



Disroot.org  
Annual Report  
2018



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## Annual Report 2018

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## Annual Report 2018

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2018 has ended, it was a good year for Disroot which far outshone the two years that preceded it. We've managed to upgrade hardware and break even on our costs. We've worked twice as much in comparison to previous year. We've experienced a wave of abuse and spam originating from- or targeting Disroot. On the other hand we've also experienced a lot of love, help and respect from fellow Disrooters. Lots of excitement, joy, sweat, tears, depression, signs of burnout, serious and hard decisions and truly all colors of the rainbow of emotions; A crazy rollercoaster called Disroot.org.

Here is the summary of the most significant moments of the year (the good as well as the bad), our financial situation and some plans and speculations for 2019.

## The Highlights of 2018

### New Servers

As Disroot's user-base grew wider and the platform started being used more heavily, we saw an increase strain on our server, especially due to database based services. We realized quickly that in order to provide stable services we will need to invest in a standalone dedicated database server. Luckily we still had some old servers stashed away - a donation from a friend few years back. However the servers were missing key components such as memory, disks, raid controllers and so on. If we were to deploy a new server in the data-center we had to invest in hardware. We had some help, this time from *huxley* who kindly donated a bunch of memory modules, but the rest we had to buy ourselves. Alongside database server, we decided it was also time to invest in some bigger disks for more storage space. In total we fronted about 3500 EUR from private funds (=the pockets of the Disroot admins), way more than our originally planned budget for 2018, but this expense was necessary for the continuation the project. And so in January, after good few hours of noticeable downtime and lots of work prior and during the operation (sleepless nights

included), our database server was installed. This enabled us to ease the load on the main server and opened doors to faster, more reliable and future proof (for the time being) performance. Later this year, further enormous growth in user-base and general service usage led us to deploy additional machine in the data-center. Thanks to leftovers from all previous server upgrades (RAM, disks and CPU's) we could assemble yet another server. This upgrade secures the performance for now but as we learned last year it is hard to really predict accurately when we will need to upgrade the hardware again. We are already planning some upgrades in the coming months (more memory, better CPU's) but we are slowly reaching limits of what the current hardware can offer and soon, if Disroot keeps growing, we will need to plan a huge investment in better servers.

### Extra Storage and Custom Domains

With bigger storage, we were finally able to respond to countless requests and questions about extra storage. Unlike domain linking or email aliases, extra storage costs real money in terms of hardware, electricity and space in data-center. Therefore unlike the other 'rewards' we offer for people that decide to donate to Disroot on regular basis, extra storage is provided as pay-for-feature. Current price per GB has been set to 0.15 EUR and we provide packages up to 54 GB, though bigger amounts are also possible upon request. All the income from extra storage however is counted together with the rest of the donations and added to the financial overview as such.

### Disroot's Automation

Last year we've mentioned that we would like to focus on creating automation scripts to help us maintain the platform as well as make it possible for anyone to setup platforms similar to Disroot as easy as possible. We decided to base our work mainly around Ansible which is a widely used tool for automation of software deployments, configuration and maintenance. This year we have worked hard to automate as much as possible. This resulted in some of the playbooks published under our [git repository](#). The work was not as smooth as we initially planned, but we have most of the aspects of Disroot in half baked state already which means in 2019 there will be more and more Ansible roles

released as well as some other tools and scripts we use internally. We can already see how much this work has improved the overall time spent on keeping Disroot running and we hope once we reach full automation we will have more time to focus on yet new developments.

### Hubzilla Community Project

The recent boom in activitypub protocol powering federated social networks such as Mastodon, Pixelfed, Peertube and the likes made us very excited. The huge refugee flow from corporate walled gardens such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and G+ last year even brought these eccentric open-source-community-driven social networks to the mainstream media. Many of you were asking us when we will follow the trend and set up our own Mastodon instance (understandable, as it was the new and shiny kid on the block). We, however, thought the network was quite saturated, with many Mastodon instances to choose from. But it got us looking again at similar projects that don't get as much exposure. [This article](#) was a jaw dropper that made us realize that Hubzilla is our holy grail of social networks we've somehow overlooked before. We quickly deployed a new instance for testing and soon after other disrooters from the active community jumped onboard and we began testing, documenting and playing with this amazing piece of software. From first impressions the initial experience - on-boarding, user interface and exposure - wasn't super intuitive so we were excited to contribute and help in that department. We are still excited about Hubzilla and continue to work on improvements whenever we can (which is obviously very limited due to our regular workload). We hope to finally announce Hubzilla as the officially-provided, supported and recommended go-to social platform for Disroot, sometime in the near future.

For those of you interested to read a bit more about Hubzilla's creator and reason behind building freedom social networks check [this article](#).

### Registration Gate

The growing popularity of Disroot, while very flattering and empowering, also put our platform in the spotlight for all kinds of unpleasant types of abusive

activity. At first we dismissed it, as "part of the work" all publicly available free platforms have to deal with, but as the amount of abuse reports continued growing we found ourselves spending more and more time fighting those. People who follow us on social networks or chat know very well how frustrating some of the attacks we had to defend against were. When our measures turned out to be futile against the massive amount of spammers flooding the gates of the project we decided to temporarily close the registrations of new accounts while searching for better ways to reduce abuse. After two months of contemplating, testing, talking to- and with the community, we came up with a plan and decided to re-open registrations. Our new registration system requires email address for verification (which is immediately removed once the request is approved and the account is created) and depends on manual approval of account requests. This may add a little to our work load but is not even comparable to the amount of work spent on fishing out bogus accounts. Major noticeable difference is that we were able to finally get rid of Google Captcha \o/ - This has truly been like salt in our eyes from day one and something we've been ashamed of but the only measure we originally had for keeping some annoying bots away. With the new manual verification process the Captcha is redundant.

### Matrix Closure

One of the rather controversial events of the year was our decision to phase out matrix chat. After two years of hosting matrix instance we became more and more concern with resource footprint as well as some privacy issues and, no less important, the amount of stress and work hours spent on making sure matrix works as expected. We have decided to partially discontinue Matrix by making it unavailable for new users, purging old room history and removing inactive users. This was not an easy decision but we knew that, in the current state, keeping the instance up and running was impossible. We instead decided to focus on Jabber/XMPP as our recommended chat solution and are happy with the results so far. We are planning on focusing even more on making Xmpp shine not only for disrooters but hopefully for the open source community at large by contributing work to several projects out there (various clients/apps, howto's, tutorials, promotion etc). You can read more about the reasons for matrix closure as well as Xmpp in our [blogpost](#).

## A New Donation Page

Since some time now we've been talking about having a better, clearer and, most importantly, transparent overview of the current state of finances at Disroot. We've finally got to re-designing the page with a graph that summarize all the costs and donations from all sources. A second graph shows the number of people that donate each month. This visualization also helps us to better predict future movements. We've also decided to introduce 'goals' - simple financial aspirations we hope you will help us achieve. At this moment it's more of an experiment, as we have just managed to cover our investments from the start of the year, but as our financial situation becomes more and more stable we will be able to introduce new goals.

One of such goals we've set for 2018 was to start donating a percentage of the surplus from donations to developers without whom it would not be possible for Disroot or to exist. We are grateful for the work they are doing for a freer, safer independent internet. Since November (when we managed to recover costs) we started donating 15% of our surplus as long as the donations double the monthly costs. We wish we will be able to donate to even more projects with every month that goes by.

## Community Involvement

We want to give a huge shout-out to the Disroot community at large. Every year the active group of disrooters grows and this year was just amazing. We've manage to create more howto's and translations, we've started with the first community project (Hubzilla), We have a Disroot mobile app ( <https://f-droid.org/en/packages/org.disroot.disrootapp/> ) and the general warm atmosphere, skill sharing, support of the disrooters all over the place is just outstanding. We are pretty sure this coming year will be no different. We would like to give special shout-out to: *Fede, Meaz, Massimiliano* and *Maryjane*, who were supporting us the entire year and thanks to their contributions and involvement day and night our work at Disroot is a joy. It's a pleasure to work with you guys and it's a pleasure to deliver services to such an awesome community!

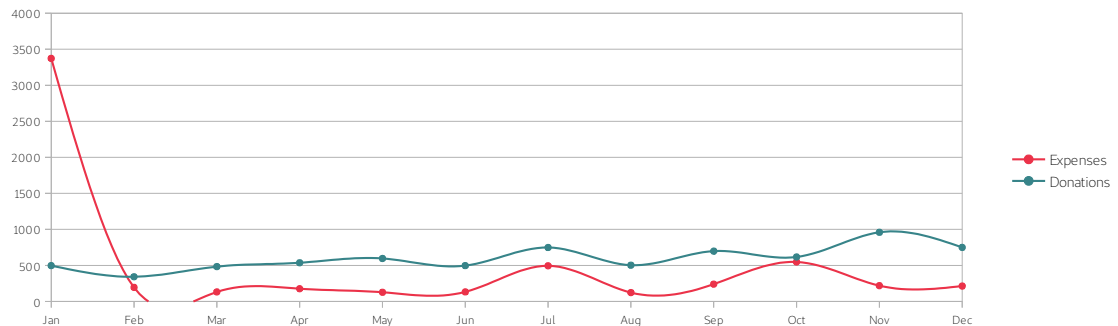
# Finances

Our annual reports in the two previous years were following Disroot's birthdays thus time spanned from August to August. Since the beginning of 2018 we are an official foundation making this system not very convenient for our administration. We are starting with a clean slate with the 2018 annual report which covers, as customary, the calendar year from January to December. By this we are closing the debts from the years before and consider those our own investment into the project. Following is our costs and donation overview from 2018.

## Expenses

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Expenses	€ 3,373.75	€ 194.70	€ 131.94	€ 176.50	€ 127.05	€ 132.42	€ 494.52	€ 122.70	€ 239.85	€ 548.13	€ 218.84	€ 213.42
Bills	€ 135.97	€ 72.02	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00
Paypal Fees	€ 5.63	€ 4.10	€ 13.36	€ 9.80	€ 8.47	€ 13.84	€ 9.73	€ 9.83	€ 21.73	€ 18.79	€ 27.25	€ 25.55
infrastructure	€ 4,018.15	€ 118.58	€ 118.58	€ 136.73	€ 118.58	€ 118.58	€ 453.69	€ 177.87	€ 208.12	€ 463.13	€ 286.59	€ 177.87
Bank fees	€ 10.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 29.97	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 31.10	€ 0.00	€ 10.00	€ 33.26	€ 10.00	€ 10.00
VAT	€ 796.00-							€ 65.00-		€ 32.95	€ 105.00-	

## Costs vs. Donations



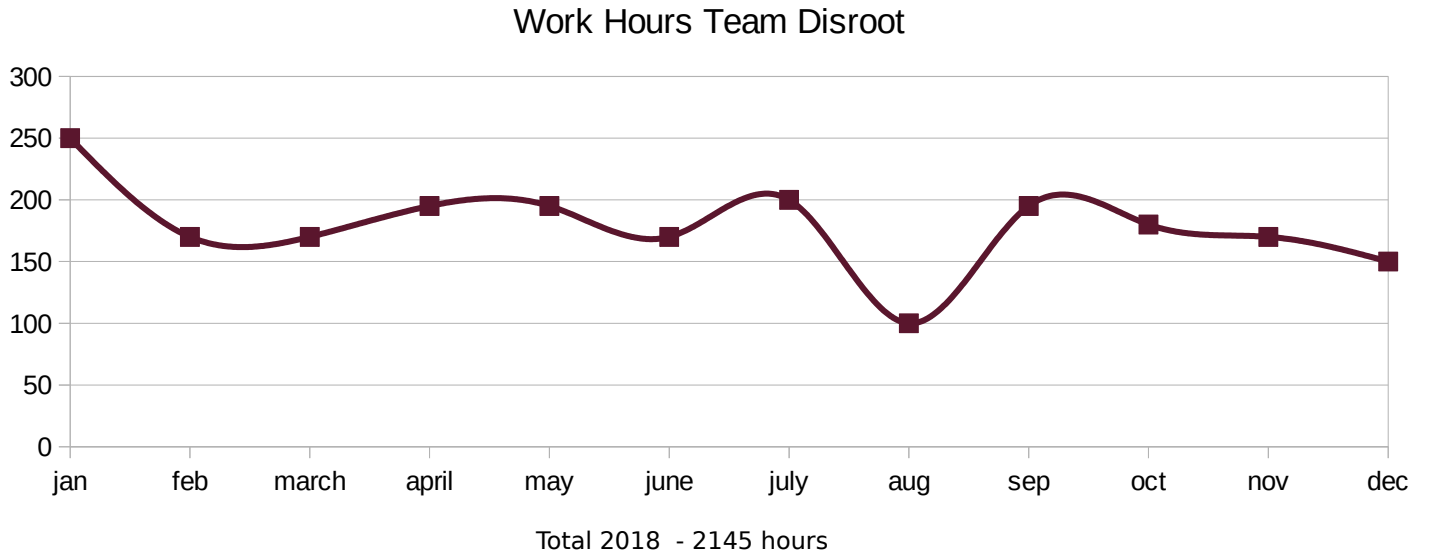
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Expenses	€ 3,373.75	€ 194.70	€ 131.94	€ 176.50	€ 127.05	€ 132.42	€ 494.52	€ 122.70	€ 239.85	€ 548.13	€ 218.84	€ 213.42
Donations	€ 497.68	€ 342.37	€ 483.28	€ 536.55	€ 596.28	€ 497.18	€ 748.42	€ 503.19	€ 698.03	€ 616.72	€ 959.61	€ 749.68
Subtotal	€ 2,876.07-	€ 147.67	€ 351.34	€ 360.05	€ 469.23	€ 364.76	€ 253.90	€ 380.49	€ 458.18	€ 68.59	€ 740.77	€ 536.26
Donated to FOSS											€ 103.48-	€ 80.44-
Monthly total	€ 2,876.07-	€ 147.67	€ 351.34	€ 360.05	€ 469.23	€ 364.76	€ 253.90	€ 380.49	€ 458.18	€ 68.59	€ 637.29	€ 455.82

Current balance: € 1,071.2



## Work Hours

We, of course did, not manage to keep noting all hours we spent working thus this is a rough estimate. Our new years resolution is to do a better job this year. Whether we manage to make it any better, we'll see when writing the next annual report...



# Disroot in 2019

## Fully Automated Disroot Deployment (Published)

Something we have started already in the previous year and definitely want to finish in 2019. Automating all the possible aspects of running Disroot.org will surely make our life easier in terms of maintenance, which will give us more time to work on improvements and innovations. It also enables anyone to jump on-board and run their own disroot-like platform. We observe more and more similar project to ours popping up and we dare to say this trend is just starting. We hope that by sharing our work with others, not only we can help others but also fuel collective cooperation instead of everyone reinventing the wheel over and over again.

## Mailbox Encryption

In the coming year we want to introduce mailbox encryption. Our plan is to implement server side encryption rather than having "end-to-end" encryption. While this approach might be less secure, as the encryption keys are stored on the server (they work in combination with a user's password, just as in Nextcloud), we think the advantages of such setup exceed the disadvantages. Server side implementation of E2E encryption has a major drawback that it requires a dedicated application to function (these are usually web-based apps so fully trusting your web-browser is also an important factor in trusting the encryption). Instead of forcing one mail client on all users, we rather let disrooters choose their own favorite email app and not take away the ability to use IMAP/POP3 and to maintain added security of GnuPG used locally, from within one's computer. We believe that only such type of end to end encryption gives the best security, freedom and the control over the encryption keys in the hand of the user. That is why we are supporting projects like autocrypt.org in their strive to create a standard and secure email encryption implementation on application level rather than at the provider.

## Financial Stability

In 2018 we saw a real transformation in Disroot's financial situation. We are grateful to have reached the point where we no longer need to invest our private money to keep the project alive. But we also know we cannot stop at that. On one front, our servers are slowly reaching a point where they cannot be expanded anymore and in order to upgrade, we will soon have to buy new hardware which will require a great investment. On another front, we are noticing Disroot is taking more and more time from us. This leads to the situation where either our day jobs or our health are hurt in the process. We realize that if we want the project and our life to function well alongside, we kind of need to be employed by Disroot. So in short, we need to first secure enough funds for the case of major upgrades, growth and hardware maintenance but also eventually make Disroot our day-job. Obviously that won't happen overnight but we do think it is possible and want to look into multiple ways to achieve that.

Currently there are thousands of disrooters actively using the various services every day. At the same time less than 100 people are donating each month. We are extremely thankful to those who support the project but can't help also thinking what a solid base we will have if all active users would donate us a "coffee a month" (or 12 coffees a year). As we keep saying: **any amount helps.**

As we cannot rely on donations only we want to explore more ways to achieve our financial goals without changing the current nature of Disroot. Since Disroot is not intended for commercial activity some people has raised a need for a commercial alternative so we started a parallel project where we offer multiple services, support and consultancy to organizations and (small) businesses. We would like to give this project some more exposure so anyone looking for such solution can find it. The project is still in development and more information will soon follow.

We are also beginning to explore possibilities of grants and funding from organizations and foundations that share our values and strive for better, more transparent, safer, private and decentralized internet. We do not seek venture capital type of funding. Hell no! At the same time we totally lack any

experience in writing grant/funding applications. If you are one of those people that know how it is done and would like to help out, please get in touch.

Here are the different ways you can help the project as of now:



### Mission Statement and Growth

Last but not least on our list :-) Some more thoughts about the future of Disroot. We want to better define the scope of the project, where our limits lie and how much do we want to grow. We need a proper mission statement! We never desired to become a large service provider with continuous growth as its main goal. What we want is to maintain a healthy size platform. What exactly that means we still need to clarify. We see Disroot as something more than just a service provider. By sharing our work and insights, creating tools for easier setup and maintenance, we want to create a platform that helps other like-minded groups set up their own spin of Disroot. We want to encourage and promote the use of free software and ethical web platforms. **We want our internet BACK!!!!**

Yours truly,

The Disroot Team

Muppeth & Antilopa

10 January 2019

