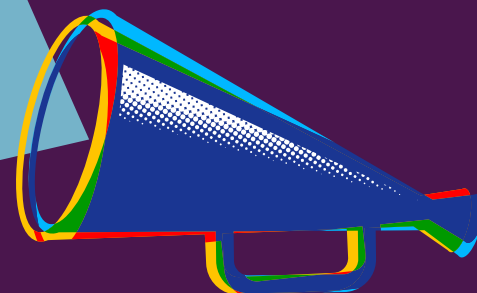




Whistleblower protection



Fact sheet | April 2018

Directorate-General for
Justice and Consumers



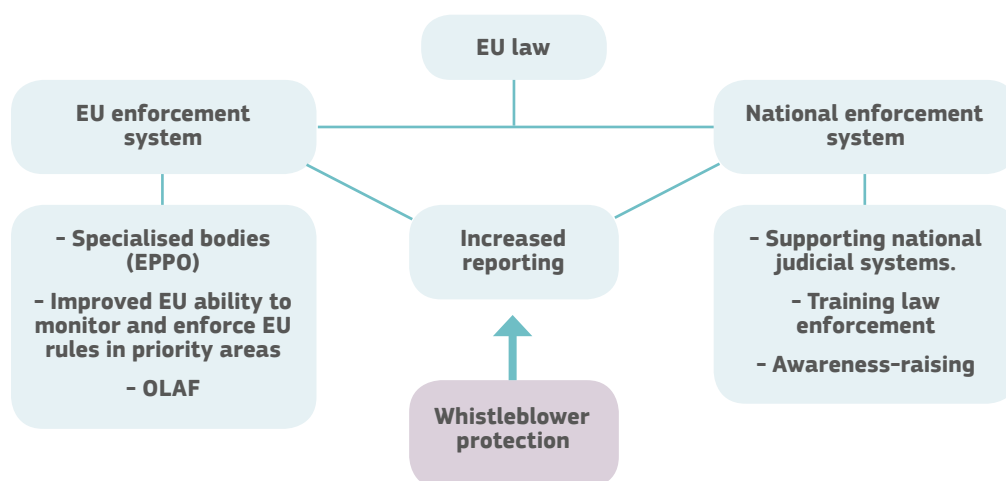
Recent scandals, from LuxLeaks to Panama and Paradise Papers or Cambridge Analytica, were brought to the attention of the authorities and the media by whistleblowers.

Who is a “whistleblower”?

Whistleblowers are people speaking up when they encounter, in the context of their work, wrongdoing that can harm the public interest, for instance by damaging the environment, public health and consumer safety and EU public finances.

What role do they play in enforcing EU law?

Whistleblowers’ reports can lead to effective detection, investigation and prosecution of violations of EU law that would otherwise remain hidden, causing serious harm to the well-being of society and, generally, to the public interest.



Why do whistleblowers need protection?

Whistleblowers face high risks of retaliation, ranging from being demoted to being brought to court, losing their jobs and economic stability and having their good names sullied.

This fear of suffering retaliation has a chilling effect on potential whistleblowers. Answering to the 2017 Special Eurobarometer on corruption, 81% of respondents said that they did not report the corruption that they had experienced or witnessed. Similarly, 85% of respondents to the Commission's 2017 public consultation expressed the view that workers very rarely or rarely report concerns about threat or harm to the public interest. Fear of legal and financial consequences was the reason most widely cited for that why workers do not report wrongdoing.

The main problems

Protection of whistleblowers is fragmented across the EU and uneven across policy areas

Currently, only ten EU countries (France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden and United Kingdom) have a comprehensive law protecting whistleblowers. In the remaining EU countries, the protection granted is partial: it covers only public servants or only specific sectors (e.g. financial services) or only specific types of wrongdoings (e.g. corruption). Recent scandals uncovered by whistleblowers illustrate how insufficient protection in one country not only negatively impacts the functioning of EU policies there, but can also spill over into other countries and into the EU as a whole.

At EU level, there is only a very limited number of sectors where measures have been put in place to protect whistleblowers (mostly only in the areas of financial services).

What will the new proposal bring?

The proposal will guarantee a high level of protection for whistleblowers who report breaches of EU law by setting new, EU-wide standards. The new law will establish safe channels for reporting both within an organisation and to public authorities. It will also protect whistleblowers against dismissal, demotion and other forms of retaliation and require national authorities to inform citizens and provide training for public authorities on how to deal with whistleblowers.

Awareness about the protection of whistleblowers

