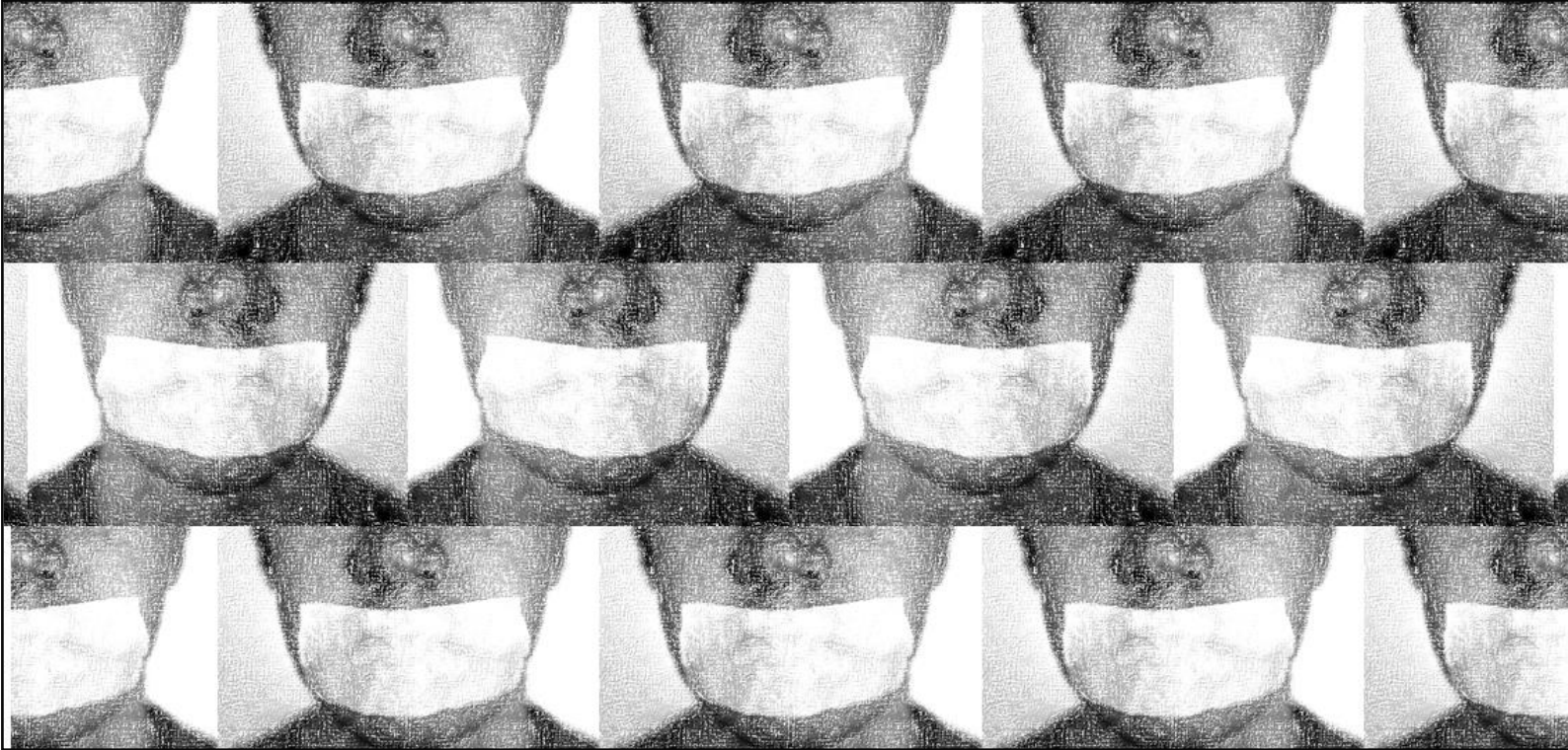


# The News Media Landscape: An overview of the context of Press Freedom and Regulation in the Netherlands

Authors: John Steel, Neil Roberts, Julie Firmstone, Charlotte Elliott-Harvey



Published, November, 2024.

This report is part of the AHRC funded project “Defining Freedom of the Press: A cross-national examination of press ethics and regulation”

Project information, working papers, reports and publications are available online at: <https://www.derby.ac.uk/departments/humanities/defining-freedom-of-the-press/>

To cite: Steel, J., Roberts, N., Firmstone, J., Elliott- Harvey, C. (2024) *The News Media Landscape: An overview of the context of Press Freedom and Regulation in the Netherlands*. <https://doi.org/10.48785/100/434>

Reports for the following countries are available [here](#): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom

Learn more via a free online course: [Understanding Journalism Ethics](#)



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

This project received funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, under project number [AH/R00644X/1](#), until June 2020. The project term ran from June 2018 to June 2022. This report received additional funding from the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds.

For further information please contact John Steel, [j.steel@derby.ac.uk](mailto:j.steel@derby.ac.uk)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Copyright for this issue: ©John Steel

## Abstract

*The News Media Landscape: An Overview of the Context of Press Freedom and Regulation in the Netherlands* examines the structure, regulation and cultural context of journalism in the Netherlands. The report was produced as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project *Defining Freedom of the Press: A Cross-National Examination of Press Ethics and Regulation*, which explores and compares systems of press freedom and ethics across a range of European democracies. It outlines constitutional safeguards for freedom of expression, the regulatory framework for public and commercial media, and the role of self-regulation. The report examines the structure of the media landscape, including ownership concentration and the relationship between public service and commercial publishers. It explores patterns of audience news consumption, levels of public trust, and the growth of digital and online-only news outlets. Further sections address journalism culture, professional ethics, and challenges related to misinformation, political polarisation and journalist safety. The report provides a detailed national case study designed to inform comparative research on press regulation, ethics and media freedom within democratic systems.

## Netherlands

**RSF ranking:** 4<sup>th</sup> out of 180 (RSF, 2024)

**Population:** 17.7m (Worldometer, 2024)

**Percentage in the capital:** 6.7% (1.18m; World Population Review, 2024)

**GDP:** 1,117.1bn USD (Statista, 2024)

**EU member:** since January 1, 1958 (EUROPA, 2024)

**Official languages:** Dutch (EUROPA, 2024)

### Press freedom environment:

Freedom House classes the Netherlands as a “free” country with a total score of 97 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2024). This is down from 99 out of 100 in 2020 (Ibid.). This score represents scores of 39/40 for political rights and 58/60 civil liberties (Ibid.). Its narrative report for 2024 categorises the Netherlands as “a parliamentary democracy with a strong record of safeguarding political rights and civil liberties” (Ibid.). There are still issues with discrimination against minority groups such as Muslims and immigrants, while politics is polarised and there is higher distrust in government (Ibid.). The Dutch administration also has responsibility for six Caribbean islands, where asylum policies are also an issue, along with corruption and prison conditions (Ibid.). The cabinet resigned in July 2023 over disagreements on asylum policies. This led to elections in November 2023, with sweeping gains for the far-right Freedom Party (PVV), who became the largest party in parliament (Freedom House, 2024). They formed an uneasy coalition with other right-wing parties who held concerns over the constitution and rule of law (Ibid.).

In the civil liberties section of the Freedom House narrative report, the Dutch media is described as being free and independent, with diversity in print, broadcast and the online press (Freedom House, 2024). However, there are threats to the safety of journalists, with 214 instances of threats, violence or intimidation, an 8 per cent increase on 2022 (Ibid.). These were reported to PersVeilig, a journalists' safety initiative (Ibid.). The year before, in July 2021, Dutch crime reporter Peter de Vries was shot dead after leaving a TV studio, causing a major shock in a "society that values press freedom" (RSF, 2024). Reporters without Borders (2024) state that both the far right and the far left are responsible for attacks on journalists but there is active protection for press freedom from the state and government. This works less efficiently in the Netherlands' overseas territories (RSF, 2024). In terms of the current RSF rankings, the Netherlands is listed as 4<sup>th</sup> (out of 180) on the 2024 World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2024).

## **Media landscape**

There is a high degree of concentration in the ownership of Dutch media (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024), which is dominated by three corporations: NOS, the public service broadcaster, and DPG Media and Mediahuis, the Belgian groups which own most of the Netherlands' newspapers (Ibid.). However, Reporters Without Borders describe the level of pluralism in the Dutch media as "high", with very few restrictions on press freedom (RSF, 2024). A "traditionally independent and highly trusted" media is served by a number of national and regional newspapers, although there are concerns about the decline of regional journalism in the country (Ibid.). Amsterdam has also provided a "safe haven" for exiled Russian media outlets the *Moscow Times* and *TV Dozhd* (RSF, 2024).

## **Newspapers and market**

In 2024, the Netherlands had 27 daily newspapers: 10 national, 16 regional and one local (Expatica, 2024).<sup>1</sup> By 2016, newspaper ownership had become highly concentrated, with two Belgian publishers (*De Persgroep* and *Mediahuis*) controlling 80 per cent of newspaper circulation (Bakker, 2017). Key national daily newspapers are: *Algemeen Dagblad* (tabloid), *De Telegraaf* (tabloid), *de Volkskrant* (quality), *Het Financieele Dagblad* (financial news), *NRC Handelsblad* (quality), and *Trouw* (BBC, 2023).

The *Algemeen Dagblad* has one national edition and seven regional editions (Bakker, 2017). One-time weekly, *Vrij Nederland*, is now a magazine offering an online subscription and a promise that it will enable readers to "Read less, read better", with one daily article, which is sent by email or through WhatsApp (Costera Meijer and Kormelink, 2018). It is important to note that most people buy newspapers in the Netherlands via subscriptions, although copies are also available

---

<sup>1</sup> Please see Appendix 1 for Expatica's list of major Dutch newspapers (national and regional)

for purchase at newsstands and shops. Print news subscriptions are declining, whereas digital subscriptions have increased by 20 per cent (Ibid.). Like the other countries in our study, Dutch users are very much online, with a 95 per cent internet penetration rate (Newman et al., 2024). The current situation of the newspaper media in the Netherlands is much like in the other country contexts, in terms of the technological shifts in how news is produced and consumed, but also in terms of how newspapers are no longer able to generate revenue from advertising and classified ads (Pleijter et al., 2012: 242). This then means newspapers as a traditional news form have had to scale down and decrease the size of their newsrooms (Pleijter et al., 2012) in response to the number of people reading a daily newspaper, which dropped below 50 per cent in 2015 (Bakker, 2017). A cursory overview of newspapers shows that in terms of subscription models as advertised online, the cheapest offers have online-only packages, with various combinations of access to online articles as well as e-newspapers. The more expensive subscription packages include posted printed newspapers. This demonstrates that these newspapers are moving away from offering readers print subscriptions as a first subscription option. Most online brands operate a commercial “freemium” model with premium content behind a paywall to attract subscribers (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024).

The Reuters Digital News report (Newman et al., 2024) depicts a media market dominated by a strong public sector broadcaster, two Belgian media conglomerates and the risk of further consolidation (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024). DPG Media are adding TV to their operations in print, radio and online. They are acquiring RTL Nederland in a deal worth €1.1bn, also to include the streaming platform Videoland (Ibid.). At the time of writing, the takeover is subject to approval from the Netherlands Competition Authority (ACM) (Ibid.). The regulator blocked RTL’s plans to buy Talpa, including SBS TV, in 2023, arguing it would allow RTL to set television advertising rates (Ibid.). Mediahuis is also planning to merge its international operations, leading to concerns about editorial independence and plurality (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024).

### **Audience news consumption**

The 2024 Reuters Digital News Report combines results of weekly usage across television, radio, and print, as well as online in the Netherlands (Newman et al., 2024: 93). The public broadcast news organisation, Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS), ranks at the top for TV, radio, and print, with 57 per cent reach. It is followed by the commercial broadcasters RTL Nieuws (30 per cent), SBS Nieuws (22 per cent) and other public service broadcasting programmes on Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO) (17 per cent) (Ibid.). In terms of the print media, local regional daily newspapers have 16 per cent weekly reach, with freesheets on 15 per cent. The biggest weekly usage among paid-for publications is recorded by *Algemeen Dagblad* (tabloid, popular) (15 per cent), *De Telegraaf* (tabloid, popular) (14 per cent) and *de Volkskrant* (broadsheet, quality) (8 per cent). For online reach, the

digital brand NU.nl is the market leader (45 per cent) ahead of NOS (32 per cent) (Ibid.). The biggest print newspapers are also those with the strongest digital reach: *Algemeen Dagblad* (28 per cent), *De Telegraaf* (19 per cent) and *de Volkskrant* (8 per cent). NOS also has a record of reaching younger audiences on social media, particularly the 13-to-18-year-old bracket on Instagram (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024). They have a million followers for NOS Stories on Instagram and half a million followers on YouTube for their weekly longform explainer videos (Ibid.). Throughout the Netherlands, internet penetration is high at 95 per cent (Newman et al., 2024: 92).

The Eurobarometer Media & News Survey (2023) polled 1,013 Dutch people on their news consumption habits. The most popular source of news was television at 68 per cent, just below the EU average of 71 per cent. Social media for news consumption was slightly higher than the EU average, however. It was used by 39 per cent (compared to the EU average of 37 per cent). Also above the EU average (21 per cent), 26 per cent of respondents still sourced news from the print media (Ibid.).

### **Public service media**

The Dutch public broadcaster Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO, 2018), is said to have set a standard for commercial media and, along with its NOS news programmes, it benefits from a high and longstanding level of public trust (Costera Meijer and Kormelink, 2018) (Newman et al., 2024). The NPO's licences are controlled by the *Commissariaat voor de Media* (CvdM), which was founded in 1988 (Bakker, 2017). "Fake news" is mainly a concern on social platforms and NPO broadcast an event in 2018 called "News or Nonsense" to address the issue (Costera Meijer and Kormelink, 2018). Public broadcast programming is run by groups that are interest or politically-orientated, and given airtime according to their membership number, and every region has a local public TV channel (BBC, 2016). Funding for public broadcasting has decreased in recent years (Bakker, 2017), however, in 2019 NPO was given €40m by the Dutch government as compensation for poor returns on advertising revenues (Costera Meijer and Kormelink, 2019).

Ongehoord Nederland (ON) has provisional recognition as a public sector broadcaster, running until 2026 alongside an annual subsidy. It is expected to endorse established ethical principles but has already faced three sanctions for bringing the public broadcaster into disrepute and spreading disinformation (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024). Despite this, the government decided against revoking its licence and retained its funding and airtime (Ibid.). NPO argued ON should have its licence revoked but the Secretary of Culture and Media countered that the problems weren't "manifest or structural" enough to warrant this (Ibid.).

### **Public trust in the press and media**

According to the 2024 Digital News Report, overall trust in Dutch news is at 54 per cent, with the Netherlands ranking 9<sup>th</sup> out of the 47 countries in the study (Newman et al., 2024: 93). The most trusted sources of news are NOS News (public news on NPO) (82 per cent), followed by regional or local newspapers (76 per cent). RTL (broadcaster), NU.nl (online) and *Algemeen Dagblad* (tabloid, popular) all score 74 per cent trust ratings (Ibid.). The least trusted outlets are the digital news providers GeenStijl (30 per cent) and Linda Nieuws (36 per cent) (Ibid.).

In 2016, 1,020 Dutch participants took part in Special Eurobarometer 452, titled *Media pluralism and democracy* (Eurobarometer, 2016: factsheet for the Netherlands). Here, 84 per cent of participants thought that the national media represented a “diversity of views and opinions”, and 61 per cent thought that the media were “free from political or commercial pressure” (Ibid.). Likewise, 55 per cent thought that public broadcasting services were free from political influence (Ibid.). General trust in news was at 73 per cent, reliability in television was at 79 per cent, radio at 84 per cent, and newspapers (both print and online) at 83 per cent. However, trust in social media platforms was low at 22 per cent (Ibid.). A low number of participants were aware of regulatory bodies at 11 per cent, with 67 per cent thinking that they were free from political or commercial influence (Ibid.). In the study, 33 per cent of Dutch respondents thought that journalists, bloggers, and social media users were the targets of hate speech and abuse, the second-highest national percentage out of the 28 countries involved in the study (Ibid.).

### **Online only/digital entrants**

In terms of online-only brands, the Reuters Digital News Report for 2024 lists the following as the most-used sources of news “used last week”: NU.nl (45 per cent), Indebuurt (6 per cent), MSN News (5 per cent) and Linda Nieuws (5 per cent) (Newman et al., 2024: 93). On Instagram, ‘cestmocro’ has emerged as a popular news source, passing more than a million followers in 2023 (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024). The backers are unclear. The site started as a meme page in 2017 but now reposts mainstream news stories with credit (Ibid.). However, it has also faced criticism for posting misinformation and not challenging hate speech (Ibid.). It responded to allegations of neglecting impartiality by adopting a pro-Palestinian stance on the Israel-Hamas conflict by saying it chooses “the perspective of the repressed and not the oppressor” (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024).

A key digital entrant from the Dutch context is *De Correspondent* (The Correspondent). Launched in 2013, it was the first crowdfunded digital entrant to achieve 19,000 supporters in five months, with a start-up budget of \$1.7m (De Correspondent, 2019). By 2019, it had become entirely member-funded and ad-free with 52 full-time staff, and supported by some 60,000 members (Ibid.). The content is driven by balanced, long-form articles, where “De Correspondent journalists are expected to spend up to 40 per cent of their working time in conversation with members, asking readers for expertise and seeking sources” (Gabbatt, 2018). Also,

“Conversation Editors” facilitate communication between members and correspondents to help develop the editorial, as well as engage with minority groups to contribute to comments (Costera Meijer and Kormelink, 2018). A US sister publication, *The Correspondent*, was set up in 2019 but discontinued publication within 18 months. The 2017 report for the Netherlands for the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), cited *De Correspondent* as a media outlet that was “hogging audiences”, and there was a need to “increase media viability, taking into account that the public’s attention is shifting towards nonlinear consumption of entertainment/information and to the internet platform” (Rossini, 2018: 13).

### **Additional context**

Hallin and Mancini’s model of *media systems* (2004), describes the Netherlands as having a *Northern European or Democratic Corporatist Model*, which is “characterised by a strong mass press, a high degree of political parallelism, professional journalism, and strong public service” (Harrie, 2018: 13). Like all the countries in our study, is also grappling with changes and influences from the digital realm.

Data on risks to media pluralism refers back to 2018, showing that the Netherlands was overall ranked as “low risk”, in terms of basic protection (13 per cent), political independence (23 per cent), and social inclusiveness (32 per cent). However, results showed that it had “medium risk” concerning market plurality (46 per cent) (Rossini, 2018: 4-12). The “medium risk” of market plurality in the Dutch context resulted from “a strong media ownership concentration” and a lack of legislation on media ownership disclosure (Ibid.: 13).

In terms of the current RSF rankings, the Netherlands is listed as 4<sup>th</sup> (out of 180) on the 2024 World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2024). However, there are growing risks to the safety of journalists and in 2021, Dutch crime reporter Peter de Vries was murdered after leaving a TV studio (Ibid.). This resulted in a major shock in a “society that values press freedom” (RSF, 2024).

The most recent Reuters Digital News Report for 2024 shows that trust in certain brands remains high (Newman et al., 2024: 93), including the top-ranking public broadcaster. However, a rise in disinformation prompted the government to launch a public education campaign in 2019 (Costera and Kormelink, 2019). It also referenced a joint study between *de Volkskrant* and *De Correspondent*, which showed more people were viewing radical content on YouTube (Ibid.). The report also wrote about a news organisation innovating with digital content by creating daily podcasts. Commercial broadcaster RTL began providing users with a two-minute synopsis of the news as a part of a “7am wake-up service” via WhatsApp (Ibid.).

## **Regulatory environment**

On the Dutch government's website, a dedicated page about "Supervision of the media" outlines the jurisdiction of the Dutch Media Authority, which includes both public and commercial broadcasters (Government of the Netherlands, 2024). The Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2024) monitors if broadcasters are in compliance with the Media Act 2008 over items that include rules on matters such as advertising and due coverage of Dutch and Frisian content (Government of the Netherlands, 2024). These activities are taken retrospectively after content has been broadcast, in order to prevent government interference or influence on programming content (Ibid.). Transgression of the rules can result in a fine of up to €225,000, the reduction of airtime (for public broadcasters), or reduced broadcast permissions (for commercial broadcasters), or specific instructions and orders (Ibid.). Reporters Without Borders says that Dutch journalists are protected by "a solid legal framework" but sourcing the documentation which underpins this has proven difficult and often arrives late or is incorrect, when requested by journalists (RSF, 2024).

## **The press council**

The Dutch press council, the *Raad voor Journalistiek*, was set up in 1960 (Ríos et al., 2018: 226). At the time when the Dutch press council was set up as the Court of Honour, it had the authority to issue warnings, reprimands, suspension of membership, or even expulsion (Jones, 1980: 28). The press council is a self-regulatory body, and it typically handles complaints that have already gone through a given media organisation's complaint system (Bakker, 2017). In the Netherlands, publications are not members of the regulatory system. Instead, organisations such as the Association of Newspaper Publishers are registered with the Dutch press council, in turn placing the organisation's membership within the scope of the press council. Cooperation with these organisations and ultimately with the Press Council complaints procedure is voluntary; nonetheless, participation levels are high. Recently the Dutch press council has faced challenges in having its verdicts and moral authority recognised by companies (Ríos et al., 2018: 225). Digital journalism is included in the Dutch codes of ethics, in terms of general principles being applicable, as well as user-generated content and sources that are open-access, like Wikipedia (Díaz-Campo and Segado-Boj, 2015: 738, 740).

The structure of the press council is based in its parent foundation called the Stichting Raad voor de Journalistiek, which consists of four types organisations: the "Netherlands Union of Journalists (NVJ), the Netherlands Society of Chief-Editors (Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren), several co-ordinating organisations of printed press, and (co-ordinating) organisations of public and commercial broadcasting" (Raad voor de Journalistiek, 2024). The board of the Stichting Raad voor de Journalistiek selects the Chairman (who is a "a high-profile journalist"), members, and secretaries, where there are four vice-chairmen (who

are “members of the judiciary”), ten members that are journalists, and ten members that are not journalists, and the secretary and deputy secretary (both of whom must be lawyers) (Ibid.). The board of the Stichting Raad voor de Journalistiek has authority over the press council’s regulations (Ibid.).

The press council has developed a guidebook for good journalistic practice, saying the “the aim of this guidebook is to contribute to the transparency and the surveyability [sic] of the judgements of the Press Council on behalf of the professionals and the public” (Raad voor de Journalistiek, 2024). On the basis of an internal report called “Press councils of Western Europe” (Koene, 2009), the press council added five members of the public who work in the realm of civil society (Raad voor de Journalistiek, 2024). The press council has struggled with “criticism about its organisation” and has implemented new elements such as temporary funding to pay for additional administrative support, and changing the requirement for the Chairman being a lawyer to the Chairman being a journalist (Ibid.). They also claim to have simplified the wording in their decisions although, contrary to some calls, they continue to require that complainants file their complaints “to the journalist/editor first” (Ibid.).

### **Recent press council report/cases**

Only directly affected parties can submit a complaint to the press council, and they must be submitted within six months (Raad voor de Journalistiek, 2024). A mission statement reads as follows:

“The complaint must concern journalistic practice of either a professional journalist or someone who, on a regular basis and for remuneration, collaborates on the editorial content of a mass medium.

“Besides, the Press Council cannot treat complaints concerning the maintaining of the standard of good taste or general complaints against the press. The complaint always must be in regard of a specific matter, as far as journalistic practice is concerned.

“Since the change from a disciplinary council to a council of opinion the Press Council no longer can impose a sentence on the journalist. Neither can the Press Council assure the complainant financial compensation. The Press Council gives its opinion on a complaint and publishes its decision on its website and in the professional magazine for journalists. Also it circulates its decisions on a wide scale by sending it to the national news agency and to several other media.

“As a satisfaction to the complainant and as a contribute [sic] to the debate on journalistic ethics, it is of great importance that media publish the opinions of the Press Council, especially those on valid or partially valid

complaints. The number of media, which actually publish in valid and partially valid cases, is now around two-third[s], and still growing.” (Raad voor de Journalistiek, 2024)

Information on recent cases is not available in English from the Dutch press council.

### **Other bodies and codes of ethics**

The Netherlands Association of Journalists (NVJ) is a union that runs education programmes and includes a legal division (NVJ, 2024). It also lobbies for fair pay and safe working conditions and most Dutch journalists are members (RSF, 2024). Founded in 1884, it now has more than 8,000 members (NVJ, 2024). Its mission statement says: “We stand up for the interests of journalists so that they can work freely and independently” (Ibid.). Instead of one central code of practice, it refers its members to various different “sources of journalistic professional standards”, including the Guidelines of the Council for Journalism and the Code for Journalism, established by the Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren, the Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief (Ibid.) (Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren, 2024).<sup>2</sup>

### **Journalism culture**

The assassination of investigative journalist Peter de Vries in 2021 caused a huge shock in the Netherlands (RSF, 2024). Some journalists have become reticent about reporting certain stories and subjected themselves to self-censorship, as public opinion has become polarised on issues including immigration, agriculture and climate change (Ibid.). Some journalists reporting on organised crime have been given police protection and there have been offline as well as online threats (Ibid.). In the online space, female reporters and journalists of colour are particularly vulnerable to trolling (Ibid.). Claims of sexual misconduct at commercial broadcasters in 2022 and a workplace bullying scandal at NPO/NOS prompted an inquiry (Kormelink and Lamot, 2024). In early 2024, the Investigative Committee on the Conduct and Culture of Broadcasters published a report on workplace safety at NPO. It concluded there was “widespread unacceptable behaviour”, with 75 per cent of respondents saying they had been a victim or a witness in the past year (Ibid.). Recommendations included professionalising HR, paying more attention to developing leadership skills and avoiding temporary contracts (Ibid.). Public media has traditionally been highly valued, with a separation between media and politics.

In the Netherlands, journalists are trained, typically with a professional Bachelor’s degree in journalism (47.1 per cent), or with a Master’s degree (33.5 per cent) (Hermans, 2016). The number of freelance journalists has increased, with a decline in the number of traditional journalists (Pleijter et al., 2012: 244). As in other country

---

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for a translation of the Code for Journalism (Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief)

contexts, the Dutch government has been working to incentivise local and regional media, as well as junior journalists, by offering state support (Ibid.). Similar to Denmark, journalists were typically trained as apprentices first in a newsroom, before moving on to writing roles (Ibid.: 246). Journalism as an object of research is something new to Dutch academia, with large studies on journalists only beginning in the early 2000s (Ibid.: 245).

The most recent Worlds of Journalism Study for the Netherlands ( $n=522$ ) was in 2016. Dutch participants had worked an average of 18.73 years as journalists, with beat journalists typically covering culture, economics, and local news (Hermans, 2016). In general, Dutch journalists adhered strongly to a value of factual and objective reporting (Ibid.: 2). In the study, the categories that most participants responded to in terms of values (i.e. more than 50 per cent responding “extremely” and “very important”) were: “Report things as they are (92.9 per cent), “Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life” (72.1 per cent), “Tell stories about the world” (69.4 per cent), “Be a detached observer” (64.9 per cent), “Provide analysis of current affairs” (64.8 per cent) and “Let people express their views” (59.8 per cent) (Ibid.). With regards to professional ethics, almost all of the participants in the study “strongly” or “somewhat agreed” that they must respect codes of professional ethics in every instance (88.7 per cent), and over half thought “what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation” (68.5 per cent). A little under half thought that “it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it” (49.7 per cent), and a smaller number thought that ethics came down to the individual’s judgement (45.8 per cent; Ibid.: 3).

## Other information

### Governing framework

Constitutional monarchy (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2018)

### Parliament

Staten-Generaal

### Seats in parliament

150 (Freedom House, 2024)

### Last election

November 2023 (Freedom House, 2024)

### Seats held by women

40% (The World Bank, 2024)

### Coalition government

Freedom Party (PVV), the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), New Social Contract (NSC) and the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB)

### Populist party

Party for Freedom (PVV)

### Constitutional text on freedom of speech/expression/the press

7.1. No one shall require prior permission to publish thoughts or opinions through the press, without prejudice to the responsibility of every person under the law (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2018).

**Media model** (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 67)

*Northern European or Democratic Corporatist Model*

### Key events

**2016:** Geert Wilders (PVV) is convicted for inciting discrimination against Moroccans in his 2014 campaign (BBC, 2018).

**2017:** Turkish ministers are blocked from campaigning due to fears that this might polarise the Turkish expat community, leading Erdoğan to cite the country as a “Nazi remnant” (Reuters, 2017).

**2017:** PM Mark Rutte convenes a coalition government after a record 225 days (BBC, 2018).

**2017:** US ambassador Pete Hoekstra says that there are “no go zones” in the Netherlands, but he later said it was “fake news” (Belam, 2017).

**2018:** A recent scandal was a debate about the cultural practice of “Black Pete”, who is a white man in blackface in an annual festival. The issue was between

activists who say that the tradition celebrates slavery and enforces racist stereotypes, and those who say it's Dutch tradition (de Vries, 2018).

**2021:** Assassination of investigative journalist and crime reporter Peter de Vries (RSF, 2024)

**2023:** Victory for the populist Freedom Party (PVV) as the largest party in the general election, leading to a new coalition government (Freedom House, 2024)

... [click here for the BBC's recent articles on the Netherlands.](#)

... [click here for The Guardian's recent articles on the Netherlands.](#)

## Appendix

### 1) National Dutch newspapers, ranked by circulation (Expatica, 2024)

*Algemeen Dagblad (AD)*

"the most trusted newspaper with the widest reach; its political leaning is centre-right, though its readership mostly votes VVD and CDA"

*De Telegraaf*

"a sensationalist right-wing conservative newspaper with the second-highest readership in the Netherlands. Its readers predominantly vote PVV and VVD"

*De Volkskrant*

"a high-quality print newspaper with the third highest reach. Traditionally a left-wing journal, its readership votes primarily PvdA. In 2013, the paper won the European Newspaper of the Year Award"

*NRC*

"a progressive newspaper with well-researched factual reporting; its political leaning is centrist/liberal, with a VVD/D66 following"

*Trouw*

"another winner of the European Newspaper of the Year Award (2012), this protestant Christian newspaper has a centre/centre-left alignment. Interestingly, its readers predominantly vote CDA"

*Het Financieele Dagblad*

"a traditionally right-wing newspaper that focuses on financial news and geopolitics. The political stance of its readership is unknown"

Not ranked:

*Reformatorisch Dagblad* – compact. Protestant. <https://www.rd.nl/>.

*Nederlands Dagblad* – tabloid. <https://www.nd.nl/>.

Source: Expatica, 2024 (<https://www.expatica.com/nl/moving/about/netherlands-news-106958/>)\*

\*Expatica also lists the ten most influential regional newspapers as follows:

- *Noordhollands Dagblad*
- *De Limburger*
- *De Gelderlander*
- *Brabants Dagblad (BD)*
- *Dagblad van het Noorden (DvhN)*
- *De Stentor*
- *AD Rotterdams Dagblad*
- *Eindhovens Dagblad*
- *BN DeStem*
- *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia*

## **2) Code for Journalism: Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief**

(Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren)

*Automatically translated using Google Translate*

### **Code for Journalism**

The members of the Society are in no way bound by this Code. The Code serves only as a starting point for debate. See the report of the 49th members meeting of the Society, held on Friday 18 April 2008 in Middelburg.

#### **Truthful**

1. When reporting news, the journalist takes reality as he encounters and perceives it as his starting point. The verification of facts and the presentation of different opinions embody the journalistic pursuit of objectivity.
2. In reporting, the journalist makes a clear distinction between facts, assertions and opinions.
3. The journalist works carefully and with integrity and also demonstrates this in his reporting by accounting for his journalistic methods.
4. In his reporting, the journalist makes the facts verifiable where possible.
5. The journalist checks the facts in his reporting and makes those facts verifiable where possible.
6. When editing news, in text, sound, image or combinations thereof (infographics, animations), the journalist makes clear what his editing consisted of.
7. The journalist who incorporates fictional elements in his reporting, by changing the names of those involved or dramatizing facts, always accounts for this.
8. In columns, reviews, opinion pieces and similar genres, the journalist is

allowed greater freedom than in other reporting, where it concerns checking facts, omitting the right to respond, and mixing facts and fiction.

9. The journalist who refers to information from third parties, by citing another medium as the source or by adding a hyperlink, does so openly and generously, but is not necessarily responsible for the content of the underlying information.

### **Independent**

1. The journalist performs his work independently and avoids (the appearance of) conflicts of interest.
2. If the journalist is affiliated with any political party, interest group or company other than the publisher of his own medium, he will always account for this in his reporting if this is relevant for the assessment of the report.
3. The journalist does not abuse his position.
4. The journalist does not accept material or immaterial compensation that is intended to influence, promote or counteract reporting.

### **Fair**

1. When collecting, selecting and editing news, the journalist shall act fairly.
2. The journalist shall protect sources to whom he has promised confidentiality.
3. The journalist who bases himself on anonymous sources must demonstrate that his sources are reliable, the information could not have been obtained in any other way and he has verified it elsewhere as best he can.
4. Seeking to hear both sides of the story is a basic journalistic principle. In particular when publishing accusations or allegations against a person or organisation, the journalist shall apply the right of reply. The accused shall be given sufficient opportunity, preferably in the same publication and without unreasonable time pressure, to respond to the allegation.
5. The journalist shall not infringe the privacy of individuals further than is necessary in the context of open reporting.
6. The journalist respects the privacy of victims, relatives, patients, but also suspects and perpetrators by avoiding the general recognisability of persons involved in the reporting in all cases in which these persons will suffer disproportionate disadvantages from recognisability and insofar as avoiding recognisability is not contrary to the interest of adequate reporting.
7. The journalist does not publish text or photos and does not broadcast audio recordings or images made of persons in private situations without the consent of the person involved, unless the publication serves a major social interest.
8. The journalist does not use private documents unless the persons

involved have given their consent, or the publication serves a major social interest.

9. The journalist who is found to have published an incorrect report will correct any damaging inaccuracy, whether requested or not, as soon as possible and in a generous manner.

### **Open visor**

1. The journalist collects, selects and publishes the news without hiding behind an identity other than his own, unless this method serves a major social interest.

2. The journalist in principle makes himself and his methods of collecting information known as such.

3. The journalist does not provoke incidents with the intention of creating news. Nor does he provoke incidents to illustrate an abuse, unless this serves a major social interest.

4. Unless this serves a major social interest, the journalist does not participate anonymously or under a pseudonym in discussions, on the internet or in other media, if there are points of contact between his normal reporting and his contributions to these discussions.

5. The journalist does not steal information and does not pay for stolen information.

6. The journalist does not use information obtained unlawfully by third parties, unless its publication serves a major social interest.

(Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren, 2024)

<https://genootschapvanhoofdredacteuren.nl/code-voor-de-journalistiek/>

### **Bibliography**

Bakker, P. 2017. Netherlands. *Media Landscapes*. [Online]. Available from:

<https://medialandscapes.org/country/netherlands>.

BBC. 2016. Netherlands profile - Media. April 12, 2016. *BBC - Europe*. [Online].

Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17741366>.

BBC. 2023. Netherlands profile - Media. June 19, 2023. *BBC - Europe*. [Online].

Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17741366>.

Belam, M. 2017. US ambassador to Netherlands describes own words as 'fake news'. December 22, 2017 at 13:46. *The Guardian - Europe*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/us-ambassador-to-netherlands-describes-own-words-as-fake-news>.

Commissariaat voor de Media. 2024. *Toezicht naleving Mediawet*. [Online].

Available from: <https://www.cvdm.nl/>.

- Comparative Constitutions Project. 2018. Netherlands's Constitution of 1815 with Amendments through 2008. [Online]. Available from: [https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Netherlands\\_2008.pdf](https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Netherlands_2008.pdf).
- Costera Meijer, I. and Kormelink, T.G. 2018. Netherlands. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism - Digital News Report 2018*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/netherlands-2018/>.
- Costera Meijer, I. and Kormelink, T.G. 2019. Netherlands. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism - Digital News Report 2019*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/netherlands-2019/>.
- De Correspondent. 2019. FAQ. [Online]. Available from: <https://thecorrespondent.com/faq>.
- de Vries, J. 2018. Black Pete: the scandal we Dutch can't stay silent about any more. November 14, 2018 at 05:59. *The Guardian - Opinion*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/14/black-pete-scandal-dutch-silent-sinterklaas>.
- Díaz-Campo, J. and Segado-Boj, F. 2015. Journalism ethics in a digital environment: How journalistic codes of ethics have been adapted to the Internet and ICTs in countries around the world. *Telematics and Informatics*. 32(4), pp.735-744. DOI: 10.1016/j.tele.2015.03.004.
- Dutch Society of Editors-In-Chief. 2024. <https://genootschapvanhoofdredacteuren.nl/code-voor-de-journalistiek/>
- EFJ. 2018. Netherlands: New 'Source Protection Act' finally enters into force. October 4, 2018. *European Federation of Journalists - News*. [Online]. Available from: <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2018/10/04/netherlands-new-source-protection-act-finally-enters-into-force/>.
- Eurobarometer. 2016. Media pluralism and democracy - Special Eurobarometer 452 - Report. *Digital Single Market*. [Online]. Available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/media-pluralism-and-democracy-special-eurobarometer-452>.
- Eurobarometer. 2023. Media & News Survey. Available from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3153>.
- EUROPA. 2024. EU member countries in brief - Netherlands. July 23, 2024. [Online]. Available from: [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/netherlands\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/netherlands_en).
- Expatica. 2024. Where to get the news in the Netherlands. July 23, 2024. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.expatica.com/nl/moving/about/netherlands-news-106958/>.
- Freedom House. 2024. Netherlands: profile [2024]. *Freedom of the Press 2024*. [Online]. Available from: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/netherlands>.
- Gabbatt, A. 2018. The Correspondent: crowd-funded news site prepares to launch English version. November 14, 2018 at 05:01. *The Guardian - Media*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/nov/14/de-correspondent-english-crowdfunded-news-site>.

- Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren. 2024. Code for Journalism. [Online]. Available from: <https://genootschapvanhoofdredacteuren.nl/code-voor-de-journalistiek/>.
- Government of the Netherlands. 2024. Supervision of the media. *The media and broadcasting*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.government.nl/topics/the-media-and-broadcasting/supervision-of-the-media>.
- Hallin, D.C. and Mancini, P. 2004. *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. [Online]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available from: ACLS Humanities eBook.
- Harrie, E. ed. 2018. *Newspapers in the Nordic media landscape 2017*. [Online]. Göteborg: NORDICOM. Available from: NORDICOM.
- Henley, J. 2017. Dutch parties agree coalition government after a record 208 days. October 9, 2017. *The Guardian - Europe*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/09/dutch-politicians-ready-form-government-election-coalition>.
- Hermans, L. 2016. Country Report: Journalists in the Netherlands. *Worlds of Journalism Study*. [Online]. Available from: [https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30118/1/Country\\_report\\_Netherlands.pdf](https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30118/1/Country_report_Netherlands.pdf).
- Jones, J.C. 1980. *Mass media codes of ethics and councils: A comparative international study on professional standards*. [Online]. Paris: UNESCO. Available from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000423/042302Eo.pdf>.
- Kiesraad. 2019. Elections of the House of Representatives. *The Electoral Council*. [Online]. Available from: <https://english.kiesraad.nl/elections/elections-of-the-house-of-representatives>.
- Koene, D.C. 2009. Press councils of Western Europe. *Raad voor de Journalistiek*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.rvdj.nl/uploads/fckconnector/5e5f0690-3d71-4993-8229-0481e128394e>.
- Kormelink, T.G. and Lamot, K. 2024. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism - Digital News Report 2024*. [Online]. Available from: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/netherlands>.
- Minority Rights. 2024. Netherlands - Minorities and indigenous peoples. [Online]. Available from: <https://minorityrights.org/country/netherlands/>.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C.T., Arguedas, A.R. and Nielsen, R.K. 2024. Reuters Institute Digital News Report. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. [Online]. Available from: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>.
- NPO. 2018. Nederlandse publieke omroep. [Online]. Available from: <https://over.npo.nl/>.
- NVJ. 2024. English. [homepage]. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.nvj.nl/>.
- Pleijter, A., Hermans, L. and Vergeer, M. 2012. Journalists and journalism in the Netherlands. In: Weaver, D.H. and Willnat, L. eds. *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*. [Online]. pp.242-254. Available from: DawsonERA.

- Raad voor de Journalistiek. 2018. Guidelines. June 6, 2018. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.rvdj.nl/english/guidelines>.
- Raad voor de Journalistiek. 2024. English. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.rvdj.nl/english>.
- Reuters. 2017. Netherlands bars Turkish ministers as 'Nazi remnant' dispute escalates. March 12, 2017 at 03:43. *The Guardian - World*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/12/netherlands-bars-turkish-ministers-as-nazi-remnant-dispute-escalates>.
- Ríos, M.M.i.d.l., Rodríguez-Martínez, R., Maz, M.F. and Fedele, M. 2018. Press councils as a traditional instrument of media self-regulation: The perceptions of European journalists. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*. 7(2), pp.221-243. DOI: 10.1386/ajms.7.2.221\_1.
- Rossini, D.A. 2018. Country Report: Netherlands. *Monitoring media pluralism in Europe: Application of the media pluralism monitor 2017 in the European Union, FYROM, Serbia & Turkey*. [Online]. Available from: [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61150/2018\\_Netherlands\\_EN.pdf](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61150/2018_Netherlands_EN.pdf).
- RSF. 2024. World Press Freedom Index - Netherlands. [Online]. Available from: <https://rsf.org/en/netherlands>.
- Statista. 2020. National newspaper circulation per edition in the Netherlands in 2017, by title and circulation type. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/694721/national-newspaper-circulation-per-edition-in-the-netherlands-by-title/>.
- Statista. 2024. Netherlands - Statistics & Facts. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263581/gross-domestic-product-gdp-in-the-netherlands/>.
- The Correspondent. 2019. Unbreaking news. [Online]. Available from: <https://thecorrespondent.com/>.
- The World Bank. 2024. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%) - Netherlands. *Data*. [Online]. Available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=NL>.
- World Population Review. 2024. Amsterdam Population 2024. [Online]. Available from: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/amsterdam-population/>.
- Worldometer. 2024. Netherlands Population (2024). July 23, 2024. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/netherlands-population/>.

## **Defining Freedom of the Press: A cross-national examination of press ethics and regulation**

Working Papers and reports are available online at: [defining-freedom-of-the-press.info](http://defining-freedom-of-the-press.info)



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

This project received funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, under project number [AH/R00644X/1](#), until June 2020. The project term ran from June 2018 to July 2024.

For further information please contact John Steel, [j.steel@derby.ac.uk](mailto:j.steel@derby.ac.uk)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Copyright for this issue: ©John Steel