their own. High-capacity Member States may not gain as much, although they would still benefit overall, especially in complex cross-border investigations.