

Date: June 2024

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# Bits of Freedom Annual Report 2023



## PREFACE

Do you love horseback riding and like listening to Dutch folk singer André Hazes? Chances are you saw ads on social media for the Dutch political party BBB during the last general elections. Or are you more into field hockey and do you go to the museum a lot in your spare time? Then D66 was ready to target you. So much was revealed by the Dutch news magazine De Groene Amsterdammer in November 2023. Their research showed once again: anyone who can afford it can influence people online - in a very targeted manner.

For us, online influence in the context of the elections was therefore one of the big themes of 2023. From left to right; every political party seemed captivated by the profiling capabilities of Meta and Google. Parties pay big money to reach potential voters, also when it means that it disappears into the pockets of manipulative middlemen: Big Tech. This puts our democratic rights under pressure. How informed are we, and how free are our elections, when each of us is continuously and unknowingly influenced online?

Fortunately, our work on this topic has borne fruit: the European Digital Services Act (DSA) prohibits political ads based on sensitive data, such as sexual orientation, religion or ethnicity. This is now even being set out in a European law on political online ads. Something we have been fighting for for years!

But Bits of Freedom wouldn't be Bits of Freedom if we were not still concerned. We remain critical, because manipulation does not only happen in the context of elections, or through straight-up ads. Big Tech's sensationalist algorithms have shaped a public debate in which hate flourishes, outrage is rewarded and misinformation goes unpunished. And there's no easy fix. But that does not mean we should lose sight of small successes. Initiating change, and in our case advancing digital rights and the democratic rule of law, is something you're in for the long haul. By continuing to speak up, we will get there. Step by step.

We were pleased to see many of the changes we advocated for becoming reality in 2023. In addition to the new European rights for platform users, the year revolved around influencing the AI Act, limiting government surveillance and censorship, and conducting our own technical research into digital malpractice, among other things. We're looking forward to sharing some of the highlights of our work in this annual report. One thing is certain: our work is far from being done.

Bits of Freedom  
June 2024

## **TEAM**

Evelyn Austin  
Rejo Zenger  
Inge Wannet  
Lotte Houwing  
Nadia Benaissa  
Maartje Knaap  
Meri Urdaneta  
Nico Voskamp  
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Ilja Schurink

## **BOARD**

Sophie Logothetis (chair)  
Peter Rampertaap (treasurer)  
Marjolein Lanzing  
Rosien van Toor

# 1. HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

These are some of the topics we worked on.

## 1. WE STOOD UP FOR THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE PRIVATELY

The European Commission wants to protect children and young people from sexual abuse. And that's super important. But, like a lot of others, we think the way the Commission is going about this is wrong. Because if [the Commission's proposal](#) is passed unchanged, it will have a big negative impact on the confidentiality of communications online. That would be bad news for everyone, including for children and young people.

To ensure that the right to communicate confidentially remains protected, we spoke with policymakers and in the European Parliament, as well as with law enforcement agencies, technology companies and organizations advocating for children's rights. We wanted legislators to understand the risks and shortcomings of the bill and opt for measures that would be more effective and have fewer harmful side effects.

And with success! Towards the end of the year the European Parliament (EP) took [a sharp position](#). The EP believes that listening in on someone's communications should only be possible in the case of a concrete suspicion. And that end-to-end encryption should be well protected. The position of the European Council is more problematic, although, partly due to our efforts, it too has become increasingly critical over the past year. Now, [closed-door negotiations](#) will commence, which, of course, we will closely monitor - and try to influence.

## 2. WE INCREASED CIVIL RESILIENCE AGAINST BIG TECH

At the end of August 2023, the very large online platforms, such as Instagram and X, had to start complying with [new European legislation](#). Among other things, they had to start offering a non-personalized feed and be more transparent about ads. That's good news!

To influence the interpretation and implementation of these rules, we asked governments, regulators and companies critical questions, and gave solicited and unsolicited advice.

We also want to ensure that everyone knows what their new rights are and how they can best exercise them, so that everyone can contribute to the public debate as freely and safely as possible. We therefore continued churning out our newsletter on online platforms and spoke in the media. We also concluded the project '[the Public Interest vs. Big Tech](#)', in which we talked with civil society organizations about whether and to what extent they are hindered by Big Tech. Their input will inform an awareness campaign that will go live in 2024. We can't wait!

### **3. WE SHED LIGHT ON THE WORK OF THE SECRET SERVICES**

In 2023, the Temporary Cyber Act was debated in parliament. This is an addition to the Intelligence and Security Services Act of 2017. The bill would make it easier for intelligence services to intercept Internet traffic.

A temporary addition to a complicated law that will soon be structurally amended and whose subject matter is shrouded in much secrecy: you can imagine that this does not necessarily invite broad public discussion. Whereas that is precisely what is needed. We therefore made every effort to ensure that the creation of the Cyber Law would take place out in the open, and that members of parliament were well-informed.

We [presented the Big Brother Awards Expert Prize 2022](#) to the Minister of the Interior, and [launched a statement](#) co-signed by technology companies, academics, former politicians and regulators, journalists and human rights organizations. We [spoke in parliament](#) and did a number of [FOIA requests](#) to surface details concerning the introduction of the proposed law. The results were picked up by investigative journalism organisations [Follow the Money](#) and [Argos Medialogica](#), among others.

Although the proposal unfortunately made it through parliament with many of its damning qualities still intact, we are pleased with the attention that was given to the impact that this proposal will have on our rights and freedoms. We look forward to the discussion in the Senate in 2024.

### **4. WE FOUGHT HARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AI ACT**

Towards the end of the year, an agreement was finally reached on the AI Act. The agreement was preceded by lots of negotiating - much of which we were involved in. [We organized advocacy meetings](#) in [The Hague](#) and in Brussels, emphasizing that human rights must be protected in the development and use of artificial intelligence. We also made our position known in other places. At events, such as during The Night of the UN and the 20th anniversary of European Digital Rights (EDRi), and in newspapers, for example by writing about [the government's algorithmic failures](#).

Partly because of our work, and by acting with others, citizens' interests have been heard: for example, stronger bans have been placed on AI applications with high risks, including on biometric identification systems used in public space. In addition, it will not be allowed to target individuals through *predictive policing* systems.

### **5. WE EXPOSED DIGITAL MALPRACTICES THROUGH TECHNICAL RESEARCH**

Digitization brings risks and can unfortunately result in malpractices. To uncover hard evidence of this for use in our advocacy, awareness campaigns and litigation, we launched a technical research desk. In 2023, we conducted numerous investigations, three of which we'd like to highlight:

1. We investigated what happens to your personal data on 32,843 Dutch government, healthcare and education websites. Turns out: Google has access to highly personal and privacy-sensitive information. If it were up to us, government websites should lead by example and curb Google's power. So in early 2024, we'll roll out the results of the study and hold politicians accountable: remove Big Tech from our waiting rooms, classrooms and town halls.
2. We examined how cycle tracker apps, which keep track of when you get your period, handle your data. The conclusion: oftentimes much more data is processed than necessary, and often before you, the user, have given your consent. Time for legal action?
3. On behalf of the Racism & Technology Center, we wrote a rebuttal to a statistical analysis on algorithmic discrimination made by the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam. The occasion was a complaint filed by VU-student Robin Pocornie against the VU over the proctoring software she'd had to use at home during Covid-19. The software did not recognize her as a person because of her dark skin color, impeding her ability to take her exams. Our analysis refuted the VU's statistical arguments that the software was not discriminatory. Pocornie's case managed to bring the harmful side of facial recognition to wide attention. It has also motivated us to make our tech expertise more readily available to activists. To be continued!

## **6. WE CALLED PRIVACY-UNFRIENDLY MUNICIPALITIES TO TASK**

We celebrated the fifth anniversary of the General Data Protection Regulation. This European law protects people's privacy by regulating how their personal data is processed. Back in 2022, we researched compliance with the law among the ten largest Dutch municipalities. The results raised a lot of eyebrows. In 2023, we took stock: [what had happened since our report?](#)

Well: quite a lot! Parliamentary questions were raised in response to our report, and the government itself launched an investigation into its GDPR-compliance. We talked to several municipalities about how they moved forward, and we launched an investigation into online tracking on municipal websites. We kept emphasizing that the protection of personal data should be given high priority. With results: we can conclude that the GDPR is back on municipalities' agenda. And rightly so: the least governments can do is comply with the law.

## **7. WE MADE A PODCAST SERIES ABOUT DIGITIZATION AND THE ELECTIONS**

More and more listeners are finding their way to our podcast: in 2023 each episode was listened to approximately 1,400 times. Dutch newspaper NRC [tipped it last year as followed](#): 'Relaxed and in clear language, staff of the organization for digital civil rights discuss the social, political and moral dimensions of everything that goes on on and around the Internet.[...] In short, in the words of the opening song: 'No unworldly shit for the World Wide Web.' (It sounds catchier in Dutch!)

In addition to our regular episodes, we also made a series about the elections. Among other things, we focused on political ads, the party programs, our own digital election agreement and the election results, as well as on our recommendations for a future Minister of Digital Affairs. Our guests this past year were: Sarah Eskens, University Lecturer in Law and Technology; Marijn van Vliet, public affairs advisor; Katina Yiannakas of the Human Rights Board; Tim Staal of Expertise Center SPOON; Haroon Ali, journalist, writer and member of our Advisory Board; Fatima Aarbaj, researcher at the Ombudsman Metropolis Amsterdam; Rami Ismail, game developer and diversity and inclusion activist; Fieke Jansen, co-founder of the Critical Infrastructure Lab; Lieven Heeremans, co-founder of the Podcast Network; Süeda Işık, editor at NRC; Oumaima Hajri, researcher; and Marleen Stikker, director of Waag and winner of the 2022 Felipe Rodriguez Award.

## **8. WE MOBILIZED CIVIL RESISTANCE AGAINST HARMFUL DIGITIZATION**

Only with a broad social movement representing the interests of all people in the Netherlands will we be able to steer digitalization in the right direction. But the people impacted most by careless digitalization are not always well represented in The Hague. We want all organizations in the Netherlands that stand up for an open and just society to understand the technological dimensions of the problems and developments they oppose. And to know how technology can actually bring their goals closer.

In 2023, together with Public Interest Litigation Project (PILP), we organized the last of a series of workshops for organizations working against racism and for climate, migrants and undocumented people, and women's rights. Together we explored the positive and negative impact of Big Tech on achieving their goals, and what they need in order to make their voices heard more effectively. We will continue this collaboration in the coming years.

## **9. WE ARGUED FOR BETTER ENFORCEMENT OF FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY**

Unfortunately, facial recognition technology is being deployed more and more. One of the most notable examples last year was its use by the [Royal Netherlands Marechaussee](#) to identify protesters at a climate action. We worked to raise awareness of the consequences of this on our open and free society and called for better enforcement, as existing legislation often already prohibits the use of this technology.

We filed a [“tip” to the Data Protection Authority about Clearview AI](#), which led to a formal investigation we're expecting to hear more about in 2024. Furthermore, we wrote a letter to members of parliament about the “Deployment Framework Facial Recognition,” which the police created themselves in the absence of a legal basis. We also collaborated on the launch of [“Je gezicht is nu van ons”](#), the Dutch translation of Kashmir Hill's book *Your Face Belongs To Us*, and wrote several [op-eds](#) in order to expand our reach.

## **10. WE NAMED THE BIGGEST PRIVACY VIOLATORS OF THE YEAR DURING THE ANNUAL BIG BROTHER AWARDS**

Every year, we organize the Big Brother Awards to draw attention to individuals, companies and governments that have committed gross violations of citizens' freedom of communication and privacy. Perhaps the least desirable award to win.... On February 13, 2023, we announced the winners for the year 2022. Fortunately, the awards were incredibly well picked up by (national) media.

From four nominees, the public and a panel of experts chose respectively European Commissioner Johansson and the Dutch Minister of the Interior as the winners. Johansson's "victory" was due to her proposal to allow tech companies to monitor everyone's phones in the fight against child abuse. The Minister of the Interior won for facilitating the limitless data hunger of the secret services and reducing oversight of those same services.

The evening's Felipe Rodriguez Award highlighted someone who made an important positive contribution to the right to privacy in 2022; this year an anonymous whistleblower working for a municipality. The person revealed serious, fundamental problems with Dutch municipalities' compliance with privacy laws.

By using the Big Brother Awards to generate annual attention to serious violations of citizens' freedoms, we keep politicians and companies on their toes.



## 2. OUR FINANCES

Our annual financial report for 2023 was audited by Hilgers Accountants and can be downloaded [here](#).

### RESULTS 2023

#### INCOME

Mostly, our projections turned out to be fairly accurate. One thing stands out. Like last year, our targeted net donor growth remained entirely unrealized. Although we, again, succeeded in finding many new donors, an above-average number also left us.

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#### Income 2023 (in euro)

	Realization 2023	Estimated 2023	Realization 2022
Individual donors	381,285	424,000	368,901
Foundations	689,973	752,000	574,000
Corporate supporters	112,333	109,000	139,157
Other	6,913	-	16,489
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,184,504</b>	<b>1,285,000</b>	<b>1,098,547</b>
Project financing	314,884	302,492	258,893
Net interest	6,611	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,505,999</b>	<b>1,587,492</b>	<b>1,357,440</b>

#### EXPENDITURES

On the expenditures side, four things stand out. First, we postponed hiring a new colleague due to a grant falling through. We also relied less on freelancers, together resulting in significantly lower personnel costs than budgeted. Nevertheless, we made a big jump in our personnel expenses, our biggest cost and measure of sustainable growth: we spent a little over € 200K more than in 2022. After several years of being very cautious about our spending, this is good news.

Second, due to developments in our movement building strategy and plans, spending in this area was mostly pushed forward to 2024. Third, our ambition was to increase our communications expenses. We are happy to see this finally happening, most notably by running a major brand campaign. Finally, we set aside €50,000 for a move (housing) that didn't take place.

## Expenditures 2023 (in euro)

	Realization 2023	Estimated 2023	Realization 2022
Personnel costs	935,751	1,137,118	718,479
Housing	31,475	89,170	29,508
Office	20,021	21,204	37,596
Communication	102,011	118,648	42,711
Movement building	5,112	26,500	16,005
General costs	43,589	62,347	32,408
Deductions	1,432	-	1,201
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,139,391</b>	<b>1,455,005</b>	<b>877,908</b>
Projects	272,706	337,492	186,920
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,412,097</b>	<b>1,792,479</b>	<b>1,064,828</b>

All in all, this means that we'll close the year with a positive result which will be put to use in the coming years. It brings our designated reserve to approximately € 666K and our continuity reserve to roughly 25% of our expected costs for the coming year.

In 2023, 5,5% of funds spent went to fundraising and 5% to administration. 89,5% was spent directly on achieving our objectives. This is in line with our principle of not spending more than 20% of our funds and our time on fundraising and administration.

## SUPPORTED BY FOUNDATIONS

For a part of our work, it's difficult to obtain (sufficient) financial support from individual donors. For this reason, foundations are extremely important to us, both for the sustainability of our work and for the further development and growth of our organization. In some cases, foundations make it possible to take important steps at crucial moments, for instance by funding a new role in the team or research into a new work program.

In 2023, we received support for our core costs from:

- The **Adessium Foundation**: works toward a society in which people live in harmony with one another and with their surroundings.
- The **Ford Foundation**: works toward a fair and just society.
- The **Limelight Foundation**: works toward a robust and free information ecosystem.
- **Open Society Foundations (OSF)**: work toward robust and inclusive democracies.
- **Stichting Internet Domeinregistratie Nederland (SIDN)**: works toward a carefree digital world with opportunities for all.

- **Stichting Democratie & Media:** invests in independent, critical media and is dedicated to a robust democracy, based on the rule of law.

We received project funding from Aspiration Tech for our public interest tech pilot, from Luminate for Litigating Big Tech (in collaboration with PILP and Nederland Wordt Beter), from Gieskes-Strijbis Fund for our collaboration with Amnesty, Open State Foundation, Waag and Setup, from Open Society Foundations under the New Executives Fund, and from Goeie Grutten, SIDN fund, Civitates and EDRI for our work on platform regulation and in particular a public interest campaign to be launched in early 2024.

## **DONORS**

We concluded 2023 with 3.143 recurring donors, from whom we receive a donation on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis. We also receive one-off donations from individuals directly through our website or by direct transfer (1,190 times in 2023). Donations from individual donors totaled € 381,285.

At the beginning of 2023, we experienced an above-average number of cancellations and reductions in recurring contributions. Fortunately, we managed to reverse this trend by the end of the year, and the number of recurring donors stabilized. We met our donors during the Big Brother Awards and our anniversary. We also conducted a comprehensive donor survey, the results of which we will present and use in 2024.

Furthermore, in 2023 we introduced a new (and easier) way to make one-off donations on our website, and added new products to our shop, including the popular supporter socks. We also launched a major brand campaign called “i <3 technology, but only on my terms” in collaboration with advertising agency KesselsKramer.

## **CORPORATE SUPPORTERS**

The following companies supported us in 2023:

With € 10,000 or more: Duckduckgo and Freedom Internet

With € 2,500 or more: BIT, Greenhost, IB-Vision, iunxi - serious ict infrastructure, Unc Inc, and Voys.

With € 1,000 or more: Cryptography in Context, Hunki Enterprises, Intermax Cloud-sourcing, VBVB ICT and Yourhosting.

With € 500 or more: Breedbandwinkel.nl, Considerati, CT&V advies, GeoCat, Green Mini host, Het Rooster, iCulture, Mark Verhijde Advies en Projecten B.V., Mijndomein, NederHost, Nijweide BV, PrivacyLab, Prijs Vergelijken, RealConnections, Root Legal, Sooda internetbureau B.V., Talksome, VPNGids.nl, en Zygomatic.

With € 250 or more as ZZP (independent worker without employees) donor: Charys, DevNomads, Filosofie in actie, Leemshop, Mindshards

Finally, we received support in kind from: Bitonic, Blendle, Byte, CipherMail, Cyso / SQR.NL, DMARC Analyzer, Ekco, HAGENS, Jeroen Smeets, Mollie, Passbolt, Rick Pas-toor, Rootgamer, DeBesteVPN.nl, VPNgids.nl, Sentia and Xolphin.

## BUDGET 2024

### Projected expenditures 2024 (in euros)

Personnel costs	1,367,319
Housing	91,153
Office	24,204
Communication	141,602
Movement building	23,500
General costs	65,588
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,713,366</b>
Projects	304,758
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,018,125</b>

### Projected income 2024 (in euros)

Individual donors	427,362
Foundations	971,792
Corporate supporters	130,000
Merch and other	9,700
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,538,854</b>
Project financing	259,758
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,798,612</b>

In our expenditures, we allow for a staffing of 11 FTEs. A number of projects and events have already been budgeted - and income largely committed - to the amount of about €300K, including our own share of €30,000.

We have multi-year contracts for financial support with six foundations. In 2024, our contracts with Stichting Democratie en Media (Democracy and Media Foundation), Open Society Foundations, Limelight Foundation and Stichting Internet Domeinregistratie Nederland (SIDN) will expire. We hope to renew them. We're aiming to raise an additional € 415K in foundation support for 2024.

We hope to raise a total of € 437K from individual donors in 2024, which represents a substantial increase of approximately € 50K compared to last year. We hope to raise approximately € 130K from companies, which is an increase of about € 18K.

Should we realize the above ambitions, the difference between our estimated income and expenditures will come to approximately - € 220K. This negative result

will be supplemented with funds from our designated reserve. Our continuity reserve will not be used in 2024.

## **OUR FINANCING IN THE COMING YEARS**

### **DESIRED INCOME MIX**

Bits of Freedom assigns great importance to having a sustainable financial situation, and it is our intention to remain fully independent. In drawing up our financial planning, we always try to look five years ahead. In recent years we have seen increased attention from private foundations for our work. Contributions from individual donors, on the other hand, are growing less rapidly. This means that our funding mix is changing and most notably the share of our income coming from foundations is increasing. In 2024, we expect 24% of our income to come from donors, 7% from corporations, and 54% from foundations. 15% of our income in 2024 is earmarked and comes primarily from foundations. Because earmarked income carries risks in terms of effectiveness, assurance of knowledge and expertise, and good employment practice, we aim to keep this type of income as low as possible.

### **CHALLENGES**

In the areas of asset management and financial reserves, we wish to maintain a continuity reserve of at least 25% of our annual costs for the coming year. That's an average for NGOs of our size. We expect to have a continuity reserve of approximately 25% at the end of 2024.

### 3. OUR REACH

We reached millions of people through our own communication channels (newsletters, social media and websites). We also rolled out a national brand awareness campaign, which reached an additional million people. We were unmissable in national and international media: we made more than 100 media appearances. To further raise awareness about our issues, we spoke at universities and events, and wrote numerous articles. Finally, we had more than 100 advocacy meetings in Brussels and The Hague, were mentioned 25 times in debates, parliamentary questions, meeting documents and policy papers of the Dutch Parliament, and spoke twice in parliament as an expert.

Visit [our website](#) for a selection of video- and audio clips of our favorite media appearances.

## 4. PLANS FOR 2024

Looking ahead, these are the plans we are most excited about.

### **1. WE WILL HOLD (LOCAL) GOVERNMENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR DISCRIMINATORY USE OF ALGORITHMS**

With their increasing use of algorithms, governments seem to understand less and less how their own decisions come about. This creates a Kafkaesque government that states, “You are suspected of something, we don’t know why, but that’s the way it is.” In 2024, we will deploy technical research, strategic litigation and campaigns to call governments to task regarding their irresponsible use of algorithms.

### **2. WE WILL MAKE SURE THE GOVERNMENT DOESN’T CENSOR**

What can, may or should the government do with criminal, unlawful or undesirable information online? The Ministry of Justice and Security is looking for answers in a multi-year project. We have been involved from the start and will continue to offer constructive and sharp criticism of the ministry’s ideas in 2024. We want to ensure that if the government wants to have information made inaccessible, it does so only through its formal powers. In addition, it must be crystal clear that the government’s course of action varies according to the type of information. Only when the government shows a deep understanding about this, will our rights and freedoms be protected.

### **3. WE WILL MEET OUR NEW MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

From June 6 to 9, 2024, the European elections will take place. We are all too eager for the EU to come up with solutions to social problems caused by digitalization. Think for example about the power of Big Tech companies on our freedom, privacy and democracy. But also the use of algorithms and its effects on vulnerable groups in our society. To encourage our new European parliamentarians to work on these problems, we will provide a nice - and practical - welcome package when they take office. Time for action!

### **4. WE WILL PROTECT THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE CONFIDENTIALLY**

The right to confidential communication is under constant pressure, and will be in 2024. One of the biggest threats is the European Commission’s proposal to protect children and young people from sexual abuse. While the goal is laudable, the proposal is disastrous for everyone’s freedoms. We will contribute to amending the proposal so that it really helps children and young people, without sacrificing the confidentiality of communications.

## **5. WE WILL CONDUCT TECH RESEARCH TO UNCOVER DIGITAL INJUSTICE**

Technology is becoming increasingly intertwined with our lives. In the workplace, at the doctor's office, on the street, at school, at the border: we encounter often opaque technical systems everywhere we go. Civil society organizations and activists do not always have the technical expertise to understand these systems and - where necessary - to tackle them. We want to contribute to increasing their ability to do so. In 2024, we are therefore further expanding our tech research desk.

## **6. WE WILL FIGHT MANIPULATION BY PLATFORMS**

Manipulative web design is often used online to move us toward certain choices. In doing so, our freedom of choice diminishes, and that's not okay. We are being manipulated so that large platforms can make money off of us. In 2024, we will challenge manipulative design. For instance, we will research manipulative design across various platforms and make use of the new complaint possibilities with the Consumer and Market Authority (ACM) and the European Commission. We will also provide input to the European Commission regarding addictive platform design. It is time for manipulative design to stop and we are only too happy to commit to that!

## **7. WE WILL INVESTIGATE AND CHALLENGE PLATFORMS' REDRESS MECHANISMS**

Social media can be a tool for advocating for change, for self-protection and defense. Because platforms occupy an extremely dominant place in our public discourse, their content moderation policies and practices have a huge influence. The Digital Services Act places new requirements on platforms with regards to how they communicate their content moderation decisions, and the avenues they offer for redress. In 2024, we are collaborating with, among others, anti-discrimination organization Nederland Wordt Beter to test the platforms' redress systems and if needed, challenge them.

## **8. WE WILL ENSURE THAT PEOPLE CAN STAY LOUD ON - AND AGAINST - BIG TECH**

We are launching an international campaign in 2024 mobilizing civil society actors to take advantage of their new European rights regarding very large online platforms (the Digital Services Act). We will engage activists and other (European) organizations to spread the word and make more people aware of the possibilities to better safeguard your rights and safety online and on social media. Know your rights, be safe and stay loud!

## **9. WE WILL CELEBRATE OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY**

Reason for a party! Bits of Freedom is turning 25 in 2024. Of course, this will not go unnoticed. How exactly we plan to celebrate is something we are keeping to ourselves for the time being, but of course the countless people who have contributed to our work throughout the years will be central. We hope to see you, too!



## **10. WE WILL ORGANIZE THE BIG BROTHER AWARDS**

With the annual Big Brother Awards we draw attention to individuals, companies and governments that have infringed on the freedom of communication and privacy of citizens. The awards for the biggest violators of our digital rights, and (hopefully) the least desirable award to win!

## 5. OUR ORGANIZATION

Bits of Freedom was founded in 1999. We shape internet policy in order to advance an open and just society. One in which people can hold power accountable and effectively question the status quo. We do this through advocacy, campaigning and litigation, in the Netherlands and Brussels.

Bits of Freedom has fourteen staff members, a board and an advisory committee. Hundreds of volunteers contribute their efforts each year. We are a founding and active member of European Digital Rights (EDRi). We receive financial support from thousands of donors and numerous corporate supporters, foundations and project subsidies. To safeguard our independence, we do not accept money from governments.

Our team is composed of a mix of talented starters, experienced staff and promising trainees and interns. We are an inclusive workplace, with a diversity of perspectives. Our personnel policy promotes equal opportunities and aims to contribute to correcting inequalities in our organization, network and sector. Our employment policy is based on five pillars: socioeconomic security, equal opportunities, work autonomy, a healthy balance between work and private life, and professional development.

Landelijke Vereniging van Klachtbehandelaars (LVKB) serves as Bits of Freedom's independent complaint committee for complaints about unwanted behavior. No complaints about Bits of Freedom were received by LVKB in 2023.

This past year we said goodbye to our communications lead Bér Engels and welcomed his successor Maartje Knaap (who, among other things, put together the annual report you're reading now!). We also welcomed our first student trainee, Ramla Yusuuf. Joining our advisory committee were Haroon Ali, Marieke Kuypers, Petra Oldengarm and Justine Pardoën, and we said goodbye to Ot van Daalen, Linda Duits, Anneke Jansen, Olaf Kolkman and Mohamed el Maslouhi. Janine Huizenga left our board and we found a fantastic successor in Rosien van Toor.

We collaborated a lot in 2023, leading to richer perspectives and more diverse courses of action. With Public Interest Litigation Project, we organized meetings for civil society organizations to increase civil opposition to Big Tech. We partnered with Amnesty International Netherlands, Open State Foundation, PublicSpaces, SETUP and Waag in our advocacy in The Hague, and in Brussels we worked closely within the umbrella organization European Digital Rights (EDRi). We look forward to continuing these collaborations in the new year.



**Bits of Freedom fights for your freedom and privacy on the internet.**

These fundamental rights are essential for your development, for technological innovation and for the rule of law. But this freedom isn't self-evident. Your data is being stored and analysed. Your internet traffic is slowed down and blocked.

Bits of Freedom makes sure that your internet is your business.

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