

THE NETHERLANDS

On media concentration and resilient freelance journalists

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Introduction

The Netherlands is a mid-sized country in Western Europe with a population of 17.4 million people. In 2019, the Netherlands was ranked 17th in the world based on its USD 914 billion gross domestic product, and 13th based on gross domestic product per capita (USD 53,016). At the end of 2017, minister Arie Slob (a member of the Christian Union, a socially conservative, centre-left Christian-democratic party) took over the media portfolio from State Secretary Sander Dekker (a member of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy). Later, Mr. Slob allocated more money to journalism subsidies thanks to an investigative journalism scheme. Moreover, since 2019, a pilot scheme worth EUR 2.85 million, aimed at professionalising public local media services, was put in place to subsidise the appointment of journalists and support staff (e.g., managing volunteers, training neighbourhood reporters, supervising trainees) and improve the continuity, spread, depth, and quality of the local news infrastructure. Politically the Netherlands is considered a mature parliamentary democracy and a welfare state, although it became less generous on all fronts in 2020 compared with previous decades.

Freedom in the World 2021: status "free" (Score: 98/100, down from three years in a row at 99). Although known for its tolerance and political rights completely safeguarded in the Dutch society, tensions are mounting between its majority population and the Muslim and immigrant population. Therefore, the 1-point loss from 2016 to 2017 can be attributed to rising anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic sentiment as well as Muslims and immigrants experiencing harassment and intimidation. The 2021 report will be posted online when it becomes available (Freedom House, 2021).

Liberal Democracy Index 2020: the Netherlands is placed in the Top 10% bracket – rank 10 out of measured countries), which is a bit lower compared to a decade earlier, in 2009, but up from rank 16 in 2019 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2020, 2021).

Freedom of Expression Index 2018: rank 21 of measured countries, a slight decrease from 19 in 2016 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2017, 2019).

2020 World Press Freedom Index: rank 5 of 180 countries, fluctuating between 2 and 5 from 2013–2019 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

While the Netherlands is a small country whose language is shared by very few others (chief among which being Belgium, with which it shares a border), it can be considered a global media player. For instance, the Endemol Shine Group started as a Dutch production house and is now creating content for all platforms worldwide. Another example is RELX (previously known as Reed Elsevier), the product of a merger between British trade book and magazine publisher Reed and Netherlands-based scientific publisher Elsevier. RELX is a global provider of scientific books and information-based analytics. *Elsevier Weekblad* is published by RELX and is also the largest weekly in the country.

In the three decades that followed the launch of commercial television in Flanders (1989), very few Dutch-speaking Belgians followed Dutch media content, and there has never been a tradition in the other direction. Things are different when it comes to media acquisitions. In the last decade, two Flemish press companies – Mediahuis and DPG Media Group – have become major players in the Dutch market. In 2015, a Dutch subsidiary of Mediahuis took over the Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant Media Holding (NRC), the publisher of daily newspapers *NRC Handelsblad* and *nrc.next*, which cater to the well-educated and wealthy audience. Two years on, in 2017, this expansion drive was still going strong, with Mediahuis taking over the Telegraaf Media Group, the publisher of popular daily *De Telegraaf* and regional newspapers such as *Noordhollands Dagblad*. As a result, Telegraaf Media Group was renamed Mediahuis Nederland in 2019. In 2017 as well, Mediahuis acquired the Media Groep Limburg, the publisher of regional newspaper *De Limburger*.

The other Flemish media company, DPG Media Group, had already taken over PCM Publishing in 2009 and rebranded its subsidiary De Persgroep Nederland. As a result, it became a publisher of national (*Algemeen Dagblad*, *de Volkskrant*, and *Trouw*) and regional (such as *Het Parool*, *Rotterdams Dagblad*, and *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*) newspapers in the Netherlands. In April 2015, DPG Media took over Wegener Media, becoming the publisher of seven Dutch regional newspapers (such as *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia*) in five provinces (Noord-Brabant, Zeeland, Gelderland, Overijssel, and Flevoland). In December 2019, DPG Media announced the acquisition of Sanoma Media Netherlands, the largest magazine publisher in the Netherlands. DPG Media also owns the *nu.nl* online news platform, the largest news site in the country.

The Netherlands has a unique public broadcasting system, commonly being characterised as “pillarised” and grounded on the principle of external diversity, representing many social and cultural segments, or “pillars” (Christian-protestant, Catholic, and Socialist) (Lijphart, 1975). The foundation of the

public broadcasting system, both television and radio, is the Dutch Public Broadcaster (NPO), which operates three public networks (NPO1, NPO2, and NPO3). Six member-based television broadcasters are given airtime on these three networks, which are regulated by the Dutch Media Act 2008. These six broadcasters are required to represent and appeal to the diversity of Dutch society in terms of age, lifestyle, geographic and cultural origin, and political orientation. Working alongside these is the task-based Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS), which is under statutory obligation to make news programmes for television, radio, and the Internet. *NOS Journaal* is the umbrella name for the television and radio news broadcasts. There are, in addition, news programmes aimed at children (*Jeugdjournaal*), teenagers and young adults (*NOS op 3*), and the general public (*Nieuwsuur* [News hour], a daily current affairs television programme co-produced by NOS). NOS is also responsible for two themed digital channels: *NPO Nieuws* [NPO news], a 24-hour news channel which rebroadcasts the latest *NOS Journaal* and covers live events, and *NPO Politiek* [NPO Politics], a live channel featuring coverage of parliamentary sessions, debates, and archival material.

According to risk assessments made through the Media Pluralism Monitor of the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute in Florence, the risks to media pluralism in the Netherlands are low in terms of basic protection, political independence, and social inclusiveness, and somewhat moderate in terms of market plurality. This is complemented by a strong legal framework that guarantees freedom of expression. Political independence of the media is underpinned by a strong journalistic culture of self-regulation and editorial autonomy along with an independent public service media governance structure. Social inclusiveness is also seen to be upheld by purposeful policy and considered to be at low risk. While these three areas appear to represent low risk, there is still room for improvement: 1) journalists face hardship because of their employers' preferences for poorly paid, self-employed journalists, or freelancers; 2) there is lack of legislation to protect journalistic sources; 3) there is no legislation regarding conflicts of interests between media owners and political parties; and 4) some population groups, such as the visually impaired and women, have less access to media. Market plurality, on the other hand, is considered to be at medium risk, mostly because of high degree of media ownership concentration, with two Flemish media companies dominating the press sector, as well as low transparency related to ownership patterns (Rossini, 2017: 6).

Covid-19

From mid-March to mid-May or beginning of June 2020, the Rutte III cabinet took measures restricting freedom of movement (a so-called intelligent lock-

down) in the name of public health to prevent the spread of this viral disease. The lockdown included working from home, banning events and meetings involving the physical presence of more than 100 people, closing borders to neighbouring countries, and closing schools (under public pressure, following similar steps being taken by neighbouring countries), childcare centres, cafés, restaurants, and sport clubs. Shops, however, were not shut down.

At the beginning, the Covid-19 crisis resulted in an unprecedented hunger for news among the Dutch audience. Daily newspapers (both print and online) saw their sales of subscriptions increase significantly. Consequently, mainstream media organisations were able to reaffirm their authority as reliable sources for facts and opinions, bringing expertise and explanations to the Covid-19 debate. This had not been the case in the past decade. Also, radio and television stations appealed to a growing audience, with the public broadcaster reaching a record number of viewers. However, advertising-based news media revenues fell significantly (an estimated 30%). Such revenue shortfalls led to drastic decisions in the Dutch media market. For example, firstly, the last-ever print version of the free newspaper *Metro* appeared on Friday, 20 March 2020 (Bakker, 2020). Secondly, lifestyle magazine *VRIJ*, a weekend supplement of *De Telegraaf*, was discontinued as of July 2020 (De Telegraaf, 2020). Thirdly, Mediahuis Nederland said it would cut about 70 of its advertising department's 160 jobs (Rogmans, 2020).

As Covid-19 resulted in both decreasing advertising revenues and an increased demand for news, and considering that provision of information during a crisis is of vital importance, the government decided to create a temporary support fund. Local media organisations were the most vulnerable in this respect; hence, this special support fund was aimed at door-to-door newspapers and local public broadcasters. A total of EUR 9.3 million had been allocated to these media organisations. Most of the interviewees were against accepting support from the government for their own medium, given the importance they attached to their independence. Generally speaking, they were more understanding of the support given to local media organisations, considering they were the most vulnerable. However, interviewees made four key comments in this regard. First, they highlighted how many door-to-door newspapers did not provide (a lot of) information and news. Second, some indicated that local public broadcasters were already subsidised, and others pointed out that these subsidies were quite nominal. Third, some respondents reported that they could not understand why the so-called hyper-locals were originally not eligible to apply for extra money. Due to this reason, EUR 1.6 million of the special support fund has been allocated to local newspapers following a subscription model, as well as to local new sites (the hyper-locals) (SVDJ, 2020a). The most prominent, fourth, criticism was that the special support fund, rather than being backed by a new budget, is designed to deduct funds from subsidies earmarked for

“special research projects” in 2021. The latter corpus is an important source of income to sustain smaller or local media outlets such as *Investico* or *VersBeton*. Investigative journalism, in this connection, was considered far more important for democracy than door-to-door newspapers, the beneficiaries of this special support fund. In response to criticisms, special research projects will continue to be supported in 2021. Moreover, an additional subsidy of EUR 24 million has been made available to support local news media in the September–December 2020 period (SVDJ, 2020b).

Leading news media sample

This follow-up study to the 2011 Media for Democracy Monitor country report for the Netherlands (d’Haenens & Kik, 2011) is based on desk research and in-depth interviews. The secondary analysis of relevant documents, including quantitative data, is from 2018 or 2019, unless stated otherwise. Information collected from the interviews reflects the most up-to-date situation. Sixteen professionals in Dutch news media and representatives of the academic world were interviewed. The selected sample represents different media platforms (print, audiovisual, and information and communication technology) and different owners. Our interviewees include editors-in-chief, news chiefs, and leading journalists of news media.

Only two large print news media owners are left in the Dutch news market: DPG Media and Mediahuis (CvM, 2019a, 2020). For the purposes of our study, we selected two Mediahuis national newspapers, one DPG Media national newspaper, and one DPG Media regional paper. These are briefly characterised as follows:

- *De Telegraaf* (Mediahuis), a popular daily with the largest nation-wide circulation;
- *NRC Handelsblad/nrc.next* (Mediahuis), quality newspapers sharing one editor-in-chief with each following a course of its own, like *nrc.next* targeting a younger readership;
- *De Volkskrant* (DPG Media Group), a quality paper with the third-largest nationwide circulation;
- and *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia* (DPG Media Group), a regional newspaper.

We also looked at *De Groene Amsterdammer*, an independent and the oldest weekly magazine in the country. Despite the decline in the reach of print media and magazines in general, the number of readers of *De Groene Amsterdammer* has risen steadily since 2009 (Bakker, 2019).

There are two leading news owners for radio and television: the Dutch Public Broadcaster (NPO) and the RTL Group (CvM, 2019a; CvM, 2020). We selected the following news broadcast media:

- NOS: Within the Dutch public broadcasting system (NPO), NOS is the broadcaster with clearly outlined tasks. It is legally bound to provide daily newscasts for three television channels, six radio stations, as well as NPO start. The NPO start website and app make up NPO's video-on-demand service. The three television channels run a thematic digital channel (NPO 1 Extra, NPO 2 Extra, and NPO 3 Extra). The most important news bulletin on television is the *Achtuurjournaal* (NOS). NPO Radio 1 is a 24-hour news and sports station. NPO Nieuws and NPO Politiek are 24/7 news and political digital channels, available both on cable and on the NPO start website and app.
- RTL: RTL is the largest commercial counterpart of NOS and is active via television, apps, and a website. The news bulletin of RTL4 is the only counterpart to NOS's *Achtuurjournaal*.

Further, we selected the Business Nieuws Radio (BNR) station, owned by a relatively small media player, the Financieele Dagblad Media group (FD), which also owns the *Financieel Dagblad* newspaper. BNR Nieuwsradio can be characterised as a commercial radio station, which at first focused on financial and economic items only (BNR) but has become a quasi-generalist newscaster providing a wider news menu ranging from economic affairs, mobility, housing, and lifestyles, to sports. As far as format is concerned, it is the only counterpart to the public broadcaster's NPO Radio 1.

In addition to the national public broadcasters, there are also regional and local public broadcasters. The foundation Regional Public Broadcasting (RPO) is seen as another leading news medium in the Netherlands, which is a cooperation and coordination body of 13 regional public broadcasters spread across the country (RTV Noord, Omrop Fryslân, RTV Drenthe, RTV Oost, Omroep Gelderland, RTV Utrecht, Omroep Flevoland, RTV Noord-Holland, Omroep West, RTV Rijnmond, Omroep Brabant, Omroep Limburg, and Omroep Zeeland).

Our interviewees from the broadcast media included the editor-in-chief of *NOS Journaal*, the editor-in-chief of a regional public broadcaster, and a leading journalist of BNR Nieuwsradio. Unfortunately, we were not able to set up an interview with an RTL news journalist. Finally, the following online-only news media were selected, and editors-in-chief or leading journalists of these news platforms were interviewed:

- *Nu.nl*, the largest commercial website focusing on news from the Netherlands. It has been owned by DPG Media since the end of 2019, when the company took over the Dutch arm of publishing group Sanoma, the largest Dutch magazine publisher between 2001 and 2019.
- *ThePostOnline*, a private right-wing Dutch news and opinion website. The website published a print version between 2018 and 2019, called *ThePostOffline*.
- *Follow the Money*, an independent news website for financial-economic investigative journalism, which started in 2010.
- *Investico*, an online independent platform for investigative journalism, which started in 2016. It is a non-profit foundation aiming to collaborate with other news media organisations.
- *Versbeton.nl*, an independent online hyperlocal magazine, started in 2011, targeting Rotterdam individuals with high interest in news. It is a platform for in-depth reflection on the city of Rotterdam.

Additionally, three academics (Piet Bakker, Huub Evers, and Jo Bardoel), the chairman of the Dutch Association of Investigative Journalists (Evert de Vos) and the ombudsperson for journalistic productions of the NPO (Margo Smit) were interviewed. Huub Evers is also the ombudsperson of the regional newspaper *De Limburger*, owned by Mediahuis.

Indicators

Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)

(F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability 3 POINTS

A wide variety of news and information media is still available to all Dutch citizens, although several news outlets were shut down. Regional and local news coverage varies from region to region.

IN 2011
3 POINTS

In 2018, the Netherlands' print media market included eight national newspapers, one free-sheet, seventeen regional newspapers, and two weeklies (Bakker, 2019; CvM, 2019b). Compared with a decade earlier, (2008) one national newspaper disappeared, as *NRC Handelsblad* and *nrc.next* were no longer seen as two distinct publications. Moreover, three free-sheets were shut down, nine regional newspapers ended their operations, and two weeklies changed their periodicity to monthly publications. Among the national newspapers,

there are three quality newspapers (*De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad/nrc.next*, and *Trouw*), two popular newspapers (*Algemeen Dagblad* and *De Telegraaf*), two newspapers with a Christian-protestant profile (*Reformatorisch Dagblad* and *Nederlands Dagblad*), and one specialist daily (*Het Financieele Dagblad*).

In 2018, *Metro* was the only free-sheet distributed nationwide, mainly in the Dutch railway stations aimed at commuters, but was terminated as a print version in March 2020, as mentioned above in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic. As of 2018, circulation figures were no longer available. Instead, reach figures were provided based on the population aged 13+ and expressed in percentages. Between 2014 and 2018, *De Telegraaf* dropped from 12.9 to 8 per cent, *de Volkskrant* from 5.6 to 4.6 per cent, and *NRC Handelsblad/nrc.next* from 3.5 to 3 per cent (CvM, 2019b).

Of these, at least one regional newspaper is distributed in each of the twelve Dutch provinces. On average, regional newspapers reach around 1 to 2 per cent of the population. Most national dailies and weeklies are available all over the country, either in single issues or by subscription. Single copies of regional papers are only available in the region they focus on or by mail subscription. However, in total, for all newspapers, reach figures dropped from 57.1 per cent in 2014 to 40.4 per cent in 2018 (CvM, 2019b).

In addition, there are only two opinion weeklies and news magazines: *Elsevier Weekblad* and *De Groene Amsterdammer*. Although *Elsevier Weekblad* was the most circulated and read in 2018, amounting to about 60,000 copies, this figure was lower by 10 per cent as compared with that in 2017, and half of that in 2008. *De Groene Amsterdammer*'s circulation of about 23,000 in 2018, in contrast, was higher than that in the previous two years (Bakker, 2019).

In 2019, the largest television owners in the Netherlands were public broadcaster NPO with three channels, commercial broadcaster RTL with seven channels, and commercial broadcaster Talpa TV with five channels (SKO, 2020). In 2018, 82.5 per cent of the Dutch population aged six and older watched the public broadcaster on a weekly basis, 79 per cent watched a programme on an RTL channel, and 72.4 per cent watched a programme on one of Talpa TV's channels. Average viewing time per day amounted to 156 minutes, which was 28 minutes less than in 2019 (SKO, 2020). There were 18 radio stations catering to the Dutch audience, with nearly all of them offering a specific music menu. Meanwhile, in 2018, NPO Radio 1 and BNR Nieuwsradio were the only two stations broadcasting news bulletins around the clock, with a market share of 8.2 per cent and 0.8 per cent, respectively (CvM, 2019a).

In 2020, every news source is available online and offline, except for online-only news websites such as *nu.nl*. More than 95 per cent of the Dutch have Internet access, and 98 per cent of households have broadband access (CvM, 2019a; Eurostat Statistical Yearbook, 2020; Newman et al., 2020).

(F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 2 POINTS

IN 2011
3 POINTS

On average, eight out of ten Dutch nationals turn to the news on a daily basis, varying from seven out of ten in the younger age group (18–34 years) to nine out of ten in the oldest age group (55+). The average daily reach figures – not only for print media but also for television and radio – have declined in the last decade. The public broadcaster is seen as an important news source both online and offline.

In 2019, 57 per cent of the Dutch population said they were extremely or very interested in news, varying from 40 per cent in the youngest age group (18–24) to 63 per cent in the oldest age group (55+). Among all age groups, up to 10 per cent of people were not really interested in news (CvM, 2019a). Looking at the frequency of news use, 84 per cent of the Dutch were consuming news at least once a day, while 2 per cent consumed news less than once a week (CvM, 2019a; Newman et al., 2020).

Interestingly, on a weekly basis, the most popular news sources continue to be television newscasts (65%). This is followed by social media and all-news radio stations (each at 39%), websites or apps from traditional newspapers (36%), print newspapers as well as websites or apps from television or radio broadcasters (both at 31%), and websites or apps from other news services. Only 5 per cent of the respondents mentioned reading a print opinion or news magazine (CvM, 2019a). Consumption of all types of news has declined over the last three years, the hardest hit media being print and social media or blogs (CvM, 2019a). In 2019, 70 per cent of the Dutch used television as their main news source – 4 per cent less than in 2017. Additionally, online news sites were the second-most important news source (65% in 2019, 2% less than in 2017) followed by radio news and news on social media or blogs – both 39 per cent with a decline of, respectively, 3 per cent and 8 per cent compared with 2017 – in the third position. In recent times, print media was the least-used news source (33% in 2019, 7% less than in 2017) in the country. Considerable differences were also observed in the use of news media types across the age groups. Traditional news media (television, print, and radio) as main sources varied between 36 per cent for the 18–24 age group to over 42 per cent for the 25–34 age group. This reached more than 47 per cent for the 35–44 group, beyond 58 per cent for the 45–54 group, and 75 per cent for the 55+ group. The younger a person, the more likely they were to turn to online sources (including social media and blogs) as their main news medium. This varied between 65 per cent in the youngest group and 25 per cent in the oldest group. Overall, Table 1 shows that the average daily reach of traditional media declined between 2009 and 2018 – by 27 per cent for newspapers, by 7 per cent for television, and by 9 per cent for radio.

Table 1 Average daily reach of television, radio, and newspapers, 2009 & 2018 (%)

Media type	Daily reach 2009	Daily reach 2018
Newspapers	68	41
Television	76	69
Radio	72	63

Source: CvM (2019a, 2019c)

Nevertheless, Table 2 shows that public broadcaster NOS is the most-frequently used news source among the Dutch population, followed by free website *nu.nl*, RTL, and popular newspaper *De Telegraaf*, which is more often read online than offline. Finally, SBS 6 (Talpa TV) that broadcasts the *Hart van Nederland* [*Heart of the Netherlands*] programme – a popular news bulletin focusing on regional news – reaches 28 per cent of the population on a weekly basis. Meanwhile, the online Dutch-oriented news source *nu.nl* was the 10th most visited website in 2019 on a monthly basis (CvM, 2019a).

Table 2 Weekly and regular use of the largest news services, online and offline (%)

	Weekly (min. 1x per week)	Regularly (min. 3x per week)
NOS (total)	68	53
NOS (offline)	41	36
NOS (online)	6	5
NOS (online and offline)	21	12
Nu.nl	43	31
RTL (total)	42	26
RTL (offline)	24	16
RTL (online)	7	5
RTL (online and offline)	10	5
De Telegraaf (total)	31	21
De Telegraaf (offline)	8	5
De Telegraaf (online)	14	10
De Telegraaf (online and offline)	10	6
SBS6 Hart van Nederland (total)	28	18
SBS6 Hart van Nederland (offline)	21	13
SBS6 Hart van Nederland (online)	3	2
SBS6 Hart van Nederland (online and offline)	5	2

Source: CvM, 2019a

Therefore, on average, eight out of ten Dutch nationals followed the news on a daily basis. Nearly 69 per cent of those aged 18 to 34 consumed news on a daily basis, 80 per cent of those between ages 35 and 54 did, and 91 per cent of those older than 55. However, 29 per cent of the Dutch often and sometimes actively avoided news, which is a higher percentage compared with the other nine countries in the sample: that is Belgium (2%), Switzerland (3%), Germany (4%), South Korea (5%), Sweden (7%), Norway (8%), Hong Kong (9%), Finland (12%), and Denmark (14%) (CvM, 2019a; Newman et al., 2020).

(F3) Diversity of news sources

3 POINTS

IN 2011
3 POINTS

Editors-in-chief and journalists emphasised the crucial importance of checking news sources, especially in the case of social media. Exchange of information, be it international, national, or regional, is increasing. Much like the public broadcaster, reflection of societal reality in news was part of the mission of all news media organisations.

Journalists interviewed as part of our study based their news stories on a large variety of news sources; for example, news agencies such as Reuters or Dutch press agency Algemeen Nederland Persbureau (ANP), their own network of sources, social media, input of information via the audience, and international, national, and regional media were their regular go-to for news stories. According to interviewee Piet Bakker, the two main sources for journalists were from the government at all possible levels, and also the ANP.

In summary, it can be said that any “news medium” worth its salt must check its sources, and extra caution is recommended when using social media such as Twitter or Facebook. Twitter is used as a barometer of society rather than a real news source. Information received from news agencies is trusted as such, although some journalists rely more on foreign news agencies or sources such as the British Broadcasting Corporation than on domestic news agency such as ANP. This is especially the case for foreign (financial) news production.

Generally speaking, investigative journalism is viewed as important, but the ability to invest time in research varies according to the type of media. Quality newspapers such as *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* invest more time and money in investigative journalism than radio news stations or popular newspapers such as *De Telegraaf*. Obviously, there is an enormous difference between those news media that focus on daily current affairs and all other types of news media. Daily newspapers such as *De Telegraaf*, television newscasts such as *NOS Journaal*, all-news radio stations such as BNR Nieuwsradio, and general websites such as *nu.nl* are less keen on research than a weekly publication such as *De Groene Amsterdammer* or investigative online platforms such as *Investico* or *Follow the Money (FTM)*.

With regard to content exchange, *Investico* has paid partnerships with national media such as *Groene Amsterdammer* (weekly news magazine), *Trouw* (quality newspaper), *Financieel Dagblad* (specialist newspaper), *Argos* (radio news programme on NPO Radio 1), or *Nieuwsuur*, a television news programme on NPO 2) on the one hand, and with regional media such as *versbeton.nl* on the other. *Investico* is part of both the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism and the European team Investigate Europe, which lets it share, merge, and cross-check facts. Meanwhile, regional, national, and international news media organisations, such as *The Courier*, publish *Investico* articles on a regular basis.

While online platform *FTM* has no paid partnerships, it exchanges content on a regular basis with Flemish news website *Apache*, and once in a while with international news media outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Financial Times*. Depending on the topic, *FTM*'s journalists work together with other European news outlets from the very start of a particular research project. The growing volume of internal content sharing within media companies is especially striking. Regional Mediahuis newspapers such as *De Limburger* frequently publish articles by national newspapers *De Telegraaf* and *NRC Handelsblad*. However, the reverse is not true. National newspapers do not reprint articles by regional newspapers, nor do *De Telegraaf* and *NRC Handelsblad* reprint the other's pieces. The latter, meanwhile, does collaborate on a regular basis with its Flemish counterpart *De Standaard*. According to one of our interviewees, this collaboration has lasted for many decades, long before the news titles shared the same owner.

Such information sharing is also done at DPG Media, whose national newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* and regional newspapers such as *Twentsche Courant Tubantia* collaborate on several news stories. *Algemeen Dagblad* provides national news to all regional titles, and major regional news (including some sports reporting) also appears in it. Within the FD Media Group, there is information sharing between the BNR Nieuwsradio station and the *Financieel Dagblad* (specialist newspaper), with the latter feeding news to the former. Other forms of collaboration at a national or international level are based on the network of journalists. For instance, there has been collaboration between *NRC Handelsblad* and public news and current affairs programme *Nieuwsuur*.

There is also a permanent collaboration between the 13 regional public broadcasters within the Foundation Regional Public Broadcasting. Although no structural cooperation has been set up, regional public broadcasters also share materials and images with the national public broadcaster. From 1 July 2020, NOS (part of NPO) and the regional public broadcasters started to operate the same app. Interestingly, while regional public broadcasters are keen to cooperate, regional newspapers remain reluctant.

Overall, journalists and editors-in-chief emphasised the need for a clear distinction between sponsored and journalistic articles, highlighting the importance of transparency about corporate advertising disguising as content. Public relations material is increasing, but interviewees insisted that they were under no significant pressure as part of their daily work.

The importance attached to reflection on and sensitivity to social diversity was dependent on the news medium. While it is part of the mission of the public broadcaster, private news media outlets such as *VersBeton* and regional newspaper *Twentsche Courant Tubantia* also include it in their statement. According to interviewee Jo Bardoel, the issue of gender diversity in news sources has gained some prominence on the agenda of news media in the last two decades. Additionally, giving a voice to both ethnic minorities and younger people is given importance as well.

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy 3 POINTS

Newsroom democracy is provided for by editorial statutes, which are common in Dutch newsrooms. Journalists are represented via a newsroom council that influences decisions such as hiring an editor-in-chief or news chief. Most new media platforms draw up an editorial statute.

IN 2011
2 POINTS

All established news media in the Netherlands, including those in our sample, have an editorial statute with the following main characteristics:

- a procedure for the appointment of editors-in-chief or other managerial functions;
- most media have a newsroom council, representing the editors and those involved in the appointment procedures;
- editors can influence the appointment of the editor-in-chief (for instance, BNR Nieuwsradio's new editor-in-chief was suggested via e-mail by its former editor-in-chief, as well as its management, however, this was not in line with the editorial statute, and after editorial protest, a correct procedure based on open applications was set up);
- editors-in-chief need to be supported by editors, otherwise they will be toppled;
- in summary, staff decisions are taken by the owners and executives, but in connection with newsroom staff.

Most recent news platforms have put in place an editorial statute. In practice, the founders automatically become editors-in-chief (see *FTM*, *Investico*, *VersBeton*,

and *tpo.nl*). *FTM* has no editorial statute yet but, is working on one. *Tpo.nl* has an editorial statute, but there are no rules with respect to the appointment of the editor-in-chief.

In general, there is an open debate culture in the country based on which news stories are selected and presented in the news media. However, editors-in-chief have the last word, among other things, on the themes that are selected and whether diversity of news sources is an issue or not. Although most journalists try to stress their independence (which is also clearly imbedded in the editorial statutes), the editorial line is often a reflection of a news medium's ideological orientation (according to our interviews with Huub Evers and Piet Bakker). For instance, *tpo.nl* and *De Telegraaf* have a right-wing sensibility, while *NRC Handelsblad* is more liberal and *de Volkskrant* or *De Groene Amsterdammer* are labelled as progressive. Editorial meetings are scheduled on a regular basis, but editors are expected to introduce ideas, perspectives, and news stories at any time. Editorial meetings normally take place at the office, but they have gone online since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to some journalists, a lack of face-to-face interactions has made their job more difficult.

Meanwhile, none of our interviewees mentioned internal rules meant to support female journalists in their careers or help them access managerial positions. No indications were given that women were paid less than men. The man–woman ratio among editorial staff was also more or less equal, although it was reported to be a matter of importance.

(F5) Company rules against *internal* influence on newsroom/editorial staff

2 POINTS

IN 2011
2 POINTS

Editorial bylaws endorse the chief editor's final responsibility and protect the strict separation between editorial staff on the one hand, and management and shareholders on the other. However, concentration in the newspaper market has increased significantly over the last ten years, and editors-in-chief are getting more involved in managerial tasks.

Dutch news media is known to separate the newsroom from both owners and commercial departments' influence, and all – including the editorial staff – value this distinction. Independent researcher Huub Evers also confirmed this.

Media house owners never intervene in editorial matters, indicated the interviewed editors-in-chief. This also applied to public service radio and television channels, whose politically oriented executive board refrains from making any editorial interference.

Likewise, there is an explicit segregation between newsrooms and sales departments. Obviously, editors-in-chief coordinate with the sales department,

but everyone interviewed confirmed that there were no interferences. Advertisers may at times regret the publication of certain articles, but none of the interviewed journalists felt any pressure preventing them from being critical.

In 2009, Huub Wijfjes had indicated that with editors-in-chief being a part of the management board, there might have been an influence on their roles as gatekeepers of editorial independence. However, none of the journalists reported they had ever been in a position where they could not exercise such independence, nor did editors say anything to the contrary.

Concentration in the Netherlands' newspaper market has significantly increased in the last decade. Several interviewees indicated that working conditions and editorial independence varied from one news company to another. For example, DPG Media is seen as one of the most commercially influenced media companies. Evert de Vos called the situation with DPG Media in Belgium – one single, cross-media newsroom for both television and newspapers – a “nightmare vision for Dutch newspapers”.

(F6) Company rules against *external* influence on
newsroom/editorial staff

2 POINTS

IN 2011
2 POINTS

Direct influence from external parties on newsroom work and content is strictly forbidden, although advertisers occasionally attempt to gain influence. Given their smaller markets, local, regional, and niche news media are at higher risk of external influence.

Rules or bylaws ensure the strict separation between editorial and advertising departments. The interviewed journalists were, on principle, opposed to any outside influence, independence being of prime value to them.

Journalists and editors-in-chief did not feel any pressure from advertisers, nor from owners. The editorial statutes guaranteed editorial freedom even when it appeared to go against the interests of an important advertiser or the sales department. All our interviewees, including Piet Bakker and Huub Evers, categorically rejected any influence from advertisers on editorial content. Advertising clients were diverse, without undue influence from any one of them. Some interviewees recalled rare cases of advertisers threatening to withdraw important advertising budgets over several years, without such incidents hindering critical reporting.

However, one of the newspaper journalists we interviewed pointed out the grey areas between journalistic articles and advertisements. He especially highlighted travel, leisure, or fashion journalism in magazines or weekend newspaper supplements where there were editorial influences by the sales department. Moreover, the risk of interference from advertisers, politicians, or

other important figures is much higher at a local or regional level because of the closer relationships between journalists and the subjects they are reporting on. For instance, a potentially relevant news story may not come out because freelancers at the local or regional level are financially dependent on one or more of its actors.

None of the media organisations under study said they were dependent on one or several advertisers. As mentioned earlier, the risk is much higher for regional and local media, as well as for media houses that focus on niche sectors such as cars, finance, or fashion, owing to the small market size. Leading national news media organisations do not face such an issue. Furthermore, being part of a larger media company is beneficial in this case, since such a company is better able to survive potential losses of advertising revenue. For instance, BNR Nieuwsradio is still in existence only thanks to the support of the *Financieel Dagblad* newspaper – which may or may not help it survive the current Covid-19 crisis.

Advertising on the public broadcasting media is organised via the Foundation Advertising on Radio and Television, which allocates advertising airtime to various NPO media platforms and collects their proceedings. Revenue was originally transferred to the government that further placed it in a fund intended to help newspapers experiencing temporary difficulties. This fund was managed by the Press Fund, created in 1974. In 2014, the fund renamed itself the Journalism Fund, with a view towards stimulating the quality, diversity, independence, and innovation of the journalistic infrastructure in the Netherlands. The original financing mechanism for loss of advertising revenue in the print media has also been abandoned. At the same time, the Foundation Advertising on Radio and Television secures the independence of NOS with respect to advertisers and media agencies.

Interestingly, another relevant finding has been the news media's development of other business models to secure their independence. For instance, the *Groene Amsterdammer* and *VersBeton* have largely switched to donation and subscriber formulas, making advertising revenues marginal. Online advertising is not very lucrative, and above all, it is described as disruptive. *FTM* made it a unique selling position to ban advertising completely as a way to underline its credibility and editorial independence. For instance, writing about the bank sector while raising money from it via advertising is viewed as sending the wrong signal to the readership.

(F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing 2 POINTS

IN 2011
2 POINTS

In the absence of formal news or document selection rules that might outline a definition of what is and what is not news, meetings and discussions held by editorial staff can be considered as informal selection procedures.

There are no formal rules that might underpin the news selection and production process, but a constant debate among the editorial staff about what could and did go wrong is regular practice. Journalistic values such as independence, objectivity, representation of both sides of an issue, checking news sources, and so forth, are valued to a great degree. Stylebooks are sometimes used only if problems arise, but not necessarily with any consistency. Some stylebooks define the importance of issues such as the diversity of news sources. Most news media is governed by the self-regulation body Netherlands Press Council, which looks at complaints of violation of good journalistic practice. Aiming to contribute to the transparency of its judgements on behalf of the professionals and the public, the Press Council publishes a guidebook for journalistic behaviour. This has been revised and amended several times since it first appeared in 2007, with the last changes made in 2018. Some media outlets – among them *De Telegraaf* – do not recognise the Press Council, which undermines its legitimacy.

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 2 POINTS

Employment conditions among male and female journalists are equal in terms of conditions and pay.

The Netherlands is ranked 6th on the Gender Equality Index, and 3rd in the “employment” domain (EIGE, 2019a, 2019b). Interviewee Jo Bardoel mentioned a tremendously positive evolution in this regard, in the last ten to twenty years. There is no indication that women are currently paid less than men, although more female than male journalists do tend to work part-time. It was also observed that women also tended to work more on “soft” topics such as fashion and lifestyle, in contrast to men working on “hard” topics such as crime, politics, and finance.

Strikingly, none of the interviewees could provide a very clear answer to the question: “Are men and women in the media equal in terms of compensation?” This may indicate that internal gender equality is not very high on the agenda, a view supported by the lack of any explicit language regarding staff gender diversity in the NPO’s performance agreement (Rijksoverheid, 2017). Moreover, in putting together a panel of 16 interviewees, we were only able to find four female respondents. Female inequality seems to be viewed as a thing of the past, with one of the two female editors-in-chief we interviewed stating

that gender was not an issue for them. However, one of them also said that only 35 per cent of her staff were female, a figure she would like to see increase and an issue that she would bear in mind as part of future recruitment procedures.

(F9) Gender equality in media content

2 POINTS

Although there is a growing sensitivity among journalists for gender equality in media content, media professionals overestimate the number of women in the news. No formal rules apply. The public broadcasters (at local, regional, and national level) do not follow a quota system, although they are supposed to represent women in a balanced way.

Gender equality was seen to be much more of a private and personal concern among journalists, and some are more sensitive to it than others. Our interviewees acknowledged its importance, but admitted that gender equality in media content continues to be limited. In daily practice, time constraints often meant that they turn to the same old and trusted sources. Therefore, although no formal rules exist, there was a general feeling among our interviewees that news stories are now more gender balanced, both when it came to the sources used and to the actors covered in the news stories. Some stylebooks mention gender equality regarding news sources. Our interviewees expressed the idea that female journalists put gender equality higher on the agenda.

The NPO's performance agreement (Rijksoverheid, 2017: 7) stipulates that it must ensure a balanced representation of women. While NPO is obligated to measure the representation of women in its television and radio broadcasts as part of its performance measurement, it does not have to adhere to quota rules. The representation of women in traditional news media (newspaper, television, and radio) is lower in the Netherlands (19.5%) when compared with worldwide (24%) and European (25%) proportions of the same in the 2015 edition of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) (Women Inc, 2017: 12). Strikingly, Dutch media professionals overestimated the quantum of female experts: 53 per cent of them felt that 20 to 40 per cent of experts are female, although the actual figure is only 12 per cent (Women Inc, 2017). The Media Authority noted that, of all the guests in Dutch news and opinion programmes between 2010 and 2015, only 22 per cent were women (Atria, 2017). Given an increased use of online news media sources, the GMMP has also included the representation of women in the digital news media as one of the aspects to monitor. The percentage of women in the news on four Dutch news sites varied from 9 per cent at *nu.nl*, to 10 per cent at *nos.nl*, to 33 per cent at *joop.nl*. All of these combined asserts that the Netherlands is less advanced in this respect than Europe as a whole (24%) or even when seen in relation to the group of 144 countries surveyed in the world (average = 25%).

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms
(alias social media)

2 POINTS

Misinformation is a crucial issue in Dutch newsrooms. Only a few media outlets check online comments using algorithmic tools. Sufficient training is provided.

Misinformation and fake news are high on the agenda in Dutch newsrooms. Somewhat surprisingly, none of the journalists interviewed indicated that their news media were using automated fact-checking tools, such as the Google News Initiative or membership in the Open Data Institute, for instance.

Checking news sources seemed to rank at or near the very top of journalistic values in the Netherlands. For instance, *De Telegraaf* has the co-workers of the writer proofread articles. Further on, the news chief, the editor-in-chief, and the final editor read pieces to minimise the risk of publishing sloppy work or false information. In October 2019, a report commissioned by Interior Minister Ollongren (Rogers & Niederer, 2019) presented the impact of disinformation and so-called junk news appearing on social media before and during the 2019 Provincial Council elections and European Parliament elections in the Netherlands. This report signalled a proliferation of large volumes of tendentious and fake news. Examples of actual disinformation and fake news are hardly found in the Netherlands, but many hyperpartisan, extreme, and openly ideological “junk news” sites, such as *Opinie2*, *Stop de Bankiers*, *E.J. Bron*, *Dagelijkse Standaard*, *Climategate*, *geenstijl.nl*, *tpo.nl*, and so forth are in existence. Clickbait sites include *tpook*, *parra*, *viraaltjes*, *aboutmedia*, and *hardewaarheid*. In addition, sources that devote a lot of attention to conspiracy theories include, among others, *Nine for news*, *Martin Vrijland*, *DLM Plus*, *Wanttoknow*, and *Ellaster*.

There is certainly a growing need for fact-checking in the present times, compared with what was the case in the last five to ten years. Websites such as *hoaxmelding.nl* and *nieuwscheckers.nl* compile lists of instances of false news on social media (Rogers & Niederer, 2019). Investigative journalism platforms such as *Investico* (started in 2016) and *FTM* (started in 2010) were created to check the quantity of misinformation and fake news. Indeed, fact-checking has become a flourishing industry in recent years. Audiences have also proved to show a greater interest in fact-checks, more so during the Covid-19 crisis. Data journalism is also on the rise; two examples are 1) *FTM* and public broadcaster NOS have been working with LocalFocus, a company specialised in data visualisation, and 2) *De Telegraaf* has an editorial staff studying data relevant to various societal trends.

Some news media outlets have also been investing more time and staff in fact-checking. For instance, *nu.nl* has hired an extra full-time equivalent for that purpose. This is not the practice at NOS, where specific fact-checking is, more often than not, carried out by individual journalists. Generally speaking, content on social media is seen as a barometer but not as a main news source.

Algorithmic tools are not yet in use, except for screening online comments (still in beta testing at *nu.nl*). Some news media platforms such as *Twentsche Courant Tubantia* do not allow comments on their own website, but use Facebook as a moderating tool for online comments. Filtering out comments that are racist, promote violence, and so forth can be categorised as fact-checking, according to Huub Evers. In addition, the public broadcaster has been checking facts with the help of the University of Leiden. Training is provided on how to identify manipulated images or, for instance, on data scraping. The Association of Investigative Journalists (VVOJ) is taking the lead in providing relevant training.

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment 3 POINTS

(Online) harassment is an increasing problem in the Netherlands. *Persveilig.nl* was launched as a contact point to address problems. In general, journalists are supported and protected by their employer's legal department.

Dutch journalists are confronted with harassment, “shit storms”, and insults, especially online. In most cases, these matters tend to abate by themselves, but on occasion, the media company's legal department has had to be called upon, entailing a report being issued to the police. The general level of support provided was considered fair and sufficient by the journalists interviewed.

The website *persveilig.nl* was launched in November 2019 as a contact point where journalists could report threats of all kinds related to their profession. *Persveilig.nl* is a collaboration between the Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ), the Association of Editors-in-Chief, the police, and the Public Prosecutor's Office. Strikingly, only a few of the journalists we interviewed had heard of this initiative.

At present, security agents protect NOS crews that film demonstrations on the ground. It has been commonly believed over the last few years that organised crime groups threaten crime reporters. An attack against the building of *De Telegraaf* in 2018 was directly linked with the newspaper's coverage of organised crime. However, the reporter in question and his family have since been under the constant protection of security agents.

Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level 1 POINT

Ownership concentration on a national level is remarkably high, with only five large media companies sharing the market among them. IN 2011
2 POINTS

It is a well-known fact that media concentration threatens pluralism of reporting. Such pluralism is considered a major value in its importance for healthy opinion formation in a democratic society. Given the current media landscape and the actual use that people make of the media, observers have been criticising the traditional division of media markets according to newspaper and magazine press, radio, and television. They have been in favour of looking at particular media markets to serve specific functions (information, leisure, etc.) in which media platforms are interchangeable. The media authority continues to monitor different media outlets, which is considered to be the most in line with international media practice, based on the sector-by-sector approach of competition policies. Moreover, each medium possesses particular characteristics that make a specific contribution to the provision of information. This is why such modes of dissemination must be looked at separately in order to determine actual media concentration and plurality of media content. There must be sufficient competition within each media type (see also CvM, n.d.).

As of 2018, the television market was dominated by three large players: public broadcaster NPO (NPO1, NPO2, and NPO3), RTL Nederland (RTL4, RTL5, RTL7, RTLZ, and RTL8), and Talpa Network (SBS6, Net 5, Veronica, and SBS9) (CvM, 2019a). NPO's market share was 35.5 per cent (CR1 = 0.35), RTL's 23.1 per cent (CR2 = 0.59), and Talpa Network's 15.9 per cent (CR3 = 0.75). In comparison with the situation in 2008, the CR3-index has improved very slightly (-0.028). However, it still reveals the highly concentrated nature of the television market (CvM, 2019a). In 2018, the first nine of the ten most-viewed channels (i.e., with the highest average daily reach among the Dutch population aged 6+) belonged to one of these three large players. The Regional Public Broadcasting Foundation (daily reach of 13 regional public service broadcasters) is the tenth most-viewed channel, and the only one not belonging to any of the "big three" players (CvM, 2019a).

In 2018, the radio market was comparably concentrated by three dominant players. Of these, Talpa Network (Radio 538, Sky Radio, Radio 10, and Radio Veronica) possessed a market share of 33 per cent (CR1 = 0.33), public broadcaster NPO (NPO Radio 1, NPO Radio 2, and NPO 3FM) 30 per cent (CR2 = 0.63), and DPG Media (Q-music) 8.7 per cent (CR3 = 0.72). The C3-index increased by 13.8 per cent between 2008 and 2018, primarily due to the takeover of Sky Radio by Talpa Network in 2017 (CvM, 2019a). Based on average

daily reach (which represented the Dutch population aged 10+), seven out of the ten most-listened-to channels were owned by one of these three radio players. The other three channels in the top ten were the regional public broadcaster, 100%NL (owned by RadioCorp, an independent media company), and E Power Radio (a private company comprised of fourteen regional commercial channels and one national channel).

The shares for the daily newspaper market are based on circulation data from Nationaal Onderzoek Multimedia, which represents the “total circulation in the Netherlands per year”. At present, only two big companies own most of the newspapers: Mediahuis (*De Telegraaf*, *NRC Media*, *Holland Media*, with regional titles) and DPG Media (*ADR Nieuwsmedia* – *Algemeen Dagblad*, and regional titles such as *Het Parool*, *de Volkskrant*, and *Trouw*). Besides these, there is the smaller FD Media group, owner of specialist newspaper *Financieel Dagblad* (as well as BNR Nieuwsradio, with a daily reach of 0.8 per cent in 2018 among the population aged 10+). The only available figures are the most recent (4th quarter of 2019), based on brand reach (online and offline, based on the population aged 13+). The first six newspapers are all owned by Mediahuis or DPG Media: *ADR Nieuwsmedia* (71.5%), *De Telegraaf* (55.1%), *de Volkskrant* (33.9%), *NRC* (26.8%), *Metro* (owned by Mediahuis – 26.4%), and *Trouw* (20.5%). *FD* is the first newspaper that is not owned by either of the two largest media companies. Its monthly branch reach is 9.3 per cent (NOM, 2020). These percentages combine online and offline reach. There were no figures available to indicate the reach of news websites exclusively. Since the end of 2019, *nu.nl* has been owned by DPG Media. It is the only Dutch news website in the top-10 list of the most visited websites on a monthly basis. Of those, *Alphabet* leads the list along with *Google*, *Google Maps*, and *Google Play* (CvM, 2019a).

(E2) Media ownership concentration regional (local) level 1 POINT

The same two large players dominate both the national and regional newspaper markets. By contrast, concentration in the regional radio and television market is considerably lower.

IN 2011
1 POINT

As of 2018, the major regional publishers – Mediahuis and DPG Media – also dominated the national level. For the most part, the regional news offering could be assigned to a specific owner, because separate figures were not available for each door-to-door magazine (CvM, 2019a). As Piet Bakker mentioned, hyperlocals are very diverse, both in the way they bring news to the readers and in terms of their reach figures, but most of them (such as *VersBeton*) are independent.

Concentration in the regional radio and television market was found to be considerably lower, because each province had its own regional public broadcaster. At the local level, 77 localities are defined, 9 of which have no local regional broadcaster at all (NLPO, 2020). The audiences of regional public broadcasters varied a lot across the different regions, but were able to be reached via radio, television, and the Internet. For instance, RTV Oost was found to really be in touch with the population of the province of Overijssel (east of the country, 25 villages, 1.15 million inhabitants), being a news leader, and providing high-profile stories via radio, television, app, and social media, resulting in 170,000 singular listeners, 660,000 singular viewers, and an average of 1,019,750 visitors online on a weekly basis. RTV Noord (in the northern province of Groningen – 12 villages with 584,000 inhabitants) demonstrated the following reach figures: 121,000 singular listeners, 812,000 singular viewers and an average of 715,250 visitors online on a weekly basis. In the province of Brabant (in the south – 62 villages with 2.5 million inhabitants), Omroep Brabant is available through radio, television, and online platforms. On a weekly basis, it reached 255,000 singular listeners, 961,000 singular viewers, and an average of 2,156,000 visitors online (ORN, 2020).

(E3) Diversity of news formats

3 POINTS

Dutch news media range across a wide array of different news formats, from headline news online to long-form reads in newspapers and discussion programmes on radio and television.

IN 2011
2 POINTS

All forms of news media are available online, and digital subscriptions for print media have crucially grown in the last five to ten years. This has resulted in a combination of news articles or sections (varying from headline news to one article in 24 hours) that are freely accessible, and other items behind a paywall. The public broadcaster as well as *nu.nl*, *Investico*, and *VersBeton* are the only exceptions, with all their online content being freely accessible. In 2009, there were four free-sheets available. As of 2020, *Metro* is the only one left, and this too became an online-only publication in the spring.

According to a *De Telegraaf* reporter, there has been an increase in the diversity of formats, owing to the availability and reach of various platforms. For instance, an article is constrained by a maximum length in the space of a newspaper, but its online platform offers more room for background information. The reporter also mentioned that she uses her personal Twitter account for live reporting and background information. In addition, she stated that she used Twitter to interact frequently with her audience (which includes answering questions). Huub Evers also noted that more background materials, such as full reports, are now accessible via Twitter.

Such a flexibility of online formats can also be illustrated by *Investico*'s work process. The journalists working for this platform of investigative journalism create content as part of their partnerships (for which they are paid), but in a few days' time, the original and long versions of their pieces are made available, including full disclosure of their sources.

Two other examples of the increasing diversity of formats include the recent emergence of podcasts focusing on economics, business, and world politics, available on the website of BNR Nieuwsradio, and the live talk shows that *Vers-Beton* has been conducting in Rotterdam, three to four times a year since 2018.

(E4) Minority/Alternative media

2 POINTS

IN 2011
3 POINTS

The public broadcaster aims at inclusive broadcasting. Minority groups, among them ethnic minorities, can make their voices heard. In this regard, some forms of media are doing better than others. Cultural diversity and diversity of opinion remain thorny issues.

“Public broadcasting is available for everyone, of whatever colour and age”, vide the Media Act. The NPO's concession policy plan 2016–2020, entitled “Het publiek voorop” [“The public first”], also mentions pluriformity and diversity as two key values of broadcasting policy: “NPO's media brands aim to offer to its audience a balanced picture of the society and diverse set of beliefs, opinions and interests among the population in the social and cultural field” (NPO, 2015: 70). In aiming towards a proportional representation of ethnic minorities, quota agreements were created in the past (e.g., 11 %, proportional to the percentage in the population). Such an ethnic minority quota was later dismissed. In line with its performance agreement (Rijksoverheid, 2017: 7), NPO aims to represent people with a non-Western migration background in a balanced way as a way to mitigate prejudices against them. In their book *Heb je een boze moslim voor mij?* [Got an angry Muslim for me?], Annebregt Dijkman and Zoë Papaikonomou (2018) criticise the lack of cultural and religious diversity in newsrooms of current affairs programmes, which – they argue – leads to unidimensional, often negative portrayals of certain groups. Like these authors, Shashi Roopman (quoted by Mercita Coronel in an interview published in *dekanttekening.nl* in December 2019), the editor of *Up! Network NL*, a right-wing online media platform, is convinced about the importance of diversity in the media, but his interpretation is different. In his view, ethnic representation is limited to a number of ethnic groups (Turks, Moroccans, Africans) and framed through a predominantly left-wing orientation: linking ethnicity automatically with the left-wing political frame. Conversely, right-wing broadcasters PowNed and Wij Nederland have joined the “left-wing” public broadcasting system. Ongehoord

Nederland [Unheard Dutch] has come forward as an aspiring broadcaster. Other initiatives aimed at improving diversity in the newsroom relate to attracting news columnists by newspapers as well as the conscious decision of the correspondent to make its editorial staff less homogeneous. Public broadcaster NPO operates FunX Radio. While it was planning to add a sub channel called Turkpop to FunX Radio to reach youngsters and young adults with a Turkish migration background, the then State secretary Sander Dekker vetoed this. He argued that it would conflict with NPO's mandate to connect the populations (Ministerie van OCW, 2015). The days of target-group television are over, but no structural alternative has emerged in its place. Therefore, a key question remains on whether cultural diversity and a diversity of opinion can be found in the programmes of the mainstream media.

(E5) Affordable public and private news media

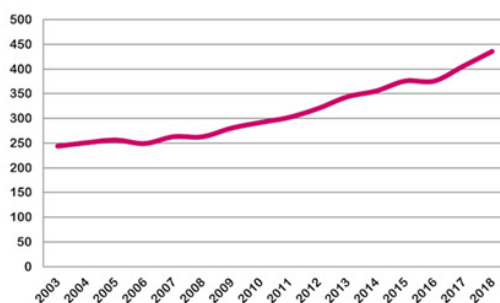
3 POINTS

News media have moderate sales prices compared to the average income of Dutch households.

IN 2011
3 POINTS

Bakker (2018) conducted research on the prices of newspapers over the years. Figure 1 shows the trend in price increase between 2003 and 2018 (4% between 2003 and 2012, and 5% between 2013 and 2018). For the purpose of comparison, let us indicate that in 2017, the average yearly disposable income of more than 7.7 million Dutch households was EUR 41,000, which was a 10.8 per cent increase from 2013 (EUR 37,000 per year, per household) (CBS, 2019).

Figure 1 Average annual price for a full newspaper subscription (online and offline)



Comments: Only the prices of six regional titles were available in 2018. The 2017 figure is based on a 2016–2018 average, as no figures were available.

Source: Graph from Bakker, 2018

The Netherlands also has several (wireless) Internet providers: the price of an Internet connection varies from EUR 22 to approximately EUR 80 per month. These prices are dependent on the connection times and various extra options, with the speed of the connection being one of them. The cheapest Internet and television combination package is EUR 45 per month, but prices of about EUR 100 per month are also found (internetvergelijk.nl, 2020).

NPO Start (the national public broadcaster's online video platform) has three subscription modes: 1) free of charge without creating an account, in which one can watch or listen live to television and radio, with a possibility to time-shift specific programmes (e.g., radio podcasts) in order to view or listen to them after the live broadcast; 2) free of charge with an account, which comes with extra options such as writing a child profile or starring programmes as favourites; and 3) NPO Start Plus, which makes it possible to watch and listen to ad-free radio and television programmes for EUR 2.95 per month. Programmes are available in HD quality and can be time-shifted, with the options of being viewed or listened to for a longer period. Previous seasons of some programmes are also available (NPO, 2019).

(E6) Content monitoring instruments

3 POINTS

The Dutch Media Authority publishes the Media Monitor, an annual report that analyses ownership relations and markets, with a specific focus on pluralism in news media. The Dutch Journalism Fund strongly focuses on research and monitoring news media, including those related to local and regional news.

IN 2011
3 POINTS

One of the tasks entrusted to the Dutch Media Authority is to watch over the separation between the editorial and the commercial aspects of television and radio. It does this through the Media Law, which lays down rules for public and commercial broadcasters to follow, enforcing them at the national, regional, and local levels. The Media Authority is, additionally, also in charge of granting broadcasting licences for radio and television, and auditing the annual accounts of public broadcasting organisations.

Since 2002, the Media Authority has been publishing the Media Monitor, an annual report analysing ownership relations in the media market, with a specific focus on pluralism in news media. Since 2018, the Media Monitor has been primarily based on the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. Since 2005, separate studies have been carried out each year focusing specifically on the news market in the Netherlands. The most recent of these studies pertain to the representation of men and women on television, as well as filter bubbles. Since 2017, there is also a yearly study which looks at diversity on television as well as the satisfaction and viewing behaviour of the audience.

The Dutch Journalism Fund is heavily involved in research that monitors the Dutch news media market with a specific focus on the local and regional news supply. In the recent past, examples are 1) a 2014 study which mapped news use and news supply before and during the municipal elections (Landman et al., 2015); 2) a large-scale scenario study published in 2015 about the future of journalism (Kasem et al., 2015); and 3) a 2018 study of the news ecosystems in the four largest Dutch cities (Utrecht, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam). Moreover, under the heading “State of the News media”, the Dutch Journalism Fund provides constant updates about the Dutch news media.¹

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level

2 POINTS

Most media organisations comply with the guidelines of the Press Council and the Code of the Association of Editors-in-Chief or observe a code of conduct of their own.

IN 2011
2 POINTS

The guidelines of the Netherlands Press Council list general rules to further objectivity in journalism. The Press Council resorts to these guidelines when dealing with complaints. The *Genootschap van Hoofredacteuren* then writes the second. The latter is a more specific manual than the general guidelines. It lists a number of concepts which constitute the basis of an open and democratic society. The members of the Association are committed to heeding these rules.

Some media, such as *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool*, do not recognise the authority of the Council. However, since 2013, *Elsevier Weekblad* and RTL have been affiliated again with the Council after a 13-year hiatus. There is no published list of Council members. In the annual report (RvDj, 2019), the following media organisations were mentioned as part of the foundation and financially contributing to the continuation of the Council: RTL, Talpa TV, NPO (national public broadcaster), RPO (regional public broadcaster), and NLPO (local public broadcaster).

Media researcher Huub Evers indicated that in the last one or two decades, news media organisations have developed their own codes. However, in practice, these are only referred to when problems arise. NPO ombudsperson Margo Smit also shared this experience. She expressed her regrets over the lack of discussions and open debate about the internal codes as well as the national codes.

(E8) Level of self-regulation**2 POINTS**In 2011
3 POINTS

The Press Council, which examines complaints about media coverage, is a self-regulatory organisation. Self-regulation can also be found in the open debate culture on fairness, balance, and impartiality in the newsrooms.

The Press Council is a self-regulatory organisation that examines complaints lodged by citizens or other media outlets about reports and articles in the media. The primary aim is to find a compromise between two parties so that a lawsuit can be avoided. To this end, the Council has written down a code of conduct or guidelines in a guidebook that serves as the basis for high-quality and objective journalistic practice that will not harm anyone's rights.

A second instrument intended to promote journalistic quality was the Nederlandse Nieuwsmonitor [Dutch News Monitor], launched in 2005. It had three types of reports: a continuous monitor, an event monitor, and an issue monitor. The latest study published on *nieuwsmonitor.org* about the future of the ANP (Dutch press agency) in the rapidly changing media landscape dates back to December 2018.

The Media Ombudsman Foundation (MON) is the other organisation dedicated to journalistic ethics and self-regulation in the Dutch language area. The MON chairman has also published his views about national and international news trends on the organisation's website. MON's overarching mission is to make a relevant and substantive contribution to the recalibration of basic journalistic principles such as reliability, diligence, independence, objectification of the facts, hearing both sides, (self-) critical analysis, ethical justification, and willingness to rectify. MON also tests news media (both printed, audiovisual, and online) against moral and ethical standards.

All journalists interviewed referred to an oral-debate newsroom culture revolving around fairness, balance, and impartiality of news reporting. They indicated that most of these discussions usually take place on an ad hoc basis during editorial meetings.

(E9) Participation**3 POINTS**In 2011
3 POINTS

Audience participation happens by posting comments in some online newspaper editions or via Facebook pages, and by e-mails to the editor-in-chief or the ombudsperson.

An open debate with the news audience is highly valued, and the news media is always on the lookout for innovative methods to interact with its audiences, said the interviewed journalists. In comparison with 2009, most news sites today do not have a facility to post comments online. When comments are allowed,

sites apply some sort of moderation to achieve a healthy debate. Most of them use a registration system. Some news media outlets, meanwhile, choose Facebook as a way of communicating with their readers, as well as a monitoring tool. The audience is asked for information in specific cases via websites, social media platforms, or newspapers. All interviewed journalists said user-generated content was never an option for them. They firmly said that journalism was a serious profession and audiences could only be used as witnesses in case of specific news events.

The business model of donations followed by *VersBeton* or *FTM* encourages direct interaction with the audience, where members can send e-mails to the editors-in-chief. Sending e-mails or letters to the editor is still a common practice in the Dutch news media. Twitter is also used to interact with the audience (see Indicator E3 – Diversity of news formats). News media with an ombudsperson such as NPO, *De Limburger*, *NRC Handelsblad*, and *de Volkskrant* can rely on intermediaries between the editorial staff and the audience. An interesting example of interaction with the audience is the *nuij.nl* platform of the *nu.nl* general website. This distinct website, reopened in April 2018 after a one-and-half-year hiatus, discusses news by getting in touch with editors and contributing to articles. In an effort to ensure a constructive discussion, there are specific rules in place, and the website assigns editors to moderate the content.

Meanwhile, one of the missions of MON (not mentioned under Indicator E8 – Level of self-regulation) is its role as a contact point for fighting misinformation. The audience, along with journalists with professional values, is deemed responsible for fighting the information crises. However, the comments on the MON website actually reflect a very poor practice of public interaction.

In NPO's 2016–2020 concession policy plan ("The public first"), interaction with the audience is a key aspect: programme content can be found on the public broadcaster's website, on social media, or on a search engine. Through these gateways, which include search options and referrals, viewers are catered to on the platform of their choice.

(E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

2 POINTS

Most news media organisations enjoy a culture of openness with room for discussion on internal pluralism, although this is still a matter of individual interests of journalists. No formal rules are in place.

IN 2011
2 POINTS

Compared with 2009, sensitivity towards internal pluralism has increased in Dutch newsrooms, confirmed Jo Bardoel. While the NPO has a legal obligation to represent all significant voices in society, private media outlets follow their own preferences. The newsroom journalists we interviewed confirmed that the choice of experts and voices was repeatedly discussed, although it was more of

a private and personal concern among journalists (see also Indicator F8 – Rules and practices on internal gender equality). However, most of our interviewees admitted that looking for new, diverse faces and voices regularly falls prey to time constraints and tight editorial deadlines. Also, experienced experts know what is expected from them based on media logic, making the journalists' lives easier with quick and adequate responses.

Overall, diverse opinions are welcome in Dutch newsrooms and are promoted by most editors-in-chief, albeit within the scope of the news medium's focus. Some stylebooks mention gender equality of news sources. In general, the search for ethnic minorities is a trickier issue, because newsrooms include only a few journalists with an ethnic minority background. Most of the editors-in-chief we interviewed spontaneously brought up their explicit search for suitable journalists with an ethnic profile other than Dutch.

Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)

(C1) Supervising the watchdog "control of the controllers"

2 POINTS

In 2011
2 POINTS

There is no independent institution in the country that systematically monitors media performance, although the website *denieuwereporter.nl* and Media Ombudsman Foundation (MON) are inviting citizens and media professionals to think about the media's role as a watchdog.

Compared with 2009, the independent foundation Stichting Mediadebatbureau, which aimed at stimulating reflections among citizens about media quality, reliability, and diversity, no longer exists. The BNR Nieuwsradio discussion programme *Mediazaken* [*Media matters*], in which media professionals reviewed issues concerning journalism and the media, was discontinued in April 2016. However, online-only initiatives such as *FTM* and *De Correspondent* have started their operations in the past decade. Their mission statements – “revealing the truth” and “acting as watchdog” – are crucial, including in relation to other media organisations. In general, experts, journalists, and audiences do trust the Dutch news media to play their roles as watchdogs. Trust in news is also relatively high in the Netherlands: 14 per cent of the population indicated that they did not trust the news, compared with 53 per cent stating they did (CvM, 2019a).

However, openness to external evaluation is low because independence is very highly valued. Moreover, the journalists interviewed were convinced that journalistic values were automatically embedded in each individual journalist, resulting in no need for an external assessment of their professionalism.

An initiative to stimulate discussion of and research on the influence of new media and social-cultural developments can be found on the *denieuwereporter.nl* website, started in 2005. Its editor-in-chief is university lecturer Alexander Pleijter. The website is an independent blog about journalistic practice, with an open forum for debate and comments about developments in the media, a refreshing source of ideas for self-reflection among journalistic circles (De Nieuwe Reporter, 2020).

The MON (see Indicators E8 – Level of self-regulation and Indicator, & E9 – Participation) also works on deliberations over journalistic ethics and values. An ongoing debate in the Netherlands is about the need for an independent news ombudsperson. In 2019, MON chairman Jan van Groesen had stated that due to the absence of an independent ombudsperson, news media couldn't properly fulfil their function as an information provider. It is worth noting, however, that the website's publication rate is very low (in 2020, so far there is only one article; 2019 had one article, 2018 two articles, and 2017 three articles) and the most recent reaction to a piece dated back to 2016.

(C2) Independence of the news media from powerholders 1 POINT

The Dutch news media enjoy relative independence from the powers that be. Media ownership concentration increased in the last decade, with more media titles held by a single owner.

IN 2011
1 POINT

Mergers and acquisitions reshaped the Dutch media landscape in the last decade. Strikingly, more media titles and brands are held by one and the same owner compared with 2009, leading to a higher risk of influence of power and conflict of interests. For instance, in 2009, RTL Nederland was also partly held by Talpa media, but is now fully owned by the RTL Group. Earlier, Talpa Media and Mecom owned the Telegraaf Media Groep, but since 2018, 99.5 per cent of its shares are held by Mediahuis. The last example is that of Talpa Network, created by John de Mol, who set up Talpa Holding NV to host all his media activities, mainly focusing on radio and television (having sold all shares in newspapers). Since 2018, John de Mol also owns the Dutch news agency ANP. An exception in this concentration trend is the FD Mediagroep: controlled (98%) by HAL Holding, it owns both *Het Financieele Dagblad* and BNR Nieuwsradio.

Some of the journalists we interviewed indicated that the high level of media ownership concentration (see Indicators E1 & E2 – Media ownership concentration national and regional (local) levels) is making it more difficult for journalists and especially freelancers to move from one media company to another, if the latter is owned by the same company. However, our interviewees denied any

direct influence of owners over the journalistic daily routines (see Indicator F6 – Company rules against *external* influence on newsroom/editorial staff).

(C3) Transparency of data on leading news media 3 POINTS

On its *mediamonitor.nl* website, the media authority describes the current media ownership relations.

IN 2011
3 POINTS

The websites of the commercial media's parent companies and their annual accounts usually provide all the data needed about their (major) shareholders, but they don't mention advertising markets. The information regarding Indicators E1, E2, and C3 do not appear in the colophons of newspapers or magazines, nor on the websites of television or radio channels. Some media organisations (such as *NRC Handelsblad* or *Investico*) make their editorial statutes and mission statements available online, while others (such as *nu.nl* and *Tweentsche Courant Tubantia*) do not.

On *mediamonitor.nl*, which is open to the general public, the media authority describes both the current ownership situation, and the news consumption trends.

(C4) Journalism professionalism 2 POINTS

The Dutch newsrooms have become highly professionalised over the past decades. Close examination of the work done, and being done, is a regular feature of editorial meetings. However, this mostly occurs on an ad hoc basis. Only a few news media organisations have an ombudsperson.

IN 2011
3 POINTS

As Jo Bardoel pointed out, journalism has become highly professionalised over the past decades, with an increase in academic profiles and well-developed curricula both at the bachelor's and master's level. According to Bardoel, journalism was never as good as it is today. Investigative journalism has also become more powerful in recent years.

This positive outlook was tempered somewhat by Evert de Vos, the chairman of the Dutch Association of Investigative Journalists, who did recognise that professionalism and investigative journalism had improved, but added that it very much depended on what news medium one was looking at. The cutbacks in regional print media had closed the door to investigative journalism. Moreover, de Vos indicated that a lot of smaller investigative platforms were depending on subsidies, which was not a sustainable business model, especially in view of the decision to allocate the 2021 "special research projects" funding to the

special Covid-19 fund intended to help door-to-door newspapers and local public broadcasters (see also the “Covid-19” section).

The journalists interviewed indicated that, in practice, self-reflection was limited to an ad hoc and fleeting critical evaluation during editorial meetings. The open debate culture (see Indicator F4 – Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy) often resulted in lively discussions on how news was selected and framed. Such discussions were more difficult to achieve when everyone was working from home, as had been the case during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Another facet was the open debate culture with the audience (see Indicator E8 – Level of self-regulation). For instance, the editor-in-chief of *Twentsche Courant Tubantia* often responded to audience comments based on disagreements on how a news article ought to be written or on the timing of a news story. The most effective form of self-reflection was also found in news media with an ombudsperson, such as NPO, *De Limburger*, *NRC Handelsblad*, and *de Volkskrant*. These media outlets benefitted from the buffer effect created by the presence of intermediaries between the editorial staff and the audience (see also Indicators E8 – Level of self-regulation, & E9 – Participation).

(C5) Journalists’ job security

2 POINTS

In general, the Association of Journalists controls the basic working conditions of professional journalists in the Netherlands.

IN 2011
2 POINTS

The Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ) controls the basic working conditions for professional journalists in the Netherlands. They are into negotiating collective employment agreements and copyright contributions, providing legal advice to its members, discussing insurance issues, and so forth. A notable trend, however, is that permanent contracts have become very scarce in journalism. Freelancers are more and more the norm in the Netherlands. Jo Bardoel, Piet Bakker, and Huub Evers confirmed this trend. Younger journalists with “flexible” (read “uberised”) contracts were replacing their retired predecessors, said Bardoel. Piet Bakker also indicated that the increased number of freelancers was a direct consequence of the media concentration, characterised by ever fewer media companies. This has resulted in a fierce battle in the rates paid to freelancers, as confirmed by the journalists we interviewed. The NVJ is doing a good job, also in the case of conflicts with freelance contractors, thinks Piet Bakker. He has no knowledge of cases in which freelancers or journalists were dismissed due to personal convictions. The increase in the number of freelancers reduces job security, especially in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Even now, some news media organisations are refraining from hiring, fearing that the crisis will only make things worse in the future.

(C6) Practice of access to information

1 POINT

IN 2011
1 POINT

One of the most important sources of news is government, with Dutch legislation on the public nature of government records giving citizens (and hence journalists) the right to access government data. The way in which the law functions as well as the lengthy procedures involved are strongly criticised.

For citizens to be well informed, it is important that journalists have easy access to information. As government information is one of the most important sources, free access is mandatory. The primary tool in Dutch legislation is the Public Access Act, which gives citizens (and hence journalists) the right to access government data. However, it is crucial that this kind of information is made easily accessible and understandable. It would be unacceptable if things were otherwise. Democracy can only benefit if government activities, at whatever level, can be followed and scrutinised.

In the past 10 to 15 years, journalists have time and again attacked the way in which the Public Access Act functions. It takes lengthy procedures to gain access to government information and often leads to dissatisfaction. Every journalist we interviewed complained about the time it took to obtain information and the quality of the information obtained, where often a lot of information was made illegible. Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Public Access Act was suspended, under the pretext that public servants lacked time. This measure was viewed as an attack against a fundamental democratic right. Journalists were becoming increasingly dependent on leaks and whistle-blowers, which is a clear frustration among the journalists interviewed. Journalists also use the Public Access Act for very simple questions which entail no political danger. One journalist told us that these simple questions could have been answered very easily via the telephone, as was the case 15 to 20 years ago. The first prerequisite of the Public Access Act is that everything is publicly accessible unless there is a good reason to make it inaccessible – but as it is, things seem to be working the other way around.

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement

3 POINTS

IN 2011
3 POINTS

The media themselves decide on the extent to which they play their role as watchdog, on the basis of their distinctive characteristics.

It goes without saying that it is the media's prerogative to choose the extent of their role as a watchdog. For instance, *De Telegraaf* journalists maintained that their task was to report the news based on the perception of what their audience wants. As their newspaper is not affiliated with the Press Council, one may

wonder whether it even has any concept of a watchdog. Quality newspapers *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* considered investigative journalism as their priority, noted Huub Evers. This is also the case for regional newspapers such as *Twentsche Courant Tubantia*, which won two “Tegels” awards (in 2009 and 2015) and was also nominated in 2020. *De Tegel* [*The Tile*] is a Dutch prize for journalism awarded since 2006. The 2019 winners included *NRC Handelsblad* (“background information” category), *NOS* and *NRC Handelsblad* (“news” category), *Algemeen Dagblad* (“reporting” category), *Trouw* and *RTL Nieuws* (“research” category), *De Limburger* (“regional/local” category), *de Volkskrant* (“text” category), and *Investico* (“pioneer” category).

Investigative online platforms such as *Investico* and *FTM* considered the watchdog role as part of their mission statements. *Investico* says on its website:

We strengthen the democratic rule of law by fuelling public debate. Not by presenting whipped-up scandals, but by explaining via news and research stories how decisions are made on social issues that are important to the Dutch audience, and by monitoring the implementation of these decisions.

The name of the *FTM* platform refers to the watchdog role: “When in doubt, follow the money”, or as mentioned on their website:

We do research on people, systems and organisations that misbehave (financially and economically) and thereby possibly cause damage to groups in society. Our weapon: radically independent journalism. “Follow the money” is our editorial Leitmotiv. Because if you follow the money trail you will discover the truth, whether it concerns care, the financial world, politics or education.

(C8) Professional training

2 POINTS

Training courses are offered by the Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ) and the Association of Investigative Journalists (VVOJ). Some media (companies) have set up their own training structures. Training opportunities depend on the news medium.

IN 2011
1 POINT

The Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ) and the Association of Investigative Journalists (VVOJ) offer a variety of training courses, ranging from an introduction to Big Data, to interviewing techniques, to how to deal with unsafe situations. As digital media is turning the entire profession of journalism on its ear – from text creation to Big Data analysis – requests for further professional training are mounting. The VVOJ’s annual conference is a big event that everyone wants to attend. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the VVOJ has been offering online training courses – these are always fully booked.

Some media organisations have an “in-house academy” of their own. This is the case of NPO, *NRC Handelsblad*, DPG Media, *Investico*, and *FTM*. At the public broadcaster’s, a training budget is made available to in-house employees but not to freelancers. *NRC Handelsblad* has its “NRC Academy”, with training courses run by internal and external instructors. As part of a talent programme, young journalists are trained and coached in the profession. *Investico* also runs a talent programme, which trains and coaches young journalists: “the masterclass”. *FTM* has a monthly knowledge session about topics such as data analysis or narrative techniques.

At the regional level, training courses are co-organised with students of university campuses, such as the school for journalism in Tilburg, regional public broadcasters, and regional newspapers. Other news media such as *nu.nl* offer more limited training options, such as less-frequent internal or external workshops or training sessions at the editorial level. The BNR Nieuwsradio journalist even said that there was no time at all for training, as working for radio meant being willing to pull out all the stops.

According to our interviewees, staff training requires time and money, both of which are scarce in newsrooms. Most editors-in-chief (who are in charge of approving any training course) are willing to support their journalists, but overall, possibilities are limited.

(C9) Watchdog function and financial resources

2 POINTS

Dutch newsrooms provide resources for investigative reporting as much as possible – no more, no less. The Dutch Journalism Fund subsidises specific projects on a temporary basis, as well as investigative journalism.

IN 2011
1 POINT

According to our academic interviewees, more staff and financial resources have been invested in media investigations of late, although no figures have been disclosed. Traditional news media have come to understand that in these times of freely accessible content, the need to be distinctive becomes that much more pressing, as indicated by our expert interviewee Jo Bardoel. According to Piet Bakker, so-called time or money constraints are poor excuses for an unwillingness to take a hard look at priorities. All journalists and editors-in-chief confirmed that resources could be, and are, made available for investigations. Overall, however, funds are limited. Teams are established and financed on an ad hoc basis. They are also based on subsidies such as those of the Fund for Special Journalistic Projects, which enables journalists and writers to set up projects of a special nature or quality. The fund seeks help to explore new angles based on which special news projects could be carried out.

Another subsidy fund is the Investigative Journalism Fund. It is intended to structurally strengthen the watchdog role of the news media by increasing the

investigative journalism function in the Dutch newsrooms. No less than 75 per cent of its budget goes to regional or local news media because, as mentioned earlier, they are the most vulnerable of all. This explains the government's decision to set up a temporary support fund for local and regional news media outlets in response to the current Covid-19 crisis (see "Covid-19" section). The other 25 per cent is allocated to national news media. An annual contribution of approximately EUR 5 million from the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science goes to the Dutch Journalism Fund in a bid to share knowledge, facilitate research, and stimulate collaboration and innovation.

Conclusions

Overall, we can conclude that Dutch journalists are able to play their role of buttresses of democracy. However, there are three problem areas. First, media ownership concentration is high in the Netherlands (see Indicator E1 – Media ownership concentration national level). This was a major concern among the journalists and experts we interviewed, as it constitutes a clear threat to media pluralism. It is not yet seen as an acute risk because news brands still retain enough differentiating features, catering to different audiences. However, the newsrooms of the regional newspapers of DPG Media are being dismantled. And the fact that in Flanders, the television, newspaper, and magazine newsrooms of DPG Media (News City) have been merged, does nothing to allay such fears.

Another critical issue is the lack of access to government data (see Indicator C6 – Practice of access to information). The Public Access Act procedure (the public nature of government records) is under strong criticism as being needlessly complicated and time consuming. The fact that the law was suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic is seen as a subtle move towards "autocratisation".

A third possible threat to a well-functioning journalistic infrastructure is the fact that permanent contracts are being exchanged for freelance deals, which entail very limited job security and low pay (see Indicator C5 – Journalists' job security), with increased ownership concentration making it even less easy to negotiate pay rates. The crisis also has a clearly noticeable impact on freelancers in the newsrooms of *De Telegraaf* and BNR Nieuwsradio. The loss of a number of media companies also detracts from freedom of expression, as new job opportunities are becoming scarcer. As a result, freelancers are being forced to work several jobs to make ends meet, more so at the regional and local levels. In other words, with freelancers' living hinged on the good will of the very actors of the stories they should be reporting on, the journalistic function is now increasingly in lockdown (see Indicator F7 – Procedures on news selection and news processing).

Note

1. see <https://www.svdj.nl/stand-van-de-nieuwsmedia/>

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