

Annual Report

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Foreword

There is no singular role for nonprofit newsrooms but there is a common question that all of them should address: How is our work additional to what's already out there?

Nonprofits rely on donors large and small, from individual members and supporters to foundations and national or regional funders to support mission-driven public interest journalism. These donations have to have an effect.

There are many great newsrooms whose work provides a compelling answer to the question of additionality from combatting news deserts blighting local communities to topic-based ventures which bring an expert lens to big topics from health to criminal justice.

At Lighthouse we're transnational in our mission, we range across public interest themes and we intentionally blend approaches to reporting and storytelling. So our version of the question is this: Would this story, this investigation, this experiment happen without us?

This is the question that drove some of the best work we produced in 2023. It also provides the criteria by which we understand what makes a Lighthouse story.

Our Suspicion Machines series combined reporting on welfare surveillance and algorithmic targeting of vulnerable communities across a broad range of countries. The little-and-large coalition of media partners — in WIRED and metro newsroom Vers Beton — enabled us to combine international reach and sophistication with deeply local reporting, in a way that would not have come together otherwise.

The collaboration between our data team and investigative reporters in obtaining and then analysing the “holy trinity of algorithmic accountability”: the training data, model file and code for a system used by a government agency to automate risk assessments for citizens seeking government services. The result was hailed as a landmark in AI accountability reporting. The methodology and approach enabled us to go on and partner with El Confidential in Spain to delve into algorithms used to target alleged sickness benefit cheats; and with Le Monde in France to break new ground in reporting on a secretive algorithm which scores half the population for fraud risks based on often arbitrary criteria.

We were able to take what we learned into workshops, conferences and festivals around the world to share it with interested reporters and researchers and grow the community doing algorithmic accountability reporting from Chile and Brazil, to Sweden and Lebanon.

The impact of the work has been felt in Rotterdam, the Dutch port where our reporting went deepest, as city authorities scrapped plans for a new risk assessment algorithm. It fed into the policy-making process around the EU's AI act and a case study to inform the work of the digital rights community, practitioners and academics.

Finally, the materials that have come from this family of investigations, helped us make the argument that Lighthouse is equivalent to a peer-reviewed research organisation, a key argument that convinced Eurostat to share a major data set with us in pursuit of our next big data investigation.

The combination of innovation, impact and collaboration was in evidence across many of our other investigations of the year. The West's Next Plastics Dump brought together leading Thai and Burmese investigative outlets with European counterparts to investigate a cynical trade that sees wealthy nations dump their waste in one of the world's most vulnerable states. The collaborative supply chain reporting that drove the work was written up as a practical guide for other reporters to deploy in their work.

The Left Behind series brought home to the UK, France and the Netherlands the human cost of these countries' chaotic exit from Kabul and the betrayals that followed, and it did so in partnership with Afghan journalists. The stories provoked strong responses in all of the countries, triggering parliamentary debates, calls for public inquiries and, most importantly, a way out for some of the subjects of the reporting.

Daniel Howden
Managing Director

Our

investigative journalism

In 2023, we directed our in-house expertise toward exposing bias in an algorithm used to predict welfare fraud. Journalists have been trying to get under the hood of these AI systems for some time. Suspicion Machines, published with WIRED Magazine, was the culmination of two years of research, trial and error. No other newsroom has obtained this level of access to a predictive algorithm, which was having huge consequences for welfare applicants. After publication, Rotterdam city authorities abandoned plans to build a new algorithm to replace the one we took apart.

Our investigation into a similar French risk-profiling algorithm, led to MPs calling for an inquiry into its deployment and civil society groups joining in an open letter to the Prime Minister to call for a stop to its use. This work put us on the radar of decision makers looking at how to deploy AI systems ethically. Lighthouse's Managing Director was invited to give the keynote address at a seminar of policymakers from Latin America working on early regulation of the use and transparency of AI tools in public agencies.

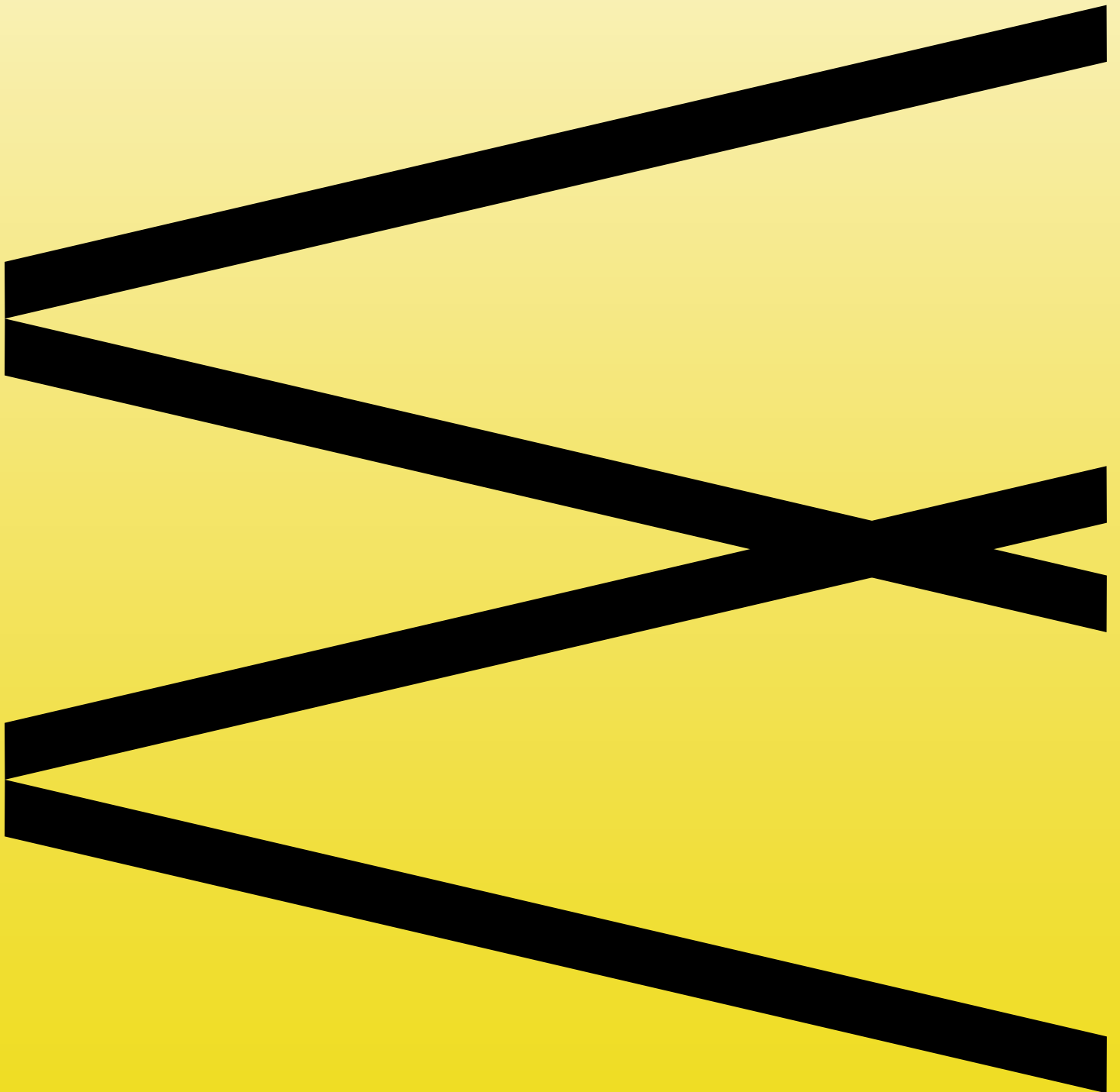
Also from the Surveillance Newsroom, findings from Flight of the Predator contributed to the sanctioning of bad actors by the US Treasury Department. Ghost in the Network prompted a recommendation by the GSMA that its members cut off Andreas Fink's access, and our exposure of Italian geolocation firm Tykelab led to a sudden decrease in observed traffic.

The Food Systems Newsroom also emerged as a leading voice on the underreported issue of lobbies' role in shaping European agricultural policy. The lack of transparency in lobbying makes it difficult to scrutinise private interests behind policymaking. Europe's Potemkin Lobby revealed how Copa-Cogeca opposes environmental reforms. Alternative farmers unions, who often feel threatened by Copa-Cogeca, told us that the investigation led to them gaining more access to decision-making spaces. And, thanks to Hunger Profiteers, last year the EU tightened rules for financial markets to curb excessive speculation.

Finally, after reporting on Europe's secretive purchase of Syrian phosphates, the EU sanctioned key players we named.

The following report brings the impact of our newsrooms into greater focus.

Team



Directors



Ariadne Papagapitos
Impact Director



Daniel Howden
Managing Director



Klaas van Dijken
Director



Ludo Hekman
Director

Core team



Bashar Deeb
OSINT Investigator



Beatriz Ramalho Da Silva
Investigative Reporter



Charlotte Alfred
Senior Editor



Crofton Black
Senior Reporter



Elena DeBre
Investigative Reporting Fellow



Eva Constantaras
Data Editor



Fahim Abed
Investigations Editor



Gabriel Geiger
Investigative Reporter



Halima Salat Barre
FBJP Fellow

Core team



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OSINT Investigator



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Investigations Editor



Jonathan Moens
Investigative Reporting Fellow



Justin Casimir Braun
Data Reporter



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HR and Operations Associate



Lionel Faull
Investigations Editor



Loane Alonzeau
Impact Fellow



Margot Gibbs
Investigative Reporter

Core team



Maud Jullien
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 Staius
Investigative Reporter

Supervisory board



Ayna Smith



Gauri van Gulik



Maria Margaronis



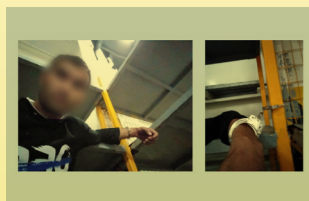
Sarah Stillman



Tuesday Reitano

Calendar of the year

JANUARY
DETAINED
BELOW DECK



In partnership with

M

JANUARY
WAR
PROFITEERS



In partnership with

WELT

MARCH
SUSPICION
MACHINES



In partnership with

WIRED

APRIL
INSIDE CROATIA'S
SECRET WHATSAPP
GROUP



In partnership with

NOVOSTA

APRIL
FRANCE'S
FORGOTTEN
AFGHAN SPIES



In partnership with

Le Monde

APRIL
THE HEDGE FUNDS
CASHING IN ON THE
FOOD PRICE SPIKE



In partnership with

The Guardian

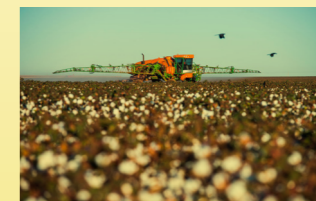
APRIL
SPAIN'S
AI DOCTOR



In partnership with

El Confidencial

APRIL
EUROPE'S FUNDING
OF EU-BANNED
PESTICIDES



In partnership with

DE GROENE AMSTERDAMMER

APRIL
ETHNIC
PROFILING



In partnership with

nrc

APRIL
TOXIC RAIN



In partnership with

The Guardian

MAY
THE INSTAGARCHS



In partnership with

.coda
stay on the story

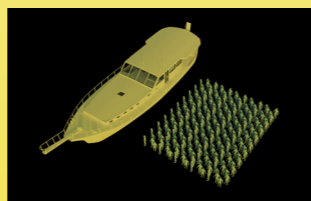
MAY
GHOST IN
THE NETWORK



In partnership with

DER SPIEGEL

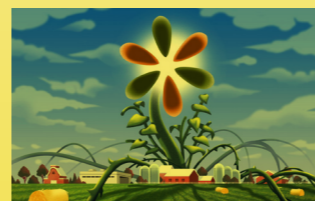
JUNE
THE CROTONE
COVER UP



In partnership with

Domani

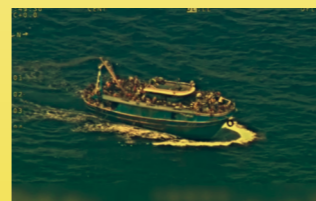
JUNE
EUROPE'S
POTEMKIN LOBBY



In partnership with

POLITICO

JUNE
DROWNING
IN LIES



In partnership with

DER SPIEGEL

JULY
AT WAR
WITHOUT AMMO



In partnership with

THE KYIV INDEPENDENT

JULY
SMUGGLER,
WARLORD,
EU ALLY



In partnership with

DER SPIEGEL

JULY
GERMANY'S
AFGHAN BETRAYAL



In partnership with

Süddeutsche Zeitung

SEPTEMBER
SYRIAN WOMEN
ON THE RUN



In partnership with

NEW LINES MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER
LEFT FOR DEAD



In partnership with

Trouw

OCTOBER
THE WEST'S
NEXT PLASTICS
DUMP



In partnership with

Frontier
MAGAZINE

OCTOBER
ANIMAL
WELFARE
WRECKED



In partnership with

RPI

NOVEMBER
ABANDONED
AFGHAN
COMMANDOS



In partnership with

INDEPENDENT

DECEMBER
EUROPE'S
NAMELESS
DEAD



In partnership with

DER SPIEGEL

DECEMBER
FRANCE'S
DIGITAL
INQUISITION



In partnership with

Le Monde

DECEMBER
FRONTEX AND
THE PIRATE SHIP



In partnership with

ALJAZEERA

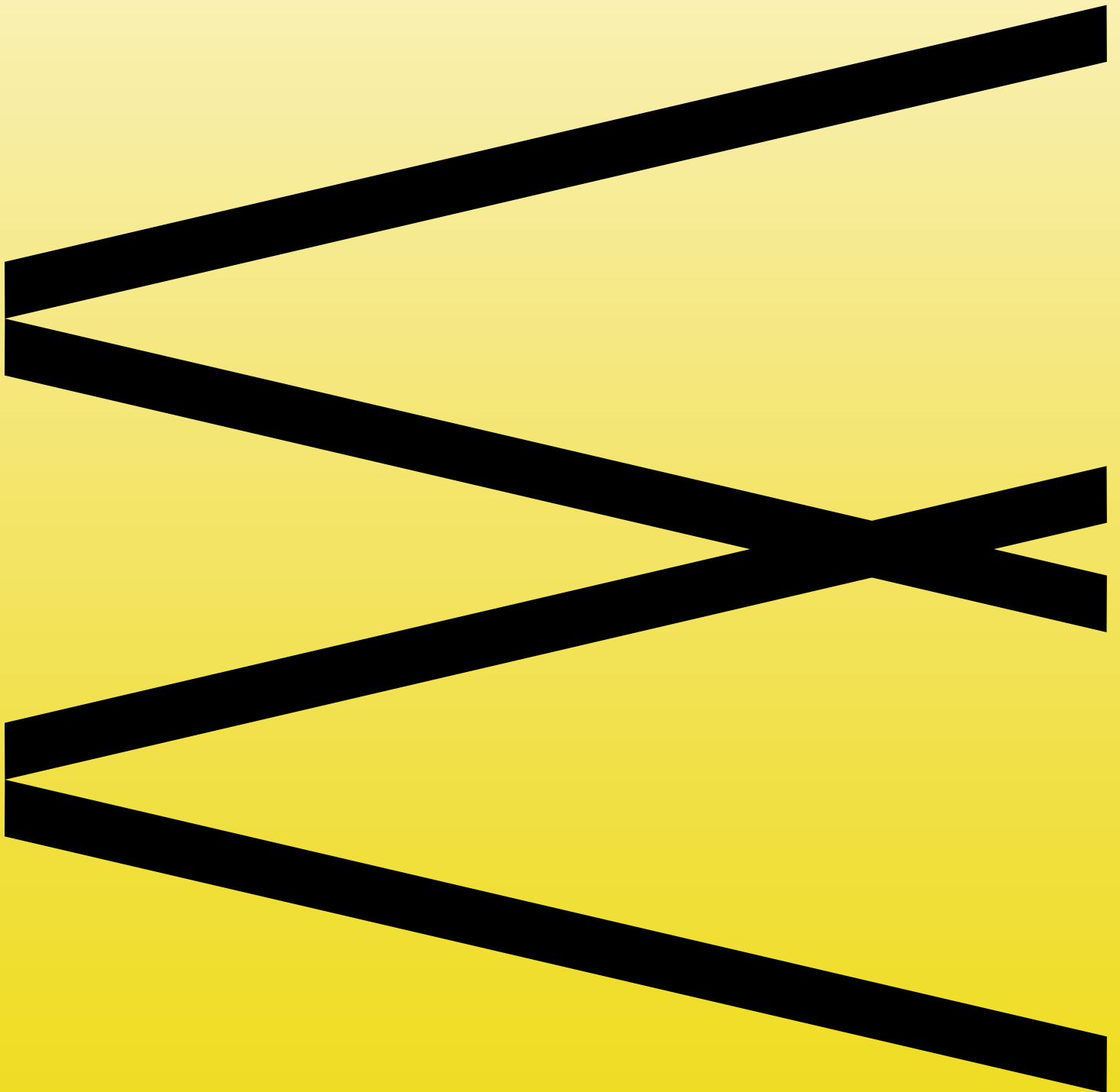
DECEMBER
THE RUBBLE
KING



In partnership with

Tortoise

Newsrooms



Borders



BORDERS

In November 2023, the President of the European Union Commission proudly announced a global alliance against human smuggling to stop the ‘unspeakable suffering’ of refugees. Yet throughout that same year, Mrs. Von Der Leyen, along with European leaders from the Far right, pushed through costly migration management deals with authoritarian and openly xenophobic regimes in Northern Africa. Europe signed a long negotiated new pact on migration which, according to human rights organisations, will downgrade the rights of people even more.

In a pre-European election year it became apparent that the EU’s interest isn’t to protect vulnerable people but to cater to far right politicians who want to keep people out of Europe at all costs. These policies have led to shipwrecks, unlawful detentions, torture and deaths.

Our Borders Newsroom revealed how European governments and agencies decided on a number of occasions not to rescue people at sea but to let them drown or be forced back INTO the hands of torturers. We found that authorities attempted to cover up their own roles by tampering evidence and pressuring survivors. We demonstrated how dodgy migration management deals have put migrants at greater risk and are leading to the EU supporting the very smugglers they claim to combat.

IMPACT

Our report “Frontex and the Pirate ship” which exposed how the EU’s border agency and Malta handed over the coordinates of refugee boats to an infamous Libyan militia was discussed in the EU parliament. The LIBE Committee called a hearing with Frontex demanding answers to our revelations. Our story on how Italy’s authorities and Frontex lied about how much information they had prior to the Cutro shipwreck was widely picked up in Italian media and won the German Reporter’s prize. It also led to MEPs raising questions in Parliament about how the “disastrous misconduct” of Frontex and the Italian authorities would be addressed.

Surveillance



SURVEILLANCE

2023 saw the publication of our multi-award winning “Suspicion Machines” series, two years in the making, which has travelled across Europe revealing how faulty and discriminatory systems make life-changing decisions about millions of vulnerable people. The series drew on over 100 freedom of information requests across a dozen countries. Its centerpiece was an unprecedented audit of a machine learning fraud detection system deployed in Rotterdam, published by Wired. We teamed up with European newsrooms to investigate similar systems in their own countries, producing major investigations with Le Monde in France and El Confidencial in Spain.

Our “Ghost in the Network” investigation used confidential phone network data to trace the links between a murder in Mexico, an anti-government activist in Congo, an account hijack in South-East Asia and a maverick Swiss telecom engineer selling location tracking systems. The unveiling of this shadow world of telecom access brokers tells a broader story about the globalisation of the surveillance industry a decade after the Snowden revelations.

IMPACT

Our Suspicion Machines investigation forced the city of Rotterdam to shelve its fraud detection system and provoked an inquiry by the Dutch Data Protection Agency, while in France our publication led to a parliamentary inquiry. It spurred public agencies across Europe to share the underlying code of their own systems, a significant step towards broader understanding of how AI systems are being used, as well as becoming required reading on university courses in the Netherlands, USA and France. Impacts continued to be felt by the spyware and surveillance companies we have investigated, as Intellexa and its executives, whose trade with Sudan we revealed at the end of 2022 in “Flight of the Predator”, fell under US export bans and, latterly, personal sanctions.

Food systems



FOOD SYSTEMS

The Food Systems Newsroom's investigations targeted European policymaking both inside and outside Europe's borders.

Europe's Potemkin Lobby, our seminal investigation into Copa Cogeca, Europe's agriculture lobby group, called into question the legitimacy of the 'union' over its claims to speak for farmers that it claims to represent.

The Food Systems Newsroom reported how Europe outsources deadly harms of its food system to the Global South: Our Toxic Rain investigation revealed how European countries export pesticides banned in the EU to Brazil to grow products for multinationals, and how European development banks had given millions of Euros to agricultural developments which use such pesticides.

Hunger Profiteers continued to break ground on the financial actors profiting from and driving the global food price crisis, revealing how the world's top ten "trend-following" hedge-funds made nearly \$2 billion from trading on food in the weeks surrounding Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

IMPACT

Our newsroom continued to gain standing in the Food Systems space.

Our Europe's Potemkin Lobby investigation was shared widely in Brussels policy circles and provided reporters important context for reporting on farming unions during the 2024 tractor protests. Our 2022 investigation into meat giants' tax avoidance was nominated for Best Investigation at the Guild of Food Writers Awards, and campaigners used our Toxic Rain investigation to lobby development banks.

Hunger Profiteers' (rare) primary evidence on speculation informed MEPs on the ECON Committee who approved regulatory reforms, including giving regulators power to halt trading, as well as a chapter devoted to speculation in the United Nations' 2023 Trade and Development Report.

War winners



WAR WINNERS

The investigative skills and cross-border networks developed during our pilot in Syria continue to bear fruit. Our team following the impact of Denmark's decision to revoke residency for Syrians noticed that Syrian women were uniquely disadvantaged by this proudly feminist government's policies, including survivors of domestic violence ordered to return to Syria. With harrowing testimonies and government data, our investigation Syrian Women on the Run exposed an asylum system designed by and for men.

We published an audio investigation into the government cronies tearing down former opposition neighbourhoods and turning the rubble into the steel used to build a new Syria. The Rubble King podcast included rare access to the stories of workers in Syria forced to help dismantle their former neighbourhoods.

We also launched our next War Winners newsroom in partnership with exiled Afghan journalists who are working on the first investigations into profiteering and exploitation in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

IMPACT

Our story on Syrian GBV survivors helped shift the narrative about the impact of Denmark's policy on returns to Syria and was shortlisted for the European Press Prize. Meanwhile, our podcast about Syrian war profiteers was widely shared and helped refocus European attention on the profits made by Syrian government cronies with connections to Europe. The newsroom's early work with Afghan partners is already supporting the application of new OSINT, data and money trails approaches to their editorial agenda.

Migration



MIGRATION

Following the West's chaotic withdrawal of Kabul in 2021, European leaders were quick to pledge that they would bring their Afghan allies to safety. Our Left Behind series, which was the migration newsroom's main focus in 2023, sought to investigate the extent to which these pledges had been met more than a year on.

We published five investigations as part of the series over the course of 2023, zooming in on France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Each combined reporting methods to expose the abandonment by national governments of Afghans to whom they owed a clear duty — and the subsequent harm these individuals have faced at the hands of the Taliban.

In a year when Afghans made up the second most common nationality claiming asylum in the EU, and the most common in the UK, exposing the failure by those countries to help even those to whom they owe the greatest duty — be it Dutch-funded NGO workers or commandos paid by Britain — brought into sharp focus the extent to which European governments will go to curb refugee numbers.

IMPACT

Our investigation into Afghan former commandos left behind by Britain prompted extensive debate in parliament about the plight of these individuals and, ultimately, led the government to admit it had failed to consider the cases properly and pledge to review each of them.

We were invited to speak at the Dutch parliament after we revealed that Afghan employees of Dutch funded NGOs had been rejected for relocation to the Netherlands — with one man subsequently murdered by the Taliban.

Our investigation into Germany's refusal to relocate Afghans who worked for its development agency GIZ led to 34 GIZ workers being accepted for relocation to the country, compared with a total of 56 in the two previous years.

Special projects



SPECIAL PROJECTS

Among our special projects this year was an investigation that found rich countries secretly dumping plastic waste in Myanmar, one of the world's most troubled and repressive states.

Working with journalists in Myanmar, Thailand, the UK, Canada, Poland and Brussels we obtained and analysed international and national trade, customs and shipping data and interviewed dozens of people involved in the supply chain, from logistics companies to border smugglers, recycling factories and waste collectors.

This shady supply chain is deliberately opaque, enabling the plastic industry and rich countries that consume most of the world's plastic to claim progress in the war on plastic pollution, while consumers are unaware that plastics they put in a recycling bin may be dumped in neighbourhoods thousands of miles away.

IMPACT

In Myanmar, local social media influencers seized upon the story and a local mayor was forced to respond by pledging to clamp down on companies dumping foreign waste.

The story also created pressure on foreign regulators and plastic producers. The investigation was raised in Canada's parliament where politicians are working on efforts to close a loophole enabling waste dumping in Myanmar. Lidl UK — whose warehouse waste littered communities in Yangon — pledged to investigate its supply chain. In Brussels, MEPs used the investigation to successfully advocate for a ban on EU waste exports to non-OECD in the new Waste Shipment Regulation.

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CIVIS
**RECONSTRUCTING
THE MELILLA
MASSACRE**

N
IJ4EU Impact Award
**UKRAINE
EXODUS**

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IJ4EU Impact Award
**UNMASKING
EUROPE'S
SHADOW
ARMIES**

A
Germany's
Human Rights
Film Award
**UNMASKING
EUROPE'S
SHADOW
ARMIES**

A
SIGMA
**UNMASKING
EUROPE'S
SHADOW
ARMIES**

A
IJ4EU Impact Award
**FRONTEX
COMPLICIT IN
PUSHBACKS**

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SIGMA
**RECONSTRUCTING
THE MELILLA
MASSACRE**

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European Press Prize /
Investigative Reporting
**FLIGHT OF
THE PREDATOR**

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European Press Prize /
Innovation Award
**RECONSTRUCTING
THE MELILLA
MASSACRE**

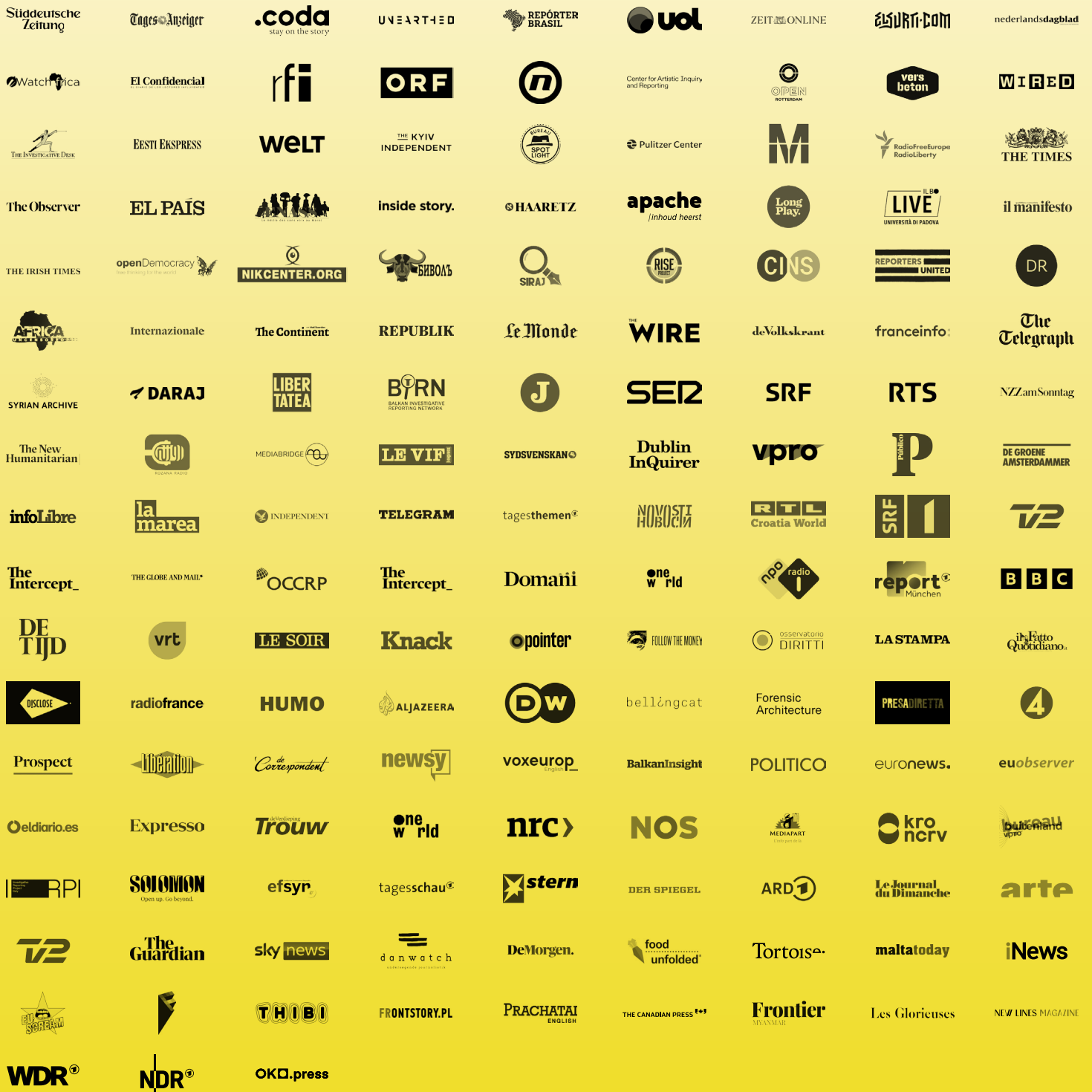
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Guild of Food Writers
Annual Awards
BIG MEAT

A
One World Media
**RECONSTRUCTING
THE MELILLA
MASSACRE**

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AMEJA
**DROWNING
IN LIES**

A
German Reporter:innen Prize /
Investigations category
**THE CROTONE
COVER UP**

Media partners



Donors



Financials

NOTES TO THE STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE	2023 (€)	2022 (€)
INCOME		
Grants and contract income	2,390,035	1,380,239
Media partners	9,043	4,461
Lighthouse sessions participations fees	(661)	2,975
Other income	15,242	8,719
	2,413,659	1,396,394
WAGES AND SALARIES		
Wages and salaries	278,922	190,853
Socials security charges	65,039	38,943
Holiday payments	15,457	12,143
Core team compensation	899,029	540,969
Wage tax from previous years	0	4,865
	1,258,447	787,773
PROJECT COSTS		
Consultancy costs	10,512	2,718
Freelancers	156,487	212,575
Software, subscriptions and hosting costs	2,522	5,767
Travel costs	131,210	61,021
Workshop costs	2,881	6,091
Other costs	1,875	9,032
	305,486	297,204
DEPRECIATION TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS		
Equipment	6,041	3,771
MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION COSTS		
Accountancy costs	39,483	29,428
Auditor's costs	15,253	14,034
COO Consultant costs	10,614	0
Bank and interest charges	3,927	6,263
Supervisory board expenses	6,626	1,494
Insurance costs	12,322	2,957
Office and phone costs	41,948	39,586
Software, subscriptions and hosting costs	29,935	19,637
Travel costs	64,467	56,237
Web development	22,036	4,950
Other costs	37,851	27,517
	284,461	202,103

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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