

IRE 2022: How to localize cross-border investigations tipsheet

Emilia Díaz-Struck (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists)

Contact: ediazstruck@icij.org

Some stories mentioned in the presentation:

1. [Pandora Papers: An offshore data tsunami](#) | Emilia Díaz-Struck, Delphine Reuter, Agustín Armendariz, Jelena Cosic, Jesús Escudero, Miguel Fiandor Gutiérrez, Mago Torres, Karrie Kehoe, Margot Williams, Denise Hassanzade Ajiri and Sean McGoeey — Contributors: Bruno Thomas, Anisha Kohli, Helena Bengtsson, Shirsho Dasgupta, John Keefe, Miranda Patrucic, Pierre Romera, Marcos García Rey, Soline Ledésert
2. [The Panama Papers: Victims of offshore](#) | Hamish Boland-Rudder, Will Fitzgibbon, Carrie Ching, Arthur Jones, Eleanor Bell Fox, Muthoni Kiarie
3. [Pandora Papers: Power players](#) | ICIJ – Credits: <https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/power-players/>
4. [Los Protagonistas Mexicanos](#) - Quinto Elemento Lab
5. [As Catholic order fought sex abuse claims, secret trusts devoted to it poured millions into American rental properties](#) | Spencer Woodman – Contributors: Mathieu Tourliere, Andrea Cardenas, Georgina Zerega, Leo Sisti, Mike Hudson, Dean Starkman, Kathryn Kranhold, Margot Gibbs, Brenda Medina, Agustín Armendariz, Emilia Díaz-Struck
6. [Suspect foreign money flows into booming American tax havens on promise of eternal secrecy](#) | Will Fitzgibbon, Debbie Cenziper and Salwan Georges – Contributors: Alice Crites, Shawn Mulcahy, Brenda Medina, Delphine Reuter, Jesús Escudero, Alicia Ortega de Hasbún, Mónica Almeida, Francisco Rodríguez, Enrique Naveda and Anna Anjos
7. [Pandora Papers Latin America](#) (CONNECTAS with links to Latin America publications) | more than 100 journalists from more than 30 media partners in at least 20 countries and territories who reported and published stories in Spanish and Portuguese
8. [Odebrecht's hidden transactions](#) | Antonio Cucho Gamboa, Sasha Chavkin
9. [Explore the FinCEN Files data](#) | ICIJ
10. [Inside scandal-rocked Danske Estonia and the shell-company 'factories' that served it](#) | Simon Bowers, Karrie Kehoe and Holger Roonemaa – Contributors: Kristof Clerix, Colm Keena, Inga Springe, Ilze Vēbere, Elena Loginova, Paolo Biondani, Mago Torres, Jelena Cosic, Miriam Pensack, Miguel Fiandor, Meike Schreiber, Frederik Obermaier
11. [From temples to offshore trusts, a hunt for Cambodia's looted heritage leads to top museums](#) | Malia Politzer, Peter Whoriskey, Delphine Reuter and Spencer Woodman – Contributors: Annie Gilbertson, James Oliver, Rory Tinman, David Conn, Anne Davies, Mario Christodoulou

12. [Pandora Papers: Familias Piñera y Délano sellaron millonaria compraventa de Minera Dominga en Islas Vírgenes Británicas](#) | *Francisca Skoknic (LaBot) y Alberto Arellano (CIPER)*

Tips:

1. Embrace the power of collaboration. Work together with reporters from the countries the stories are related to. Share and keep in touch to understand the different angles and which are the local, regional and global angles a story might have. Be generous with credit.
2. Review if a broken system is affecting people in different countries and how they are affected.
3. Explore the story systematically. Find local connections across global systemic problems.
4. Understand the regulation in each country.
5. Review data that crosses borders. Money flows may have more than one country involved and local stories can be found across different countries.
6. Make data and files accessible to everyone.
7. Structure the information. Create country lists with key information.
8. Find public records: court records, contractors' data, real estate data, corporate records, financial statements... Navigate records and reporting in multiple languages.
9. Review if there is any public money involved
10. Understand who are the different actors and what their roles are: people, entities, enablers.
11. Plan the different ways in which the story can be presented and who the audience is.
12. Consider security risks and keep them in mind throughout a project to establish personal and digital security protocols.

Sasha Chavkin (Rainforest Investigations Network/NBC News)

Contact: Sasha.Chavkin@nbcuni.com; Twitter: @sashachavkin

Stories:

[How banks helped Venezuela's 'boligarchs' extract billions](#)

By Sasha Chavkin and Patricia Marcano

[Nicaraguan Indigenous Leader Who Aligned with Government Reaps Hidden Reward](#)

By Sasha Chavkin, Christopher Mendoza, Eli Moskowitz and Maria Fernanda Cruz

Tips:

Localizing stories with places

- Look in documents for specific places relevant to your readers (contracts, government reports, financial transactions, court records)
- For public institutions, visit key sites and talk to citizens who use them (hospitals, housing complexes, schools)
- Use place to tell your story (contrast perpetrators and victims, wealth and poverty)

Finding people to bring stories to life

- Identify and investigate the key people behind companies (court cases, news clippings, books, political activities)
- Learn the back stories of key subjects
- Search social media for photos, quotes and relationships

Shirsho Dasgupta (Miami Herald/McClatchy DC Bureau)

Contact: shirshodg94@gmail.com; Twitter: @ShirshoD

Examples:

1. [Before he went on lam, Italian fugitive used Miami firms to set up offshore](#) | *Nicholas Nehamas and Leo Sisti*
2. [Influential economist defended construction giant. Secretly it paid his firm millions](#) | *Ben Wieder, Kevin G. Hall and Alicia Ortega Hasbún*
3. [How heirs to a fashion empire ended up sinking cash into scores of modest Florida homes](#) | *Ben Wieder and Emily Mahoney*
4. [How a Coral Gables lawyer and an ex-Miami cop became cogs in massive alleged Ponzi scheme](#) | *Shirsho Dasgupta*
5. [Men tied to Italian mob money-laundering case still able to snap up South Florida properties](#) | *Ben Wieder, Shirsho Dasgupta and Karen Wang*
6. [Pandora Papers leak solves riddle: the ID of Saudis behind Florida real estate shopping spree](#) | *Shirsho Dasgupta*

Tips:

1. Make lists of all the entities and persons related to your story. Background them all thoroughly: What properties do they own? Do they own yachts or private jets? Do they have professional licenses? What businesses are they engaged in? What is their source of income? Are there any lawsuits tied to them? Who are the attorneys or law firms who've represented them?
2. Don't just focus on the people or entities that you come across say in leaked documents but also look up the companies and individuals they do business with — it takes a village!

3. As you go along, keep drawing out connections between entities and persons, even if it is a rough diagram.
4. Make detailed timelines on the events that are supposed to have taken place. This reduces errors in reporting. For instance, if you wish to write in your story that X did business with Y who was a sanctioned individual, you have to be completely certain that the deals took place when the sanctions were actually in place.
5. Read every document thoroughly. Sometimes even an innocuous traffic citation might mention the model of the car and hence offer insight into a person's lifestyle.
6. Try to figure out who are people who are most vulnerable and affected by a certain activity and speak to them.
7. Focus not just on a particular incident or activity but structural issues like how it was allowed to happen — loopholes in laws or regulations, political influence, etc.
8. Archive and save all of the “evidence” that will be used in your reporting and story — take screenshots and keep copies, save web pages on Wayback Machine. This provides greater transparency but also helps if there is push back post-publication.
9. If you see your story is leading to areas not covered by your outlet but others, consider collaboration. For help with reporting in other countries, contact organizations like ICIJ or the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) who can help put you in touch with reporters in those countries.
10. Take the time to develop the bigger story — these investigations can take months, sometimes years.

Sources:

1. State corporation records.
2. International corporation records — [OpenCorporates](#), [Companies House](#) (UK), [Luxembourg Business Registers](#) (Luxembourg), [LexisNexis](#) (and similar databases).
3. Publicly available databases created from leaks — [Offshore Leaks](#) (ICIJ), [Aleph](#) (OCCRP), [Wikileaks](#).
4. Sanctions lists — [US Treasury/OFAC sanctions](#), [UK sanctions](#), [EU sanctions](#), [UN sanctions](#), [OpenSanctions](#).
5. [Interpol red notices](#).
6. Court records — all types and all levels.
7. Professional licenses, violations, citations and fines.
8. Deeds, mortgages and liens — from county courts and county property tax appraisers.
9. Lobbying records and campaign contributions — state and federal ([Lobbying Disclosure Act](#) records, [FEC](#), [OpenSecrets](#)).
10. [Foreign Agents Registration Act](#) (FARA) filings.
11. US IRS Form 990s for nonprofits — [Nonprofit Explorer](#) (ProPublica) and [GuideStar](#).
12. Archived versions of websites — [Wayback Machine](#) (Internet Archives).
13. Newspaper and magazine archives.
14. PR newswires.