

Frequently Asked Questions

Learn more about the data in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks database

This database contains information on almost 320,000 offshore entities that are part of the Panama Papers and the Offshore Leaks investigations. The data covers nearly 40 years – from 1977 through 2015 – and links to people and companies in more than 200 countries and territories.

The real value of the database is that it strips away the secrecy that cloaks companies and trusts incorporated in tax havens and exposes the people behind them. This includes, when available, the names of the real owners of those opaque structures. In all, the interactive application reveals more than 360,000 names of people and companies behind secret offshore structures. They come from leaked records and not a standardized corporate registry, so there may be duplicates. In some cases, companies are listed as shareholders for another company or a trust, arrangement that often helps obscure the flesh-and-blood people behind offshore entities.

ICIJ obtained the data through two massive leaks. The majority of the names in this database come from Panamanian law firm [Mossack Fonseca](#), whose inner workings were exposed in the [Panama Papers](#) investigation published in April 2016 in conjunction with Süddeutsche Zeitung and more than 100 other media partners. Around a third of the offshore entities were incorporated through [Portcullis Trustnet](#) (now Portcullis) and [Commonwealth Trust Limited](#), two offshore service providers exposed as part of ICIJ's 2013 Offshore Leaks [exposé](#). This was the first information added to this database when it [was released](#) in June 2013, which was then produced in conjunction with Costa Rican newspaper La Nación.

The database does not disclose the totality of the leaked records. It doesn't divulge raw documents or personal information en masse. It contains a great deal of information about company owners, proxies and intermediaries in secrecy jurisdictions, but it doesn't disclose bank accounts, email exchanges and financial transactions contained in the documents.

ICIJ is publishing the information in the public interest. While many of the activities carried out through offshore entities are perfectly legal, extensive reporting by ICIJ and its media partners for more than four years has shown that the anonymity granted by the offshore economy facilitates money laundering, tax evasion, fraud and other crimes. Even when it's legal, transparency advocates [argue](#) that the use of an alternative, parallel economy undermines democracy because it benefits a few at the expense of the majority.

Read more about why ICIJ is making this information public [here](#). The questions and answers below address the most frequent questions about this data. If you still have questions after reading them, please [get in touch with us](#).

How current is the data?

The Offshore Leaks data is current through 2010. The Panama Papers data is current through 2015.

Should I assume that everyone named in the database has committed a crime?

No, there are legitimate uses for offshore companies and trusts. We do not intend to suggest or imply that any

persons, companies or other entities included in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database have broken the law or otherwise acted improperly.

Why can't I find some names in the database that appeared in the Panama Papers stories?

While the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database opens up a world that has never been shown in this much detail, not every owner of a company that appears in the Panama Papers shows up in the public database. This is because that information is often buried in emails, power-of-attorney letters and internal notes of Mossack Fonseca employees and cannot easily be extracted in a systematic manner. In addition, Mossack Fonseca often failed to collect the necessary information about the real owners of companies, relying instead on banks and other intermediaries to keep track of that essential data. While we faced a similar situation with the original Offshore Leaks data, those original databases from [Portcullis Trustnet](#) and [Commonwealth Trust Limited](#) contained more ownership information.

On April 3, 2016 ICIJ published an [interactive application](#) with detailed information on dozens of politicians in the leaked files. In order to better tell those specific stories, ICIJ manually added information from Panama Papers documents about the politicians to this database. You will identify these records easily because they include a note that says "record manually added from leaked documents." In those cases ICIJ only registered the information connected to the public figure and not that of the rest of the people that may be associated to an offshore entity, whose information could have been inside the documents.

How did you link a name to a country?

ICIJ performed automatic identification of country names within all the addresses contained in the database. We used geocoding tools to complement the process. Some of the addresses ended up being manually reviewed by our team. ICIJ also shared these identifications with the reporting team of more than 370 journalists and improved the results based on their feedback.

Once a country was determined, the connected record --an entity, an officer or an intermediary-- was linked to that country. The record was tagged as having a "not identified" country, if no match could be made. The limitations to this whole identification process include potential data entry and country matching errors. If you find a name that is identified to the wrong country please [contact us](#).

The original addresses from the leaked records were not standardized, containing multiple spellings or ways of describing the same address. ICIJ did not perform any cleaning on the addresses. This may mean that what a human eye appears to be same address, in our database appears as several records.

What should I keep in mind before using the data or publishing any findings?

The information contained in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database is just a fraction of the leaked files of the Panama Papers and Offshore Leaks investigations. We recommend caution before drawing any conclusions, as many people and entities have the same or similar names. We suggest you confirm the identities of any individuals or entities found in the database using addresses or other identifiable information.

I can't understand some of the terms used in this database. Could you

help me with that?

This database contains information about offshore entities, officers, intermediaries and addresses:

Offshore Entity:

A company, trust or fund created in a low-tax, offshore jurisdiction by an agent.

Agent (registered agent or offshore service provider):

Firm that provides services in an offshore jurisdiction to incorporate, register and manage an offshore entity at the request of a client.

Officer:

A person or company who plays a role in an offshore entity.

Intermediary:

A go-between for someone seeking an offshore corporation and an offshore service provider -- usually a law-firm or a middleman that asks an offshore service provider to create an offshore firm for a client.

Address:

Contact postal address as it appears in the original databases obtained by ICIJ.

These are some useful definitions of other terms used in this application, which originate from the terminology that appeared in the leaked records:

Beneficial owner (ultimate beneficial owner or beneficiary):

The person who is the true owner of a company. In the offshore world, the identity of beneficial owners is often kept secret.

Bearer shares:

Whoever physically holds a certificate of shares is considered the owner of the shares. Bearer shares provide one of the deepest levels of secrecy. Many countries have banned bearer shares because they are considered a facilitator of tax evasion and money laundering. In the database, bearer shares are sometimes referred to in Spanish as “Portador.”

Nominee:

A person or company that acts on behalf of the beneficial owner of an entity to provide an extra level of secrecy.

Nominee director:

Stand-in who control a company on paper but exercise no real authority over its activities.

Nominee shareholder:

A person who is listed as a shareholder on a company’s documents but has no real power over the company or claim to its assets. This is common practice in offshore financial structures to hide the identity of the real owner.

Power of attorney:

Authorization given to a person to represent the offshore company. It can confer rights that include managing the company without any limitation, carrying out contracts, purchasing products and borrowing or lending money. Each authorization notes which powers are granted to the person who will act on behalf of the company and whether they are general or specific.

Incorporation Date:

The date when an offshore entity was created.

Dormancy Date:

The date when an offshore entity stopped being active.

Inactivation Date:

The date when a client told the agent to deactivate the offshore entity, which could be reactivated at a later date.

Struck off Date:

A company becomes struck off when it fails to be in good standing, which happens when it fails to pay license fees. In the offshore world this is the equivalent to closing an entity, although it can be reactivated at a later date if the fees start being paid again.

Offshore Leaks Database

An internal account created by the offshore services firm to record miscellaneous charges of an officer or master client.

Tax status:

In this database, it is information that relates to the jurisdiction where an entity may have fiscal duties.

And here's some terminology connected to trusts:

Trust:

A legal arrangement in which an individual transfers assets owned by him/her to a trustee.

Trustee:

A person who holds title to the assets in a trust and is responsible for administering the assets on behalf of the beneficiaries of the trust.

Beneficiary:

A person who is entitled to certain financial benefits under a trust arrangement. Sometimes beneficiaries are not aware of their role in a trust because the settlor or the trustee have not notified them.

Protector:

An advisor to a trust settlor who oversees the work of the trustee.

Trust settlor:

A person who creates a trust or transfers assets to an already existing trust.

Why are you linking to Open Corporates and Google Maps?

[OpenCorporates](#) is a website with information on more than 99 million companies (as of May 9, 2016). It claims to be “the largest open database of companies in the world”. The website was very useful for the reporting of ICIJ's offshore investigations. As the offshore economy is directly connected to our regular economy and its regular companies, we believe there is an added value for connecting the opaque structures exposed in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database with OpenCorporates.

ICIJ also linked to [Google Maps](#) in the pages showing addresses to provide additional information on its geolocation.

The connection to both sites was done automatically and it may not yield any results. We also recommend you to double check the result obtained refers to the same record in this database.

Why did you decide to use a graph database?

The Panama Papers and Offshore Leaks datasets reveal the names of the people behind opaque offshore structures and expose these networks of secrecy. Graph databases are the best way to explore the relationships between these people and entities — it's much more intuitive to use for this purpose than a SQL database or other types of NoSQL databases. In addition, graphs allow to understand these networks in a very intuitive way and easily discover connections.

Can I download all the data in my computer?

Yes, of course! Follow the instructions in [this link](#). Remember that the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database is licensed under the [Open Database License](#) and contents under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike](#) license. Always cite the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists when using this data.

How do I get in touch with ICIJ?

The easiest way to contact us about any issues related to this database is to email us at data@icij.org. From there, we'll answer any emails that have to do with tips, questions or errors you may find in the database. If you have any general queries to ICIJ, please email contact@icij.org.

If you wish to contact us in a secure manner, follow the instructions in [this page](#), which includes a link to our Secure Drop server.

If you're a journalist wanting access to the totality of the leaked files or interested in collaborating with ICIJ, please send an email to data@icij.org. We welcome these new offers of collaboration, but also ask for your patience as we are vetting the requests carefully and may only add a few new partners to the investigation.

This is not easy data to understand. It took great commitment from all of our current media partners to find stories of important public interest. ICIJ's data unit provided training to our partners to make sure that everyone understood the intricacies of the information they were reporting on.

Who funds ICIJ?

ICIJ is a project of the Center for Public Integrity, a non-profit organization. We rely heavily on charitable foundations and on financial support from the public. We do not take funding from governments. Without our readers' support, we cannot exist.

Recent ICIJ funders include: Adessium Foundation, Open Society Foundations, The Sigrid Rausing Trust, The Ford Foundation, Fritt Ord Foundation and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. We also receive support from Australian philanthropist Graeme Wood. The Center for Public Integrity's annual tax returns are [published online](#), and include detailed information about our funders.

We [welcome individual donations](#) in support of our work.

ABOUT THIS DATABASE

This ICIJ database contains information on almost 320,000 offshore entities that are part of the Panama Papers and the Offshore Leaks investigations. The data covers nearly 40 years up to the end of 2015 and links to people and companies in more than 200 countries and territories.

- [About this data](#)
- [Data sources](#)
- [How to use this database](#)
- [About ICIJ](#)
- [Credits](#)

DISCLAIMER

There are legitimate uses for offshore companies and trusts. We do not intend to suggest or imply that any persons, companies or other entities included in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database have broken the law or otherwise acted improperly. Many people and entities have the same or similar names. We suggest you confirm the identities of any individuals or entities located in the database based on addresses or other identifiable information. If you find an error in the database please [get in touch with us](#).

DOWNLOAD DATA

The ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database is licensed under the [Open Database License](#) and contents under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike](#) license. Always cite the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists when using this data. You can download a raw copy of the database [here](#).

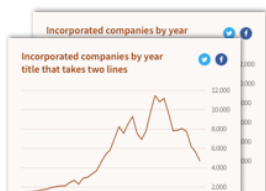
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Explore the offshore connections of world leaders, politicians and their relatives and associates.



PANAMA PAPERS: KEY FIGURES

Discover the big numbers behind the Panama Papers files, including nearly 40 years of data.

LEAK TO US

ICIJ encourages whistleblowers to securely submit content that might be of public concern.

ABOUT ICIJ

We are a network of the world's best investigative reporters, collaborating on in-depth global stories.

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ICIJ investigations drive important social issues to the top of political and policy agendas around the world.



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