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WAPIS

NEWSLETTER



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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Since 2000, the number of major civil wars has decreased significantly. However, the security situation has become more complex and multifaceted, with threats including human, drug and arms trafficking, money laundering, terrorism and the financing of terrorism, cybercrime and counterfeiting of all types of products, especially pharmaceuticals. Terrorism and the financing of terrorism have now become a security quagmire for many countries in the region, particularly in the Sahel area. Initially confined to certain countries in the Sahel like Mali, Niger, the Lake Chad Basin and Nigeria, today terrorist attacks have multiplied and spread to other countries such as Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Despite efforts made by Member States at national and regional levels, terrorism remains a real threat for all countries in the region, including coastal countries. The number of reported deaths from terrorist attacks has increased five-fold in three years, resulting in more than 4,000 victims in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger in 2019.

During the first five months of 2021, 670 armed incidents perpetrated by terrorist groups in the region resulted in more than 2,840 deaths. In addition to being the target of terrorist groups and traffickers of all kinds, the region (especially coastal countries) is facing growing cross-border insecurity. This is due to the lack of control over maritime areas and the expansion of piracy and all types of illegal activity at sea, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, with direct consequences on the region's resilience. This has exposed how the region's vulnerabilities are exploited by criminals, with insufficient and inadequate response capacity of Member States to address threats at sea. In addition to these threats, the management and exploitation of natural resources, the slow pace of defence and security sector reforms and land management issues continue to expose the region's fragility.

One of the strategies put in place to eradicate the current security challenges in the region is the WAPIS Programme. WAPIS is designed to build the capacity of Law Enforcement Agencies in our Member States through the creation of electronic criminal databases, with the aim of sharing such data at national, regional and global level in real time.

At inception, the WAPIS Programme encountered a series of challenges at the level of our Member States, particularly in the areas of legislation and

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This Programme
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technology. Today, the Programme has gained momentum and the governments of our community continue to buy into it. Data Collection and Registration Centres have been established and operationalized in 12 ECOWAS Member States, with three countries waiting to be inaugurated. It is hoped that WAPIS Data Centres will be inaugurated in these countries in the coming months.

The Automated Finger Print Identification System (AFIS) is an essential component of the WAPIS Programme, which will guarantee a reliable and comprehensive police information system. The exchange of biometric data is a crucial precondition for the identification of persons of interest. This identification is only possible if biographical data are associated with biometric data. Therefore, the AFIS infrastructure will be directly linked to the WAPIS national architecture. The AFIS Project was launched in March 2022 with an implementation period of 24 months in three pilot countries, namely: Benin, the Gambia and Togo. The ECOWAS Commission will work with its partner, the European Union, to ensure that all our Member States benefit from this component.

The second level of WAPIS implementation is establishment of the regional platform, which will serve as a catalyst for regional security integration in the fight against all forms of crime, especially terrorism. During the Second ECOWAS Expert Committee Meeting on the creation of the WAPIS Regional Platform held from 8 to 9 November 2022 in Abidjan, the Committee, among other things, agreed to continue with the option of setting up a decentralized regional platform for a transitional period. This will eventually be replaced by a centralized regional platform.

This is not to say that everything went smoothly during implementation of the WAPIS Programme in our Member States. The socio-political challenges in some participating countries caused them to take longer than expected to put in place the appropriate legal framework required for the legality and sustainability of the WAPIS system. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacted implementation of the Programme. Consequently, INTERPOL was unable to accomplish some of the planned activities.

In order to complement ongoing efforts in the fight against terrorism, the ECOWAS Commission supports the full implementation, operationalization and sustainability of the WAPIS/AFIS Programme in all our Member States. This has been demonstrated consistently throughout the structure of the ECOWAS Commission. That is why during

the Mediation and Security Council Meetings held in June and July 2022 in Abuja and Accra respectively, the Council recommended that the ECOWAS Commission:

- I. Extend the WAPIS Programme beyond the capital areas to cover air, sea and official land border control posts in ECOWAS Member States;
- II. Work closely to identify and secure alternative funding instruments to support the extension of WAPIS to all air, sea and official land borders within the ECOWAS space;
- III. Continue to involve ECOWAS representatives in the beneficiary countries, especially during strategic visits, by including the WAPIS Programme on the agendas of meetings concerning security and the justice system whenever possible;
- IV. Take all necessary measures to assess the legal, operational and technical prerequisites involved in setting up a regional data-sharing mechanism, including via the organization of a dedicated workshop with support from INTERPOL and drafting of the required regulatory framework for adoption by ECOWAS Member States.

The Council further recommended that Member States:

- I. Adopt the appropriate legal operational framework, including a Data Protection Law;
- II. Appoint, deploy and retain competent staff at national level;
- III. Allocate a budget line for running the system at national level;
- IV. Call on the ECOWAS Commission to urge the participating countries to honour their commitment to sustainability of the WAPIS System.

We at the ECOWAS Commission will be very grateful for any initiative that the Government and participating agencies may wish to take, with a view to publishing the ECOWAS Supplementary Act on Personal Data Protection Law in their National Gazette, enacting a national law and considering creating a budget line to ensure the sustainability of the system after the implementation phases.

LEAD STORIES

The WAPIS Programme at the heart of government priorities in Guinea-Bissau: A delegation received by His Excellency Sissoco Embalo, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau

As part of operationalization of the WAPIS Programme in Guinea-Bissau, on 19 October 2022 the Programme delegation had the honour of being received by His Excellency Sissoco Embalo, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, who is also the current Chairman of ECOWAS.

This audience provided an opportunity to explain the aims of WAPIS and discuss the current progress of implementation in Guinea-Bissau and also in West Africa.

The President of the Republic reiterated Guinea-Bissau's and ECOWAS's commitment to facilitating implementation of this Programme, which is one of the most important in terms of security in the region. In particular, he emphasized the importance and the need for West African States to strengthen their co-operation in the fight against national crime and terrorism.

In addition to this audience, the WAPIS Programme delegation handed over IT equipment to the authorities to

help operationalize the system in the country. This visit to Guinea-Bissau also kicked off training sessions in the use of WAPIS upstream of inauguration of the Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE), scheduled for January 2023.



The WAPIS delegation had an audience with the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 19 October 2022, Bissau (Guinea-Bissau)

The Africa Round Table at the 17th Annual Conference of Heads of National Central Bureaus (NCBs) welcomed the progress in implementing the WAPIS Programme in the region.

The 17th Annual Conference of Heads of NCBs was held in Lyon, France, from 28 to 30 November 2022, attended by NCB representatives from 195 INTERPOL member countries.

This conference was the ideal occasion to provide an update on INTERPOL's police capacity and the operational needs of its members, and to make it easier for members of the INTERPOL NCB network to share information with one another live and in-person, and with the General Secretariat.

On the agenda of the Africa regional Round Table at this conference, the WAPIS Programme was the subject of a presentation by the Head of the Programme, Mr Richard GOTWE, in the presence of the Secretary General of INTERPOL, Mr Jürgen Stock.

Welcoming the progress made by the Programme and significant advances in boosting exchange of criminal data, the participants reiterated their commitment to supporting

implementation of the system so it can be used effectively in the context of consolidating the security architecture in countries and the fight against crime in all its forms. They were particularly keen to replicate WAPIS in other regions of Africa to ensure the continent is armed effectively in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime.



Africa Round Table at the 17th Annual Conference of Heads of National Central Bureaus (NCBs), 29 November 2022, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

The ECOWAS Expert Committee, which met in Abidjan, issued strong guidelines concerning implementation of the WAPIS data-sharing regional platform

The second ECOWAS Expert Committee Meeting on the WAPIS regional platform was held in Abidjan, in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, on 8 and 9 November 2022. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and adopt recommendations about implementation of the WAPIS data-sharing regional platform.

At the end of the discussions, the meeting adopted several conclusions and made some significant recommendations, including holding onto the option of setting up a decentralized regional platform for a transition period, which will eventually be replaced by a centralized regional platform, as well as adoption of a Supplementary Act creating the regional platform and making it operational, plus identification of a structure in charge of ensuring it runs smoothly.

It is also important to emphasize that the experts also defined data-sharing arrangements for the regional platform by classifying them in three categories: automatic sharing, optional sharing with automatic diffusion and optional sharing with diffusion on a case-by-case basis.

There were more than fifty experts representing the ECOWAS countries, Mauritania and the ECOWAS Commission who attended this meeting. The conclusions from this meeting will be examined by ministers in charge of Security for ECOWAS and Mauritania before being definitively ratified by the Conference of Heads of State.



ECOWAS Expert Committee Meeting on the regional platform, 8 November 2022, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

The WAPIS Steering Committee gives an update on Programme implementation

The Seventh Steering Committee Meeting of the West African Police Information System (WAPIS) Programme was held on 10 November 2022 in Abidjan, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.

The Steering Committee meeting, mainly consisting of the national points of contact from participating countries and directors of the Data Collection and Registration centres (DACORE) or their deputy, was co-chaired by representatives of the European Union and the ECOWAS Commission. The deliberations focused on the progress

made in overall implementation of the Programme and in each participating country since the Steering Committee meeting in February 2022.

At the end of the meeting, recommendations were made to all the participants, especially the participating countries and partners (ECOWAS, European Union and INTERPOL) in order to support and boost Programme implementation actions.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Gambia and Mauritania are raising awareness of law enforcement agencies about the use of WAPIS in order to strengthen their security architecture

As part of implementation of its communication plan, the WAPIS Programme organized two information and awareness-raising sessions in the Gambia and Mauritania during a strategic visit to boost the authorities' commitment to and support for WAPIS, and also encourage adoption of WAPIS by law enforcement agencies.



Awareness-raising session on the use of WAPIS, 13 October 2022, Banjul (the Gambia)

In the Gambia, 313 officers from various law enforcement services affected by the system participated in the session, which took place from 13 to 15 October 2022. The opening ceremony was presided over by the Permanent

Secretary to the Ministry of the Interior, Mr Gibril LOWE, with the effective presence of the ECOWAS Representative in the Gambia and the Representative of the European Union plus the Deputy Director General of the National Police.

The same enthusiasm was felt in Nouakchott, in Mauritania, from 25 to 27 October 2022, where more than 300 people took part in awareness-raising sessions organized jointly by INTERPOL and Mauritania's Directorate-General of National Security. The Secretary General of the Ministry of the Interior and Head of the European Union delegation in Mauritania attended the opening ceremony and reaffirmed the importance of WAPIS in the security architecture at national and regional level, but most importantly urged participants to take ownership of the system, which will without doubt be a game-changer in the fight against transnational crime and terrorism.

During the first quarter of 2023, several awareness-raising sessions will be organized in Togo, Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, again with the aim of popularizing WAPIS for a safer world and African region.



Awareness-raising session on the use of WAPIS, 25 October 2022, Nouakchott (Mauritania)

Togo reinforces its organizational and operational architecture around WAPIS

From 26 to 28 September 2022, the WAPIS Programme, in collaboration with the Togo Ministry of Security and Civil Defence, organized a workshop on validating the standard operating policy on WAPIS databases.

This workshop, which it is important to stress involved the participation of 15 national experts from the National Police, Gendarmerie, Customs, the Justice System, Water and Forestry Administration, provided an opportunity to adapt this operating policy to the national context. A number of working sessions will be organized between these experts until the standard operating policy has been validated in early 2023.

In the same vein, the first meeting of the WAPIS Strategic Orientation Committee (CNOS) was held on 29 September 2022 in Togo. This initial Committee, presided over by the Representative of the Minister of Security and Civil Defence, discussed several matters, including adoption of the 2022-2023 action plan.

At the end of the discussions and after changes had been made by members of the Committee, the WAPIS action plan was adopted and guidelines given on its implementation. Togo is therefore continuing its inexorable march towards effective operationalization of WAPIS and continues to demonstrate the usefulness of WAPIS on the authorities' security agenda.



Workshop on validating the standard operating policy on use of WAPIS databases, 26 September 2022, Lomé (Togo)

The WAPIS Programme strengthens its co-operation with development partners as part of the implementation of WAPIS in Niger.

A series of partnership meetings have been held recently in the context of implementation of the Programme in Niger. First of all, the partnership between EUCAP Sahel and the Programme has been consolidated. In fact, EUCAP Sahel has been working with the WAPIS Programme since March 2018 to deploy training for WAPIS users. In addition, EUCAP Sahel has also supported the Programme in raising awareness in Niger's national law enforcement personnel on how to use the system on a daily basis.

The WAPIS Programme has also developed its co-operation with the UNDP. The UN agency's country office supports extension of the WAPIS system to the courts. This means that judges, prosecutors and court clerks will be connected to the system and will be able to both look up and input data such as arrest warrants and final court rulings.

Finally, Niger will also feature the first connection between IOM's Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) and the national WAPIS system. This connection will allow extensive exchange of police data at the borders

and the possibility of querying the national database system directly from the eight border posts already connected to the MIDAS system. Discussions for the connection are being finalized at national level.



Awareness-raising session on use of the WAPIS system for Nigerian investigators in the National Police, Gendarmerie and National Guard, 3 November 2023, Niamey (Niger)

WAPIS Programme-OCWAR: A win-win partnership

The WAPIS Programme and the three OCWAR projects, OCWAR-T, OCWAR-M and OCWAR-C, which are responsible for supporting respectively the fight against organized trafficking, the fight against money laundering and the fight against cybercrime in the ECOWAS region, are continuing to exchange best practice and strengthen their co-operation.

In recent months, the WAPIS Programme was invited to present its system as part of the outreach to investigators and magistrates from the 15 ECOWAS countries in three different OCWAR-C training sessions.

OCWAR-T, a programme implemented by UNODC based in Dakar, supports awareness-raising and the installation of infrastructure in the Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) UTC units. Areas of co-operation are in place, and a presentation to the heads of the units concerned will take place at INTERPOL headquarters in Lyon during an official UNODC visit in December.

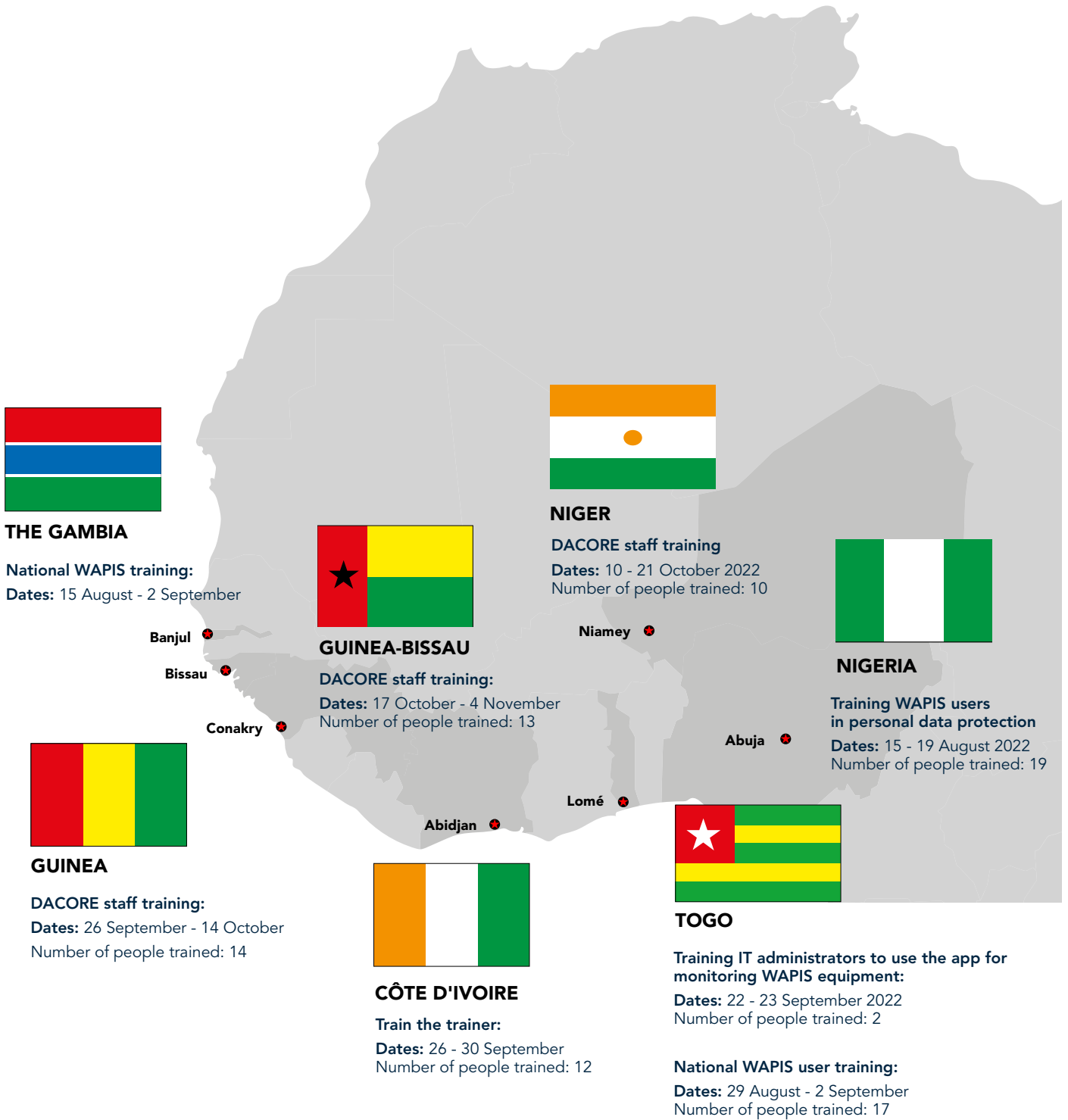
Finally, the WAPIS Programme was welcomed on 23 and 24 November by the OCWAR-C project during the second

regional meeting of the heads of cybercrime units. The presentation to the heads of the cybercrime units was a great success and there was a very good response both in terms of requests for WAPIS connection to their units and the feedback received. In 2023, the two projects will work together on adding the cybercrime taxonomy to the national WAPIS platforms.



Presentation of the WAPIS Programme to the 2nd OCWAR-C meeting of Heads of Cybercrime Units in the ECOWAS region, 23 November 2023, Dakar (Senegal)

Training law enforcement officers remains a priority for the WAPIS Programme



SPOTLIGHT ON AFIS

Funded by the European Union for a period of 33 months (2022-2024) to the tune of EUR 15 million, the aim of the AFIS project is to strengthen or set up criminal AFIS systems in West African countries, as the next step in the West African Police Information System (WAPIS) Programme. Mr Hervé RAFFOURT, Senior AFIS project manager, tells us what's been happening in recent months.

We have reached an important milestone in implementation of the AFIS project in recent months.

It is important to remember that INTERPOL and CIVIPOL recently conducted a feasibility study in beneficiary countries of the WAPIS Programme in order to assess the existing legal and technical frameworks relating to the AFIS project, if applicable, and analyse the legal and technical possibilities of introducing this component into the national WAPIS Programme. An AFIS technical evaluation report classified countries into one of the following three categories:

- Pilot countries where a full AFIS will be put in place;
- Countries where an existing AFIS will be restored or upgraded;
- Countries needing to be prepared for deployment of an AFIS as part of a potential future action.

On 21 July 2022, INTERPOL, the European Union delegation and ECOWAS held the first meeting of the AFIS Project Steering and Coordination Committee. Based on the results of the study report, the Committee recommended that:

- a full AFIS be implemented in the following pilot countries: Benin, the Gambia and Togo;
- an existing AFIS be restored or upgraded as a priority in the following countries: Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Mauritania
- an existing AFIS be strengthened at a later date in the following countries: Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal;
- Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali and Sierra Leone should be prepared for deployment of an AFIS as part of a potential future action.

In September-October 2022, the AFIS project conducted a series of missions in the pilot countries to kick off project implementation:

- Strategic mission to receive political support from the national authorities for implementation of the AFIS project in the country;
- Mission to launch the project and define needs for the chain of custody: reporting, crime scene record, AFIS, fingerprint development.

Technical missions were also made to Cape Verde and Mauritania to define the needs for strengthening the chain of custody or extending AFIS.

The ultimate objective is to map out implementation of the AFIS project for every country visited in 2022. This document will summarize all the needs expressed during the missions: training, equipment for the chain of custody, legal and HR advice, AFIS extension, refitting the Forensic Police Unit premises. It will contain recommendations and choices for countries when there are a number of possible options. It will thus constitute a benchmark for future implementation of the AFIS project in every country that is a beneficiary of the WAPIS Programme.

I could not conclude without sincerely thanking my superiors for having chosen my humble self to head this highly strategic centre. I would like to thank the European Union, ECOWAS and all the partners involved in creating this vital programme.



WAPIS/AFIS Project strategic visit to the Gambia during the meeting with Mr Assan Tangara, Permanent Secretary, at the Ministry of the Interior, 8 September 2022, Banjul (Gambia)

CONCLUSION



Richard GOTWE
Head of the WAPIS Programme

Dear readers,

As the year races to an end, it gives us an opportunity to take a look in the rear mirror and reflect on events in 2022, a year marked by accelerated operationalization of the WAPIS system in the majority of beneficiary countries, contributing hugely to our aim of building the capacity of West African countries to tackle transnational crime and terrorism via enhanced management and sharing of police information.

There are now in fact 14 out of 16 beneficiary countries with operational Data Collection and Registration Centres (DACOREs), equipped with adequate equipment and run by trained staff, which are collecting, centralizing and recording police data. Liberia and Mali, countries in which all operational activity had been suspended until recently, already possess all the necessary infrastructure to go ahead with digitizing police data. I would like to take the opportunity here to welcome the decision of the last Steering Committee which, in order not to waste these achievements and these investments, opened up the possibility of relaunching some operational activities, and more specifically training courses in both these countries.

In addition, almost 1,000 law enforcement officers have been trained, either by INTERPOL trainers, or by national trainers, in the various training modules delivered by the Programme: operator, data validator, investigating officers, data quality, administrator.

Not forgetting the three events to raise awareness of the Programme organized in Ghana, the Gambia and Mauritania, each of which were attended by over 300 participants.

Also, nearly 500,000 items of police data have been collected effectively in the databases, and this rate of progress will accelerate in 2023 thanks to more remote sites being connected to the DACOREs.

Worthy of mention is the connection of five countries to INTERPOL's I-24/7 global system, allowing WAPIS users to interrogate INTERPOL's global databases directly from their workstations: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mauritania, Niger and Togo.

In addition, the regional platform continues to take shape. The latest ECOWAS Expert Committee on the matter defined data-sharing arrangements for the regional platform by classifying them in three categories: automatic sharing, optional sharing with automatic diffusion and optional sharing with diffusion on a case-by-case basis.

And finally, the cherry on top of the cake was the effective start-up of the AFIS component of the Programme, allowing three designated pilot countries to be equipped with a full AFIS system: Benin, the Gambia and Togo. Other countries will benefit from material assistance and training in forensic science.

We should also welcome all these initiatives in synergy with partner projects which are becoming a reality and will benefit West African countries: EUCAP Sahel, OCWAR-C, OCWAR-T, OCWAR-M, OIM, FRONTEX, ONUDC.

None of these results would have been possible without the support and commitment of all our stakeholders: the European Union, which has funded the Programme since 2012 with a total budget to date of EUR 52 million; the ECOWAS Commission, our strategic partner; and all the beneficiary countries, who have truly taken ownership of the Programme.

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The work is far from done, and we will visit the terrain in 2023 to undertake some priority actions that we have identified below:

- Increased number of awareness-raising actions in order to boost ownership by the heads of law enforcement agencies;
- Increased number of training courses, focusing on CID officers;
- Mentoring and support with changes in everyday practice due to the WAPIS system at the heart of the security arrangements in each of the beneficiary countries;
- Extension of the WAPIS system beyond the DACORE in the capital, and beyond the capital once communication infrastructures allow us to do so, targeting border checkpoints, including airports;
- I-24/7 extensions;
- Participation in regional and international police operations in the beneficiary countries;
- The integration of offences in compliance with the national criminal code;
- The deployment of the new system version, which will incorporate the new reporting module and options for connection to existing border control systems;

- Boosting the IT equipment of participating countries, more specifically starting up mirror sites for the DACOREs as part of disaster recovery plans, and the replacement of equipment acquired when the project launched in the pilot countries.

I'd like to wish you all excellent end-of-year festivities and I hope to find you even more committed next year and determined to overcome the many challenges that are bound to arise as we navigate towards a safer West Africa and a safer world.



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