

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

Strengthened enforcement capacities of public authorities (STEP EU)

Pia Engelbrecht-Bogdanov · Monday, May 26th, 2025

Corrupt individuals and criminals often hide behind shell companies, trusts and other legal arrangements to launder stolen funds across borders. By using assets such as real estate, jets, yachts and art, the corrupt can also integrate their dirty money into the economy. Disrupting these mechanisms and networks is crucial to tackling both corruption and organised crime.

When it comes to fighting cross-border corruption, the European Union (EU) has been taking steps to improve and put in place stronger safeguards, but it still risks becoming a global hotspot for corrupt money flows.

While some progress has been made at the member state level, several obstacles still hinder the effective detection and investigation of other financial crimes, as well as the pursuit of legal accountability, across the EU.

These obstacles include:

- Information on corporate and asset ownership and financial data is often unavailable, inadequate, fragmented or of poor quality.
- Not all relevant competent authorities – meaning an organisation that has the legal power to perform a function – have direct and unfiltered access to the necessary information and data to support the detection, investigation, and prosecution of cross-border corruption.
- Not all relevant competent authorities can easily, or in a timely manner, access relevant information from other member states or third countries.

- When information is available, authorities may lack the tools and technical expertise to crosscheck data, process and use the information.
- Law enforcement authorities and financial intelligence units (FIUs) are often underfunded and understaffed and lack access to the right expertise to deal with complex cross-border cases.
- The coordination, cooperation and exchange of information and intelligence among the different authorities responsible for tackling these crimes – such as law enforcement, FIUs, asset recovery offices, and anti-corruption agencies – needs to be improved. Likewise, coordination between authorities across EU member states and third countries is also not working effectively.

What we're doing about it

Transparency International and Transparency International EU have come together with national chapters in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain to implement the STEP EU project.

The key objectives of the two-year project are to:

- Improve the understanding of available data and identify any gaps, including its use, for the prevention and early detection of corruption and other financial crimes.
- Strengthen EU member states' capacities to detect, investigate and prosecute cross-border corruption.
- Enhance cooperation between competent authorities to facilitate a consolidated EU approach to reducing cross-border corruption.

Our approach

To support the project's objectives, we have adopted an approach based on four pillars.

Research. We will assess the scope, quality and availability of information related to asset and company ownership and financial data, and the accessibility and use of this information to relevant competent authorities and other stakeholders in nine EU countries.

We will also assess the detection and investigation capacities of law enforcement authorities to trace and follow corrupt money flows, and aim to identify any legal loopholes, institutional blocks and resource scarcities that challenge the capacity of competent authorities to prosecute.

Design recommendations. Based on the evidence gathered through our research, we will design actionable and specific recommendations. These will provide national level governments, EU institutions, and other relevant stakeholders with a roadmap or a way to improve and strengthen their abilities to tackle corruption.

We will seek to cooperate with law enforcement and other relevant authorities directly, building on previously established relationships between our chapters at the local level and investigative bodies.

Peer-to-peer sharing. We will build on our longstanding track record of acting as conveners to bring various stakeholders to the table. Through these exchanges, we will promote the evidence collected and identify best practice examples. We will also offer a platform for authorities to gain knowledge, exchange ideas and experiences and discuss measures to strengthen the capacity of member states and the EU to respond to cross-border threats.

Evidence-based advocacy. Working with partners and organisations in the anti-corruption community, we will promote our findings and recommendations. This will be done through direct meetings with authorities and EU institutions, publication of analyses, op-eds and articles, social media posts, participation in public consultations and hearings, and regional and international fora.

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