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Women and Leadership in the News Media 2025: Evidence from 12 Markets

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Key findings

In this Reuters Institute factsheet, we analyse the gender breakdown of top editors in a strategic sample of 240 major online and offline news outlets in 12 different markets across five continents.

Looking at a sample of ten top online news outlets and ten top offline news outlets in each of these 12 markets, we find:

- Only 27% of the 171 top editors across the 240 brands covered are women, despite the fact that, on average, 40% of journalists in the 12 markets are women. This is a small increase from 2024, when the figure was 24% across the same markets.
- Among the 32 new top editors appointed across brands covered this year and last, 11 (34%) are women.
- In all 12 markets, the majority of top editors are men, including in countries where women outnumber men among working journalists.
- The percentage of women in top editorial positions varies significantly from market to market, from 7% in South Korea to 46% in the UK. This year the UK has overtaken the US, and is, for the first time, the country in our sample with the highest share of women top editors, while the US, following its third consecutive decrease, is now tied in second place with South Africa.
- When we compare the percentage of women working in journalism with the percentage of women in top editorial positions, we find a weak positive correlation. Still, in nine out of 12 markets there are lower percentages of women in top editorial roles than women working as journalists.
- Looking more broadly at gender equality in society and the percentage of women in top editorial positions, we find no correlation. It continues to be the case that many countries that score well on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (UN GII) have relatively few women among the top editors.
- There is notable variation in the percentage of online news users in each market who say they get news from one or more major outlets with a woman as the top editor (whether online or offline). This ranges from, at the high end, 74% in Finland and Hong Kong to, at the low end, 23% in Mexico.
- Looking across the ten markets where we have collected data for six years, the percentage of women among the top editors has changed from 23% in 2020 to 28% in 2025.
- But the change is not consistent across the sample – while the percentage of women in top editorial positions has increased relative to 2020 in six countries, it has decreased in South Africa (47% to 38%) and South Korea (11% to 7%), and to a lesser extent in the United States (41% to 38%) and Brazil (22% to 21%).

General overview

Leaders play a critical role in news organisations. They define the priorities that will receive increasingly finite resources and the strategies to achieve them. They shape the workplace culture by fomenting particular rules, spoken and unspoken. And they represent news in the public eye, standing in for individual news brands and journalism more broadly. Given this practical and symbolic importance, understanding who occupies these positions of power and how well they reflect the public they serve matters.

This factsheet extends a line of work we began in 2020, focused on scrutinising gender diversity at the highest level of editorial leadership, a narrow but important indicator of diversity in newsroom management. We collect and analyse data across a sample of major online and offline news outlets in 12 different markets across five continents.

Our research builds on, and seeks to contribute to, the ongoing work done by some journalists and news media, as well as many decades of research documenting consistent disparities in journalism (e.g. Callison and Young 2019; Steiner 2017). While these problems are by no means new, they are also by no means resolved.

Recent studies, including from a growing variety of countries, continue to highlight persistent challenges confronting women journalists, ranging from exclusionary norms and practices that pigeonhole women to specific beats or hinder their career progression (e.g. Alankus 2024; Blumell and Mulupi 2024; Martínez-Corcuera and Faedo 2024), to sexual harassment from colleagues and sources (e.g. Hanusch et al. 2024; Baloch et al. 2024), to violence online and offline (Hart and Sharma 2024; Zviyita and Mare 2024).

Such obstacles, alongside broader societal disparities, provide a helpful backdrop for understanding why imbalances in news coverage, too, have proven so obstinate (e.g. Wheatley et al. 2024).

Methods and data

Building on and extending our work from past years (Andı et al. 2020; Eddy et al. 2023; Eddy et al. 2022; Robertson et al. 2021; Ross Arguedas et al. 2024), we examine a strategic sample of 12 markets with varying levels of gender equality, as measured by the UN Gender Inequality Index (UN GII). We include the same 12 markets we covered between 2021 and 2024, ten of which we also covered in 2020.

To get an overview of global differences and similarities, we include a diverse selection of markets from multiple continents. To leverage available data on the journalistic profession and on news and media use, we include 12 markets from those covered in *Worlds of Journalism* (Hanitzsch et al. 2019) and in the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2024* (Newman et al. 2024). While the *Digital News Report* provides fresh data each year, by now, the available *Worlds of Journalism* data is in some cases over ten years old.[1] The 12 markets included in the sample are: Kenya and South Africa in Africa; Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea in Asia; Finland, Germany, Spain, and the UK in Europe; Mexico and the US in North America; and Brazil in South America.

Our approach to data collection is identical to previous years. In each market we focused on the top ten offline (TV, print, and radio) and top ten online news brands in terms of weekly use, as measured in the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2024* (Newman et al. 2024). When compiling the top ten lists, we only included specific brands, leaving out catch-all categories, such as 'local news' or 'regional news'. We also excluded foreign news outlets that do not have newsrooms within the country of interest. Adhering to these lists also means that news aggregator brands such as Yahoo! News are included in the analysis if they (1) are widely used in that market (2) have local teams based there, and (3) produce at least some original content.

Since we focus on the most widely used online and offline brands, some important outlets with more limited reach are not included in the sample. (In the UK, for example, *The Economist* and the *Financial Times*, both of whom have a female editor-in-chief, are not in the sample.) Because of year-on-year

[1] *The Worlds of Journalism* data are not collected as frequently as the *Digital News Report* data or the UN GII data, but we use them here as the best available cross-country comparative data on the gender breakdown of the journalistic workforce. The data from Hanitzsch et al. (2019) used in this analysis were collected between 2012 and 2016, as the data collected between 2021 and 2023 are not yet publicly available.

changes in the most widely used brands and our focus on the top ten online and offline brands, there has been some turnover in the specific brands included in the analysis: 227 of the 240 brands covered in 2024 are included in the analysis again this year.

The data were collected in late January and early February 2025. We identified the top editor for each brand by checking their official webpages, press releases, and news coverage, supplemented by other public information, such as professional social media accounts (e.g. LinkedIn and X). We looked for the editor-in-chief or nearest equivalent (e.g. executive editor or head of news for TV), although the exact terminology varies from country to country and organisation to organisation. We compiled and double-checked our lists in consultation with local partners in every market, including current and former Reuters Institute Journalist Fellows and academic experts. In some cases we also contacted the brands or their press offices to confirm who is their top editor. Where organisations responded, we always deferred to their judgement.

We refer to the individuals identified collectively as the top editors. This, of course, does not imply that the top editor is the only person who matters, or is even always the most important person in terms of day-to-day editorial decision-making. For example, as Director General, Tim Davie is both the chief executive officer of the BBC and its editor-in-chief, both online and offline. So here he is coded as the top editor for the BBC both online and offline, even though Deborah Turness, the BBC's CEO of news and current affairs, is much closer to daily decision-making in, and holds more direct responsibility for, BBC News.

In most cases, it is possible to identify a single person in the role of top editor. However, exceptions to this can be found in Germany, where organisations sometimes have shared top leadership. Three such cases, where the joint top editors are a man and a woman, present in this year's data. Two of these instances corresponded to the online and offline version of a single brand, which has the same leadership for both, so we coded one each (i.e. the offline as led by a woman and online as led by a man). For the third brand, since there was only one data point, we simply coded the top editor as a woman.

In some instances, brands on our lists belong to (or have been absorbed by) larger media groups or conglomerates. In such cases, we privileged the name of the person in the top leadership role at the level of the *brand* listed – rather than the entire group – or in the case of some media groups in Kenya and South Africa with leadership organised around medium (e.g. radio, broadcast) rather than brand, at the *medium* level. Likewise, when there appeared to be clear convergence between the online and offline version of a brand, with a single person steering the ship, we used the same top editor for both. However, when we identified a different person in charge of the online version of a brand, and especially when we understood this to be tied to distinct content and distinct editorial teams or decision-making, we used different names for the online and offline versions of the brand.

We've made some updates to our data set this year, where we have found new or better information about the person in the top editor role. This typically does not affect the coding, but on rare occasions it can. This year we have two such instances across the 240 observations included: one in South Korea and one in Japan. In both of these cases, the corrections we identified correspond to changes in top editors that took place in the year before the timeframe of our current data collection (i.e. between January 2023 and January 2024). We have updated the 2024 figures for both countries in the relevant charts and analyses. Using the updated figures means the variation is slightly smaller than if we had not, but as we show in the findings, the shifts are still important in both markets. This is worth keeping in mind when interpreting the data.

In a constantly evolving media environment, where many news organisations offer little or no transparency about who is actually in charge, it sometimes requires a qualitative judgement to determine who the top editor is. Indeed, in some cases where there is no single, clearly designated editor-in-chief, or roles and responsibilities across online and offline parts of the same outlet are unclear, we have made a judgement call as to who to code as the top editor of the outlet in question. We have tried to be as clear and consistent as possible about the criteria used to code an opaque and inconsistent world. The primary point of the factsheet is to capture the overall pattern, even if in some cases individuals could have been coded differently.

Gender is not binary, but as far as we are able to ascertain, every editor in the sample identifies as either a woman or a man. We coded observations as missing in cases where both online and offline versions of the same brand share a top editor.[2]

In 2025, the analysis covers a total of 171 individuals across the 240 brands included. A few top editors had publicly or privately announced they were stepping down at or around the time of data collection. In these cases, where no replacement had been publicly announced by mid-February 2025, we chose to keep the outgoing top editor listed as is, and we include here the top editor as of mid-February.

Findings

Based on this dataset, we find that 27% of the 171 top editors across the 240 brands covered are women. While this is a slight improvement on last year's 24%, this is still substantially below the 40% of journalists in the 12 markets who are women and the proportion of women in the population more generally. And across all 12 markets, the majority of top editors are men.

Compared with last year, the top line has changed in several of the markets covered, as a result of both personnel changes and the introduction of new brands in the top editor list. Generally speaking, the data suggest a relatively slow pace of change and a high degree of inertia in the overall pattern, with turnover decreasing slightly in recent years: 14% of the brands included in both 2024 and 2025 have changed their top editor in the past year. This is very similar to the pace of change in 2024 (16%) and 2023 (17%), but slower than the pace of change in 2022 (24%) and 2021 (21%). From 2021 to 2025, the average annual turnover in top editorial positions among brands in our sample is 19%, but the figure varies considerably by country.

The percentage of women among new top editors this year is 34%, which is seven percentage points (pp) higher than the average for the full sample and 10pp higher than this data point last year – in other words, among new appointments, although far from achieving gender parity, there is a greater percentage of women. Likewise, we find higher representation of women among the 13 new brands added to the list this year, where 38% of top editors are women (14pp higher than last year).

As is clear from Figure 1, the percentage of women in top editorial positions continues to vary significantly across the 12 markets we cover. Overall, seven countries saw an increase in the proportion of women top editors, two remained the same, and three saw decreases.

We find the most fluctuation over the past year in Japan, the country with the highest turnover in top editor roles.[3] This has resulted in a 17pp increase, up from 8% last year. Meanwhile, we see the largest drop in South Korea, where a 6pp decrease to 7% has put it in last place among the 12 countries included in this analysis. (As noted in the 'Methods and data' section, both shifts were slightly reduced due to one update in each country.) As with last year, Mexico and Kenya are second- and third-to-last, respectively, despite small increases relative to last year. It is important to keep these country-specific variations in mind when interpreting the topline average; the change in Japan, for example, accounts for close to half of the increase in the 12-country average.

Meanwhile, the UK has for the first time overtaken the US, with the highest share of women top editors of the sample at 46%, followed by South Africa and the US (38%), and in third place Finland (36%). In the UK, the US, and South Africa, the changes this year (upward in the UK and South Africa, and downward in the US) are driven by personnel changes rather than differences in brands included.

Although our research spans only six years, we can see some interesting trends in the data over that time. In the UK, despite some minor dips, the trend has been generally upward since we first started collecting data in 2020, when only 29% of top editors were women.

[2] Likewise, sometimes roles are collapsed as news organisations consolidate functions among fewer individuals. When the person assuming the additional role is already on the top editor list, we reflect such instances in our data not as a change in personnel but in a reduced number of overall editors to avoid double counting (e.g. when an offline editor-in-chief takes over the online operation as well). However, when there are changes in the organisational structure resulting in new top editors, we do code such instances as a personnel change, as we are interested in capturing changes in organisational reality.

[3] Turnover reached 26% in Japan and 25% in South Korea this year. The US and Kenya also had higher-than-average levels of turnover at 22% and 21%, respectively.

Meanwhile, in the US, which had reached parity in our sample in 2022, the trendline is curved, with the 2025 levels returning to levels similar to – and even slightly below – those of 2020. In South Africa, the trend has been much more variable, with a high peak in 2021 (when it reached 60%), followed by large dips in 2022 and 2023, and smaller increases since then.

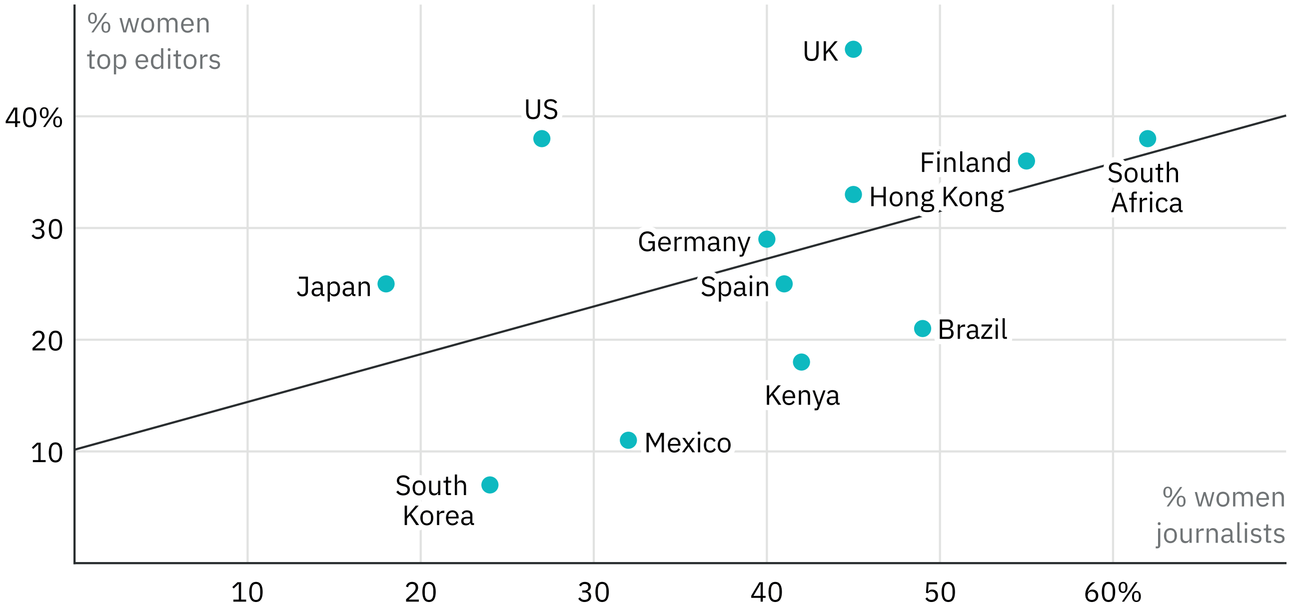
Figure 1. Percentage of women top editors in every market

Data not collected for Kenya or Spain in 2020.

Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 200 news outlets in 2020 and 240 news outlets in 2021–2025.

In Figure 2, we look at the relationship between the percentage of women in top editorial positions and the proportion of women working in journalism, relying on data from *Worlds of Journalism* (Hanitzsch et al. 2019). Similar to previous years, we find some evidence of a weak positive correlation between the percentage of women working in journalism and the percentage of women in top editorial positions, but there is a large amount of uncertainty due to the small number of data points. (And correlation does not necessarily entail causation.) There continues to be more women working as journalists than there are women among top editors in nine of the 12 markets, with the UK, the US, and Japan as exceptions. We see the biggest gaps in Brazil (28pp), South Africa and Kenya (24pp), and Mexico (21pp).

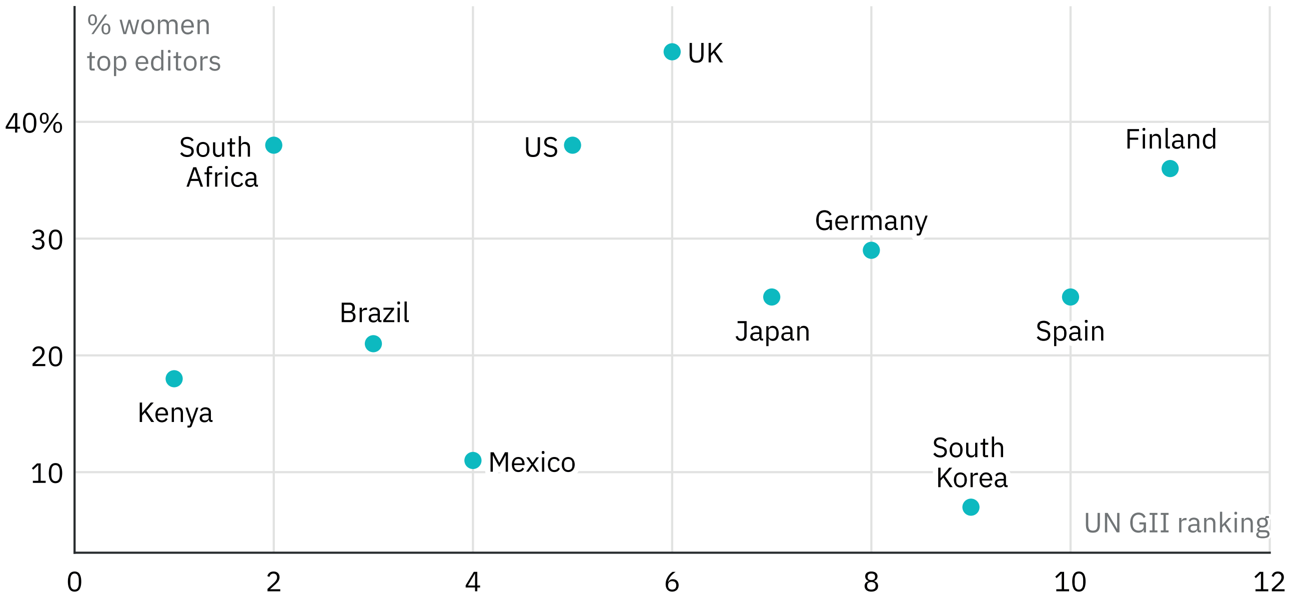
Figure 2. Percentage of women journalists vs. percentage of women top editors



Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 240 news outlets in 2025. Data on women journalists (2012–2016) from Worlds of Journalism.

In Figure 3, we examine the percentage of women in top editorial positions vis-à-vis gender inequality in society more broadly, relying on data from the UN GII (2022). As in past years, we find no correlation across 11 markets (Hong Kong is not included in the UN GII).[4] This suggests there are dynamics at play here that are specific to journalism and the news media that cannot be reduced to broader societal patterns of gender inequality.

Figure 3. Gender inequality vs. percentage of women top editors



Hong Kong is not included in the UN Gender Inequality Index.

Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 240 news outlets in 2025. Data on gender inequality from the United Nations 2022 Gender Inequality Index (UN GII), with ranking rescored from worst to best.

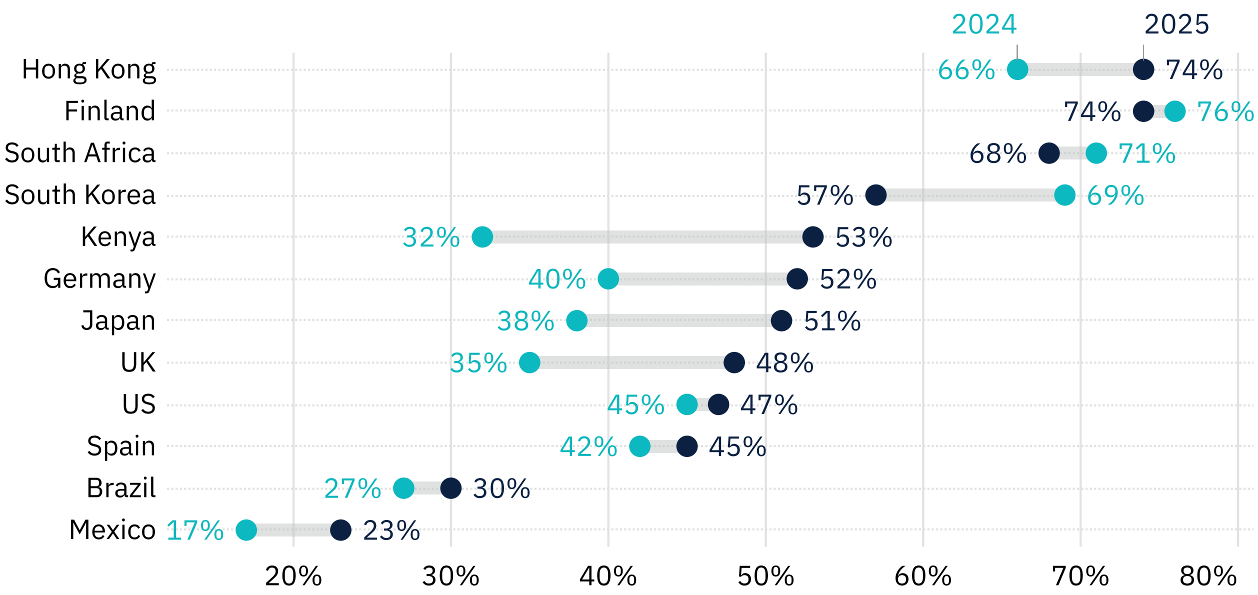
[4] UN GII estimates gender inequalities based on three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status. Higher GII scores indicate higher gender inequality. UN GII rankings were recoded for interpretability, with the highest-ranked (worst GII score) country coded here as 1 and the lowest-ranked (best GII score) country coded here as 11.

Finally, by combining the data collected for this Reuters Institute factsheet with data from the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2024* (Newman et al. 2024), we can establish the proportion of people in each of the 12 markets covered who access news from at least one major news outlet with a woman as the top editor.

As Figure 4 shows, the share of online news users who say that they consume news from at least one major outlet with a woman as the top editor varies considerably across the markets covered. In Hong Kong (74%), Finland (74%), and South Africa (68%), a large majority does. In other markets, including Kenya, Germany, Japan, the UK, and the US, only about half of online news users have accessed news from at least one major outlet with a woman as top editor in the past week. The figures are even lower in Brazil (30%) and Mexico (23%).

In nine of the 12 markets, the figure is higher than it was last year. At 52%, the average across all markets covered is 5pp higher than the 47% we found last year and slightly higher than when we first started this work in 2020 (when the figure was 49% across the ten markets covered).[5] We find the largest increase relative to last year in Kenya, where the proportion of online users consuming news from at least one major outlet with a woman top editor grew 21pp, followed by 13pp increases in both Japan and the UK. Meanwhile, the largest dip was in South Korea, where there was a 12pp decrease.

Figure 4. Percentage of online news users using at least one source with a woman top editor



Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 240 news outlets in 2024 and 2025. Data on news audiences from the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2024*.

[5] These figures can fluctuate drastically from one year to the next as changes to the top editor of a single but very widely used brand can have a very large impact.

Conclusion

In this Reuters Institute factsheet, we have analysed the gender breakdown of top editors in a strategic sample of 240 major online and offline news outlets in 12 different markets across five continents. We have found that the clear majority of top editors across the sample are men. As has been the case in almost every year since we started this work in 2020, all the markets covered have a majority – often a large majority – of men in top editorial positions.

Our analysis indicates that the underrepresentation of women among top editors is driven, at least in part, by dynamics internal to journalism. Indeed, the lack of a correlation between gender equality in society and the percentage of women among top editors suggests that specific factors are at play beyond the inequalities seen in society at large. Likewise, the weak positive correlation between the percentage of women working as journalists and the percentage of women among top editors suggests that the low female representation cannot be reduced to low numbers of women in journalism more generally. Instead, it is likely that women face particular barriers in terms of career progression, as highlighted in the extensive scholarship documenting the prominence of gendered routines and 'boys' clubs' within newsrooms (see Blumell and Mulupi 2024 for a recent example in Kenya). While journalism is no longer a 'male domain' industry, the lack of female leadership points to vertical gender segregation: the concentration of women in the lower echelons of the journalistic profession (Urbániková and Čaladi 2024).

This year we find a larger increase, on average, in the direction of greater gender equity, with knock-on consequences for the proportion of news consumers who get news from women-led news organisations. Part of the change is driven by a single country, Japan, where the figure increased from a low baseline from last year. In light of the significant variation we have seen over the years we have been doing this work, we would require several successive years with significant changes in the same direction before drawing wider conclusions about the trend. As noted, these improvements are small and would need to be sustained over time in order to meaningfully move newsroom leadership close to parity. Yet it is hard to ignore that the waning interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts discussed in last year's factsheet is now accompanied by more overt hostility, following US President Donald Trump's very public move to ban DEI programmes in the federal government, with many large tech companies following suit and ABC News owner Disney and other media corporations reportedly reconsidering their previous commitments.[6] It is still to be seen to what extent this may reverberate in the news sector specifically, and beyond the context of the United States.

What is more certain is that deep-seated structural inequalities are unlikely to go away on their own. And organisations lacking incentives to address longstanding hierarchies – or worse yet, fearing potential retribution – are much less likely to dedicate effort and resources to them, especially in what is already a highly challenging environment for journalism. In this context, the work of individuals and organisations trying to keep the industry's focus on these issues – such as the Global Alliance on Media and Gender, the International Women's Media Foundation, and the International Center for Journalists – will likely become more challenging, but also more important.

We will know more when we repeat this analysis and publish new data in 2026 to track developments in gender equality among top editors across the world.

[6] https://apnews.com/article/trump-dei-executive-order-diversity-inclusion-f67ea86032986084dd71c5aa0c6b8d1d;
https://www.economist.com/business/2025/02/02/corporate-americas-diversity-wars-are-just-getting-started;
https://www.businessinsider.com/us-big-tech-dei-europe-diversity-inclusion-mark-zucekerberg-meta-2025-1;
https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2025/02/13/disney-shifts-away-from-dei-to-return-to-its-primary-business-mission/

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