

The 2017 World Press Photo Contest: Technical Report

Foreword

This is World Press Photo's second year to release a technical report reviewing the photo contest. As part of our desire to be more transparent about our activities, we are making public data on the contest related to issues of diversity, representation, and verification.

This report is intended to further inform conversation within our community of professional visual journalism. It has been compiled in the weeks after the 2017 Photo Contest winners' announcement, and is not intended to be a comprehensive presentation of all aspects of all the relevant issues.

Putting this report together has once again brought to light a very important fact: there is a scarcity of data on the global, professional visual journalism community. For example, we are not aware of how many people around the world consider themselves to be professional photographers, photojournalists, or visual journalists. Without that baseline knowledge of the community as a whole, it is difficult to make judgments about some of the data in relation to the contest. For example, because we do not know the demographics of the global, professional visual journalism community, we cannot say whether the number of women entering the contest—which appears to be relatively low—is representative of the professional community as a whole.

With the [State of News Photography reports published in 2015 and 2016](#), we began a research program surveying contest entrants to help understand the lives and livelihoods of professional photographers. We are repeating that survey this year, and the main findings will be presented later in the year.

To get a comprehensive picture of the global professional community from which our contestants come, we need partners to help us undertake this research and we welcome proposals that would contribute to this effort. In the meantime, I hope you find information of value in this review of the 2017 Photo Contest.

Lars Boering
Managing Director

Data

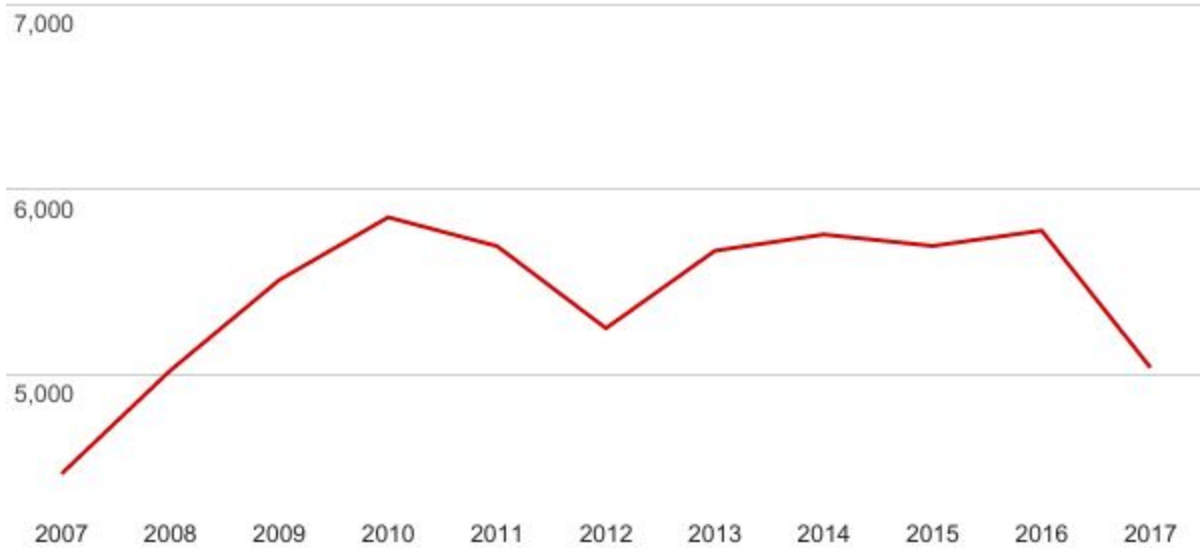
1. The number of entrants, their countries, and continents 2007 - 2017

The 2017 Photo Contest saw 5,034 photographers from 126 countries enter 80,408 images.

Year	Entrants	Countries	Submitted photos
2007	4,460	124	78,083
2008	5,019	125	80,537
2009	5,508	124	96,268
2010	5,847	128	101,960
2011	5,691	125	108,059
2012	5,247	124	101,254
2013	5,666	124	103,481
2014	5,754	132	98,671
2015	5,692	131	97,912
2016	5,775	128	82,951
2017	5,034	126	80,408

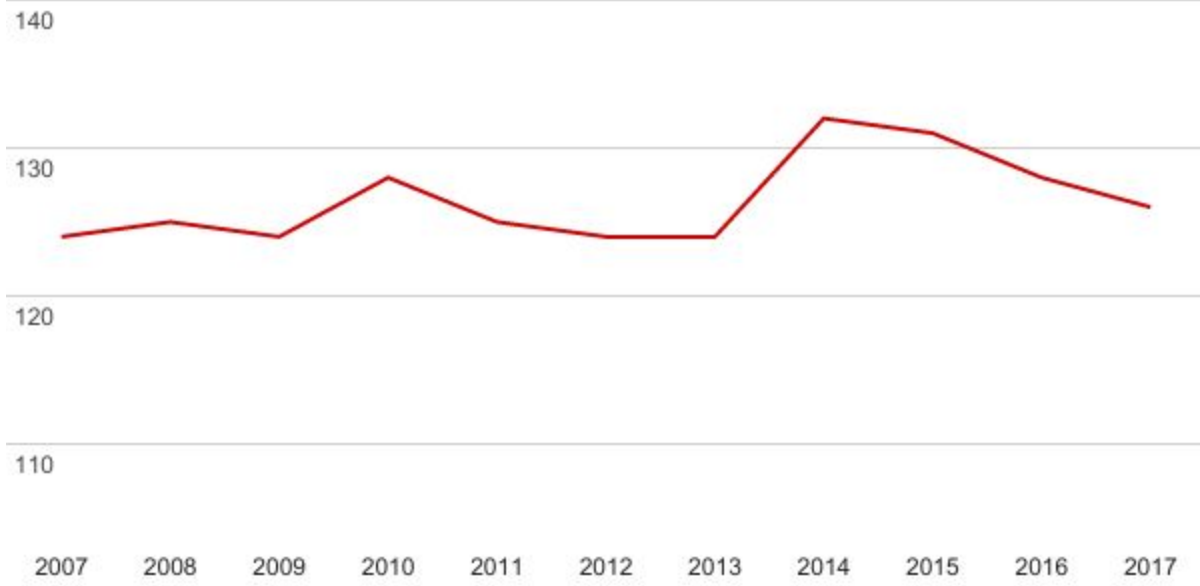
Number of entrants by year

Year / Entrants



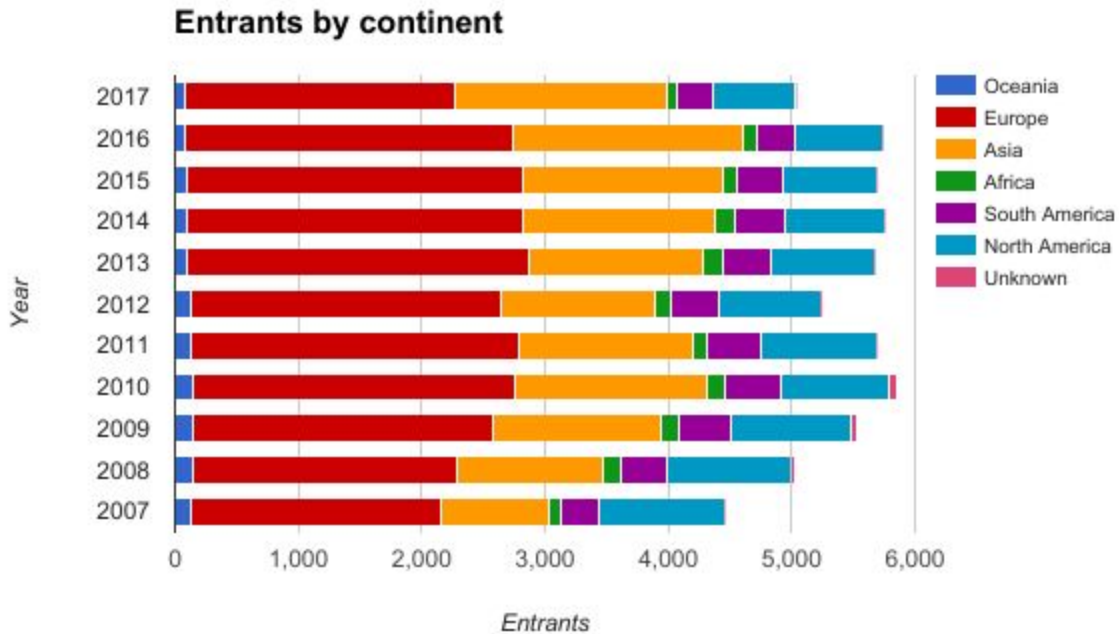
Participating countries by year

Year / Countries



The top 13 countries—those with 100 or more entrants each—are listed below, with the numbers of entrants from each for 2016 and 2017.

Countries with more than 100 entrants in 2017	2017 entrants	2016 entrants
China	799	1014
United States	503	512
Italy	416	440
Spain	222	246
France	206	231
United Kingdom	200	219
Germany	199	234
Poland	164	151
Russia	154	189
India	136	153
The Netherlands	127	150
Brazil	105	125
Iran	106	117

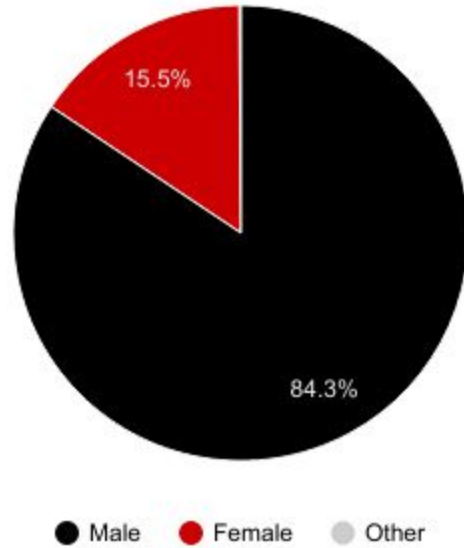


The geographic distribution of entrants is weighted towards Europe and Asia, with the 2017 data showing 47 percent of entrants came from Europe and 31 percent from Asia. North America was the source of 13 percent of entrants, 6 percent were from South America, 2 percent from Africa, and 2 percent from Oceania.

Improving global diversity is a major goal for the organization. Addressing the under-representation of photographers in Africa, Asia (beyond China), and South America is a priority. We have had selected training programs and other initiatives over the years in these areas, but we are now committing more attention and resources to this issue. For example, we had a [regional masterclass in Mexico City](#) in December 2015 and Nairobi in 2016, as well as an upcoming masterclass in Accra, Ghana, this year. Having also implemented [the African Photojournalism Database on Blink](#)—in conjunction with Everyday Africa—we are supporting new talent and connecting them to the international media economy.

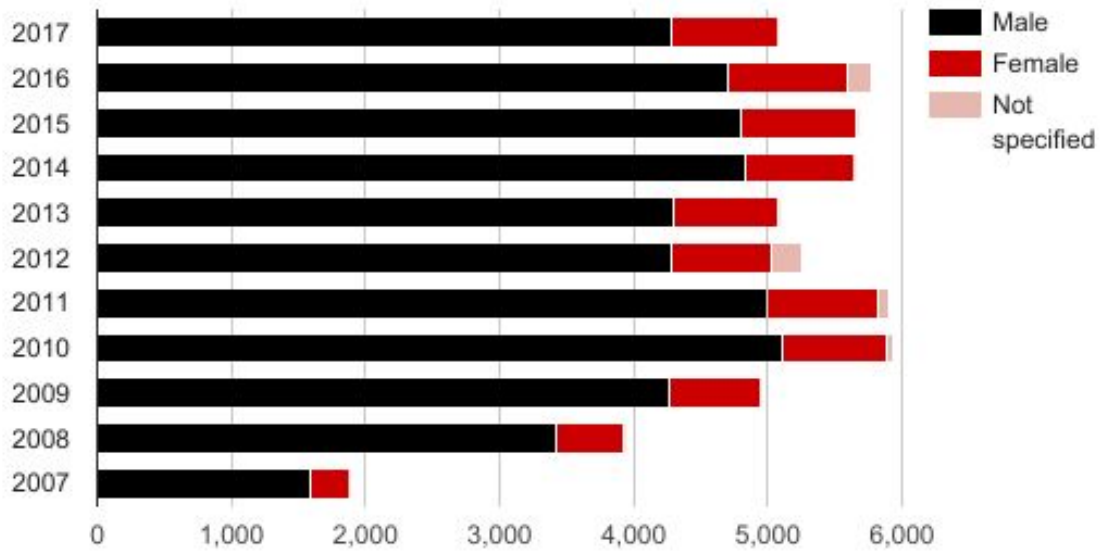
2. Gender of contest entrants 2017-2017

2017 Photo Contest entrants by gender



Increasing gender diversity is another major concern and strategic goal. In the last three years, the number of female entrants to the World Press Photo Contest has been 15 percent. In 2012, the most recent "high point", it was 17.5 percent.

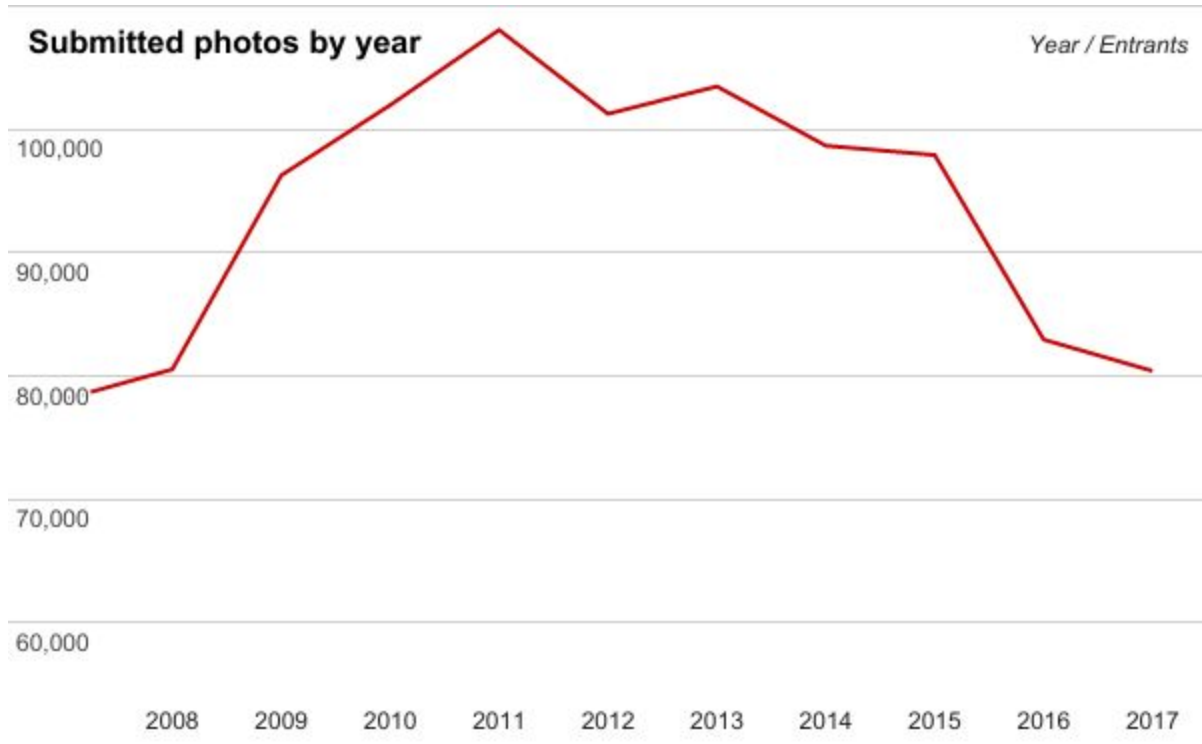
Photo contest entrants by gender



One hindrance to clarity on this topic is the fact that we do not know what proportion of the professional photojournalism industry is female, so we cannot confirm whether or not the proportion of female entrants is reflective of the industry.

3. The number of photos entered 2007 - 2017

The number of submitted photos this year was down—a result of fewer participants—but the average number submitted per participant increased.



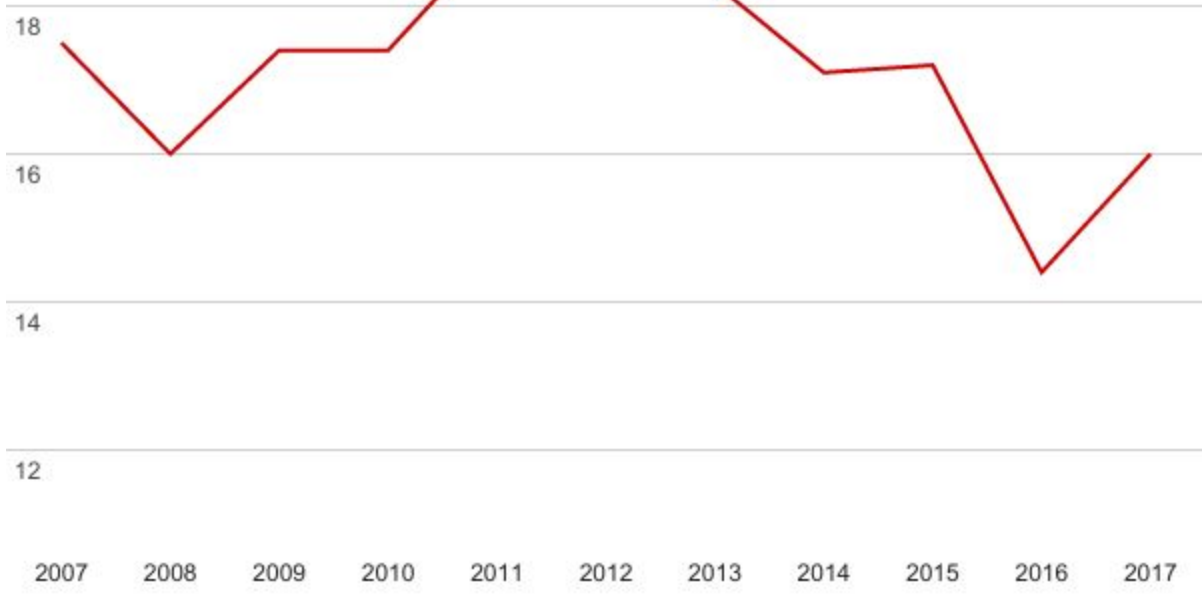
The number of pictures entered peaked in 2011, and lowered to just over 80,000 this year.

The average number of pictures entered by each participant increased in 2017 because of the increase from eight to 10 images in each story.

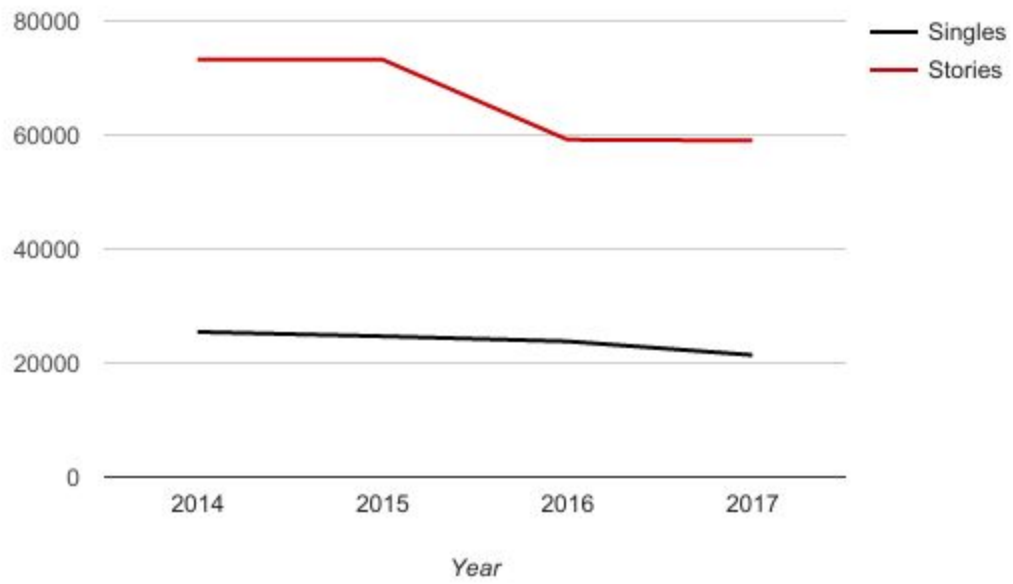
Year	Average number of photos entered per participant
2007	17.5
2008	16.0
2009	17.4
2010	17.4
2011	19.0
2012	19.3
2013	18.3
2014	17.1
2015	17.2
2016	14.4
2017	16.0

Average number of photos entered by year

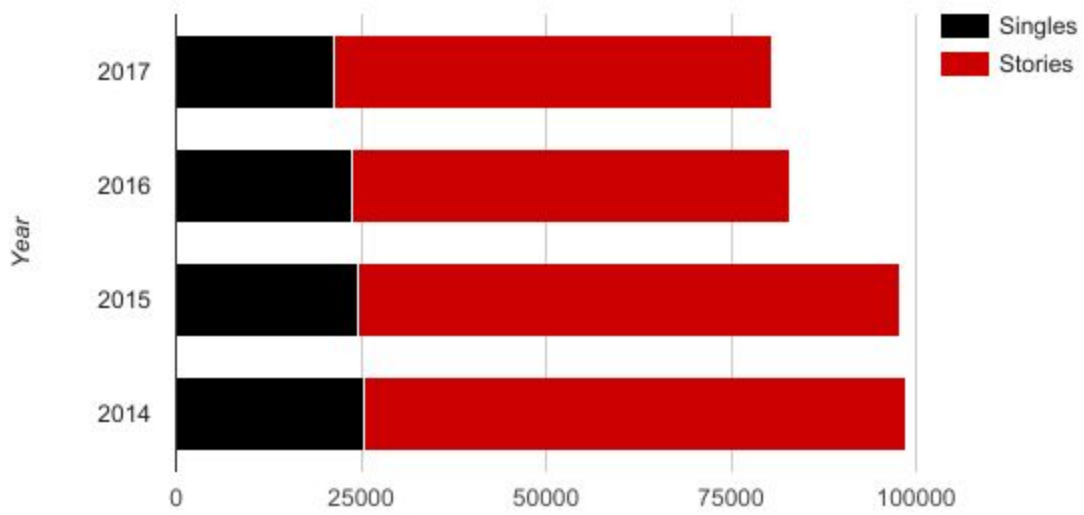
Year / Average



Number of photos submitted

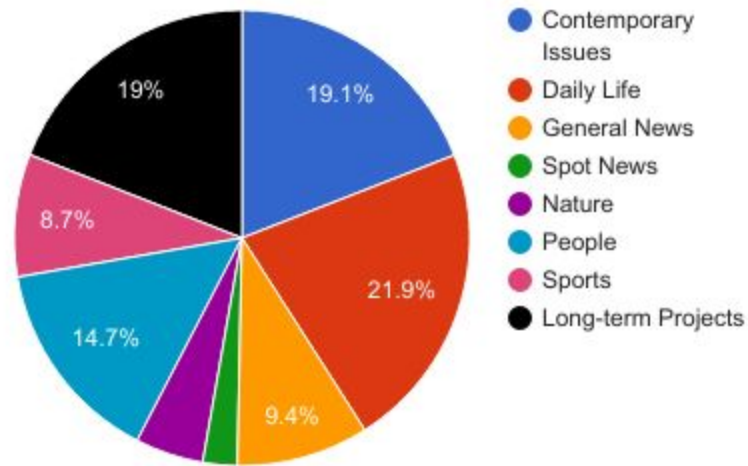


Number of photos submitted

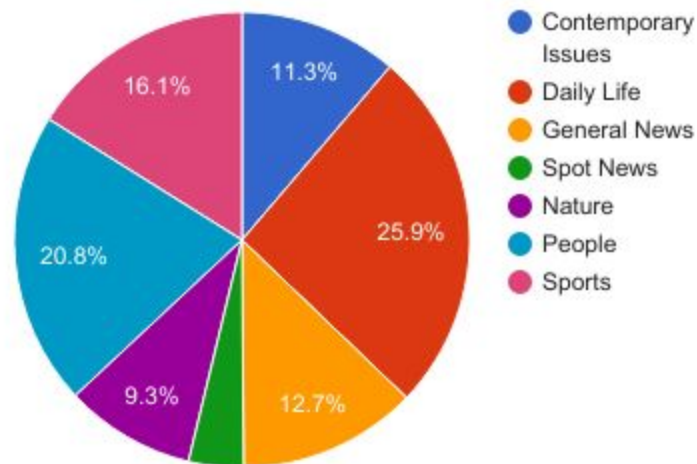


4. Contest entries by category

2017 entries by category - stories



2017 entries by category - singles



5. Prizewinners by country

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	TOTAL
USA	13	15	9	9	5	7	4	11	9	9	5	96
Italy	5	4	6	9	9	7	6	3	9	2	4	64
France	6	2	6	6	4	4	1	4	2	1	2	38
China	3	3	7	2	3	3	4	3	6	2	1	37
Germany	1	2	2	3	6	1	1	3	2	2	3	26
Spain	5	4	1		3	2	3	2		2	3	25
Australia	2	3	1	3	3	1	2	2	1	4	2	24
UK	1	3		7		2	1	4	1		2	21
Russia		1	3			3	1	3	3	2	4	20
The Netherlands	2	1	1	6	3	5	1	1				20
Canada	2	4	2	2	1	1	1			2	2	17
Poland		2	5		2	2	2	3	1			17
Sweden	2		2	2		3	1	1	1	4	1	17
Denmark	3	1			1	2	4		1			12
Brazil	1		3	1	1		1			2	2	11
South Africa	1	1	1		2	2	1	1		1	1	11
Iran						1	3	1	2	1	1	9
Mexico	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		2		9
Japan	1	1	2			3				1		8
Switzerland	2	2	2				1			1		8
Hungary	1	3		1	1						1	7
Ireland			1	1	3	1			1			7
Argentina	1		1	1		1	1	1				6
India			1		2	1	1				1	6
Israel	2	2		1	1							6
Belgium		1	1				2		1			5
Palestinian Territories	2			2			1					5
Turkey							1		2	1	1	5
Bangladesh					1			2	1			4
Chile			1	1			1				1	4
Syria										2	2	4
Czech Republic							1	1			1	3
Portugal		1					1			1		3
Azerbaijan								2				2

Bulgaria		1						1				2
El Salvador			1					1				2
Finland								1			1	2
Indonesia					1		1					2
Jordan							1	1				2
Malaysia							2					2
New Zealand								1			1	2
Norway	1					1						2
Peru				1			1					2
Serbia							1	1				2
Slovenia										2		2
Somalia				1	1							2
Afghanistan						1						1
Austria										1		1
Bosnia & Herzegovina						1						1
Colombia			1									1
Ecuador				1								1
Egypt						1						1
Eritrea									1			1
Greece			1									1
Haiti					1							1
Hong Kong					1							1
Mali				1								1
Nigeria	1											1
Pakistan											1	1
Philippines											1	1
Romania											1	1
South Korea			1									1
Ukraine			1									1
Vietnam							1					1
Zimbabwe		1										1
Countries with first-time prizewinners in 2017												

This table shows the number of awards per country from 2007 to 2017, not the number of

winning photographers. This means if a photographer is awarded a prize in two categories, the country is counted twice. The table does not include winners of the photo of the year. Note also that the nationalities of the prizewinners are provided by the prizewinners when they enter, and on occasion the nationalities have changed after announcement, when dual nationalities are sometimes declared by photographers.

As entries are judged anonymously, the country of entrants is not a visible factor during the judging process. It is interesting, nonetheless, to see the range of countries from which winners have come.

Verification process

The World Press Photo contest has three verification processes to ensure compliance with its code of ethics and entry rules.

Photography gives us a creative interpretation of the world. However, when we want pictures to record and inform us of the varied events, issues, people, and viewpoints in our world, there are limits to how pictures can be made. This is why we take a strict stance on manipulation. The World Press Photo contest rewards pictures that are visual documents, providing an accurate and fair representation of the scene the photographer witnessed. We want the audience to be able to trust in the accuracy and fairness of the prize-winning pictures. We do not want prize-winning pictures to mislead the audience.

We are the only photo contest that has this extensive a verification process, and we are the only photo contest that can say all the winners have successfully passed an extensive verification process.

a) Entry checks

Entry rule 9 states the contest is for single frame, single exposure pictures. This means multiple exposures, polyptychs (diptychs, triptychs, etc.), stitched panoramas (either produced in-camera or with image editing software), and pictures with text added within the frame, are not eligible. These entries that are not eligible are removed from the contest by a team of checkers after the first round of judging is completed.

The specific reasons for removal include:

- Duplicate images (for example, because the same image had been entered by both a photographer and an agency or publication)
- Multiple exposure images
- Composite images, usually diptych presentations (new edits were requested when possible)
- Images too small (new files were requested when possible)
- Fabricated / manipulated dates
- Images not considered photographs (for example, those made by a scanner, x-ray machine, thermal heat camera, etc)
- Scanned documents/letters/drawings included within entries
- Images containing additional text / copyright / borders / drawings (new files were requested when possible)
- Images with selective black, white and color within one frame

b) Manipulation review

Entry rule 10—revised for 2016, and retained for 2017—states “the content of a picture can not be altered by adding, rearranging, reversing, distorting or removing people and/or objects from within the frame.”

There are two exceptions to this:

- (i) cropping that removes extraneous details is permitted;
- (ii) sensor dust or scratches on scans of negatives can be removed.

The process for ensuring compliance with this rule takes place in the second-to-last round of judging. Entrants whose pictures remain in the contest and are eligible for the final round are contacted and required to provide the file as recorded by the camera. These files could be:

- RAW file(s)
- Full format JPEG file(s). These must be as delivered by the camera, and provided in a series showing at least three frames before and after the contest entry
- For smartphones, the image captured with the built-in, stock camera app, emailed from the phone
- Scans of film negative(s), provided as a contact sheet to show a series of at least three frames before and after the contest entry

Entrants readily comply with this requirement. That is testament to their openness and commitment to transparency on how images are produced. It underlines the fact that photographers do not want to mislead either the jury or the audience.

In both 2015 and 2016, two entries were excluded because of a failure to provide these files. In 2017, the number was four. The reasons for the failure to provide the files are unknown, so we cannot assume any intent to deceive. In 2017, one entry was also withdrawn by an entry coordinator after the request for raw files was made.

Two independent digital analysts compare original files with contest entries to determine whether the content of any picture (either a single picture or frame in a story) has been altered ([click here for details on how this is done](#)). The [guidance on manipulation](#) describes and shows what alterations to the content of a picture are not allowed. We produced videos with visual examples, and they have been viewed tens of thousands of times. While the organization sets the rules and provides the guidance, it is the jury that determines the application of the rules that leads to exclusions.

Overall, more entries were checked in 2016 than 2015, and proportionately fewer problems were found. In 2017, the overall situation was very similar to 2016, though the specific reasons for exclusion changed:

- In 2015, 100 entries were analyzed, and 12 were excluded for cloning.
- In 2016, 174 entries were analyzed, and 7 were excluded for cloning.
- In 2017, 169 entries were analyzed, and 14 were excluded for cloning.

The relatively few instances of cloning involved very small, often tiny, elements being removed. A number of them replicated almost exactly the examples of what not to do shown in our guidance video on removal of content. These included:

- physical marks on a body

- small objects in the picture
- reflected light spots
- shadows
- extraneous items on a picture's border that could not be removed by crop

The jury was presented with images flagged by the digital analysis, shown the original file and the contest file side-by-side, then confirmed the exclusion of the flagged entries. In the case of cloning, that did not involve extensive debate as, even when materially small, the ethical significance of cloning was clear. At the same time, the materially small nature of these cases means that there was no intention on the part of the photographer to mislead the jury in relation to the meaning of an image.

An important part of the process is the 36-hour period allowing photographers whose entries were flagged by the independent analysts to respond. All the photographer responses were presented in full to the jury.

Entry rule 11—also revised for 2016, and retained for 2017—states:

Adjustments of color or conversion to grayscale that do not alter content are permitted, with two exceptions:

- (i) Changes in color may not result in significant changes in hue, to such an extent that the processed colors diverge from the original colors.
- (ii) Changes in density, contrast, color and/or saturation levels that alter content by obscuring or eliminating backgrounds, and/or objects or people in the background of the picture, are not permitted.

It is important to emphasize that this rule is not about processing itself. All images are processed, but the line is drawn at those instances where there is darkening or lightening of area of an image so that material content is obscured and in effect removed. This was detailed in our guidance video on unacceptable color changes. Levels of processing that produce changes within the rules are judged as aesthetic choices, and factored into the jury's general deliberations on the overall merits of an entry.

In 2015, of the 100 entries analyzed, eight were excluded for obscuring or eliminating backgrounds, objects or people through changes in density, contrast, color, or saturation. In 2016, of the 174 entries analyzed, 22 were excluded for these reasons. In 2017, of the 169 entries analyzed, 16 were excluded for these reasons.

The jury process by which these cases are decided involves the secretary tabling a series of individual motions to exclude those entries from the contest for breaching entry rule 11. There is then extensive debate in the jury. Each of those individual motions is then voted on by the jury, with at least five votes out of seven in total required to confirm exclusion. The 2017 jury viewed the guidance videos before considering the cases presented to them by the analysts and, after debate, took a firm and consistent line against these color changes. It is our sense that over the last two years juries are becoming stricter with regard to color changes.

c) Fact-checking

Entry rule 8 states “all pictures must have accurate captions,” and the guidance on captions details what information must be provided in captions.

The process for ensuring compliance with this rule takes place after the jury decides on the prize winners. An independent fact-checking team reviewed all captions to verify the accuracy of the information given. They also examined the metadata in the picture files. If required information was missing or incorrect, photographers were contacted and asked to provide the correct information in the week between the jury’s decision and the public announcement of the winners. The independent fact-checking team found no problems with any of the winning pictures, and was able to verify their captions and metadata.

The fact-checking process is where clause 2 of the code of ethics (that entrants “must not intentionally contribute to, or alter, the scene they picture by re-enacting or staging events”) is handled. Captions must explain the circumstances in which a photograph was taken.

Post-award issues

For the 2016 contest onwards, an entirely new process was established for verification issues that arise after an award is made. This means such issues are now handled very differently to previous cases that arose in the wake of the 2013 and 2015 contests.

From the conclusion of the 2017 Photo Contest onwards, if, at any time after an award is announced, an entry is alleged to have broken one or more of the entry rules, or contravened the code of ethics, it will be investigated.

The process for determining the status of an award alleged to have broken the entry rules is as follows:

- The allegations must be presented to the World Press Photo Foundation, in the person of the Managing Director, in a written and signed statement containing supporting evidence. The Managing Director can seek legal and other advice, and will determine whether the allegation warrants an investigation. The World Press Photo Foundation, in the person of the Managing Director, can also initiate an investigation.
- If an investigation is considered necessary by the World Press Photo Foundation, the foundation will convene an independent fact-checking team and ask it to conduct an investigation of those allegations, and present the foundation, in the person of the Managing Director, a written report.
- A post-award jury will be convened, comprising the Managing Director of the World Press Photo Foundation, the chair of the General Jury and another member of the General Jury (in the categories Contemporary Issues, Daily Life, General News, Long-Term Projects and Spot News) or the chair of the relevant specialist jury (for the categories Nature, Sports and People), to review the fact-checking report.

- The post-award jury must reach a unanimous decision on whether or not the entry should be disqualified.
- In the event the post-award jury cannot reach a unanimous decision, the World Press Photo Foundation, in the person of the Managing Director, will decide whether or not the entry should be disqualified.
- Once a decision has been reached, the World Press Photo Foundation will publish a statement on the investigation and the decision.

If a winner is disqualified, the award will be revoked and the pictures will be removed from the World Press Photo website and if applicable from other output.

This process was activated with regards to Hossein Fatemi's second-place Long-term Projects winner "An Iranian Journey". The information here adds to [the formal statement released on 1 March 2017](#) after Ramin Talaie, the principal accuser of Hossein Fatemi, went public via an [article on Medium.com](#), also published on 1 March 2017, with the same allegations first presented to World Press Photo via email on 14 February.

The first indication that there was a potential issue with the Fatemi story was when we received an email from Morteza Noro on 7 February alleging that many of Hossein Fatemi's photos were "set up". World Press Photo wrote back to Noro on the same day saying, "We take allegations like this against stories which might have been entered into the contest very seriously. However, to follow up on such allegations we need accurate information and supporting evidence. Can you specify exactly which of the photos in the story are 'set up'? Can you provide us with evidence that demonstrates beyond a reasonable doubt that they were 'set up'?"

While we waited for Noro's response, we contacted Fatemi's agency, Panos Pictures, to see if they were aware of issues with the story, and they gave us information on how they had received anonymous allegations concerning Fatemi in April 2016. After their own investigation, they concluded there was no evidence to support those allegations.

Noro replied to World Press Photo on 14 February saying, "Unfortunately I don't have any proof of the matter. This is just my opinion and I really have no other intention rather than sharing my view." This reply gave us nothing to act on.

The first time there was information to act on was when World Press Photo received an email, also on 14 February, from Ramin Talaie with allegations against Fatemi. After the document Talaie sent was reviewed, a formal investigation began immediately.

On 15 February, World Press Photo formally commissioned Santiago Lyon to conduct an independent investigation into these allegations. He was asked to gather as much evidence as he could, principally by interviewing people living in Iran and elsewhere, who were present when the photos in Fatemi's winning story that were identified by Talaie as having issues, were taken. This investigation involved hours of interviews with five individuals who had direct knowledge of how the photographs were made, in addition to speaking at length with Fatemi and Talaie.

It is essential to stress that World Press Photo's jurisdiction can only concern the photographs that were entered into the contest by Fatemi, and the question is whether there is evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that confirms they have broken one or more of the entry rules or contravened the code of ethics.

This focus was overlooked in a lot of commentary on the issue following Talaie's publication of his Medium article. That article contains personal accusations about Fatemi's character and motivations, raises issues about his aesthetic style and work practices, and presents 23 photographs as having issues. However, only six of those photographs are in Fatemi's awarded story, and it is only those photographs that we could investigate.

There are two contextual issues that make assessing the truth of the allegations very difficult:

1. Talaie does not have direct, personal experience of the circumstances in which the photographs he questions have been produced. He lives outside of Iran and has not been back since 2009. Instead, Talaie has collected multiple claims from other Iranian photographers about Fatemi's alleged misconduct. This means the accusations Talaie presents are by definition secondary sources. These claims are the basis of a document Talaie compiled last year. This was the document that later found its way anonymously to Panos Pictures, though it is unclear who actually sent it to Panos Pictures. This document was also the basis for the article Talaie published on Medium.
2. In the course of Santiago Lyon's investigation, Talaie freely stated that the Iranian photojournalism community is rife with personal animosities and resentments. Some of these personal conflicts stem from contentious business dealings. Although there is no question that Talaie has collected the claims of others because of his passionate concern for the ethics of photojournalism, a fair account of these allegations and the manner of their presentation cannot ignore this context. It is for these reasons that on 1 March Lars Boering described this case as having a 'he said versus she said' quality about it.

This context was important in setting the focus of Santiago Lyon's investigation. Concerned only with the six photographers mentioned in Talaie's document that were also in Fatemi's awarded story, Lyon concentrated on interviewing five individuals who were actually present when the disputed photos in the contest entry were taken, in addition to Talaie and Fatemi. This means Lyon was dealing with primary sources, in contrast to Talaie's collection of secondary accounts. Lyon then compared and contrasted the responses and presented summaries of his interviews and other information to the post-award jury for consideration.

When the evidence from that investigation was presented to a post-award jury, that jury concluded it did not conclusively substantiate the allegations, so there was insufficient evidence to declare a clear breach of our contest entry rules.

There have been some calls for all the details of Lyon's interviews and summaries to be released. This is not possible. Interviewees were told the report was confidential, and interviews were conducted in confidence so that those individuals felt able to speak freely. This investigation was to provide information to a post-award jury for them to determine what the status of Fatemi's award should be in relation to the contest rules. The investigation was never

intended to build a case against Talaie or anyone else, so no principle of justice is harmed by not disclosing interview summaries. Furthermore, given the 'he said, she said' nature of the argument, we do not wish to fuel the obvious animosities and resentments that have surrounded this case for a long time, and we definitely do not want people who have provided information others will see as potentially helping Fatemi themselves become the focus of attention on social media.

By following the new procedures and commissioning an independent investigation to inform the post-award jury as best as possible, World Press Photo has done everything it can to establish what evidence currently exists relating to the six photographs in Hossein's story subject to the allegations Talaie collected.

If in the future, additional evidence comes to light then this should be shared directly with World Press Photo. It will also be independently and rigorously examined, leading to the convening of another post-award jury if necessary.