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United Nations
Interregional Crime and Justice
Research Institute

UNICRI AND ASSET RECOVERY

**Assisting Countries
in the Tracing, Seizure
and Confiscation of
Illicitly-Obtained Assets**



UNICRI's Mission

The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) identifies evolving threats and trends in crime, as well as best practices in responding to these issues, with the wider aim of advancing justice, security and the rule of law in support of peace, human rights and sustainable development.

This work ranges from the latest practices to address the causes of radicalization, to promote effective (and ethical) use of artificial intelligence in law enforcement, as well as to support the development of CBRN risk mitigation programmes and to assist countries in addressing multiple other areas, including how to better trace, seize, confiscate and recover illicitly-obtained assets.

While UNICRI's headquarters is located in Turin, Italy, UNICRI's specialised office on Illicit Financial Flows and Asset Recovery is located in Brussels and has over 25 years of experience in tracing, freezing, seizure and confiscation of illicitly-obtained assets. UNICRI's Asset Recovery experts have assisted States in recovering assets valued in the hundreds of millions of US dollars and in facilitating the drafting or modification of laws and regulatory frameworks to streamline the asset tracing and recovery process.

UNICRI also provides technical advice to Member States on real, pending cases, giving prosecutors and other asset recovery officials real-time, practical experience in resolving cases, and in hunting down assets linked to corruption and organised crime.



UNICRI's work focuses on Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, that is centred on promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies, free from crime and violence. Justice, crime prevention and the rule of law are the basis for fighting poverty and reducing inequalities while enhancing economic growth and stability and protecting the environment.

UNICRI's Asset Recovery Work

UNICRI relies on voluntary contributions for all of its programmes; our work on illicit financial flows and asset recovery is funded principally by generous contributions from the European Union, to:



RESEARCH

Carry out **research** on illicit financial flows, particularly illicitly-obtained assets linked to organized crime and corruption. Our research provides policymakers and practitioners with practical recommendations needed to improve the seizure and confiscation of illicitly-acquired assets, both through the criminal justice and other non-conviction-based forms of forfeiture. This assists countries in using all of the tools in the toolbox, and accelerates the process of confiscation (down from a period of several years to a period of several months).



TRAINING

Coordinate **training and study missions** for policymakers and practitioners to foreign jurisdictions to identify best practices in the seizure and confiscation of illicitly-acquired assets. Such missions are also used to allow police and prosecutors to meet face-to-face to discuss and resolve pending cases, and to produce tangible outcomes, as well as sustainable working relationships.



COMMUNICATION

Facilitate cross-border communication, both formal and informal, between States that may have lost a significant amount of assets as a result of high-level corruption or organized criminal activity, and States in which the fruits (bank accounts, real estate) of that illicit activity may be located. This support from UNICRI often leads to quicker resolution of pending cases. For example, UNICRI's experts have assisted Member States in recovering well over USD 400 million in stolen assets, and in the tracing / locating of assets valued at over USD 54 billion. This includes bank accounts, aircraft, real estate and gold, as well as stolen cultural assets, some of which are over 2 000 years old.



LEGAL ADVICE

Offer **legal advice** on the drafting of policies on asset recovery. For example, UNICRI provides expert advice to Member States, based on actual, proven field-level practice, helping to ensure that any new policies are effective in "going after the money". This can include the latest developments on how to adopt and implement civil confiscation (clearly a global trend) and other non-conviction-based forms of forfeiture, which dramatically reduce the time needed to obtain orders for permanent confiscation of illicitly-acquired assets. UNICRI's team includes renowned experts on developing laws to address illicit enrichment and other forms of unexplained wealth.



SOCIAL RE-USE

Promote social re-use of recovered assets. Ensuring that assets stolen from State coffers are returned to the citizens, or that profits from organised criminal activity are recovered and put to good use, contribute to restoring communities' confidence in the work of justice systems. UNICRI's asset recovery experts provide technical advice on how to draft legislation that helps to ensure that any recovered assets are optimized for social re-use. This may include legislation that ensures that a certain percentage of recovered assets are directed, say, to improving the salaries for nurses, doctors, teachers, police and judges, or for building clinics and schools, as well as providing funding to reduce youth unemployment (which, in some countries, is a catalyst for radicalization). Advice provided on social re-use is tailored to the needs of each country.

UNICRI and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Now more than ever, with increasing threats emanating from organised crime, corruption and the financing of terrorism (as well as armed conflict), governments need to be more attuned to the latest modalities for agile seizure and confiscation of assets. Member States need to be able to identify and use all of the “tools in the toolbox”. UNICRI’s particular and highly-specialised

expertise in this field has proven to be practical, pragmatic and results-oriented. This approach appeals to Member States who need real, actionable advice; and appeals to international donors, who wish to see such pragmatic and results-oriented approaches. UNICRI’s efforts help ensure that promoting justice also promotes the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



For more information on UNICRI’s strategic priorities, or its specific work in assisting countries to capture assets linked to corruption and organised crime, please visit UNICRI’s website at: www.unicri.org

Key initiatives involving UNICRI's work are generously funded by the European Union, and include, for example, the following: through the initiative, "*Support to EU Eastern Partnership Countries to Enhance Asset Recovery*"; UNICRI is bolstering the capacity of asset recovery practitioners in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine; this initiative supports prosecutors, intelligence and financial crime investigators, and provides particular emphasis on bolstering non-penal modalities for the seizure and confiscation of illicitly-obtained assets, particularly assets linked to organised criminal activity. Through the project, "*Building Libya's National Capacity to Prevent and combat Corruption and Money Laundering*", a project co-implemented by UNICRI and UNODC, assistance is being provided to Libyan officials to improve mechanisms for both the prevention and prosecution of acts of corruption. The wider purpose of this initiative is to support Libya in building long-term sustainable national capacities to counter corruption and money laundering. UNICRI's role includes facilitating the confiscation and return of looted assets, including high-profile cultural assets, some with a monetary value of over USD 10 million; this demonstrates, including from a donor perspective, that UNICRI's work is producing a high return on investment.

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