

TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

2022/2023 AML SUPERVISORY REPORT FOR THE INDEPENDENT LEGAL PROFESSIONALS SECTOR

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TERMINOLOGY

AML/CFT Obligations

"AML/CFT obligation", in relation to a financial business, means an obligation of the financial business under this Ordinance, the Anti-Money Laundering and Prevention of Terrorist Financing Regulations, an applicable Code or such other enactment as may be prescribed.

Customer Due Diligence (CDD)

CDD includes;

- Identifying the customer and verifying the customer's identity on the basis of documents, data or information obtained from the customer or through reliable and independent source(s).
- Identifying, where there is a beneficial owner who is not the customer, the beneficial owner
 and taking adequate measures to verify his identity so that the financial business is satisfied
 that it knows who the beneficial owner is, including, in the case of a legal person, trust or
 similar legal arrangement, measures to understand the ownership and control structure of the
 person, trust or arrangement.
- Understanding and, as appropriate, obtaining information on the purpose and intended nature
 of the business relationship.
- Monitoring of accounts/transactions on an ongoing basis to ensure that the transactions being conducted are consistent with the financial business' knowledge of the customers, their business and risk profile, including where necessary, the source of funds and, updating records and data/ information to take prompt action when there is material departure from usual and expected activity through regular matching with information already available with the financial business.

Designated Non-Financial Business and Profession (DNFBP)

A financial business, as set out under Schedule 2 of the Anti-Money Laundering and Prevention of Terrorist Financing Regulations 2010 (AML Regulations), that is not a regulated financial business as set out under Schedule 1 of the AML Regulations.

Financial crimes

Financial crimes refer to money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing.

Independent Legal Professional (ILP)

A financial business operating as a firm or sole practitioner who, by way of business, provides legal or notarial services to other persons, when preparing for or carrying out transactions for a customer in relation to—

- a) the buying and selling of real estate and business entities;
- b) the managing of client money;
- c) the opening or management of bank, savings or securities accounts;
- d) the organisation of contributions necessary for the creation, operation, or management of companies; or
- e) the creation, operation or management of trusts, companies or similar structures, excluding any activity that requires a licence under the Trustees Licensing Ordinance or the Company Management (Licensing) Ordinance.

Money laundering (ML)

Money laundering is the processing of criminal proceeds to disguise their illegal origin.

Proliferation financing (PF)

Proliferation Financing (PF) is defined as the act of providing funds or financial services which are used, in whole or in part, for the manufacture, acquisition, possession, development, export, transshipment, brokering, transport, transfer, stockpiling or use of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery and related materials (including both technologies and dual-used goads for non-legitimate purposes), in contravention of national laws or, where applicable, international obligations. It includes technology, goods, software, services, or expertise.

Terrorist financing (TF)

The term terrorist financing is defined by the FATF as the financing of terrorist acts, and of terrorists and terrorist organisations.

INTRODUCTION

The Turks and Caicos Islands Financial Services Commission (the Commission) is responsible for the AML supervision of independent legal professionals ("ILP"). Given the threat criminals pose to the profession, the Commission is committed to ensuring that ILPs operate in compliance with applicable Laws, Regulations and Codes to prevent or detect money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing.

AML supervision of ILPs is achieved through a range of tools, which include annual reporting through the update form or annual supervisory questionnaire (ASQ) and onsite/offsite examinations, which enable the Commission to identify weak controls; unsafe or risky business practices; system vulnerabilities, etc.

This approach to supervision ensures that the Commission not only supervises effectively, but also helps it to develop and deliver more focused and relevant guidance and training which in turn supports registrants in complying with their AML obligations.

This report highlights the work the Commission has undertaken during the reporting period to fulfil its supervisory obligations under the Proceeds of Crime Ordinance (POCO). ILPs should be guided by the information contained in this report to assist in meeting their AML/CFT obligations.

The Commission expects this report to develop further in the coming years as its supervisory approach develops and matures.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Financial Services Commission (the Commission) is responsible for the AML/CFT supervision of Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professions (DNFBPs)¹ in accordance with regulation 23 of the AML Regulations.

All DNFBPs, including ILPs, have AML/CFT obligations as defined by section 2 of the POCO. These obligations include, among other things, the requirement to

- a) carry out an AML/CFT business risk assessment, which must be documented;
- a) have written AML/CFT policies and procedures;
- b) appoint a Money Laundering Compliance Officer and Money Laundering Reporting Officer;
- c) keep records of the customer and customer transactions for a minimum period of time; and

¹ DNFBPs are defined by Schedule 2 of the AML Regulations and include independent legal professionals when they; carry out specific transactions identified in the Schedule

d) apply customer due diligence measures to prospective and existing customers and beneficial owners.

The Commission is vested with responsibility for determining compliance by DNFBPs with the POCO, including the AML Regulations, the Anti-Money Laundering and Prevention of Terrorist Financing Code 2011 (the "AML Code"), the Anti-Money Laundering and Prevention of Terrorist Financing Guidance Notes (the "AML Guidance Notes") as well as best practices as set out by the Commission.

Failure to comply with AML/CFT obligations will result in the Commission taking enforcement actions, including cancellation of registration. The result of enforcement action may mean that the ILP can no longer operate legally. There are stiff penalties (fines and/or imprisonment) for a person that operates a DNFBP which is not registered by the Commission.

Legislative Amendments

Several legislative amendments occurred in 2022 that impacted ILPs. These are:

- a) ILPs are required to carry out customer due diligence for the purchaser and vendor of real property under transaction, in accordance with section 13A of the Anti-Money Laundering and Prevention of Terrorist Financing Code, which came into operation on 18 November 2022.
- b) A definition of "realtor" was provided in regulation 2 of the Anti-Money Laundering and Prevention of Terrorist Financing Regulations, which came into operation on 18 November 2022

RISK PROFILE OF ILP SECTOR

Based on information and data provided through the update forms submitted by ILPs in 2022, the Commission carried out individual AML/CFT risk assessment of ILPs. The majority of ILPs were vulnerable to being used for money laundering, because –

- a) The services provided included property conveyancing², which for a number of ILPs was among the most significantly subscribed service;
- b) ILPs were involved in high value real estate transactions;
- c) The client base of the ILP sector is dominated by clients from foreign jurisdictions³, particularly the United States of America, Canada and Europe;

² Transactions that involve the buying and selling of real estate are attractive to criminals and pose a higher level of ML/TF/PF risk

³ Clients that do not reside permanently in the TCI will always pose a higher level of ML/TF/PF risk

- d) The large presence of foreign clients increases the potential for non-face-to-face⁴ interaction; and
- e) Many ILPs owned company management/agent business⁵ which allow them to increase their income stream and maximise business relationships with their clients

ILPs are advised to be mindful that based on the National Risk Assessment ("NRA"), the most significant threat to the TCI for ML, TF and PF arise from persons outside the TCI. The high values associated with real estate in the TCI, coupled with its access to the international financial system, makes the jurisdiction attractive to bad actors.

Given the heightened risk set out above, ILPs must ensure that they comply with their AML/CFT obligations to prevent the TCI being used to aid financial crimes.

REGISTERED ILPs

A list of registered ILPs can be found on the Commission's website at www.tcifsc.tc/list-of-approved-dnfbps/.

2022/2023 WORK PROGRAM

Fit and proper assessments

The POCO and AML Regulations require the Commission to determine the fitness and probity of registered ILPs, their directors, managers, key staff, and owners on an ongoing basis. To determine fitness and probity, the Commission is guided by the DNFBP fit and proper criteria set out in regulation 27A of the AML Regulations, as well as the DNFBP fit and proper guidance of December 2021.

The Commission carries out its fit and proper assessments when a registration application is submitted, and when there is notice that there has been a change in the owners, senior managers, Money Laundering Compliance Officer ("MLCO") or Money Laundering Reporting Officer ("MLRO") which may occur via an update form⁶, or when triggered on an ad hoc basis e.g. adverse news raising fit and proper concerns. Fit and proper assessments are also conducted on the ILP itself. Both the registration application and update form identify the persons that an ILP declares as its owners, directors, managers, and key staff, among other things.

To carry out fit and proper assessments, the following additional documents must accompany the registration application or the update form:

⁴ Non-face-to-face situations pose a higher level of ML/TF/PF risk

⁵ Company management/agent business pose a higher level of ML/TF/PF risk because of its attractiveness to criminals for anonymity

⁶ Update forms are submitted by ILPs on an annual basis due to the sector posing a higher risk of money laundering

- a) Personal Declaration Questionnaire (PDQ)
- b) Identification and address verification documents no older that three years
- c) Academic/professional qualifications (e.g. practicing certificate)
- d) Professional/financial references
- e) AML/CFT Compliance Manual (provided only if changes made since previously submitted)
- f) Business Risk Assessment (provided only if changes made since previously submitted)
- g) Business Plan (no older that three years)

The Commission registered one ILP in 2022 and four in 2023. The fit and proper test was applied to all applicants. Update forms were received in 2022 from all registered ILPs and the fit and proper test was applied against these registrants as well.

Offsite examination

Based on an assessment of the update forms submitted by ILPs, the Commission carried out an offsite examination of seven ILPs in 2022. The scope of the examination was to determine whether the ILPs had adequately identified the money laundering (ML), terrorist financing (TF) and proliferation financing (PF) risks within their operations.

Also included in the scope of the examination was to determine if the ILPs had established, maintained, and implemented appropriate risk-sensitive policies, systems and controls (AML Manual) to prevent and detect money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing, including policies, systems and controls relating to—

- a) customer due diligence measures and ongoing monitoring;
- b) the reporting of suspicious activity;
- c) record-keeping;
- d) the screening of employees;
- e) internal controls; and
- f) risk assessment and management

Examination Findings

Business risk assessments (BRAs)

The below are the findings from the examination:

- a) The majority of ILPs operated with a BRA; however, in one case an ILP operated with a BRA that was applicable to its company management business and not tailored to its law practice and the specific risks it faced in this context.
- g) None of the ILPs examined identified their risk tolerance.
- h) BRAs of all ILPs did not consider and clearly distinguish inherent risks, i.e. the level of risk without mitigation or controls; the effectiveness of the systems and controls in mitigating risk; and calculating their residual risk, i.e. the level of risk that remains after considering the effectiveness of its systems and control.
- i) Inadequate understanding of the risks that ILPs are exposed to through their operations.
- j) Two ILPs failed to consider organisational structure and/or delivery channel risks.
- k) Absence of statistics to support risk assessments such as the number of clients, the number of clients from jurisdictions identified in the BRA of an ILP;
- 1) BRAs were not informed by the NRA;
- m) None of the ILPs included consideration of and clearly distinguished between the different types of financial crime risks (money laundering, terrorist financing, proliferation financing) by evaluating the associated risks independently.

In carrying out risk assessments, the Commission expects that:

- a) The BRA includes:
 - i) The identification and assessment of money laundering, terrorist financing, proliferation financing risks, to include all relevant risk categories (such as those related to the structure of the entity, geographic risk, customer risk, product risk and channel/distribution risk).
 - ii) Consideration of all inherent and residual risk factors at country, sector, ILP, and business relationship levels to inform the design and implementation of policies, procedures and controls that are commensurate with the identified risks.
 - iii) Quantitative data to give an overall inherent risk rating for the ILP and its underlying business units, to include sufficient evidence to support the assigned risk ratings.
- b) The methodology for undertaking risk assessments is documented to ensure consistency across business units and includes collaborative engagement with the business units to assess risk, to facilitate Senior Management review and sign-off, and to provide demonstrable engagement at board-level.
- c) The identified risks are assigned a risk rating having regard to the systems and controls in place to manage those risks.

- d) The risk assessment identifies gaps with action plans recorded to address such gaps.
- e) The risk assessment process is driven and overseen by the MLRO and covers all aspects of the AML Regulations, AML Code guided by the AML Guidance Notes and Business Risk Assessment Guidance of January 2020.
- f) Risk assessments are reviewed on a frequent basis by Senior Management, at least annually, and are actively used to inform the ILP's risk-based approach and the design of AML/CFT controls.

The reason for a business risk assessment is to ensure that the AML/CFT policies, procedures and controls of an ILP are appropriate and effective, having regard to the assessed risk. Where an ILP has not identified the ML, TF and PF risks it faces, it consequently cannot determine whether its systems and controls are effective to manage and mitigate those risks. In the absence of adequate controls, the likelihood of risks crystallising is significantly increased.

AML Manuals

The below are the key findings in this category:

- a) AML Manuals were overly complicated, and in some cases voluminous, imposing procedures and controls which creates a burdensome AML compliance program which does not suit the structure and operations of the firm.
- b) All ILPs established, maintained and implemented measures (i.e. policies, systems and controls) to prevent and detect money laundering and terrorist financing.
- c) ILPs' AML/CFT measures did not incorporate proliferation financing.
- d) Four ILPs AML Manual did not describe the services it provided, which contributes to these manuals appearing to not be tailored to the firms.
- e) Five ILPs did not describe their risk profile informed by their business risk assessment and the TCI's National Risk Assessment, which made them appear to be very generic.
- f) While all ILPs Manual required that identification information be obtained on every customer, third party and beneficial owner, the information collected did not include all of the basic identification information set out in the AML Code.
- g) AML Manuals for two ILPs did not set out the information required for clients that were not individuals; three ILPs did set out the information required for clients that were not individuals, but this was inadequate, and two ILPs completely set out the information required for clients that were not individuals.
- h) Five ILPs required relationship information that included the purpose and intended nature of the business relationship.

- i) Four ILPs required that the source of funds be obtained for all clients.
- j) One ILP required that source of wealth be obtained for clients presenting a higher level of ML/TF risk, but this was only where the client was a politically exposed person ("PEP").
- k) None of the ILPs had a specific requirement to ascertain the reason for using a firm based in the TCI where the client is not resident in the TCI.
- l) All ILPs, except one, required that the identity of the customer, third party acting on behalf of customer or beneficial owner of customer be verified.
- m) All ILPs, except one, set out when verification of client's identity is to be undertaken;
- n) Five ILPs required that it be determined whether a customer, any third party for whom the customer is acting and any beneficial owner of the customer or third party, is a politically exposed person;
- o) Five ILPs required that it be determined whether a business relationship or transaction, or proposed business relationship or transaction, is with a person connected with a country that does not apply, or insufficiently applies, the FATF Recommendations or is from countries for which there is a call to apply enhanced or countermeasures by the FATF, UN or EU;
- p) Five ILPs required that it be determined whether a business relationship or transaction, or proposed business relationship or transaction, is with a person connected with a country that is subject to measures for purposes connected with the prevention and detection of money laundering or terrorist financing or proliferation financing, imposed by one or more countries or sanctioned by the European Union or the United Nations
- q) Six ILPs did not require the financial business prepare and record a risk assessment with respect to the customer, considering customer risk, product/services risk, delivery risk and country risk;
- r) Four ILPs required periodic updates of the customer due diligence information that it holds and adjustment of the risk assessment that it has made;
- s) Four ILPs indicated the employees responsible for obtaining identification information and verifying identification information of clients;
- t) Four ILPs did not indicate acceptable documents to verify identity, prove address, etc.
- u) While all ILPs had policies and procedures related to identifying and reporting suspicious activity, the policies and procedures were inadequate;
- v) While all ILPs had policies related to record keeping, the policies were inadequate;
- w) ILPs either did not have policies and procedures for employee vetting or the policies and procedures were inadequate;
- x) Six ILPs had policies and procedures for the training of staff.

As a result of the above findings, the Commission published a model AML Manual to assist ILPs to comply with their AML/CFT obligations. The model manual can be found on the Commission's website at www.tcifsc.tc/aml-ctf-guidance/.

Sanctions

The Commission took enforcement action against four ILPs in 2022 for failing to conduct and document the business-level risk assessment and for failing to establish written policies and procedures to prevent and detect ML, TF, and PF. Five ILPs were deregistered in 2022 because they did not meet the criteria for registration as a DNFBP as set out in the AML Regulations.

In 2023, an ILP was subject to enforcement action and received an administrative penalty of \$5,000 for not appointing an MLCO and MLRO and notifying the Commission of change of MLCO and MLRO. Additionally, an ILP was deregistered for failing to satisfy the Commission's fit and proper test.

The Commission will work with other national agencies and financial institutions to identify those who are carrying out activities as an ILP for which registration is required.

OUTREACH & GUIDANCE

TCI Bar Association

In April 2023, the Commission with colleagues from the Attorney General's Chambers met with the TCI Bar Association during its annual general meeting at the Beaches Resort. During the meeting, the Commission was able to discuss with the Association a number of issues including AML/CFT legislative amendments that impact the sector, the TCI's CFATF mutual evaluation follow-up reporting, supervisory initiatives planned for 2023 and other issues. The Commission also had the opportunity to hear from the Association about its concerns.

Model AML Manual

In 2023, the Commission published a model AML Manual to provide guidance to assist DNFBPs, including ILPs, to comply with their AML/CFT obligation to establish, maintain and implement appropriate policies and controls to prevent and detect money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing.

ILPs are strongly encouraged to review their manuals in relation to the model manual to ensure that both are harmonised.

Terrorist Financing Guidance

The Commission published Terrorist Financing Guidance in March 2023. The guidance applies to NPOs, FIs and DNFBPs and explains the TCI's terrorist financing legal framework, terrorist financing

threats and vulnerabilities, preventative measures to mitigate the risk of terrorist financing, and red flag indicators.

Proliferation Financing Guidance

The Commission published Proliferation Financing Guidance in December 2022. The guidance applies to FIs and DNFBPs and explains the TCI's proliferation financing legal framework, proliferation financing threats and vulnerabilities, preventative measures to mitigate the risk of proliferation financing, and red flag indicators.

Targeted Financial Sanctions Guidance for Financial Institutions and DNFBPs

The Commission published a Targeted Financial Sanctions Guidance in May 2022. The guidance applies to NPOs, FIs and DNFBPs and explains the international legal framework for targeted financial sanctions, the TCI's legal framework, the process to issue financial sanctions notices, the various sanction regimes that apply to the TCI, the legal obligations of NPOs, FIs and DNFBPs under the various sanction regimes, implementation of freezing measures, etc.

Financial Sanctions Notice Advisories

The Commission issued advisories to NPOs, FIs and DNFBPs (including ILPs) for every financial sanction notice issued in 2022 and 2023 by the Attorney General's Chambers. The advisories made recipients aware of new designations, amended designations and designations removed under the various sanction regimes.

All ILPs should identify and assess the sanctions risks to which they are exposed and implement a sanctions screening programme commensurate with the nature of their business, size, complexity, countries covered, etc. In doing so, consideration should be given to:

- a) what customers the ILP has (international or domestic), where those customers originate or are located, and what business they undertake;
- b) the volume of transactions and distribution channels; and
- c) what products and services the ILP offers.

ILPs exposed to sanctions risk must screen on an ongoing basis (at least daily) and each time an FSN has been issued. The screen should cover all customers, potential customers, beneficial owners, and transactions to identify potential matches with the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI) Consolidated List. Clients can be searched against the OFSI Consolidated List Search Tool at www.sanctionssearchapp.ofsi.hmtreasury.gov.uk/. ILPs using automated screening programs should ensure that the program covers the OFSI designations.

The Financial Services Commission supervises and monitors ILPs for compliance with customer due diligence and transaction monitoring rules regarding targeted financial sanctions.

If an ILP discovers that a client has been designated under any of the various sanction regimes, the ILP should immediately take the following actions:

- a) Freeze such accounts and other funds or economic resources.
- b) Refrain from dealing with the funds or assets, or from making them available (directly or indirectly), to the sanctioned person or entity, unless approved by the Governor.
- c) Report any findings to the Governor at governorgdt@gov.tc, with any additional information, that would facilitate compliance with the Regulation.
- d) Provide any information concerning the frozen assets of the sanctioned person or entity that the Governor may request, noting that information reported to the Governor may be passed on to other regulatory authorities or law enforcement.

Financial Sanctions Notices can be found on the Commission's website at www.tcifsc.tc/financial-sanctions-notices/, and on the Attorney General's website at www.gov.tc/agc/2023-sanctions-notice.

FATF Public Statements Advisories

The Commission issued advisories to NPOs, FIs and DNFBPs (including ILPs) for each of the FATF's public statements published in 2022 and 2023. The advisories inform recipients of jurisdictions that have been identified with strategic deficiencies in their AML/CFT regimes.

The advisories call for ILPs business risk assessments, and policies and procedures to consider the information contained in the risk analysis of the identified countries.

2024 WORK PROGRAM

Upcoming examinations

The Commission will carry out onsite examinations of ILPs in 2024 which will cover the following areas:

- a) Risk Assessment/Identification of High-Risk Customers
- b) Client accounts
- c) Corporate governance
- d) Customer Due Diligence Measures (including sanctions screening)
- e) Independent reviews of AML/CFT Compliance Program
- f) Record keeping
- g) Reliance on intermediaries
- h) Framework for reporting suspicious activity
- i) Staff Vetting

j) Staff Training

Fit and Proper Assessments

ILPs shall be requested to submit an update form to ensure that the Commission's records are accurate; apply fit and proper test to all relevant persons, and to update their risk profiles.

Outreach

The Commission will host a training session with ILPs on recognising suspicious activity.

Conclusion

The ILPs continues to play an important role as a gatekeeper against money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing. ILPs can be exploited to provide a veneer of respectability to criminals to facilitate their illegal activities. Accordingly, ILPs must be careful not to facilitate any criminal activity. This requires ILPs to be constantly aware of the threat of criminals seeking to misuse their services in pursuit of money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferating activities. The starting point is for ILPs to have an effective and appropriate AML Compliance Program. This means that ILPs must appropriately assess ML/TF risks and develop and implement policies and procedures tailored to the circumstances of their business. To achieve this, ILPs must consider the NRA, this report, their AML/CFT obligations and the various guidance mentioned earlier in this report.

ILPs are also reminded of their obligation to inform the Commission of changes of owners, directors, senior management, the Money Laundering Reporting Officer, and the Money Laundering Compliance Officer to enable the fitness and propriety of these persons to be carried out by the Commission. A Personal Declaration Questionnaire (PDQ) will be required for persons taking on these new roles. The PDQ can be found on our website at www.tcifsc.tc/non-financial-business-forms/.