**INTRODUCTION**

The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) is a global network of investigative journalists working across borders to expose crime and corruption so the public can hold power to account. By increasing transparency and accountability, investigative reporting fosters more inclusive sustainable development and just societies.

The adoption of Goal 16 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development made peace,

governance, and anti-corruption central to advancing international development around the world for the first time. OCCRP’s work directly contributes to the global community’s ability to meet this

goal and reach key targets:

• 16.4: to “significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen

the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime;”

• 16.5: to “substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.”

Our work also addresses Goal 10, to reduce inequalities, by exposing how organized crime and corrupt politicians launder vast sums through the global financial system and further widen the gap between elites and the rest of society. Our work contributes to achieving a key target: 10.5 — “improved regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthening of the implementation of such regulations.”

**ROLE OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Crime and corruption affect so many of the SDGs — no poverty, reduced inequalities, economic growth, healthy people and planet — and investigative journalism is crucial to revealing the hidden damaging systems that thwart progress in these areas.

OCCRP’s investigations expose the relationship between money and power and are often the catalyst for change: using revelations from our stories, advocates can press for policy reform and package information for law enforcement, which has the authority to act on evidence and deliver justice. Policymakers can point to investigative findings to pass legislation and advance reforms. Citizens who read our work get the information they need to act and organize on their own behalf. Since 2009, OCCRP investigations have led to $9.6 billion in fines levied and monies seized.

Follow-the-money journalism and collaborating with reporting partners enables us to report on some tough, closed countries where there is no free press. When protests erupted in Kazakhstan in January 2022 because of an increase in fuel prices, [we exposed for the first time how former president Nursultan Nazabayev’s multiple charitable foundations owned assets worth billions of dollars](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fthe-nazarbayev-billions-how-kazakhstans-leader-of-the-nation-controls-vast-assets-through-charitable-foundations&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180220258%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=avublNjgvVRtcp3YWvoFx87BXiVpmpe4clv2G78yXGM%3D&reserved=0). The new president complained of “[a powerful clique of oligarchs](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fparadisepapers%2Fkazakhstans-secret-billionaires&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180220258%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=bEfp65RRhbS4apNdpoaZEJEWecWQ1vtojbWO5kPJsNM%3D&reserved=0) whose stranglehold on Kazakhstan’s economy had led to serious inequalities.” As our notes, "These findings exemplify the corruption and stark inequality that has plagued Kazakhstan since it gained from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Under Nazarbayev’s long years of leadership, most Kazakhstanis have seen little benefit from their country’s vast mineral wealth, even as it lined the pockets of a circle of billionaires, including members of Nazarbayev’s family and officials close to him."

Despite the best efforts of governments, activists, and academics, we are failing to make the changes needed to protect our planet for the future. One key factor holding us back is the role of organized crime and corruption in undermining efforts to protect the planet. From illegal logging of [African rosewood](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fchinese-companies-and-namibian-elites-make-millions-illegally-logging-the-last-rosewoods&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180220258%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=V2HqrBigxrlJwuTV9ABDUsKKR8VHhAFrtlD1tvYxREY%3D&reserved=0) and [European old-growth forests](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2F5655-clear-cut-crimes&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=8n2DKfcoxQ6E0jmWcZMmNNbe37L6g4uO0OjPm2N2YuI%3D&reserved=0), to [illicit mining](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fmining-secrets-solway-linked-companies-moved-nearly-2-billion-in-suspicious-funds&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ehVlfx%2BXLYOyyNphBKfFBPeY6KY0eUHsZbWeN%2BA6juM%3D&reserved=0) and the [trafficking of rare species](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fastronomical-money-how-smugglers-made-tens-of-millions-moving-rare-birds-around-the-world&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=hagaHRTKhQCNroTxbkTD%2FGdvdOu1TJyRSrzz%2Bg9Rr30%3D&reserved=0), organized criminal networks are making hundreds of billions of dollars from this destruction every year. Attempts to rein in carbon emissions are being stymied by fraudsters, while green energy projects are being hijacked by business elites with powerful friends. Ask any environmental expert and they will tell you that organized crime and corruption are key factors hindering our efforts to protect the planet.

Investigative journalism is key to revealing who is benefiting from this destruction. Using follow-the-money reporting, technology such as drones, and other cutting edge techniques, OCCRP has published stories that explain the degradation people see around them. In Brazil, [we exposed how the world’s top meat companies are buying tainted beef raised on cleared rainforest](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fhow-illegal-land-grabs-in-brazils-amazon-feed-the-global-beef-industry&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=LmpIpm5ZXJhCgSzG%2FZ43LYvjg1EMXnibqzETBcOXXNI%3D&reserved=0). We r[eported on how Daniel Ortega’s autocratic government is driving rampant deforestation in Nicaragua](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fnicaraguas-forgotten-deforestation-crisis&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=hsnIJIAP1d%2FaQa2PWccIOY38PMtf0tEPRxCCmILiGc8%3D&reserved=0), working with local reporters as they endured state persecution. As Europe sought alternatives to Russian gas, [we exposed how BP allowed companies owned by Azerbaijan’s autocratic government to plunder $1.7 billion from its prize gas project](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fbp-turned-a-blind-eye-to-corruption-in-prize-azerbaijan-gas-project&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=6Uvpg8tpiRXYQ9oQdsq3PMQx33CUF4PsMdkpnm0P67c%3D&reserved=0). And in Mexico, [we showed how dairy companies are bleeding dry an oasis that may hold the key to the origins of life on earth](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Finvestigations%2Fmexicos-dairy-industry-is-destroying-an-oasis-that-may-hold-the-key-to-the-origins-of-life&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=88KZ1lw7d%2F9D6U8kkDgPLzjnaWG3ZrkARd%2BQJ20Ha%2FM%3D&reserved=0).

Multi-partner collaborative investigations like [OpenLux](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fopenlux%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=nKCQUNz91pMSf4HCL0v13wAN0FtOUfUtFX%2BBXECH%2F7Q%3D&reserved=0) and [Suisse Secrets](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fsuisse-secrets%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=cr%2BjVPU0vw%2FcBMGRPx%2ByZRUZFH4MsCkDhL3c435S4yE%3D&reserved=0) showed how corrupt officials from developing countries use opaque jurisdictions in wealthy countries to hide stolen money — money that could be used to build roads, schools, and infrastructure. Without investigations like this that call out the industries that enable these systems like corrupt banks, law firms, lobbying groups, and registration agents, these systems would remain hidden from the public.

OCCRP also contributed to the Pandora Papers, which exposed the shadowy financial system that benefits the world’s most powerful and is exploited by criminal networks. These investigative stories led to positive results around the world, including U.S. lawmakers drafting the ENABLERS Act, which would make it more difficult for criminals to use U.S. systems to hide illicit wealth.

**BARRIERS FACING INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM**

Independent investigative journalism is under threat like never before. Reporters are harassed, tortured, jailed, sued, surveilled — and murdered. In many places, there is no access to information and a severe lack of financial support, making it difficult for investigative journalists to do their jobs of reporting in the public interest.

In the past few years, the number of SLAPPs — strategic lawsuits against public participation — has grown significantly around the world. Many reporting organizations don’t have legal support, while law firms representing crime figures, corrupt government officials, and politically connected businessmen target journalists and publishers to harass and distract them. As a result, some outlets censor themselves, avoiding stories about litigious individuals or removing stories from their websites upon receiving threats.

The outlets and journalists choosing to fight these lawsuits spend years defending themselves in each case and some have multiple cases against them. The time, money, and psychological burden spent on defense debilitates journalists and diverts them from their reporting in the public interest. In 2022, [OCCRP battled 43 lawsuits against its global network](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Faboutus%2Foccrp-slapps-back&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=fFZLva0kBIx9qmDKfCGmlFcm0NyG9EVfrELV8s2Vb%2Bk%3D&reserved=0); staff had editorial meetings in courtroom hallways because they had so many cases against them and had to be in court to defend themselves. In Italy, reporters can go to jail if a court rules against them in a defamation case. Our Serbian member center KRIK is fighting 11 lawsuits - that’s more than the number of reporters they have on staff. SLAPPs also have a chilling effect on young would-be journalists, who might avoid investigative reporting because they are afraid of being sued. Fewer investigative journalists means less transparency and more corruption — setting achievement of the SDGs further behind. Experience shows that journalists usually win these suits in countries where there is rule of law — but at a great cost. (In June 2023, OCCRP and the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice will launch [Reporters Shield](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.reporters-shield.org%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=A8W7RGpNYThBIHNAVBJRDbQdlD2RFhYluXpfE4hH878%3D&reserved=0), a global legal protection program and defense fund for investigative journalists, which we hope will deter these suits in the first place.)

[The Pegasus Project](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fthe-pegasus-project%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=BB%2FKVWwVwL7lZgoor31sxbUgT2CeUBPulCtFgFemSMs%3D&reserved=0) showed how members of the OCCRP network such as Azerbaijani reporter [Khadija Ismayilova](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FAN7EOiyOvl4.&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=BcUxVCZzXiRF8uqpeVsozHxgBQFEeXSGIJpV0Bdp8%2Bc%3D&reserved=0) and Hungarian reporters [Szabolcs Panyi](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fthe-pegasus-project%2Fszabolcs-panyi-hungarian-journalist&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=yjXVSktD6Nptf3Ran1iam0InETFIDfE98oiiLjmRDcI%3D&reserved=0) and [András Szabó](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fthe-pegasus-project%2Fandras-szabo-hungarian-journalist&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ZReULHDHxN%2FVDw%2FAUx31pa7r%2BTj2nrODmGlBkZHM%2Ft0%3D&reserved=0) have had their phones infected with Pegasus spyware. This malware, developed by Israeli cyber-arms company NSO Group, was used by governments to unlawfully surveil journalists and human rights defenders and not only puts journalists in danger, but also their contacts, families, and sources.

We can’t do our jobs without access to information. The r[ecent ruling from the European Union Court of Justice that shut down public access to ultimate beneficial owner registers](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fbeneficial-ownership-data-is-critical-in-the-fight-against-corruption%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Of%2FSaNn1MdNTeJ9dmbPjjCZT%2BFoeTPgOGqYbp8ZFdbk%3D&reserved=0) will seriously impair the fight against dirty money flows in Europe and beyond.

For our [COVID-19 public procurement project](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.occrp.org%2Fen%2Fcoronavirus%2Feuropes-covid-19-spending-spree-unmasked&data=05%7C01%7Cthibaut.guillet%40un.org%7C158598f7570f4321414f08db06156581%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638110461180376841%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Oo21TAL48TlzDPRhSzgEkWOIh2A3BhpB7sF7u%2FyxzaY%3D&reserved=0), we collected information from over 37,800 COVID-19 related tenders and contracts worth over 21 billion euros that covered key goods such as personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilators, tests, and medications. The project also highlighted which countries were the most transparent about sharing data, and which countries have remained “black holes” for COVID-19 procurement information, like Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark, who all rejected reporters’ data requests, arguing that it was necessary to preserve secrecy so as to not undermine negotiations for the purchase of goods. In response to a freedom-of-information request, Norway provided some details on contracts, such as company names, but would not give price information. We obtained the most contracts, roughly 15,000, from Portugal. Despite its relatively small size, it was one of the few European countries to publish all its contracts online, along with an overview of its COVID-19 related purchases.

Compiling this data in one place allowed reporters to compare government spending and ask questions that held their governments to account: Why did mask prices fluctuate so wildly from country to country? Why isn't my government releasing this data when others are?

Finally, the lack of financial support continues to threaten the industry. Investigative reporting is expensive and time consuming to produce and requires specific expertise. It is a public service and needs to be robustly funded and supported as a key lever to achieve the SDGs.