

Anti-money Laundering Enforcement and Compliance Trends around the World

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Money laundering remains one of the most persistent threats to global financial integrity. As illicit networks grow more sophisticated, governments and financial institutions face mounting pressure to strengthen anti-money laundering (AML) enforcement and compliance frameworks. In response, regulators worldwide have accelerated reforms, harnessing new technologies, tightening transparency rules, and expanding international collaboration to combat evolving risks.



AI as the new frontline in AML compliance

The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning represents a transformative shift in AML compliance. Financial institutions are increasingly exploring and implementing AI-driven solutions to enhance the monitoring of large volumes of transactions and customer behaviour in real time. Unlike traditional rule-based systems, machine learning models can identify subtle anomalies and complex patterns that human analysts might overlook. By improving detection accuracy and reducing the number of false positives, these technologies allow compliance teams to focus their resources on genuinely high-risk activities.

These technologies are also redefining risk management. Predictive analytics allows compliance teams to anticipate potential money-laundering schemes rather than simply react to them. For instance, AI-powered systems can flag emerging typologies, such as layering through crypto-assets, well before they gain regulatory attention. As regulatory expectations evolve, institutions that effectively leverage these tools will be better positioned to demonstrate a proactive, risk-based approach to AML compliance.



Crypto-assets in the AML landscape

Crypto-assets continue to reshape the financial landscape, introducing new AML challenges. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) first extended its Recommendation 16 – the so-called “Travel Rule” – to virtual asset service providers (VASPs) in 2019, laying the groundwork for greater transparency in crypto-asset transfers. Building on this foundation, the FATF just finalized comprehensive revisions to Recommendation 16 in June 2025, with changes set to take effect by the end of 2030. The updated standards broaden the scope to cover all payments or value transfers and related messages – beyond traditional wire transfers – requiring financial institutions to include standardized sender and recipient information in cross-border peer-to-peer payments exceeding USD/EUR 1,000 and to ensure the accuracy and integrity of this data throughout the payment chain, supported by enhanced fraud-prevention measures.

The Crypto Travel Rule has already been embedded into EU law through Regulation (EU) 2023/1113, which entered into force on 30 December 2024. While these FATF standards are not binding in the U.S., they often influence the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN's) regulatory approach, and similar rules may be adopted in the future.

While the rule itself is not new, its application to virtual assets is still evolving. Many jurisdictions and VASPs are in the process of operationalising compliance mechanisms, including secure data-sharing protocols and interoperability solutions. As crypto-assets gain broader adoption, enforcement agencies are enhancing their investigative capabilities. Increasingly, financial intelligence units (FIUs) are collaborating with blockchain analytics firms to trace illicit flows, reflecting the growing role of technology in AML oversight worldwide.



Ultimate beneficial ownership transparency

Another defining trend in AML reform is the global push toward ultimate beneficial ownership (UBO) transparency. Anonymous corporate structures have long facilitated the concealment of illicit wealth, but regulators are closing these loopholes.

In the EU, the recently adopted Regulation (EU) 2024/1624 – often referred to as the “Single Rulebook” Regulation – will harmonise AML requirements across Member States, further enhancing transparency for legal entities, trusts, and similar arrangements. Across the Atlantic, the U.S. Corporate Transparency Act, which was enacted in 2021 and took effect in January 2024, requires certain business entities to file beneficial ownership information with the FinCEN. The primary goal is to enhance transparency in business ownership and combat money laundering and tax evasion.

These measures reflect a broader global consensus: corporate secrecy is incompatible with effective AML enforcement. However, success will depend on ensuring that these UBO registries are accurate, accessible to competent authorities, and effectively integrated into existing due diligence processes.



Strengthening cross-border cooperation

Money laundering is inherently transnational and combating it requires a coordinated international response. Mechanisms such as the FATF's mutual evaluation process and the Egmont Group's secure information-sharing platform play a pivotal role in assessing compliance and facilitating cooperation among FIUs.

Regional partnerships have also gained prominence. The EU, for example, established the new EU Anti-Money Laundering Authority (AMLA) to coordinate national authorities in the fight against money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Similar initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region aim to align domestic frameworks with FATF standards while enhancing cross-border investigative capacity.

Closely linked to AML enforcement, sanctions compliance has become increasingly prominent in recent years. The escalation of global sanctions regimes, particularly in response to geopolitical conflicts, has pushed financial institutions to strengthen screening mechanisms and cross-border cooperation.

This convergence between AML and sanctions compliance reflects a broader shift toward integrated financial crime risk management across jurisdictions.

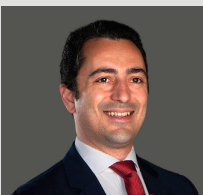


Looking ahead

As financial crime typologies evolve, AML compliance is moving beyond a reactive paradigm toward one centred on foresight, data-driven decision-making, and collaboration.

The integration of AI, the regulation of crypto-assets, and the increasing transparency of ownership structures are not isolated developments. They form part of a broader convergence between technology, governance, and ethics in financial regulation.

Ultimately, the future of AML enforcement will depend on sustained innovation and global solidarity. Regulators and institutions alike must remain agile, continually refining their frameworks to safeguard the integrity of the international financial system.



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