

# **CONTEXT**

The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) is an Agency of the European Union dedicated to training law enforcement officials, based in Budapest, Hungary. This is a crucial role that is intended to ensure European law enforcement officials are equipped to protect human rights, prevent and fight serious crime and terrorism, and maintain public order, with a view to creating a common EU law enforcement culture. It was established in 2000 as the European Police College and it became an Agency in 2005. Its current legal mandate entered into force on 1 July 2016, resulting from the 2015 Regulation (EU) 2015/2219 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training[[1]](#footnote-1) (‘CEPOL Regulation’). As per Article 3 of the Regulation, CEPOL’s mandate includes supporting, developing, implementing, and coordinating training for law enforcement officials.

More specifically, the Agency is:

* Supporting Member States in the provision of training to law enforcement officials, in particular on elements of cross-border and European law enforcement cooperation;
* Supporting Member States in developing bilateral and regional cooperation through the delivery of multilateral training;
* Developing, implementing and coordinating training on specific thematic areas;
* Developing, implementing and coordinating the training of law enforcement officials when preparing for participation in EU missions and in capacity building activities in non-EU countries;
* Providing training to law enforcement trainers and supporting the development and exchange of best practice;
* Developing, upgrading, and evaluating learning tools and methodologies that support the learning and development of law enforcement officials[[2]](#footnote-2).

Article 32 of the CEPOL Regulation requires the Commission to carry out an evaluation by 1 July 2021 and every five years thereafter, assessing, in particular, the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of CEPOL and of its working practices. The external study supporting this evaluation was conducted by a consortium of RAND Europe and Ernst & Young[[3]](#footnote-3).

The external study was based on a number of data collection activities:

(1) A documentary review;

(2) A public consultation of EU citizens;

(3) Online surveys of CEPOL National Units and National Contact Points, Framework Partners, third countries, and training participants;

(4) Interviews with stakeholders from CEPOL, EU institutions, Member State organisations, international organisations and third countries;

(5) Virtual ‘visits’ to CEPOL’;

(6) Three case studies;

(7) Workshops.

The research approach ensured the gathering of information from a wide range of stakeholders, including in CEPOL, other EU agencies, Member States and third countries, which strengthens the balance and breadth of perspectives.

This evaluation has two main objectives: (1) To assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value of CEPOL and of its working practices since 2015[[4]](#footnote-4); and (2) To describe lessons learned and elaborate recommendations to better respond to the challenges posed by the constantly changing environment against the background of the currently authorised financial and human resources for CEPOL. The evaluation covers CEPOL’s activities over the period 2015 to 2020 with all EU Member States (except Denmark[[5]](#footnote-5)), third countries with which CEPOL has working arrangements, cooperation agreements and similar arrangements, and international organisations and EU agencies.

This report will be submitted to the European Parliament and the Council as well as to the Management Board of the Agency. The Staff Working Document, which accompanies this Commission Report, provides a detailed analysis of the outcomes of the external evaluation.

# **KEY FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION**

In terms of **effectiveness**, the evaluation found that CEPOL’s key programming documents consider and reflect the objectives of its legal basis and the priorities as set out in the 2015 EU Agenda on Security. This is confirmed by the stakeholders who overwhelmingly perceived that CEPOL’s actions and activities over the 2015 to 2020 period have duly reflected the objectives laid out in its mandate. CEPOL is engaged to fulfil its mandate when it comes to cross-border and European-level policing and invests its resources accordingly, with appreciable results.

Moreover, the introduction of the EU-Strategic Training Needs Assessment methodology, developed to identify gaps in knowledge, skills and competencies and training needs, has strongly improved the prioritisation of training needs. The methodology identifies training priorities and aims at coordinating available training activities to prevent overlaps and duplication, while indicating emerging law enforcement trends. Yet, the evaluation pointed out that CEPOL’s ‘train-the-trainers’ offer, an activity enabling trainers to implement modern delivery methods and blended learning techniques to ensure quality police training in a multicultural environment, is comparatively smaller than that the offer of other EU Justice and Home Affairs agencies and consideration should be given to expanding it.

The evaluation concluded that, given CEPOL’s relatively small size (96 staff members in 2020) and annual budget (EUR 10.6 million in 2020), CEPOL cannot be expected to directly reach a sizeable proportion of the target audience through residential training activities. The idea encompassed in the CEPOL Regulation is for the Agency to broaden the reach of its target audience through a cascading effect, multiplying the outreach as a result from the training of trainers and peer-to-peer transfer of knowledge. In its current form, cascading relies heavily on the actions of Member States and is not consistently monitored by CEPOL. Also, CEPOL’s use of the train-the-trainer delivery approach is limited, delivering only five sessions in 2019 and two in 2020 before the pandemic. CEPOL’s investment in upgrading and expanding its online training offer emerged as a positive strategy for extending its outreach, which became paramount in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants selected for CEPOL’s residential training do not always have a suitable profile in terms of level of expertise and seniority. Activity Managers within CEPOL have the power to vet and decline participants’ applications, but the evaluation finds that this power is hardly ever used, as it is an established practice to accept the first candidate presented by Member States, regardless of his/her profile. This is a well-known issue, which is often discussed among the CEPOL National Units in their regular meetings. However, stakeholders reported that CEPOL Activity Managers are now reported to be reviewing more carefully participant applications.

In terms of **efficiency**, the evaluation found that the benefits stemming from participating in CEPOL’s activities outweighed the costs for Member States, and that CEPOL’s resources were managed well. The evaluation also concluded that there were some inefficiencies related to the Management Board’s decision-making process, CEPOL’s planning processes and monitoring procedures. CEPOL’s internal structure appears to operate efficiently, although CEPOL’s staff turnover might have affected the Agency’s overall efficiency during the 2015 to 2020 period. CEPOL now operates under a hybrid business model, which combines the traditional grant approach, consisting in tendered topics among the eligible Framework Partners, and the ‘new’ CEPOL Knowledge Centre method, consisting in a cluster of experts specialised in a topic. This mixed method is meant to streamline and simplify the grants management and has been put in place after the Management Board rejected the complete abolition of the grant system. CEPOL was generally capable of absorbing the EU funding it received.

The yearly development cycle for CEPOL’s training activities is deemed to be too short, jeopardising quality. Prior to CEPOL’s development of training, the Management Board is required to make decisions about topics, guidelines are drafted, and Framework Partners undergo selection procedures. Once these processes are complete, according to some stakeholders, there is little time left for quality content development, as the yearly cycle has come to an end. Consequently, Framework Partners with no ‘off-the-shelf’ training solutions that could be offered during this limited timeframe are discouraged from applying to organise a course. The result is that the number of grant applications from Framework Partners is constantly decreasing.

Training activities that have been outsourced to CEPOL’s Framework Partners for development and delivery are less exposed to CEPOL’s quality assurance mechanism. This results in training activities of variable quality. CEPOL has a quality assurance mechanism in place to control its training activities from development to delivery, which was found to be effective in guaranteeing high-quality content and trainers when CEPOL is responsible for both developing and delivering training. Training activities outsourced to Framework Partners, while still appreciated by participants, are sometimes of variable quality as they have not always been systematically screened by the CEPOL’s quality assurance mechanism.

CEPOL’s Cybercrime Academy is perceived to be an important step taken by the Agency to address emerging needs but should be further improved. The establishment of CEPOL’s Cybercrime Academy received mixed reviews from stakeholders. While covering a very relevant topic and where demand is high, questions were raised on its actual mission, its limited size and the ability to attract experts to deliver trainings with relevant knowledge and skills. The activities delivered through the Cybercrime Academy have also been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as the on-site residential activities using the specialised facilities could not take place. More generally, some Member State and EU-level stakeholders were critical of CEPOL’s cybercrime training offering, questioning the quality, consistency and breadth of the training provided.

The evaluation found that, while there is a good relationship between the CEPOL Executive Director and the Management Board, Management Board meetings are hampered by the low engagement by some Members and the disproportionate focus on administrative matters. Furthermore, some representation issues in relation to the CEPOL Management Board emerged (i.e. low engagement of several Member States; gender imbalance; no customs or border officials; the levels of seniority of representatives are varied). Board Meetings are attended by large numbers of delegates per Member State, not always properly representing the full spectrum of the law enforcement bodies and their inputs. Several stakeholders observed that, while most Management Board decisions are related to content and strategy, the agenda of Board meetings is cramped with administrative items, leaving relatively little room for strategic discussion.

The number of CEPOL staff increased steadily over the period 2015 to 2020 (from 45 to 96). It however emerged from the evaluation that the relocation of CEPOL from the United Kingdom to Hungary and the subsequent salary correction coefficient applied to Budapest seems to play a key factor in CEPOL’s difficulty in attracting and retaining staff. This is however not an isolated complaint among the decentralized Agencies. The turnover of staff has resulted in a shift in corporate culture and challenges in attracting appropriately qualified staff.

It was confirmed that CEPOL’s objectives are **relevant** to the EU needs and challenges defined by key strategic documents and CEPOL’s training offer is relevant to the needs of EU Member States. The evaluation showed that CEPOL’s objectives respond to or are aligned to key elements included in the Stockholm Programme[[6]](#footnote-6), the EU Agenda for Security[[7]](#footnote-7) and the European Law Enforcement Training Scheme[[8]](#footnote-8). Training participants across the 27 EU Member States also indicated that over the 2015 to 2020 period, CEPOL’s training offer adequately addressed the needs and expectations of their countries. The relevance of CEPOL’s objectives and training activities is attributed to: (1) the alignment of CEPOL’s Annual Work Programmes with the European Agenda on Security[[9]](#footnote-9) (as mentioned above); (2) the introduction of the EU Strategic Training Need Assessment, which has allowed CEPOL to link training priorities to the needs of its target groups; and (3) the embedding of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats’ priorities into its residential and online training activities. Furthermore, CEPOL activities are widely recognised for building trust and facilitating the development of cooperation among law enforcement services. Indeed, the introduction of EU Strategic Training Need Assessment and Operational Training Need Assessments was an important step forward in ensuring a stronger alignment of training topics and activities to stakeholders’ needs. Nevertheless, there were mixed findings in relation to CEPOL’s ability to adapt its training offer to scientific, technological and socio-political developments.

CEPOL’s remit and activities appear to be **coherent** with and complementary to other relevant actors at the EU level. Stakeholders from other Justice and Home Affairs Agencies were generally positive about their relationship with CEPOL. Yet, the extent of coordination is ad hoc, varies by Agency and by CEPOL’s level of engagement with JHA agencies and EU institutions. This means that there is some room for improvement; CEPOL could therefore adapt its working approach to maximise potential synergies. The JHA Training Matrix, a spreadsheet which Agencies were expected to feed manually, intended to ensure structured coordination, was abandoned in 2019 due to reasons mainly linked to a lack of awareness and engagement of the tool among JHA agencies. However, no structured methodology has replaced the JHA Training Matrix; instead, CEPOL undertakes coordination through a peer-to-peer approach, notably through interaction in meetings of the Network of the Justice and Home Affairs Agencies[[10]](#footnote-10) and/or involvement in specific projects, which does not guarantee the achievement of full synergies.

The evaluation concluded that, regarding the **EU added value**, all consulted stakeholder groups were of the view that CEPOL indeed provides added value with regard to training on specific crime areas compared to what is offered at the national level. CEPOL’s objectives and tasks helped to improve the ability of Member States to train their law enforcement officials compared to what they could have done at the national level. Some consulted officials stated that CEPOL usefully offered training on EU-level instruments and tools and provided insights into the EU dimension of cross-border tools, such as cross-border exchange of electronic evidence and international law enforcement cooperation, which were seldom covered in national training. As a by-product of that training, CEPOL’s activities are widely recognised for building trust and facilitating the development of cooperation among law enforcement services. The majority of consulted stakeholders agreed that CEPOL’s activities as a whole contribute to an increase in mutual trust among law enforcement organisations. Moreover, stakeholders confirmed that CEPOL’s activities have facilitated an increase in the number of opportunities for cooperation and in the quality of cooperation between national law enforcement services at EU level as well as, to a smaller extent, on a bilateral and regional basis. The majority of training participants agree that CEPOL’s training activities provide concrete opportunities to establish networking with their European counterparts and that CEPOL adds unique value to develop cooperation that would not have otherwise been achieved through national means. This outcome is particularly attributed to CEPOL’s exchange programme and residential activities. The evaluation found that CEPOL’s work in third countries is highly valued by informed stakeholders, though some within CEPOL’s governance are not aware of these activities. In pursuit of its mandate, CEPOL extended its support to the EU external policy by developing the law enforcement capacity in partner countries in the EU neighbourhood. CEPOL capacity building projects in third countries effectively contribute towards improving the stability in the EU neighbourhood and in building trust with neighbouring countries. Although training in third countries is a crowded market, CEPOL is praised for its commitment to provide training responding to the needs of partner third countries. As per mandate, CEPOL manages dedicated Union External Assistance funds to fulfil its objectives in third countries.

# **LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The evaluation highlights the importance for CEPOL to streamline its activities to focus on key priorities within the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats, the Security Union Strategy and recent internal security strategies, while remaining open to assessing and catering for the specific training requests of Member States within this framework. In that regard, CEPOL should increase its cooperation with other Agencies in general, and with Europol in particular, in order to maximise synergies as widely as possible. In this context, CEPOL has accepted to take the lead in the coordination of the common horizontal strategic goal on “capacity building through training, networking and innovation” during the upcoming cycle 2022-2025 of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats. Likewise, CEPOL should increase its coordinating role, also when contributing to implement all the internal security strategies, including the Counter Terrorism Agenda, adopted in December 2020[[11]](#footnote-11), and both EU Strategies on Organised Crime[[12]](#footnote-12) and on Trafficking[[13]](#footnote-13), adopted in early 2021.

Linked to this, it is paramount for CEPOL to play a central role in coordinating law enforcement training among all different stakeholders, and notably the other JHA agencies. Rather than being in competition with other EU training stakeholders, CEPOL should aim to become “the” EU hub for law enforcement training. While the Agency is not in a position to cater for all training needs itself, it has a unique role in mapping and monitoring the catalogue of existing law enforcement training offers provided by all JHA agencies and other stakeholders and to act as a portal for law enforcement practitioners looking for suitable training opportunities at the EU level.

At the same time, it is equally important for Member State representatives to further strengthen coordination within their countries, with a view to gathering the views and addressing the needs of the entire law enforcement community. In particular, the evaluation highlighted the importance of the role of CEPOL’s Management Board, as a body which should reflect and relay all inputs and demands beyond the academic world, notably from the operational level in their Member States, to be fed into the Board’s strategic decisions. In this context, attention should also be paid to gender representation within the Management Board, as also highlighted by the European Parliament, which – in the context of the 2019 discharge procedure – urged CEPOL to ensure gender balance when nominating their members.

In the same vein, CEPOL should aim to reinforce the outreach and impact of the Agency. This could be achieved, for instance, by integrating cascading (i.e. multiplying the outreach as a result from the training of trainers and peer-to-peer transfer of knowledge) more systematically into all activities, stepping up the train-the-trainer programme, with a special focus on law enforcement senior managers, and continuing to develop and strengthen its online offer. This would help CEPOL to better address its target audience, as broadened in the legal basis in force since 2016, now including prosecutors, customs officials, and other persons involved in law enforcement (e.g. forensic lab personnel).

Another sphere needing attention is the Cybercrime Academy, and more generally, the training offers addressing specific technical skills, such as cryptocurrency, access to (big) data and encrypted data, which can hardly be covered by single Member States alone.

Finally, as regards the activities carried out by CEPOL in third countries, it is confirmed that these should continue, where possible, and in line with the EU’s external policy. However, considering the resources available to the Agency, they should not deflect attention from the core priorities referred to above, while ensuring that they meet concrete needs and have a real added value.

# **CONCLUSIONS**

The evaluation recognised the **overall positive contribution of the Agency** to the policy needs, objectives and values of the Security Union and their valuable activity in third countries. In all five criteria evaluated, CEPOL was globally found to score well, being effective in carrying out relevant activities contributing to a European law enforcement culture, providing added value compared to the national level, utilising resources efficiently and in a coherent manner within the EU security architecture.

While acknowledging CEPOL’s contribution to enhancing security through training of and building a common culture among law enforcement actors, the evaluation identified some issues deserving attention. Those concern the internal functioning of the Agency, its corporate image and culture, and the relationship with the Management Board. Based on these, the evaluation issued the recommendations outlined in chapter 3 above, which do not require changes affecting either the budgetary resources or the legal framework, and are therefore relatively easy to implement.

As envisaged in Article 32 of the CEPOL Regulation, the next five-year evaluation will assess how these recommendations have been addressed.

Looking at the medium to long term, key questions will have to be raised, as to the very future of training of EU law enforcement and the role of the Agency, in a rapidly evolving security environment and in a digital age.

Notably, consideration should be given to how the Agency should best play its role given its mandate and resources.

1. Regulation (EU) 2015/2219 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2015 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2015/2219. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The final report of the supporting study is available online at https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2837/540159. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These are the five criteria used as a basis in the evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Denmark is not considered a Member State in accordance with Protocol 22 on the position of Denmark. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Council of the European Union. 2009. The Stockholm Programme – An open and secure Europe serving and protecting the citizens. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. European Commission (2015). The European Agenda on Security. COM(2015) 185 final. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu\_agenda\_on\_security\_en.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. COM(2013) 172 final, Establishing a European Law Enforcement Training Scheme. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. European Commission. (2015). The European Agenda on Security. COM(2015) 185 final. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu\_agenda\_on\_security\_en.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies’ Network includes nine agencies: CEPOL, EASO, EIGE, EMCDDA, eu-LISA, Eurojust, Europol, FRA and Frontex. Since 2010, the JHA agencies have in turn hosted the Network. In 2021, Frontex hosted the network, coordinating its activities and carrying out the secretariat function. In 2022 it will be CEPOL’s turn to chair the Network. The agencies work on a wide range of important areas, including migration and border management, drug trafficking and combating organised crime, human trafficking and gender equality. Since these areas have a lot in common, the Network was established to make use of the synergies and share information. The hosting agency reports to the Council’s Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI) regarding the Network’s progress and achievements. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. COM(2020) 795 final. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. COM(2021) 170 final. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. COM(2021) 171 final. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)