

Europol Information System

Introduction

European Police Office (Europol) was established by the Europol Convention, as a result of the treaty of the European Union. It is now the European Law Enforcement Agency that handles criminal intelligence. The EU Council decision (April 09) transformed Europol into a EU body from 1st January 2010.

The Europol Information System (EIS) stores the data that Member States and Europol itself provides. A principle of the system is that Member States have equal and unrestricted access to all the data within the system. The EIS system went live under the UK presidency of the EU in October 2005.

A fully working EIS system that all member states contribute to, will improve working relations between member states investigations, enhancing both operational and strategic understanding of organised crime.

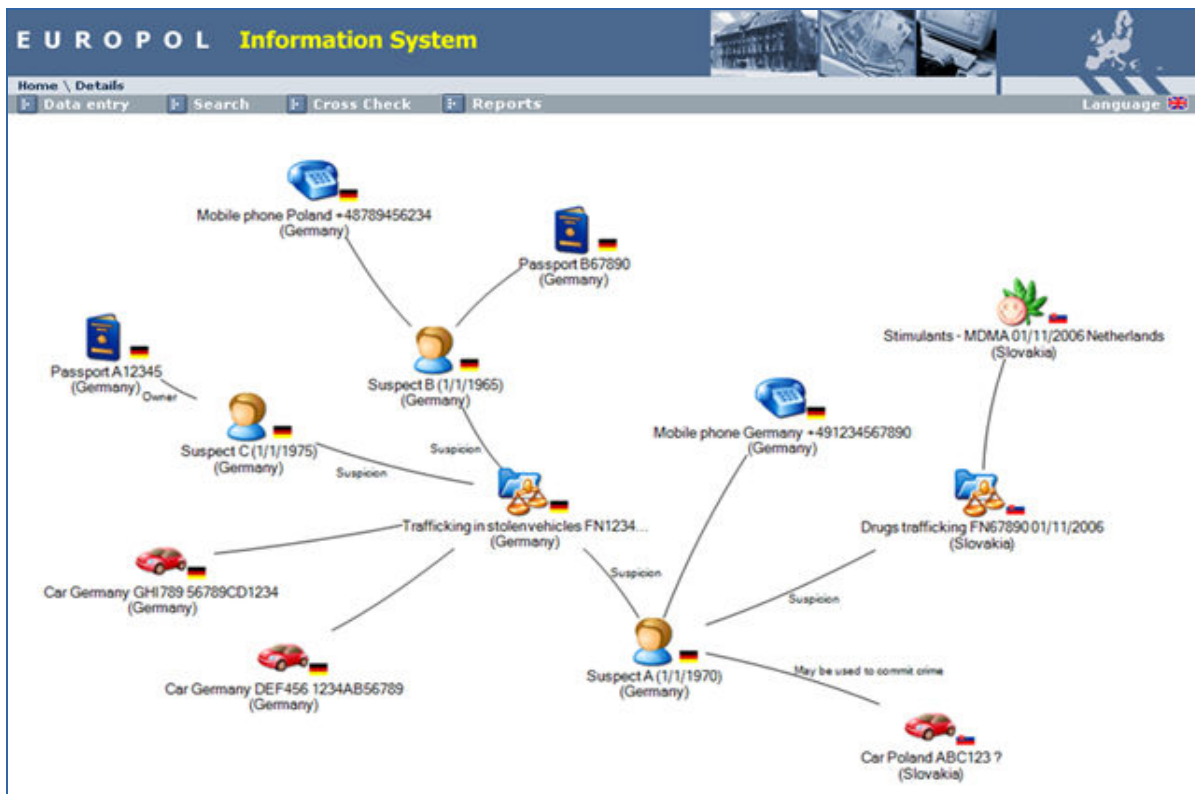
Input, retrieval and modification of data in the EIS by the Member States (MS) is governed by the EU Council decision and the respective national law. Personal data retrieved from the EIS may be used only to prevent and combat crimes falling within the competence of Europol.

What kind of data can be stored in EIS and how?

The data in the IS are stored in different objects (such as persons, cars, identity documents, etc.), which must be linked to each other to create a structured picture of a criminal case.

On the right, you can see an overview of the types of data that can be stored in the IS.

There are several ways of viewing data stored in the IS. One example is the chart view, which gives a graphical overview of the stored information. It provides insight into links between data objects:



Criteria for entering data into EIS

Like all computerised systems, the value of EIS is directly related to its content. Therefore, criteria have been defined in order to attain a high quality standard on the contents of the database. Some of these criteria are forced by the system; some are based on business rules provided in the form of user support documentation and training. Users in the Member States and at Europol are thus guided in the process of entering data into the EIS. Only SOCA can input data currently.

Restrictions on storage and use of data

The Member States and Europol must carefully select and assess the data to be processed in the IS against the legal and quality criteria.

Evaluation codes must be used to establish the authenticity and accuracy of the source and the information.

The data stored in the IS may only be disseminated and/or used in accordance with the Handling Codes and Europol protection levels applied by the owner of the information.

Storage time limits

Information can be stored in the IS for three years, after which a data review must take place. During the review, the data owner may decide on continued storage until next review if this is still necessary for the performance of Europol's tasks. If no action is taken by the Member State in question (or Europol for Third Party data), then the objects that expire are automatically deleted by the IS one day after the expiry date.

Added value for Member States

In cross-checking leads against the content of the IS, investigators can quickly validate or discard lines of investigations in their cases. A simple hit or absence of a hit can give a new dimension to an investigation, particularly in those with an international dimension. Querying databases is an essential process in gaining insight into criminal activities, even more so when related to international organised crime. The scope of the IS makes it a fundamental part of this process.

Data Ownership

Data can be inserted into the IS in a manual or automated way. The data inserted into the IS remain under the full control of the inputting entity (data owner); they cannot be altered in any way by Europol or another Member State. The owner is responsible for data accuracy, reliability and verification of storage time limits, and ensuring that they are kept up-to-date.

Conclusion

The EIS will enhance the SOCA intelligence database to a pan European level. Access to search Member States intelligence is invaluable for the UK as it potentially could open up cross border investigative opportunities. The type of information gathered will increase collaborative operations and help reduce the time in which they are carried out. Additionally, these IS checks could open up new avenues for investigations because the intelligence supplied by other MS potentially does not exist in the UK.

Access can be obtained by successfully completing a 1 day training course run by SOCA.