

# NARRATIVE REPORT 2021

CIFAR.EU



Published: 2022, CiFAR – Civil Forum for Asset Recovery e.V.  
CiFAR – Civil Forum for Asset Recovery e.V.,  
Köpenicker Str. 147, Berlin, Germany  
[www.cifar.eu](http://www.cifar.eu)



# CONTENTS

■ OVERVIEW	1
■ RESULTS AREA 1	3
■ RESULTS AREA 2	10
■ RESULTS AREA 3	16

## OVERVIEW

Berlin, 24 May 2022

While the past year saw the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in some ways restricted our activities and altered the aims we had set out for the year, experience gained from 2020 enabled us to increase our flexibility in response to changing events and saw us increase our activities carried out online and remotely until travel became possible again.

Our work over the past year has been diverse as before and part of our ongoing aim of developing a solid network of skilled civic actors able to work on asset recovery and providing the foundational knowledge for them to do so.

Our **Global Priorities** results area saw the development and promotion of key research in 2021. This included the launching of new research into the utility and effectiveness of sanctions, the launch of our - now global - *Sanctions Watch* web portal, which lists nearly 200 individuals sanctioned worldwide under the EU, UK, Switzerland, US and Canada sanction regimes. It also saw us engage in advocacy around the *Civil Society Principles for Accountable Asset Return*, which were presented and discussed in international conferences, and were used by staff from the UNODC/World Bank StAR Initiative to call for states to publish asset return bilateral agreements at the UNCAC CoSP in December 2021, which we also attended.

Work under our **Strengthening civil society** results area too continued strongly over the year, with a slew of virtual training taking place for investigative journalists and civil society over the first half of the year and the resumption of in-person trainings with our investigative camp in Senegal held in November.

Our focus over the last year in this results area was particularly weighted towards Sub-Saharan Africa, with new outreach to organisations in Burundi, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, and Zambia, amongst others, as well as journalists from across West Africa, and ongoing support to partners in Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique and Moldova.

2021 also saw us hire our first country coordinator for Kenya and plans beginning to take shape to open a new office in Nairobi.

Overall, 2021 was a year of many challenges, particularly related to the pandemic, but one where we were also able to take important strides forward and improve our work. Going forward, the past year has enabled us to lay the base for many new initiatives and to begin to consolidate what we have done.

The CiFAR Team

RESULTS AREA

1

---

# GLOBAL PRIORITIES

---

## OVERVIEW OF RESULTS AREA

While several measures aimed at preventing the theft of public assets have been in place for many years and while criminal proceedings remain the default for recovering any money hidden overseas, the past four years have seen a growth in prominence of new ways to combat illicit financial flows. This has included big pushes on beneficial ownership and generally on fighting financial secrecy, sanctions, and the use of non-conviction-based forfeiture of ill-gotten gains, alongside questions over the utility of traditional methods. Lacking in many of these discussions and policy tendencies though are solid, empirical reasons for favouring certain tools over others. These tools have also only made progress to a certain extent, with issues around transparency and accountability remaining as strong as ever.

This results area transcends country cases and represents our commitment to push the agenda on asset recovery globally – developing the evidence around and advocating for measures that really work to tackle cross-border corruption and asset recovery. These areas represent not only priorities, but also where we have added value as a specialised civil society actor focussing on asset recovery. A key part of this result area is considering both the traditional and the new tools and situating them within the challenging political contexts within which asset recovery is carried out. This result area is also about considering the interlinks between asset recovery and the bigger political issues of transparency, accountability and good governance globally and nationally.

### PRIORITY AREA 1: NEW TOOLS FOR ASSET RECOVERY

*Within the field of asset recovery, traditional, criminal justice approaches are frequently being replaced by calls for states to adopt and use new, non-traditional tools to make case-work more effective and faster. Our priority is to develop a better understanding of non-traditional tools more broadly, their prevalence and effectivity in actually combatting cross-border corruption, facilitating asset recovery and contributing to systemic change in both countries of origin and financial centres.*

Sanctions as a tool for asset recovery remained one of our main areas of work within this priority area. With sanctions becoming a more and more important issue in international politics, our research and analysis is helping to fill the gap between anti-corruption and sanctions policies and understanding how sanctions can be effectively used to advance asset recovery worldwide.

In 2021, we expanded our analysis and advocacy of sanctions as a tool for asset recovery and updated our flagship tool – Sanctions Watch.

## PRIORITY AREA 1: NEW TOOLS FOR ASSET RECOVERY

- In May we launched a global report – [Sanctions as a tool for asset recovery: Global perspectives](#) – looking at the utility and effectiveness of sanctions that sought to reflect the views of both the global financial centres implementing sanctions and of countries of origin of stolen assets, with its executive summary translated into three languages.
- In December, we launched the expanded [Sanctions Watch](#) web portal, which now lists nearly 200 individuals sanctioned worldwide under the most important anti-corruption sanctions regimes: the EU, UK, Switzerland, US and Canada. The database also features maps, guidance for the private sector in sanctions compliance and other resources.

Promotion of this work also picked up over the year, this includes:

- In April 2021 we wrote an op-ed piece that was published on [Open Democracy](#) discussing the removal of the Egypt sanctions that had been imposed following the 2011 revolution.
- In May 2021, the launch of our report was picked up by several media outlets, including [OCCRP](#), [All Africa](#), and [The Namibian](#).
- In September 2021, we were one of the civil society organisations invited to comment on the European Parliament's recommendations on human rights and corruption concerning the expansion of EU Magnitsky sanctions to corruption and for which we provided feedback.

## PRIORITY AREA 2: RETURNING ASSETS TO HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS

*A growing challenge in international asset recovery cases are returns of stolen assets to countries where corrupt regimes are still in power or where there is little to no possibility of citizen oversight of returned assets. This brings into tension the duty to return on the part of the states holding the assets and the duty to return responsibly. Our priority is to develop new understandings of possibilities and creative solutions to return stolen assets to hostile environments in a way that is transparent, accountable and benefits the people from whom the assets were stolen.*

Our work on returning assets to hostile environments is scheduled to increase in 2022 and in 2021 no major new activities were initiated.

Work however continued on the Uzbekistan case, through our membership of the Uzbek Asset Return Network. Within this group, CSO partners advocate to ensure that returns made are undertaken transparently and accountably, given the limitations on civic space that exist currently in Uzbekistan. Our work in this forum focusses on providing comparative, global perspectives on the case.

In 2021 we also provided a training for Venezuelan civic actors on how to engage with asset recovery and how to build strategies for progress on anti-corruption and asset recovery, given the security situation faced for working on this kind of work in the country.



## PRIORITY AREA 3: ASSET RECOVERY AS LAW

*The traditional approach to recovery has focussed on criminal proceedings through strong anti-corruption laws and facilitated by solid asset recovery laws. Our priority in this area is to work with our partner organisations to evaluate, design and advocate for strong laws that both prevent public asset theft and ensure transparent and accountable returns. We also aim to lead and support investigations by investigative journalists and CSOs into compliance with existing laws, including in particularly sanctions.*

The [Civil Society Principles for Accountable Asset Return](#), launched in late 2020, were a key element of our global advocacy for asset recovery laws and policies in 2021. In this regard:

- We presented and discussed the principles in international conferences, including a regional GIZ conference organised in Tirana, the UNCAC Conference of State Parties (CoSP) in Egypt and to UNCAC Coalition member CSOs.
- Along with partner NGOs from across the world, we also submitted the principles at the UN Special Session of the General Assembly against Corruption.

The Principles have been used, among others occasions, by the UNODC/World Bank StAR Initiative to call for states to publish asset return bilateral agreements at the CoSP, showing that they are becoming a best practice worldwide to measure governments' asset recovery commitments on transparency and accountability.

In terms of national laws for asset recovery, this year we focussed on analysing legal frameworks and gaps in several sub-Saharan African countries. This took place in Zambia, Burundi, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda and aimed to map out the legislative and policy gaps that would make asset recovery technically challenging and which would prevent transparency and accountability in any returns. The findings are helping us and other civil society organisations to identify needs and solutions for asset recovery reform, especially in East and Southern Africa. The results of this will be published in 2022 as a series of reports.

## PRIORITY AREA 4: MAKING ASSET RECOVERY MORE VISIBLE

*Despite increased attention over the past four years, citizens and civil society are still largely in the dark about asset recovery in almost all countries. This ranges from the status of ongoing cases around the world, to the processes being used to reclaim stolen assets, and the numbers and actors involved in cases. Our priority in this area is to identify and publicise more information on asset recovery cases in a way that is accessible for everyone.*

As asset recovery becomes of growing interest in more countries, especially in the Global South, we contributed to these discussions both by participating and organising public events, as well as through expanding knowledge on asset recovery.

- Publicising our sanctions work, we organised the webinar "Ten years on: are sanctions working for asset recovery?" in February 2021.
- We presented asset recovery challenges and the role of civil society in a conference on illicit financial flows organised by GIZ in Tirana, attended by academics, prosecutors and public officials from Western Balkans.
- We presented both at the UNCAC CoSP, alongside Nigerian partner CSOs, on asset management in Sub-Saharan Africa, and at an UNCAC Coalition side panel to the COSP preparations on non-trial resolution and management of recovered assets, sponsored by France and Nigeria.

Seven new country profiles were posted on our website in 2022, featuring Angola, Burundi, Ethiopia, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, as well as an update of our Germany profile. The profiles feature an analysis of the anti-corruption and asset recovery frameworks in the country, as well as of ongoing cases, and aim to provide civil society with more information on the situation in key countries, as a way to support their engagement.

## PRIORITY AREA 4: MAKING ASSET RECOVERY MORE VISIBLE

15 blog articles were written and published on our website in 2021, featuring case analysis and explanations of sanctions regimes, and guest blogs on Nigeria and Uganda from experts and partners of CIFAR.

We also updated our website, expanding our tools and support section for civil society, and launching a new portal dedicated to our work with investigative journalists.

RESULTS AREA

2



---

# Strengthening civil society

---

## OVERVIEW OF RESULTS AREA

Despite the emergence of more civil society actors in the field of asset recovery, gaps still exist in civil society knowledge. Even where an understanding of the process of asset recovery is strong, organisations that work on this topic as a part of broader anti-corruption, democracy or human rights work are still likely to need support to understand where and when certain actions should be taken and in developing advocacy and campaigning strategies that build on asset recovery for systemic transparency and accountability reforms. Further, the nature of case-based asset recovery work means that for many civic actors, they will only start working on asset recovery for the first time when a major case breaks, meaning they will also need support to build connections in other countries.

This results area directly builds on the work of our 2016-2019 strategy and aims to ensure an even stronger, more connected and diverse range of civil society actors engaged on the issue of asset recovery globally, with a particular emphasis on the Global South. Activities within this results area focus on capacity and strategy building, networking and on the inclusion of more diverse voices from civil society in global debates.

### PRIORITY AREA 5: CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIZING

*Lack of capacity is still the major issue for greater involvement of civil society in engaging on asset recovery, particularly those from the Global South for whom a major case may be the first time they work on the topic. Our priority in this area is to carry out more capacity building in the Global South for NGOs that need it, continue to work to train investigative journalists to work on asset recovery, and support cross-border strategizing, advocacy and campaigns on cases and on our Global Priorities.*

In 2021, although mostly online due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, capacity building was one of our most intense areas of activity. We provided both NGOs and investigative journalists from different regions with ongoing support and training on asset recovery and investigating corruption.

#### Civil Society Organisations

2021 was a key year in also supporting NGOs to become stronger actors in asset recovery, with a focus particularly on Sub-Saharan African organisations.

- We conducted scoping assessments in five new countries – Zambia, Uganda, South Africa, Ethiopia and Burundi, conducting remote interviews with CSO groups and stakeholders.
- We organised a series of online webinars for NGOs from Portuguese, English and Spanish

## PRIORITY AREA 5: CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIZING

speaking countries, introducing them to tools and strategies for digital safety when working on anti-corruption.

- We organised a training for Moldovan CSOs and public officials that drew on the experience of partner organisations in France and Ukraine to discuss opportunities and challenges in asset recovery.
- We consulted with and supported strategic advocacy planning for NGOs from Mozambique, Moldova, Mexico and Kenya, helping them identify the most pressing issues related to asset recovery in their countries and how they could better engage with cases.
- In line with our strategy, we dedicated particular focus on Kenya as a priority country in 2021 and hired a country coordinator at the end of the year. Our plan is to open an office in Nairobi in 2022, enabling us to work more closely on asset recovery reform in the country and on support to CSOs in East and Southern Africa.

### Investigative journalism

We started the year with a 5-day training on financial investigation skills for 10 journalists from the Western Balkans, North Africa and Europe. This was in addition to the 20 we supported in 2020.

In early 2021, activities under the same project saw the publication of two investigations on cross-border corruption cases produced by our trained journalists. One of these looked at the [missing impact assessment of Italian multinational company ENI](#) in Albania and its effect on the environment. Following the story, one of the journalists started giving environmental impact assessments to other journalists with a partner NGO, using the story as a case study for successful investigations. The other story looked at how [polluting oil from Europe ended up in North Macedonia](#), led by OCCRP with the contribution of some of the trained journalists.

Following the publication of the story, **7 firms were sanctioned and 5 more have been accused by the prosecutor's office** of violation of the law.

## PRIORITY AREA 5: CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIZING

2021 also saw the kick-off of a new project targeting francophone and anglophone journalists from West Africa and Europe. 30 Journalists were selected, met and learned about cross-border corruption and how to conduct investigations during a 5-day, online training and a series of half day webinars in the Summer and Autumn of 2021. In November, we brought the group to Sali, Senegal for a 3-day work camp, where they received additional training and started group investigations supported by mentors. For these investigations, we provided grants to take their stories further. These stories are due to be published in early 2022.

We gave two further training sessions in 2021, during an investigative journalism session on storytelling and asset recovery in Nigeria, in collaboration with our partner CISLAC and attended by 20 journalists from Nigeria.

2021 also saw us publish our first manual for investigative journalists in [English](#) and [French](#). The manual introduces journalists to the basics of financial investigations, access to information, databases and digital security of journalists.

Several trainees of our previous investigative journalism training programmes also continued working on asset recovery and cross-border corruption throughout 2021, showing the sustainability of our work. This includes:

- a story following up on [alleged sanctions breaches of Mubarak assets](#), published in March, with an additional investigation on the topic currently under way.
- a story on the [drugs trade between Syria and Greece](#), published with OCCRP.

Two trainees who published a story on [informal construction endangering Lake Ohrid](#) between Albania and North Macedonia in 2020 were further invited to participate in public events and training sessions on their experience in investigating the case.

## PRIORITY AREA 6: NETWORKING AND INCLUSION

*Civil society organisations have come together for the Global Forum for Asset Recovery in 2017 and other international conferences and events, as well as part of case-specific advocacy groups. Despite this, there are still barriers to cooperation, particularly between civil society organisations, where there is still a big over-representation of civil society from financial centres in events and in coordination groups. There are also still too often civil society organisations working on the same case from two different jurisdictions without cooperating with each other, potentially undermining any gains they could make by acting cooperatively. Our priority is to continue our work to convene civil society across borders on asset recovery, including through supporting civil society actors to build their networks through meetings and events and through expanding our databases of engaged actors and individuals.*

In our ongoing support to civil society organisations and investigative journalists, we connected partners with their peers from different regions and countries, especially when working on cross-border cases.

- We worked to support cross-country CSO networking around both our Civil Society Principles work, as well as in our membership of the UNCAC Coalition and Uzbekistan Asset Return Network.
- We specifically connected Venezuelan civil society with their counterparts in Europe to help them find information on Venezuelan assets stored in the EU and worked with partners in Portugal to gain contacts in Lusophone countries.

In a broader sense, 2021 also saw us further develop our contacts amongst civil society from across the world, positioning us well to provide ad hoc support to connect organisations as needed.

Inclusion of journalists, especially from remote regions in the Global South, was one of the main objectives of our West Africa investigative



## PRIORITY AREA 6: NETWORKING AND INCLUSION

journalism work throughout the year, especially when collaborating on stories and gathering during the work camp in Senegal.

Networking for activists, policymakers and journalists was among the main objective of all our public events, including the workshop on anti-corruption sanctions we organised in February, a workshop on the role of investigative journalism we organised in May, and an event celebrating CiFAR's fifth anniversary.



---

# CiFAR as a strong actor

---

## OVERVIEW OF RESULTS AREA

Since 2016 CiFAR has grown from founding to an organisation well-respected within the asset recovery and anti-corruption fields and able to secure funding to implement projects that fulfil our strategy and mission. We have also professionalised several of our internal systems and developed policies and procedures for the implementation of our work that meet international best practice. Nevertheless, we still face challenges in securing longer term funding and in supporting our core work and have work to do to strengthen our internal governance system as we continue to grow. We also need to understand better how we can respond dynamically to changing conditions and progressing case situations within the framework of project-based work and improve the visibility of our research and tools so that they better reach those who can use the.

As such, our focus over the next four years will also be to strengthen CiFAR's ability to be an expert, agile actor able to engage sustainably on asset recovery and to respond to the needs of others working on cases on the ground.

### PRIORITY AREA 7: STRUCTURES

*Over the course of our first strategy and in establishing CiFAR, we founded our board and created an advisory board made up of five international experts from the civil society, government and academic fields. We also set up an office and built up the structure of the internal organisation, establishing policies on procurement, staff, hiring, conflict of interest and travel. Many of these policies and procedures are solid but will need reflection and possible revision during the lifetime of this strategy. In particular, we will carry out a review of internal governance system, focussing on the roles of the Board and Advisory Board, with a view to increasing independence and accountability within the structures of CiFAR and in our interactions with the outside world. We will also seek to make as many of our processes and procedures as public as possible, as well as our funding, to continue to ensure that we are as transparent ourselves as we demand from others.*

2021 was an important year for our organisational growth. We reviewed our governance system and established the new international board, professionalising its role and clarifying its rules and the mandates of its members.

We also created an overall internal control policy, detailing approval structures and updating and bringing together our different organisational policies.

## PRIORITY AREA 7: STRUCTURES

Thanks to increased financial stability, we also managed to have a more stable staffing structure, with two directors appointed and programme coordinators hired for longer terms, as well as regular help from interns.

## PRIORITY AREA 8: VISIBILITY AND FUNDING

*Our funding has grown over the past four years and we have a base of donors with whom we have now cooperated with on several projects. Further, we have built visibility for ourselves and the issues we work on through speaking at prominent international conferences, our website, press releases and news stories about us. Our priorities in this area is to ensure that we are growing sustainably through building our base of donors and increasing our funding levels to be able to cover all our work areas effectively, including by increasing our staffing capacity and seeking longer-term and non-project based funding. We are also working to improve our visibility through developing our communications strategy, with a focus on reaching relevant audiences with our messages and on being seen more often as a focal point for our area of expertise.*

2021 was a year of marked financial growth for CiFAR. We increased our income from €127,000 in 2020 to €235,000 in 2021, allowing us to conduct many more activities and have stronger impact. We managed to diversify our donor base, to include the GIZ Anti-Corruption and Integrity Programme, and strengthened our relationship with our historical donors, the National Endowment for Democracy and the GIZ Illicit Financial Flows Programme.

We kicked off our communication strategy in 2021, diversifying and increasing our social media, expanding our presence on LinkedIn and Twitter, and updating our website with more content. We also focused on establishing stronger media contacts to share our reports and statements.

Throughout the year we had:

- 10,185 website visitors to our main website and 4,550 visitors to Sanctions Watch.
- 468 Twitter followers and 58103 impressions
- 767 Facebook followers, with a reach of 3462 impressions.





CiFAR - Civil Forum for Asset Recovery  
e.V.

Köpenicker Str. 147  
Berlin, Germany  
[www.cifar.eu](http://www.cifar.eu)

Support us: [cifar.eu/support-us](http://cifar.eu/support-us)  
Contact us: [info@cifar.eu](mailto:info@cifar.eu)