

2021 COVID-19 Related Work

Since 1991, OPDAT has provided expert assistance and case-based mentoring to foreign counterparts to develop justice systems that can combat transnational crime, corruption, and terrorism consistent with international standards (*e.g.*, the UN Convention against Corruption). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of related crime throughout the world, OPDAT provides foreign counterparts with tailored assistance and case-based mentoring – within the scope of its authorized activities – to help detect, investigate and prosecute wrongdoing related to the pandemic.

To facilitate its COVID-19 related work, OPDAT draws upon criminal justice experts, including its Resident Legal Advisors (RLAs), COVID-19 Coordinators for their respective U.S. Attorneys Offices, attorneys and cybercrime experts from the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS), as well as members of the U.S. Transnational and High-Tech Crime Global Law Enforcement Network (GLEN). The GLEN consists of International Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property (ICHIP) prosecutors posted to regional positions, two subject-matter expert ICHIPs – the ICHIP for Internet Fraud and Public Health and the ICHIP for Dark Web and Cryptocurrency – as well as DOJ computer forensic analysts and law enforcement officials with related expertise.

Illustrative examples of OPDAT’s COVID-19 related work in 2021 include:

- On January 12, ICHIPs hosted a virtual program where a representative of Pfizer presented its Field Guide for Identification of the newly developed Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine to prosecutors, investigators, and customs officials of the Africa Joint Pharmacrime Working Group. In this program, Working Group members learned how about how to identify legitimate vaccine. In follow-up programs, the ICHIPs presented case studies about prosecuting counterfeit pharmaceuticals cases.
- On April 6, ICHIPs hosted regional representatives from AstraZeneca and Moderna in the sixth virtual meeting of the Joint Pharmacrime Working Group for African countries. Thirty-Nine law enforcement officials and prosecutors participated from 23 Anglophone and Francophone African countries (Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, the Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia.) They both discussed types of scams they had observed, including numbers advanced fee type. They also discussed diverted medications from various middlemen and brokers claiming to have special access. The Moderna representative said they had also detected online fraudulent sales of COVID-19 vaccines. The AstraZeneca representatives also warned about state-sponsored disinformation campaigns. Working group members from Senegal, Togo, and Burkina Faso also spoke about issues they had observed in their countries in the era of COVID-19.

- On April 21, an RLA and an ICHIP hosted a virtual program for Bulgarian prosecutors and investigators. In two prior programs on April 7 and 14, the ICHIP discussed how to investigate and prosecute a counterfeit pharmaceuticals case. This program built on those discussions with a discussion led by an ICHIP by representatives of COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers, who shared how criminals had increasingly turned to COVID-19-related frauds and provided examples of the latest scams and frauds they were seeing on social media, the dark web, and on messaging apps like WhatsApp and Signal.
- On April 28, ICHIPs hosted a panel of COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers for 46 prosecutors and investigators from Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru. In this virtual program, an ICHIP moderated a panel of COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson, and Pfizer, as they discussed COVID-19-related frauds that were targeting governments, businesses, and individuals, and they shared the steps they were taking to safeguard the supply chain.
- On May 3, ICHIPs hosted a virtual program for 127 prosecutors and investigators from the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Suriname. Here, an ICHIP led a discussion by COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, and Pfizer which shared the steps they were taking to safeguard the supply chain. The representatives also shared the COVID-19-related crimes they were seeing such as fraudulent offers on the dark web, scams on social media, and fraudulent offers to governments and businesses.
- On May 26, an OPDAT RLA and an ICHIP hosted a virtual program for 22 Bulgarian customs officials who had requested this program after learning of the April 21 program. Here, the ICHIP led a discussion by a panel of representatives from COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, and Pfizer who provided examples of the COVID-19-related frauds they were seeing on social media, the dark web, and via messaging apps. Then, the ICHIP and an FDA investigator illustrated how to prosecute these kinds of cases by presenting a case study of a group that sold counterfeit pharmaceuticals online.
- On July 21, ICHIPs hosted a virtual program for Brazilian prosecutors and investigators. One ICHIP opened the session with remarks that gave context to the kinds of crimes that would be discussed, and another ICHIP led a discussion by representatives from COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson which shared the steps their companies were taking to safeguard vaccine supplies, as well as presenting the latest COVID-19-related frauds that were targeting governments, businesses, and the public. Building on this presentation, an HSI investigator discussed investigations of COVID-19-related crimes.