

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS ON CULTURAL PROPERTY IN THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANISATION'S ILLICIT TRADE REPORT 2019

The World Customs Organisation's 200-plus page Illicit Trade Report 2019 is the fifth annual report to include Cultural Heritage statistics and the third in a row to give detailed analysis of this risk category. Yet again, it shows the negligible contribution Cultural Heritage makes to global transnational crime, accounting for just 0.2% of all reported cases and seizures. Although no total values are given for each risk category it is clear that, here as well, Cultural Heritage crime is dwarfed by all other categories.

The largest single seizure in 2019 for Cultural Heritage crime reported through the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) was valued at €289,418 (\$324,148 / £248,899). The insignificant scale of Cultural Heritage crime is evident from the 2019 highlights selected to illustrate the problem by the WCO. These include the seizure of 3 spoons and seven coins of no great value in one incident, 13 copper coins in another and ten silver coins in a third. Other examples listed are of similar scope.

According to the WCO:

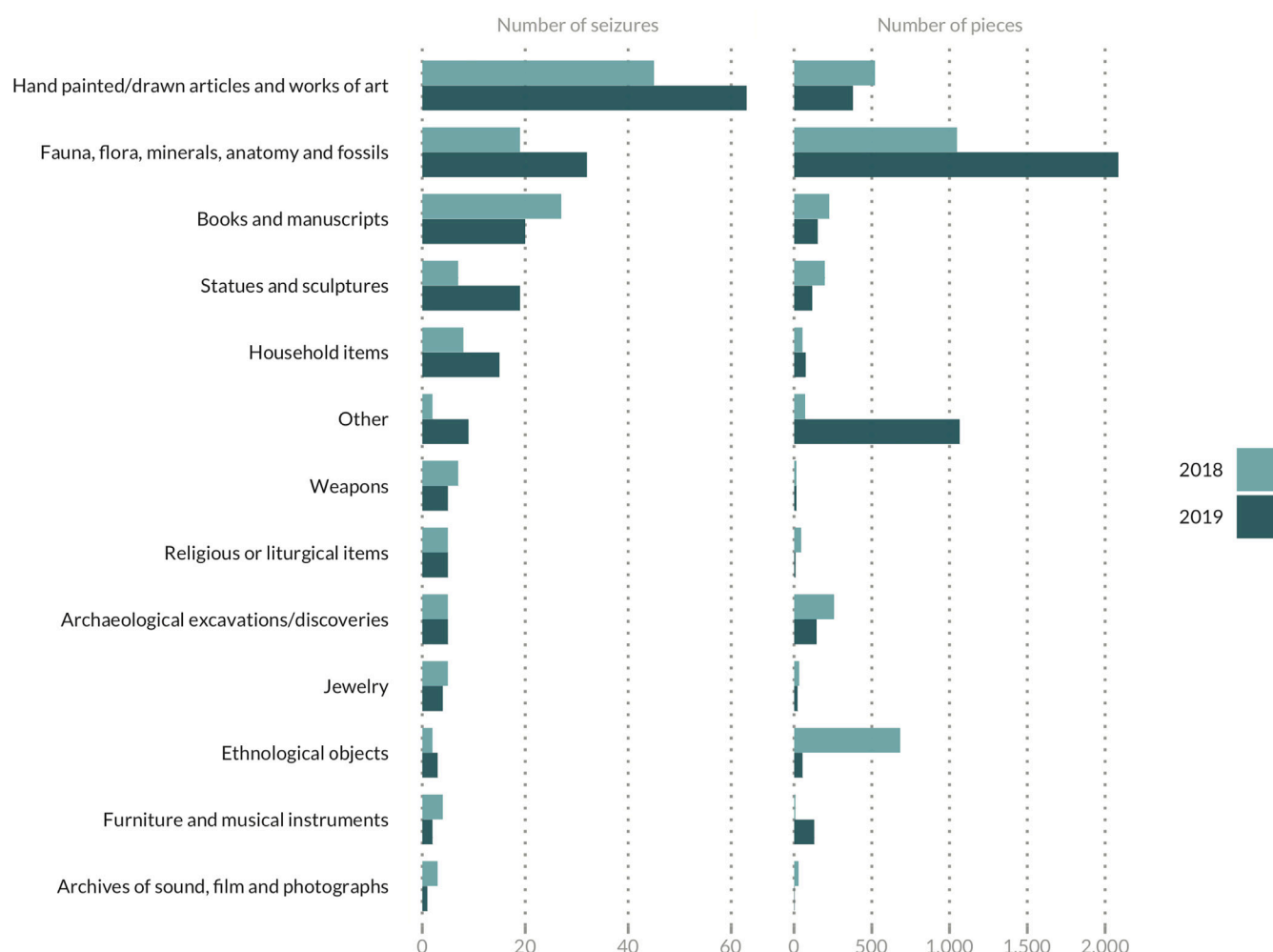
- Cultural Property made up just 0.2% of cases and seizures involving reported illicit trade globally.
- Cultural Property includes all forms of art, antiques and collectables as well as other items, together forming at least 13 distinct categories, ranging from household items to flora and fauna, as well as books and manuscripts.
- The report gives no clear figures for antiquities as a category, listing the top three categories of recovered objects as Fauna, Flora, Minerals, Anatomy & Fossils; Other; and Hand-painted or Hand-drawn articles and works of art.
- 137 countries globally reported trafficking cases and seizures across the range of categories in 2019. Of these, 34 countries reported seizures of Cultural Property.
- Only 20 countries reported seizures of Cultural Property in 2018. So even with 14 more countries reporting cases in 2019, the number of cases fell 12.7% from 260 to 227, while the number of seizures more than doubled from 123 to 271. However, the number of items seized fell from 22,462 to 9,399. This is largely attributed to a spike in 2018, when 10,000 coins were taken in a single seizure. These totals show the highly significant contribution that often low value coins make to the individual totals. According to WCO totals for 2019, the average value of coins seized was under \$100. 54.7% of all Cultural Heritage items seized in 2019 were currency or medals.
- The number of archaeological items reported as seized fell by around half, from 314 to about 150.
- Outside the Russian Federation and the US, no country in the world registered more than 15 instances of trafficking in Cultural Property.
- Western Europe is not a trafficking hot spot for Cultural Heritage.

WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANISATION ILLICIT TRADE REPORT 2019

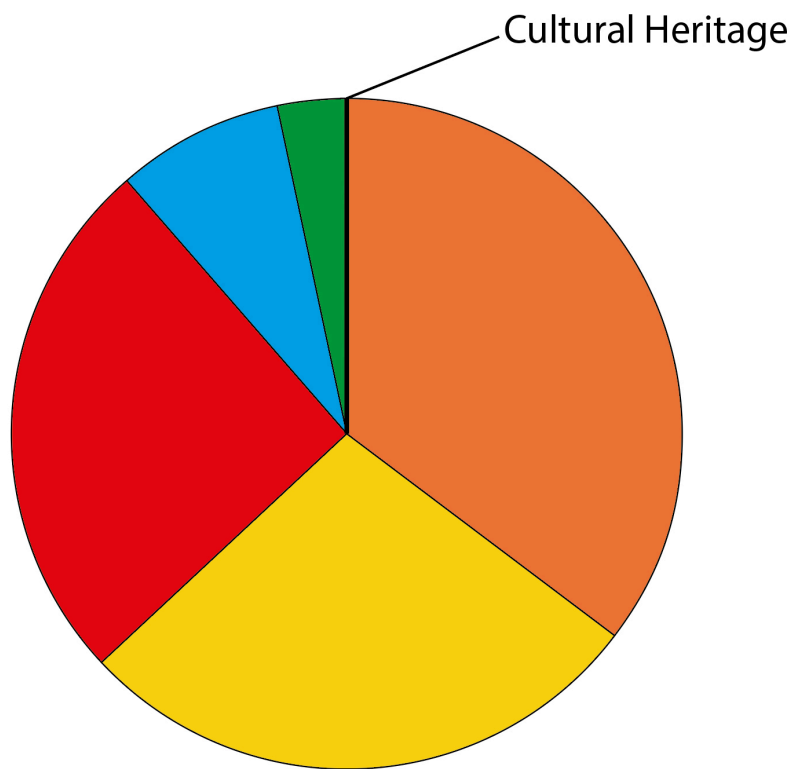
(Published July 2020 See: <https://bit.ly/32W8j7B>)

	2018	2019
Number of reported cases globally involving Cultural Property	260	227
Number of reported seizures globally involving Cultural Property	123	271
Number of reported items seized globally involving Cultural Property	22,462	9,399
Number of reported items of currency and medals seized globally	19,258	5,141
Number of reported archaeological items seized globally	314	150 (approx)
% share of reported cases of illicit trade globally involving Cultural Property	0.08%	0.2%
% share of reported illicit trade seizures globally involving Cultural Property	0.08%	0.2%

Figure 2: Number of seizures and quantity seized by type, 2018-2019



Share of cases by risk category



Number of cases

Total:	102,214
Drugs:	36,264 (35.48%)
IPR + H&S:	28,203 (27.59%)
Revenue:	26,285 (26.72%)
Security:	8,190 (8.01%)
Environment:	3,045 (2.98%)
Cultural Heritage:	227 (0.22%)

Drugs

IPR + H&S

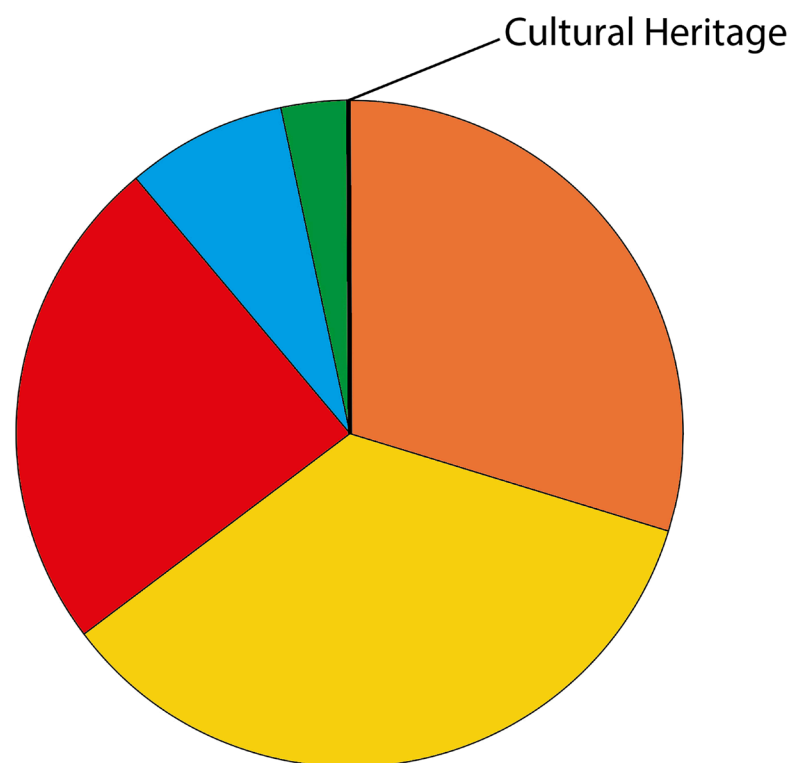
Revenue

Security

Environment

Cultural Heritage

Share of seizures by risk category



Number of seizures

Total:	133,453
Drugs:	40,017 (29.98%)
IPR + H&S:	46,386 (34.76%)
Revenue:	32,426 (24.30%)
Security:	10,469 (7.84%)
Environment:	3,884 (2.91%)
Cultural Heritage:	271 (0.20%)

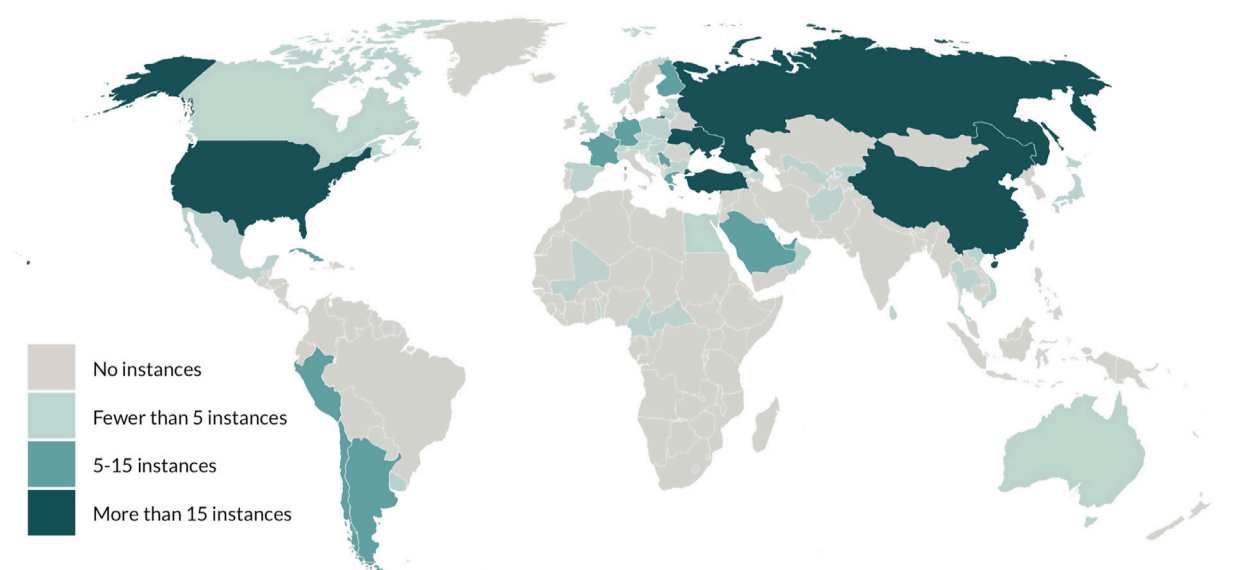
The first two points that the WCO 2019 report makes in its Cultural Heritage section are that this area of illegal activity is more complex than other areas and that it can take more than a decade for cases to be resolved.

The introduction also flags up issues with the quality of the data, noting that some Customs administrations “preferred to report a general bulk of data consisting of the number of cases and seized objects without providing details on the cases”. This raises obvious questions over the quality of the response to the data and resulting policies and action.

“It should also be noted that additional reporting not made via the Customs Enforcement Network is discussed but not included in the analysis.” While welcome, “The WCO continues working with Members to encourage collection and sharing of seizure data in a manner that facilitates analytical perspectives on this type of illicit trade.”

Outside of the Russian Federation and US, reported instances of trafficking are low, as this heat map shows:

Figure 9: Heat map of trafficking instances by country, 2019



Another notable factor is that, according to the WCO, “As in 2018, a handful of cases contributed to the majority of items recovered.” With the number of countries reporting cases for the year rising to 34 from 23 in 2018, this points to a global picture of relative inactivity, with just a few major cases augmented with more minor cases. This is still extremely limited compared to other types of illegal activity reported by the WCO. Most cases are also grouped geographically in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Eurasia, South America and the Caribbean. This indicates that, despite many, varied and persistent claims to the contrary, the evidence shows that Western Europe is not a hub for Cultural Heritage crime.

Of the eight highest reporting countries – who reported 183 (80.1%) of the 227 cases – Russia reported 133 cases, while the second highest reporting country, Ukraine, reported fewer than 30. All of the others reported fewer than ten each. So Russia accounted for 58.6% of all reported cases globally.

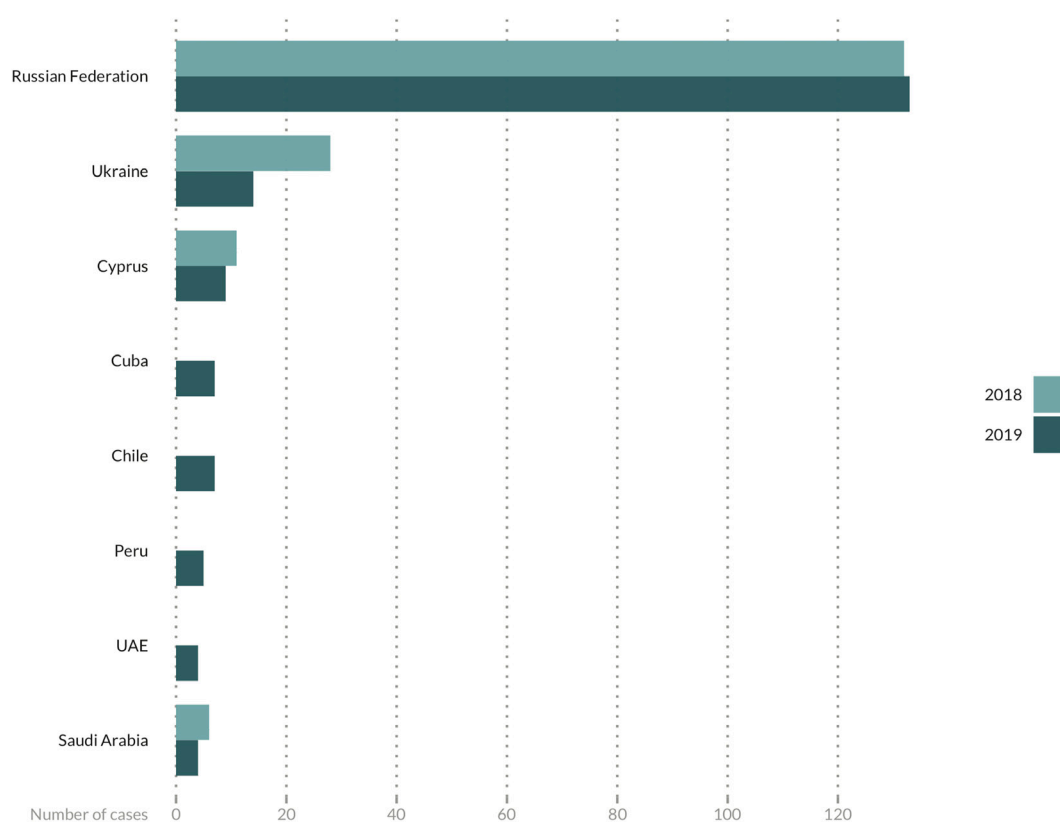
Despite highly vocal fears of a surge in looted artefacts emerging from Syria and Iraq, neither features in any significant way in the WCO report.

Clearly, as can be seen from recent changes in 2018 data from the original report, delayed reporting is a factor, but even these differences are miniscule in the global picture of transnational crime. The report does acknowledge that “trends and patterns in this analysis serve for indicative purposes only”, which indicates that while they may not be complete, the submitted data do reflect global patterns and the relative weight of crime across the various sectors, from Cultural Heritage to drugs and weapons.



Left: On October 25 2019, Customs seized these seven coins and three spoons from an Azerbaijani citizen en route from Ganja to Baku. See page 24 & 25 of the WCO 2019 report.

Figure 1: Number of cases by country, 2018-2019



Left: On June 19, 2019, Customs officers on the Uzbek-Afghan border seized these eight coins. See page 20 of the WCO 2019 report.

Summary comparison between risk categories in 2019

Cultural Heritage

- 34 countries reported seizures
- 227 reported cases
- 271 individual seizures
- 9,399 items seized

Drugs

- 119 countries reported seizures
- 36,264 reported cases
- 40,017 individual seizures
- More than 1.1 million kilos seized

Environment

- 60 countries reported seizures
- 3,045 reported cases
- 3,884 individual seizures
- Approx 1 million kilos of waste alone. Other commodities not listed

Intellectual Property Rights & Health & Safety

- 50 countries reported seizures
- 28,203 reported cases
- 46,386 individual seizures
- 97.1 million pieces seized

Revenue

- 78 countries reported tobacco seizures
- 22,045 reported tobacco cases
- 52 countries reported alcohol seizures
- 4,240 reported alcohol cases
- Approx 4.5 million kilos of tobacco seized
- Approx 2 million litres of alcohol seized
- Total cases: 26,285
- Total seizures: 32,426

Security

- 45 countries reported seizures
- 8,190 reported cases
- 10,469 individual seizures
- 264,332 weapons seized, 716,217 pieces of ammunition seized
- Total seizures: 980,549 pieces

Statistical sources in the WCO report 2019

- Cultural Heritage: page 11
- Drugs: page 37 & 40
- Environment (Fauna, Flora & Waste): page 95
- IPR and H&S (Counterfeit and Medical goods): page 121
- Revenue (Tobacco & Alcohol): page 151 & 171
- Security (Weapons & Ammunition): page 185