Euro banknote counterfeiting at historically low level in 2020

- 460,000 counterfeit euro banknotes withdrawn from circulation in 2020, a historically low level in proportion to banknotes in circulation
- About two thirds of the total were €20 and €50 banknotes
- Euro banknotes continue to be a trusted and safe means of payment
- All euro banknotes can be verified using the “feel, look and tilt” method

Some 460,000 counterfeit euro banknotes were withdrawn from circulation in 2020 (220,000 in the second half of the year), a decrease of 17.7% when compared with 2019. €20 and €50 notes continued to be the most counterfeited banknotes, jointly accounting for about two thirds of the total. 94.5% of counterfeits were found in euro area countries, while 2.8% were found in non-euro area EU Member States and 2.7% in other parts of the world.

The likelihood of receiving a counterfeit is very small, as the number of counterfeits remains very low compared to the over 25 billion euro banknotes in circulation. In 2020, 17 counterfeits were detected per 1 million genuine banknotes in circulation, a historically low level (see the chart below).

Low-quality reproductions are continuously withdrawn from circulation. All are easy to detect as they have no security features, or only very poor imitations of them. Ever since the first series of euro banknotes was issued, the Eurosystem – i.e. the European Central Bank (ECB) and the 19 national central banks of the euro area – has encouraged people to be vigilant when receiving banknotes. You can check your notes by using the simple “feel, look and tilt” method described in the dedicated section of the ECB’s website and on the websites of the national central banks. The Eurosystem also helps professional cash handlers ensure that banknote-handling and processing machines can reliably identify counterfeits and withdraw them from circulation.

Using counterfeits for payments is a criminal offence that may lead to prosecution. If you receive a suspect banknote, compare it directly with one you know to be genuine. If your suspicions are
confirmed please contact the police or – depending on national practice – your national central bank or your own retail or commercial bank. The Eurosystem supports law enforcement agencies in their fight against currency counterfeiting.

The Eurosystem has a duty to safeguard the integrity of euro banknotes and to continue improving banknote technology. The second series of banknotes – the Europa series – is even more secure and is helping to maintain public trust in the currency.

Number of counterfeits detected annually per 1 million genuine notes in circulation

Half-yearly figures:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of counterfeits</td>
<td>363,000</td>
<td>301,000</td>
<td>262,000</td>
<td>251,000</td>
<td>308,000</td>
<td>240,000</td>
<td>220,000</td>
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Breakdown by denomination in 2020:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>€5</th>
<th>€10</th>
<th>€20</th>
<th>€50</th>
<th>€100</th>
<th>€200</th>
<th>€500</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of total</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
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