

The New Humanitarian|

Journalism from the heart of crises

A woman wearing a bright orange headscarf and a patterned headband is leaning over a concrete well structure. She is filling a large yellow plastic water container. In the background, there are several cows, a person, and a small white car in a dry, dusty landscape under a clear blue sky. The scene suggests a rural area where water is a precious resource.

Annual Report
2021

Executive summary

Introduction

In recent years, we have established ourselves as the only newsroom worldwide specialised in covering humanitarian crises, beginning with our spin off from the United Nations. Since 2015, we have created a new legal entity; raised millions of dollars in funding; recruited an almost entirely new team, including an Executive Editor from the New York Times and a Chief Operating Officer with extensive experience in HR and strategic planning; launched a new investigative reporting unit; won several awards (including a One World Media Award for our reporting on COVID-19); rebranded the organisation; and put our work on the map in fora like TEDx, the World Economic Forum, and the Global Investigative Journalism Conference.

After years of creating the building blocks of a successful media non-profit, The New Humanitarian is now reaping the benefits of previous investments. 2021 allowed TNH to consolidate successes to date and set the foundations for future growth, most notably with the development of our new 5-year strategy.

We proved that less is more: We reduced our editorial output to allow our editors more time to produce more impactful, creative and distinctive reporting, all while maintaining our audience significantly above 2019 levels (as with other news media, audience levels in 2020 were exceptionally high due to interest in COVID-19).

Our noteworthy journalism included continued coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and reporting from hard-to-reach areas, including Afghanistan and Ethiopia. We published several impactful investigations – including a follow-up on our 2020 revelation of accusations of sexual abuse and exploitation of women by Ebola aid workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We continued our popular Rethinking Humanitarianism series and launched a second season of the Rethinking Humanitarianism podcast. We led an important conversation in the media sector on decolonising journalism about the Global South, while continuing to build our clout and visibility with participation in major industry events and distribution partnerships with mainstream media.

We continued to strengthen our financial outlook and operations: thanks to continued support from our donors, we renewed several multi-year partnerships; increased our budget despite uncertainty linked to COVID-19; and continued to build up our reserves, equivalent to two months of operating expenditures.

Finally, we sought to improve morale among staff after two long years of COVID, and reinforced our team, including adding specific resources for people and culture, podcasting and multimedia, among others.

"The pieces that are coming out of TNH are just amazing, especially given the way you are incorporating multimedia, amplifying local voices, utilising excellent photography, and weaving those personal stories in through more technical analysis. It is really, really impressive, all in spite of the obvious challenges to getting reporters on the ground."

- Devon Terrill, Program Officer, Journalism & Media,
Stanley Center for Peace and Security

2021 at a glance



Our journalism in 2021

The New Humanitarian's journalism seeks to do three things:

Provide in-depth, field-based perspectives on humanitarian crises

When political turmoil thrust humanitarian needs into mainstream headlines, we pushed beyond those headlines to provide distinctive, aid-focused coverage looking at the roots of those crises and ways forward. As the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and silenced many Afghan voices, we relied on the remote reporting skills honed in the pandemic to rebuild our shattered network of sources and journalists and ensure their voices were heard. When tens of thousands of people, many of them Haitian, arrived on the southern US border, we were among the first to report from the Darién Gap, between Colombia and Panama, on the perilous migration route they had taken. And long after the military takeover of Myanmar disappeared from the news cycle, we continued to speak with local sources and tap local contributors

to highlight the deepening challenges faced by civilians and aid workers, even as physical access and communications were severely restricted.

We unearthed signs of progress, too. We looked at how COVID-19 raised awareness of needs within the Navajo Nation's Indigenous community in the United States, and funding to help meet those needs. We dug deep into data to understand the great progress Bangladesh has made in reducing deaths from storms, even while a warming planet amps up the ferocity of those storms. And we reported on grassroots efforts to make a difference in the lives of communities experiencing humanitarian crises, from women working to ease ethnic tensions in South Sudan to **Indigenous Amazon** groups' efforts to ensure vaccine access for their communities.



Shahidullah and Murtaza, both 26-year-old Afghan asylum seekers, leave Caldiran village in eastern Turkey trying to reach the main city of Van, on 6 July 2021. (Emre Caylak/The New Humanitarian)

Shine a spotlight on forgotten stories and emerging trends

Despite obstacles to access, the ongoing battle for readers' attention, and the cost and personal risks of on-the-ground reporting, we held fast to our moral commitment to pay consistent attention to crises often overlooked by mainstream media. In Burkina Faso, it took a chartered plane and carefully devised security plans to report from the town of Djibo – where, we were told, we were the first international journalists to visit in five years. Once there, in an exclusive report we revealed secret peace deals being pursued with jihadists. In Sudan, we needed months of research and a trip by donkey across rugged terrain to enable our reporters – among only a handful

of journalists to visit mountainous rebel-held territory in a decade, residents said – to explore how Darfur had gone from a global cause to a forgotten crisis, one in which 1.5 million people remain in displacement camps and new violence has forced hundreds of thousands of others from their homes. And after six months of building contacts and trust with sources on the ground, we spent time in northeastern Nigeria, speaking with former Boko Haram fighters who were part of a secretive government programme to return them to civilian life, and their neighbours, who were weighing whether they could forgive and move on.

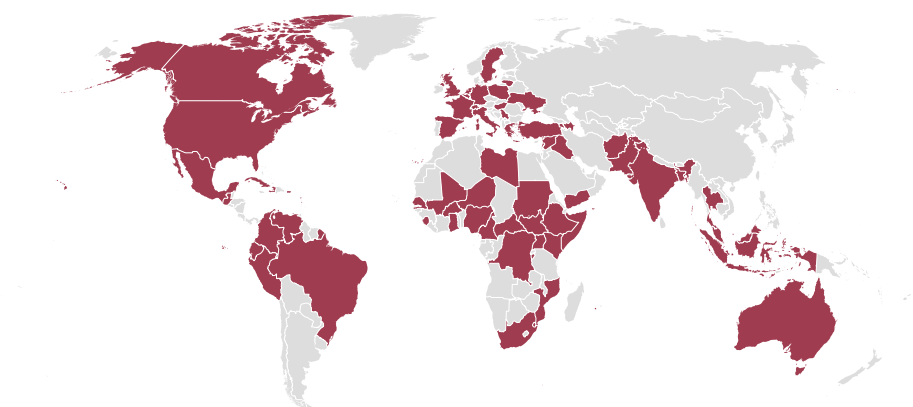
Cast a critical eye over the emergency aid sector

Our coverage spurred discussions and reflection within the humanitarian response sector, among governments and other donors who fund it, and in the communities it serves. Through surveys, data analysis, and discussions with sources throughout the sector, we examined how aid could be distributed in a more climate-conscious way; whether humanitarian organisations had made good on vows to improve racial justice within their ranks; and on the pace and appetite for change in the face of new realities. And our platforms remained a safe space for myriad

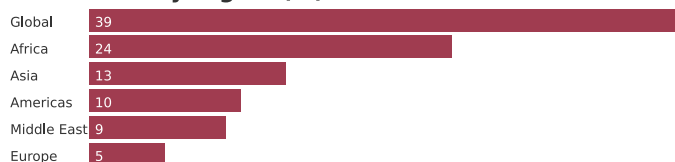
voices to question long-held assumptions and ways of working, from aid workers in Myanmar asking whether the idea of neutrality is outdated, to refugees suggesting how they could have **a real say** in the multilateral decision-making that shapes their futures. Our exclusive reporting uncovered a mystery donor to humanitarian aid for Yemen (hint: look no further than the key combatants), and donor discontent over the UN's handling of aid to Ethiopian refugees in Sudan. And we exposed the abusive and deadly effects of EU and Libyan migration policies.

Places we reported from in 2021

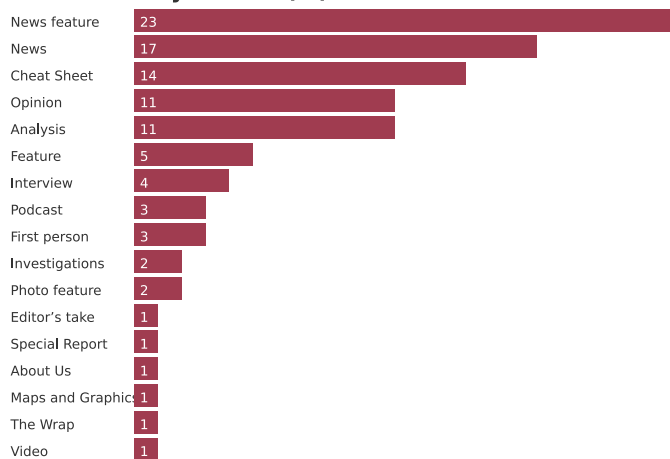
TNH 2021 datelines



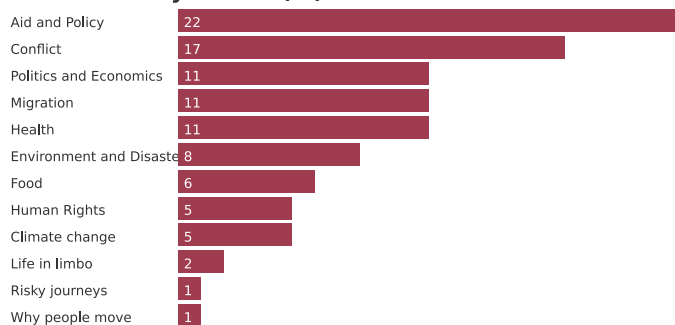
Production by region (%)



Production by format (%)

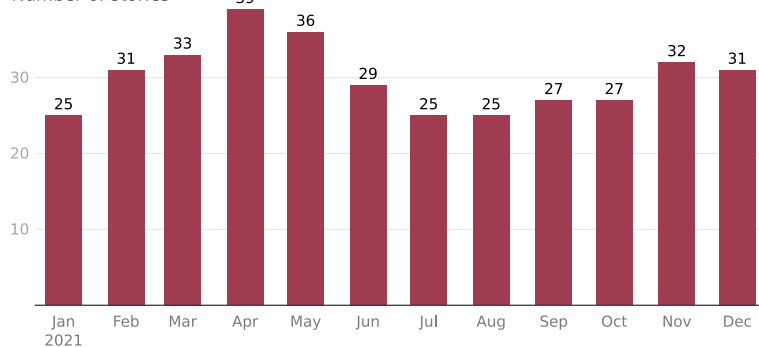


Production by theme (%)



Editorial production

Number of stories



Our impact

In 2021, our coverage of humanitarian crises informed decision-making in the interest of those most affected at the highest levels. For example, we were invited to participate in an off-the-record roundtable to advise the team at the US National Security Council responsible for writing the National Security Strategy on how to centre racial equity in their foreign policy.

We provided greater accountability and transparency in the aid sector: In one investigation, we uncovered claims from women in Burkina Faso that local men – some of them community leaders – demanded sex in exchange for humanitarian assistance. Our investigation prompted further reporting by local media outlets which prompted the minister for humanitarian affairs to address the problem in a press conference. Other reports explored allegations of sexual exploitation, bullying, and fraud at Oxfam in

Congo and Iraq, which led the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to suspend its funding on condition that Oxfam improve its safeguarding.

By making humanitarian issues more accessible to a wider audience, we raised awareness of forgotten crises and inspired further support: Some of our readers, for example, contacted us wanting to donate money and clothes to people interviewed in our coverage of the war in Ukraine.

Our audience

In 2021, our average monthly web users settled after the dramatic peaks in 2020 attributed to our coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, we had 279,000 monthly visitors to our website, with a high of 378,000 in April, after our investigation into new Oxfam misconduct allegations in Iraq and “rotten” work culture in Congo.

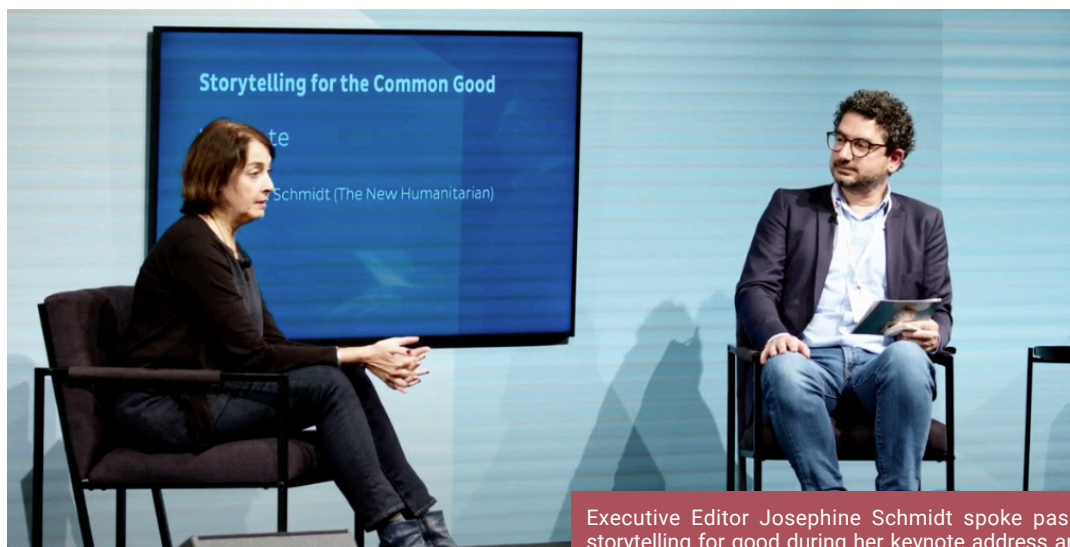
In total, articles on our site were read more than 5 million times by more than 3 million people in 2021. New articles were viewed 4,335 times on average, a decrease compared to a year dominated by pandemic stories in 2020, but a more than 50 percent increase on average page views per article in 2019.

We also ramped up our efforts to provide a platform for diverse voices from across the humanitarian spectrum to have their say with more than 15 widely read opinion

pieces, two of which – about volunteerism and child sponsorship respectively – reached more than 10,000 page views and inspired lively debate on Twitter.

Our online community grew as we saw our reach on social media increase in 2021. Our videos were viewed more than half a million times on YouTube, with an additional 78,000 video views on other social channels. Our audience on social media increased by 12 percent to 188,000 followers, while our newsletter subscribers grew by 8,000 to total more than 64,000 and our podcasts were downloaded more than 100,000 times.

Events



Executive Editor Josephine Schmidt spoke passionately about storytelling for good during her keynote address and discussion at the Human Rights Film Festival in Berlin.

We continued hosting online events in 2021 to deepen engagement with our readers. We tried a fresh format for our flagship 10 Crises to Watch event, inviting leading thinkers from across the humanitarian space to speak about the issues that had their attention at the turn of the year. More than 1,000 people joined us for an engaging conversation on the trends on the horizon.

We also organised a series of Reader Salons for more informal conversations with editors from The New Humanitarian. Readers got a chance to hear from journalists like Eric Reidy, our editor-at-large for migration, who spoke in-depth about his reporting, after winning the UN Correspondents Association for his work reporting on the impact of COVID-19 on displaced people.

Raising our profile in the media sector

The quality of our journalism continued to make us an attractive partner for major newsrooms around the world, who worked with us to ensure the stories we told reached as wide and relevant an audience as possible. We co-published reports with the **Thomson Reuters Foundation**, **The Independent**, **Al Jazeera**, **The Guardian US**, and **Der Spiegel**.

Our work was republished, cited by, or linked to from numerous major media outlets, as well as diaspora newspapers, including The New York Times, The Washington

Post, National Public Radio, The Guardian, Swiss Info, Le Monde, The Mail & Guardian, Haitian Times, Nigerian Tribune, The South African, and Jemen-Report, an annual report on Yemen published by the German-Yemeni society.

Our staff were also interviewed by the BBC, Voice Of America, France 24, and TV5 Monde, among others, and in podcasts including **Deeper Look**, **Al Jazeera's The Take**, **It's All Journalism**, and **Storytelling for Impact**.

Our membership programme

We saw growth in our membership programme, which provides a channel for readers who are aligned with our mission to support us financially, while also bringing them closer to our work. By the end of 2021, 637 readers were paying members who contributed more than 41,000 CHF to our work throughout the year. This is an important part of our plans to diversify our

revenue, decrease reliance on grants, and increase our independence. Membership provides us with an opportunity to keep our most loyal supporters informed about our work, including at a strategic level, via a members-only newsletter, a private Slack channel, and our Reader Salons, where they engage in informal conversations with TNH editors about our stories.

Our funding

In 2021, our overall income was CHF 2'333'823 and our total expenditure was CHF 2'147'455. This represents an 8 percent increase in our spending levels compared to 2020, with 20 partners ([listed here](#)) supporting our work.

Unearmarked funding, which accounted for 74 percent of our overall income, allowed

more coherent coverage and flexibility to adapt to a changing news environment. Through individual donations, speaker fees, and our membership programme, we generated small amounts of independent revenue, allowing us to continue building reserves and providing greater sustainability for our organisation.

Our organisation and governance

In 2021, TNH established a full operations team to strengthen its foundation for future organisational development and growth. In November, we hired our first Chief Operating Officer (COO) to lead strategic and risk management processes.

She oversees a Head of People and Culture, who is tasked with building a diverse, global team and nurturing a culture of innovation and well-being; as well as a Head of Administration, Finance and Compliance, who manages the organisation's finances. They are supported by an Admin and Finance Assistant. The operations team will support the organisation in its next phase of development to mature its internal processes, increase financial transparency,

improve employee experience, and scale its work.

We hired a podcast producer to reach and engage target audiences through our flagship Rethinking Humanitarianism podcast, while also developing future podcast offerings. We also brought on board a multimedia editor to use video to amplify our journalism to wider audiences.

We equally welcomed some new faces to our board of directors: award-winning Syrian journalist Zaina Erhaim; American marketing and product development executive Hayley Nelson; Chilean editor and author Paula Escobar-Chavarría; and award-winning Indian media entrepreneur Syed Nazakat.

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