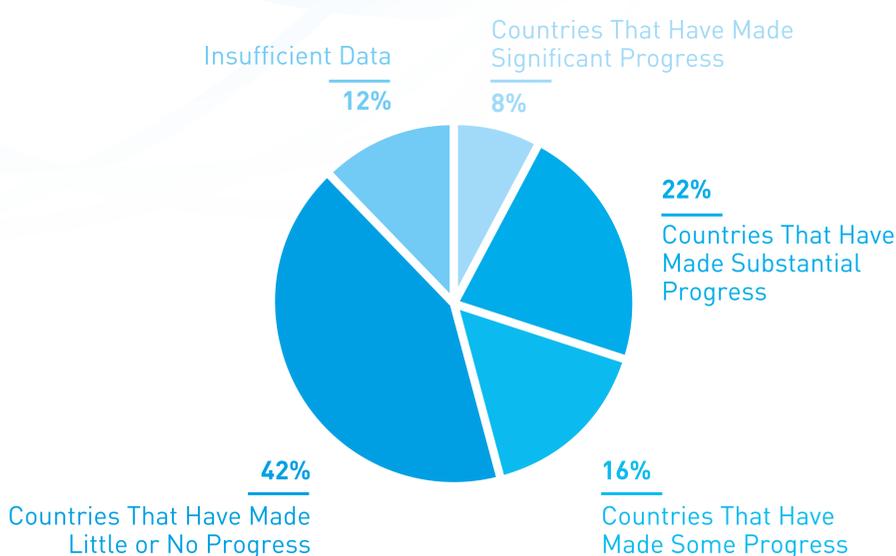


RECONSIDERING THE PAST: NEW APPROACHES TO LOOTED ART AND PROVENANCE RESEARCH

Data supplied by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany



THE MID-1990^S SAW A RESURGENT INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN NAZI-ERA LOOTING AND THE ISSUES SURROUNDING THE RETURN OF PLUNDERED CULTURAL OBJECTS TO THE RIGHTFUL OWNERS OR THEIR HEIRS. THIS INTEREST CULMINATED IN THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST-ERA ASSETS IN 1998, WHICH BROUGHT TOGETHER FORTY-FOUR GOVERNMENTS AND THIRTEEN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS TO HERALD IN A NEW APPROACH TO CULTURAL HERITAGE IN WHICH THE SALE, PURCHASE, EXCHANGE, AND DISPLAY OF ART FROM THE 1933-1945 PERIOD IS ADDRESSED WITH GREATER SENSITIVITY AND A HIGHER INTERNATIONAL STANDARD OF RESPONSIBILITY.

The 'Washington Principles' – as the eleven non-binding tenets agreed upon at the conference in 1998 came to be known – jumpstarted museum and state efforts to investigate the provenance of Nazi-era acquisitions held in their collections and return plundered objects to their rightful owners. The Washington Principles were followed, in quick succession, by Resolution 1205 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on looted Jewish cultural property in 1999 and the Declaration of the Vilnius International Forum on Holocaust Era Cultural Assets in 2000. Progress stagnated somewhat until forty-seven countries convened in Prague in 2009 for the Holocaust Era Assets Conference, which culminated with the Terezin Declaration and the creation of the European Shoah Legacy Institute – an organisation dedicated to monitoring the progress of States in adhering to the principles contained within the Terezin Declaration.

A report published by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and the World Jewish Restitution Organization in 2014 examining the progress made by States in implementing the Washington Principles and Terezin Declaration found that, of the fifty countries assessed, only four may be said to have made major progress (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, and Netherlands) with another eleven considered to have made substantial progress. These statistics clearly show that much work remains to be done to ensure that provenance research and cultural heritage protection mechanisms are strengthened and the obligations acquiesced to under the Washington Principles and the Terezin Declaration enforced in member States.