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НЕДВИЖИМОСТЬ — САМЫЙ ПРОСТОЙ СПОСОБ ОТМЫТЬ ДЕНЬГИ

Аннотация*: Статья посвящена проблеме использования рынка недвижимости как одного из наиболее простых и масштабных инструментов легализации преступных доходов. На основе данных международных организаций (FATF) и аналитических агентств (SmartSearch) раскрывается глобальный масштаб явления, оцениваемый в 1,6 триллиона долларов ежегодно. Анализируются причины привлекательности сектора для отмывания денег: высокая емкость рынка, слабость регуляторного надзора по сравнению с банковской сферой и возможность манипуляций со стоимостью объектов. Особое внимание уделено российской специфике, включая статистику МВД о росте числа преступлений и низкий индекс прозрачности рынка. Приводятся реальные примеры уголовных дел и международных расследований (кейсы в Ульяновской области, Санкт-Петербурге, а также дела, связанные с коррупцией в Гондурасе и украинскими олигархами), наглядно иллюстрирующие механизмы интеграции «грязных» денег в легальную экономику через покупку домов и квартир за наличные. В заключение делается вывод о негативном влиянии этого процесса на доступность жилья и низкой эффективности возврата преступных активов.*

***Ключевые слова**: отмывание денег, рынок недвижимости, легализация преступных доходов, бенефициарный владелец, финансовая прозрачность, теневые схемы, коррупция.*

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REAL ESTATE IS THE EASIEST WAY TO LAUNDER MONEY

***Abstract:** The article is devoted to the problem of using the real estate market as one of the simplest and most extensive tools for money laundering. Based on data from international organizations (FATF) and analytical agencies (SmartSearch), the global scale of the phenomenon, estimated at 1.6 trillion dollars annually, is revealed. The reasons for the attractiveness of the sector for money laundering are analyzed: high market capacity, weak regulatory oversight compared to the banking sector, and the possibility of manipulating the value of facilities. Special attention is paid to Russian specifics, including statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs on an increase in the number of crimes and a low index of market transparency. Real-life examples of criminal cases and international investigations are given (cases in the Ulyanovsk region, St. Petersburg, as well as cases related to corruption in Honduras and Ukrainian oligarchs), vividly illustrating the mechanisms of integrating "dirty" money into the legal economy through the purchase of houses and apartments for cash. In conclusion, it is concluded that this process has a negative impact on housing affordability and the low efficiency of recovering criminal assets.*

***Keywords:** money laundering, real estate market, money laundering, beneficial owner, financial transparency, shadow schemes, corruption.*

Real estate is traditionally perceived as one of the most reliable and understandable investment instruments, but this asset also has a shadow side. For the criminal world, buying a house or apartment for cash and then reselling it has long been perhaps the easiest and most effective way to give illegally acquired capital a completely legal appearance. The scale of this phenomenon is so great that, according to international experts, about 1.6 trillion US dollars are laundered annually through the global real estate market.[1] In 2024 alone, the volume of real estate transactions around the world directly related to dirty money reached the astronomical mark of $60 billion.[2] These figures bring the problem of money laundering through real estate to the level of a global economic threat that distorts markets and undermines confidence in financial institutions. For example, according to SmartSearch analysts, the influx of illegal funds into the UK residential real estate sector has exceeded 11 billion pounds since 2016, which has led to artificially inflated house prices by an average of 3,000 pounds nationwide and more than 11,000 pounds in London.[3]

The secret of the attractiveness of real estate for money laundering lies in its fundamental characteristics, which the FATF (Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering) highlights in its reports. Firstly, it is the high capacity of the market, which allows you to "absorb" huge amounts of money in one or more transactions. Unlike many small financial transactions, buying an elite mansion or commercial building allows you to launder tens of millions at a time. Secondly, in many jurisdictions, the real estate sector is much less regulated than the banking sector. While financial transactions are closely monitored, real estate transactions, especially those involving shell companies, often remain opaque. Thus, in the UK, about 3,400 real estate agencies (14% of the total) still operate without proper

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[1] Money Laundering Statistics 2024 // Zigram URL: https://www.zigram.tech/resources/money-laundering-statistics-2024/ (дата обращения: 16.05.2026).

[2] Money Laundering in 2024: Unmasking the Scale, Tactics, and APAC Risks Behind the Global Financial Shadow Economy // TrustSphere URL: https://www.trustsphere.ai/post/money-laundering-in-2024-unmasking-the-scale-tactics-and-apac-risks-behind-the-global-financial-s (дата обращения: 16.05.2026).

[3] Dirty money inflating house prices by up to £3,000, research reveals // The Intermediary URL: https://theintermediary.co.uk/2025/08/dirty-money-inflating-house-prices-by-up-to-3000-research-reveals/ (дата обращения: 16.05.2026).

AML/CFT supervision, and more than half of registered agents admitted that they do not always verify the identity of the final beneficiaries.[4] Thirdly, manipulations with valuation (overestimation when buying to justify a large payment) and the possibility of generating income from rent or subsequent resale make real estate not just a "vacuum cleaner" for dirty money, but also a potentially profitable asset. Russia fully illustrates these global trends. Law enforcement agencies have recorded a steady increase in the number of crimes related to money laundering. According to the Interior Ministry, in the first half of 2025 alone, 862 criminal cases of money laundering were initiated in the country, which is 33% more than in the same period last year.[5] Investments in real estate, along with securities, precious metals and cashing out through one-day firms, have been named by experts as one of the most popular money laundering schemes in the country. The lack of transparency of the market exacerbates the problem: according to the OPEO Index of Real Estate Opacity published by Transparency International, Russia received only 4.84 points out of 10 possible, while the rating for the "reliability of the legislative framework for combating money laundering" was 3.75 points, which indicates the presence of serious legislative and enforcement gaps. Real criminal cases serve as a clear confirmation of these gaps.[6]

Real criminal cases serve as a clear confirmation of these gaps. Investigators regularly uncover schemes where real estate plays a key role in legitimizing shadow capital. One of the characteristic stories occurred in the Ulyanovsk region and Moscow, where law enforcement officers stopped the activities of a large-scale network of shadow bankers. The attackers earned about 40 million rubles by illegally cashing out funds, for which they created their own real estate agency. The scheme was characterized by cynical simplicity: the agency offered clients apartments from

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[4] Dirty money inflating house prices by up to £3,000, research reveals // The Intermediary URL: https://theintermediary.co.uk/2025/08/dirty-money-inflating-house-prices-by-up-to-3000-research-reveals/ (дата обращения: 16.05.2026).

[5] В РФ на треть выросло количество дел об отмывании денег // ФИНМАРКЕТ URL: https://www.finmarket.ru/main/article/6450784 (дата обращения: 16.05.2026).

[6] Недвижимость России: непрозрачность и слабый контроль // Transparency International URL: https://ti-russia.org/blog/bez-kontrolya-i-prozrachnosti-rynok-nedvizhimosti-v-rossii-ostayotsya-uyazvimym/ (дата обращения: 16.05.2026).

large developers with a tempting discount, but on one condition — payment was accepted exclusively in cash. Thus, huge amounts of unaccounted-for cash turned overnight into a liquid asset that could later be sold for "clean" money.

In another high-profile case in St. Petersburg, a criminal group has used a more sophisticated, multi-pronged combination since 2016. Forged documents and fictitious sales transactions were used. Fraudsters issued loans to front persons, illegally received social benefits and legalized the stolen through a chain of real estate transactions. The total damage in the case exceeded 45 million rubles, and the amount of directly laundered funds amounted to more than 10 million. This scheme demonstrates how real estate serves as the final link to "dissolve" the origin of funds received from a whole bunch of crimes.[7]

No less revealing is the case of Ukrainian oligarchs Igor Kolomoisky and Gennady Bogolyubov, who, as it turned out during the FinCEN Files investigation, used hundreds of shell companies to buy up factories, office buildings and industrial facilities in the American Midwest in order to hide billions of dollars allegedly stolen from «PrivatBank».[8]

Thus, the myth that buying a house for cash and then selling it a year later is a safe way to launder money is not so far from reality. The massive influx of illegal monetary capital into the real estate sector raises prices, making housing less affordable for ordinary citizens, and undermines the stability of entire markets. Despite the fact that law enforcement agencies and organizations such as the FATF are constantly improving their control methods, the effectiveness of detecting and recovering criminal assets remains frustratingly low — the authorities manage to intercept only about 1% of the total amount of funds laundered in the world every year. Unfortunately, given the scale and sophistication of the described schemes, this confrontation is far from over.

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[7] В Петербурге осудили участников схемы на 45 млн рублей и отмывание 10 млн // Аргументы и факты URL: https://spb.aif.ru/society/v-peterburge-osudili-uchastnikov-shemy-na-45-mln-rubley-i-otmyvanie-10-mln (дата обращения: 16.05.2026).

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