

Statewatch Strategic plan 2022 – 26 Summary



statewatch

Vision

An open Europe of democracy, civil liberties, personal and political rights, free movement, freedom of information, equality and diversity

Mission

To monitor, analyse and expose state activity that threatens civil liberties, human rights and democratic standards in order to inform and enable a culture of diversity, debate and dissent

The context

This strategy will guide *Statewatch's* work for the next five years, in a context of growing social and political polarisation, economic inequality and an expansion of repressive state powers. European governments and the state authorities they direct are seeking to expand their ability to exert control through new laws, the development and deployment of new technologies, and the formation of novel alliances and networks with other states, international organisations and corporations. Many of these developments, in both the UK and the EU, pose a serious threat to rights, democracy and movements seeking to build a better society.

In the name of fighting crime and terrorism, new police powers and surveillance measures are being introduced that affect the rights of everyone, but will particularly impinge upon the rights and freedoms of protesters, dissidents and marginalised groups. Propelled by xenophobia, nativism and racism, states continue to attack the right to asylum and to demonise and criminalise immigrants and ethnic minorities. The laws, policies, alliances, networks and agreements that provide the vehicle for these measures are often obscured behind layers of secrecy and bureaucratic jargon.

The extensive attacks on civil liberties and human rights in recent years have not gone unchallenged. Organised civil society has continued to mobilise and act, and there has been a marked upswing in community-led movements and protests across the globe. It is these movements and organisations – those seeking a more just and equal society – with which we are aligned and aim to support. This strategy identifies a number of key areas where *Statewatch* will continue to play a key role in those efforts, by monitoring and analysing the powers, policies and practices of the state, in order to stimulate, support and enable action against measures that threaten to undermine civil liberties, fundamental rights and democratic standards.

How do we achieve change?

Statewatch provides essential information, analysis and tools for civil society in the UK and the EU to hold the state to account and achieve social change.

- Publishing official documents that would otherwise remain hidden from the public.
- Producing and promoting high-quality critical research, policy analysis and investigative journalism that informs debates, campaigns and movements on civil liberties, human rights and democratic standards in Europe.
- Organising workshops, educational activities and public events to teach people about key developments and how to exercise their rights.
- Supporting and amplifying campaigns, movements and advocacy in defence of civil liberties and human rights, and undertaking targeted advocacy and outreach on issues where no other organisations are doing so.
- Building networks and making connections between different individuals and organizations within and across borders to strengthen civil society.

OBJECTIVE 1: **Strengthen civil society's access to information**

What's the problem?

States use secrecy to protect their interests and avoid scrutiny. The role of powerful economic actors in the development and implementation of law and policy often further limits transparency. State secrecy prevents accountability for wrong-doing and limits the ability of people to exercise their rights. It inhibits civil society's ability to meaningfully influence policy, and means people do not know what governments and states are doing in their name.

Who does the problem affect and how?

Secret decision-making and policy implementation prevents individuals and organizations from understanding what is going on and making their views known, undermining their ability to engage in democratic processes and the possibility to influence policy. It prevents journalists from doing their job. Such work is critical to ensure that new or changed laws do not undermine rights and freedoms, and to hold the powerful to account. The problem is compounded by the complexity of procedures and powers in many state institutions, in particular within the EU.

State secrecy is also used to shield powerful actors from accountability for wrong-doing – for example in relation to deaths in police custody and immigration detention, or the involvement of state agencies in human rights abuses such as pushbacks. Secrecy is a constant barrier for those subject to abuse and their families as they seek justice.

Outcomes after five years

→ EU institutions, agencies and bodies are more transparent.

At least three EU institutions/agencies/bodies will change their practices to better comply with transparency requirements, e.g. by establishing registers of documents or committing to add to existing registers material that is not currently available.

→ Civil society campaigns to improve rights protections are stronger through use of *Statewatch's* resources. At least 15 civil society organisations, campaigns, and/or journalists will make use of the documents and information made public by *Statewatch* in their work, as a result of direct cooperation, leading to increased public knowledge and/or improved rights protections in new or amended laws; at least 150 other references to *Statewatch* in the press and/or output produced by civil society organisations, campaigns, etc.

→ Improved ability to access information and exercise information rights. At least 300 individuals (in particular journalists, activists/campaigners, civil society workers, academics/students) trained on access to official information, in particular how to find, access and request information and documentation.

→ Insights from transformative social change campaigning through the decades are made available to the public and strategically shared. At least 50 visits to the Library & Archive by at least 50 visitors, three public events and two outputs produced based on Library & Archive material.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Expose and challenge new means of surveillance, coercion and control

What's the problem?

Rather than dealing with the dysfunctional social and economic models at the root of problems such as racism, climate change and economic inequality, governing institutions are increasingly curtailing basic rights and freedoms to try to maintain control. Propelled by xenophobia, nativism, capitalism and the possibilities offered by new technologies, new laws, spaces and tools of surveillance and coercion are being developed and deployed. Many of these new policies and practices are debated and developed in secretive and largely-unaccountable fora that are increasingly international or transnational in scale, globalizing the policies, powers and practices of state institutions and their 'partners' in the private sector, limiting the means for democratic debate, scrutiny and oversight. The post-Brexit security relationship between the EU and UK provides an important example of this tendency. Ultimately, states are seeking to maintain and increase their power in order to uphold an unjust status quo, limiting the possibilities for the social, political and economic change that is needed to develop a more just, equal and peaceful society.

Who does the problem affect and how?

New measures of surveillance, coercion and control affect society at large, and even the basic precepts of democracy. However, in their application they have different impacts on different groups. Rights affected include the freedoms of expression, association and assembly; freedom from discrimination; the right to seek asylum; to privacy; to liberty and dignity; as well as multiple economic, social and cultural rights. Groups that are particularly affected include people crossing borders, in particular those

forced to do so in an 'irregular' manner, and those who act in solidarity with them; protesters; journalists; trade unionists; lawyers; and multiple 'othered' groups within society – people in the criminal justice system, religious minorities, racialized minorities, and the economically disadvantaged. The increased complexity of tools and measures, their geographic scope, and the way in which they are presented as necessary for public safety and security impedes public understanding and interest, and makes it harder to effectively challenge them.

Outcomes after five years

→ **Harmful developments in police sharing of facial recognition data are stopped.** The introduction of a pan-European network of police facial recognition databases, encompassing the EU, potentially the UK, and drawing in biometric data from states around the globe, is halted or severely curtailed due to public and parliamentary opposition.

→ **Negative impacts of mass surveillance of travellers are better understood and not extended.** National, regional and global schemes for the surveillance of travel and profiling of travellers are understood better, and their extension beyond air travel will be halted or severely curtailed due to public and parliamentary opposition.

→ **Civic space for migrant and refugee rights defenders will be maintained and/or extended.** Advocacy and campaigning will effectively challenge the continued criminalisation of organisations, community groups and individuals supporting people in an irregular administrative situation, in particular in view of potential legal developments at EU level.

→ **Developments in surveillance, coercion and control exposed and challenged.** Emerging threats to rights and liberties that result, in particular, from the implementation of the EU's interoperability scheme, the activities of the EU's justice and home affairs agencies and the UK's post-Brexit security and policing plans are exposed and challenged.

OBJECTIVE 3:

Build a more sustainable and more effective organisation

What's the problem?

Statewatch has always 'punched above its weight' given its size and resources. However, a lack of core and multi-annual funding makes it difficult to pursue our own objectives and maximise our reach and impact, by creating a reliance on project work. For example, we have a relatively small direct audience, and could reach more actors through improved presentation and communication of our work. Our contributors' network has immense potential, which is under-used because staff do not have the capacity to activate and coordinate the network.

Statewatch has a small and highly specialised team. In order to retain and support its staff development and well-being, resources also need to be invested in the staff's conditions, training, and improved coordination and evaluation procedures. Developing more effective procedures for monitoring and evaluation of our work and organisation would support more strategic use of our limited resources, as well as communications, fundraising and planning.

As an organisation whose speciality is the laws, policies, powers and practices of EU institutions and agencies, as well as those of the UK, our location in London may present a risk for the future viability of work in that area. Finally, while we are part of numerous formal and informal networks, we could play a more active role in them to increase their impact, build our reputation and profile, and contribute to the development of more effective transnational solidarity and action.

Who does the problem affect and how?

These limitations impact the potential beneficiaries of our work, the people and organizations who could make use of the information and analysis we provide but are not aware of our work, and ultimately the quality of public and political debate, and the ability and power of civil

society to influence social change. They also affect the conditions and wellbeing of *Statewatch* staff. Consideration must be given to the fact that staff routinely deal with material relating to violence, hardship and cruelty, increasing the risk of burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma, all of which can undermine personal and organisational well-being. Acquisition of longer-term and core funding is therefore a priority for *Statewatch*'s organisational development and to increase our reach and impact.

Outcomes after five years

- Increased and diversified funding sources enable:
 - the effective implementation of this strategy;
 - organizational growth;
 - the development and implementation of a communication strategy; and
 - improved terms and conditions for staff.
- Brexit-related risks to our work on the EU are mitigated through partnership working, with the organisation able to establish a formal presence in the EU if deemed necessary.
- Improved ability to monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of our work.
- A more effective, productive and satisfied staff team.
- Collaborations with the contributors group increase, at least five meetings of the *Statewatch* contributors group held.
- We continue to play a key role in our networks, contributing to, supporting and promoting their work.
- A minimum one-third increase in website hits, social media followers, mailing list subscribers.
- The strategy is reviewed on at least an annual basis and adapted as necessary to respond to changes in the operating environment and emerging threats to civil liberties.

“The work of *Statewatch* is essential. The official (at times leaked) documents *Statewatch* publishes are a fundamental source for our investigations, as are *Statewatch* analyses. *Statewatch* deserves all your support so it can continue to fulfill its mission.”

– Charles Heller,
Co-director of Forensic Oceanography

“*Statewatch* has been an invaluable source over many years on what had been a sadly neglected subject – developments in Britain and the EU on security, intelligence, judicial, and policing matters, as well as on broader policy issues. *Statewatch* has thus played an essential role in alerting the wider public to what governments have been up to behind closed doors.”

– Richard Norton-Taylor
journalist and writer on security and defence

“The biggest threats to our freedoms rarely happen overnight; they develop incrementally at the direction of bureaucracies largely impenetrable to the public. The scrutiny, analyses, and primary documents made available by *Statewatch* are an essential resource for understanding the machinations driving surveillance and securitisation across Europe.”

– Edin Omanovic
Privacy International

“*Statewatch*’s role in fostering transparency and accountability in Europe has supported human rights civil society organisations to pursue their missions. *Statewatch* is one of the primary sources for reviewing and publishing key leaked documents on surveillance in Europe. We at EDRi are proud to count *Statewatch* among our members and to rely on their expertise and research on migration, tech, privacy and surveillance.”

– Claire Fernandez
Executive Director, European Digital Rights (EDRi)

“The reporting and analysis *Statewatch* does both on the EU and national level is invaluable to our civil society community, particularly on complex topics such as justice and home affairs, border control and biometrics.”

– Fanny Hidvegi
Access Now

“*Statewatch* is the best source of reliable, meticulous research and penetrating analysis on issues relating to European migration and policing policies and strategies. If we need to know what EU heads of state have been planning and implementing, from data exchange and interoperability to extra-territorialising migration controls, *Statewatch* is where we look. The team does the hard work of reading piles of EU minutes, non-papers and other tedium-inducing documents, so we don’t have to.”

– Institute of Race Relations, UK

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