

# 2022

Annual  
report



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# Foreword

**While our 2022 began and ended with hard-hitting accountability journalism in Europe, it was also the year when Lighthouse moved decisively beyond these borders. From hunger profiteers roiling global food markets to biometrics in African elections; and Syrian “blood” phosphates to spyware sold into Sudan; Lighthouse broke global cross-border stories.**

The driving force in these collaborations has been our interdisciplinary investigations team with the hard skills that make us one of the most sought-after investigative partners in journalism. We continue to see that a small team with skill-sets that don't typically get to work together — from data and open source to FOIA and money trails — can have an outsize impact.

This was underlined in April 2022 when the leadership of the EU border agency resigned the day after an exposé from a Lighthouse-led media coalition including Le Monde, Der Spiegel and The Guardian. The final revelation of Frontex's involvement in the campaign of illegal pushbacks in the Aegean was the culmination of two years of reporting. Toppling the head of Frontex was a clear win for accountability journalism and testimony to the way in which different reporting approaches from open source to data analysis complement each other and sustain media coverage for long enough to exert real pressure.

Impact is not always so direct. This was also the year when we turned our focus on driving change into a dedicated role with the appointment of an Impact Editor. At Lighthouse we cover the issues where we want to see progress and believe that collaborative journalism can make a difference. We will be showing our work on Impact and playing our part in making this aspect of non-profit journalism better understood.

It was a year when Lighthouse's importance as a coalition-builder shone through. We were able to restore attention to the horrific mass death at a border post outside the Spanish exclave of Melilla in June by working with European and Moroccan partners. The chilling film that we produced showed how 3-D modelling and open source can make sense of contested events. The Melilla work earned one of two nominations we received for the European press prize.

The second was for our on spyware that has illustrated the threats journalists face while also provoking some of their best investigations. This is true in the case of Inside Story, a small newsroom wrestling with the state in what's been called Greece's Watergate. Working with their brave reporters and Israel's Haaretz, we were able to show how Israeli spyware vendor Intellexa has used Greece to enable it to sell the dangerous Predator system to militia leaders in fragile countries like Sudan. 'Flight of the Predator' went on to earn a European Press Prize nomination.

We also saw the results from a year-long project with Bellingcat where we created the largest data-driven investigation into QAnon in Europe, setting up a database of channels and posts in order to reveal the dynamics of viral conspiracy theories. This platform is now providing the raw material for research and investigations from academics to US media outlets as we seek to understand how alt-media narratives travel into the mainstream.

The year ended with the first of what would become a string of important algorithmic accountability stories and some of our most ambitious work to date. It's a demonstration of the ways in which new approaches can serve accountability journalism and specialist skills can illuminate systems, demonstrate harms and assist affected communities. And when this is worked on collaboratively it can serve more global publics, travel across new borders and language barriers.

**Daniel Howden**  
Managing Director

# Our impact

In March of this year, the EU announced that it was tightening rules for financial markets. This long-awaited step followed our Hunger Profiteers investigation which revealed the lobbying that sabotaged efforts to prevent investors from driving up global food prices.

Then in April, we learned that the EU was imposing sanctions on major players in the phosphates trade that were named in our Syria's Bloody Phosphates investigation. Shortly after we published Black Sites, the European Court of Auditors began assessing whether the EU Commission had effectively protected the EU's financial interests. It's now begun taking steps to ensure that countries receive EU funding

only when they respect the rule of law. This was welcome news in relation to the impact on EU processes of some of our 2022 investigations, and there was more.

Work out of our Surveillance Newsroom forced the Greek government to admit that it licensed the export of Predator spyware to Sudan — now in civil war — after Flight of the Predator shed light on Greece's role in Europe's growing spyware scandal. The EU's PEGA Committee of Inquiry had already begun investigating the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance software thanks in part to our earlier story about Europe's NSOs. Our investigations made inroads at national levels too. Our

reconstruction of the Melilla Massacre, which exposed the EU's complicity in the bloody events of that day, sparked inquiries in the Spanish Congress and a formal vote of disapproval of the Interior Minister. In the UK House of Commons, following the launch of our Left Behind series which revealed that not one Afghan had been brought to the UK under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme a year after its launch, MPs questioned the government's commitments.

These outcomes represent steps in longer processes that can ultimately deliver change. As we pioneer innovation in investigative journalism, we also seek to drive progress

on the issues we cover. Central to this mission is our growing work to create positive outcomes for the communities most affected by the stories. Some of our most significant impact takes place behind the scenes. While reconstructing the Melilla Massacre, we helped a number of survivors obtain legal support. We continue to follow their stories and to learn from affected communities about how our work can contribute to real-life impact.





# Team

# Directors



**Ariadne Papagapitos**  
Director



**Daniel Howden**  
Managing Director



**Klaas van Dijken**  
Director



**Ludo Hekman**  
Director

# Core team



**Bashar Deeb**  
OSINT investigator



**Beatriz Ramalho Da Silva**  
Junior Investigative Reporter



**Charlotte Alfred**  
Senior Editor



**Crofton Black**  
Senior Reporter



**Eva Constantaras**  
Data editor



**Gabriel Geiger**  
Investigative Reporter



**Halima Salat Barre**  
FBJP Fellow



**Htet Aung**  
Data Scientist



**Jack Sapoch**  
Junior OSINT investigator



**Jonathan Moens**  
Investigative Reporting Fellow



**Jessica Purkiss**  
Investigative Editor



**Justin Casimir Braun**  
Data Fellow

# Core team



**Katerina Stavroula**  
Administrator



**Lionel Faul**  
Investigations Editor



**Loane Alonzeau**  
Impact Fellow



**Margot Gibbs**  
Investigative Reporter



**Maud Jullien**  
Deputy Investigations Editor



**May Bulman**  
Investigations Editor



**Melissa Del Bosque**  
Investigations Editor



**Monica Camacho**  
OSINT reporter



**Nalinee Maleeyakul**  
FBJP Fellow



**Tessa Pang**  
Impact Producer



**Thin Lei Win**  
Lead Reporter Food Systems



**Tomas Status**  
Investigative Reporter



# Supervisory board



Andrew Feinstein



Maria Margaronis



Merel Borger



Sarah Stillman



Tuesday Reitano

# Our year in stories

JANUARY  
EUROPOL TO BE  
EUROPE'S NSA?



In partnership with



JANUARY  
SYRIANS  
FLEEING  
DENMARK



In partnership with



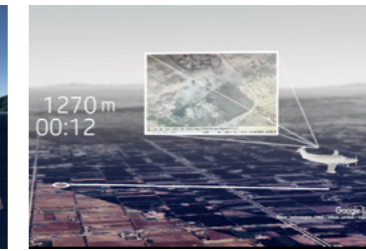
FEBRUARY  
AEGEAN  
PUSHBACKS  
LEAD TO  
DROWNING



In partnership with



FEBRUARY  
FROM  
SWITZERLAND  
WITH LOVE



In partnership with



MARCH  
UKRAINE  
EXODUS



In partnership with



MARCH  
SYRIA'S  
RUSSIAN-BACKED  
DEMOLITION  
CAMPAIGN



In partnership with



APRIL  
PUTIN'S SYRIAN  
MERCENARIES



In partnership with



MAY  
THE HUNGER  
PROFITEERS



In partnership with



MAY  
BIOMETRICS  
IN AFRICA'S  
ELECTIONS



In partnership with



JUNE  
JUNK SCIENCE  
UNDERPINS  
FRAUD SCORES



In partnership with



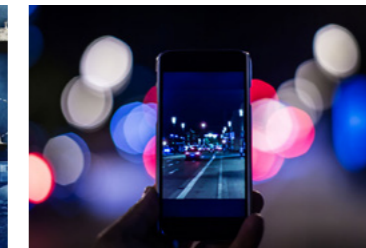
JUNE  
SYRIA'S  
"BLOODY"  
PHOSPHATES



In partnership with



AUGUST  
REVEALING  
EUROPE'S NSO



In partnership with



SEPTEMBER  
BIG MEAT



In partnership with



OCTOBER  
TRACKING  
QANON  
IN EUROPE



In partnership with



OCTOBER  
FATE OF  
UKRAINE'S  
FOREIGN  
STUDENTS



In partnership with



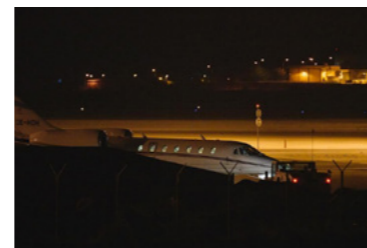
NOVEMBER  
RECONSTRUCTING  
THE MELILLA  
MASSACRE



In partnership with



NOVEMBER  
FLIGHT OF  
THE PREDATOR



In partnership with



DECEMBER  
THE LEFT  
BEHIND



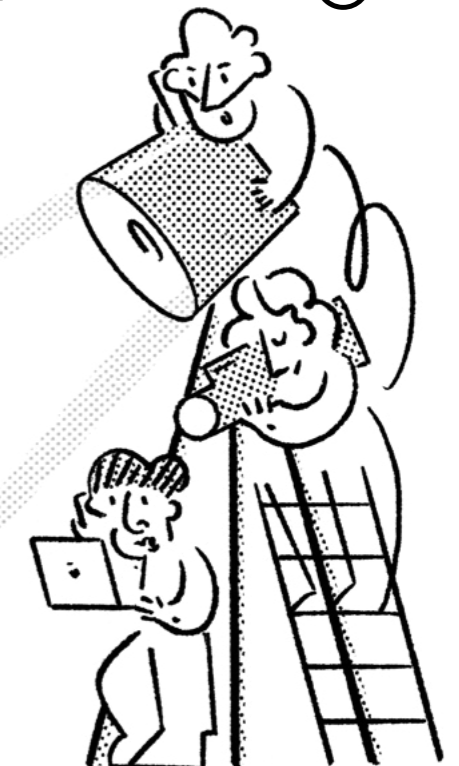
In partnership with



DECEMBER  
EUROPE'S  
BLACK SITES



In partnership with





# Newsrooms

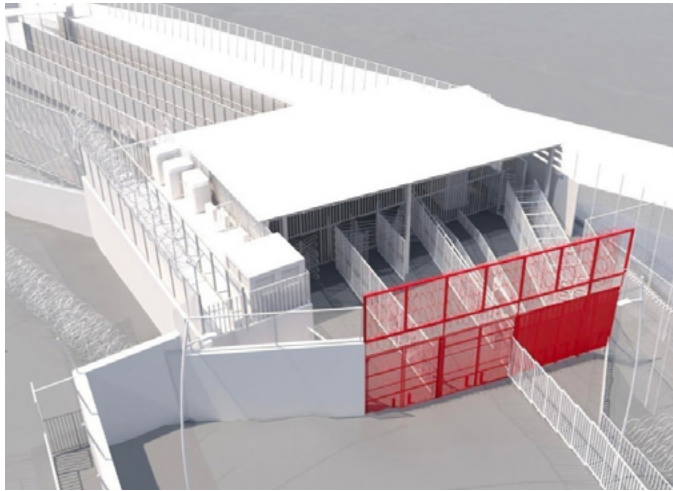
# Borders



## BORDERS

As Europe welcomed Ukrainian refugees with open arms following the Russian invasion, non-white people fleeing conflict and persecution continued to be unlawfully and often violently turned away from EU borders.

The illegal pushbacks of non-white refugees by European border police that we exposed in 2021 continued into 2022. Despite indisputable evidence that such violations were taking place, the EU failed to take action to prevent such abuse.



Our Borders investigations in 2022 extended beyond the pushbacks themselves to reveal the systematic and premeditated nature with which they are carried out, focusing on the systems created to enable such actions to take place, and to attempt to keep them a secret.

We revealed that Europe's border agency Frontex was systematically involved in forcibly turning boats of refugees around in the Aegean, according to its own database. We exposed how asylum seekers were forced to do the Greek police's dirty work of carrying out illegal expulsions of other refugees.

Our Black Sites investigation revealed how police along the EU border were using clandestine detention sites – including cages and shipping containers – to imprison, and sometimes torture, asylum seekers before forcing them across the border. We were able to show that these are not isolated sites, but part of an EU-funded system.

We produced a visual reconstruction of the Melilla Massacre, the fatal mass expulsion of asylum seekers at the Spanish enclave's border with Morocco in June 2022. While both Spain and Morocco denied responsibility for the deaths of at least 23 people, our investigation uncovered evidence showing a high degree of accountability on both sides.

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## IMPACT

**Our Black Sites investigation was used by lawyers and budget experts to demonstrate the potential unlawfulness of the EU funding streams flowing to the sites where human rights abuses are committed. Bulgarian law enforcement opened an investigation into one of the sites, and in a rare move nearly all Bulgarian media outlets were covering a migration story.**

**The Spanish government was forced to answer for their role in the bloody incident in Melilla following our revelations. The film that we produced as part of the investigation was screened in the European Parliament, while Spanish MPs have repeatedly used the findings to call for an admission of accountability from Spain and the EU.**

**Frontex chief Fabrice Leggeri was forced to resign within days of the publication of our investigation into the agency's involvement in illegal pushbacks of asylum seekers in the Aegean.**

# Surveillance



## SURVEILLANCE

This year saw the first in an ongoing series of investigations into Europe’s hidden enablers of mobile phone surveillance: companies which exploit communications vulnerabilities to track people’s locations and intercept calls, often selling to problematic regimes.

In one investigation we revealed how an Italian company posing as an SMS delivery service had been using Pacific island phone networks to send tens of thousands of secret location tracking messages around the world.



We took the lid off Europe’s biggest surveillance scandal in *Flight of the Predator*, showing how a private jet connected Greece’s “Watergate” crisis to the sale of hacking tech to Sudan, via a labyrinthine concealed corporate network.

In other work we examined controversies around EU-wide efforts to bulk up law enforcement tech powers, from government access to WhatsApp messages to Europol’s unprecedented pooling of personal data.

In an examination of problematic commodification by European companies of data belonging to inhabitants of the Global South, we took a deep dive into Kenya’s election cycle as the country grappled with flawed French biometric technology. Our *Biometrics in Africa’s Elections* work uncovered internal documentation of “a disaster unfolding in slow motion”.

A third strand of our work focused on how vulnerable people in one EU country are “scored” and “flagged” by data-driven systems as being likely to commit fraud, with little scientific basis, but life changing implications. In *Junk Science Underpins Fraud Scores* we reconstructed a Dutch risk scoring system and revealed how municipalities were flagging people for investigation based on their gender, nationality and education. In *The Algorithm Addiction* we exposed profiling in low income neighbourhoods via a banned algorithmic model.

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## IMPACT

**We choose our partners strategically to deliver the best impact for our investigations. This means working with a combination of major international platforms, top tier national media and cutting edge investigative newsrooms. Impacts seen in 2022 attest that this approach is working.**

**Our *Flight of the Predator* story on Greece’s spyware scandal was shortlisted for the European Press Prize. It also led to government officials admitting Greece’s role in selling hacking technology to Sudan as the country’s simmering conflict broke into open warfare.**

**Following our report on Kenya’s election, French authorities opened an investigation into improper use and storage of Kenyan electors’ data, while the company in question was forced to update its due diligence plan to match international standards.**

**Our investigations into welfare fraud flagging systems in the Netherlands had multipolar impact: they sparked a legal complaint to the data protection authority, two planned lawsuits and an internal governmental investigation, while municipalities cancelled the use of problematic tools en masse as our piece came out.**

# Food systems





## FOOD SYSTEMS

The Russian invasion of Ukraine propelled food systems into the centre of the public debate. It demonstrated how our current system had been dependent on international trade, particularly from Russia, for fertilisers and cereals to feed the animals in our meat industry.

On top of this, global economic insecurity made food commodities an attractive safe haven for managed money. As a consequence, food prices were rising quickly, adding to an already developing cost of living crisis.



These developments forced us to reconsider existing investigations, but also presented us with an opportunity to demonstrate some of the systemic failures in the current system.

In several publications, notably *Hunger Profiteers*, we demonstrated the increased grip of the financial sector and exposed the major winners of the system: the profiteers that speculated on hunger and made billions by doing so.

In April we presented hard evidence on how fund managers and investors profited from and exacerbated the food crisis, at the expense of European citizens and developing countries relying on food imports. We followed this with two investigations exposing the pension funds involved and identifying the top hedge funds making billions out of the crisis.

On a separate track, we traced how major meat companies raked in public funding but circumvented paying taxes with questionable offshore constructions.

## IMPACT

**The initial *Hunger Profiteers* investigation created a new beat, with dozens of publications referring to our work, from long-form documentaries and TV news shows to the *New York Times*.**

**It was quickly picked up by NGOs and politicians. As a result, petitions were organised and our evidence featured in proposals by MEPs to curb the financial markets.**

**Tangible impact followed in the Spring of 2023. A majority of the European Parliament voted in favour of a proposal to tighten the rules for financial markets.**

**The proposal included a revision of the exemptions for non-financial companies — food multinationals such as *Cargill* — limiting their opportunity to speculate with food as well as giving more power to competent authorities and increasing the level of transparency.**

# War winners



## WAR WINNERS

The War Winners newsroom documents profiteering and exploitation in countries impacted by conflict in partnership with investigative journalists and newsrooms on the ground and in exile. In 2022 our pilot on Syria produced a series of investigations that broke news, contributed to international accountability and fostered lasting cooperation between Syrian investigative journalists and international media.

Our Syrian’s Russian-Backed Demolition Campaign investigation revealed that former opposition neighbourhoods in Syria had been reduced to rubble by Russian-trained demining crews after fighting ended. While most journalists are banned from entering these areas, we documented the extent of the destruction through analysis of satellite imagery, open source images, personal testimonies and photos, and tweets from the Syrian military.



After Russia invaded Ukraine, we helped correct an international narrative emerging about willing Syrian recruits pouring into Ukraine to fight alongside Russia. The Syrian recruits we spoke to for our Putin’s Syrian Mercenaries story were not bloodthirsty ideologues but desperate men preyed upon by the exploitative mercenary system Russia had set up in Syria, including some coerced into enlisting in order to free detained relatives.

Our most ambitious investigation to date exposed a booming market in phosphates exported from Syria to Europe’s fertiliser markets, enriching the Syrian government and a sanctioned Russian oligarch. Using ship tracking, customs records, trade data, open source tools and extensive ground-reporting, Syria’s ‘Bloody’ Phosphates documented the complex network of shell companies, shady shipping operators and Syrian war profiteers benefiting from Europe’s appetite for cheap resources, despite their origin.

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## IMPACT

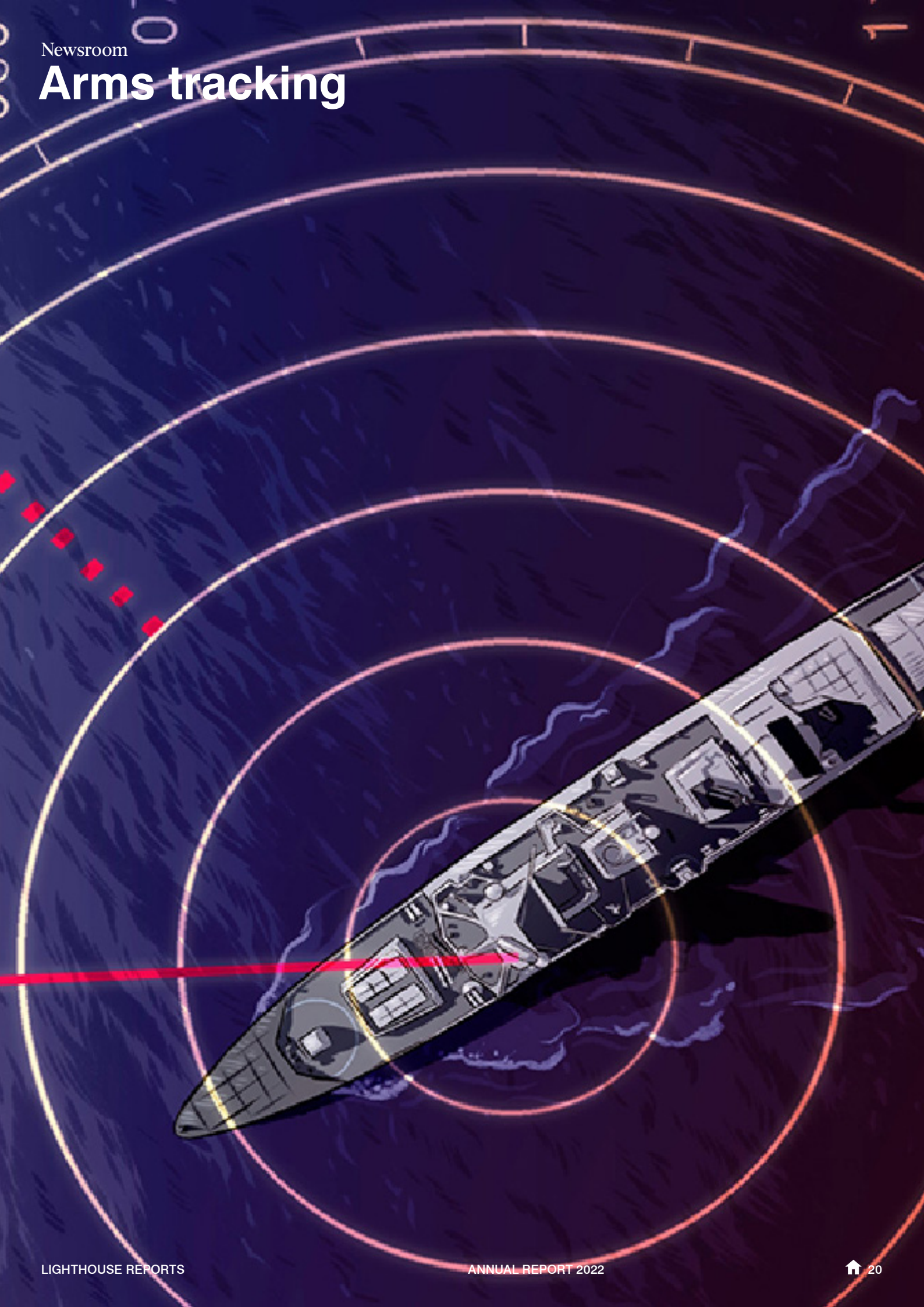
**Our investigation into Russia’s demolition campaign helped preserve evidence of what legal experts described as potential war crimes, and was included in reports by the UN human rights office. It was also used to put pressure on the Syrian authorities to clear mines according to international humanitarian principles.**

**The investigation into the shady Syrian phosphates industry resulted in the EU closing a legal loophole allowing the trade to flourish. One month after it was published, the EU sanctioned the Syrian security company transporting phosphates and its two owners, referring to their role in both phosphates and the recruitment of mercenaries to Ukraine.**

**Several months later, the EU imposed sanctions on the two main players in the trade – Syria’s official authority overseeing phosphates and Russian company Sroytransgaz which controls the industry in Syria. The company denied any connection to its Syrian offshoots but we revealed extensive links to the oligarch-run company.**

**In Russia, the nonprofit founded by jailed opposition politician Alexei Navalny used our reporting for a follow-up investigation into the senior Russian officials profiting from Syrian phosphates. In Syria, the phosphates investigation has been extensively used as a training resource for up-and-coming Syrian investigative journalists by our Syrian partner, SIRAJ.**

# Arms tracking



## ARMS TRACKING

Exposing the arms industries excessively profiting from war and oppression has been the driving force for the Arms Newsroom since its early days.

That didn't change in 2022, but the conflict in focus did: Ukraine became the epicentre. As soon as Russia invaded Ukraine, the demand from Kyiv for weaponry skyrocketed. Prices rose sharply and supply chains became increasingly complex, creating an opportunity for profiteers and an important reason for Lighthouse to start monitoring brokers.

For our War Profiteers investigation we obtained detailed documents of a lucrative arms deal. We were able to corroborate the findings and published the story with Dutch, German, Estonian and Ukrainian partners, addressing the excessive profits made at the expense of the Ukraine army.



We didn't lose sight of other conflicts. In other investigations we exposed how EU-produced weapons were ending up in the wrong hands, including how Swiss airpower was used to bomb civilians in Afghanistan and how Dutch and French technology was sustaining dictatorship in Egypt.

## IMPACT

**Our War Profiteers investigation led a Dutch MP to ask parliamentary questions scrutinising how aware the state was of the risk of excessive profiteering by brokers. MPs from left to right agreed they needed to be more vigilant when procuring arms and ammunition for Ukraine.**

**The Dutch customs agency confirmed that the findings of our investigation enabled them to investigate the Dutch company involved, an inquiry that is still ongoing.**

**Our work on Ukraine was the starting point for a network of journalists to continue to cooperate in what we call a community of accountability. They share information, suggest investigations and are currently working with us on two other Ukraine-related investigations.**

**Our work on the Egypt navy featured as evidence in a court case against the Dutch state questioning the legality of the arms exports to Egypt. According to legal experts it set some new boundaries on what kind of arms exports can be justified by an EU member state.**

# Migration



## MIGRATION

The war in Ukraine prompted an exodus of refugees unseen in Europe since the Second World War. We decided to focus on underreported aspects of the crisis and to examine how, more broadly, it would affect Europe's migration and asylum policies.

Weeks into the conflict, we used our open source investigative capacity to follow the fortunes of Ukraine's large number of non-Western residents as they fled. Our Ukraine's Exodus investigation revealed that while Ukrainians were able to cross into other countries without ID, non-white people had been placed in detention sites in Poland, Austria and Hungary.

Six months on, we found that thousands of non-white students who had fled Ukraine were being denied the right to pursue their studies in the EU and were facing expulsion. We exposed the double standards in the bloc's asylum policy and a new tendency by member states to pick and choose who gets to stay based on not the situation they are fleeing, but where they are from.



The shift is also apparent in the contrast between the bloc's warm welcoming of Ukrainians and the closed doors faced by Afghans – even those who served Western interests and values.

The first investigation in our Left Behind series revealed that the UK failed to follow through on its promise to evacuate those who worked for them. We found that no one had been evacuated under Britain's Afghan resettlement scheme a year after it was set up and that many of those left behind had faced torture and death waiting for a response from the UK.

## IMPACT

**Our revelations that Afghans who worked with the UK and had been promised resettlement were being beaten and tortured prompted a parliamentary debate on the issue, in which ministers were confronted with the findings and forced to respond.**

**The story was picked up by other media outlets and shared by senior political figures on social media. Since its publication, a number of applicants to the scheme have finally been relocated to the UK, although the process remains slow.**

**Our reporting on the detention of non-white students in Europe was widely picked up by media outlets in Europe and in the US, leading to diaspora and advocacy groups raising the issue on social media and in closed meetings with European leaders.**

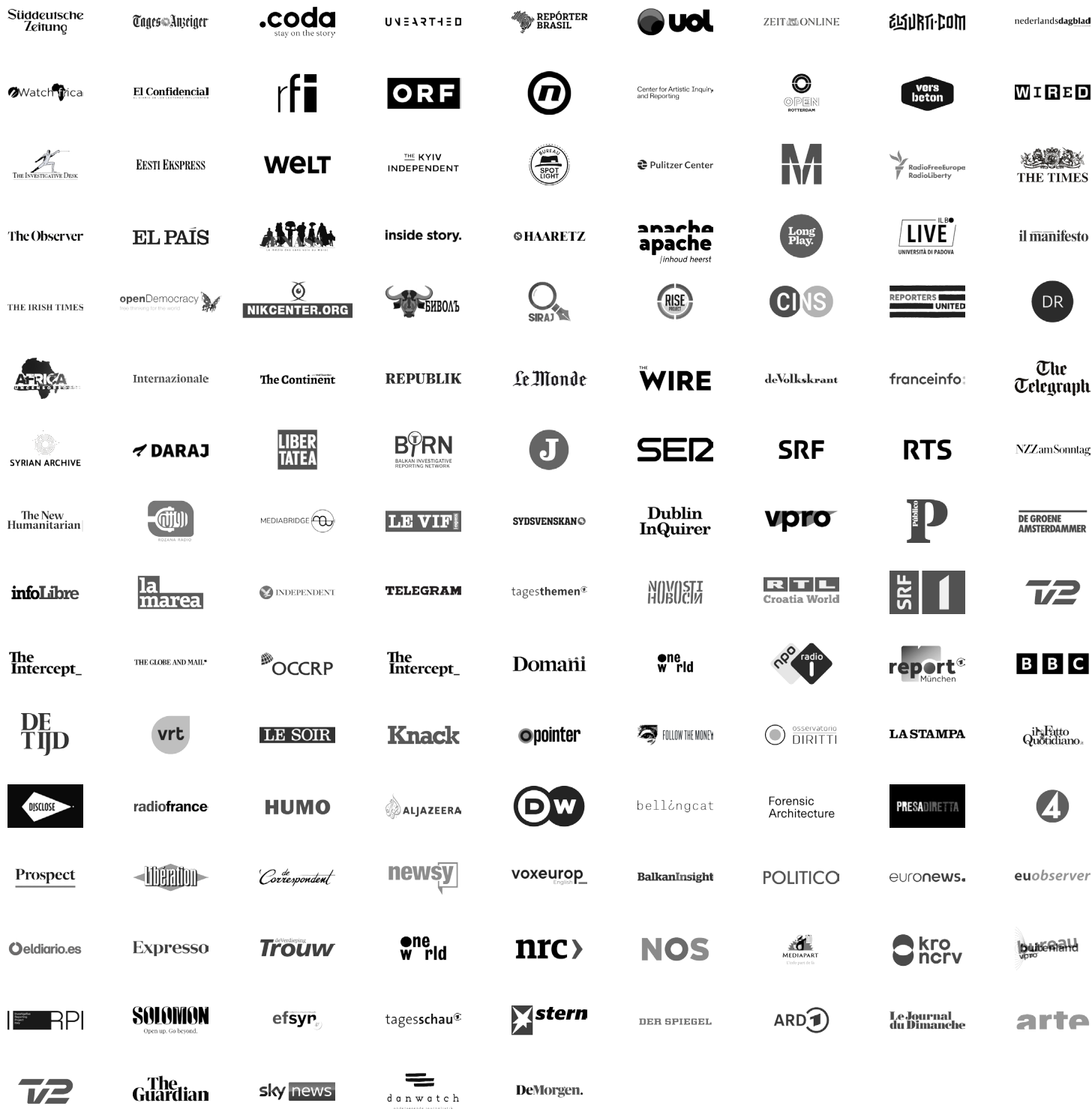
**In the months following Ukraine's Exodus investigation, all but one of the students we reported on were released from detention. Still, it's unclear whether all non-white third-country nationals fleeing Ukraine were.**



# Media partners



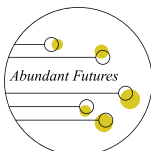
# Media partners





# Donors

# Donors





# Financials

# Financials

NOTES TO THE STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE	2022 (€)	2021 (€)
<b>INCOME</b>		
Grants and contract income	1,380,239	867,129
Media partners	4,461	20,876
Lighthouse sessions participations fees	2,975	2,250
Other income	8,719	400
	<b>1,396,394</b>	<b>890,655</b>
<b>WAGES AND SALARIES</b>		
Wages and salaries	190,853	103,500
Socials security charges	38,943	18,883
Holiday payments	12,143	8,280
Core team compensation	540,969	231,912
Wage tax from previous years	4,865	—
	<b>787,773</b>	<b>362,575</b>
<b>PROJECT COSTS</b>		
Consultancy costs	2,718	17,710
Freelancers	212,575	224,325
Software, subscriptions and hosting costs	5,767	10,669
Travel costs	61,021	25,552
Workshop costs	6,091	2,516
Other costs	9,032	5,852
	<b>297,204</b>	<b>286,624</b>
<b>DEPRECIATION TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS</b>		
Equipment	<b>3,771</b>	<b>1,285</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION COSTS</b>		
Accountancy costs	29,428	24,122
Auditor's costs	14,034	10,830
Bank and interest charges	6,263	5,703
Supervisory board expenses	1,494	—
Insurance costs	2,957	2,185
Software, subscriptions and hosting costs	19,637	11,083
Office and phone costs	39,586	17,735
Travel costs	56,237	13,234
Web development	4,950	3,354
Other costs	27,517	-1,165
	<b>202,103</b>	<b>87,081</b>

# Acknowledgements

Lighthouse Reports is built on the trust and support of our partners, our funders and the network of terrific and committed freelance and staff journalists who have made our newsrooms part of their most ambitious work. We are incredibly grateful for everything you do to promote and sustain our work.

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**Facebook/lighthousereports**

