

Third Symposium on Supranational Responses to Corruption

Turning Illicit Gains into Development Outcomes

Vienna, Austria, 9-10 November 2026

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The World Bank's Office of Suspension and Debarment, Sanctions Board Secretariat, Legal Vice Presidency, and Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative (StAR), together with partners, are pleased to announce **the third Symposium on Supranational Responses to Corruption: Turning Illicit Gains into Development Outcomes**, to be held in **Vienna, Austria on 9-10 November 2026**. Scholars and practitioners from all relevant areas (development, law, finance, diplomacy, etc.) and sectors (non-profit, government, academia, international organizations, judiciary, private sector) are invited to submit proposals for contributions (*i.e.*, essays, papers) to be presented at the symposium. Contributions may be conceptual, empirical, comparative, or practice-oriented, and may focus on one or more mechanisms. Interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, and policy-relevant proposals are particularly encouraged. The deadline for submission of proposals is **6 July 2026**.

Background

The [Sevilla Commitment](#), adopted at the International Conference of Financing for Development in 2025, highlights that achieving sustainable development requires USD trillions in financial resources that remain largely unavailable. Recent global geopolitical transformations and tensions, resulting in significant cuts in international development assistance, further widen the development financing gap. In this context, strengthening domestic resource mobilization (DRM) – the way a country raises, manages, and deploys its *own* financial resources – has become a key strategy for countries to support their economic growth, reduce poverty, and finance their development priorities while limiting their exposure to fluctuating foreign aid.

However, DRM efforts can be seriously weakened by corruption, which diverts substantial financial resources, depriving countries of revenue that could otherwise fund their development needs. Instead of being invested in health, education, and infrastructure, vast amounts are stolen and frequently transferred abroad for the enrichment of corrupt government officials, private contractors, or third parties. This is a critical problem for many countries where high-level corruption and related illicit financial flows has resulted in the plundering of national wealth, and where resources are essential for the development of their societies.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) recognizes that corruption in all its forms inflicts profound harm and emphasizes that both the losses corruption causes and the illicit gains it generates should be recovered and returned to the countries affected. Under UNCAC's auspices, **(i) asset recovery and return** – the process of tracing, reclaiming and, where assets have been transferred abroad, returning the proceeds of corruption to their country of origin – has been established as a fundamental principle of the global anti-corruption framework and practice, helping restore public resources to the countries harmed by corruption. In parallel, the Financial Action Task Force standards emphasize the international asset recovery architecture within the broader financial integrity framework, including the international return of proceeds of crime. Beyond this mechanism, other, emerging instruments also hold significant potential for restoring such resources. These include **(ii) the sharing of foreign bribery-related penalties and disgorgement of illicit profits** – typically imposed by authorities in high-income jurisdictions – with the countries harmed by the underlying misconduct, and **(iii) the allocation of financial remedies imposed by multilateral development banks** through their anti-corruption sanctions systems. These mechanisms, despite providing viable ways to recover resources, present a range of political, institutional, legal, and practical challenges. **See the Background Note below for more details.**

These challenges can significantly delay, complicate, and in some cases even prevent the return of funds or assets, diminishing the value and potential development impact of recovered resources. Consequently, countries where large-scale corruption has occurred may be deprived of timely access to funds that could otherwise be deployed to address urgent development needs. This not only weakens the overall effectiveness of resource restoration efforts but also leads to missed opportunities to convert illicit gains into meaningful investments in public services, economic resilience, and long-term sustainable development. A more systematic effort to identify, articulate, and address these challenges through innovative

solutions would significantly enhance the scale, effectiveness, and coherence of efforts **to channel recovered resources into development outcomes**. In turn, this will help unlock substantial resources that could be redirected toward sustainable development priorities, delivering tangible benefits to affected populations.

Goals

The Symposium aims to generate new research, ideas, and knowledge to help identify policy options and research priorities that can improve the scale, efficiency, and development impact of efforts to restore public resources lost through corruption and related illicit financial flows. Discussions will take a structured look at the challenges, constraints, and successful practices linked to different restoration mechanisms - asset return, foreign bribery penalties, and MDB financial remedies - with a focus on drawing out transferable lessons, areas of complementarity, and opportunities for innovation.

These restoration mechanisms are currently viewed in isolation, and the Symposium will seek to facilitate an integrated perspective, exploring how these mechanisms function together and whether viewing them as part of a broader ecosystem could lead to more coherent management, allocation, and use of returned funds, regardless of their source. This approach is intended to promote alignment, reduce fragmentation, and ultimately **enhance the developmental impact of returned resources**. Seeing these avenues as interconnected may also support stronger oversight and accountability, including through shared principles on transparency, accountability, and development-oriented use of restored resources.

Note: The Symposium will **focus specifically on the restoration phase of funds/assets** (repatriation, allocation, deployment), rather than on the technical recovery process (locating, tracing, seizing), which involves distinct institutional actors, mandates, and specialized expertise.

Research themes

Research themes are listed in the **Annex** below.

Symposium Knowledge Report

The organizers will produce a Knowledge Report based on the presentations at the Symposium to be made available to the public. The Knowledge Report is intended to serve as a resource for advancing interdisciplinary dialogue among policymakers, practitioners, and scholars with a view to generating actionable guidance and building productive partnerships toward supporting a coherent global framework for turning illicit gains into development outcomes. Knowledge Reports from past symposia are available [here](#). Selected contributors may be invited for further collaboration with the organizing institutions.

Symposium

The Symposium is by invitation only and will take place in person on 9-10 November 2026 in Vienna, Austria. Participants are responsible for their own travel and accommodation costs. Participation funding (travel and/or accommodation) may be available for a limited number of selected contributors upon specific request at the time of proposal submission.

Submission Guidelines

A proposal should be 300-500 words and indicate explicitly how the proposed contribution relates to the Symposium's theme. The final essay/paper submission should be 2,500-7,500 words without annexes. Please submit the proposal along with a short biography (including name(s), affiliation(s), and contact details) to IntegritySymposium@worldbank.org. Please disclose and describe any use of generative artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of your submission. The paper/essay does not have to be new/unpublished material (*i.e.*, previously presented/published materials are acceptable). For the unpublished materials, a publication opportunity may follow the symposium. For questions, please reach out to integritysymposium@worldbank.org.

Timeline

The deadline for submission of proposals is **6 July 2026**. Successful applicants will be informed by **6 August 2026**. The deadline for submitting the essay/paper is **30 September 2026**.

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Partners:

 **Federal Ministry**
Republic of Austria
European and International
Affairs


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for the UNCAC**

Annex

Research themes include but are not limited to:

Legal, Institutional, and Political Challenges

- Legal bases for repatriation, restitution, and fines repurposing under international and domestic law.
- Conditionality, earmarking, and sovereignty concerns in international return agreements.
- Legal design of foreign bribery settlements with compensation or development components.
- Political incentives shaping decisions on whether, how, and when to return or share funds.
- Managing political risk and diplomatic in return negotiations (power asymmetries between enforcing and affected states).

Models for Return and Allocation

- Comparative analysis of return channels: treasury transfers, trust funds, MDB-managed vehicles, civil society intermediaries, foundations, or community-led mechanisms (*i.e.*, BOTA Foundation, Galactica and Abacha Asset Return, Uzbekistan 2030 Vision Fund, etc.).
- Criteria for choosing channels in different governance contexts, including in fragile-conflict countries.
- Hybrid and innovative models (public-private partnerships, social impact mechanisms, escrow or performance-linked arrangements).
- Role of civil society in decision-making.
- Victim-centered approaches.
- Reinvestment in integrity and governance.

Safeguards against Corruption and Misuse

- Oversight, fiduciary controls, and integrity mechanisms for returned funds;
- Transparency tools (open data, beneficial ownership, citizen monitoring);
- Accountability roles of parliaments, supreme audit institutions, civil society, and private sector - examples from practice.

Management of Assets

- Strategies to preserve or enhance value during proceedings, including of crypto assets.
- Interim use, advanced deployment, or conditional early access mechanisms.
- Governance and institutional models for funds/asset management.

MDB Financial Remedies as Development Tools

- Effectiveness and limitations of administrative sanctions systems.
- Comparative analysis across MDBs.
- Legal and ethical considerations of MDB involvement in allocating remedies.
- Balancing integrity protection with development impact.
- Administrative burden versus developmental returns.
- Lessons from successful restitution and trust fund models.

Innovations, Trends, and Research Gaps

- Emerging practices and pilot models.
- Role of technology (tracking, monitoring, digital public finance tools).
- Open research questions and data gaps.

Background Note

International Asset Recovery and Return

While asset recovery and asset return are two connected steps in the overall process of restoring corruption-related losses and gains to the benefit of the deprived country, each stage involves different actors and requires different strategies and expertise to succeed. **Asset recovery** involves locating, tracing, and seizing assets obtained through corruption, and faces challenges such as complex financial networks, cross-border legal hurdles and cooperation, strict bank secrecy laws, and the need to prove the illegality of the assets. **Asset return** focuses on repatriating the seized assets to the country affected by the sanctioned corruption, with challenges including disputes over rightful ownership, risks of re-corruption and misuse in the receiving country, political friction over conditional agreements, and delays due to legal and procedural requirements. Moreover, returning assets to countries with weak governance or fragile conflict-affected contexts introduces additional complexity, raising critical questions about accountability and effective oversight. Additionally, the difficulties in effectively returning assets often span years and thus diminish their value and limit their potential to fund meaningful development initiatives. The Symposium's focus will be on the asset return and allocation process, building on examples involving returns to a government's treasury, through multilateral funds (*i.e.*, return of US\$330 million to Uzbekistan via the [2030 Multi-Partner Trust Fund](#)), via development organizations (*i.e.*, return of US\$52.88 million to Nigeria [via the World Bank](#)), non-profits (*i.e.*, return of US\$115 million to Kazakhstan via [BOTA Foundation](#)), and exploring alternative channels such as community-led initiatives, conditional social programs, trust funds, or public-private partnerships that aim to ensure transparency, accountability, and the effective use of repatriated assets for sustainable development outcomes.

Foreign Bribery Penalties

Foreign bribery penalties are financial and legal sanctions imposed on companies or individuals for bribing public officials in another country to gain a business advantage. Over the past two decades, based on the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, there has been a marked expansion in the enforcement of foreign bribery legislation, criminalizing the bribery of foreign public officials. Jurisdictions including the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, and Switzerland have taken prominent roles, and enforcement actions against bribing companies have grown both in frequency and scale. Some multinational corporations have faced financial penalties reaching hundreds of millions or even billions of US dollars. These trends raise important questions of equity and distribution. The corrupt conduct underlying these cases frequently takes place in, and harms, low- and middle-income countries whose populations bear the brunt of the misconduct. Yet, enforcement is often carried out by authorities in higher-income states where the companies are headquartered or listed. In practice, the substantial penalties collected in foreign bribery cases are usually absorbed into the general revenues or treasuries of the enforcing states rather than earmarked for restitution to countries directly affected by the corrupt acts.

While some foreign bribery settlements may include provisions for compensation, disgorgement, or development-related payments, such cases remain the exception rather than the rule. This disconnect has prompted increasing debate among policymakers, civil society organizations, and international bodies about the fairness and effectiveness of current enforcement models. Within this context, proposals to repurpose fines – redirecting them toward remediation, development projects, or institutional strengthening in affected countries – have gained traction (*i.e.*, [working paper by the Basel Institute on Governance](#)), inviting reflection on a range of possibilities such as establishing dedicated restitution funds, channeling payments through multilateral development banks, supporting civil society and anti-corruption initiatives, aligned with national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), financing community-led or sector-specific programs, or designing conditional investment mechanisms that directly benefit the populations most harmed by the underlying corruption.

Financial remedies by multilateral development banks (MDBs)

As part of the broader effort to safeguard development finance from corruption, major MDBs including the World Bank Group (WBG), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), have developed their **own administrative sanctions systems** which investigate and sanction companies and individuals found to have engaged in corruption-related practices in connection with MDB-financed projects.

These sanctions systems are primarily designed to protect the integrity of MDB-funded initiatives and to ensure intended use of development funds. They are decidedly not criminal investigation or enforcement mechanisms. Nevertheless, sanctions – which typically imply debarment from participating in MDB-financed projects – can include financial restitution or remedies whereby sanctioned entities may be required to repay misappropriated funds, compensate for financial harm, or disgorge profits derived from corrupt conduct. This avenue is distinctive in that it does not depend on national judicial systems but instead relies on **administrative enforcement frameworks**, which can be more flexible and expedient. It is especially valuable in contexts where corruption affects **development projects directly**, ensuring that misused funds can be redirected to their intended purposes or otherwise benefit the affected country. Over the past two decades, MDB-imposed financial remedies or restitution have amounted to hundreds of millions of US dollars and have typically been used for the benefit of the affected countries through various channels: restitution to the affected projects, contributions to trust funds ([US\\$55 million by AfDB](#)), funding of civil society organizations (*i.e.*, [US\\$50 million by IDB](#)), channeling through third parties (*i.e.*, [US\\$100 million by the WBG](#); [EUR 13.5 million by the European Investment Bank](#)), or return to the national budget.

While MDBs are uniquely positioned to ensure that recovered resources are channeled back into development purposes, they have rarely used the funds through their own operations, primarily due to concerns about conflicts of interest (*i.e.*, using the funds via MDBs' operations), political sensitivities (*i.e.*, governments soliciting that the funds resources are paid into their treasury with no strings attached), or the additional administrative burden (*i.e.*, setting up trust funds, designing new fit mechanisms for disbursement, monitoring, etc.). Alternative mechanisms, while necessary, present their own challenges, including limited oversight, delays in disbursement, difficulties in aligning funds with local development priorities, and risks of mismanagement or dilution of impact. These conundrums have, at times, led MDBs to underutilize their otherwise potent and strategically positioned sanctions systems, reducing the potential for recovering and repurposing gains from corruption in a way that maximizes development impact.