Investigative Journalism in the Public Interest

Launched in December 2019, The Center for Media and Democracy in Israel, Shomrim (the Guardians) is a non profit independent news organization established to strengthen Israeli democracy through investigative journalism. A newsroom free of commercial or political bias, that aims to strengthen the flow of trustworthy fact-based and data-driven information to the public; incubate investigative reporting projects with potential for social impact; highlight new voices; and examine issues of importance to communities that are overlooked. From investigations and documentary projects to data-journalism and photo-journalism, Shomrim tells stories that might otherwise go untold and empower Israelis to participate meaningfully in their democracy.

Inspired by ProPublica, Shomrim is a new player in the local media field. Unlike most media outlets, we are a non-profit dedicated exclusively to investigative reporting. Shomrim’s unique model is to conduct independent investigations or in partnership with other media organizations and to publish them in print, broadcast and digital outlets across the entire political spectrum to achieve maximum exposure and impact. Our newsroom employs in-house and freelance journalists who implement the Freedom of Information Law and navigate big open data sources. Shomrim is also laying the foundation for a vibrant investigative journalist community by conducting an annual conference, developing training resources and building strategic relationships with media outlets, schools and civil society organizations.
Highlights of the Year

2021 was a breakthrough year for Shomrim. Our investigative projects, and first and foremost the Pandora Papers Investigation, unarguably positioned Shomrim as an important player in the Israeli media environment. As this report will demonstrate, the distribution partnerships significantly grew, and the national news coverage was testimony to strong agenda-setting influence.

Acting in the public interest, Shomrim produced more than a dozen major investigations examining crucial issues pertaining to police lawlessness, inequalities in the public health system, discrimination against minority groups, prison labor and rehabilitation, privatization of social services, the opioid pandemic and the largely un-scrutinized appointment of legal guardianship. The majority of the stories were picked up by other news organizations and became subject of widespread public discourse, and several sources, who were first interviewed by Shomrim, were invited for follow up interviews focusing public attention to the issues that we uncovered. Most often, our stories dealt with topics that received light or seldom coverage or were never mentioned. Although important, they were pushed to the margins of the media agenda in favor of scandalous news of the moment.

Shomrim’s coverage of the Pandora Papers Investigation - a global investigation into the financial underworld of the global elite led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). Shomrim was the only news organization in Israel to participate in the investigation. Journalists Uri Blau and Daniel Dolev, led by Editor Eyal Avrahamy, spent more than 6 months researching and analyzing the data and uncovering the faces behind the anonymous offshore shell companies. No other media organization in the country could have immersed in such an in-depth, time-consuming and costly investigation. The stories were released in three waves: the first revealing the offshore connections of Barkat, Ramon and Steinmetz; the second featuring Milchan’s offshore fortune; and the third uncovering the names of Israeli billionaires with offshore assets - Teddy Sagi, Idan and Eyal Ofer, Moshe Hogeg and Eitan Stibbe.

Within hours of publication, Shomrim’s exposé hit headlines and set the public agenda in Israel. All media players - major and niche, published Shomrim’s findings with full credit, placing due attention to tax avoidance and raising important legal, societal, fiscal and moral issues of pubic interest. Broadcast channels devoted items to tax havens, financial engineering and money laundering, and the legal albeit ethically problematic tax avoidance of political players, public officials and billionaires. There were follow ups in the radio and news podcasts, and more than 2 million internet users engaged with our findings. Our impact on Israeli media and public conversation was far reaching and awarded us wider recognition, which led to expanding distribution partnerships and strengthening existing partnerships.

Following Shomrim’s exposure, the Movement for Quality Government approached the Attorney-General and Police Inspector-General requesting them to investigate if Likud MK Nir Barkat broke the law. Additionally, Likud MK David Amsalem submitted the ‘anti-Barkat’ bill designed to limit to 100,000 shekels the amount of money politicians may donate from their own private funds toward their political campaigns. Shomrim will continue to follow up on the measures taken and make sure that the issue does not fall in the public agenda.
EAPC (KATZA) - State-Owned Europe Asia Pipeline Company’s Oil Leaks and Extensive Ecological Damage - the series of articles by Daniel Dolev featured in Ynet revealed new information about unreported oil leaks over the years, agreements shrouded in secrecy and misinformation and lack of government oversight and public scrutiny over oil pipeline running from the Red Sea resort of Eilat to the Mediterranean port city of Ashkelon. The articles sparked a heated public debate about the aging pipeline and many media organizations picked up on different angles of the company’s mishaps and environmental records. Currently, the government is assessing the costs and benefits of the new KATZA deal. Shomrim’s findings resonated across civil society organizations devoted to addressing environmental challenges and were a resource for an eco-system investigation, which led to re-examining the agreement to transport oil from the United Arab Emirates through Israel to Europe.

Tel Aviv District Court Judge Khaled Kabub’s Duty to Disclose Conflict of Interest - a joint investigation by Shomrim and Calcalist uncovered non-disclosure of potentially disqualifying conditions on behalf of Supreme Court Candidate, Judge Khaled Kabub. Although the judge has been friends with attorney Zvika Bar Nathan since law school, and although Bar Nathan represented Kabub in several private matters including the recent Bramley Affair and even spoke on his behalf on Channel 13 investigative show - The Source, Kabub did not disqualify himself from presiding in hearings involving the Goldfarb, Seligman and Co., where Bar-Nathan is Vice Chair, and did not provide due disclosure, in violation of all norms and precedents. Additionally, attorney Boaz Ben Zur, who represented Kabub’s son in the Bramley Affair, was also not included in the Judge’s recusal list. Following the investigation and request for comment, Kabub added attorneys Bar Nathan and Ben Zur to his conflict list.

The EAPC Leaks: The Writing Was On the Wall

Before the Zin disaster: more than 240,000 liters of oil seeped into the Negev and the public was kept in the dark

It took EAPC more than 7 years to remove millions of liters of oil from a 60-year old pipeline it once referred to as “a ticking time bomb”

Official EAPC document: it was a miracle that oil didn’t leak into Haifa

The writing was on the wall: Another oil leak from the Ashkelon-Haifa pipeline
Minimal Enforcement of COVID-19 Rules in Haredi Communities - the pandemic exposed police discrimination in the enforcement of state regulations in ultra-Orthodox areas, where the outbreak was disproportionately intense and where there were increasing reports of widespread flouting of restrictions. COVID-19 emphasized the insularity of the Haredi public, who give first priority to their rabbinical leadership over state governance, and when compliance conflicted with communal norms, this 'under the radar' public was in a powerful position to disobey regulations. The state was either unwilling or unable to enforce pandemic regulations on the 1.1 million Haredi citizens, who considered themselves exempt from civil obligations and legal ramifications.

The West Bank Wild West - from the right, Jewish settlers claim excessive force and brutality by police, and from the left, human rights organizations complain that reports to the police about violent attacks against Palestinians and their property in the hands of hilltop youth and Jewish extremists lead to nothing. In the face of raging violence and ideological crime, the police is without sufficient manpower and financial resources and operates under vague divisions of order maintenance between itself, the military and the Israel Security Agency, and according to political interests of power holders.

The No Man’s Land of Southern Israel - massive amounts of illegal weapons are making their way into the Negev’s Bedouin communities and subjecting residents to violent theft, demands for protection payments and attacks on private property and even military infrastructure. News about failed law enforcement in the Negev rarely reaches headlines unless an inhumane and dreadful event takes place such as the horrific rape of a 10-year-old girl at her home in the middle of the night. Residents of the Negev - Jewish and Bedouin - are increasingly distressed in the face of the escalating crime, which is becoming more audacious, and the total lawlessness.

Little Columbia: How the Negev Turned into a Crime Hothouse with the Aroma of Marijuana - across the Negev, criminals are making the desert bloom with hundreds of cannabis hothouses, and the money they raise is funding a rampant crime wave in southern Israel. Shomrim joined a Green Patrol operation to document the daily helplessness and powerlessness of law enforcement officials in what has become a state within a state where police cannot combat crime. Despite the consistent destruction of crops, the number of indictments is practically none. It is impossible to gather evidence tying the hothouses to their owners and without conviction or punishment, there is no deterrent effect.

Colombia in Israel: Shomrim exposes the cannabis map of Israel’s Wild South

Endless fields of weed: Across the Negev, even in the shadow of some of the largest IDF bases, Bedouin criminals are making the desert bloom with hundreds of cannabis greenhouses - and the money they raise is funding a rampant crime wave in southern Israel. Shomrim joined a Green Patrol operation to document the daily helplessness and powerlessness. A special Shomrim report.
**Prisoner Rehabilitation Only for Those with Means** - a Shomrim inspection revealed that 70% of prisoners are not rehabilitated and released after serving their full sentence because they are unable to receive a rehabilitation plan (which is a mandatory requirement for shortening the prison term). Surprisingly, only 20% receive support services from the Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority, which operates on a 60 million ILS annual budget. The remaining 10% who have means purchase private rehabilitation plans, which are unsupervised. Thousands of shekels buy them a tailored rehabilitation plan that is submitted to the Parole Board. The bottom line: a prisoner with money can buy his freedom faster and the majority of offenders reenter society without receiving rehabilitation treatment in jail or in the community. It is no wonder that Israel's recidivism rate is over 40%.

**Israel Prison Service Sweatshops** - although employment is a key to rehabilitation, prisoners are not covered by Israeli Labor Law. Incarcerated workers are employed in 62 factories owned by the Israel Prison Service and private businesses and are subjected to unfair labor practices such as below minimum wage pay, no social benefits, and output-based compensation.

**Prison Canteens are Flourishing** - thousands of inmates pay for basic supplies such as mineral water bottles, tuna cans, warm undershirts and blankets free of itch mites. Prisons are not properly heated, the food is in poor quality and thinly distributed, and there is often no access to clean and healthy water. While the Israel Prison Service is obligated by law to provide water and food in a sufficient amount to maintain the health of the inmates, they spend a lot of money and accumulate debt not for the purchase of luxury items but as a means to survive.

**Forced Conservatorship** - every year, thousands of Israelis are denied fundamental rights by the courts. A Shomrim special analysis shows that whereas in 2003, there were only 23,000 legal guardian cases in Israel, today the number tripled to 65,000. Also, in 97% of the cases, court hearings take place without the presence of the people whose independence is taken away. The courts appoint thousands of conservators without meeting with, hearing from, or even informing the person in question. There is a huge group of very vulnerable people who are given no voice in fateful decisions that affect the rest of their lives. Rulings are made solely based on documents submitted to the judge.
Israeli Society

Riots in the Arab Community - although the outbreak of increasingly volatile protests by Israel’s Arab citizens, who took to the streets in unprecedented numbers, caught almost everyone by surprise, Arab community was not shocked by the venting of anger demonstrated by young Arabs. According to social activists and political leaders interviewed by Shomrim, this rage is rooted in an explosive combination of institutional discrimination, deprivation, alienation, racism, lack of trust in the government and local disputes. Additionally, the distribution of inciteful content and disinformation via social media networks combined with a leadership vacuum also contributed to the eruption of chaos on Israel's home front. The anger has been building up years and years and cultivating a new generation born five decades after the Independence War that is fearless and fed up with oppression.

Alienation and Lack of Opportunity are Pushing Arab Youths into the Arms of Criminals - crime is rampant in the Arab community, claiming the lives of dozens of young people a year. To make matters worse, criminals are becoming cultural heroes among many youths. School principals look in desperation as boys and girls slip through their hands, drawn by the promise of fast cash that a life of crime offers. While the death toll climbs and the violent incidents proliferate, there is an increasing discussion within Arab society over the role of schools who are the last line of defense before young adults embark on their adult lives. Yet many graduates cannot pursue tertiary education due to poor educational achievements and thus have no promising employment opportunities, especially if they were born into a family without financial means, which is the case in more than half of the households. Regrettably, the Arab education system lacks the means to provide at risk students with psychological and social support, and even food security, and to conduct school-based violence prevention programs.

Illegal Warfare in a Densely Populated Area - Kfar Bara, a small locality in the triangle area, has the highest firearm related death rate per person: 55 times higher than Tel Aviv. The 13 localities that follow on the list are also Arab. The desperate residents speak about an organized crime price list, exposed for the first time by Shomrim: 5,000 ILS for vehicle arson, 50,000 ILS for leg shooting and zero expectations from the police after decades of state neglect and lawlessness in Arab cities and towns.
Millions of Shekels Earmarked for the Ethiopian Community Fail to Reach their Destination and Remain in the State Pocket - the Prime Minister’s Office allocated 17 million shekels to local authorities to provide services for the Ethiopian community in the domains of housing, education, health, culture and welfare but Shomrim’s investigation revealed that less than 20% of the funds were transferred and local administrations did not take up the glove.

Half a billion shekels is the budget for a 4-year plan which was launched after the demonstrations in 2015 but in contrary to catchy headlines and shiny presentations, bureaucracy is slow. Shomrim found that a headquarter was only established in 2017 and some government ministries began implementation as late as 2019. The action plan was extended to 6 years, however with the same budget, and is still far from reaching its goals. There is also the issue of the glass ceiling in the public service sector. While the administration takes pride in the employment integration of the Ethiopian community in public service agencies and government companies, in actual most community members are employed in maintenance and cleaning positions.

Privatization of Welfare Services - this first exposé of Shomrim reveals that non-profit organizations, who struggled to survive during the COVID-19 crisis, are losing government tenders to private companies for the provision of services which they developed professional expertise in over the years. What does a hi-tech company know about social work services or what does an agency that serves youth with developmental disabilities know about juvenile prostitution rehabilitation? Private companies have discovered the financial potential of the social services sector and the end result is minimal pay for junior professionals, reduced service capacity and an incompetent response to the most vulnerable populations. It appears as if the state is actively laboring to eliminate non-profits who are losing to private companies not only in the domains of social services but also in education, health and exhaustion of rights.
The Public Health System

An Opioid Pandemic by Doctor Prescription: 1 of 10 Israelis is at Risk of Opioid Addiction - the latest investigative report by Shomrim revealed that 3 years ago a special committee was established by the Health Ministry to regulate the excessive prescription of opioid medications, a euphemism for a deadly pandemic where the addictive potential of prescribed drugs is played down. In the US, this pandemic has crushed public health and social and economic welfare, causing normative people to become addicted to prescription opioid pain relievers and resulting in half a million deaths from opioid involved overdoses. In Israel, Shomrim discovered that 1 of 10 people consumes prescription opioids and this figure only represents drugs purchased in the White Market. Shomrim revealed the protocols of the Health Ministry Committee and data which was previously undisclosed to the public. The Committee has not reached any conclusions although this issue has become a public health crisis with devastating consequences.

The roots behind the US opioid pandemic are associated with doctors’ efforts to improve pain management and aggressive marketing by pharmaceutical manufacturers. While Israel shares some of these system vulnerabilities, the Health Ministry is not in a rush to unravel the tangled financial ties between pharma companies and the medical establishment. Concerns were raised in the Committee mentioned above, including patient satisfaction questionnaires, which lead physicians to prescribe pain killers to ease patients’ discomfort; the unsupervised work of pharmaceutical sales representatives in the hospitals, who are providing interns and young unexperienced doctors with supporting articles on prescription opioids; and conferences, research scholarships and continuing medical education courses funded by pharmaceutical companies. Physicians for Human Rights representatives claim that the government is not providing sufficient funds for academic research causing physicians and researchers to become more dependent on donations from pharmaceutical companies.

Who Does Your Medical Record Belong To? - contrary to common belief, our medical chart is not fully accessible. Physicians’ notes and comments, for example, which are considered separate pieces of information, are not. Whether positive or negative, they can follow a patient without his knowledge. Also, there is a fee for copies of medical records from the HMOs or hospitals, and the information provided is only what the law defines as mandatory. Changing or deleting data on the file is impossible and in some cases this information will be shared with other parties, including insurance agencies. This Shomrim investigation questions patient-doctor trust and the gains and losses of sharing personal information with healthcare professionals.

The X-Files: If You See a Private Psychiatrist, Will the Insurance Agency Know - to avoid documentation of a medical condition in the public health system, particularly a mental health condition, or to receive timely treatment, many turn to private healthcare. Yet medical information, documented by private healthcare professionals, finds its way to the IDF, hospitals or insurance companies.
Even when medication is purchased through private prescriptions, insurance companies know, Shomrim uncovers.

One Scanner for 500,000 People - PET-CT scanning is critical to the diagnosis and treatment of oncology patients. Yet only 16 PET-CT machines serve more than 9.2 million Israelis. In the periphery, the ratio is nothing short of a scandal: in the Southern District 1:665,000 and in the Northern District 1:660,000. Patients wait weeks or months for a scan while their cancer does not, and much too often, this deprives them of timely treatment. Shomrim’s investigation revealed another side effect - the proliferation of companies specializing in helping people “fix” appointments for a costly price. This troubling industry, which the state comptroller warned about several years ago, is thriving and magnifying inequalities in access to healthcare.

The Payment Arrangement for HMO Healthcare Service Providers is Impacting Clinical Decision Making, Doctor-Patient Relationship and Preventative Medicine - HMOs offer two means of payment: passive and active capitation. By way of passive capitation, a physician receives payment for each enrolled patient assigned to them, regardless of the number of patient visits. In this case, the physician will no doubt prefer patients that rarely make an appointment (e.g., young patients who see a family physician twice a year on average). Physicians paid on an active capitation basis only receive payment according to a patient’s quarterly visits and reimbursement is given only for the first visit per quarter. Undoubtedly, this physician will prefer adult patients who see doctors more frequently than the young population, and especially those with minor health problems. Payment methods influence physician practice behavior and affect proactive medical care and clinical decision making.

Environment

Israel Nature and Parks Authority has no problem receiving donations from big corporations in the heart of some of the biggest environmental battles in recent years, including ICL Group, Nobel Energy, Carmel Tunnels and Nesher - Israel Cement Enterprises. This Shomrim story brings attention not only to the problematic greenwashing of their environmental footprints but the dangers of conflict of interest in public decision-making. The Authority is a public corporation with enforcement power and influence on planning procedures, policy building and decision making. Its large jurisdiction and vast areas of operation can directly and indirectly impact the interests of the companies that contribute to it and when there is partial transparency of donations, concerns of neglected public interest arise.
A Spotlight on Our Journalists

At the heart of Shomrim are exceptional journalists led by Editor, Eyal Abrahami. Abrahami carefully selected the right mix of experienced journalists who are committed to Shomrim’s mission and to investigations that produce real impact.

Chen Shalita
Investigative Reporter

Began her career in journalism in 1993 as a legal correspondent for the Yedioth Yerushalayim local newspaper. She then served as a researcher for the Shetach Hefker investigative TV show. Her feature writing began in 1997 at the Jerusalem-based Kol Ha’ir weekly from the Schocken Group. Thereafter, she was a staff writer for Yedioth Ahronoth’s Shiva Yamim weekend supplement for 7 years, and from 2007 to 2020, served as a reporter for Globes daily G Magazine.

Chen specializes in articles in the fields of politics, law and the media that offer a behind-the-scenes look at decision-making processes, and is fascinated with sketching a sociological profile of new phenomena in Israeli society. Among her work is a series of articles characterizing the changing electorate of the political parties in Israel.

“For me, Shomrim is understanding that the How is no less important than the What. Analyzing how public systems operate on stage and behind the scenes affects our lives much more than chasing after politicians’ juicy headlines. Shomrim is there to unravel these mechanisms.”

Daniel Dolev
Investigative Reporter

Daniel began his career in journalism as a production editor for the news pages of Yedioth Ahronoth and continued to serve as editor of the front page of Haaretz. Alongside his editorial work, he took part in the Pulitzer Prize winning Panama Papers investigation, and also published a series of articles on the eviction struggles in Tel Aviv’s Givat Amal Bet and HaArgazim neighbourhoods. Thereafter, Dolev worked as a researcher for Uvda - the investigative TV show. From 2017 to 2021, he served as an investigative reporter and legal affairs correspondent for Walla news. Dolev has published investigative reports on a wide range of subjects, including the law enforcement system, the Israeli Security Agency, the Israel Police, and the State Attorney’s Office.

“When repeatedly asked - Why Shomrim?, I like to say that it is the closest thing to a start-up there is today in the field of journalism in Israel. The attempt to build a new model that produces good journalism and promotes collaborations between journalists and media outlets is something that I am very proud to be a part of. Not to mention the opportunity to be involved in this initiative from its very start, to participate in its design and to hope that it will grow roots and become an inseparable part of the local media landscape.”
Stoplight on our journalists

**Roni Singer**
**Investigative Reporter**

Roni started her journalistic career as a broadcast journalist for Ynet and then moved on to Haaretz where she coordinated the news desk reporters, was an editor for the news desk, a consumer reporter and a crime reporter. She was also the newspaper correspondent in Kenya, Italy and France. In 2009, she was appointed reporter for Uvda, the investigative TV show, which featured her investigations on money and government, police and crime, health and welfare. After 4 seasons, she was appointed a political and investigative reporter for Calcalist. In 2018, she was a reporter and presenter for the Shetach Hefker investigative journalism documentary TV show for 3 seasons and conducted a series of investigations on cyber, kashrut, law and politics. In 2019, her documentary MeToo - Revolution was aired on Kan11. Her work on intrafamilial homicide of women in Arab society won her an international award from the EVZ Foundation - Remembrance, Responsibility and Future.

“Shomrím is an island of genuine freedom of the press. The only agenda is facts and a good story and to achieve this, Shomrím affords us time, space, in-depth and collaborative investigation and all the resources that a journalist truly needs. In an era when it is difficult to conduct in-depth reporting, I am thankful for arriving to Shomrím’s island.”

**Miki Levi**
**Head of Data Analytics**

Miki began his career as a columnist for Maariv, went on to the news desk and joined the editorial teams at the weekend supplement and the foreign desk. At Globes, Levi served as deputy editor of G Magazine (weekend supplement) and as editor of The Poenta, a short news section.

“I can summarize my activity within Shomrím and the overall activity of Shomrím in one simple equation: good journalism mirrors reality to the public; outstanding journalism gives the public tools to mirror reality to themselves. As a data journalist, my everyday mission is to look at widespread public opinion and to examine how much of it is true, are their angles that remain unexplored and what can be learned about Israeli democracy. The autonomy given to the Data Division to delve into any event, field, subject or attitude, no matter how small or esoteric, enables us to expose actions and mechanisms under the surface.”
By the Numbers

In 2021, vision turned into reality. Shomrim built significant and continuing partnerships, positioning itself as a reliable news source on abuses of power and betrayals of public trust, and spotlighting entrenched problems, including economic inequality, access to health care and climate change, that are unlikely to be resolved without significant changes to the system.

**Journalistic Outputs**

141 collaborations with media outlets  up 250%

180 articles  up 150%

126 data-stories  up 85%

12 short videos

47 newsletters  up 120%

**Most Engaging Stories***

Pandora Papers Investigation  2,042,000 views

Violence in Arab Community  777,000 views

Privacy in Israel  730,000 views

KATZA - Europe Asia Pipeline Company Malfunctions  703,000 views

Operation Guardian of the Walls and the Street Riots  606,000 views

* The data was calculated by combining page views on Shomrim’s social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and website, and estimating reader interaction on other media platforms where Shomrim’s items were republished or cited (whether a co-investigation or a follow up item).

**Reader Engagement:**

Newsletter subscribers  up 402%

Twitter reach  437K monthly  up 288%

Facebook reach  728K monthly  up 146%

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630 Third Ave, RM 1500
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Please indicate that your donation should be directed to The Center for Media and Democracy in Israel, Shomrim.

Budget

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* The figures are not final and before a financial audit

** For the full report submitted to the Israel Corporation Authority, please visit guidestar: (Hebrew)