

**Financial
Statements**

**About
Bellingcat**

**2023
Highlights**

Strategy

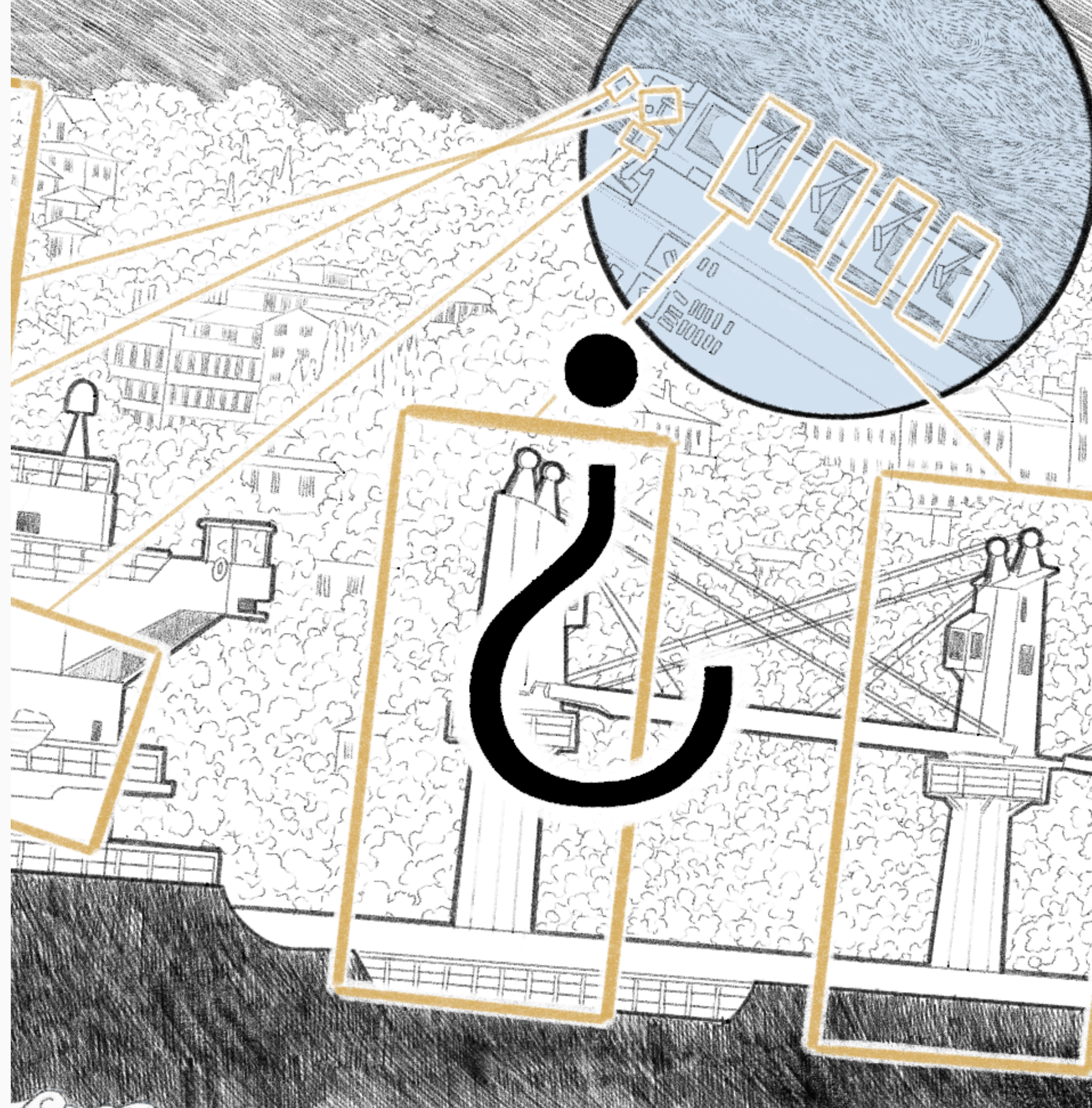
Bellingcat

2023

Annual Report

Table of contents

Welcome	3
Highlights 2023	4
Organisational Development	5
Strategy	6
Research Highlights	7
Impact	9
Editorial	11
Investigative Tech-Team	13
Training	15
Global Authentication Project	16
Justice & Accountability Unit	17
The Bellingcat Team	22
Partners and Supporters	26
Financial Statements	28



Welcome

By Eliot Higgins



In 2023, Bellingcat solidified its leadership in the field of open-source investigation by finalising a comprehensive five-year strategy. This new plan, developed through our "open strategy" approach, involved the entire organisation and various stakeholders, emphasising inclusivity and collaboration.

The strategy focuses on three key areas. First, it prioritises enhancing our community engagement, recognising the crucial role of our volunteers, contributors, and collaborators. Second, it expands our research scope beyond our traditional focus on Russia to include global issues including human rights abuses, conflict monitoring, online ideologies, misinformation, corporate misconduct, and environmental concerns. Lastly, we've significantly grown our editorial team, increasing our output with 148 new publications across diverse platforms and improving our publication speed and accuracy by specialising our editors. These strategic updates position Bellingcat at the forefront of open-source investigations, ready to tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing global landscape through innovation and impact. The year was marked with significant achievements for Bellingcat, showcasing the power and impact of our investigative efforts globally. Our stories have not only shed light on critical issues but have also led to concrete actions and changes.

In recognition of our impactful work, Bellingcat received several prestigious awards in 2023. Bellingcat was named the International News Media Organisation of the Year for the second consecutive year by the Society of Editors, and we also received the Media City Bergen Anne Jacobsen Memorial Prize and the WIN WIN Gothenburg Sustainability Award. These accolades reflect not only our investigative excellence but also our growing influence and credibility in the international media landscape. Bellingcat's work was also a major part of the documentary "Navalny", which, among other awards, won the Academy Award and BAFTA for Best Documentary, underscoring our contribution to international journalism and human rights.

Furthermore, our educational initiatives expanded significantly. In partnership with The Student View, we developed educational materials and teacher training programs for secondary schools in the UK, aiming to enhance media literacy and resilience against disinformation. This expansion into educational sectors signifies a strategic broadening of our impact, to empower future generations with the skills to critically assess information.

As we enter 2024, Bellingcat is poised to build on the solid foundation laid by last year's strategic initiatives. The implementation of our new organisational strategy, which began on January 1, 2024, marks a new era of structured and impactful investigations under the guidance of dedicated research teams and editors. This structured approach is already showing promise, with teams more organised and focused than ever before on exploring emerging topics.

Our educational outreach will continue to expand as we plan to train 200 teachers to deliver our newly developed media literacy programs to students. This initiative, assessed for effectiveness by Demos in August 2024, represents a long term commitment to embedding open-source investigation skills in both secondary and higher education settings.

Moreover, the reorganisation of our volunteer community under experienced leadership has rejuvenated our collaborative efforts. The early successes of this new structure underscore its effectiveness in harnessing the collective power and expertise of our community for ongoing and future investigations. As we look ahead, the health and vitality of our volunteer community and the robustness of our educational programs will remain central to our mission. By nurturing these areas, we ensure that Bellingcat continues to lead the way with cutting-edge research and a strong, engaged community dedicated to uncovering the truth.

Highlights 2023

Most Read Stories



1

From Discord to 4chan: The Improbable Journey of a US Intelligence Leak



2

Identifying Possible Crater from Gaza Hospital Blast



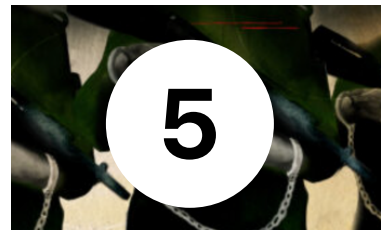
3

Hamas Attacks, Israel Bombs Gaza and Misinformation Surges Online



4

Tracing the Odnoklassniki Profile of the Texas Mall Shooter



5

How Wagner Gave Three Russian Crime Bosses from the 90s a New Lease of Death

Awards

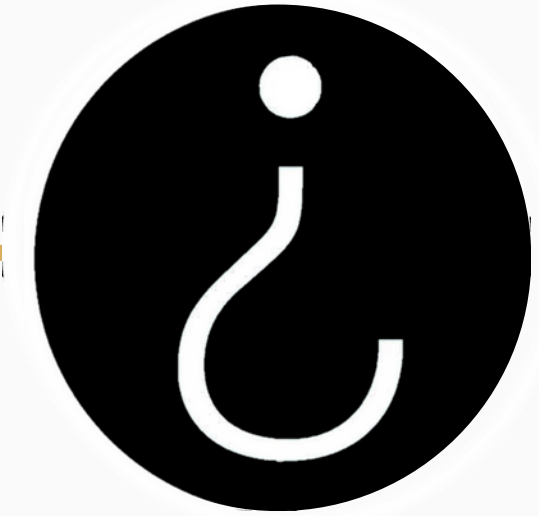
- Society of Editors International News Media Organisation of the Year (2023)
- Media City Bergen Anne Jacobsen Memorial Prize
- Win Win Gothenburg Sustainability Award
- Navalny wins Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature (directed by Daniel Roher and produced by CNN Films)
- Navalny BAFTA for Best Documentary
- Navalny honoured with a duPont-Columbia Award
- Navalny Critics Choice Documentary Award for Best Political Documentary

Organisational Development

In 2023, Bellingcat hired new staff to support its investigative work, and we expanded our editorial team to include a new social media editor, expanding our presence on social media platforms. Particular attention was paid to the Bellingcat Discord community, which by the end of 2023 had expanded to over 20,000 members, and had become an increasingly active and vibrant community, contributing to the investigative work of Bellingcat. Bellingcat also hired a new community manager for the Global Authentication Project, reinvigorating the community and providing a basis for further growth and development.

The work of our Justice and Accountability Unit (J&A) continued, further developing investigations related to the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The J&A team, in partnership with the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN), has continued to work with partners to develop Bellingcat's J&A investigation process, as well as work with external organisations to develop the understanding of open-source investigation and evidence in the justice and accountability community. Over the course of 2023 Bellingcat's J&A unit and GLAN continued to send information about civilian harm incidents to the ICC, and are working with them to provide accurate and reliable open source information which could later be used as evidence.

In September 2023, the Director of Research & Training Aric Toler (also member of the Executive Board) left Bellingcat after nine years of employment to pursue a career with The New York Times. He was replaced in the role by our senior investigator and trainer Dr. Giancarlo Fiorella, who has been employed by Bellingcat since 2018. The transition went very smoothly and naturally, as Giancarlo was already part of Bellingcat's leadership team since 2021. Continuity and stability is guaranteed by the fact that the other two members of the Executive Board (Founder and Creative Director Eliot Higgins and Director of Operations Dessi Damianova) remained in their positions. The three-member Executive Board continued its efforts and duties to lead the organisation and its management without interruption.



In July, Bellingcat welcomed two new Supervisory Board (SB) members: Sander van Luik and Maria Teresa Ronderos. Since joining, both have been actively engaged with the Executive Board and the whole Bellingcat team (among others, by attending two annual staff retreats, developing a white paper for two-tier governance with the Executive Board, and advising on the strategy and year plan 2024). Both SB members have been extremely helpful in this transition period and have seamlessly integrated with the Executive Board and the whole Bellingcat team.

Bellingcat Productions continued to work on the development of productions based on its research, with the first completed projects expected to be released in 2024. Bellingcat's US-based 501(c)(3) allows for direct donations from US donors to Bellingcat and will enable Bellingcat's future expansion into the US.

In partnership with The Student View, Bellingcat began to develop educational material and teacher training material for secondary schools in the UK, as part of a long term project to develop Bellingcat's educational work in secondary and higher education. The long term goal of this project is to develop material that can be used in multiple countries and support media literacy and resilience development internationally.

Strategy

A major part of 2023 was dedicated to finalising a new five-year strategy, necessary to ensure that Bellingcat can stay at the forefront of open-source investigation and remain a leader in developing methods with applications in a variety of fields including education, journalism, legal practice, academic research and many others.

The process of developing the strategy was intensive and took nearly one full year. In line with the collaborative and collective spirit of Bellingcat, we chose the “open strategy” methodology: the strategy was developed by the active participation of the whole staff and many different stakeholders (donors, partners, volunteers) as opposed to a top-down approach (e.g. developed by a small management team and sent back for implementation to the rest of the staff).

The strategy document not only lays out Bellingcat’s mission, vision, and values, but also operationalises these and sets out goals and milestones for the organisation over the next five years. The strategy defines three major emphasis areas. Firstly, we identified the necessity to keep our community engaged, and to manage them more effectively. This is because the core of Bellingcat’s work is the collaboration with our community, including volunteers, contributors and members of our online digital platforms. Secondly, the strategy describes new focus areas, both in terms of research topics and geographical regions. In the (recent) past, Bellingcat was mainly associated with Russia-focused research. However, there are a vast amount of topics and research areas where our expertise in open-source investigations can be applied.

Following the approval of the organisational strategy by our Supervisory Board, we officially began to implement it on January 1, 2024. Our strategy sets out a new way to organise ourselves and our work. Bellingcat staff now work in research teams focused on topics, including environmental research, conflict monitoring, and finance. By organising ourselves in this way, we’re giving structure to the formula that has made Bellingcat a leader in open-source investigation over the past decade.

At the core of our strategy is a commitment to our community: the many thousands of people across the world who are inspired by Bellingcat’s work to expose wrongdoing wherever they may live. Our strategy is centred on building spaces where open source research enthusiasts can meet, share information, and learn how to conduct open source investigations like the ones carried out by Bellingcat Staff. Our strategy is intrinsically connected to our community: for Bellingcat to thrive into the next decade, our community must thrive.

Our strategy document is an impressive achievement. The fact that each and every single Bellingcat staff member had a say in its contents is a testament to our commitment to the values of collaboration and transparency.

Research highlights

In 2023, 7.7 million people visited the Bellingcat website to read the 148 articles that our researchers published. These ranged from cutting-edge investigations, to collaborative reports written alongside allies around the world and guides on how to conduct open source research. Some of these articles also became videos on our growing network of social media accounts, helping to bring the insights of our researchers to new audiences.

Our most read articles reflected some of the biggest stories to emerge in 2023. As always, Bellingcat researchers and editors worked tirelessly to help make sense of what was happening in the world using open source data. Our top three must-read articles in 2023 were:

From Discord to 4chan: The Improbable Journey of a US Intelligence Leak

This joint investigation with The New York Times shed light on a story that shook the United States intelligence community. The investigation followed weeks of whispers online that an individual with Top Secret clearance in the United States government was leaking classified information containing highly sensitive details about the war in Ukraine, as well as a slew of intelligence assessments involving entities across the globe.

This investigation discovered the unlikely source of the leak: Discord, a chat app popular with gamers and other innocuous hobby groups. As it turned out, the individual who was leaking the classified information was doing so on a server, seemingly to impress his friends. Once the documents were shared on Discord, they made their way to 4chan, and eventually Telegram, where they were widely disseminated.



Identifying Following Carter from Gaza Hospital Blast

On the night of October 17, 2023, social media platforms were flooded with graphic images of the aftermath of an explosion in the parking lot of the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza City. The images showed a large number of dead and injured in what appeared to be the parking lot of the hospital. Once the images appeared online, Bellingcat investigators archived posts and began to analyse them to answer the question: what happened?

As our investigation showed, the explosion was caused by a munition that left a crater in the parking lot of the hospital. Images from the scene showed that the parking lot was being used as a refuge by residents of Gaza City, as evidenced by the large number of sleeping cots and other bedding in the area. This investigation helped to set the tone for subsequent reports written by peer organisations, including The New York Times and Forensic Architecture.



Hamas Attacks, Israel Bombs Gaza and Misinformation Surges Online

In the days after the Hamas attack against Israel on October 7, Bellingcat researchers identified a surge in recycled images online. These images claimed to show unfolding events but in fact they were images from previous conflict zones, re-packaged by bad actors who attributed them to the war in Gaza.

This article highlighted several of these pieces of dis/misinformation, and showed conclusively that they did not show images from the current conflict.

As the war in Gaza has dragged on, so has the amount of dis/misinformation online associated with the conflict. This article showed what this landscape looked like in the early stages of the conflict and acted as a warning sign for readers - alerting them to be on the lookout for deceptive images and videos about the conflict.



Impact

Arrests made in Lucas Villa case following Bellingcat Investigation

Bellingcat's investigation into the death of protestor Lucas Villa stretches back several years. Our 2023 piece published with local partners CLIP and Cerosetenta analysed phone metadata and brought the story back to the forefront of the public's attention and revealed new details about the case. The investigation was covered by leading Colombian media and in the weeks after publication the Colombian police arrested figures associated with La Cordillera gang for their alleged involvement in the murder.

Extradition of Far Right Extremist Rob Rundo

We've done three stories on U.S. neo-Nazi leader Robert Rundo. In November 2020, Bellingcat revealed that Rundo, after federal rioting charges had been dismissed against him in 2019, was attempting to build a base for himself in Belgrade, Serbia pending appeal of those charges; several months later, Rundo was deported from Serbia. In November 2021, Bellingcat once again revealed that Rundo was in Belgrade despite having been deported from Serbia earlier in the year. In November 2022 — after federal charges had been reinstated against him and a US warrant was out for his arrest — Bellingcat revealed that Rundo was attempting to build a new base for his activities in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Several months later, in March 2023, Rundo was arrested in Bucharest, Romania and extradited to the United States in August 2023.

UN writes to Colombian Government about Death of Indigenous Journalist

Our investigation with partner Cerosetenta into the fatal shooting of Colombian journalist Abelardo Liz dived into complex sound analysis of supersonic bullets to find contradictions in the official statements from the Colombian Army. The month after publication four UN Special Rapporteurs wrote to the Colombian government calling for urgent action in this case and expressing concern at the excessive use of force by soldiers. Our story was awarded runner-up in the Innovation Category at the European Press Prize in 2024.

Proposed Reform to Irish Limited Partnerships

Following Bellingcat's joint report with the Irish Times concerning Irish Limited Partnerships, both Irelands Tánaiste Leo Varadkar and Taoiseach Micheál Martin commented on the need for legislative change. In 2023, proposals to reform the Limited Partnerships Act were made by the Government. In their submission of evidence to the Irish Government regarding the Act and the policy of paying for corporate documents, Transparency International Ireland commented that "given the importance of The Times / Bellingcat report in helping to generate political concern at the abuse of LPs, it is arguable that – had it not been for the grant the authors won – CRO fees may have prevented this Bill from being introduced".

Action on Non-Consensual AI Porn Deepfakes

Bellingcat's investigation into AI Porn website AnyDream and how the platform skirted payment rules resulted in both Stripe and Fanvue shutting down payment for the platform. In addition both Discord and Reddit - where the company was promoting its site and interacting with users- shutdown the company's account citing violations of community guidelines.

Covering Dis/Misinformation in the Hamas-Israel Conflict

Bellingcat's work on dis/misinformation related to the conflict between Israel and Hamas resulted in widespread media coverage, with Bellingcat researchers and trainers speaking to major media outlets across the world.

This included interviews in national media including TV broadcast, radio, print and online. Researchers did interviews with media across the globe including in Canada, France, UK, Australia, Sweden, The Netherlands, US, Ireland, Colombia, Germany, Czechia, Pakistan and Japan.

Our work on disinformation and misinformation about the conflict was covered in more than 10 languages including Japanese and Persian.

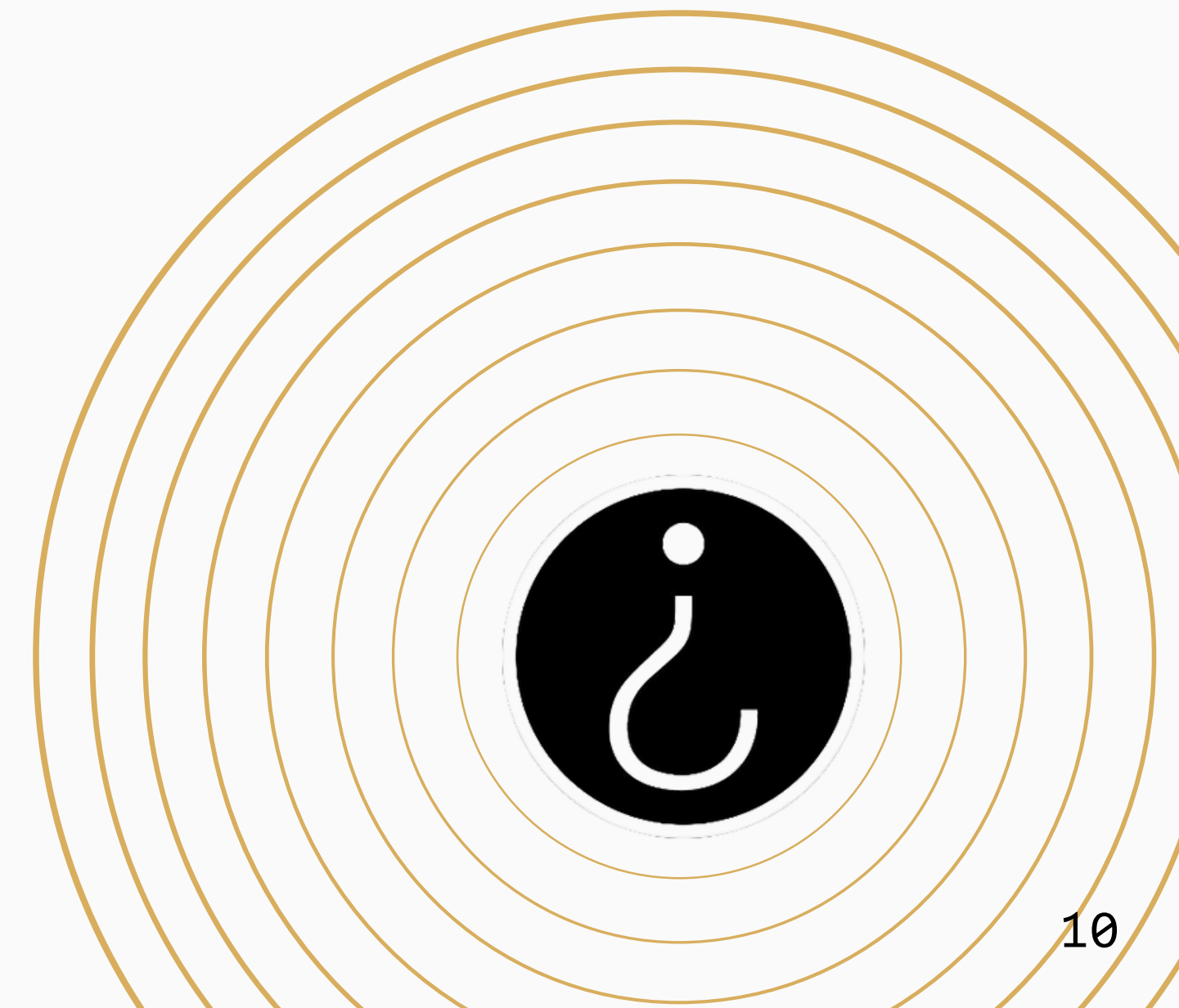
Reaching New Audiences: Collaboration with new Global Partners

Bellingcat researchers continued to reach out and partner with new media organisations to promote our work and share resources. New partnerships included:

Reuters Investigations: Co-published on the extrajudicial killing of a young man in Nigeria.

Lloyd's List: Co-published on Russia's ghost ships and grain smuggling from Ukraine.

Expresso and SIC Notícias: Co-published on the whereabouts of Angolan Billionaire Isabel dos Santos after Interpol issued a warrant for her arrest.



Editorial



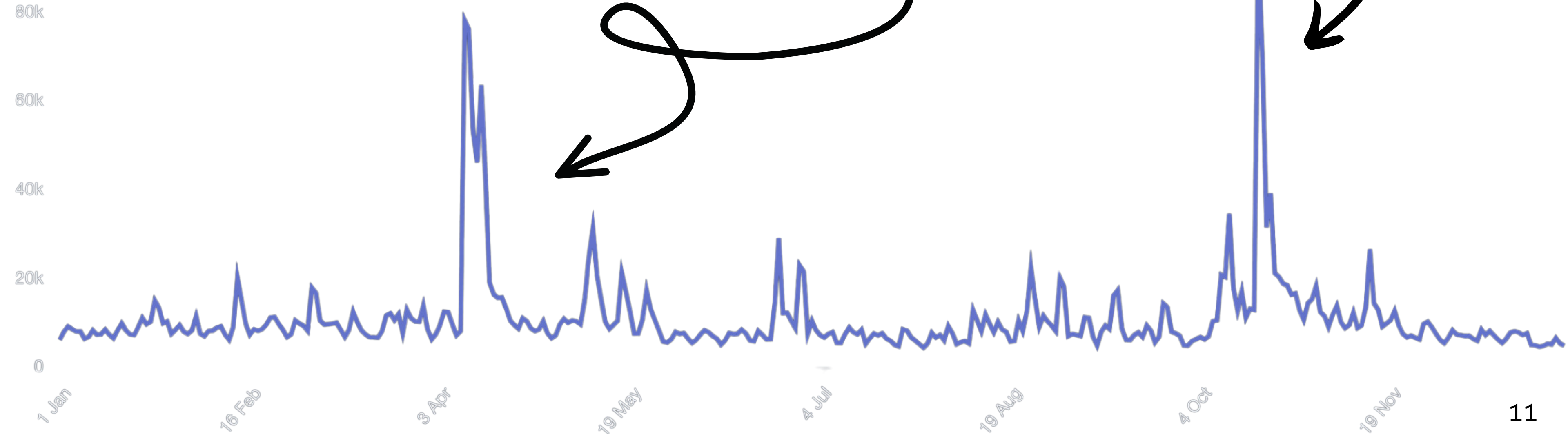
3.8 Million
Unique visitors on our website

4.5 Million
Total website visits

7.7 Million
Page views

The top month was October 2023 with 592.000 visits.

April was a close second with 585.000 visits.



A world map where 22 countries are highlighted in a dark green color. These countries are located in North America (USA, Canada), South America (Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina), Europe (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg), Africa (Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa), and Asia (India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Russia, China, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Russia, China, Mongolia).

Countries Covered in 2023

In 2023 we covered a total of 22 countries in our investigations, with stories spanning across five different continents. Our readers came from 98 different countries.

Investigative Tech Team

Data driven Investigations & Research Tool Development

In 2023 the Tech Team continued to publish guides and tool descriptions on Bellingcat's website. Our guides are focused on explaining the use of tools or technical methods to open source researchers and the general public who do not have a technical background. The goal is to enable them to integrate those tools and methods in their projects. We published a total of nine articles over the year, our tech fellows published an additional seven articles on our website.

The Tech Team also frequently assisted projects of Bellingcat researchers, for example by supporting data analysis needs, creating visualisations, interactive infographics and maps. The team also collaborated with a Portuguese newspaper on investigating fake news spread by the Portuguese far-right party.

A key goal of Bellingcat's Investigative Tech Team is to cooperate and collaborate with other organisations or individuals who are active or interested in the field of open source research. Moreover, at the end 2023, we hired a Tech Community Facilitator to focus on the community solely. We launched a landing page for the Bellingcat code repository on GitHub, and [explained](#) how volunteers can contribute to our tools, and added [a code of conduct](#) for our technical contributors on GitHub. To help raise the profile of technical contributions and provide a place for interested users to start their journey by asking for help, sharing ideas, or planning their contributions we created a dedicated technical contributor space on the existing Bellingcat Discord.

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Notable tools developed in 2023

OSM Search tool: The tool assists open source researchers with geolocation. To make it more accessible a video guide [Start Your Geolocation Search With Ease](#) was published on Youtube. The tool was featured in various open source blogs, videos and on a French cartography website.

Octosuite: This tool was developed by one of our Tech Fellows and quickly became the most popular tool in the Bellingcat repository on Github getting 1.7k stars and 166 pull requests. The tool uses GitHub's Public API to make the process of investigating accounts and repositories on the platform more efficient, while also creating a set of automated and easily reproducible queries.

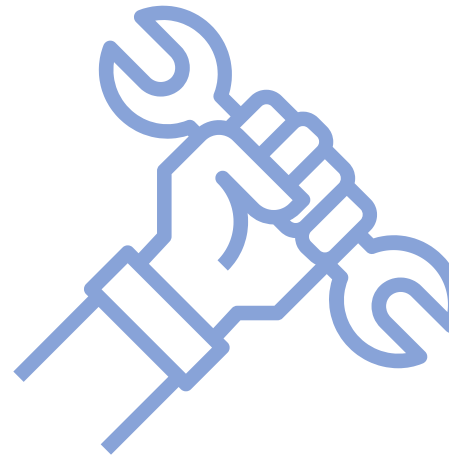
In the tech investigation **Mapping the Aftermath of the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Border Clashes** and accompanying video Aiganysh used various satellite images and sensors to document the burned villages of the conflict. Miguel created the interactive map with each destroyed house mapped with before and after imagery. The map served as a visualisation of the conflict and showed the scale of the destruction which had not been reported before.

Tech Team Impact



Tech-Guides

Our guides enable others to integrate our tools and methods in their projects. We published nine articles on our website. Our Tech-fellows published an additional seven articles.



Tool Development

The team worked on the development of 10 tools this year, and contributed to the development of five tools created by our Tech-fellows.



Events

In 2023 we held two hackathons to help the tech community get to know each other and work collaboratively on tools



Workshops and trainings

The team offered four public workshops and carried out 16 tech sessions and presentations.



Tech-Fellows

We guided five Tech-fellows with the creation of tools and guides.

Training

In 2023, Bellingcat delivered training across five continents to journalists, human rights activists, legal practitioners, and students. These training events ranged from week long engagements, during which Bellingcat trainers assisted participants in working through their own projects, to guest lectures delivered online at universities across the globe.

This year marked the resumption of our in-person training program following the end of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Bellingcat trainers spent a total of four weeks with dozens of eager workshop participants in Amsterdam, London, New York City, and Prague. In addition to these public in-person workshops, we also hosted over a dozen digital training events during which we covered topics such as web scraping, digital footprint tracing, and image verification.

In addition to these events, Bellingcat trainers also hosted sessions in Spanish—both in-person throughout Latin America as well as online—free of charge to participants living in the region. Simultaneously, we offered the same training to journalists and researchers living in Africa and Central Asia, also free of charge. Both initiatives have been made possible via a generous grant from a foundation which covered associated costs from us. The goal of our training in these regions is to maximise access to Bellingcat’s collective toolkit and knowledge so that others can carry out their own important investigations, regardless of their economic resources.

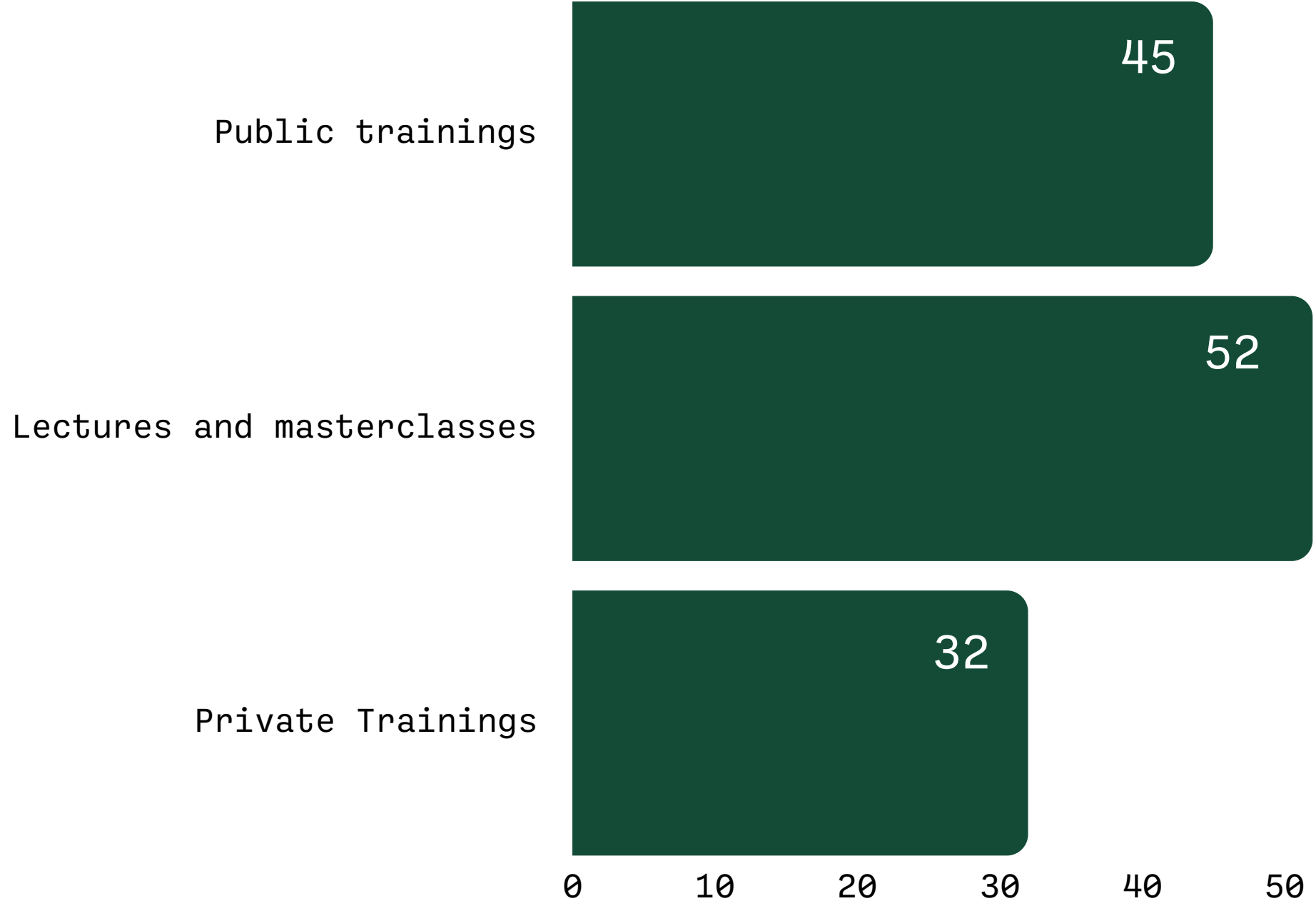
At the core of Bellingcat’s ethos is a desire to spread open source research knowledge as widely as possible. This makes our training activities vital not only for the financial health of our organisation, but also to the fulfilment of its vision.





Trainings

We organised a total of 129 trainings, lectures, masterclasses and private workshops this year.



Global Authentication Project

Volunteer Community

In 2023 our Volunteer community continued to support the Civilian Harm project in Ukraine and contributed to a few other research projects that resulted in publications. Here's an overview:

Continue Mapping Incidents of Civilian Harm in Ukraine

Since 2022 February, Bellingcat and members of its Global Authentication Project have begun to log and map incidents of civilian harm in Ukraine on an interactive TimeMap. Together we logged 449 events in 2023.

Mapping the Aftermath of the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Border Clashes

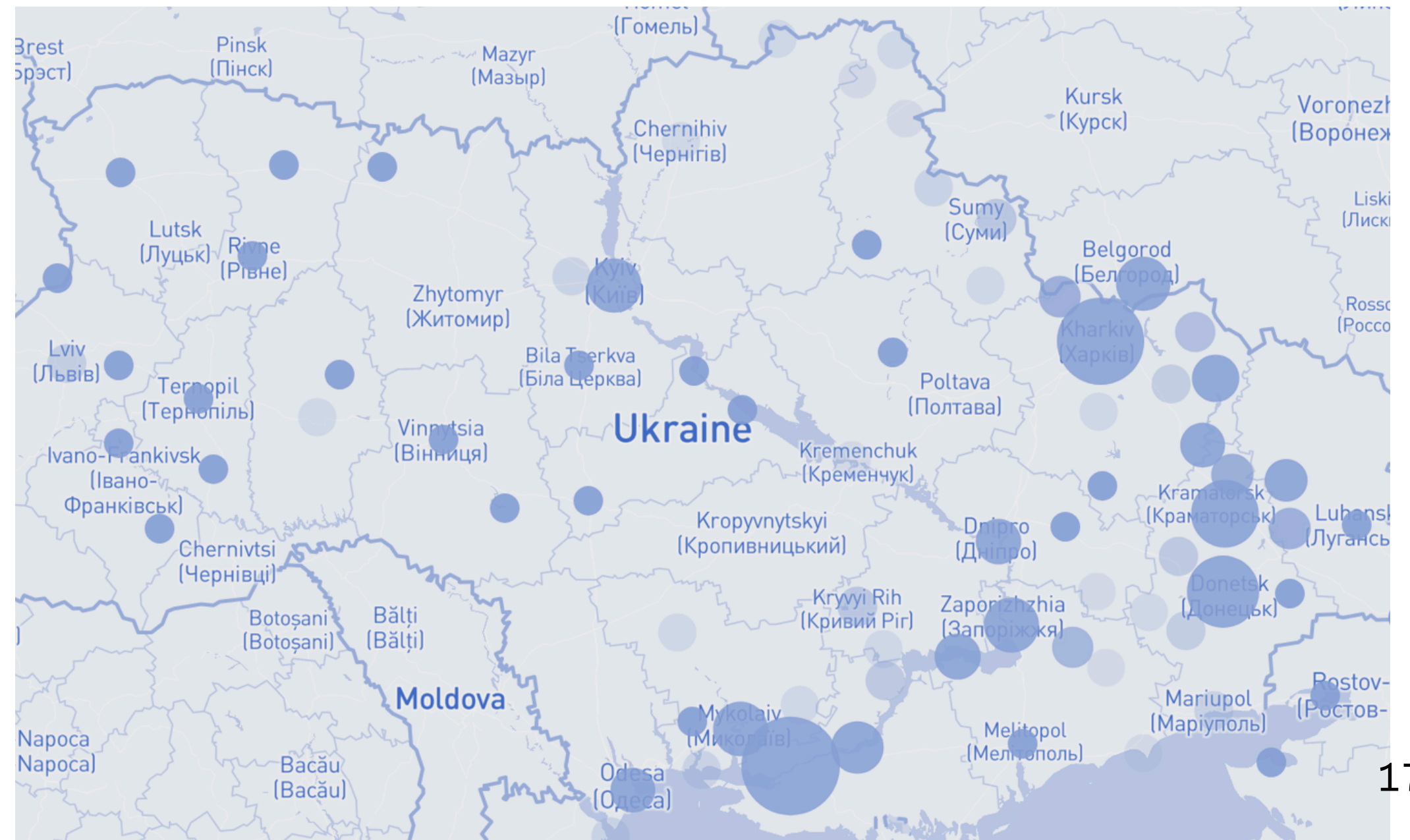
To help assess the impact of these events on civilians, Bellingcat has created an interactive map showing apparent changes to buildings after the clashes, identifying civilian infrastructure and private property that was likely impacted.

Russia's Ghost Ships and the Evolution of a Grain Smuggling Operation

The collaborative research led by Bellingcat, Scripps News, and Lloyd's List using AIS data and satellite imagery unveiled a clandestine operation wherein vessels like the Mikhail Nenashev transported grain from occupied eastern Ukraine. This investigation exposed persistent attempts to mask the source of grain exports from sanctioned areas. The video report was nominated for CIR Open Source Film Awards!

Community Events

Throughout 2023, we organised a series of nine live sessions exclusively for members of our Volunteer Community, aimed at enhancing their skills in open source research. These sessions covered a wide range of topics, including basic and advanced geolocation, chronolocation, image searching, command line tools for open source investigations, archiving, and more.



Global Authentication Project

Organisational and Community Research (Q4 2023):

Upon the arrival of a new program lead in Q4 2023, a thorough organisational and community research initiative was launched. This involved comprehensive member surveys, interviews with community stakeholders, and consultations with Bellingcat's internal team to discern areas ripe for improvement and strategic focus for 2024. Key Improvement Areas Identified:

- Streamlining member recruitment and onboarding processes
- Fostering closer collaboration between members and internal staff
- Implementing systematic communication and feedback mechanisms
- Expanding and diversifying community programs to accommodate a broader range of skills and interests
- Refining the member journey and establishing clear pathways for community involvement and evolution.

Promotion of Internal Talent

One prominent member was hired as a fellow between October 11 to February 11 to address challenges arising from staffing shortages during a critical period. These efforts allowed a further successful geolocation of incidents in the Civilian Harm in Ukraine project, showcasing a significant increase from 1293 incidents reported at the start of November 2023 to over 1500 by the end of the year. In response to the growing need for community engagement, an experienced full-time Community Manager was appointed to lead the Volunteer Community Program at Bellingcat. As the sole dedicated staff member, the Community Manager initiated a series of strategic actions to enhance the program's effectiveness.

Developing 2024 Strategy

Building on the momentum of our 2024 strategy, we developed a clear plan and initiated steps in key areas. These efforts commenced in early Q1 2024 and are integral to our ongoing growth and development.

• Implementation of Cohort-based Recruitment (Q1 2024):

Introducing a cohort-based quarterly recruitment strategy that should result in the successful community growth and health, with onboarding new community members. New members will support the CIVHARM project, as well as other research projects alongside in-house researchers. Concurrently, a revamped recruitment and security onboarding process will be developed to further focus on fostering a safe environment for our members and staff to collaborate in.

• Enhanced Collaboration and Learning Opportunities:

To foster closer collaboration, a new structure for the Volunteer Community is introduced, mirroring Bellingcat's internal teams. In addition to the ongoing CIVHARM project, three new projects will be rolled out in Q1, 2024 - two of which were in the area of conflict monitoring and one in the investigative technology field. Additionally, two new series of member-only sessions will be rolled out to facilitate practical learning and peer exchange on various tools and project-specific briefings.

• Community Expansion and Support:

To better support this expanding community, bi-weekly rotating Community Office Hours will be established across different time zones. To consolidate resources and enhance transparency, a dedicated Community Hub will be launched, providing our vetted volunteers with access to a comprehensive knowledge library.

• Launch of a Public Community Homepage and Public Outreach:

Furthermore, a public homepage will be established to inform the broader community about volunteer opportunities and showcase member-contributed projects. Monthly updates on social media platforms and a quarterly newsletter will also be initiated.

Volunteer Community Voices

“One of the things I most value about the community is that it operates as an open, flat structure with no hierarchy. Volunteers are treated with the same respect as staff and can make as much of a contribution as they are interested in.” - Fraser

“Being part of the Global Authentication Project is an honour, and an opportunity to take part in high-impact research as part of a group of people striving for excellence and using high-performance tools.” - Stéphanie

“It is a place to share, learn, and develop technical skills, that beginner open-source researchers would otherwise find intimidating.” - Akk36

“This community has a great sense of connection with fellow like-minded individuals who are passionate about journalist, open source intelligence and truth-seeking. It also represents a collaborative platform where people can contribute to important investigations that have global impact.” - Sn00per

“The Bellingcat volunteer community is a collective of likeminded people that use their skills and talent to help the world be better through tireless efforts.” - Anonymous



Justice and Accountability Unit

Open-Source information as evidence

The Justice and Accountability Unit, a partnership between the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and Bellingcat, strengthened its focus on incidents of civilian harm as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. With a unique mandate in Bellingcat to interact with national and international justice mechanisms, the J&A Unit's mission is to demonstrate that online open source information can be used as evidence in justice and accountability processes.

Using the Online Open Source Methodology developed by GLAN and Bellingcat, in 2023 we continued to collect, preserve and analyse open source images and videos of the war in order to achieve this mission.

Civilian Harm

Much of the data that the J&A Unit collects is publicly available and can be found at ukraine.bellingcat.com. We have logged over 3,100 incidents of civilian harm, of which over 1,700 have been geolocated - the most important step towards verifying an incident has occurred. This was done in partnership with the volunteers of the Global Authentication Project using the ATLOS platform, a platform created by two Stanford University computer science students seeking to make collaboration between people conducting open source investigations easier.

Investigations

After the first batch of 32 incident reports regarding the use of cluster munitions in the city of Kharkiv were completed, the J&A Unit switched to an RFI model, answering specific requests from prosecutors and civil society organisations focussing on legal accountability who required open source analysis skills. As part of this we completed an RFI in partnership with the [Clooney Foundation](#) focused on the alleged unlawful detention, torture, and execution of a man in the Kharkiv region.

We also completed an RFI in partnership with the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) regarding the murder of [Mantas Kvedaravičius](#) which was subsequently submitted to Lithuanian authorities. In February 2024, the General Prosecutor of Lithuania announced that three soldiers of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic had been identified as suspects and charged with the unlawful arrest, deprivation of liberty and murder of the filmmaker.



Justice and Accountability Unit

Training & partnerships

The primary aim of the Justice and Accountability Unit is to demonstrate the feasibility of open source information as evidence. Whilst some of that can be achieved by conducting investigations, it is vital that legal professionals, including judges, prosecutors and defence counsels understand how the information was collected and authenticated.

As part of this effort we partner with the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) to Ukraine to deliver training to Ukrainian lawyers and judges. In September 2023 the J&A Unit provided training to Ukrainian lawyers and judges in the city of Kharkiv.

The J&A Unit also continues to provide data to the ICC and works with national and international prosecutors on matters related to Ukraine.

While the J&A Unit's immediate concern has been work that directly relates to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it also continues to work on the conceptual basis of use of open source information as evidence. To that end it participated in another mock trial as part of Swansea University's TRUE Project, designed to assess the persuasive power of open source information as evidence.



Trust in User-generated Evidence:
Analysing the Impact of Deepfakes on Accountability
Processes for Human Rights Violations

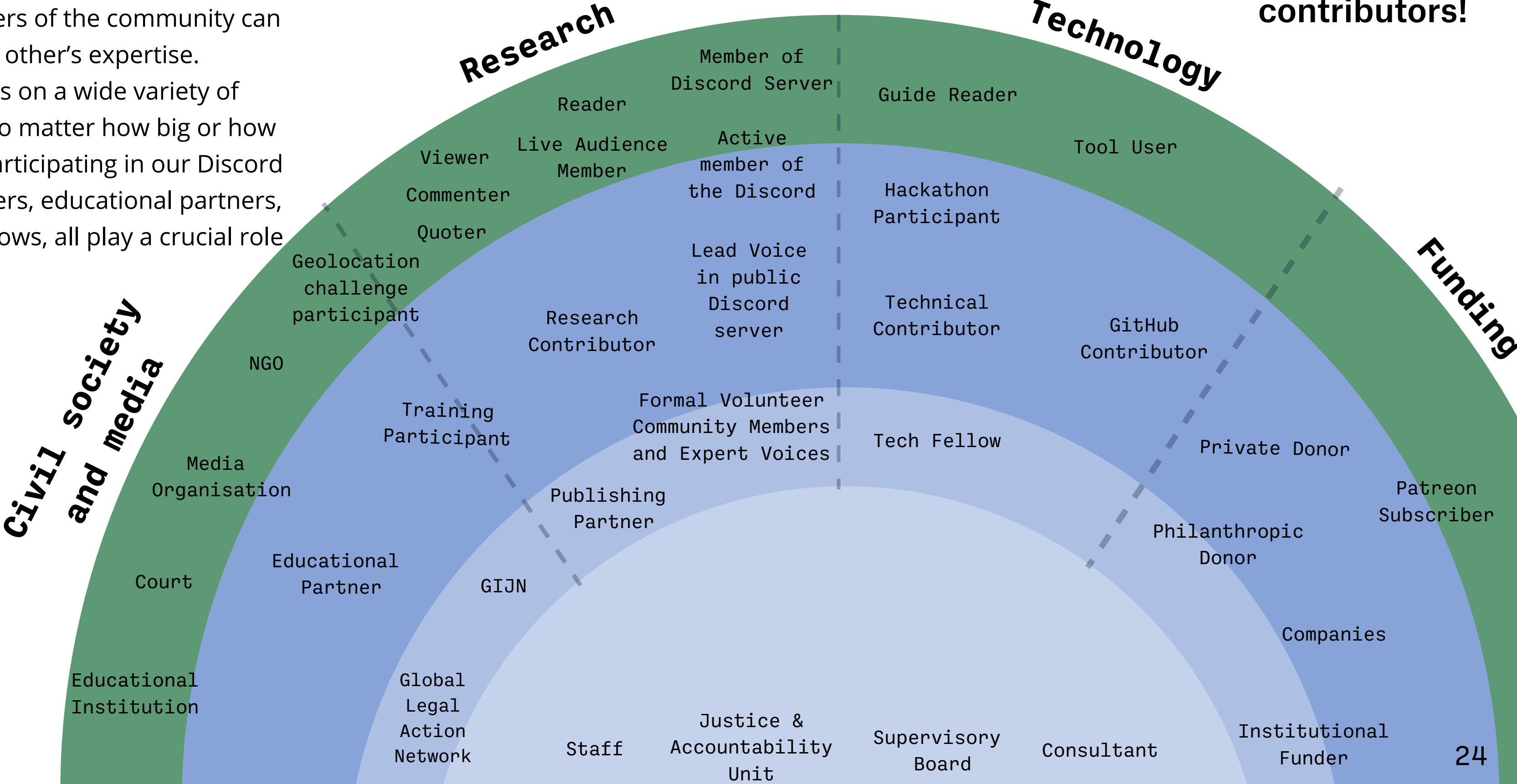
The Bellingcat team



The Bellingcat Community Ecosystem

We aim to create a circular ecosystem, in which members of the community can learn from each other's expertise. Bellingcat thrives on a wide variety of contributions, no matter how big or how small. People participating in our Discord server, volunteers, educational partners, funders and fellows, all play a crucial role in our work.

Thanks to all community contributors!



Investigative focus teams

This year we defined our investigative focus areas by creating teams that work on conflict monitoring, human rights, financial investigations, online ideologies and environmental research. We also established the Rapid Response team, quickly jumping on breaking news events such as the escalation in Gaza, Wagner's revolt on Moscow and the increase in violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

- Conflict Monitoring
- Human Rights
- Financial Investigations
- Online Ideologies
- Environmental Research
- Rapid Response



Executive Board



Eliot Higgins



Dessi Damianova



Giancarlo Fiorella

Supervisory Board



Sander van Luik



María Teresa
Ronderos

External Advisory Board

- Algirdas Lipstas
- Anya Neistat
- Francis Fukuyama
- Premesh Chandran
- Emiel Jurjens

Partners & Supporters

Part of our thriving community are our valuable partners for projects and research in 2023, with whom we often share a long history of appreciated collaboration.

Media outlets

- Cerosetenta
- CLIP
- Colombia Check
- Expresso (Portugal)
- Lloyd's List
- Reuters
- Scripps News
- SIC (Portugal)
- The New York Times
- The Sunday Times

Other partners

including in-kind donations

- Financial Times
- Global Legal Action Network
- Hunchly
- Kennedy van der Laan
- Lloyd's List Intelligence
- Maltego
- Mapbox
- Planet Labs PBC
- Prakken D'Oliveira Human Rights Lawyers (legal advice)
- RiskIQ
- Vizlegal
- Total Design
- Umbra Space

Funding Partners

Our work wouldn't even remotely be possible if not for our funders and donors. Each euro, dollar, krona, pound, rupia, peso etc. represents the trust of thousands of donors worldwide and enables every second we spend on investigating, training, building tech tools, empowering our community and advancing standards of justice and accountability. Many supporters choose to choose not to be mentioned publicly and we respect that. We therefore would like to thank the foundations and companies listed here for their generous support as representatives of our supporting community: THANK YOU!

- Civitates
- European Commission
- Limelight Foundation
- Nationale Postcode Loterij
- Proton Foundation
- Svenska Postkod Stiftelsen
- The Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

Financial Statements

Consolidated balance sheet as per 31 December 2023

In Euro's, after profit appropriation

Assets	31 December 2023	31 December 2022
Fixed Assets		
Intangible Fixed Assets		
Website	5.443	10.578
Intangible Fixed Assets		
Building	16.580	11.401
Hard – and software	21.941	15.313
Office equipment	9.124	12.233
Total tangible fixed assets	47.645	38.947
Total Fixed Assets	53.088	49.525
Current Assets		
Deposits	32.540	32.519
Debtors	23.509	74.841
Accounts receivable and advances	129.725	403.782
VAT to receive	0	966
Interest to receive	12.035	58
Total current assets	197.809	512.166
Cash and cash equivalents	4.208.807	2.885.234
Total Assets	4.459.704	3.446.925

LIABILITIES	31 December 2023	31 December 2022
Reserves and funds		
Continuity reserve	1.621.441	1.014.807
Earmarked reserve	725.000	225.000
Earmarked funds	0	21.255
Share of third parties	-34.246	-7.411
Total reserves and funds	2.312.195	1.253.651
Current liabilities		
Payable to staff	64.417	53.314
Payable to suppliers	23.365	17.722
Taxes Payable	28.371	43.109
VAT payable	27.516	0
Other short-term liabilities	62.077	56.670
Obligations related to current projects	720.070	887.108
Grants received in advance	1.208.122	1.113.711
Other amounts received in advance	13.571	21.640
Total current liabilities	2.147.509	2.193.274
Total Liabilities	4.459.704	3.446.925

Consolidated statement of income and expense from 1 January till 31 December 2023

INCOME			
	Actuals 2023	Budget 2023	Actuals 2022
Income from Lotteries	353.608	414.000	428.399
Income from other non-profit organisations	2.316.663	1.450.000	1.411.520
Income from companies	374.996	60.000	283.365
Income from governments	77.165	70.000	162.703
Income from legacies	51.286	0	0
Income from individuals	555.588	380.000	831.537
Sum of the proceeds gained	3.729.306	2.374.000	3.117.524
Income from workshops	635.616	500.000	439.154
Income from keynotes / presentations	61.968	25.000	44.986
Income media productions	34.528	0	15.089
Sum of earned income	732.112	525.000	499.229
Total Income	4.461.418	2.899.000	3.616.753

EXPENDITURE

Spent on the organisation's objectives:

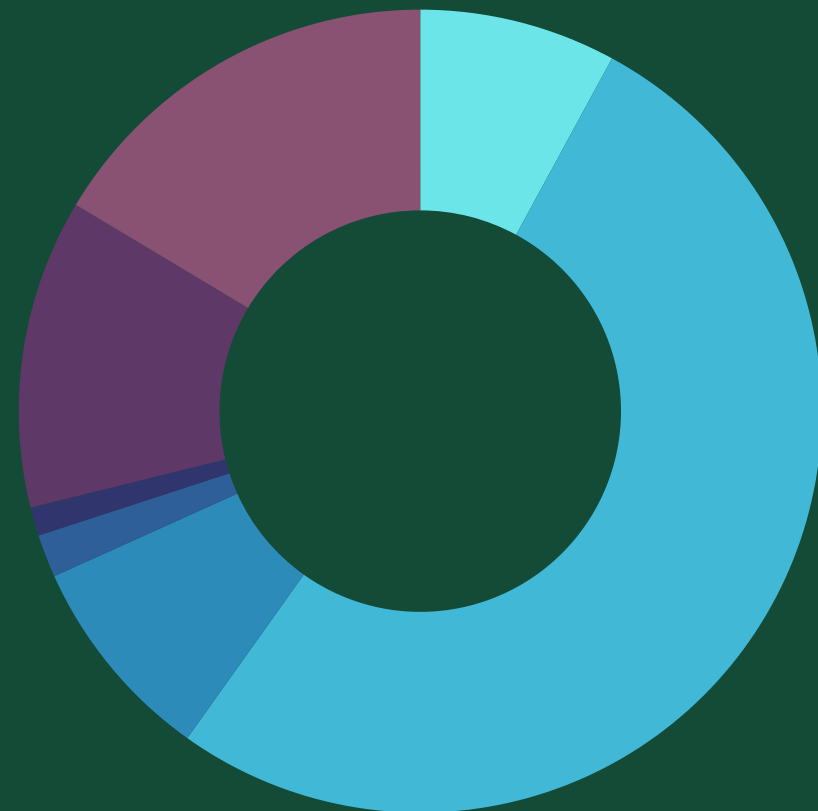
Research and Investigations	2.314.590	1.744.601	2.050.311
Training	405.673	393.853	226.509
Media productions	149.542	0	13.020
Costs of fundraising	163.923	290.479	230.939
Management and accounting costs	383.467	416.567	315.445
Total expenditure	3.417.195	2.845.500	2.836.224
Operating result	1.044.223	53.500	780.529
Financial income and expenditures	-1.417	-11.000	-12.804
Result before taxes	1.042.806	42.500	767.725
Corporation tax	15.737	0	-262
Share third parties	26.836	0	-594
Result after taxes	1.085.379	42.500	766.869

Appropriation of the balance of income and expenses

Additions to:			
Continuity reserve	606.634	42.500	573.120
Earmarked reserve tech development	500.000	0	0
Earmarked reserve	0	0	225.000
Earmarked funds	-21.255	0	-31.251

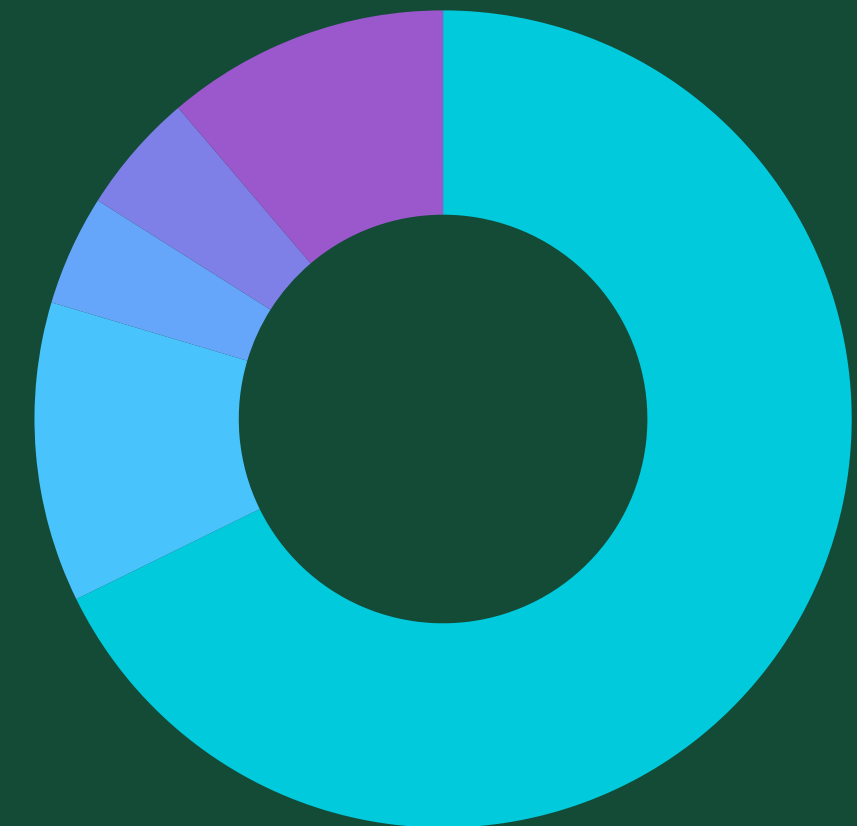
Total Income:
4.461.418

- Income from lotteries
- Income from other non-profit organisat...
- Income from companies
- Income from governments
- Income from legacies
- Income from individuals
- Own generated income



Total Expenditure:
3.417.195

- Research and Investigations
- Training
- Media productions
- Costs of fundraising
- Management and accounting costs



Consolidated cash flow statement

			2023			2022
Cash Flow from operational activities						
Balance of income and expenses in the financial year		1.085.379			766.869	
Changes for:						
Depreciation		17.494			360	
Provisions		0			-70.000	
Changes in working capital						
current assets	287.521			-402.561		
current liabilities	-45.765			855.286		
cash flow from operational activities			1.344.629			1.149.954

Consolidated cash flow statement

Cash flow from investment activities						
Investments activities						
Investment in tangible fixed assets	-22.554			-30.655		
Disinvestments in tangible fixed assets		1.498			24.619	
Cash flow from investment activities			-21.056			-6.036
Net cash flow			1.323.573			1.143.918
Liquid assets at the start of the financial year	2.885.234			1.741.316		
Liquid assets at the end of the financial year	4.208.807			2.885.234		
Changes in liquid assets			1.323.573			1.143.918

