



**Observatoire ARGA**

**ARGA Atlas**

# **INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR ASSET PROTECTION: INTERPOL, OFAC, FATF, AND OTHERS**

Author:

Sergei Khrabrykh — President of ARGA, PhD

Organization: Observatoire ARGA, ARGA Atlas

Mailing address: 21 route de l'Aviation, 12 C, 64600 Anglet, FRANCE

Contacts: [info@argaobservatory.org](mailto:info@argaobservatory.org), +33 7 58 49 62 27

Website: [www.argaobservatory.org](http://www.argaobservatory.org), <https://www.arga-atlas.com/>

Anglet, 17 March 2026

## **Purpose of the document:**

To explain systematically that international asset protection is no longer built around one universal instrument, but around a set of different mechanisms, each affecting the fate of an asset in a different way: INTERPOL through international police data exchange and the possibility of challenging unlawfully processed data; OFAC through blocking, licensing, and delisting regimes; FATF through global AML/CFT standards that shape the admissibility, transparency, and “compliance usability” of an asset and its owner in the international financial system; UNCAC and the wider asset-recovery architecture through cross-border tracing, freezing, confiscation, and return of assets; and FIUs together with the Egmont framework through exchange of financial intelligence. A dispute over asset protection in the modern world is therefore almost always also a dispute about data, sanctions, compliance, beneficial ownership, and cross-border procedural routes. ([Interpol](#))

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## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Modern asset protection in a cross-border setting rarely means only protection of title. In practice, an asset is vulnerable not only to direct seizure, but also to police notices, compliance escalation, sanctions blocking, a bank’s refusal to process a transaction, a counterparty’s refusal to deal with a “toxic” structure, financial intelligence exchange, freezing in anti-corruption cooperation, and opacity of beneficial ownership. International asset protection today is therefore a mixture of police-data law, sanctions law, AML/CFT, asset-recovery cooperation, and data governance, not one elegant ownership theory. ([Interpol](#))

INTERPOL matters in this architecture not because it “decides the fate of property,” but because Notices and Diffusions can radically alter a person’s mobility, reputational profile, access to banking, and the wider procedural background around an asset. INTERPOL states that Notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts, that Notices and Diffusions must comply with the

Constitution and the Rules on the Processing of Data, and that the strength of these tools depends on quality, legal requirements, and the safeguarding of data rights. An unlawful or disproportionate police record may not itself take the asset, but it often becomes the first step in making the asset practically toxic. ([Interpol](#))

OFAC operates differently. This is no longer police logic, but sanctions logic. OFAC officially explains that its licensing framework includes general and specific licenses, and that its delisting process is petition-based. Treasury further stresses that civil penalties for sanctions violations may be imposed on a strict liability basis and that foreign entities doing business in or with the United States, U.S. persons, or U.S.-origin goods or services also face compliance exposure. For the asset, that means protection depends not only on ownership, but on sanctions compatibility of the owner, the structure, and the route of the transaction. ([OFAC](#))

FATF, for its part, does not freeze assets or decide individual disputes, but sets the international standard of what counts as acceptable financial transparency. FATF states that its Recommendations are the international standard and notes that they were last updated in October 2025. FATF also continues to publish jurisdictions under increased monitoring, commonly called the grey list, and in 2025 it highlighted work on payment transparency and related standards. For assets, this has direct implications: if a structure, jurisdiction, or fund flow begins to look like an AML/CFT problem, the asset may remain legally yours while becoming practically unusable in the formal financial system. ([FATF](#))

Finally, UNCAC Chapter V makes the return of assets a fundamental principle of the Convention and creates a framework for tracing, freezing, confiscating, and returning assets, while FIUs and the Egmont Group provide a concealed but crucial infrastructure of financial-intelligence exchange. The Egmont Group states that FIUs serve as national centres for receipt and analysis of suspicious transaction reports and relevant money-laundering information, and that the group provides a secure platform for exchange of expertise and financial intelligence, although it does not conduct investigations itself. Protection of assets therefore takes place not only in courts, but also in spaces where the owner often does not appear directly at all: FIU analysis, sanctions screening, police-data files, and international cooperation channels. ([UNODC](#))

## **2. WHY INTERNATIONAL ASSET PROTECTION NO LONGER REDUCES TO OWNERSHIP AS SUCH**

Traditional thinking about asset protection follows a simple model: there is title, there is a contract, there is a registry entry, therefore the asset is protected. In the international environment, that is no longer enough. An asset may remain formally owned by its holder and still be functionally paralyzed through blocked payments, refusal of transaction support, account closures, reputational effects of a notice, designation risk, suspicious transaction reporting, or cross-border freezing requests. In other words, in the twenty-first century an asset may continue to exist legally while being removed from real circulation. ([OFAC](#))

That is why international asset protection now requires at least five separate questions to be distinguished. First, is there a police-data or quasi-police international trace around the owner or the asset? Second, is there sanctions risk or an already existing blocking measure? Third, does the structure survive AML/CFT scrutiny, including beneficial ownership and payment transparency? Fourth, is there a risk of asset-recovery cooperation under anti-corruption frameworks? Fifth, is there a roadmap for correction, deletion, licensing, delisting, unblocking, or defensive compliance? Without this, protection of the asset becomes a naive hope that the title register alone will explain everything to the world. It does not. ([Interpol](#))

### **3. INTERPOL: DATA, NOTICES, DIFFUSIONS, AND PROTECTION THROUGH THE CCF**

INTERPOL does not itself arrest assets or determine ownership. But its Notices and Diffusions are international requests for cooperation or alerts, and they may sharply change the procedural and reputational context around the owner of an asset. INTERPOL explains that Notices are published by the General Secretariat at the request of a member country's National Central Bureau and that they must comply with the Constitution and the Rules on the Processing of Data. It also states that Red Notices may be published only for serious ordinary-law crime, while Article 3 of the Constitution prohibits intervention or activities of a political, military, religious, or racial character. ([Interpol](#))

This matters for asset protection because, even before any formal freezing order, the presence of an international police signal can push banks, registrars, brokers, and counterparties into defensive behavior. INTERPOL itself stresses that the strength of Notices and Diffusions depends on quality and legal requirements while safeguarding the data rights of the individuals concerned. In other words, the international police mechanism itself recognizes that data protection and legality review are not decorative extras, but part of the legitimacy of the tool. If the data conflicts with the Constitution or the RPD, the dispute is no longer just about policing. It becomes a dispute about the permissibility of international circulation of information that later affects the fate of assets. ([Interpol](#))

The key protective mechanism here is the Commission for the Control of INTERPOL's Files. INTERPOL states that the CCF is an independent body ensuring that personal data processed through INTERPOL's channels conforms to the Organization's rules, and that requests may be submitted for access, correction, or deletion of data in INTERPOL's Information System. The CCF submission page confirms that a request can be filed for access to, correction of, or deletion of such data. For asset protection, this is not abstract theory: removal or correction of an unlawful police-data record may be the first condition for reducing reputational and financial toxicity surrounding the owner. ([Interpol](#))

### **4. OFAC: BLOCKING, LICENSES, DELISTING, AND CONTROL OVER SANCTIONS RISK**

OFAC is not a police body but an economic-sanctions authority. It does not "resolve a private dispute" and it does not confirm title as such. What it determines is whether one may legally transact with the asset or through the asset within the scope of U.S. sanctions. OFAC's Framework for Compliance Commitments is directed not only to U.S. persons but also to foreign entities that conduct business in or with the United States, U.S. persons, or U.S.-origin goods or services. Treasury also states that violations of U.S. sanctions may result in civil or criminal penalties for U.S. and foreign persons and that civil penalties may be imposed on a strict liability basis. For asset protection, that means something unpleasant but crucial: sometimes the dispute is no longer over the right to the asset, but over the right to touch it at all without sanctions contamination. ([OFAC](#))

At the same time, the OFAC architecture does contain corrective and defensive routes. OFAC states that a license is an authorization to engage in a transaction otherwise prohibited, and that there are two types of licenses, general and specific. Its specific-license page expressly notes that one may apply to request authorization for a transaction otherwise prohibited, for example the release of blocked funds. In the sanctions-affected asset context, protection can therefore be built not only through broad political argument against designation, but also through a highly practical licensing strategy: what transaction, for whom, on what basis, and under what conditions may be unblocked or authorized. ([OFAC](#))

A second critical route is delisting or reconsideration. OFAC's official removal page states that to seek removal from any OFAC sanctions list, including the SDN List, one may file a written petition, which starts the review process. OFAC FAQs cross-reference the same reconsideration procedures. This does not make OFAC a fairy-tale machine of restored justice. It does mean that asset protection in this sphere requires not only criticism of designation, but active work on ownership, control, governance, and evidence of changed circumstances. ([OFAC](#))

## **5. FATF: STANDARDS, GREY-LIST LOGIC, BENEFICIAL OWNERSHIP, AND THE “COMPLIANCE FATE” OF THE ASSET**

FATF does not seize assets and it does not issue delisting decisions for individuals. But it shapes the international standard by which banks, service providers, payment systems, investors, and regulators assess the riskiness of an asset, its owner, and its movement. FATF states that the Recommendations set out the international standard and notes that they were last updated in October 2025. FATF also continues to identify jurisdictions under increased monitoring, commonly referred to as the grey list. This means that the fate of an asset in the international financial system increasingly depends on whether its origin, beneficial ownership, and payment route are legible within global AML/CFT expectations. ([FATF](#))

For asset protection, this produces a double effect. On the one hand, the FATF environment creates general regulatory pressure: if the structure falls into grey-list adjacency, ownership opacity, or payment-transparency concerns, the asset quickly becomes hard to move, hard to finance, and hard to transact with. On the other hand, FATF language also makes defensive compliance possible: clarification of beneficial ownership, discipline in source-of-funds documentation, transparency of routing, and avoidance of high-risk jurisdictional deficiencies. FATF does not “return the asset” to its owner. It often determines whether that asset can remain viable within the formal global economy or will be pushed toward the grey zone. That is the compliance fate of the asset, and most people notice it much too late. ([FATF](#))

## **6. UNCAC, ASSET RECOVERY, AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN TRACING AND RETURNING ASSETS**

UNCAC Chapter V matters because it expressly makes the return of assets a fundamental principle of the Convention and dedicates an entire chapter to asset recovery. UNODC explains that the chapter aims to support countries in tracing, freezing, confiscating, and returning assets, and to facilitate more systematic and timely return of assets stolen through acts of corruption. This is a critically important zone for disputes in which the asset question is linked not merely to a private commercial conflict, but to allegations of corruption, abuse of office, or public funds. In such cases, asset protection requires understanding not only ownership and sanctions, but also the anti-corruption logic of mutual legal assistance and recovery. ([UNODC](#))

The practical difficulty is that the UNCAC asset-recovery framework is not a private service for an owner to switch on at will. It is a framework of interstate cooperation and assistance. It may therefore operate both in favor of recovery of stolen assets and against the nominal holder if the state characterizes the asset as proceeds of corruption. Hence the key defensive conclusion: where the dispute concerns public officials, state-linked companies, budgetary flows, concealment of beneficial ownership, or alleged corruption proceeds, asset protection must anticipate the logic of tracing, freezing, confiscation, and return rather than dismiss it as something external. International law has

a habit of beginning exactly where the private owner hoped the matter was still just an ordinary civil dispute. ([UNODC](#))

In this context, the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative is also useful. Official materials explain that StAR was launched by the World Bank and UNODC as a partnership to help end safe havens for corrupt funds and facilitate more systematic and timely return of stolen assets. StAR is not a tribunal and it has no adjudicative power. But as a methodological and cooperative platform it matters because it shows the routes through which modern international disputes over hidden, stolen, or disputed assets are actually pursued. ([UNODC](#))

## **7. FIUS, THE EGMONT GROUP, AND FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE AS THE HIDDEN INFRASTRUCTURE OF ASSET DISPUTES**

From the owner's perspective, an asset often "dies" for circulation long before any court sees it. One reason is financial intelligence. The Egmont Group states that FIUs serve as national centres for the receipt and analysis of suspicious transaction reports and relevant money-laundering information, and are responsible for disseminating the results of that analysis. Egmont also describes itself as a secure platform for exchange of expertise and financial intelligence, while making clear that it does not conduct financial investigations itself. For asset protection, that means many critical decisions about the future of a money flow are taken not by a judge and not even necessarily by a sanctions authority, but earlier, at the level of STR analysis, FIU dissemination, and cross-border intelligence exchange. ([Egmont Group](#))

This creates an unpleasant but important practical reality. Asset protection can no longer be built solely on the idea that "we will explain everything later in court." One must also think about how the structure of the transaction, the routing of funds, the ownership map, the supporting documentation, and the overall narrative will look inside the FIU ecosystem. Once an asset is categorized as a suspicious flow, the dispute shifts into an environment where the owner often does not even know what triggered the concern. While the owner looks for justice in public procedures, the asset may already be moving through closed financial-intelligence channels. Civilization, as usual, has found a way to make the most consequential stage invisible to the person most affected by it. ([Egmont Group](#))

## **8. A PRACTICAL MODEL OF PROTECTION**

A strong international asset-protection strategy should be built on a layered model. The first layer is police-data hygiene: verification of whether there is a Notice or Diffusion problem and, where justified, recourse to the CCF for access, correction, or deletion. The second layer is sanctions strategy: screening ownership and control, identifying blocked or risky links, and, where necessary, using licensing or delisting routes before trying to force a transaction through a blocked environment. The third layer is AML/CFT defensibility: beneficial ownership transparency, source-of-funds coherence, payment-route discipline, and jurisdictional hygiene in relation to grey-list or other high-risk exposures. ([Interpol](#))

The fourth layer is anti-corruption and asset-recovery anticipation. If the asset may be recharacterized as corruption-linked, stolen, hidden, or laundered, protection must think in advance in terms of tracing, freezing, confiscation, and return, and prepare a counter-position before international cooperation begins to work against the holder. The fifth layer is FIU-sensitive structuring: understanding how the transaction will look not only to counsel, but also to a suspicious-transaction analyst. The sixth layer is sequencing. One cannot try to solve everything at once in panic. Sometimes

one must first remove an unlawful INTERPOL data problem, then obtain OFAC authorization or a reconsideration route, and only then try to restore banking or investment circulation. In international asset protection, the order of the steps is often as important as their substance. ([UNODC](#))

## 9. CONCLUSION

International mechanisms for asset protection are not one system, but several intersecting regimes with different internal logics. INTERPOL works through legality of data and international police cooperation. OFAC works through blocking, licensing, and delisting. FATF works through the global readability of assets in the AML/CFT order. UNCAC and StAR work through tracing, freezing, confiscation, and return in corruption-related contexts. FIUs and Egmont work through intelligence and suspicious-transaction architecture. Together they create a modern reality in which an asset is protected not only by title, but by the quality of its data, compliance, routing, structure, and procedural response. ([Interpol](#))

The main practical conclusion is simple and rather vicious. Today, it is not enough merely to “own an asset.” One must also keep it internationally usable, meaning not poisoned by police data, sanctions restrictions, AML toxicity, asset-recovery recharacterization, or FIU escalation. If that fails, ownership remains on paper while the international infrastructure quietly and efficiently extracts almost all practical value from the asset. And that, it must be admitted, is one of the most elegant ways to deprive a person of property without openly calling it deprivation of property. ([OFAC](#))

## APPENDIX A. TERMINOLOGY

### INTERPOL

CCF

The independent INTERPOL body that ensures that personal data processed through INTERPOL’s channels conforms to the Organization’s rules and receives requests for access, correction, and deletion of data in the INTERPOL Information System. ([Interpol](#))

### OFAC

specific

license

A written authorization granted to a particular person or entity for a transaction otherwise prohibited; OFAC expressly notes that specific licenses may be used, among other things, for release of blocked funds. ([OFAC](#))

### Delisting

petition

A written request for removal from an OFAC sanctions list; OFAC states that this begins the review process and refers to the reconsideration procedures under 31 C.F.R. § 501.807. ([OFAC](#))

### FATF

grey list

/

jurisdictions

under

increased

monitoring

Jurisdictions that are actively working with FATF to address strategic deficiencies and are subject to increased monitoring; externally this is often referred to as the grey list. ([FATF](#))

### Asset

recovery

under

UNCAC

The system of tracing, freezing, confiscating, and returning assets under Chapter V of UNCAC; UNODC states that the return of assets is a fundamental principle of the Convention. ([UNODC](#))

### FIU

/

Egmont

platform

FIUs are national centres for receipt and analysis of suspicious transaction reports; Egmont provides secure exchange of expertise and financial intelligence but does not itself conduct investigations. ([Egmont Group](#))

# APPENDIX B. MATRIX OF INTERNATIONAL ASSET-PROTECTION MECHANISMS

## INTERPOL

layer.

This does not protect the asset directly, but protects the procedural space around the owner through legality review of data, access/correction/deletion requests, and compliance with the Constitution and the RPD. The key risk is unlawful police-data toxicity. The key defensive tool is the CCF. ([Interpol](#))

## OFAC

layer.

This works through blocking risk, licensing, and delisting. The key risk is transformation of the asset into blocked or sanctions-sensitive property. The key defensive tools are sanctions screening, licensing, reconsideration or delisting, and, where lawful and appropriate, restructuring of ownership or control. ([OFAC](#))

## FATF

layer.

This does not decide individual disputes, but determines how the asset will be perceived in the formal financial system through AML/CFT standards, payment transparency, and jurisdiction-risk logic. The key risk is compliance unreadability of the asset. The key defensive tools are beneficial-ownership clarity, routing transparency, and control of high-risk jurisdictional exposure. ([FATF](#))

## UNCAC

/

asset-recovery

layer.

The key risk is recharacterization of the asset as corruption-linked, hidden, or returnable property. The key defensive tools are early work on provenance, anti-corruption narrative, evidence of lawful source, and cross-border cooperation strategy. ([UNODC](#))

## FIU

/

Egmont

layer.

The key risk is invisible escalation through suspicious-transaction analysis and intelligence exchange. The key defensive tool is FIU-sensitive documentation and transaction architecture. ([Egmont Group](#))

## OFFICIAL SOURCES

1. **INTERPOL CCF pages and procedural materials** - independent status of the CCF and requests for access, correction, and deletion. ([Interpol](#))
2. **INTERPOL Notices / Compliance and Review / RPD materials** - legal nature of Notices and Diffusions, compliance with the Constitution and the Rules on the Processing of Data, Article 3 limits, and legal review of Red Notices. ([Interpol](#))
3. **OFAC Framework for Compliance Commitments** - sanctions compliance expectations for U.S. and foreign entities. ([OFAC](#))
4. **OFAC licensing materials** - general and specific licenses, including release of blocked funds. ([OFAC](#))
5. **OFAC delisting / reconsideration materials** - petitions for removal from OFAC lists and related FAQs. ([OFAC](#))
6. **FATF Recommendations** - the global AML/CFT/CPF standard, last updated in October 2025. ([FATF](#))
7. **FATF publications on jurisdictions under increased monitoring and related plenary outcomes** - grey-list logic and current monitoring framework. ([FATF](#))

8. **UNODC UNCAC Chapter V asset-recovery materials** - tracing, freezing, confiscating, and returning assets; return of assets as a fundamental principle. ([UNODC](#))
9. **Egmont Group materials** - role of FIUs and secure exchange of financial intelligence; Egmont does not conduct investigations itself. ([Egmont Group](#))
10. **StAR initiative materials** - World Bank–UNODC partnership and its asset-recovery support role. ([UNODC](#))