LIGHTHOUSE
REPORTS

2020

FOREWORD

This was a year that very few of us will forget. At Lighthouse Reports we ended February with our focus trained on the border between Greece and Turkey where a crisis threatened the future of the right to asylum in Europe. Briefly, it was one of the biggest stories in the world. Within days all of this changed.

Covid redrew the headlines in Europe and overwhelmed other priorities everywhere. Abruptly, we were in a new era. There was no choice but to respond but this would have to be balanced against our commitment to our existing work.

This has been the story of our year. Adapting and responding to the enormity of the pandemic without neglecting what we set out to do in the first place. The first full year for Lighthouse was always going to be about testing our newsroom model against events and proving its relevance in the media landscape.

Our starting point is the strategic observation that building new media platforms costs time and money and that attracting audiences to them progresses at best incrementally. We chose to spend our resources and energy differently. We believe passionately in delivering original, in-depth journalism on migration, corruption and conflict to a broad public audience.

We also believe this aim is best served by working with existing platforms and that these collaborations are made possible by our choice not to build a competitor.

It seems obvious in retrospect but virtual newsrooms that unite journalists and media partners around investigations into complex transnational topics are powerfully relevant to the world as we currently live in it. The capacity to work across borders with remote teams that augment existing media outlets with sought-after expertise, from open source investigators to data scientists, can be vital to sustaining public interest journalism.

Lighthouse newsrooms have been able to deliver the kind of stories that participating journalists want to work on and our media partners are proud to produce. And this was as true of our investigation into modern slavery conditions on Europe's farms, which was directly connected to Covid, as it was of our series that brought to life Europe's Dreamers, the generation of undocumented people who arrived on the continent as children.

"Vital to sustaining public interest journalism"

Previously we had seen that our model could work well adjacent to the news, spying the gaps in public interest journalism and finding investigative and creative ways to address them.

Over the last 12 months we have demonstrated that this same model can engage meaningfully with breaking news. We have been at the centre of efforts to uncover the abuse of fundamental rights at Europe's borders that has led to intense scrutiny of the EU border agency Frontex as well as the activities of member states.

In the process Lighthouse has become a sought-after partner and advisor to major media outlets who want to know more about the potential for collaborative journalism. We have expanded our core team and administrative capacity which is what underpins the ambitious work we tackle. We have a clearer sense of what tools and expertise are needed to sustain the impact and reach of our newsrooms.

Most importantly, there are journalists across Europe looking back on 2020 who have told us that the work they did in our newsrooms will be what they remember from a year they are unlikely to forget.

Daniel Howden
Managing Director

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VISION
We believe collaborative journalism helps people navigate complexity, so we create spaces to make this happen.
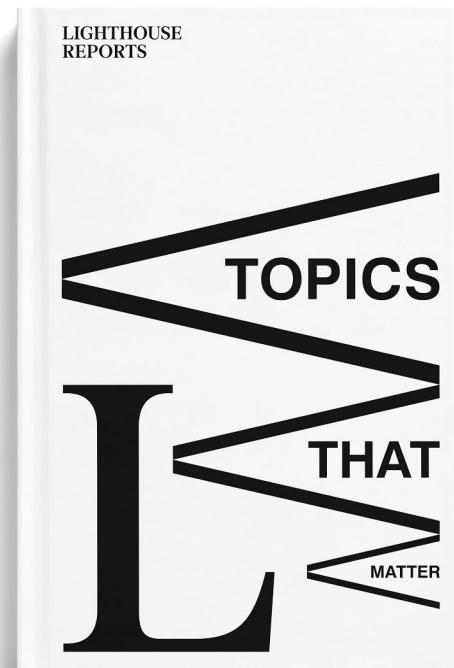
MISSION
Our theory of change is that investigative journalism can provide the public and policy-makers with clear lines of connection between decisions and consequences.

"Our newsrooms put tools, experts and editors at the disposal of working journalists. The results reach the public in the form of award-winning stories on existing platforms."

Lighthouse Reports is a media non-profit based in Amsterdam. Our newsrooms are open to journalists from well-known outlets to independent makers. The collaboration is about learning new techniques, pooling knowledge and tackling the kind of complex, ambitious stories that benefit from a team approach.
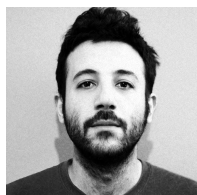
DIRECTORS

Ludo Hekman

Ludo is a journalist and editor. He has worked in print, online and television, reporting from countries including Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. He has helped to pioneer new collaborative investigations into Europe's arms industry and has a keen sense for the opportunities in emerging technologies. He has won the Citigroup Excellence in Journalism award and has been nominated for several Prix Europa awards.

Daniel Howden

Daniel is a long-form writer and experienced editor. He has been a foreign correspondent for the Economist, the Guardian and the Independent. He's a migration expert, Visiting Fellow at Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre and was Senior Editor at Refugees Deeply. Daniel is a two-times winner of the Migration Media Award, won special mention at the inaugural True Stories Award, and finalist at the Online Journalism Awards.

Klaas Van Dijken

Klaas concentrates on conflict areas and countries with repressive regimes including Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Somalia. His work has been published in media worldwide. He won the Dutch De Tegel award and has been nominated for a Prix Bayeux-Calvados Award for War Reporting in France.

CORE TEAM

Dora Bakatselou

Dora joined early in 2021 as the Administration Associate of Lighthouse. She has worked with CSOs for the past 5 years as a Program Manager, mainly in EU-funded projects.

Bashar Deeb

Bashar is an OSINT investigator. Much of his work has centred on different aspects of the refugee experience in Europe. He began working with Lighthouse as part of the EU Arms investigations and has since collaborated with Channel 4 and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. He retains a strong interest in his native Syria and the wider region.

Nouska du Saar

Nouska is a freelance journalist specialising in OSINT methods and cross-border newsrooms. She was a fellow with Lighthouse during 2020 and she leads the Plastics newsroom.

ASSOCIATES

Charlotte Alfred

Charlotte is an editor and investigative journalist working in Europe, the Middle East and the US. She was managing editor of Refugees Deeply, covered international news for HuffPost, and worked on documentaries for PBS Frontline.

Eva Constantaras

Eva is a data journalist specialized in building data journalism teams in the Global South. She was also a Google News Scholar and is a Fulbright Research Fellow.

Valentina Azarova

Valentina is an international legal practitioner and academic. A founding member of the Global Legal Action Network, she is experienced at documenting, reporting and advocating on serious rights abuses, with a focus on structural violence of war.

Leone Hadavi

Leone is an OSINT investigator and analyst. He focuses on the arms trade, weapons and vehicles ID, SOCMINT and GEOINT.
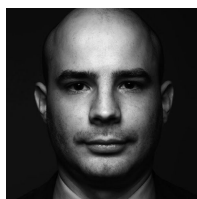
Stefano Trevisan

Stefano is a qualified lawyer
and open-source investigator. In 2020
he provided continuing legal advice
on post-sale services in the European
arms industry and contributed to
the fact-finding investigation.

Maud Juillien

Maud Juillien combines an investigative
mindset with the skills of a filmmaker.
She worked as a correspondent for
the BBC in Senegal and in the DRC.
She works with Lighthouse on
documentaries and chaired some of
the investigative teams in our arms
trade newsrooms.

SUPERVISORY BOARD

Andrew Feinstein
Andrew Feinstein heads the UK-based non profit, Shadow World Investigates and is author of 'Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade'.
He was previously a campaigning MP in his native South Africa.

Maria Margaronis
Maria Margaronis, Chair of Lighthouse Reports, is a BBC radio documentary maker, London Correspondent for The Nation and trustee of the Women for Refugee Women charity. Her work has appeared in The Guardian, the London Review of Books, The Times Literary Supplement and The New York Times.

Hans Bergwerff
Hans Bergwerff is a specialist advisor on Dutch tax law. Previously founded Bergwerff ten Cate, worked at Loyens & Loeff, BDO and MeesPierson.
He is elected Board Treasurer of Lighthouse Reports.

Sara Stillman
Sarah Stillman is a staff writer with the New Yorker, teacher of literary non-fiction at Yale and head of the Columbia J-School's Global Migration Project.

Tuesday Reitano

Tuesday Reitano is the Deputy Director of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and a senior research advisor at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. She served as a policy specialist in the UN System, including with UNDP, UNDG and the UNODC. She is the co-author of 'Migrant, Refugee; Smuggler, Saviour'.

Guido van Nispen

Guido van Nispen served on the Supervisory Board prior to stepping down in Autumn 2020. He is the founder and CEO of WE-Technology.work.

Nani Jansen Reventlow

Nani is the founding Director of the Digital Freedom Fund, which supports partners in Europe to advance digital rights through strategic litigation. She is a Lecturer in Law at Columbia Law School and Adjunct Professor at Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government. She is an expert in human rights litigation

BORDERS NEWSROOM

The Borders Newsroom seeks to sustain public interest journalism in the context of nested crises at Europe's external borders, ranging from confrontation at Greece's land and sea borders with Turkey, to abuses of asylum seekers in the Western Balkans, to the arrival of Covid-19. These emergencies have created states of exception that threaten the 1951 refugee convention and right to asylum. The newsroom exists to detect and decode disinformation and empower investigative journalism, local and international, in this hostile context, while holding the main EU agencies, state and non-state actors to account. It provides domain expertise and tools including open source investigation. It aims to be a nerve centre for journalism that provides an evidence-base for a public debate on challenges to fundamental rights, rule of law and right to asylum that arise from border enforcement policies and the EU asylum and migration system.

IMPACT

The newsroom investigations proved that illegal pushbacks were taking place in the Aegean and revealed the involvement of Frontex, making headlines across Europe. The reporting has prompted the EU's anti-fraud agency to investigate Frontex, whose own Management Board conducted an internal inquiry. The head of Frontex has been called before national parliaments and now faces a special scrutiny working group of the European Parliament under the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.

PUBLICATIONS

The Killing of Muhammad Gulzar (Bellingcat, Forensic Architecture, Der Spiegel, Sky News, Pointer)

EU border agency Frontex complicit in Greek illegal pushback campaign (Der Spiegel, ARD, Bellingcat, Asahi TV)

Samos and the anatomy of a maritime pushback (Deutsche Welle, Bellingcat)

Frontex, an agency in the eye of a storm (Liberation)

Scandals Plunge Europe's Border Agency into Turmoil (Der Spiegel)

MIGRATION NEWSROOM

Despite the profound influence of migration on its politics, Europe is poorly served by specialist migration reporting. While immigration correspondents are commonplace in US newsrooms there are few if any specialist correspondents across the EU, with migration reporting one among many tasks for social affairs and general news journalists. The migration newsroom is at the centre of efforts to address the consequences of this underinvestment, while showing the way to more progressive outlets by gaining impact and audiences for more ambitious stories produced from collaborative reporting. It offers a meeting place and training ground where general reporters serving big audiences get to know migration specialists by working with them on major investigations and series. This can mean conducting original research projects at the borderline between journalism and academia, it can also mean finding innovative framings that challenge widespread misconceptions.

IMPACT

The fate of young undocumented people in Europe has struggled to capture public sympathy equivalent to the "dreamers" in the US. A landmark series in The Guardian introduced Europe to its own dreamer generation. The widely read 6-part series was followed by a podcast and Op-Eds then republished in five more languages on VoxEurop.

In the midst of the pandemic we undertook a 6-country investigation into modern slavery practices endured by migrants harvesting Europe's fields. Invisible Workers appeared on television, online and print in 10 languages prompting criminal inquiries and helping push social conditions into EU agriculture reform talks.

PUBLICATIONS

Europe's Dreamers: We Want to Build a Better Life (The Guardian)

A Journey Into Europe's Dreamer Generation (VoxEurop)

Invisible workers: underpaid, exploited and put at risk on Europe's farms (Euronews)

Grim plight of the 'invisible' seasonal farm workers in France (Mediapart)

The Systematic Exploitation of Harvest Workers in Europe (Der Spiegel)

EU ARMS

The arms tracking newsroom defined the early phase of Lighthouse. In 2020 we built on investigations into arms export deals to focus on where much of the real money is obscured: long-term maintenance contracts. These agreements are worth up to 80% percent of the total value of defence contracts and bind the buying and the selling countries for years. Often invisible links connected selling countries to controversial conflicts but we had to go and find them. Investigations zoomed in on Libya and Yemen. We documented how EU companies supported Turkey and the United Arab Emirates -- opposing parties in the Libya conflict -- with structural support, in spite of their obvious and well-known breaches of the UN arms embargo on Libya. We also published analyses of French companies profiting from the training of Saudi soldiers, when the war in Yemen was raging for years already.

IMPACT

After breaking new ground on arms deals the newsroom has succeeded in providing entirely new scrutiny to underlying structures. When German MEP Hannah Neumann successfully pushed for tight, centralised control on EU arms exports and an export ban for Yemen, she cited Lighthouse's work and made sure spare parts and maintenance were included too. Investigations from this newsroom have helped sustain a case at the ICC, got criminal investigations and litigation processes off the ground and forced critical policy changes. Our legal analysis has been published in guide form and become a manual for NGOs, public litigation initiatives and universities.

PUBLICATIONS

Behind the cannons that threaten the civilians of Yemen: French training companies (Mediapart, Arte)

Revealed: The Scorpion connection (Sky News, The Guardian, Bellingcat)

Turkey and UAE openly flouting UN arms embargo to fuel war in Libya (The Guardian)

Mirages maintained by French companies at the heart of suspicions of war crimes (Arte, Mediapart, EUObserver)

How Airbus is helping Turkey, which is flying military transport planes to Libya despite the embargo (ARD, Stern, El Diario)

PLASTICS

Europeans believe they are recycling more plastic than ever. But is this a lie? In 2018 China stopped importing Europe's plastic waste and the bloc had to find alternatives. Where does it go now? And is it recycled or dumped? Our newsroom finds answers. We track the exports of plastic waste from the consumer to the recycler abroad and investigate the companies who are exploiting loopholes to profit from illegal waste export. Turkey emerged as the preferred destination, so we documented how plastic waste from Europe is ending up at illegal dumpsites in Turkey, violating international trade rules and destroying the environment. One of the investigations zoomed in on the Belgian port of Antwerp. Heavily contaminated plastic waste from the Netherlands and the rest of Europe can be illegally exported via Antwerp to countries where it is dumped, not recycled. Waste traders find ways to tamper with transport documents, unnoticed by poorly-resourced port authorities.

IMPACT

This newsroom emerged from the Lighthouse Sessions where we train outstanding early career journalists. The project has had a successful pilot phase, focused on the Netherlands and Belgium with a series of national publications, including in NRC. It stirred political debate in the Netherlands and uncovered the main dynamics, as well revealing most effective methodologies for further investigation. For 2021 an EU-wide follow-up is in the works.

PUBLICATIONS

Ending waste abroad: big business
(Pointer, KRO-NCRV)

Antwerp port hub for European plastic waste
(De Tijd)

Containers full of illegal plastic waste (Humo)

Plastic Waste: How a Dutch sweet wrapper could end up on a Turkish roadside (NRC)

Playing hide and seek with recycled plastic (NRC)

IN DEVELOPMENT

WAR WINNERS

When wars end or conflicts wane international and media attention moves on. But post-conflict zones are often the scene of immense profiteering by organised crime and its regime partners. They are spaces where the fortunes made during the fighting become visible. Until recently journalists (and by extension affected communities) had few compelling means of making this struggle visible. This newsroom will enable international journalists to work in concert with local reporters and citizen groups to capture the reality of post-conflict land-grabs and exploitative redevelopments. Using open source information, on-the-ground testimony and documentary evidence we will reveal the transformation of urban areas in the wake of war.

SURVEILLANCE NEWSROOM

A collaborative space with the resources and expertise to enable European media to interrogate the rise of the surveillance tech industry. It tackles the complexity of emerging technologies, their adoption by state and supranational actors and questions the push to render people as data. It illuminates this datafication and its implications for human rights in formats which are impactful and relatable to the public at large. Significant public money has already been sunk into mass surveillance tools that violate human rights, from predictive policing algorithms to facial recognition, to data extraction from personal devices. This newsroom seeks to persuade leading European media that deeper scrutiny is achievable through collaboration.

Lighthouse Reports is a different type of journalism outfit.

We believe the best way to find the truth is together, so we build and support teams across skills and platforms to investigate topics to find the unreported stories that matter.
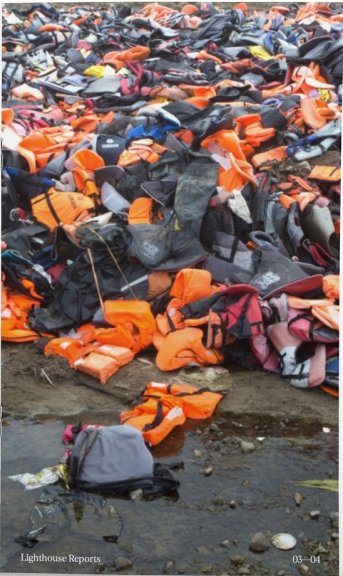
2020

→ **Direct involvement in 92 media productions**

→ **37 media partners joined one or more of our newsrooms**

→ **6 active newsrooms with 31 separate investigations completed or in production**

→ **Stories out of 12 countries**

→ **More than a dozen stories with pan-European or worldwide reach**

→ **Cooperated with strategic litigators and lawyers on 5 cases, with Lighthouse's work cited in many more**

→ **More than 150 journalists have worked in our newsrooms**

→ **Lighthouse had a direct influence on policy changes and political debates across Europe in at least 14 instances**

MEDIA PARTNERS

Netherlands
buitenland vpro · FOLLOW THE MONEY · kro ncrv · NOS · nrc.nl › · one world · Trouw

Denmark
Danwatch · TV2

UK
BBC · The Guardian · sky NEWS

Belgium
DeMorgen.

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France
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INTERNATIONAL

ALJAZEERA · bellingcat · DW · Forensic Architecture · newsy

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Democracy & Media Foundation Stichting Democratie & Media

GLOBAL WHOLE BEING FUND — Educating for humanity on the move

OAK FOUNDATION

FONDS Bijzondere JOURNALISTIEKE PROJECTEN

Rockefeller Brothers Fund

svdj — stimuleringsfonds voor de journalistiek

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

We would like to extend our special thanks to our funders, partners and supporters for all you do to promote and sustain Lighthouse Reports.