

# RIVER CLEANUP ANNUAL REPORT 2021





# INTRO

*Like so many people, I was far too busy to care about the environment. I had a hectic job, children, and an active social life. And then, in 2017, I was challenged to do something super simple, but outside my comfort zone: I had to pick up trash for 10 minutes and share a post about it on Facebook.*

*That simple act opened my eyes. I started to see the trash and realized it was literally everywhere. After that, my behavior changed gradually. I began to buy more consciously, compensate, inform, reduce. I wanted to do something about the problem on a large scale.*

*That's when I started organizing cleanups along rivers. These first cleanups were very varied in success. Sometimes 10 people took part, other times 100. Finally, I realized that I couldn't make a difference that way, which is why I started River Cleanup.*

*What started as a 10 minute cleanup in 2017 is now a non-profit organization active in 57 countries, recovering 1.2 million kg of waste by organizing 2.532 events and mobilizing 143.699 people so far.*

*And this is only the beginning. We are on a mission to clean rivers! And can't wait to have more impact together with you!*

Thomas de Groote  
Founder & CEO, River Cleanup



*Thomas*



# PLASTIC POLLUTION ANNO 2021

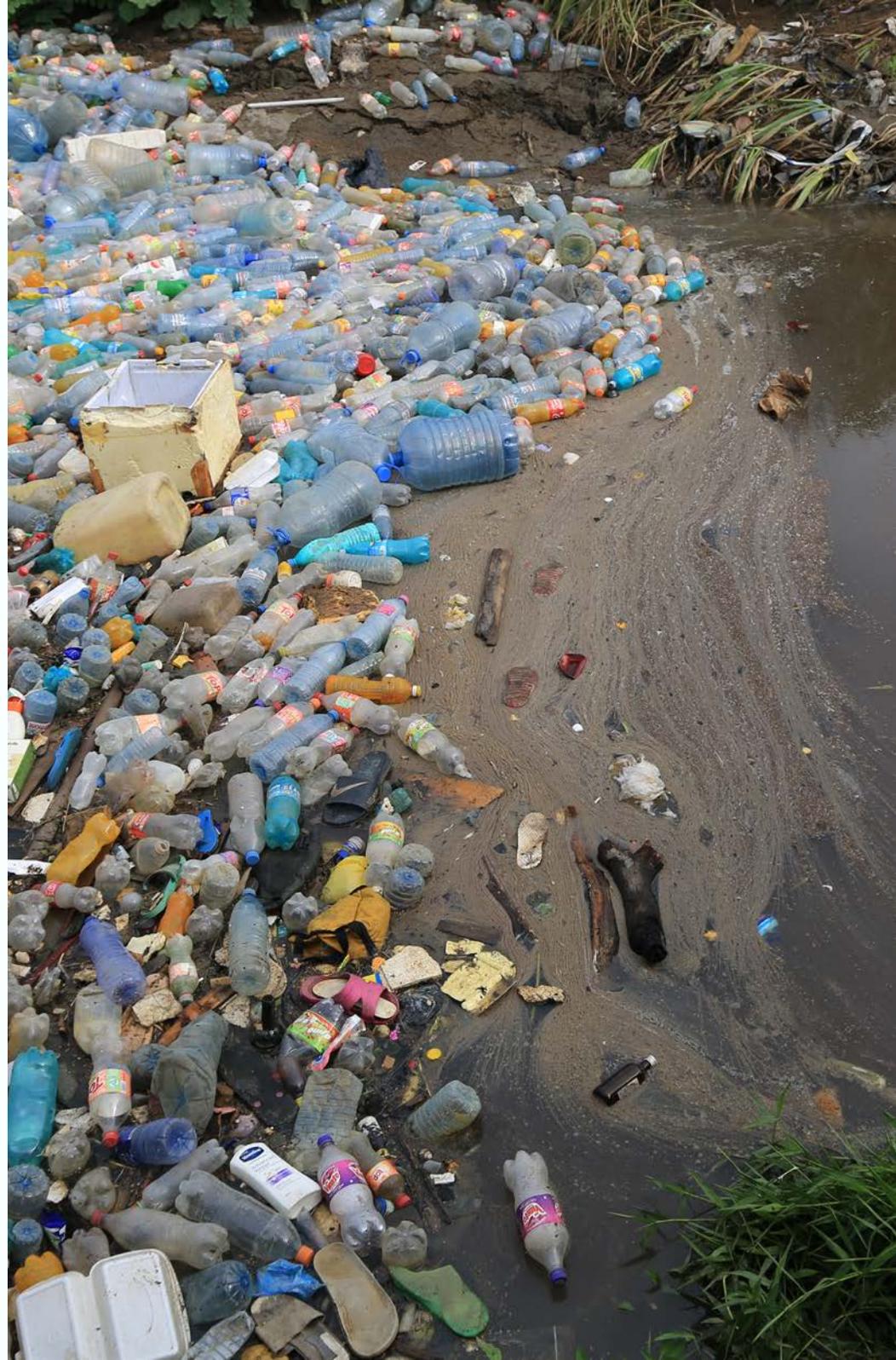
Every year, 11 billion kilograms of plastic end up in the oceans. Rivers transport most of this plastic to the oceans impacting local ecosystems and endangering marine and coastal animals.

Plastics break down into microplastics and attract pesticides, detergents, and other toxic substances ending up in our oceans. Scientists discovered microplastics in the food and drinks we consume regularly. Every week we consume 5 grams of plastic, the equivalent of 1 bank card. Every year we eat 250 grams, and this adds up to 20 kilograms of plastics in a lifetime.

Recent research shows that microplastics interfere with natural hormone systems and can impact the fertility of the next generations.

By focusing on the area in and around rivers, we can restore the natural beauty of our environment and keep both people and wildlife safe from the harmful effects of micro and macro plastic pollution.

Together, we are on a mission to clean rivers!





## **OUR VISION**

Plastic free rivers.

## **OUR MISSION**

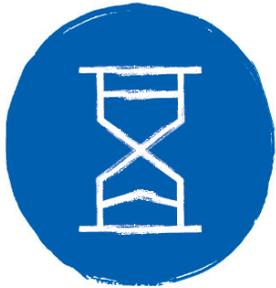
To stop plastic from reaching the oceans  
by organizing cleanups, changing behaviour and  
transforming organizations.



A simple 10 minute cleanup challenge was the start of our mission to clean rivers.

Our ambition was to have 10 cleanups in 3 countries along the Rhine! In reality, over 10.000 people joined the cleanup day in 60 cities and 5 countries, from source to ending.

River Cleanup was founded and expanded to 10 rivers in Europe and Asia.



**2017**  
10 minutes



**2018**  
10.000 people



**2019**  
10 rivers



**2020**  
100.000 people



**2021**  
1 million kg

100.000 people took action in 45 countries, and we deployed our river technology.

After 4 years, we collected our 1.000.000th kg of river waste.



# IMPACT AT A GLANCE

COLLECTED (\*)

**1.225.114 KG WASTE**

OF WHICH (\*)

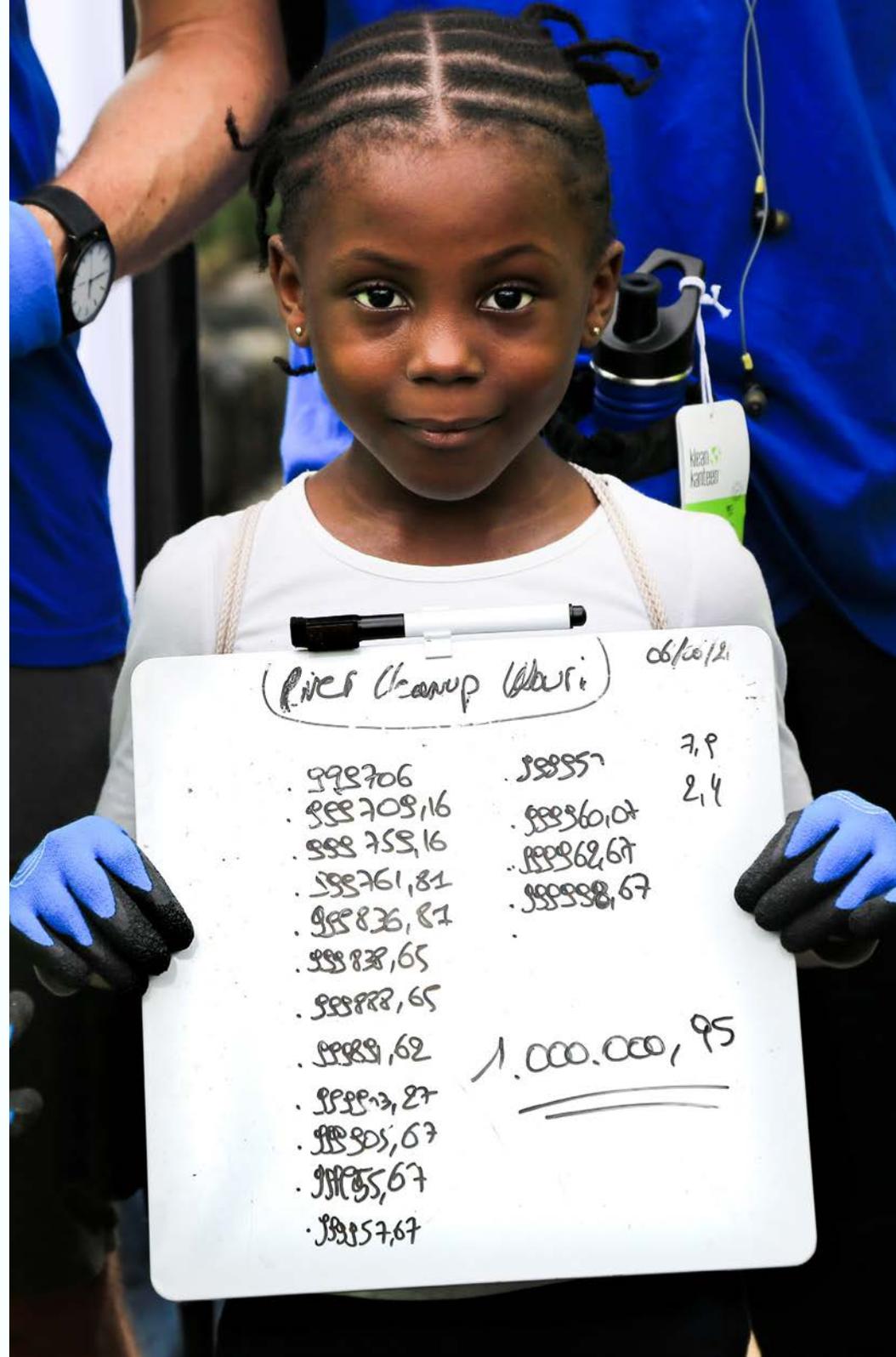
**680.000 KG PLASTIC**

ACTIVE ALONG (\*)

**161 RIVERS**

(\*)

Provisional figures December 31st 2021. Total since 2019.



(River Cleanup Liberia) 06/06/21

• 998706	• 998557	7,9
• 998709,16	• 99860,07	2,4
• 998759,16	• 99862,67	
• 998761,81	• 99898,67	
• 998836,87		
• 998838,65		
• 998888,65		
• 99889,62		
• 99893,27		
• 99895,67		
• 99895,67		
• 998957,67		
	<u>1.000.000,95</u>	



# CLEANUPS

ORGANIZED (\*)

**2534 EVENTS**

EXPANDED OUR NETWORK TO (\*)

**144.149 WARRIORS**

EXPANDED GLOBALLY TO (\*)

**57 COUNTRIES**

(\*)

Provisional figures December 31st 2021. Total since 2019.





## Active in 57 countries

### 5 core program countries

Albania  
Australia  
Austria  
Belgium  
Bulgaria  
Cambodia  
Cameroon

Canada  
Cayman Islands  
Chile  
China  
Colombia  
Costa Rica  
Cote d'Ivoire

Cuba  
Czechia  
Egypt  
Ethiopia  
Finland  
France  
Germany

Ghana  
Greece  
Hungary  
India  
Indonesia  
Ireland  
Italy

Japan  
Kazakhstan  
Kenya  
Liberia  
Lithuania  
Luxembourg  
Malaysia

Morocco  
Nepal  
Netherlands  
New Zealand  
Oman  
Panama  
Portugal

Puerto Rico  
Russia  
Saudi Arabia  
Slovakia  
South Africa  
South Korea  
Spain  
Sweden

Switzerland  
Trinidad &  
Tobago  
Uganda  
Ukraine  
United Kingdom  
United States  
Zimbabwe



# OUR APPROACH

## RIPPLE MODEL

We stop plastic before it reaches our oceans by cleaning rivers, changing behavior and transforming organizations. Our **holistic approach** is based on three complementary pillars that encompass the entire lifecycle of river plastics and can be tailored to specific needs at different levels (local-global) for maximum effectiveness.

### Pillar 1. CLEAN

Cleanups create **awareness** and empower people to make a difference. People experience they can become part of the solution. The fun and enthusiasm we see at cleanups have proven to be most effective in engaging people.

We concentrate our efforts on both **active and preventive collection** of plastics. In close consultation with (local) stakeholders, we seek the most effective and efficient solution to a local waste problem.

Although many river cleanups often require manual collection and sorting to some extent we use innovative **technology** to stop plastic from reaching the oceans.

### Pillar 2. EDUCATE

Education is the most **crucial driver for change**. We inform and educate students from elementary schools to universities on the impact of plastic pollution. Within households, children are key change makers and are allowed to increasingly express their opinions. We inspire and motivate them to discuss the plastic pollution topic with their families, impacting their local communities directly.

### Pillar 3. TRANSFORM

With our transform pillar we help individuals, organizations and governments to create sustainable change.

We collaborate with **key decision makers** and business leaders to prevent and reduce plastic use and waste. And, we transform collected plastics into recyclable materials and develop new products.

Collectively these three pillars constitute our **Ripple Model**.



# OUR APPROACH

## RIPPLE MODEL

We are optimizing this model for scaling, especially the Educate and Transform pillars, to keep maximizing our impact on preventing and cleaning up river plastics. We do this together with our strategic (knowledge) partners and utilize our main strength: bringing people together to expand the River Cleanup network of (local and global) changemakers, cleanup initiatives, corporate partners, scientists, and policymakers.

### Programs:

- Global program (incl. River Cleanup Challenge & mobilization for World Cleanup Day)
- Core program (Belgium, Cameroon, Indonesia, Ghana, Albania)
- Technology & Innovation program
- Emergency program

These 4 programs work on the following **Sustainable Development Goals**:





# RIVER CLEANUP CHALLENGE

## Global program - Awareness & community building

How to reach a lot of people? Start a challenge! From March 22 to April 22, we ran the River Cleanup Challenge. The rules were simple: Do a 10-minute cleanup and challenge 3 others to do the same. Over 1250 volunteers in 20 countries joined forces with +40 ministers/politicians & mayors, 60 companies, 27 organizations, 5 schools, newspapers, radio stations, celebrities, DJs and festival organizers made the world a little more 'plastic-free.'

As we reach new people through cleanups, our network expands, and more people become aware of plastic pollution. Furthermore, we had several CEOs and C-levels launching the challenge in their organization (Google, AG Insurance, Delhaize, d'Ieteren, BOMA,...), which was a great introduction to further develop our Transform pillar.





# WORLD CLEANUP DAY

## Global program - Awareness & Community building

For the fourth time, River Cleanup was a mobilizing partner for World Cleanup Day, the most significant civic action against waste globally. Every year millions of people from all over the world join hands to clean up litter.

In Belgium, over 50 actions were organized along rivers, and in 5 key cities, we combined cleanups with a celebration to show people it's fun to do good for our planet. Our actions in the South of Belgium were spread over the summer as we did not want to wait until the end of September to start cleaning up the aftermath of the deadly floods.





# RIVER WARRIORS

## Global program - Awareness & Community building

Every month we select an individual or a group as the River Warrior of the Month. These volunteers have shown extraordinary impact in their local communities.

The requirements to be nominated are:

- Be self-engaged for a clean planet
- Inspire and activate other people to join
- Create tangible local impact

These Rivers Warriors are the embodiment of the core values of River Cleanup.





# WOURI RIVER, CAMEROON

## Core program - Impact & Transformation

The Wouri river is one of Africa's top 5 most polluted rivers, releasing almost 3 million kg of plastics/year into our oceans. In 2021 we intensified our partnership with NAMé Recycling, a local expert in collecting and recycling plastic waste from businesses, households, waterways, and streets in Cameroon. Together we focused on river plastics and collected & recycled 446.193 kg to date.

Besides cleaning up rivers, riverbanks, and drains, we initiated and tested our educational program in 10 schools in Doula. The goal is to inspire & inform students on plastic pollution and activate them to become part of the solution.

The collected waste is transformed into new products. A project together with Vlerick Business School led to a first shortlist of potential products to be made.





# ISHËM RIVER, ALBANIA

## Core program - Impact & Transformation

The Ishëm river is one of the most polluted rivers in Europe. Every year over 733.000 kg of plastic flows through it into the Adriatic Sea.

In 2021 we explored the Ishëm river and its affluents from source to mouth. As a result, the local team organized over 20 cleanup actions and some more major cleanup events set in the beautiful nature reserve at the river's mouth, creating awareness among local citizens and authorities. Besides, we identified stakeholders on several essential aspects of the project (recycling/education/policy making).

Our ambition remains to clean the Ishëm, from source to ending! And to stop the pollution, at the source.





# CITARUM RIVER, INDONESIA

## Core program - Impact & Transformation

Indonesia has been a focus country for us from the start. The Citarum River is one of the most polluted rivers globally and an obvious choice to build out our network and mission.

We partnered with Plastic Fischer to manage the operational part of the technologies and waste management. Our role is to focus on education, awareness, and fundraising.

Together we deployed 4 Trashbooms, opened a waste management facility, and reached out to several schools to start our educational program with children.





# TECHNOLOGY

## Technology - Testing of new technologies (pre-deployment)

The work of helping hands - and the commitment of human hearts - is invaluable in ridding our rivers of plastic pollution. However, new technologies support the hard work of our river warriors by automatically capturing river plastics 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We successfully deployed and tested several systems in Indonesia, Cameroon, and Belgium in the last year.

- **River Skimmer**, Belgium: By working closely with the Construct Masters of Multi Masters (Sam-sic Group), it was possible to install the first river skimmer via a pilot project in Antwerp. Two more installations are in the pipeline.
- **River Trawl**, Cameroon: On River Cleanup World, we tested a trawl system with our partner organizations Waste Free Oceans and Environment and Food Foundation.
- **TrashBoom**, Indonesia: For this technology we partner with Plastic Fischer in the collaborative project in Bandung. At the end of 2021, 4 TrashBooms were successfully installed and operational.





# FLOODS SOUTH OF BELGIUM

## Emergency program - Targeted actions in core country

On July 14th and 15th heavy rains afflicted Belgium. In Wallonia, this led to deadly floods that affected thousands of people and a huge area of nature. We took action right away. First by helping people in need and later by organizing bigger actions to help nature.

In total we organized over 50 actions to the affected areas, cleaning 20km and mobilizing 5.000 volunteers. The amount of destruction caused by the water was unbelievable. Entire house contents littered the streets, everything from furniture to photo albums.

Our ambition is clear: we will clean it up and restore nature in its beauty.





# PEOPLE & PARTNERS

Thanks to the hard work and generosity of so many,  
2021 was our most impactful year yet.  
We were able to connect with more partners, grow our global network,  
and together collect more plastic waste than ever before.



and many more



# SOCIAL METRICS

FACEBOOK (\*)

**20 858**

INSTAGRAM (\*)

**4 469**

LINKEDIN (\*)

**1 737**

VIMEO (\*)

**4 000**

WEBSITE VISITORS

**49 723**

(\*)

Provisional figures December 31st 2021. Total since 2019.





# MEDIA & REACH

PEOPLE REACHED

**120 078 741**

NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS

**197**

FEATURED ON



Trends



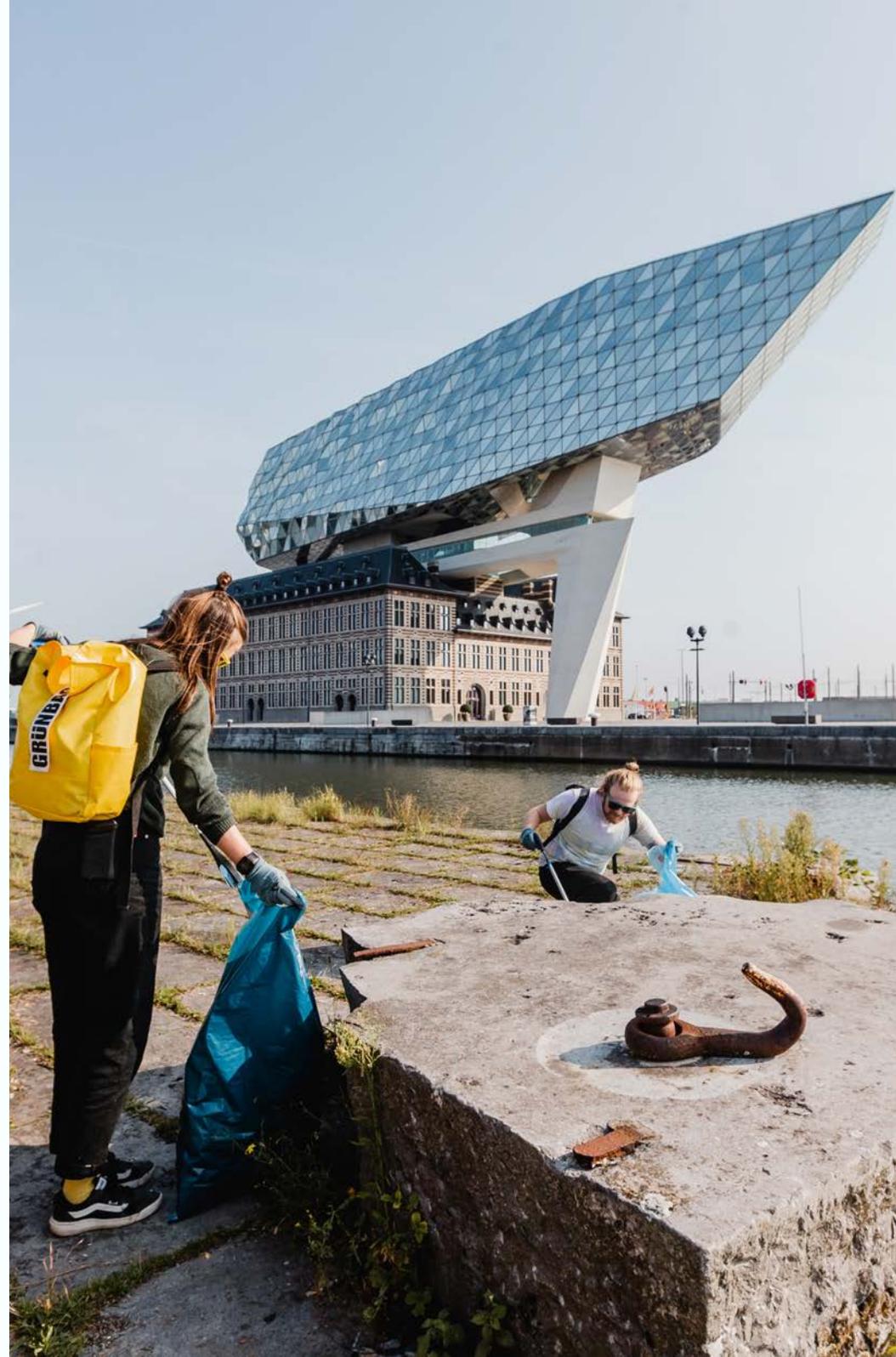
MNM  
music and more



Knack



And many others...

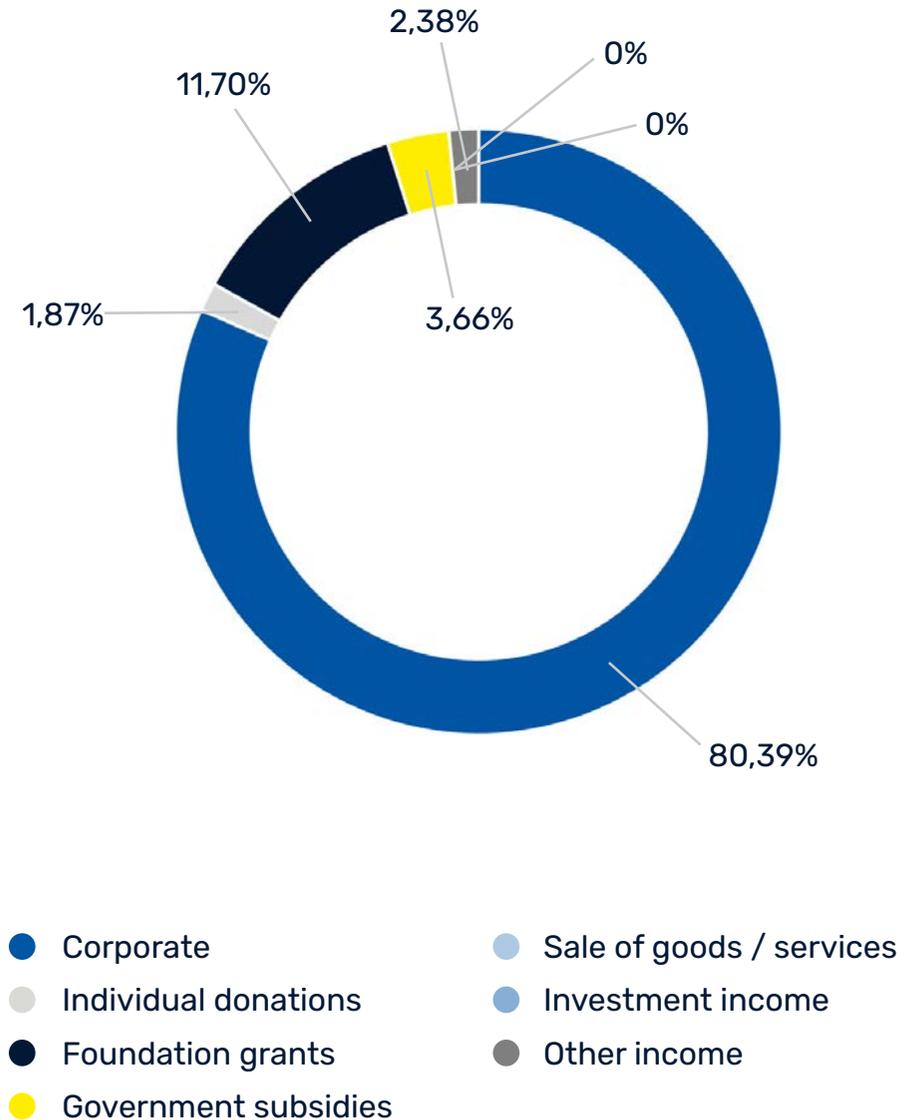




# FINANCIALS 2021

## INCOME

Philanthropy & sponsoring	€ 865.125
• Corporate	• € 712.438
• Individual donations	• € 16.546
• Foundation grants	• € 103.700
• Government subsidies	• € 32.441
Sale of goods / services	€ 0
Investment income	€ 0
Other income	€ 21.048
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 886.173</b>

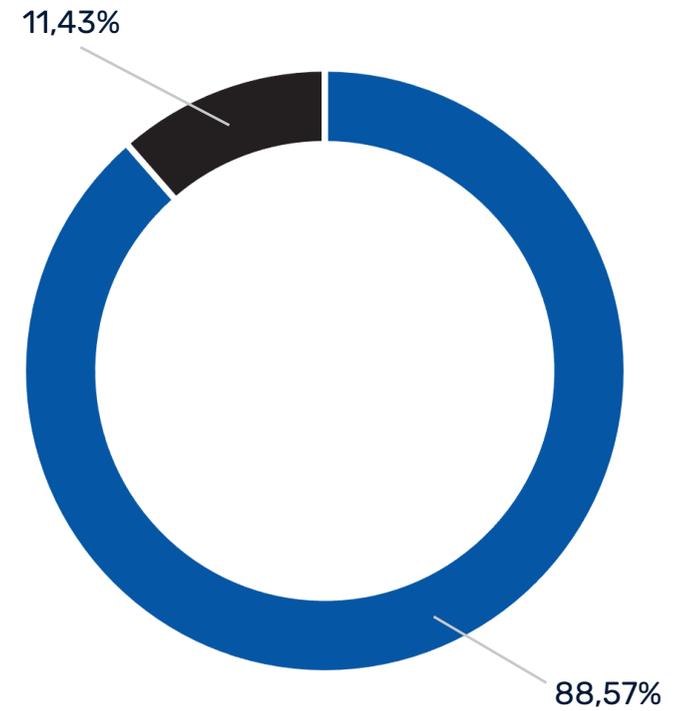




# FINANCIALS 2021

## INVESTMENTS

Core program expenses	€ 753.461
General operations and fundraising	€ 97.235
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 850.696</b>



- Core program expenses
- General operations and fundraising



**Together for clean rivers.**  
**[river-cleanup.org](http://river-cleanup.org)**