Beijing +30

WHO MAKES THE NEWS?



GMMP+30

Global Media Monitoring Project

2025

# Belgium (Dutch-speaking)

## NATIONAL REPORT



GMMP+30

# Global Media Monitoring Project

# 2025

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Table of contents


PREFACE 1
Global Context 1
Regional Context **1.**
National Context 6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 7
A DAY IN THE NEWS IN BELGIUM (FLANDERS) 8
THE CONTEXT 8
TOPICS IN THE NEWS 9
NEWS SUBJECTS AND SOURCES 10
JOURNALISTS AND REPORTERS 14
JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE: ON WOMEN'S CENTRALITY, GENDER STEREOTYPES AND RIGHTS-BASED REPORTING 15
FOCUS ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE 16
CASE STUDIES 17
Annex 1. Methodology 21
Annex 2. List of Monitors 23

# PREFACE

## Global Context

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action premised that “Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace” (United Nations, 1995). Specifically, the Declaration in its Section “J” established the following objectives related to women and media: Strategic objective J1. “Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication. Strategic Objective J2. Promote a balanced and nonstereotyped portrayal of women in the media” (United Nations, 1995).

The first global monitoring was sparked by a need for empirical evidence on women’s place, role and participation in the news.

> “In the lead up to Beijing, feminist media activists, scholars and communicators meeting in Bangkok in 1994 resolved to organize one day at the start of 1995 for the monitoring of all media and to use the data as the basis for analysis of where women were and were not, a decision born from frustration with the widespread lack of respect for the dignity of women in the mainstream news media. Media monitoring was identified as one among several strategies with potential to democratize and decentralize media, as well as assist in promoting communication forms that could challenge the patriarchal nature of media.”(Macharia, 2023)[i]

The Beijing Platform for Action thereafter enshrined media monitoring as a strategy to achieve strategic objective J1. Non-governmental organizations and media professional associations were encouraged to establish “media watch groups that can monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women’s needs and concerns are properly reflected” (para 242a)

The GMMP evolved into the largest and longest-running research and advocacy initiative for gender equality in and through the news media. In five-year spurts since 1995, the GMMP takes a snapshot of key gender equality dimensions in the news. Across thirty years to date, the GMMP has built the data from over 160 countries, with at least one observation for each variable and country.

<u>On parallel tracks</u>

The global news media landscape has changed profoundly, yet women’s place within it has not. Technological advancements, shifts in audience behavior, and evolving business models have driven change in how news are produced, disseminated, and consumed. Legacy media dominant in 1995 have ceded ground to digital forms, while professional production in media houses has no option but to compete with alternative and social media for audience attention. In 2025, the increased massification of artificial intelligence (AI) finds the news industry in a particularly fragile moment, as legacy media faces a sustainability crisis along with professional journalism. The expanded analytical capacity of computers, the expansion of digital platforms, and AI have introduced a new breed of news analysts that work at the meeting point of software development, analytics and storytelling (Kosterich, 2020).

Three decades ago, governments regulated the sector with some minimal international oversight, unlike the current considerably more complex regulatory environment. Data privacy laws, content moderation, and government reach are stricter. Audiences are transnational and international collaborations on content production are the norm, unlike three decades ago.

The evolution of women's encounters with the sector across the period has not been as dramatic. The GMMP reveals that, in many ways, the status quo of gross underrepresentation and misrepresentation in content has persisted.

This report presents the findings of the seventh iteration of the GMMP global snapshot, based on 29,935 news articles containing 58,321 people and 26,560 news personnel in 94 countries on the 7th global monitoring day, May 6, 2025.

Key Findings

**Thirty years ago, the report of the first GMMP called for a shift in coverage beyond the male-dominated realms of political and economic power. Not only has the hierarchy of "hard news" in legacy media persisted across time, it has also crossed over into digital outlets.**

Digitalization did not bring a radical break from the patriarchal norms of traditional journalism. Instead, it continues to reinforce and amplify a news hierarchy that privileges spheres and issues centred on power, namely, those dominated by men. The challenge is threefold. First, to dismantle the "hard news" bias, second, to integrate more intentionally spaces and issues of greater concern to women, and third, to enable visibility and voice to women present in traditionally male-dominated spaces.

**After a period of slow but steady improvement, progress toward gender parity in the news has flatlined since around 2010, failing to reach 50% in any media type.**

Thirty years after Beijing, women are 26% of those seen, heard, or spoken about in legacy news (29% on news websites). The needle has shifted 9 points in legacy media since 1995, and 4 points in online news during the past 10 years.

Minority groups are five points more likely to be present in digital news than in legacy media. The probability of minority women being featured in the news as the main protagonists or as interviewees is two in a hundred in traditional media (3% for men) and 4% on news websites (5% for men).

**Women's visibility in political and economic news has increased significantly – by 15 points each – over the past three decades.**

The severe underrepresentation noted in 1995 (7% in political news, 10% in economic news) has improved. Women's presence in sports news is abysmal, at only 15% of news subjects and sources.

**The proportion of women providing expert testimony has grown remarkably over the decades, showing the highest increase (+7 points) in digital news since 2015.**

In legacy media, the gender gap in authoritative roles as experts and spokespersons has closed at a slower pace than for persons providing testimony based on popular opinion and personal experience – ordinary roles that require no specialized knowledge.

**Patterns of gender-biased portrayal endure despite decades of change in women's roles in the physical world**

Women have remained about twice as likely as men to be portrayed as victims since 2010. Historically, women were most often portrayed as victims of accidents or poverty. This pattern was overturned in 2025, with “other crime” and “domestic violence” (by intimate partners and family members) becoming the top victim categories.

Women depicted as survivors in legacy media were most likely to have survived “accidents, natural disasters, poverty, and disease” in previous GMMP studies. In 2025, they are most frequently portrayed as domestic violence survivors in equal proportion to accident/disaster survivors.

The over-representation of women as homemakers/parents decreased from 81% in 2000 to 73% in 2025, indicating progress although a persistent journalistic bias toward defining women by domestic roles, despite women’s current unprecedented engagement in work outside the home. Underrepresentation in occupations and in positions of power has remained consistent.

The tendency to describe women by their age and physical attributes has also persisted. They have been photographed more often than men (a 7–9-point difference) over the past two decades, with qualitative analysis continuing to show patterns of sexualized portrayal.

**Gender inequality in the news is much more acute than in the lived experience.**

Gender equality in the news, measured by the GEM Index, is moderately correlated with gender indices in other development sectors such as the Gender Social Norms Index. Between 65% to 75% of media gender inequality cannot be explained by reality, indicating the presence of other confounding factors at play that co-mingle to produce the prevailing gendered news narratives.

**Women’s share as reporters in stories published in newspapers and aired on television and radio has risen and stagnated in spurts since 1995.**

Globally, the proportion of women as reporters in legacy media rose 6 points from 2000 to 2005, stalling at 37% for 10 years until 2015, rising 3 points again between 2015 to 2020, and gaining just two points in the past five years. The regions approach and consistently fail to achieve parity, except for the Pacific and the Caribbean, exactly at equality, and North America just a single point below. The findings suggest most news systems are willing to absorb a certain proportion of female labor in the reporter role, but not to cede to full numerical gender equality.

In legacy news media, the gender gap in political reporting has narrowed the fastest (+13 points in 25 years) – outside the sports beat – yet it remains the topic least reported by women. For the first time in 25 years, women now constitute a majority (52%) of science and health reporters. The new tracking of sports news reveals a severely low proportion of female reporters (17%).

Women’s share as reporters in national and international stories has seen significant long-term growth (+18 and +16 points, respectively).

**The sex of the journalist influences the gender lens in stories**

The gender lens has historically been found to be sharper in articles by women reporters. Across three decades, a consistent 5–6-point gender gap has existed in source selection, where female reporters feature more female sources than their male colleagues. This gap is even wider (9 points) in digital news. The gender-lens gap between female and male journalists is largest on the indicator regarding women’s centrality in the news. The difference

is just 1-2 points on other indicators measuring news quality from a gender perspective, but that it exists is an important finding.

**Gender-based violence is a blind spot in the news. When GBV makes the news, however, the gender lens in reporting is sharper than in stories on all other topics.**

Less than 2% of stories cover gender-based violence. This low count is at odds with the serious nature of GBV affecting one in three women and girls worldwide.

Stories on gender-based violence produced by female journalists are more likely to raise gender (in)equality issues than those by men.

While the gender lens is sharper in GBV stories compared to other major topics, there remains enormous room for improvement if news media are to participate in creating a society in which GBV is understood as deviant, criminal, and a violation of fundamental human rights.

**The bulk of news stories remains deficient in the GMMP dimensions of quality from a gender perspective**

The proportion of news stories that clearly challenge gender stereotypes rose from 3% (2005) to 6% (2010) but declined and has remained stagnant at 3-4% since 2015. This indicates an entrenchment of stereotypes in reporting and a consistent journalistic failure to produce content that disrupts stereotypical narratives.

The regional comparisons show significant variations. North American news is exceptional, clearly challenging gender stereotypes in 19% of stories, in sharp contrast to Middle Eastern news, where only 1% overturn simplistic narratives about the roles, attributes, and capabilities of people based on gender.

Gender stereotypes are most prevalent in stories about politics and the economy, both spheres where men are the majority power holders. Over time, challenging stereotypes remains largely confined to topics in which it is safer to challenge the skewed gender power relations status quo. These are celebrity/arts/media, and social/legal news. GBV stories challenge gender stereotypes more than any other news, at 17%. While commendable, this level is insufficient to transform the harmful norms that perpetuate such violence.

The likelihood of news stories to cite human rights or gender equality frameworks has fluctuated modestly, hovering between 7% and 11% over the 15 years that this indicator has been measured. A human rights lens is absent in approximately 9 out of 10 stories.

Online stories are less likely to integrate a human rights lens than those published in legacy media, but the probability of women being the central protagonists in a news story is higher in digital news (15%, compared to 10% in traditional news).

In all story topics except for GBV news, the sex of the reporter matters slightly for the integration of a gender lens. 3% of stories by women clearly challenge gender stereotypes, compared to 2% of those by men. 12% of stories by women highlight gender (in)equality issues, compared to 10% for men. 8% of articles by women adopt a human rights framing, compared to 7% of those by men. In the case of GBV stories, for instance, female reporters are more than 10 points more likely to call attention to gender inequality than those by men.

**The GMMP message in 2025, thirty years post-Beijing, is a global news industry whose progress towards gender equality has reached a crossroads.**

The almost standstill pace of change in the past 15 years points to a need for a radical shift in

strategies by all actors in the news ecosystem to break the inertia. Under the current conditions and with the current tools, remarkable change towards gender equality is unlikely.

The negative impacts of digitalization on the news industry and gender relations online as a whole will undoubtedly make the task of securing women's rights in and through digital news more complex.

### National Context

- Belgium has a diverse and multilingual media landscape, divided primarily between Dutch-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia, and a smaller German-speaking community.
- The media landscape in Flanders is primarily Dutch-speaking and consists of a mix of public and commercial outlets. The public broadcaster VRT (Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroep) produces television, radio, and online content for a broad Flemish audience, with an emphasis on news, culture, and education. Commercial broadcasters like VTM and newspapers such as De Standaard, De Morgen, Het Nieuwsblad, and Het Laatste Nieuws compete for audiences with entertainment, news, and opinion content.
- Belgium scores 68.5 points out of 100 in the Gender Equality Index in 2025. Belgium ranks 7th in the EU.
- Belgium has developed national action plans addressing Section J, "Women and the Media," of the Beijing Platform for Action. These plans aim to promote gender equality in media representation and combat stereotypes. In Flanders, Equal opportunities policies are developed in the Department of Culture, Youth and Media.

## MONITORING TEAM

The 2025 media monitoring wave was conducted by researchers in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maastricht University. Dr. Sara De Vuyst served as the national coordinator for GMMP Belgium (Flanders). Monitoring of the news media was conducted in collaboration with volunteers from the Media Watch Group of Furia. Sara De Vuyst conducted the quantitative analysis and reported the quantitative findings. The qualitative analysis and reporting were conducted by Prof. Dr. Aagje Swinnen (Maastricht University).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Men are overrepresented in news coverage in nearly all topics and media platforms in Flemish news, especially politics, economy, and sports. Women appear most frequently in celebrity/arts/media content (63%) and in online social/legal issues.
- Gender-based violence stories appear mostly in online news, with women as the large majority of subjects.
- Men are overwhelmingly consulted as news sources across all news media. Television (35% women) and online news (29% women) show slightly better representation but remain unequal.
- Women's voices remain underrepresented in authoritative or expert roles. Women are highly represented among activists and civil society workers (100%) and in health professions (50%). Women remain severely underrepresented in academia, policing/military, business, and political leadership roles. The cultural/entertainment fields show a more balanced gender ratio (43% women).
- Women make up only 30% of all news subjects and 27% of experts or spokespersons. Women appear more in personal-experience stories than in authoritative roles.
- Print and television show near-parity of men and women reporters (47% women, 53% men). Internet platforms have the widest gap (29% women reporters). Overall, women remain underrepresented as journalists and reporters, especially in radio and online journalism.
- Female reporters frequently cover social/legal topics, while male reporters cover politics and economy. Celebrity/arts/media topics are covered exclusively by women. Sports coverage remains mostly reported by male journalists.
- Only 2% of news stories reference gender equality.
- Most news does not challenge gender stereotypes across politics, economy, crime, GBV, celebrity content, and sports. Small improvements appear in science/health (14% challenging stereotypes)
- GBV stories overwhelmingly reinforce stereotypes (up to 85% in sexual assault coverage). A slight improvement is seen in technology-facilitated GBV, with 40% of stories challenging stereotypes. Other GBV areas, such as feminicide or trafficking, remain stereotype-reinforcing.

## A DAY IN THE NEWS IN BELGIUM

On May 6, 2026, the following topics were central in the news in Flanders:

Flemish news outlets reported extensively on violent clashes related to the Belgian Cup final in Brussels between Club Brugge and RSC Anderlecht, presenting the events not merely as isolated fan disorder but as a serious public-order incident that drew widespread condemnation from politicians, police, and football authorities. Coverage focused on footage of groups of Club Brugge supporters vandalizing shops, attacking residents, and confronting police in districts such as Molenbeek-Saint-Jean and Jette as they made their way to the King Baudouin Stadium, with many reports highlighting racially motivated abuse directed at passersby and shopkeepers. Police and local media also emphasized the role of social-media-circulated videos in documenting the rampage and in the subsequent task force analysis to identify perpetrators.

News organizations also highlighted the somewhat unexpected nature of Friedrich Merz's accession to the chancellorship of Germany. German and global media described how Merz, leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), became Germany's 10th federal chancellor after a two-stage parliamentary vote – a process that drew significant attention because he initially failed to secure a majority in the first ballot, an unusual political event in postwar Germany.

Flemish news outlets also reported on a growing national debate about whether social media should be prohibited for young people, following an open letter from a group of Flemish scientists and youth-care experts calling for a ban for those under 16. Coverage framed the issue as a public health concern, linking platforms like TikTok and Instagram to rising anxiety, sleep problems, and addictive use among children. At the same time, articles highlighted divided expert and political views: while some ministers signaled support for raising the minimum age, other advisory bodies warned that a blanket ban might be ineffective without better digital education and enforcement tools. Overall, the media portrayed the proposal not as an enacted law, but as a high-profile policy debate reflecting wider European concerns about protecting minors online.

Flemish news media also focused on the Vatican's historic process to elect a successor to Pope Francis, who passed away. Coverage explained that the College of Cardinals convened in a secret conclave beginning on May 7 in the Sistine Chapel, where cardinal electors from around the world were locked in to choose the next leader of the Roman Catholic Church – a rare and solemn event watched by millions globally.

## THE CONTEXT

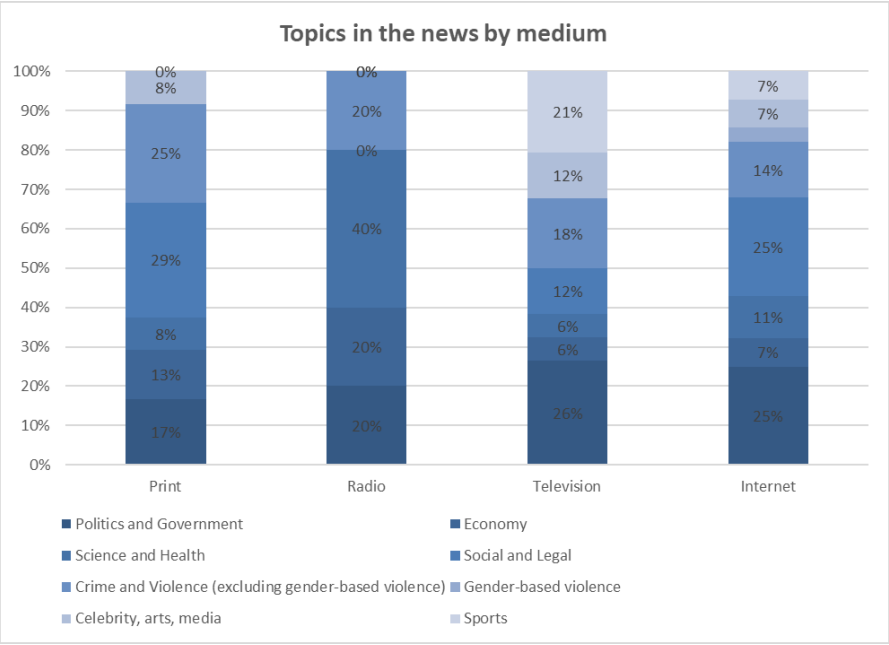
The Belgian federal state structure (Dutch-, French-, and German-speaking communities and three regions) is reflected in the country's media landscape, which consists of two large language-based markets, both characterised by increasing media concentration.

In 2025, the Flemish media landscape remains highly concentrated, with the three major media groups—DPG Media, Mediahuis, and Roularta Media Group—continuing to dominate both the newspaper and magazine markets in Flanders. The Flemish daily newspaper market is primarily controlled by DPG Media and Mediahuis, which own the majority of the region's newspapers. DPG Media publishes the most popular daily, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, along with *De Morgen*, while Mediahuis publishes *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad*. These two companies have a significant presence in the market, with Mediahuis also expanding into the Dutch newspaper market, further increasing its influence in the region.

Belgium has a strong tradition of public service broadcasting. In Flanders, the leading public service broadcaster is **VRT**, which operates TV channels, radio stations, and online platforms to serve the entire Flemish public. Funded by a public license fee, VRT focuses on **quality, impartial programming** that promotes democracy, diversity, and social cohesion. It provides an alternative to commercial media, embraces digital innovation, and maintains editorial independence, playing a key role in **pluralism and public debate** in the region. The Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Company (VRT) operates in Flanders and the Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF) in French-speaking Belgium. The leading commercial broadcaster in Flanders is DPG Media. Traditional media companies are also active in the online news market.

The Flemish team monitored the following news channels (based on a selection of channels that are consulted the most) and the density of news media in the region: newspapers (De Standaard & Het Laatste Nieuws), television (Het Journaal 19h of the public service broadcaster of the Flemish community VRT and Het Nieuws of commercial broadcaster VTM), radio news at 8 a.m. of Radio 1 (a channel of the public service broadcaster VRT) and online news websites (HLN.be and VRTNWS.be).

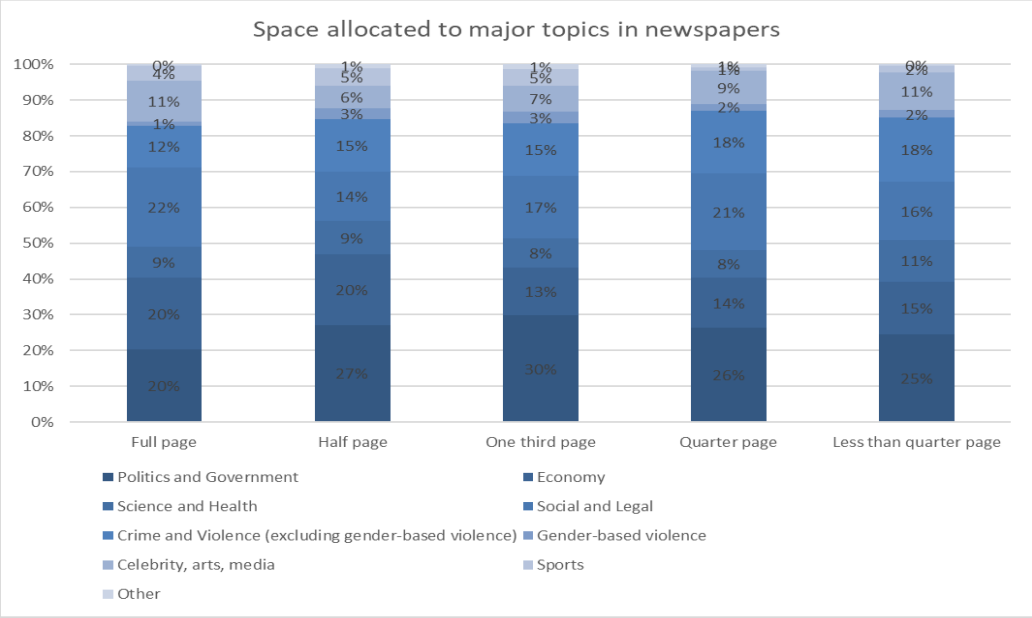
## TOPICS IN THE NEWS




The bar chart shows how different topics are represented in the news across four media types:

print, radio, television, and the internet. In print media, the largest share of coverage is devoted to crime and violence (29%) and social and legal issues (25%), whereas politics and government account for 17%. Radio news focuses most heavily on crime and violence (40%), followed by economy and politics and government (20% each). Television gives the most attention to politics and government (26%), with crime and violence and social and legal issues also getting notable coverage at 18% and 12%, respectively. Internet news shows a more balanced distribution, led by politics and government (25%) and crime and violence (25%), followed by science and health (14%). Across all media, gender-based violence receives relatively low attention, never exceeding 12%. Celebrity, arts, and media topics are primarily covered on television and the internet, where lighter content tends to be more popular. Sports coverage is minimal in print and radio but somewhat more present online (7%). Overall, topics such as politics, crime, and social issues predominate in traditional media, whereas digital platforms offer a broader mix.

The graph below shows how newspapers distribute space to major topics. Politics and government consistently receive significant coverage, especially in medium-length articles. Economic topics also take a large share, peaking in one-third-page stories. Social and legal issues are present across all sizes and become more prominent in shorter articles. Science and health topics appear more often in longer formats, suggesting they require more depth. Crime and violence coverage remains steady regardless of article length, while gender-based violence receives very limited space overall. Entertainment and sports stories take a modest share, increasing slightly in shorter pieces. Overall, the chart reveals that political, economic, and social topics dominate newspaper space, while issues like gender-based violence get minimal attention.



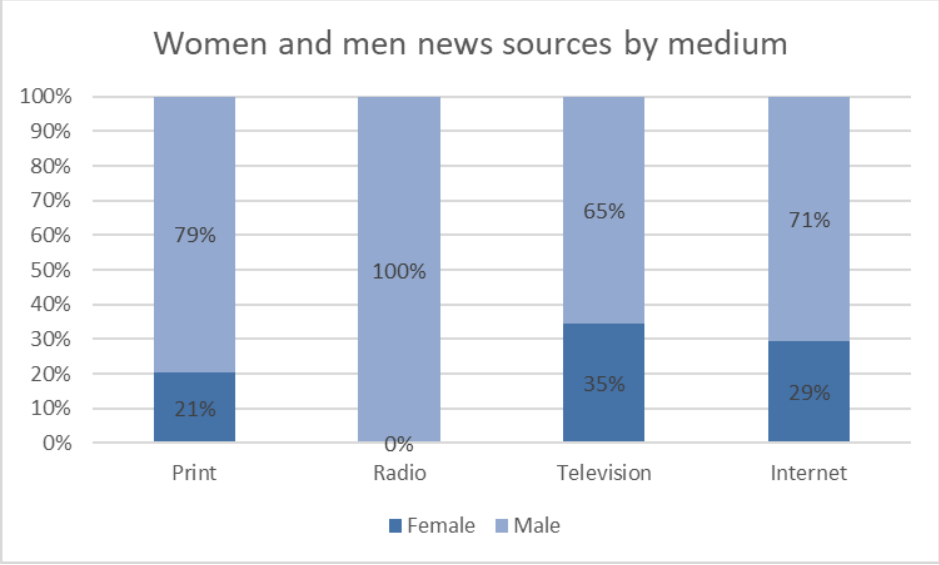

## NEWS SUBJECTS AND SOURCES

The table below shows a gender imbalance in media representation across different topics and platforms. In traditional media (print, radio, and television), men dominate coverage in nearly all areas, especially politics, economy, and sports. Women are most visible in stories about celebrities, the arts, and the media, where they constitute 63% of subjects. In contrast, women's participation in economic news is extremely low at only 8%, with none represented online. Science and health reporting shows near gender balance in traditional media, but becomes male-dominated online. Social and legal issues are the only category where women

outnumber men online, indicating greater visibility in socially focused reporting. Gender-based violence is covered only on the Internet, with women making up 75% of the subjects, which aligns with the nature of the topic. Crime and violence stories remain heavily male-focused in all media types. Overall, men continue to occupy most spaces in hard news coverage, while women appear more often in soft news topics. This pattern highlights the gender gap in media representation across traditional and online platforms.

| | Print, Radio, Television | | | Internet | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | | Female | Male | |
| | % | % | N | % | % | N |
| Politics and Government | 16% | 84% | 50 | 20% | 80% | 25 |
| Economy | 8% | 92% | 13 | 0% | 100% | 3 |
| Science and Health | 48% | 52% | 31 | 17% | 83% | 6 |
| Social and Legal | 19% | 81% | 36 | 58% | 42% | 12 |
| Crime and Violence | 15% | 85% | 39 | 25% | 75% | 4 |
| Gender-based violence | 0% | 0% | 0 | 75% | 25% | 4 |
| Celebrity, arts, media | 63% | 38% | 48 | 43% | 57% | 7 |
| Sports | 7% | 93% | 14 | 0% | 100% | 7 |
| Other | 0% | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0% | 0 |

The chart below illustrates the proportion of women and men used as news sources across four media types: print, radio, television, and the internet. Overall, men are consistently more represented than women across all media. In print media, women constitute only 21% of news sources, whereas men account for 79%. Radio shows the highest gender imbalance, with 100% of sources being men and no female representation. Television performs slightly better, with women accounting for 35% of sources and men for 65%. Online news also shows gender disparity, where 29% of sources are women and 71% are men. These figures indicate that men continue to dominate as news sources across all media platforms. Although television and online news show relatively higher female participation, the gap remains significant. This suggests that women's voices and perspectives remain underrepresented in news coverage, thereby limiting gender diversity in media narratives.

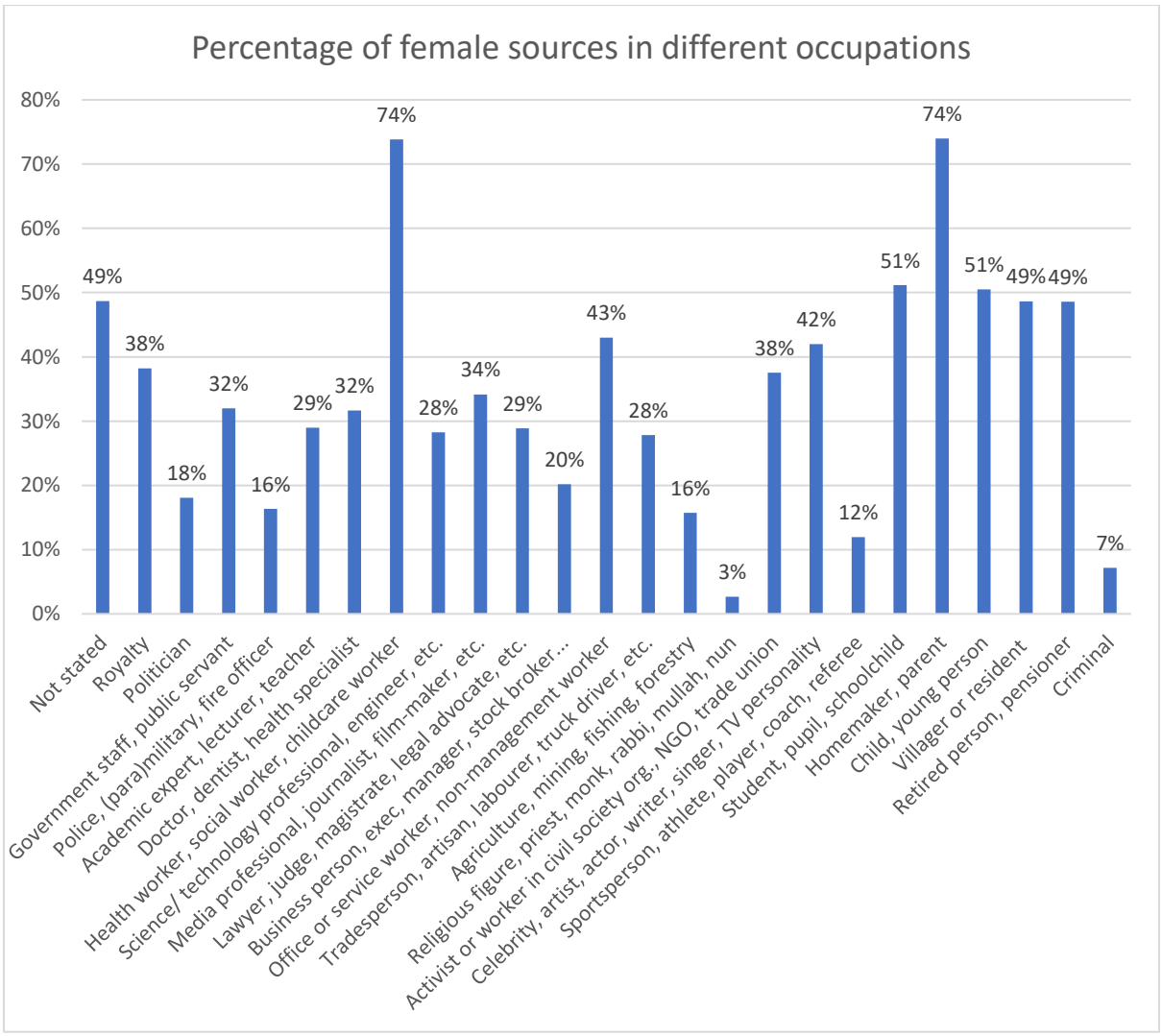



The percentage of female news subjects varies by the geographic scope of news coverage. Women are least represented in local news, accounting for only 19% of subjects. At the national level, women's representation increases slightly to 24%, indicating modest

improvement but still reflecting a gender imbalance. Representation increases significantly in sub-regional and regional news, where women account for 53% of subjects—the only category with a female majority. This suggests that women are more visible in regional contexts. In international news, women account for 32% of subjects, indicating greater inclusion than in local and national news but still below parity.

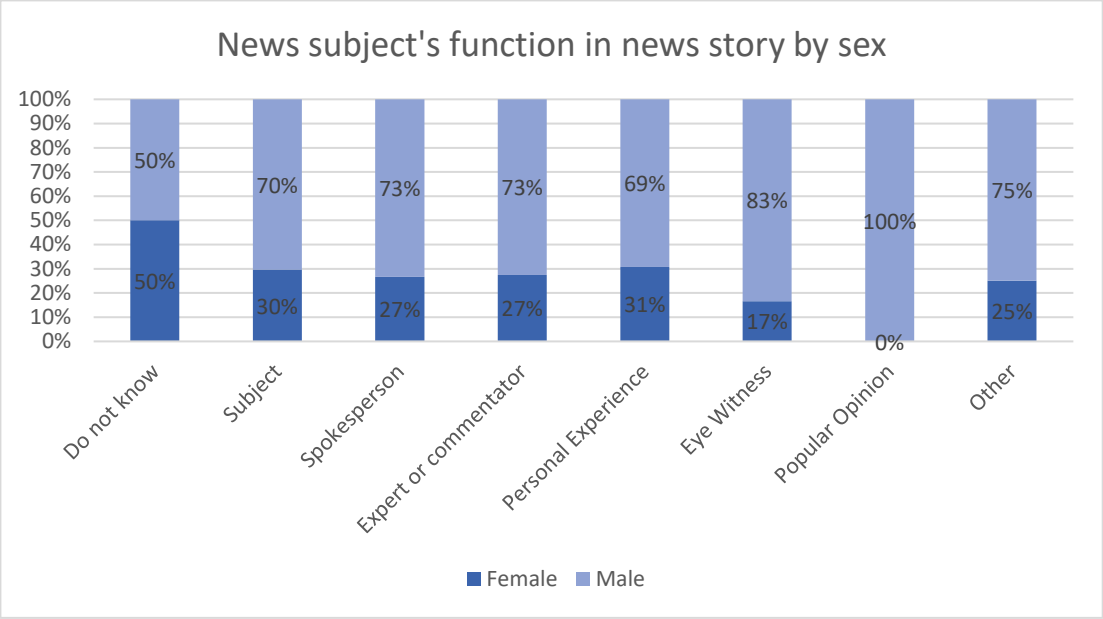
**Occupation**

The table shows the percentage of female representation across different occupational roles in the news. Overall, women remain underrepresented in most professional categories. Female visibility is highest among civil society activists and workers, where women constitute 100%. Women also achieve gender parity (50%) among doctors and health specialists and children or youth, suggesting balanced coverage in these groups. However, female experts are severely underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated fields such as academia (9%), policing and the military (13%), and business (17%). Similarly, only 25–33% of political, government, and legal figures are women, highlighting gender inequality in public and professional leadership roles. Media professionals (29%) and sportspersons (35%) show slightly higher but still unequal representation. In cultural and entertainment roles, 43% of celebrities and artists are women, reflecting a relatively better balance. Overall, the data reveal that women are more visible in caregiving, activism, and entertainment roles but remain marginalised in positions of authority, expertise, and power.



**Function**

The table below shows the gender distribution of the functions of people in the news. Overall, men are overrepresented across nearly all roles, with women significantly underrepresented. As subjects of stories, women constitute only 30%, compared with 70% for men, indicating that men are more often the focus of news coverage. Among spokespersons and experts/commentators, women account for just 27%, indicating that men are far more likely to be consulted as sources of authority or expertise. Women's representation in personal experience stories is slightly higher at 31%, suggesting they are more likely to appear in human-interest or emotional narratives rather than authoritative roles. Only 17% of eye witnesses are women. Notably, no women (0%) are represented in popular opinion roles, indicating complete exclusion in that area. Even in the "other" category, women constitute only 25%. Overall, the data reflect a persistent gender imbalance in media sourcing, with men overwhelmingly portrayed as experts and decision-makers, while women appear less frequently and often in less authoritative roles.

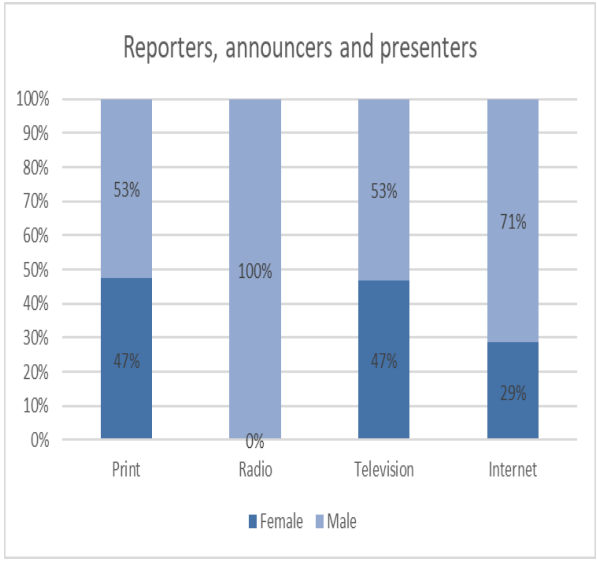



**Victim or survivor**

Overall, both women and men are rarely portrayed as victims, and representation varies greatly by context. Stories about accidents, natural disasters, or poverty, women account for 33% of victims, compared to 20% for men, suggesting slightly higher female visibility in these contexts. For non-domestic crimes such as robbery, women make up 33% of victims, while men account for 80%, suggesting a reporting imbalance or small sample size. Interestingly, women are equally represented (33%) as victims of war, terrorism, or state violence, where no male victims are reported. Women appear only once as survivors of war, terrorism, or state violence, accounting for 33%, while no male survivors are reported in that category. In all other forms of survival — such as accidents, domestic or sexual violence, crime, or discrimination — both women and men register 0%.

## JOURNALISTS AND REPORTERS

This graph compares the gender distribution of reporters, announcers, and presenters across different media platforms. In print and television, women constitute 47%, while men slightly outnumber them at 53%. Radio shows the strongest gender imbalance, with 0% women and 100% men, indicating a complete male dominance in that medium. The internet also shows a significant gap: only 29% of women compared to 71% of men, suggesting that men are far more represented in online news roles. Overall, the data reveals persistent gender disparities across all media types, with women achieving near parity only in print and television while being severely underrepresented in radio and online platforms.




Flemish media in Belgium showed a relatively balanced gender distribution among reporters across most story types. Female reporters accounted for 4% of local stories, 39% of national stories, 9% of regional stories, and 48% of foreign/international stories. Male reporters contributed no local stories, but produced 42% of national, 8% of regional, and 50% of foreign stories. Overall, the data indicate near parity between male and female journalists in the scope of story coverage, with women slightly more engaged in local reporting.

The table below illustrates that Flemish media in Belgium showed gender patterns in topic coverage across print, radio, and television. Female reporters most frequently covered social and legal issues (43%) across all media, while male reporters focused heavily on politics and government (38%) and the economy (19%). Coverage of crime and violence was relatively balanced between genders, while sports reporting remained male-dominated (19% by men vs. 9% by women). Celebrity, arts, and media topics were reported exclusively by women. These trends suggest that while topic specialisation by gender persists, women play a leading role in socially oriented reporting across all media formats.

**Coverage of topics by male and female reporters per medium**

| | Print | | | | Radio | | | | Television | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | | Male | |
| | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |
| Politics and Government | 13% | 3 | 38% | 10 | 13% | 3 | 38% | 10 | 13% | 3 | 38% | 10 |
| Economy | 4% | 1 | 19% | 5 | 4% | 1 | 19% | 5 | 4% | 1 | 19% | 5 |
| Science and Health | 4% | 1 | 8% | 2 | 4% | 1 | 8% | 2 | 4% | 1 | 8% | 2 |
| Social and Legal | 43% | 10 | 4% | 1 | 43% | 10 | 4% | 1 | 43% | 10 | 4% | 1 |
| Crime and Violence | 13% | 3 | 12% | 3 | 13% | 3 | 12% | 3 | 13% | 3 | 12% | 3 |
| Gender-based violence | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 |
| Celebrity, arts, media | 13% | 3 | 0% | 0 | 13% | 3 | 0% | 0 | 13% | 3 | 0% | 0 |
| Sports | 9% | 2 | 19% | 5 | 9% | 2 | 19% | 5 | 9% | 2 | 19% | 5 |

# JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE: ON WOMEN'S CENTRALITY, GENDER STEREOTYPES AND RIGHTS-BASED REPORTING

### References to gender equality

Stories referring to issues of gender equality/inequality, legislation, and policy, by major topic and medium, accounted for 2 per cent overall. Women were rarely the central focus of Flemish news stories across print, radio, and television. In print, women were the main subject in 21% of stories, most often in social and legal topics (29%) and celebrity, arts, and media (50%). In radio, women were not the focus of any stories, showing a complete absence in all categories. On television, only 3% of stories centred on women, primarily within social and legal topics (25%), with none in politics, economy, or sports. Overall, the data indicate that women remain substantially underrepresented as central figures in Flemish news, particularly in political, economic, and sports coverage.

| | Print | | | | Radio | | | | Television | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | | No | | Yes | | No | | Yes | | No | |
| | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |
| Politics and Government | 25 % | 1 | 75% | 3 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 1 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 9 |
| Economy | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 3 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 1 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 2 |
| Science and Health | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 2 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 2 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 2 |
| Social and Legal | 29 % | 2 | 71% | 5 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 25% | 1 | 75% | 3 |
| Crime and Violence | 17 % | 1 | 83% | 5 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 1 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 6 |
| Gender-based violence | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 |
| Celebrity, arts, media | 50 % | 1 | 50% | 1 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 4 |
| Sports | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 100 % | 7 |

### Women as the central focus of the news story

When examining stories where women were the central focus in Flemish media, coverage was heavily concentrated in social and legal issues, which accounted for 50% of such stories. Women were occasionally the focus in politics and government (17%), crime and violence (17%), and celebrity, arts, and media (17%). No stories centered on women in economy, science and health, gender-based violence, sports, or other topics. This pattern indicates that women are predominantly featured in socially oriented or high-profile personal-interest stories, whereas they are underrepresented in hard-news coverage and broader societal issues. Overall, women remain a minority as central subjects across most news categories.

### Stories that address gender inequality

Stories in Flemish media that explicitly addressed gender inequality accounted for only 2% of all news coverage. When gender inequality was raised, it appeared exclusively in social and legal stories (100% of cases, 2 stories). No coverage of gender inequality was found in politics, the economy, science and health, crime, gender-based violence, the celebrity/arts/media,

sports, or other topics. This indicates that discussions of gender inequality remain highly limited and primarily confined to socially oriented reporting. Overall, gender inequality is largely absent from mainstream news narratives across most sectors.

**Challenging gender stereotypes**

In 2025, Flemish news stories rarely challenged gender stereotypes, with the vast majority of coverage reinforcing them. Stereotypes were fully reinforced in politics and government, economy, crime and violence, gender-based violence, celebrity/arts/media, and sports. A small proportion of stories challenged stereotypes in science and health (14%) and social and legal topics (22%). This indicates that efforts to question traditional gender roles remain limited and largely confined to socially oriented or scientific reporting. Overall, the news largely perpetuates existing stereotypes across most topic areas.

## FOCUS ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Flemish media coverage of gender-based violence (GBV) largely reinforced gender stereotypes, with very few stories challenging them. In cases of sexual harassment, rape, and sexual assault, 85% of stories reinforced stereotypes, while only 11% challenged them. Similarly, intimate partner violence against women was mostly presented in ways that reinforced stereotypes (80%), with only 10% challenging them. Coverage of technology-facilitated GBV was more balanced, with 40% of stories challenging stereotypes and 40% reinforcing them. For other forms of GBV, including feminicide, trafficking, and FGM, the majority of stories (72%) reinforced stereotypes, with only 21% challenging them. Overall, stereotypical portrayals dominate GBV reporting, though newer topics like online harassment show some movement toward challenging traditional gender norms.

# CASE STUDIES

### Case Study 1. A story that is gender-aware

**Title of article:** Jongeren en smartphones: Sociale media verbieden on de 16 jaar

**Name of** newspaper, television or radio channel or news website URL**:**
VRT journaal – item 2

If the story is from a newspaper or internet news website, is it one of the stories you coded in the quantitative part of the study? Please tick yes or no.

Yes

**Date:** May 6, 2025
**Country:** Belgium

**Theme:** Science and health

**Skills:**
Sources

**Genre:**
Type 4. Gender-aware (4A Challenge of stereotypes and 4B Balance of sources)

### Analysis

This is a report by L. Verhaege and M. Temmerman on the scientific and political debate surrounding a possible smartphone ban for people under 16. This article follows an open letter drafted by 17 experts who advocate for stricter regulations. Among the scientists featured, there is an even split between male and female experts. Steven Laureys, a neurologist and self-proclaimed father of five, argues that excessive social media use can be neurotoxic and that algorithms can negatively impact the mental health of younger people. Kristel Lauwers, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at UPC Leuven and representative of the Flemish Association of Child Psychiatrists (and, as a woman, apparently doesn't feel the need to refer to any children of her own to bolster her legitimacy), advocates for debate and more regulation for tech companies. However, not all scientists agree with raising the ban from 13 to 16 years, and this is also reflected in the political debate. Vooruit and CD&V, on the one hand, and N-VA, on the other, disagree in the Flemish Parliament. All the ministers interviewed are women. Cieltje van Achter, Flemish Minister of Media for N-VA, opposes a ban, arguing it would be impossible to enforce. Caroline Gennez, Flemish Minister of Welfare for Vooruit, wants more regulation because algorithm-generated content is addictive. She cites the access code (It's Me) to the government website as an inspiring example. Hilde Crevits, Flemish Minister-President and member of CD&V, believes it is the government's responsibility to care for younger people and protect parents who are under pressure. The opinions of experts and politicians are interspersed with images and testimonies from younger people themselves. The report begins with a moving image of younger people's hands scrolling on their phones. This is followed by a still image of a boy and a girl on a couch looking at their screen. The further footage of younger people alternates between interactions between a mixed-gender

group of younger people at a school picnic table and three boys using their devices at home. The two children speaking from the playground are Jules Van Meersel and Willemien Rijmen from the second year of secondary school STROOM in Leuven – an even gender distribution. Jules admits it's difficult to stop scrolling, while Willemijn indicates that it's a challenge to listen for longer and concentrate. The entire news item is gender-aware, as it attempts to find a balance in gender representation across the three forms of testimony (the young persons themselves, scientists, and politicians) (balance of sources) while simultaneously demonstrating that leadership positions in science and politics can be filled by women (challenge stereotypes). The ministers involved are even all women.

**Case Study 2. A story that is blatantly stereotyped**

**Title of article:** Faillissement van bedrijven

**Name of** newspaper, television or radio channel or news website URL**:**
VTM news – item 5

If the story is from a newspaper or internet news website, is it one of the stories you coded in the quantitative part of the study? Please tick yes or no.

Yes

**Date:** May 6, 2025
**Country:** Belgium

**Theme:** Economy

**Skills:**
Perspective

**Genre:**
Type 1. Blatant Stereotype

**Analysis**

This is a report by Maarten Knuts for VTM news about an increase in business bankruptcies. In April 2025, 991 companies went bankrupt, a 7.3% increase and the highest figure ever. The hardest-hit sector is construction. A male expert, Jean-Pierre Waetens, managing director of Bouwunie (Construction Union), in a blue striped suit, explains the underlying reasons: the coronavirus period, which was particularly difficult for start-ups, the rising cost of materials due to the war in Ukraine, and high labor costs. Not only start-ups are affected, but also established companies. The only bright spot is that, starting July 1, 2025, a reduced VAT rate of 6% will apply to demolition and reconstruction for sale. The news item exemplifies a blatant stereotype, as not only is a male expert presented as a role model of leadership, but all accompanying footage of the construction sector features only male construction workers performing various tasks on the construction site (emphasizing their strength and muscular physique). However, figures from March 2025 show that 28,000 women are active in the construction sector, 1.2% of whom work on-site. To paint a more nuanced picture of the sector, other roles, such as white-collar jobs, could also be depicted in the news item by including women, also as experts. After all, these women are also affected by the bankruptcies.

**Case Study 3. A story that is a missed opportunity or gender-blind**

**Title of article:** Minister van Welzijn Gennez benadrukt: “Oude voorrangsregels voor kinderopvang gelden weer na arrest Grondwettelijk Hof”

**Name of** newspaper, television or radio channel or news website URL**:**
HLN – Het Laatste Nieuws; https://www.hln.be/binnenland/minister-van-welzijn-gennez-benadrukt-oude-voorrangsregels-voor-kinderopvang-gelden-weer-na-arrest-grondwettelijk-hof~aecd3026/

If the story is from a newspaper or internet news website, is it one of the stories you coded in the quantitative part of the study? Please tick yes or no.

Yes

**Date:** May 6, 2025
**Country:** Belgium

**Theme:**

Social and legal

**Skills:**

Lack of accuracy

**Genre:**

Type 3. Missed opportunity, gender blind

**Analysis**

On the one hand, this article informs the reader that the Constitutional Court has struck down the new priority rules for childcare for working parents, thus responding to the complaint of civil society organizations. The responsible minister, Caroline Gennez, will hold discussions with stakeholders and colleagues about this outcome. On the other hand, it states that the decision sparked a heated debate among members of parliament. This news item exemplifies **gender blindness/missed opportunity** in several ways. First, it uncritically repeats the gender blindness of the abolished rule, which refers to “parents” who work at least four-fifths or attend daytime education, while in reality, it primarily concerns women. Second, it probably carelessly cites a statement by Groen Member of Parliament Eva Platteau when she summarizes the civil society organizations’ objections, namely that it primarily affects “people who are single, work part-time, or are ill.” Again, the word “people” is used here as if the now abolished measure would affect men and women equally. The opportunity was missed to present a more nuanced narrative that would also address the intersection between chronic illness, a migrant background, and being a woman. Different forms of precariousness are presented here as if they lead to the same experiences for men and women. Third, in the reference to the positions of representatives of other parties—although the debate does refer to an equal number of female and male politicians—a distinction is made between “working parents” and “passives” without diversifying within that category by gender. The article does not mention that the Constitutional Court struck down the rules because they violate the principle of equality and non-discrimination. Nor does it explain what exactly this means and for whom.

**Case Study 4. A story that conveys more subtle stereotypes**

**Title of article:** Brugse hooligans vallen inwoners Molenbeek aan. “Ik riep nog dat ik net uit het ziekenhuis kom. Toch bleven ze schoppen en slaan.”

**Name of** newspaper, television or radio channel or news website URL**:**
De Standaard

If the story is from a newspaper or internet news website, is it one of the stories you coded in the quantitative part of the study? Please tick yes or no.

Yes

**Date:** May 6, 2025
**Country:** Belgium

**Theme:** Crime and violence

**Skills:**
Sources

**Genre:**

Type 2. Subtle Stereotype

**Analysis**

This article reports on violence following a football match between Club Brugge and Anderlecht at the King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels. The journalist describes the course of the violence, from the arrival of “Bruges hooligans” at Brussels Central Station to the unrest that lingered after the match, even linked to confrontations with police by pro-Palestine protesters the following day. Two eyewitnesses are interviewed. The first is Mouloude Ziani, owner of a DIY store on Vanderstichelenstraat in Molenbeek, which he and his son ran on the Sunday of the match. Unlike his colleagues at the Brol coffee shop on Ribaucourtstraat, he failed to close the shop in time when a fight broke out in front of his door. The fight continued inside his shop, resulting in him and his son receiving severe blows to the head and back. He has just been released from the hospital. The eyewitness is portrayed as a hard worker who has lived in Belgium for 60 years and doesn’t understand why he and his son suddenly became targets. The second eyewitness is a “local resident” who doesn’t want her name in the newspaper. She has lived in Molenbeek for seven years and has young children she no longer dares to let out at night. There’s a subtle stereotype here, because the man is presented as a reliable professional, while the woman remains anonymous and is approached only from a maternal perspective. Besides the two eyewitnesses, no experts are brought in to explain the violence. The link between the violence and Islamophobia, in particular, remains largely conjecture. It is mentioned in passing that the Maritien district in Molenbeek, where Zian''s shop is located, is a neighborhood with “Islamic businesses, restaurants, and mosques.” The journalist also mentions that the hooligans shouted “racist slogans” when confronting young people from the neighborhood. It’s not directly mentioned that the confrontation may have been between white football fans and people with a migrant background, nor that it likely involved mostly boys and young men. The female residents, on the other hand, are portrayed as attending to both Ziani and an injured Bruges football fan, thus confirming the stereotype that women are caring, conciliatory, and compassionate.

# Annex 1. Methodology

Over a full 24-hour cycle, thousands of volunteers from the Pacific to the Caribbean monitored their news media, adding their countries' voices to this important pulse-check on gender representation in the news media. The seventh edition of the GMMP was marked by many firsts, highlighting the enhancements introduced to this study over the years. Marking a first for the GMMP, 2025 relied entirely on electronic data capture, with no handwritten forms used; coding sheets were submitted to the technical team either directly through the platform or using the spreadsheet version of the familiar coding template. This was also the first time that the majority of the online data capture was done by in-country teams, who were responsible for over 12,000 entries. Another first was the prominence of internet news items, which surpassed radio entries at the global level and in six of the eight regions, reflecting the ongoing shift toward digital news sources.

Despite these evolutions, the fundamental GMMP methodology has remained consistent over the decades, preserving the comparability of findings across survey rounds.

**How the monitoring took place**

The GMMP monitoring day brought together a vast global network of volunteers, all committed to answering the question, *how is gender portrayed on an ordinary news day?* The GMMP country networks, ranging from university research teams to media advocacy groups, brought with them deep expertise in local media ecosystems, ensuring that the data captured was contextually grounded, accurately capturing the nuances of news coverage across the world. In some regions, collaboration crossed borders; teams in Latin America and Asia supported neighbouring countries with data entry, ensuring that knowledge and effort were shared wherever needed.

In the lead-up to the monitoring day, the WACC team and regional coordinators ran a series of training sessions on the GMMP methodology. Country teams received refresher training on the sampling methodology and monitoring procedures, along with an introduction to the updated topic breakdowns. Teams had a choice of two monitoring options: full monitoring, which provided a detailed view of gender representation across news media, or short monitoring, which captured only the key GMMP indicators.

The training sessions also covered the use of the GMMP's custom data capture platform, which has been used since 2015. Available in English, French, and Spanish, the platform serves as the central system for consolidating responses from country teams after the monitoring day. On the monitoring day itself, teams carry out the initial data capture offline, as discussion and reflection are a key part of the monitoring process. These collaborative sessions allow teams to review findings, compare interpretations and ensure consistency. To maintain accuracy, radio and television bulletins were recorded, and copies of digital and print media were collected for reference.

The GMMP questions capture quantitative data on four key dimensions of each news item: i) About the story: the topic, story placement and scope; ii) About the people in the story - subjects and sources; iii) About the news personnel - announcers, presenters and reporters - in the story; and, iv) The quality of the story from a gender perspectives -gender stereotypes, women's centrality, rights- and gender equality angles. Country teams can also include up to three additional questions about the people in the story, to explore concerns of specific national interest. Additionally, teams provide qualitative context to aid interpretation, describing the news agenda on the monitoring day, their reasons for selecting particular media outlets, and key features of their national media system. Teams also conduct a structured qualitative analysis following the GMMP's standard framework, complementing the quantitative data with insights that help explain patterns and trends in gender representation

in the media.

While teams were not limited in the number of outlets they could monitor, guidance was provided on the recommended minimum through the GMMP media bands chart. The media bands system, first introduced in 2005, was designed to promote a more balanced distribution of data and to provide each country with guidance on the minimum number of media outlets to monitor. The bands were determined by the overall number of each type of media in each country. Over the years, desktop research has formed the basis for compiling these numbers, which were then validated with country teams. For this edition, many of the media research databases previously relied upon were outdated, prompting us to turn inward and draw on historical GMMP databases as a reference for nationally relevant outlets. This list was reviewed and confirmed by country and regional coordinators.

In several countries, the number of media outlets relevant to this study has declined since 2020, reflecting shifts in the media landscape. Subsequently, the number of media bands was reduced; for instance, broadcast media bands were scaled down from five to three. For internet news, countries were ranked according to internet usage rates published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and grouped into corresponding media bands.

**Conclusion**

From classrooms and offices to shared virtual spaces, the GMMP network turned a single ordinary news day into a globally representative snapshot of gender in the media. This achievement would not have been possible without the dedication of thousands of volunteers, whose careful and diligent monitoring of media outlets worldwide sustains this important tradition of media monitoring.

**References**

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# Annex 2. List of Monitors

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[i] Read more in the full text of the Bangkok Declaration, outcome of the 1994 "Women Empowering Communication" conference at which the idea of a GMMP was birthed. https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/who-makes-the-news/Imported/documents/bangkok%20declaration.pdf