

# EARS in 2022



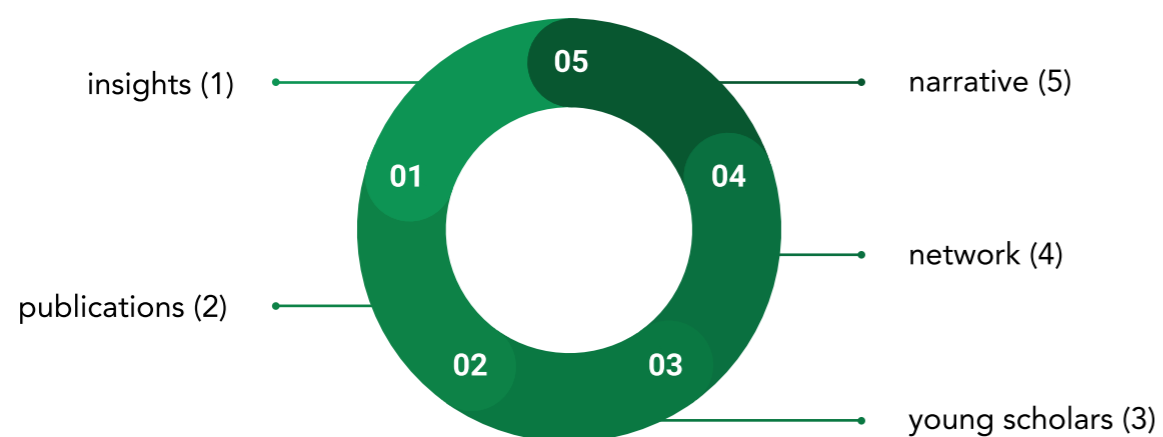
Annual Report



EARS is a European network of faculties and departments of Theology and/or Religious Studies. We aim to make religious knowledge visible to society and relevant to the public domain, thereby bridging the gap between academia and society. We use various instruments to do so, including a dashboard, website, social media, round tables, and conferences - all supported by an international team of analysts.

In 2022, the pace of our activities declined in the second half of the year due to uncertainties in funding. This resulted in less output, less events, and less activities overall. We have taken many steps to secure new funding for 2023. With adequate funding, we cannot only increase the scope of our activities, but also their quality.

EARS operates based on five focus points. They strengthen each other and are intertwined. The five pillars jointly lead to our key results.



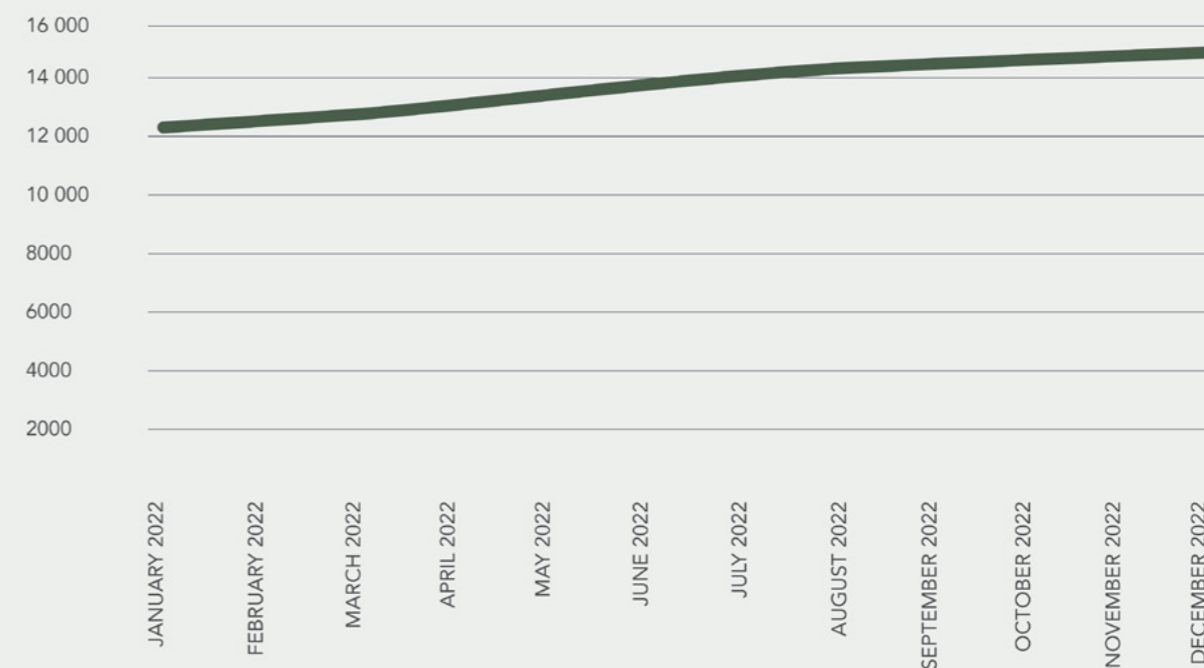
## I. Insights

The EARS dashboard ([www.earsdashboard.com](http://www.earsdashboard.com)) is a database of summarised articles published in leading European media across 25+ countries. The dashboard shows the importance of religion in the public domain and enables users to gain new insights into religion and society.

**Results 2022:** In 2022, we added 2,665 summaries to the dashboard, an average of 222 each month. These regular contributions to the dashboard enable us to maintain a database that includes many developments on religion and society from the European news. In addition, since all articles are summarised in English, EARS contributes to making this critical knowledge widely available. To further improve the benefits of the dashboard, we launched a new version in the spring of 2022. With an updated design and new functionalities, this dashboard better satisfies users' needs and provides new insights into religion and society with updated graphs and tools. The dashboard was visited by 3,796 visitors in 2022.

**Looking at 2023:** We aim to maintain a steady stream of added summaries from across Europe. Adequate funding in 2023 will allow us to strive for 4,000 to 5,000 new summaries in the dashboard. We will continuously assess the spread of our analyst team to ensure broad coverage from across the continent. In addition, we aim to increase the use of the dashboard by attracting more visitors.

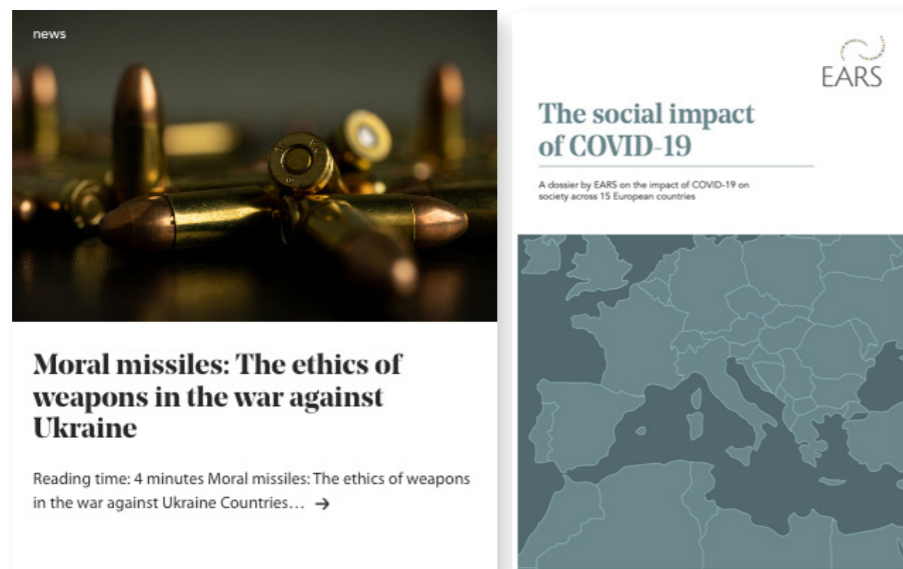
## Summaries on the EARS dashboard



## II. Publications

Around 20 analysts from more than 15 countries are part of our team and write articles about current issues regarding religion and society. In addition, they write whitepapers, weekly comments with their own analysis, and dossiers on larger topics at a European level. All articles and other documents are published on the EARS website ([www.ears.eu](http://www.ears.eu)) and on Facebook and LinkedIn.

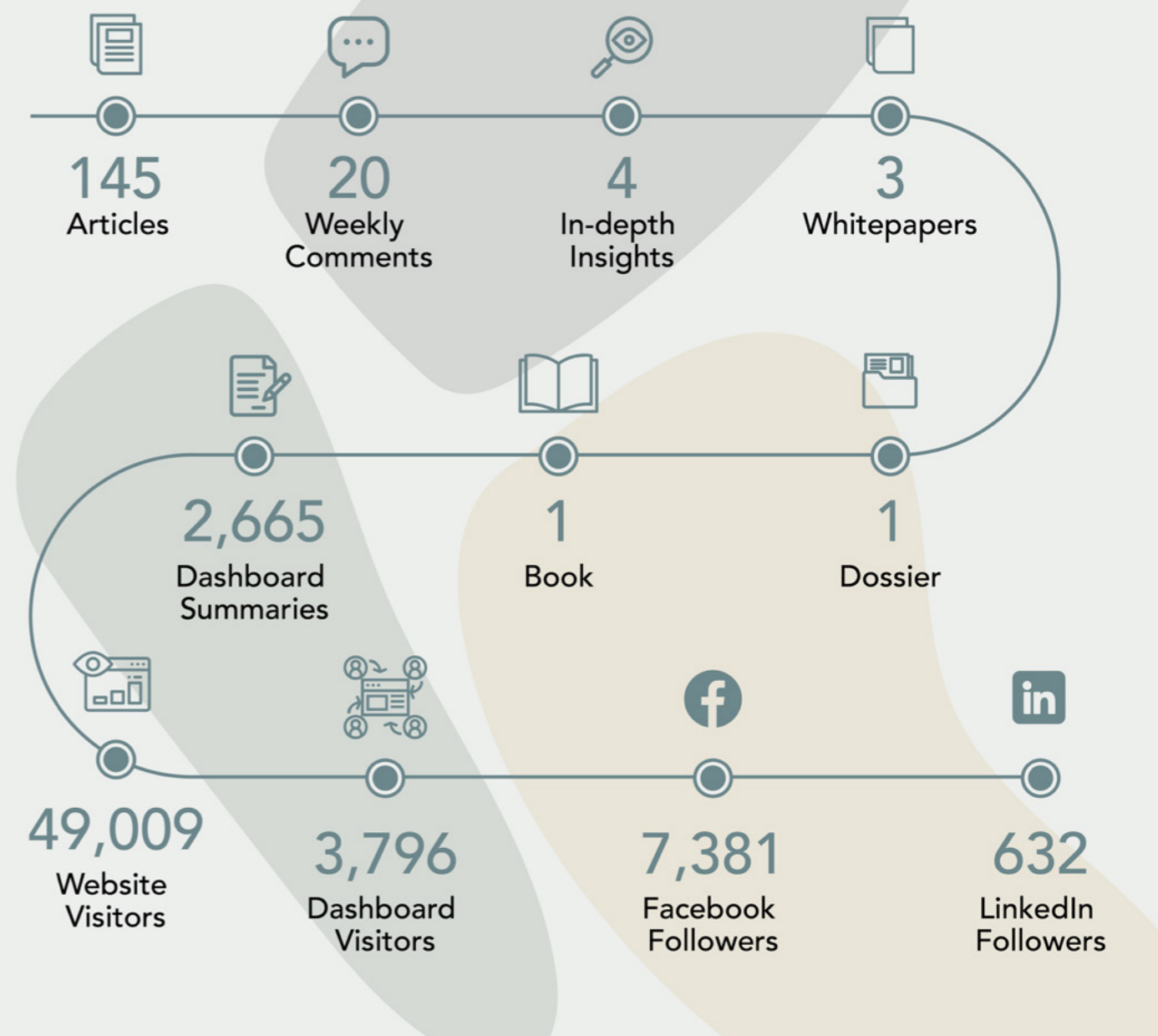
**Results 2022:** In 2022, we published 145 original articles and 20 weekly comments. In addition, we published 3 whitepapers based on our round tables on the topics of *A Pandemic of Polarisation*, *War & Peace*, and *Cancel Culture*. We also published 4 in-depth insights, written by guest authors who reached out to EARS for a publication on our platform. Moreover, a dossier was published, in which analysts analyse a trend or development from the perspective of their native country or their country of residence. This dossier covered the topic of *the social impact of COVID-19*. Finally, in early 2022, we published a book with a selection of publications from 2021: *Perspectives on 2021*.



49,009 people visited the EARS website in 2022, compared to 45,000 visitors in 2021 and 13,000 visitors in 2020. In addition, the number of people following the EARS Facebook page rose from 6,819 to 7,381 throughout the year, despite the fact that we only ran paid advertisements for our page in the first three months of this year. We also gained 220 new LinkedIn followers without any paid page advertisements, bringing the total to 632.

In April 2022, our application for a Google Grant was approved. This program for non-profits allows us to advertise on Google at no cost. Between April and December, we ran such Search Engine Advertising (SEA) campaigns for both the website and the dashboard. The advertisements for the website were viewed by 56,906 people. 4,902 of these clicked on the advertisement, leading to a click-through rate of 8.61%. The advertisements for the dashboard were viewed by 28,237 people and 1,914 of those clicked, resulting in a click-through rate of 6.78%. We are very satisfied with these results, as a 5% click-through rate is required to maintain the Google Grants. On top of that, the Google Grants have contributed to our increase in visitors to the website this year.

## Publications & Visitors 2022



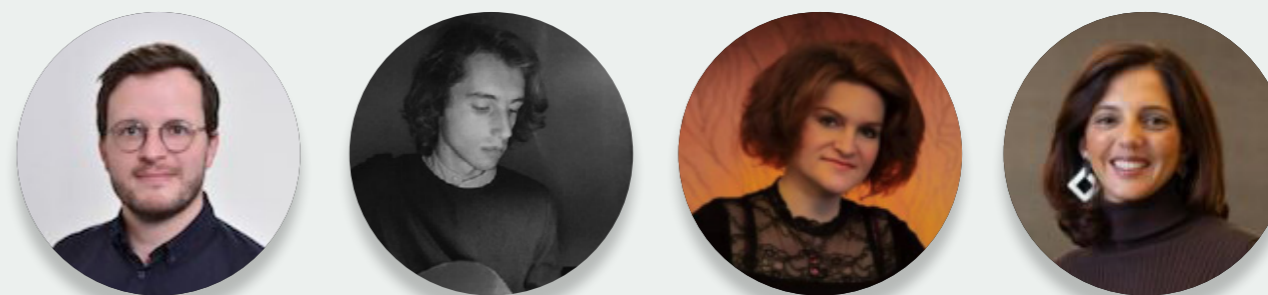
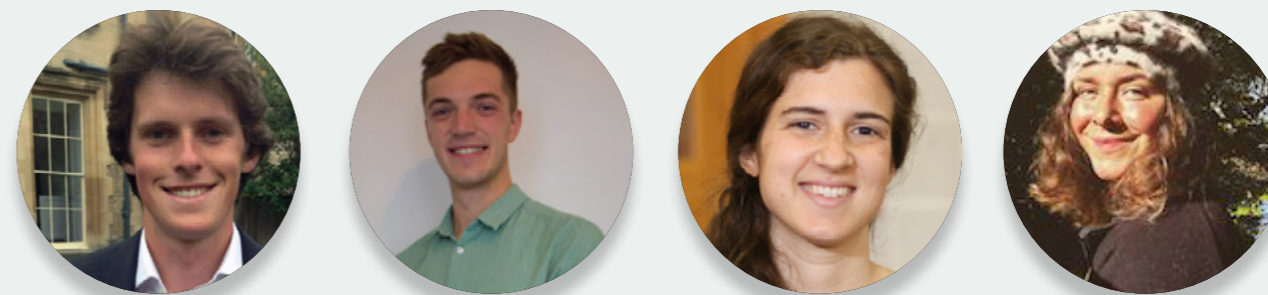
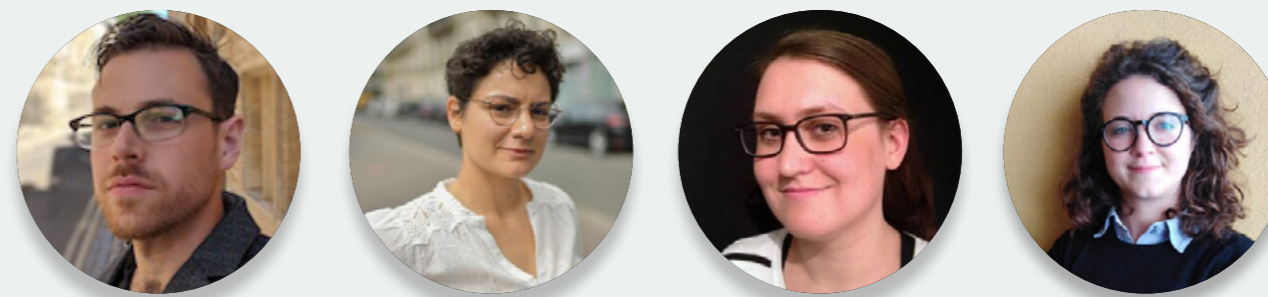
**Looking at 2023:** In 2023, we will again define one or two focus topics to centre some of our publications around. This will allow us to truly dive into a specific topic and reach deeper insights. Our attention to such a focus topic will result in articles on the website, but also in a dossier and a whitepaper on the matter. We aim to publish an average of 2-3 new articles or other publications each week. In addition, we aim to create 3-4 whitepapers based on round tables in 2022, and at least one dossier. Again, this is highly dependent on adequate funding. We will also be continuing the use of Google Grants to reach a greater audience.

### III. Young scholars

An international team of EARS analysts writes the dashboard summaries and website publications. Some of them have a background in theology, while others do not. We see that a new generation of theologians is rising: one that feels attracted to theology, but not within the current study. We see it as a goal to attract this younger generation.

**Results 2022:** The fact that young people without a background in theology are interested in theological matters is very stimulating to EARS. It implies that we are able to reach a different target audience than the regular theology student. Our analysts are responsible for updating the dashboard, as well as writing all publications, including articles, whitepapers, dossiers, and weekly comments.

**Looking at 2023:** The EARS analyst team will continue to be composed of young scholars, both from studies of Theology and Religious Studies and beyond. In 2023, we will assess the spread of the team and determine if we wish to hire new analysts from countries that are currently not covered. This decision will greatly depend on funding. In addition, we are continuing to look into the options of setting up a Ph.D. programme, where scholars from various faculties would guide a Ph.D. student.





Our analysts are located across Europe and beyond.  
Their locations are marked on this map.

## IV. Network

The EARS network consists of three circles. The member faculties and departments are the first and closest circle within the EARS network. Second, we have participants at round tables and other events. Third are policymakers, academics, journalists, politicians, and others interested in the connection between religion and society.

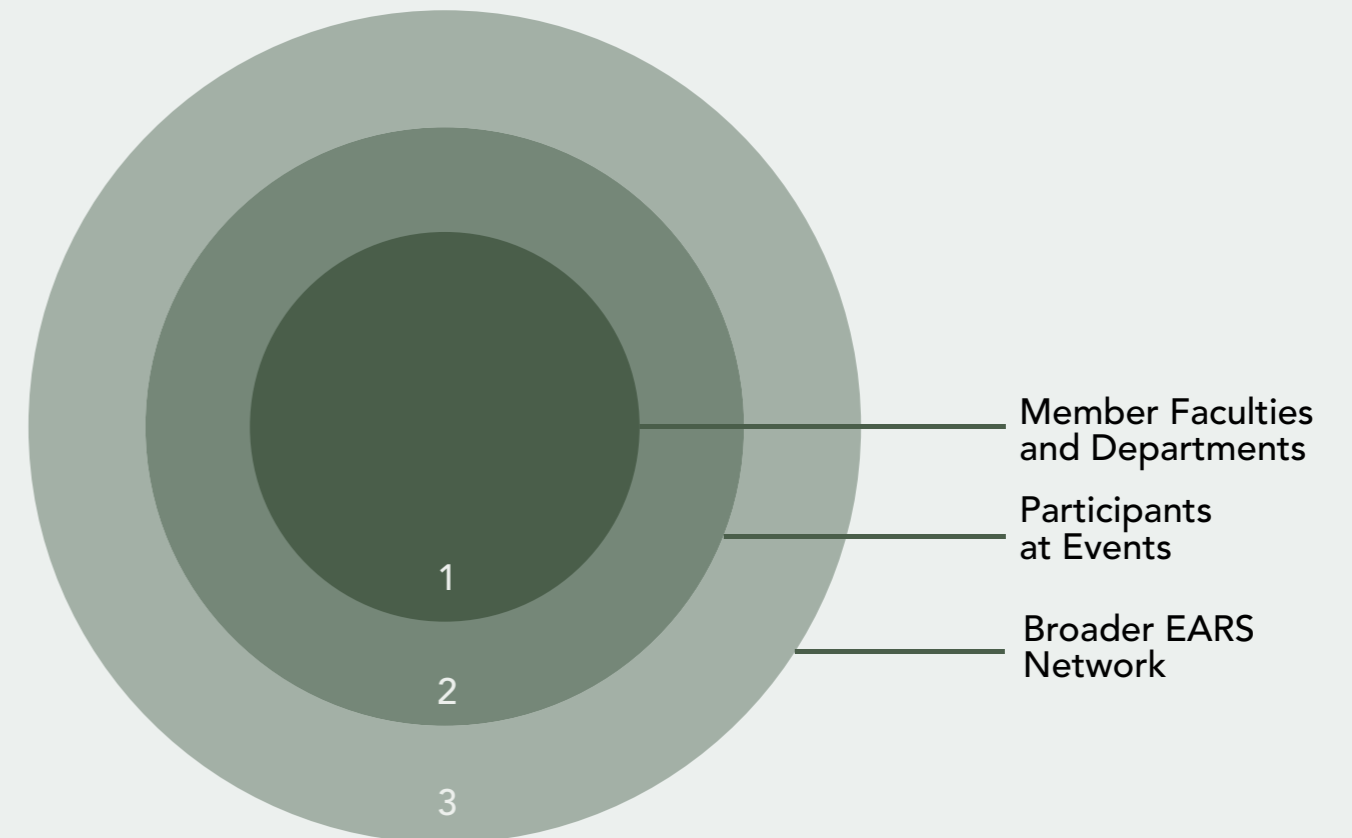
**Results 2022:** The first circle, the EARS members, has mainly been connecting online since COVID-19. Included in this circle is the EARS board, who are involved on a strategic level and support in defining EARS' next steps. The board is composed of the representatives of the faculties and departments of Religious Studies and/or Theology of Amsterdam, Berlin, Lund, Milan, Paris, Strasbourg and Vienna. EARS is led by Matthias Smalbrugge as President.



The second circle, participants at events, has again been expanded in 2022. We organised round tables on two topics: *War & Peace* and *A Pandemic of Polarisation*. The round tables were joined by new and existing EARS contacts. On the topic of *War & Peace*, we organised two sessions: one with academics, another with some of our analysts. The organisation of two separate sessions for different audiences enabled us to generate a greater variety of insights, which were reported and discussed in the resulting whitepaper. The third circle is our network, which we actively started expanding in 2021. In 2022, our network increased from 136 to 314 individuals, mainly through directly reaching out to interesting people.



In 2022, we continued sending out our monthly newsletter to our contacts. This newsletter still scores very well compared to other nonprofit organisations in terms of open rates



(37.3% for EARS in 2022 compared to 25.2% on average) and click rates (11.7% for EARS in 2022 compared to 2.8% on average), showing the involvement of our network. With a few efforts, such as posting the newsletter registration link to social media and directly reaching out to interesting people, we have increased the number of contacts receiving our newsletter from 193 in December 2021 to 518 in December 2022.

**Looking at 2023:** We aim to further strengthen the collaboration with the EARS members (first circle) and engage them in new ventures, such as the Ph.D. programme. Regarding the second circle, we will continue to organise round tables in 2023 and invite a selection of academics, journalists, politicians, and other relevant people. We aim for 6-8 round tables throughout the year on topics such as *Future of Humanities; The role of the churches in times of a European war; Cooperation between departments; Innovation of the discipline; Identity, fundamentalism and religion; and Separation between state and church.*

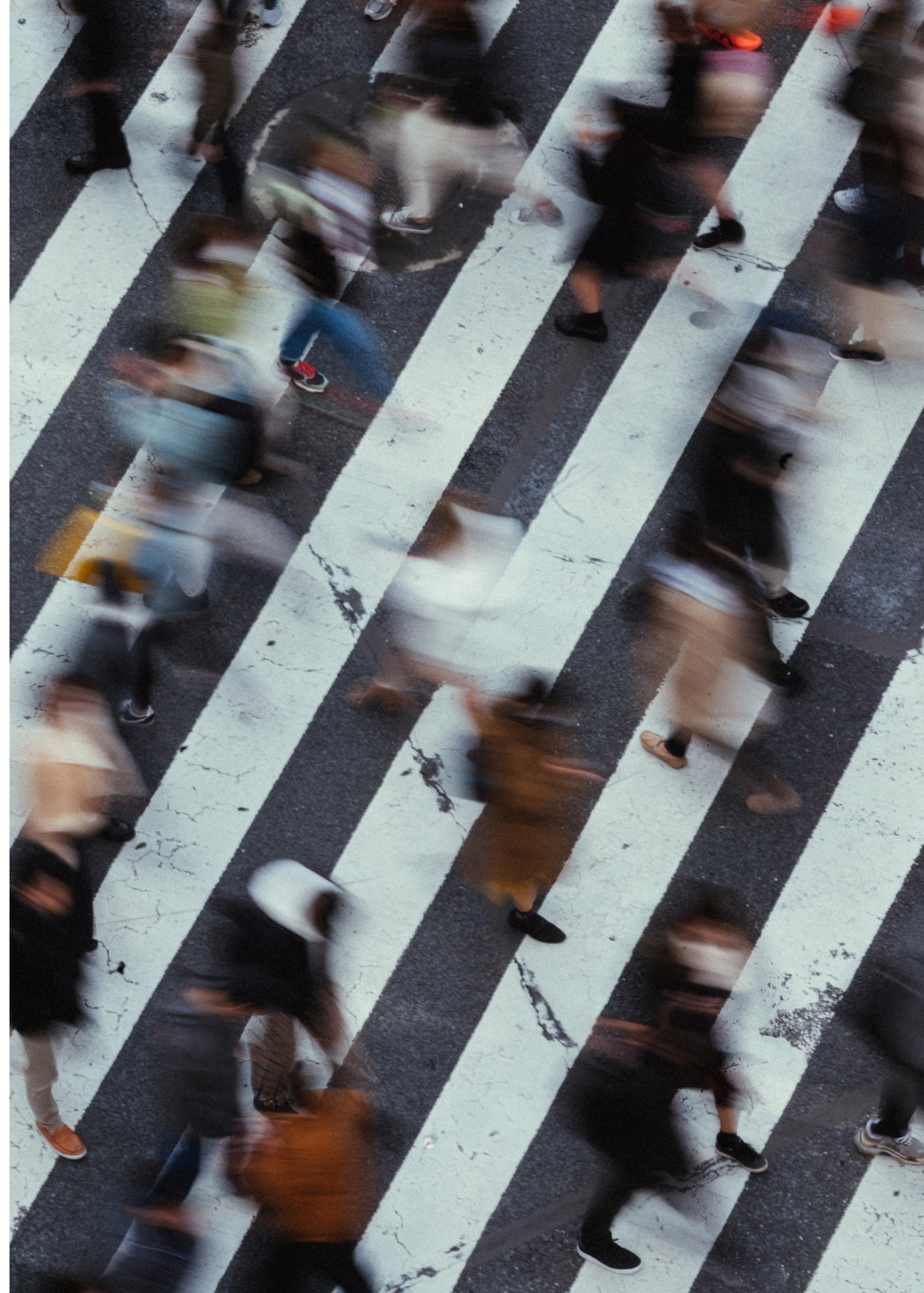
It is our goal to connect these round tables to our focus topics, for example by organising round tables for various audiences on the same topic, like we did in 2022. This should lead to more profound insights and interesting conversations. Finally, we aim to significantly expand the third circle of contacts. We will do so by identifying interesting and relevant people and directly reaching out to them. The analyst team plays a significant role in this process, since they have access to people from different countries and institutions. In addition, we will leverage our reach on social media to further enlarge our network, aiming for 500 network members by the end of the year.

## V. Narrative

With more and more faculties of Theology and Religious Studies closing, we see it as essential to approach theology in a different way, based on a different narrative. It is time to innovate the way we look at religion. Theology and Religious Studies are not just important for faithful, but for all of society. Religions involve knowledge that have shaped a culture, from concepts such as solidarity and freedom to the importance of ratio and the soul. A society without a soul, and therefore without art, science, and social cohesion, will fall apart. To reach a younger generation, we should build on this new narrative of theology. Not only to facilitate continuity of the discipline, but also to show the role that belief plays in today's societies.

**Results 2022:** This is a long-term goal. If we wish to reach a younger generation, we should also work on the narrative of theology. This is necessary to facilitate the continuity of the discipline.

**Looking at 2023:** Through the continuation of our publications and round table discussions, and through the creation of a Ph.D. programme, we wish to continue building a new narrative of theology. A first element of this new narrative is the study of plurality and diversity in our societies. After all, on the one hand, this contributes to polarisation in a religious sense. On the other, it can also contribute to bridging opposition. We wish to know: why and when does one or the other occur? Moreover, when does one turn into the other and what is the cause of this? Combining and expanding the five focus points (insights, publications, young scholars, network, narrative) is imperative to achieving this goal of a new narrative of theology.



## VI. Finances

In 2022, the costs for EARS to operate came to a total of €285,000. These are net costs excluding VAT and including in-kind contributions from, among others, ftrprf B.V. and the Faculty of Religion and Theology at VU Amsterdam. These lower costs of operation compared to previous years have been the result of a significant decline in activities and programs, due to funding uncertainties. However, looking at 2023, we have greater ambitions, although these are highly dependent on securing funding. These ambitions are intertwined and strengthen each other, and are centered around our five focus points:

1. **Insights:** we aim to accelerate the speed with which content is added on the dashboard, as well as further optimize the analytical capabilities of the dashboard.
2. **Publications:** next to continuing the publication of insightful articles, we also aim to expand on the publication of guest articles (so-called 'in-depth insights'), as well as more extensive publications such as dossiers. This enables us to share insights and knowledge in an understandable way with a broader audience.
3. **Young scholars:** we aim to hire a number of new analysts to cover countries that are currently not covered by our team. In addition, we plan to organise an online summer school to discuss key topics and developments in the field of religion with a new audience. Finally, we aim to create a PhD program within EARS, as an additional way to reach a young audience in an innovative way.
4. **Network:** we aim to further nurture our existing connections, both with member faculties and with our wider network. On top of that, we plan to continue expanding this network to reach new audiences.
5. **Narrative:** we aim to bridge the gap between academia and wider society, and seek to create a new narrative of theology that is appealing to both religious and nonreligious individuals. Our insights, publications, young scholars, and network are crucial in achieving this, as all of our activities are closely linked.





If you have any questions regarding this annual report or EARS' activities, feel free to reach out to [info@ears.eu](mailto:info@ears.eu).

## The EARS team



Matthias Smalbrugge



Miranda van Holland



Pieter Hemels



Daphne Prieckaerts



Anne Kamsteeg-Clerx

### Published by EARS

10 February 2023  
De Boelelaan 1105  
1081 HV Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

[www.ears.eu](http://www.ears.eu)  
[www.earsdashboard.com](http://www.earsdashboard.com)  
[info@ears.eu](mailto:info@ears.eu)

### Editing and production

ftrpf B.V.  
[www.ftrpf.com](http://www.ftrpf.com)

