



Audiences Understood.  
People Empowered.

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# From Outrage to Opportunity:

How to Include The  
Missing Perspectives  
of Women of All Colors  
in News Leadership  
and Coverage

The third in the series of Missing Perspectives reports



# Part 1

Narrowing the diversity and inclusion gap in news leadership in the highest-profile editorial beats. The problems and the solutions



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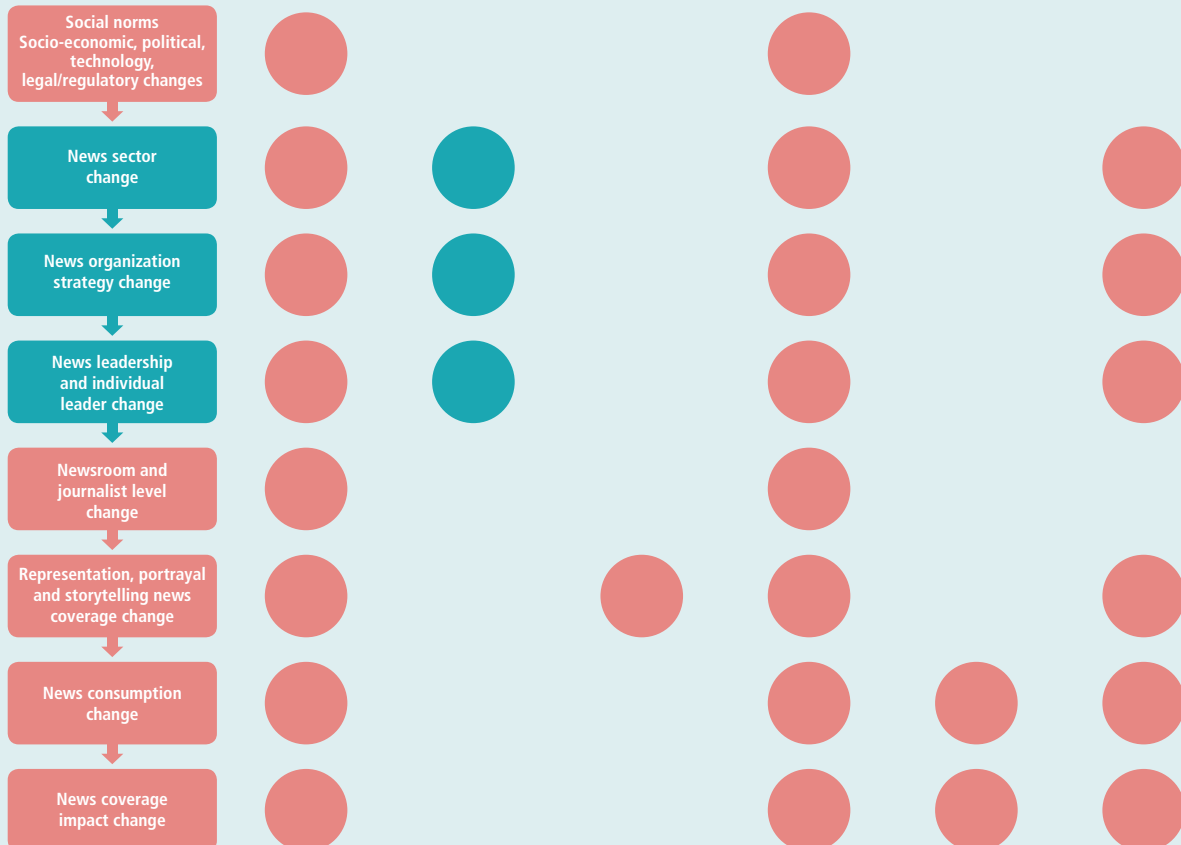
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# Part 1 at a glance

This part of the report focuses on the first element of the news value chain: resources. It investigates the gender and racial representation among editors-in-chief and editors in the highest-profile beats i.e. politics, economics/business, foreign affairs, and health. Part 1 also explores the barriers that women of all colors face in being fully included in decision-making when they are in leadership positions. Importantly, it concludes with a chapter focusing on the solutions for how to close the representation and inclusion gap at the top of news organizations and in the highest-profile beats. It features best practice case studies of success among four organizations: The New York Times, Mint, Bloomberg, and African Women in Media.



This part reveals that women are marginalized as editors-in-chief and as editors in politics, economics/business, and/or foreign affairs beats in all the researched countries. Women of color are largely invisible in the news industry or severely underrepresented in key leadership roles. Women have achieved parity in editorial roles in five of the six countries in health beats, traditionally seen as less prestigious. In South Africa and the US, women have achieved/exceeded parity in business/economics beats. There is consensus that the news leadership culture is still favoring men across countries, which precludes women of all colors from being fully included in decision-making even when they are in power. However, there are many solutions for bridging the existing representation and inclusion gaps. Among them are solutions aimed at raising awareness of the problem, removing barriers (e.g. programs aimed at retaining talent, allyship, and tackling bias at an organizational as well as individual level) and creating new habits (e.g. introducing targets and measuring progress).

**Note:**

The research into editorial roles reported in Chapters 1-6 was conducted between January and September 2022. All data reflect the accurate position at that time.

# Introduction to the problem of women's underrepresentation as decision-makers at the top of news organizations

*The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*, published in 2020, unexpectedly unearthed that in the last decade the proportion of women in news leadership in this project's countries of focus – a minority – had remained largely static. Women's representation in news is like a funnel: whilst the majority of university journalism graduates are women, the numbers swiftly reduce so that typically less than half of journalists in newsrooms are women, and certainly in all the countries AKAS researched, only a minority of news leaders are women.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, our research found that even when women formed a significant proportion of news leaders, they often did not feel included in the decision-making in newsrooms, where professional standards were seen as very male-biased. In this part of the report, we examine what proportion of top news editors and most senior editors in the highest-profile beats are women (or women of color in South Africa, the UK, and the US) in our six countries of focus. To our knowledge, this type of diversity research into the highest-

profile beats has not been conducted in the news industry before. In addition, through in-depth interviews with senior news leaders, we examine qualitatively the nature of the cultural barriers in the news industry that prevent women leaders, including those of color, from being included in decision-making. Equally importantly, we explore how these barriers can be weakened and how the drivers of women's inclusion in decision-making at the most senior levels of news organizations can instead be improved.

Researching the proportion of women in news leadership for *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* uncovered an underlying challenge that had contributed to a lack of awareness of the stalled progress: the significant gap in longitudinal, regular, and comparable global data measuring gender diversity in news governance and leadership. The most recent globally comparable dataset across 59 countries is more than a decade old, having been published in the *Global Report*

17. Kassova, 2020a

**Figure 2: Proportion of top editors in the 10 most-consumed offline and online news providers who are women (2020-2022)**

Percentage of women top editors in every market			
Country	2020	2021	2022
All 12 countries		22%	21%
South Africa	47%	60%	40%
US	41%	47%	50%
UK	29%	29%	38%
Kenya		27%	13%
Finland	33%	27%	18%
Germany	27%	19%	17%
Hong Kong	13%	17%	18%
South Korea	11%	15%	13%
Brazil	22%	12%	7%
Spain		8%	20%
Mexico	6%	6%	11%
Japan	0%	0%	9%
Base: top 10 offline and online news outlets in each country	200	240	240

Sources: Andi et al (2020), Robertson et al. (2021a), Eddy et al. (2022a)

on the Status of Women in the News Media<sup>18</sup>, based on research conducted between 2008 and 2011. To identify the proportion of women in news leadership for *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* report, AKAS had to conduct extensive country-specific research using secondary sources. Since the report's publication, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) has reported<sup>19</sup> that the proportion of women among top editors in a sample of 240 major online and offline news outlets in 12 countries<sup>20</sup> (see Figure 2) declined marginally from 22% in 2021 to 21% in 2022,

despite 40% of journalists in these countries being women. The picture was, however, mixed across different countries. The US reached gender parity for the top editors in the 10 most-consumed online and offline news outlets vs. 47% the year before. In the UK the proportion of top editors who are women in the 10 most-consumed offline and online outlets increased from 29% to 38%, but in South Africa it dropped from 60% to 40% and in Kenya, the proportion of women at the top of news organizations halved (from 27% to 13%).

18. Byerly, 2011

19. Eddy et al., 2022a

20. Four of the six countries of focus in this report are included: Kenya, South Africa, the UK, and the US.

**Figure 3: Proportion of top editors in the 10 most-consumed offline and online news providers who are people of color (2020-2022)**

Percentage of top editors in every market who are people of color			
Country	2020	2021	2022
All 5 countries	18%	15%	21%
South Africa	68%	60%	73%
US	11%	18%	33%
UK	0%	0%	0%
Germany	0%	0%	0%
Brazil	5%	0%	0%
Base: top 10 offline and online news outlets in each country	100	100	100

Sources: Nielsen and Andi (2020), Robertson et al. (2021b), Eddy et al. (2022b)

A different RISJ report published in 2022<sup>21</sup>, that focused on the racial identity of top news editors in five countries (see Figure 3), unearthed that 21% of the top editors among the 10 most-consumed offline and online news providers across all countries are people of color. In the US people of color held a third of the top editor roles in the 10 biggest online and offline news outlets. This proportion was an increase from 2020 when the research was initially conducted, and much higher than the proportion of journalists of color in the US (9%), although lower than the proportion of people of color in the working population (42%). By contrast, between 2020 and February 2022<sup>22</sup>, not a single top editor of the 10 most popular news outlets in the UK was a person of color, from a small pool of 6% of journalists of color. In South Africa the majority of top editors in the 10 most-consumed outlets were people of color, although the proportion was still lower than in the working population (73% vs. 93%).

The diversity analysis and conclusions in Part 1 of this report are based on AKAS' extensive

research into 1,166 of the most senior roles in 354 news brands in India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US, as well as the most senior editorial leads in the highest-profile beats i.e., politics, economics/business, health, and foreign affairs.<sup>23</sup> The analysis uniquely intersects observed binary gender (women vs. men) with observed binary racial identity (white vs. people of color). Typically, reports focus on gender or on race/ethnicity, but rarely combine the two. The opportunity created by intersecting gender with race lies in understanding how severely underrepresented women of color are in news. Without this unique intersection, the issue remains masked.

So, how diverse is the news leadership landscape in the six countries? Are women of color in South Africa, the UK, and the US more marginalized in news leadership than women in general? How inclusive are the news leadership cultures in journalism in different countries? How can we unlock progress? These are some of the key questions that the chapters in Part 1 of this report address.

21. Three of the six countries of focus in this report are included: South Africa, the UK, and the US.

22. The fieldwork was carried out between these dates.

23. The news brands researched did not include local brands in the UK and the US.

# The importance of intersectionality

Unlike *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* and *The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News*, which focused exclusively on gender diversity in newsrooms, news leadership, and news stories, this report is expanding the diversity lens to also include how gender intersects with race in the countries in our study with multi-racial populations i.e. South Africa, the UK, and the US. In addition to examining the gender and racial composition of news leaders at the very top of news and in four high-profile beats, we have explored how included these diverse groups think they are in decision-making in news organizations.

The research that AKAS conducted for this report revealed that at an organizational level, very little effort is made to measure how gender

intersects with race in South Africa, the UK, and the US. In addition, there are hardly any established news industry standard benchmarks for intersectional representation. The problem of not including intersectionality in any examination of the challenges that women face, is that women of color often remain out of focus. Most frequently, the diversity narratives are anchored around either women or people of color, but rarely focus on women of color. By not measuring and recording their representation (through data tracking) or inclusion (through engagement surveys), the extent of the challenge that women of color face in news remains largely hidden. And, as we shall discover later in this chapter, these often longstanding challenges have also remained unresolved. In the opinion of a senior news leader from the global north, achieving diversity and inclusion in terms of race rather than gender is a much bigger stretch. The picture is slightly different in South Africa, where the bigger challenge for women of color may be that they are women, rather than that they are not white (see Part 1, Chapter 7).

A key question remains: why is it that this part of the report is not written by a woman of color? Would that be a safe move for any woman of color working in news? And would she be listened to? The answers to these questions are contained in the pages that follow.





# Chapter 1

## Gender and racial diversity of top news leaders in organizations today

AKAS conducted a unique market intelligence research exercise in the six countries of interest, examining the gender and racial profile of the top editors/editors-in-chief and the most senior editorial leads/editors in the highest-profile news areas across 354 key national (and in India, local) media brands – 60 in India, 30 in Kenya, 61 in Nigeria, 70 in South Africa, 76 in the UK, and 57 in the US.<sup>24</sup> The research focused on finding out who the most senior editorial people were in the politics, economics/business, health, and foreign affairs desks/beats as well as across the whole news brand. The beats were selected based on how high a profile they carry in the news industry. Traditionally, the politics and economics/business beats have been considered the most prestigious areas of news, generating the highest volume of news outputs, so these became the central focus of the research. Health and foreign affairs were chosen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, the war in Ukraine. This market intelligence exercise aimed to understand the

extent to which women (and women of color) are represented in the highest-profile beats. Does the significant male skew persist when it comes to editorial decision-making at the highest level in news organizations? To what extent do women have a seat at the editorial table when it comes to covering the most important stories of our times such as the pandemic, political and economic crises, the biggest war in Europe since World War II, and others? We are about to find out the answers to these questions, but before we do that, let's go back to race.

### Racial benchmarks for the working population and in the news industry

When reporting on women's representation in news or news leadership, it is relatively easy to put any proportions in context because we know that there is gender parity between women and men in the population. It is much harder to put in context the representation

24. For a detailed understanding of the methodology used in selecting the media brands, please see Appendix 2 on Methodology

of people of color, especially women of color, because the proportion of people of color in South Africa, the UK, and the US is very different. Therefore, before diving into analysis of the proportion of women and women of color in the top editorial roles in news organizations and in high-profile beats, we will establish the benchmarks for each country. The data for women of color in news is patchy and is not easily available for South Africa and the UK.

In South Africa in 2022, people of color<sup>25</sup> constitute 93% of the working population.<sup>26</sup> Women of color constitute 46% of South Africa's working population. In the UK in 2022, people of color<sup>27</sup> are estimated to constitute 16% of the working population, with women of color constituting 8%.<sup>28</sup> In the US in 2021, the proportion of people of color in the population is similar to that in the working population. People of color<sup>29</sup> constitute 42% of the working population, while women of color constitute 21% of the working population.<sup>30</sup>

Journalists who are people of color are underrepresented in all three countries. The proportion of journalists who are women of color is not readily available for all of the countries studied and is therefore difficult to contextualize. In South Africa, one survey<sup>31</sup> recorded the proportion of women journalists as 49% in 2019. The proportion of women of color, however, was not reported. In South African media houses in 2018, the proportion of senior managers and top managers who were women was 46% and 36% respectively. The proportion of Black women in top management was 30%: much lower than that

of white men or white women, or indeed Black men (50%), and lower than the proportion of Black women in the working population (46%).

In the UK, according to a recent analysis reported by Press Gazette<sup>32</sup> in 2021, the proportion of “non-white” journalists in the UK in 2020 was 8%. The proportion of women journalists of color was not reported. In the US, 47.5% of journalists are women and 22% are people of color (Black, Asian and Hispanic).<sup>33</sup> According to a different source<sup>34</sup> from 2019, people of color (referred to as minority groups) made up 23% of all journalists in the US, with women of color representing 12%. Women constituted 42% of all journalists. While the proportion of newsroom leaders who are women was reported as 41%, the proportion of women of color who were newsroom leaders was 9% (vs. 12% of all journalists). The proportion of news leaders who were of color was 19% (vs. 23% in newsrooms).

According to seminal research by Byerly<sup>35</sup>, the only global study to quantify women's representation in news governance and leadership between 2009 and 2011, the proportion of women in top level management in news in India was 14%, in Kenya it was 35%, in South Africa 25%, in the UK 30%, and in the US 23% (no figure was reported for Nigeria). Globally 27% of the top level managers in news were women. AKAS' research into the proportion of women working as editors-in-chief in national media brands in the six countries (and in regional media in India) revealed a very similar picture to the one recorded by Byerly more than a decade ago.

25. This includes Black/African, Colored, Indian/Asian

26. Statistics South Africa, 2022

27. This includes Asian, Black, Mixed, and Other aged 20-59

28. AKAS estimates for 2022

29. This includes Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian and Alaska native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Two or more Race

30. United States Census Bureau, 2021

31. Daniels et al., 2018

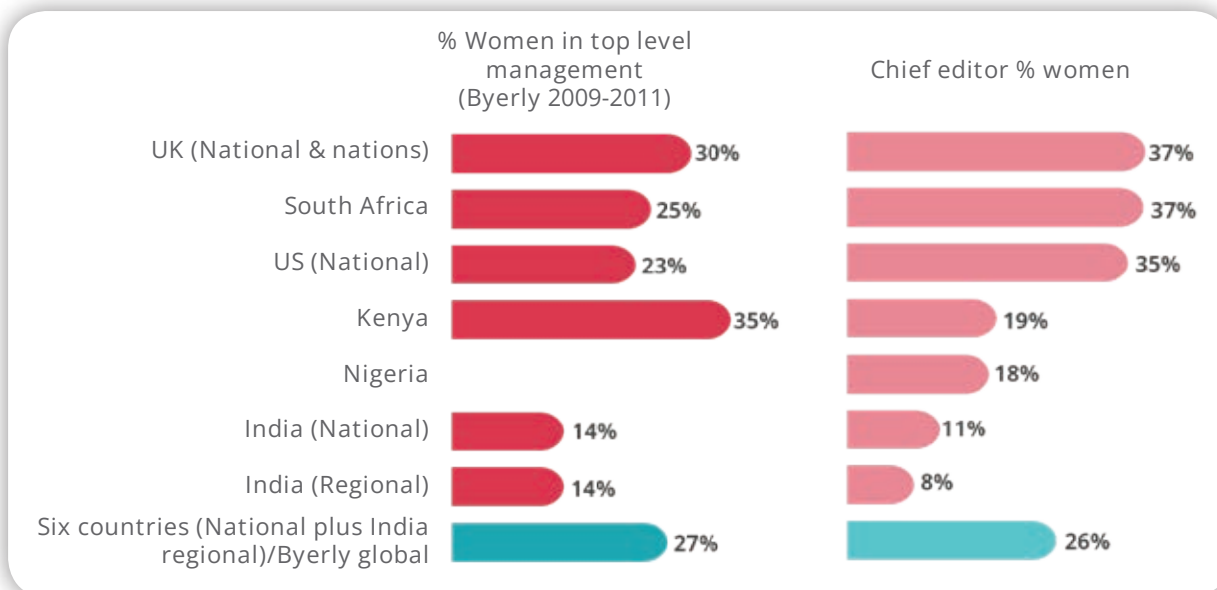
32. Tobitt, 2021a

33. Pew Research Center, June 2022

34. ASNE, 2019

35. Byerly, 2011 and 2016

**Figure 4: AKAS research of editors-in-chief in 2022 vs. Byerly’s research of women in top level management between 2009 – 2011**



Sources: AKAS news editors research (2022) and Byerly (2011)

**1 in 4 editors-in-chief across the six countries of focus in this research are women. This is marginally lower than the global average more than a decade ago. Progress has diverged across the six countries**

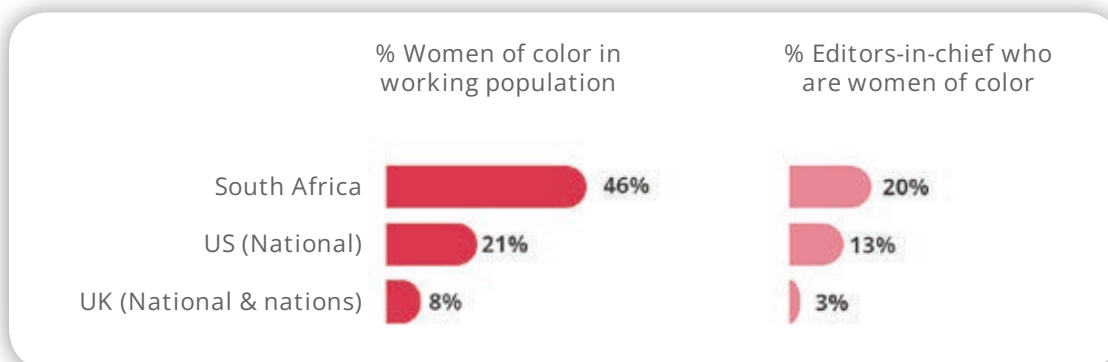
In the first half of 2022, 26% of the editors-in-chief in 298 national news media brands in India<sup>36</sup>, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US were women (see Figure 4). However, there is real variation between countries, with notably higher proportions in South Africa, the US, and the UK, and lower proportions of women in top jobs in India, Nigeria, and Kenya. Compared to a decade ago, it is a story of progress in South Africa, the US, and the UK, but one of regression in Kenya and India (with no comparison possible for Nigeria).

**The proportion of women editors-in-chief is highest in South Africa and the UK, and lowest in India**

As shown in Figure 4, 37% of all editors-in-chief across 109 news media brands in South Africa and the UK are women. A similar proportion of women (35%) hold the top jobs in US national news brands. At the opposite end of the spectrum is India, where approximately 1 in 10 chief editors is a woman (11% in national and 8% in regional media). This is down compared to a decade ago. In Kenya and Nigeria approximately 1 in 5 editors-in-chief are women (19% and 18% respectively). When comparing the results with Byerly’s analysis of top-level managers, it seems that Kenya has seen the steepest fall in numbers compared to a decade ago when more than a third of top level management in news was comprised of women. The proportion of women who are editors-in-chief in the US has enjoyed the biggest uplift compared to the last decade.

36. Also includes regional media

**Figure 5: Proportion of women of color in top editorial roles compared to their proportion in the working population (2022)**



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

**Women of color are grossly underrepresented as editors-in-chief in all three countries compared to their proportion in the working population**

1 in 5 editors-in-chief in South Africa, 1 in 8 in the US, and only 3% in the UK are women of color (see Figure 5).

The gap between women of color’s representation in top roles and their proportion in the working population is biggest in the UK, followed by South Africa and the US. There

are proportionally 2.7 times as many women of color in the working population in the UK, 2.4 times as many in South Africa, and 1.6 times as many in the US working population as there are in top news editorial jobs. As reported above, women of color make up almost half of newsroom staff in South Africa, yet only a fifth make it to the top jobs. In the US the low proportion of women of color who become journalists is reflected in the number holding the top jobs (13%), which points to an additional barrier at the point of entry into the profession. Unfortunately, we do not have a reliable source to determine the proportion of women of color in newsrooms in the UK.

# Chapter 2

## Gender and racial diversity of top editors across high-profile beats

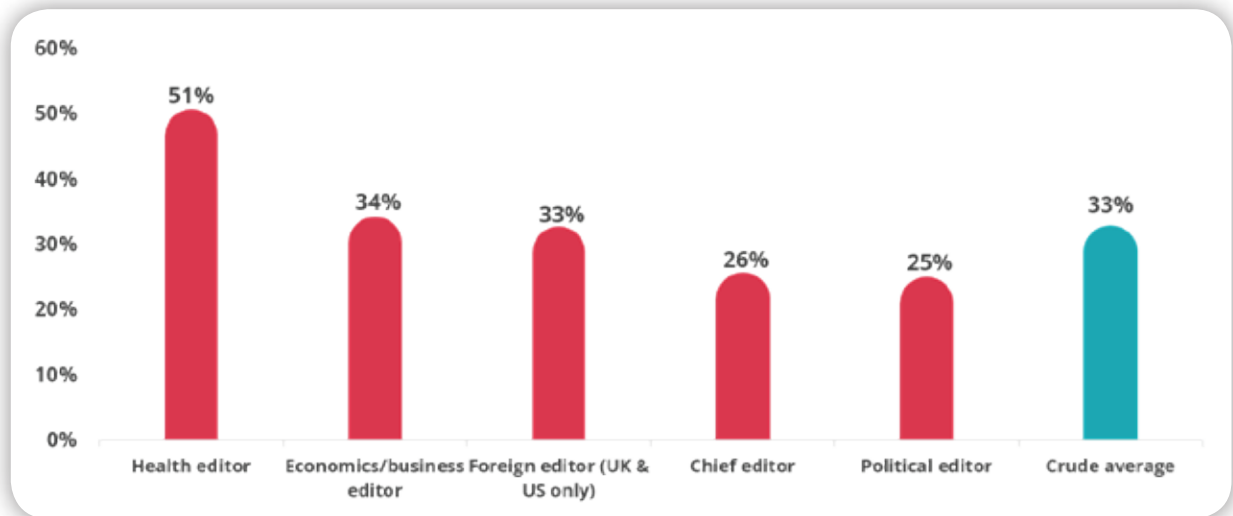
### Is the concept of structuring news in beats a Western construct?

While researching the most senior people responsible for editorial decisions across different beats, our colleagues from the global south (particularly in India) stumbled across some very interesting challenges. Often it was impossible to discern who the editor of different beats was, especially in regional or smaller news outlets, because either the beat or the title did not exist. Many outlets were simply not organized in terms of beats but had more fluid structures that cut across topics. The pandemic story in particular had at times loosened the delineation between different beats. Frequently in coverage of the pandemic, the high profile of the story had meant that editors-in-chief had been leading the editorial decisions alongside political editors, and then

health editors. In other instances, the health desks, for example, were too financially lean to have their own editor, and were led by senior journalists. In one of the interviews conducted for this project, a senior news leader from South Africa alluded to this challenge:

“Specialist beats in newsrooms are a luxury [which exacerbates the issue of women’s underrepresentation]. You have fewer journalists, and more junior as well, because based on the budgets that newsrooms have, to have very senior people is not easy.”

Figure 6: Number of women editors in key beats across the six countries (2022)<sup>37</sup>



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

To complete the research therefore, our partners in all six countries researched who was the most senior person who took editorial decisions about what stories to cover in a particular area, be it politics, economics, health, or foreign affairs.

### Does the “soft” vs. “hard” news categorization still play out in the representation of women editors in high-profile beats?

Before diving into the findings about the representation of women and women of color among the most senior editors in each of the beats AKAS investigated, we were curious to understand whether there was a significant difference in the gender representation across different beats. It turned out that there was. Moreover, the difference reconfirmed the news industry’s longstanding existing biases in appointing women as editorial leads in what journalists call “softer” beats, such as health and education, which have traditionally had a lower profile and occupy less shelf-space. Conversely, the highest-profile beats, such as politics, known as “hard” beats, which are

also the most voluminous, have remained editorially much more male-led. The tradition of channeling women into certain beats has remained firmly in place, and was mentioned by many of the senior leaders interviewed for this project. The idea was captured well by a very senior female news leader from the global south:

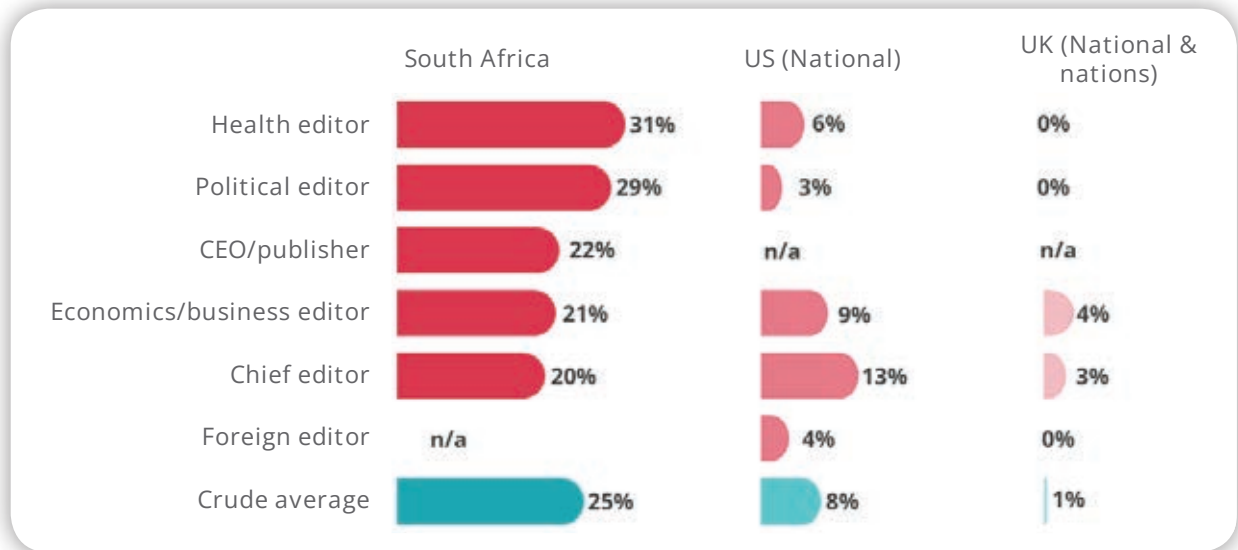
*“Are we boxing women into certain beats? I think that this is what has largely happened: we box women into health, lifestyle, entertainment, and general news and communities.”*

### There is broadly gender parity among the most senior editors in health beats across the six countries, but in politics beats only 1 in 4 are women

As evidenced in Figure 6, using crude averages, AKAS estimates that across the four beats we researched in all six countries, women represent a third of the most senior editors. However, we found a discrepancy between different desks/areas. More than half of the editors responsible for health stories

37. The figures quoted refer to national media in all six countries, plus regional media in India

**Figure 7: Percentage of editors who are women of color (2022)**



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

are women (51%) (and where health beats focus more on lifestyle than healthcare, approximately 90% are women) vs. a quarter of those responsible for political stories (25%). The proportion of foreign affairs editors and economics/business editors who are women is around a third (33% and 34% respectively). It is important to note, however, that the diversity research into foreign desks was only conducted in the UK and the US.

**Women of color are locked out of most senior editorial decision-making in the highest-profile news in the UK and are severely marginalized in the US. In South Africa, women of color are underrepresented too**

The findings from the intelligence research revealed an extraordinarily dire picture for women of color in the global north (see Figure 7).

It is particularly noteworthy that in the UK, not a single journalist in the highest decision-making editorial ranks in foreign affairs, politics, and health is a woman of color. In the US, where women of color comprise 9% of news management and 11% of all journalists (vs. 21% in the working population), their proportion is underrepresented in all key beats, including foreign affairs, politics, economics/business and health, at between 3% and 9%. In South Africa, the proportion of women of color in the most senior decision-making roles in key areas is approximately 25%. The prevalence of women of color in the working population in South Africa is almost double that (46%).

# Chapter 3

## Gender and racial diversity of top editors in politics

The politics desk is typically among the highest-profile, most competitive desks in news, and the most prestigious for journalists to join, let alone lead editorially. *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* found that gender stereotypes had greatly influenced the assignment of reporting desks in newsrooms, with women being pushed into lower-profile beats, and men taking on the agenda-setting beats such as politics which were considered more suitable for men, particularly in the global south. The findings from this new research into gender diversity in the editorial leadership of high-profile beats confirm this trend at the decision-making level.

**In South African news outlets, almost half of political editors are women. But in Kenyan and Indian regional news, the political editors are exclusively men**

As reported earlier in this chapter, across the news outlets researched in all six countries, women are most underrepresented in politics beats. However, the findings diverge substantially between countries (see Figure 8).

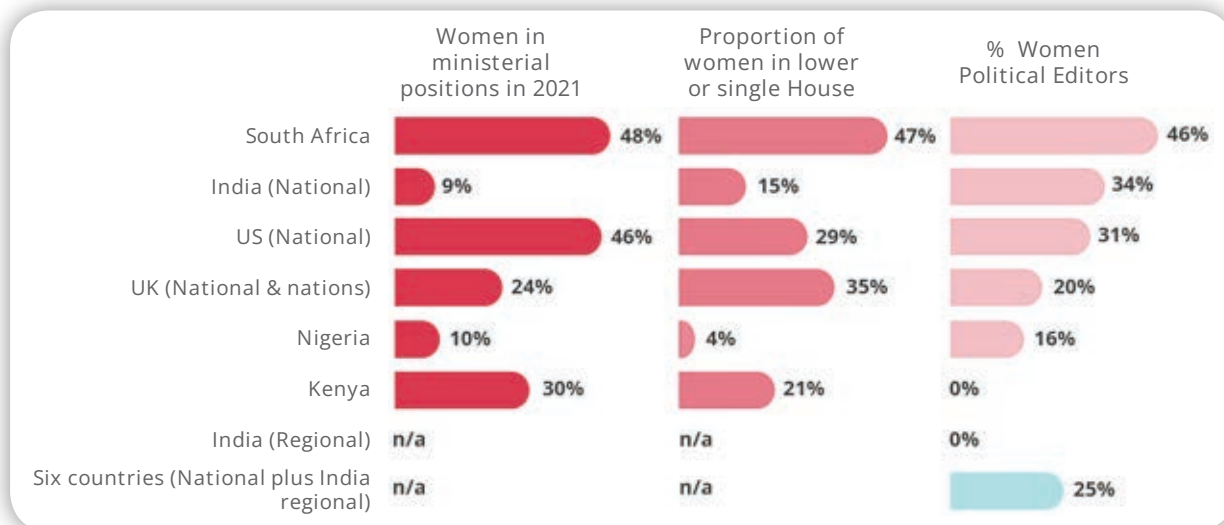
In South Africa, editors of politics beats are nearing parity (46%). By contrast, in the Kenyan news outlets assessed, there isn't a single female political editor. In India, the representation of women in editorial roles is starkly different between national news outlets (typically English-speaking and metropolitan) and regional outlets (typically non-English speaking and in non-metropolitan areas): while 29% of political editors in national news outlets are women, there are no women in the regional ones.

**Women constitute 1 in 6 political editors in Nigeria, 1 in 5 in the UK, 1 in 3 in the US, and 1 in 3 in Indian national dailies. In most countries they are more marginalized in news leadership than in political leadership**

Women political editors are grossly underrepresented in all countries bar South Africa. In the UK and the US, women are more significantly underrepresented in decision-making roles in political news beats than they are in ministerial roles in these countries: in the UK only 20% of political editors are women whereas women hold 24% of ministerial roles, while in the US the proportions are 31% vs.



**Figure 8: Proportion of women in the most senior editorial roles in politics vs. proportion of women who are in ministerial roles and in lower or single house (2022)**



Source for women in Ministerial positions: 2021: IPU Women in Politics 2021 report<sup>38</sup> Source for women in lower or single house: Inter-Parliamentary Union Open Data, ranking as of 1st July 2022 Source for Women political editors: AKAS news editors research (2022)

46%. This suggests an even more significant male bias at decision-making level in news media than in politics. However, in the US the high proportion of women in ministerial roles following the change between the Trump and Biden administrations builds an overly optimistic picture of their representation in US politics. Their representation remains a quarter (24%) in the Senate (the upper house)<sup>39</sup> and as Figure 8 illustrates, under a third (29%) in the House of Representatives (the lower house). In Nigeria, women's severe underrepresentation extends across both news media and government, although their representation in news media (16%) is more favorable than their proportion in government (10%) and in parliament (4%).

### People of color are locked out of editorial decision-making about politics in the UK and are severely underrepresented in the US

AKAS' research findings uncovered stark gaps in women and men of color's representation in decision-making roles in political news beats

in the UK and the US (see Figures 9 and 10). In the UK, there is no representation of racial minorities - almost a sixth of the working population – at senior editorial level in news about politics. In the US, the proportion of people of color occupying senior editorial roles in politics (17%) was approximately a third of their proportion in the working population, as well as much lower than their proportion in the news workforce (22%). This lack of representation was also found in South Africa, where if people of color were represented in top editorial jobs about politics to match their proportion in the working population, the number of people of color in these roles would be 1.5 times higher.

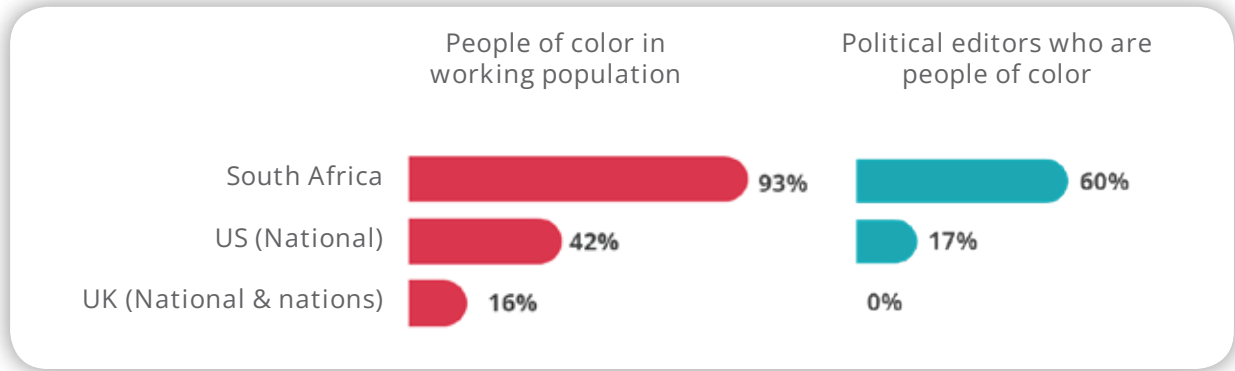
### Women of color are locked out of the top editorial jobs about politics in the UK and are almost locked out in the US

In the UK, there are no women of color who are political editors, while in the US only one of the 29 political editors is a woman of color. In fact, men of color are four times more likely to be editors than women of color in the US, while

38. Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021

39. Rutgers, 2021

**Figure 9: Proportion of people of color who are the most senior editorial leads in politics (2022)**



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

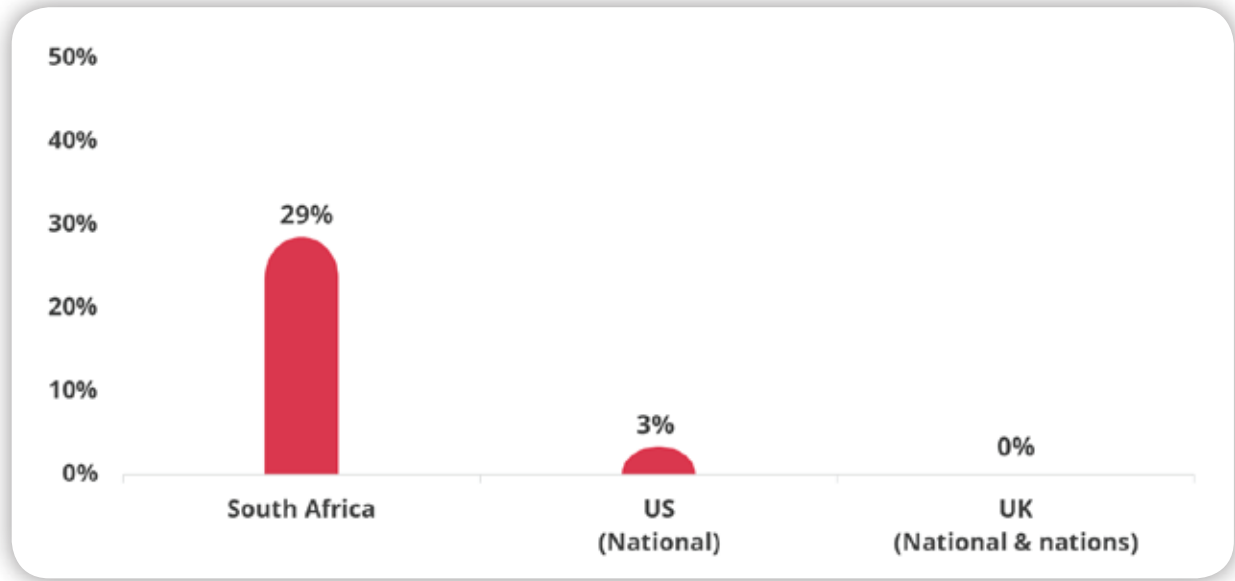
there are no people of color political editors in the UK. Women of color constitute 21% of the working population in the US, 11% of journalists and just 3% of editors in political beats. In South Africa, 29% of the top editorial jobs in politics are occupied by women of color, which is significantly lower than their proportion in the working population (46%).

In an interview for this project, a very senior male news editor from the global south pondered regretfully the perniciousness of the problem:

*“Some of our best political writers have been women, but for some reason, very few of them went up to become political editors or editors of publications - somehow they just ended up being those writers, and then they move on to do other things, which means it has to do with the culture. This belief that, ‘No, maybe when it comes to promotion, the men get those jobs’.”*

Later on in this section we will be exploring these organizational cultural barriers that keep women from decision-making roles in news.

**Figure 10: Proportion of women of color who are the most senior editorial leads in politics (2022)**



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

# Chapter 4

## Gender and racial diversity of top editors in health

The gender stereotyping of news desk assignments globally has historically placed health among lower-profile, “softer” news topics – deemed more suitable for women journalists and less appealing to men.<sup>40</sup> This persistent belief was articulated very pertinently by a senior news leader from the global south during an interview for this project.

“*In our country, the tendency has been that health reporters tend to be women journalists because health has been seen, for the longest time, as being “soft”. It’s usually not a career path that leads to highest level editing.*”

In 2019, health was among the more gender-balanced beats globally, albeit with men still predominating: 43% of journalists working on

health beats globally were women.<sup>41</sup> Did the pandemic shatter the cultural stereotypes in news around health being “soft”? Not exactly. What happened instead is that the reporting on COVID-19 was shifted to higher-profile beats, away from or alongside health, and the editors who made the decisions on what to cover remained much more likely to be men.

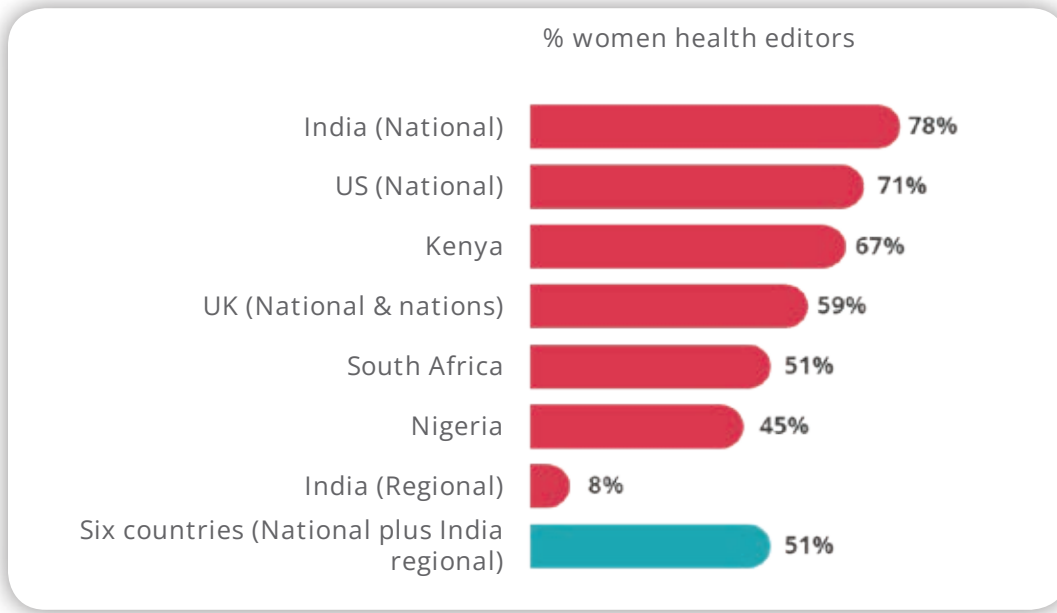
**In five of our six countries, the majority of health editors in national news media are women. Nigeria and India (regional) are the only places where men outnumber women as health editors**

The findings from AKAS’ intelligence research into editors in the six countries of interest found that 224 of the researched news brands have a health editor or a senior decision-maker dedicated to driving health coverage. Among these just over half are women (51%). In many instances the health desk extends to covering wellness and fitness, which partly explains

40. Kassova, 2020a

41. International Center for Journalists, 2019

**Figure 11: Proportion of health editors who are women (2022)**



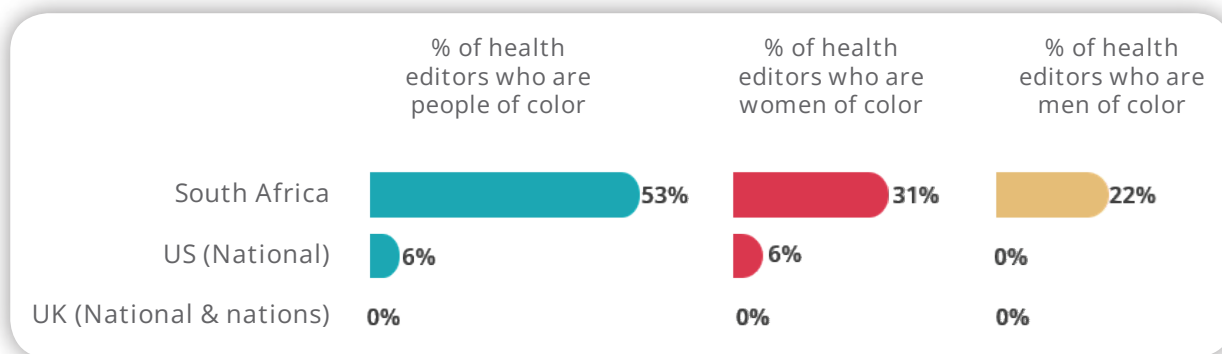
Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

the dominance of women in some countries. Almost 8 in 10 health editors in Indian national providers and 7 in 10 in US national news media are women. The figures are also high in Kenya and the UK where, respectively, almost 7 in 10 and 6 in 10 of the health editors are women. Bucking this trend, the proportion of women health editors in Nigeria is less than half (45%). Once again, the editorial decision-making in regional news media in India is found to be extremely male-dominated, with only two in 24 of the health editors (8%) being women.

### **People of color are locked out of the decision-making on health news coverage in the UK, almost locked out of it in the US, and underrepresented in South Africa**

Out of the 29 health editor roles that the AKAS team investigated in the UK in May 2022, none was found to be held by a person of color (see Figure 12). In the US, only one of the 17 health editorial roles explored is occupied by a woman of color. The missing editorial perspectives of people of color in health is particularly worrying in the context of the pandemic's disproportionate impact on people of color in the UK and the US, as well as the enormous health gap that exists generally for people of color, especially women (for details, please see

**Figure 12: Proportion of health editors who are people of color, split by gender (2022)**



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

chapter 1 on the health gap in Part 2 of this report). Thousands of important stories about the health challenges faced by people of color are potentially being missed every day as a result of the absence of people of color in key decision-making roles in journalism.

The underrepresentation of people of color in health editorial roles continues in South Africa. Despite 93% of the working population in the country being of color, only 53% of these senior editorial roles are occupied by this demographic. Where people of color do hold these editorial roles, women predominate, holding 31% of the positions (vs. men’s 22%) which is on a par with their proportion in news leadership in South Africa.

Having greater gender and racial diversity among editors has resulted in new but critically important stories emerging, according to this senior editor from the global south.

*“...we now have an industry-wide discussion around the consequences of the profession on the mental health of journalists; and the correlation between mental health and media freedom. These are discussions that could not have been on the table when you do not have this movement to have more diverse editors at the table.”*

One cannot help but wonder what the stories are that are being missed as a result of the predominance of more homogenous editorial teams. Part 2 of this report will begin to provide answers to this question.

# Chapter 5

## Gender and racial diversity of top editors in economics/business

### **A reminder of women's structural disadvantage in economics and business**

*The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* argued in 2020 that gender parity in economics and business beats represented a particular challenge for news organizations due to the structural undersupply of women in economics. It was reported that in England only 27% of economics undergraduates were women; in South Africa 21% of economics PhDs were held by women; while in the US, women represented a third of economics undergraduates and 15% of full professors of economics. On the business side, across the six countries of focus, women represent only 5-7% of CEOs.<sup>42</sup> According to ICFJ's 2019 global survey, 36% of business/commerce and 35% of economics news beats staff globally were women.<sup>43</sup> AKAS' intelligence research into the most senior editors shows that on average a

third (34%) of all economics or business editors across the six countries are women. However, there is very significant variation between countries (see Figure 13).

### **The US and South Africa are significantly ahead of other countries with the majority of economics and business editors in US national news media being (white) women**

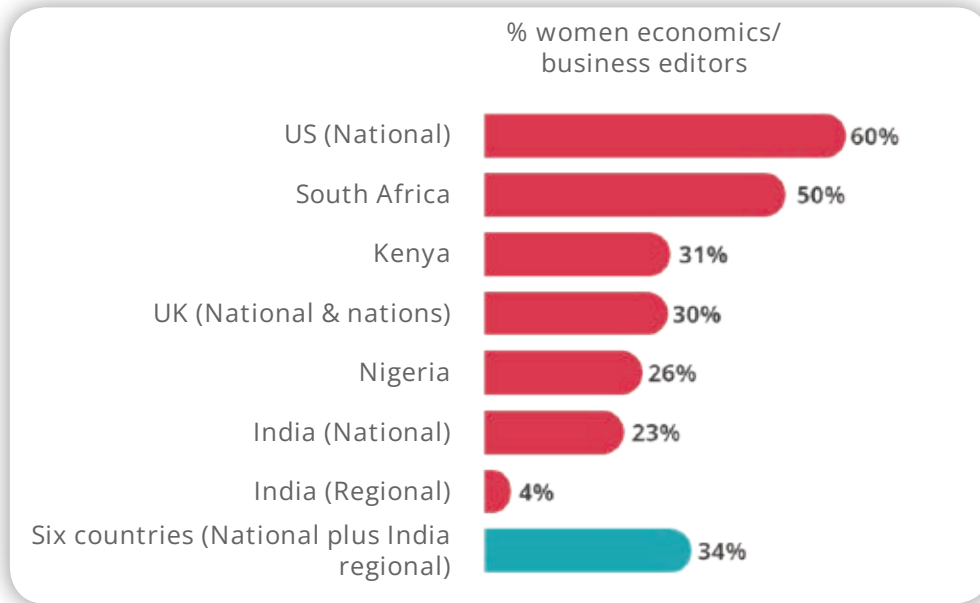
Much to AKAS' surprise and against expectations, the latest editors research uncovered that it is women who hold the majority (60%) of the 35 business and economics most senior editor roles in the US national news outlets researched. Unfortunately, this undoubted progress is undermined by the reality that there is a 22% gender pay gap between women and men business editors.<sup>44</sup> Less surprisingly and in line with women's representation in other beats

42. Deloitte, 2022

43. ICFJ, 2019 in Kassova, 2020a

44. Culey, 2022

**Figure 13: Proportion of economics/business editors who are women (2022)**



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

in South Africa, half of the 52 business and economics roles researched there are occupied by women. These proportions are significantly higher than in the other four countries where women's occupancy of the most senior leadership roles in economics/business news ranges from 4% to 31%.

### **The lowest proportion of women economics/business editors was found in Indian national and regional news media**

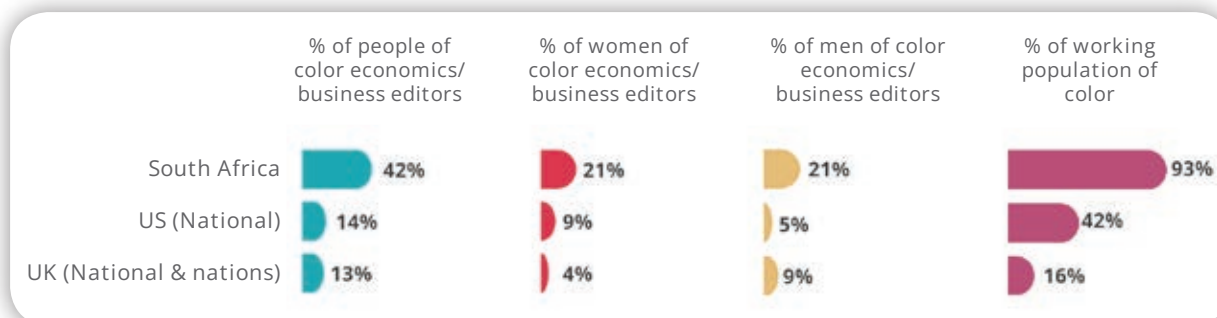
Only one out of the 23 economics/business editor roles identified in Indian regional news media is occupied by a woman. In the UK, 14 out of 46 top editor roles in business and economics are held by women (30%). However, the UK performance in this area is significantly affected by high female representation in one news provider. Without that news provider, women's representation in top editor roles in business and economics would have stood at only 18%, which would have made the UK the second least gender-diverse country in terms of decision-making in this beat.

### **Women constitute less than a third of economics/business editors in Kenya, and approximately a quarter in Nigeria**

The proportion of women occupying the most senior roles in economics/business beats in Kenya, Nigeria, and India's national news media is significantly lower than that of men. 31% of the top jobs in this beat in Kenya, 26% in Nigeria, and 23% in Indian national media are held by women.

Some of the historical barriers to improving women's representation in economics and business beats were highlighted by editors from both the global north and south in the interviews conducted for this project. They cited stereotypes, prejudice against women, and the authority gap (examined in Part 2, Chapter 1 of this report) as key barriers to better representation in economics/business editorial roles. A female senior leader from the global south shared her observations and objections to the prejudices that exist:

**Figure 14: Proportion of economics/business editors who are people/women/men of color (2022)**



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

“I worked in financial journalism, and it was all white and male. It was just so beyond ridiculous... In financial economic journalism, there’s this myth that it’s so complicated and only men can get their brains around it, it’s just bullshit.”

**Once again, people of color are significantly underrepresented in the top economics/ business editor jobs, while in the UK women of color are missing altogether**

If people of color were represented in top editorial business/economics jobs to match their proportions in the working population, the number of people of color in these roles would be 3 times higher in the US, 2.2 times higher in South Africa, and 1.2 times higher in the UK. In South Africa 93% of the working population is comprised of people of color but only 42% of these top editorial jobs are held by people of color. In the US and the UK, the proportions are 42% vs. 14% and 16% vs. 13% respectively (see Figure 14).

Of the 46 top economics/business editor roles that AKAS analyzed in the UK, two are occupied by a woman of color and only four are held by men of color i.e. men of color are twice as likely as women to occupy business editor roles. The picture in the US is even starker for people of color when juxtaposed with their proportion in the working population. Only five of the 35 roles researched in the US are occupied by people of color (three by women and two by men). These gender and racial proportions suggest that the perspectives of communities who are struggling the most financially are only marginally represented in news media in the UK, the US, and Indian regional news, and are underrepresented in all our other countries of focus.



# Chapter 6

## Gender and racial diversity of top editors in foreign affairs desks

AKAS analysis of GDELT in the first few weeks of the ongoing war in Ukraine indicated that under a quarter of the total experts, protagonists, or sources quoted in global digital news about the war were women.<sup>45</sup> This discovery prompted us to examine the gender (and racial) profile of the foreign affairs news editors who ultimately make the decisions about whose voices and stories to amplify in war coverage. Within the limited timeframe available, AKAS was able to complete this intelligence exercise for 67 national outlets in the UK and the US only (see Figures 15 and 16 overleaf).

### **Around 1 in 3 foreign editors in the US and in the UK are women**

31% of foreign editors in the US and 34% in the UK are women, which is at or below the crude average of women across all beats for both countries (43% in the US and 34% in the UK).

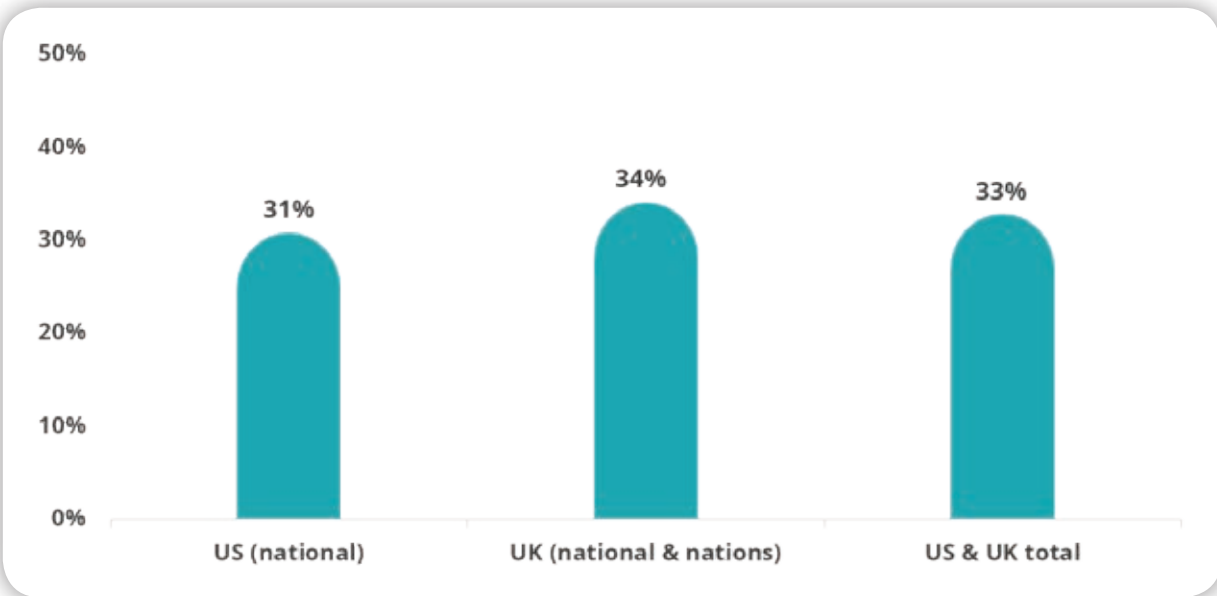
This male bias has increased the likelihood of women's perspectives and stories being missed in the context of the war.

### **People of color are severely marginalized in most senior foreign affairs editorial roles both in the UK and the US. There are no women of color foreign editors in the UK**

At the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, voices in the media called out examples of racism that had featured in some UK and US news outlets' coverage of the war. Whether it was correspondents lamenting an uncivilized war that was only meant to happen in "*poor*", "*developing*", "*third world nations*" but not in Europe, or missed stories of how people of color were facing extraordinary racism when trying to leave Ukraine, or even the sheer volume of coverage the war generated

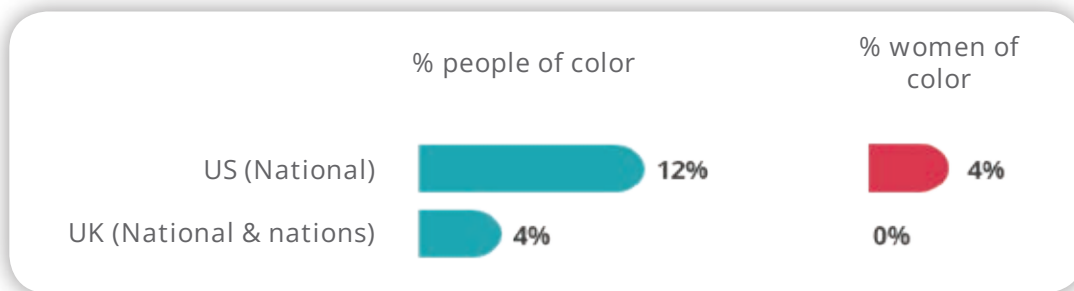
45. Kassova and Scharff, 2022

Figure 15: Proportion of foreign editors who are women (2022)



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

Figure 16: Proportion of foreign editors who are people of color (2022)



Source: AKAS news editors research (2022)

compared to the much more limited coverage of the wars in Yemen and Afghanistan, all pointed to unconscious racial bias, favoring white people “with blond hair and blue eyes”.<sup>46</sup> Having a strong affinity towards people who look “similar to us” is a well-recognized bias in behavioral science, which Rutger Bregman used in his impressive *Humankind: A Hopeful History* to partly explain how atrocities were committed by people who were not otherwise in any way considered “evil”.

AKAS’ analysis of 73 foreign editor roles in news outlets in the UK and the US shines some light on why news coverage of the war may be racially unjust (see Figure 16).

As this data indicates, there are barely any racially diverse editors in this beat, making it more likely that affinity bias will manifest in coverage being skewed towards white populations in the UK and the US. Those editors who are racially diverse tend to be men.

46. Twaij, 2022; Bayoumi, 2022



Approximately 1 in 10 of the foreign editors in the US and 1 in 20 in the UK are people of color. The proportion of people of color in the working population in the US and the UK (42% and 16%) is therefore 3.5 times higher in the US and 4 times higher in the UK than their representation as foreign editors in the news. This severe marginalization of people of color in such a high-profile beat means that the pool of people considered ‘similar to us’ – in this instance to the editors – is correspondingly very limited for people of color, and entails very limited sensitivity to the perspectives of people of color. Furthermore, no woman of color is a foreign editor in the UK (and only two of 47 roles are held by men of color) which overlays a worrying gender dimension to the racial bias. To redress the white- and male-centric biases in war coverage that have been highlighted in news outlets, there is an urgent need to bring in more editors of color.

# Chapter 7

## Beyond representation: the barriers that prevent women — including women of color — from being fully included in decision-making in news

“Whether the newsroom looks like the world we live in can’t be how low the bar is, that should be a given. How much can we hear the voices of the women in the room? Are they speaking loud enough? Are they being given a microphone that’s working, and, more importantly, are they being spoken over?”

These potent semi-rhetorical questions are at the heart of what this chapter is about. They were articulated in an interview for this project by a prominent female political editor, who made a clear distinction between women’s representation in news leadership and their inclusion in decision-making.

In the chapters preceding this one, we found that the most senior editors in the highest-profile news beats look nothing like the world we live in. There is no gender parity in the leadership of any of the high-profile beats, with the exceptions of health in five of the six countries of interest in this project, and economics/business in the US and South Africa. People of color are underrepresented in editorial decision-making across beats in South Africa, the UK, and the US. Women of color

are locked out of editorial decision-making across most beats in the UK and are severely marginalized in the US. This chapter focuses on the key barriers that women, including women of color, face which keep them outside the decision-making room altogether or keep them quiet when they make it inside the room. It is predominantly based on the analysis of 41 interviews with top leaders in news organizations and senior editorial leaders in news, with an emphasis on economics/ business and political beats.

The women and men news leaders who were interviewed were honest and generous. They shared many pertinent stories which shed light on the significant problems that women of all races still face in news leadership today. Universal stories that are experienced by women across countries and global regions. Stories which many believe are a thing of the past. I heard about female leaders being told “*Let me curtail you...*” two sentences into their argument at a board meeting; being told to “*leave their womb at the door*”; being publicly dismissed for suggesting relevant stories which “*are not news*”; being offered coaching to fit in better with the culture; being harassed by members of the public or by hired PR companies on social media for how they look or what they wear instead of the stories they tell; women leaders being asked to deliver the most complex projects, later to be sidelined when it came to promotion; women leaders being labelled “*trouble-makers*” for telling stories about women’s rights and being circumvented when substantive decisions were being made.

I also heard different stories about the specific experiences of women of color in news leadership. These stories had an added level of injustice and anguish, often unfathomable to white people of any gender. Stories of gaslighting, extreme exclusion, loneliness, with no resolution in sight. I heard about

a senior leader who was asked to guide the organization through the significance of the “*story of that man who was killed in the States*” [George Floyd] while not being asked once in the months that followed how she felt as one of the very few people of color in the newsroom; a talented and highly-skilled female leader of color who always came a close second in interviews; a senior female leader of color who was gaslighted (twice) in her career by being reassured that she was not being underpaid, only to find out once she was eventually promoted and saw the salaries of those reporting to her that she had indeed been significantly underpaid. I heard the stories of a few senior female leaders of color who were experiencing burnout from being asked to drive diversity initiatives amid cultural pushback and not given enough power to make change happen; a person of color being thrust into a news organization to run a session about the challenges that people of color face, only to be met with a nearly-empty room; a newly promoted editor turning up for her first shift being pointed to the bin, assumed to be the cleaner.



**Figure 17: How senior news leaders interviewed for this project perceive newsroom cultures (2022)**

	Top 5 news culture descriptors identified by senior news leaders in the six countries	No. of news leaders	%
1	Newsrooms and cultures are still dominated by men	21	84%
2	There are fewer senior women in news and their battle is lonely	16	64%
3	Newsroom cultures are meritocratic	14	56%
4	Success is often dependent on factors such as luck, timing, mentors	12	48%
5	Gender balance in news has improved	8	32%

Source: Author's interviews (2022) Base: 25 news interviewees; Q: To what extent, if any, has the culture in the newsrooms you have worked at aided your ascent?

The interview findings yet again highlighted the importance of examining how gender intersects with race. What became apparent while researching this project is the irrefutable fact that women of color in news experience a double whammy.<sup>47</sup> They are faced with all the disadvantages and stereotypes that women generally experience, as well as the added stereotypes and prejudices that are attached to people of color. It is for this reason that in this chapter, some key barriers associated with the exclusion of women of color have been separated out from the barriers faced by women in news leadership. It is important to remember that women of color in news leadership will be experiencing both sets of challenges. But before we explore any challenges, let us examine how senior news leaders who were interviewed for this project perceive newsroom culture in the context of gender.

### Over 80% of the interviewed news editors believe that newsrooms and news cultures are still dominated by men

As part of the research for this project, AKAS asked 25 news leaders out of the 41

interviewed whether they thought that the newsrooms they had worked in had aided or hindered their career ascent. Their responses revealed a number of noteworthy insights, among them some descriptors of newsroom cultures which were shared by many of the interviewees (see Figure 17). Across the global north and south, the vast majority of the news editors interviewed (84%) acknowledged that newsrooms and news culture are still dominated by men, while a significant majority (64%) also recognized that there are fewer women in news leadership and that their battle can be lonely.

Interestingly and perhaps somewhat contradictorily, the majority of the interviewed senior leaders (56%) held the view that newsroom cultures are meritocratic and that they had achieved their status in news on merit alone (see Figure 17). Men and leaders from the global south were more likely to hold this view. When asked how they got to grow in their career, a male editor from the global north attributed his success exclusively to his abilities.

*"I think it was my ability, my relationships with people."*

47. New research in fact points to women of color experiencing a triple whammy: gender, color and class. This report, however, has not explored how class intersects with gender or color in the context of news.

Another male leader from the global north highlighted the opportunities that newsrooms bring to form alliances, which he believed to be universal:

*“I think that the biggest benefit of newsrooms is they give those who aspire to develop leadership skills and build coalitions and alliances throughout organizations plenty of space to do so.”*

The belief in fully meritocratic newsrooms suggests a high level of unawareness of the privilege that comes with gender or other factors such as class or race, as powerfully illustrated in this story shared by a senior female news leader from India:

*“Because we’re in an English-speaking [metropolitan] newsroom... I think we are disconnected from the social barriers that a lot of other women, certainly on the regional [media], have to deal with. I was on a panel and a young journalist from the vernacular press... got up and said: ‘You guys make it sound so easy and that it’s all merit based. You have no idea what it’s like for women like me, and the barriers that we have to deal with at work - ethnicity and language and the patriarchy. And how that comes in the way of us being seen and heard.’ That really stayed with me, and now I’m very, very, very mindful of the fact that I’m privileged... and I realize that we’re the very small, slim minority.”*

A third of the interviewees believed that the gender balance in newsrooms has improved in recent years. Almost half (48%) placed factors such as luck, the right timing, and good mentors at the heart of their career success. Women, especially women of color, and those from the global north were more likely to believe this to be the case.

## **Lower representation and persistent gender stereotyping in news desk assignments are perceived as the two biggest barriers to women’s inclusion in news leadership**

In order to understand why male bias in decision-making and news coverage – evidenced abundantly in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* – has been so stubborn in the news industry globally, AKAS interviewed global leaders from nine countries, mostly from the six countries of focus in this project. One of the questions we asked the senior editors was why they thought this bias persisted. Most of the 19 leaders who responded to this question highlighted two key barriers, both organizational (see Figure 18): women’s underrepresentation in senior leadership roles (58%) and the persistent cultural gender stereotypes associated with assigning news desks (53%). Many referenced the long-standing division of desks into hard news and soft news. The editors who are chosen to lead news organizations tend to be recruited from the higher-profile hard news beats, rather than the soft ones. As we have seen, however, men are much more likely to be editors in those highly prestigious beats, whereas women occupy those with less prestige, which has a knock-on effect on women’s representation on news leadership boards. The lower proportion of women editors in high-profile beats also keeps them in the role of sidekicks rather than allowing them to progress to the position of top dogs.

## **Almost half of the interviewed leaders believe that the power and authority gender gaps inhibit women’s growth into leadership roles**

Almost half of the interviewed editors (47%) shared that there is an observable power and/or authority gap which can keep women at arm’s length when it comes to real decision-making (see Figure 18). Women leaders can still frequently be token hires, especially in news organizations where the gender gap is substantial at all levels of the organization.

**Figure 18: What senior news leaders perceive the key barriers to inclusion to be (2022)**

	Top barriers to women’s inclusion in decision-making in news	No. of news leaders	%
1	Fewer women in senior roles	11	58%
2	Persistent cultural stereotypes around assigning desks (e.g. “soft” vs. “hard” news)	10	53%
3	Career advancement slow due to power and authority gender gap	9	47%
	There is no male bias	9	47%
4	Work life imbalance affecting women more	8	42%
4	Gender balance much improved at junior and senior journalist level today	7	37%
5	The onus is on women and they are not doing enough	7	37%
5	All boys clubs keep women at arms length	7	37%

Source: Author’s interviews (2022). Base: 19 news leader interviewees; Q: How far do you agree that there is male bias in news? Why do you think it persists in decision-making and news coverage irrespective of women’s representation in news leadership?

Some leaders linked this barrier to the power and authority gap in society. Others perceived the problem to be more acute within the news industry. A senior female editor of color from the global north revealed:

*“...I think it is a real issue in our society, the way that women are perceived. It’s in everything, we’re just dismissed. I think it’s partly because women are not seen as powerful, and important, and equal.”*

A very senior editor from the global south poignantly summarized how the pernicious nature of tokenism adversely impacts a leader’s self-confidence:

*“As a woman [in a very senior decision-making role], you realize that you feel sidelined in a lot of situations, where you probably should be taking center stage. I was not given the authority that came with the office a lot of times. So you have many people who basically work below you, but report to somebody else, to the person above. It’s*

*clearly nothing to do with my competence. I would think it’s about somebody, who is gender-biased, not having confidence in me.”*

Another editor in a different country from the global south questioned how substantive and meaningful the leadership positions of women editors really are:

*“Just many leadership positions is not the only solution. You need women’s voices to be heard, and women in leadership positions, in meaningful and critical positions.”*

A senior female news leader from the global north eloquently highlighted the power and authority gap she had faced in her previous role, which was echoed by other interviewees of both genders:

*“We got to the point where most women ran the company but we were never at the top rung. There’s always a layer of men above us.”*





## Almost half of the interviewed leaders question the existing male bias in news leadership. A minority highlight the progress already made

47% of the news leaders we asked about the persistent male bias in leadership and coverage questioned its prevalence (see Figure 18). This was particularly the case in the global north and among men. The most frequently stated pushback was the perceived high representation of women editors-in-chief running well-known papers, as well as broadcasters fronting high-profile shows. The prominent UK journalist Mary Ann Sieghart, whose interview about the authority gap features in a later chapter, has explained convincingly the skew that the male bias in societies and in news creates in our brains. She contends that when women form 30-35% of a leadership group, our brains tell us that we have reached equality, because the baseline is hardly seeing any women at all (see Part 2, Chapter 1, The Authority Gap).

*“Based just on raw data, there are more women in senior positions than there were a decade or two ago. Moving the conversation beyond that would be how meaningful this is,”*

reflected a female editor from South Africa on the importance of inclusion - one of the 37% of interviewed leaders who thought that some progress in representation had been made at senior and junior levels in journalism.

**Women bearing the brunt of the work-life imbalance in journalism, women being on the outside of an all-boys club that aids career progression in journalism, and women being seen as ineffective in making their own case for change, were other barriers to having an equal voice mentioned by some**

42% of those who were interviewed on this issue emphasized the disproportionately negative impact that being a parent has on women who want to take on leadership roles

(see Figure 18). The interviewees pointed out that a lack of work-life balance affects women more than men, especially those with kids, who found it much harder to drop everything for a story or a newsroom emergency. According to the interviewees, the need to restructure work life to accommodate family often results in women taking up more writing and fewer leadership roles. A female news editor from the global south shared her frustration at having been refused a pay rise merely because she had become a mother:

*“When I came back from maternity leave, I hadn’t [got the same raise] as my male colleagues, so I confronted them. And my [female] boss said, ‘But how can you expect the same kind of raise when you’ve been on maternity leave?’, and I thought that was shocking: ‘Are you punishing me because I have been away having a child?’ It wasn’t a holiday, I was working.”*

37% of the interviewees placed the responsibility for the male bias in decision-making in news fully or partly at women’s door and thought that they were not doing enough to help themselves (see Figure 18). The same proportion thought that not being a part of the socializing structures that benefit men in journalism resulted in fewer women being allowed to join the decision-making strata. A male senior news editor from the global north explained the barrier that results from women being on the outside of men’s bonding structures:

*“If there are newsrooms that are very male and clubby, I can see very easily how women would not be included, and that culture would need to be changed. Especially if you have a very large proportion of men in leadership roles, and they have connections with one another, they socialize with one another, maybe they play sports or whatever together, I can see how women would be discriminated against in those situations.”*

A very senior female news leader from the global south explained how the boys’ club mentality and being one of very few women curtailed her agency as a decision-maker:

*“I was not really part of the boys’ club, so I would get to know about decisions once they had been taken, and then it was up to me to execute them. The decision-making continues to rest more with the men and the structure that they have put in place. Until we see enough, or at least significantly more numbers of women, to operate a sort of parallel ‘club’, it will be a challenge, because I do feel sometimes it’s a lone battle for me.”*

The following memorable quote showcases the thought process of a senior female news leader from the global south who explained why she believes that the problem lies with women:

*“Let’s also be honest with ourselves and women in this part of the world, and I say this with all sense of responsibility as a news manager: there’s so many women I work with in newsrooms, how many of them are ready for responsibility? A lot of people want to punch a time clock. You are the foreign affairs correspondent, and let’s use the big story of Ukraine. When you say to some of them: ‘Okay, let’s localize the story’, everybody has 1 billion excuses. It’s either too late, or ‘I have a husband’, ‘I have children’. You start to hear ridiculous excuses. And then a woman believes that she’ll be given the leadership of a newsroom, right?”*

Another female editor from a different country in the global south attributed some of the problem to women’s inability to convince male leaders that they deserve promotion:

*“There are issues that newsrooms obviously have to attend to, but the women themselves have to put their hand up, and sometimes there is that lack of confidence from some.”*

## **Women have to prove themselves endlessly**

One of the most psychologically and physically punishing halo effects that women in news leadership face – which have resulted from facing so many prejudices and barriers before reaching or being taken seriously in senior leadership roles – is the need to endlessly prove themselves to bridge the power and authority

gap. This is encapsulated powerfully in the thoughts of a senior female leader from the global north:

*“There’s always a layer of men above us across the company. And then you have this layer of women that are getting all this stuff done. We all started talking to each other and supporting one another. We made some change happen because our results showed it. We were killers - each of us. We almost did everything perfectly and broke all the revenue figures. I met every metric of success that I was being judged by. You have to be perfect in your job and then you can fight for change.”*

### **Harassment while on the job and unintentional bias are other challenges mentioned by minority editors**

One in five of the news editors from across the global north and south who were interviewed for this project highlighted the extraordinary burden that women bear as a result of the misogyny and harassment that exist inside and outside the newsroom (see Figure 19). We will be exploring (quantitatively) this fundamental challenge in journalism in more detail later on in this report, in the context of the safety gap that exists between men and women journalists (see Part 2, Chapter 1).

Some of the most striking observations with regard to the existing sexual harassment and misogyny were offered by senior news editors from the global south. One female senior news leader from the global south shared career-ending examples of misogyny in the newsrooms in her country:

*“I think there’s so many stories. Our newsrooms are full of these stories... people who would read explicit, pornographic things in the newsrooms to intimidate the women. There are so many stories where a woman gets a bad end of it. There was a huge scandal about two people being found in an intimate position. Well, that man is now one of the editors, and no one knows where the woman is.”*

Another editor from a country in the global south shared the complex dilemma that political editors face when it comes to sending women reporters to work on political stories and the need to put measures in place to protect them:

*“The conversation we are having as journalists in political reporting [in my country] has been: ‘Is it worth it to subject young reporters to the levels of misogyny and abuse - that is our political terrain?’ You’re sending out a young female reporter to quite possibly - almost certainly - be harassed, and sometimes or a lot of the time, by those in power. The advice we had was ‘Grin and bear it’ or ‘It is what it is.’”*

The news editor concluded that the solution is not to prevent women from reporting but to give them all the necessary tools to combat misogyny.

*“...The conversation has to shift to say, ‘It’s difficult for a woman journalist to do her job because she’s a woman.’ ...how can we then assist or, in the spirit of fostering a gender equal society and a newsroom, how do we give the tools and the skills necessary to female journalists?”*

A male news leader from the global south provided a glimpse of how circumstances prop up the often circumstantial pro-male bias in editorial decision-making in relation to who stories are assigned to:

*“I think that the discrimination is not really intentional. I’ll give an example: it’s around 7pm, or it’s very early morning, and something crops up in the newsroom and you look around to see who is available, and some people have already left, maybe some of your reporters are mothers. So you find the next available person, and the next available person is a man.”*

# The challenges that women of color face in news leadership and newsrooms

*“When it comes to power, there is one playbook for white people and another one for people of color.”*

This is how a senior politics editor from the global north described one of the key challenges that people of color face in society at large. How does the playbook for people of color differ? Do people of color feel that they belong in news organizations and in news leadership? These are key questions which this section focuses on, seeking answers particularly for women of color. The interviews with news leaders conducted for this project uncovered that inclusion in news leadership is much harder to attain for people of color. This is due in part to the pitifully small proportions of people of color in newsrooms and in news leadership in the UK, the US, and South Africa compared to their proportion in the working population.

According to some news leaders from the global north and south, the strategy for making newsrooms and news leadership more racially diverse can be narrowed down to one element: hiring.

*“The thinking is very much about hiring: ‘Let’s hire some people who’ve got different skin shade from us’. Inclusion is a real blind spot. You say you want to hire people of color. How are you going to turn this into an inclusive newsroom? That is much harder. I don’t think organizations are there yet,”*

was the concerned opinion expressed by a news editor from the global north.

**A significant downside to this mono-dimensional strategy**, which was noted by the interviewees, is the **high attrition rate of people of color in news organizations**. In the view of one senior leader from the UK, this was attributable to the culture not supporting them to stay or get promoted.

*“What we have to do is support people who are already there, to retain them, and build them up. If you’re somebody in a mid-level role, you’re not thinking of going for those jobs, because you don’t have the confidence, you don’t understand the prep,...we need to approach people and then support them through the process, and encourage them to apply.”*

This issue of attrition was reinforced by a report released in April 2022 by the Washington Post Newspaper Guild, revealing that the Post was struggling to retain Black journalists<sup>48</sup>: in 2020 45% of those who left the newsroom were people of color, even though this demographic only made up 22% percent of the newsroom and less than 1 in 5 of those hired in 2020. According to the analysis, many of those who left were Black women. *“The people who fought the hardest to push the Post to evolve are the ones who had to leave, ultimately, because it is such an exhausting job.”*

To understand the specific cultural challenges that women, including women of color, face in news organizations, AKAS asked 23 senior news editors whether they had been approached by [other] women/people of color with stories of exclusion or inequity. Their responses were coded and aggregated to build a picture of the key challenges that individual leaders or their staff face. Figure 19 presents the list of the more commonly mentioned challenges, which were put forward by five or more editors. 14 other challenges were mentioned by four or fewer news leaders.<sup>49</sup>

48. Chick, 2022

49. The pay gap, the impact of intersectionality, telling different stories to the ones accepted as the norm, undue emphasis on appearance and lack of confidence were among the other mentioned challenges

**Figure 19: The most common stories of exclusion based on senior leaders' views (2022)**

	Most common stories of gender or racial exclusion or inequity	No. of news leaders	%
1	Systematic sidelining in the past or at present	12	52%
2	Race-based exclusion	9	39%
3	Career stalling due to lack of support/opportunities	8	35%
4	No experience of exclusion of self or others	5	22%
4	Work-life balance challenges	5	22%
4	Harassment in and outside the newsroom	5	22%
4	Unconscious bias	5	22%

Source: Author's interviews (2022). Base: 23 news leader interviewees; Q: Have you ever been approached by [other] women or people of color with their stories of exclusion or inequity?

### Systematic sidelining and race-based exclusion are the most frequently mentioned taxing experiences that women/women of color share

A majority of the news editors across the global north and south (52%) who were asked to share any stories of exclusion, imparted stories in which either they or women/women of color confiding in them had been systematically sidelined (see Figure 19). Women editors were more likely to share these stories than their male counterparts.

*"I think, as women, we get to that point where you don't want to really fight, and you're better off just moving aside and doing something different,"*

I heard a senior female news leader from the global south recount, exhausted from being systematically sidelined throughout her career. A female senior editor from a different global south country shared the ongoing and consistent sidelining that occurs for women journalists:

*"My colleagues [in regional or vernacular media] have often spoken about the fact that they feel like there is this culture that keeps them out of the lead roles, that uses them 'like props', to prop up male colleagues. And so that, I realize, is a reality that we can't wish away. It continues to be a reality as of today."*

39% of the news editors interviewed shared examples of race-based exclusion and career development challenges linked to race. A male editor from the global north shared stories of racial exclusion that members of his team had brought to the fore:

*"I had some staff come to me and say they felt they weren't fully included, so we set up some meetings specifically about race and the department. And that was quite hard. Some people felt excluded because of their race. After the sessions, I got all my managers to go on a course where we talked about how we deal with issues of race, and how we work within our teams. It was quite a painful process. I felt concern and upset for the people who'd had to deal with this sort of behavior, and then I felt a personal sense of [guilt] I didn't know this was happening in my department."*

Another female leader from the global north revealed that there was a striking difference in the racial composition of the newsroom in her organization during the night shift compared to during the day, and that the career development opportunities available to those on the night shift were limited.

*“One of my new team is a Black woman who’s been at [the news organization] for years. She said to me: ‘I’ve done overnights in the newsroom, and it’s amazing how diverse the newsroom looks at night.’ These are unsociable shifts. There are people in those roles who just stay there and stagnate. If you’re on overnight shifts for a lengthy period, you’re out of the loop, you aren’t ready or all fired up for an interview. She applied for a job and they wouldn’t shift the interview from after her overnight shift.”*

### **Many women, especially women of color, have experienced their career stalling due to lack of support and growth opportunities**

Some news leaders highlighted the challenge that women of color face through not being identified with, either on the basis of race or gender. This quote from a white female senior journalist from the global north encapsulates this challenge:

*“My friend, who is a Black woman my age... just could not get any career progression [at the news organization] at all. And she found out she was paid less. She felt like there were other people working at the same level who were getting more opportunities than she was, and she left and she’s doing the most amazing work now ... they didn’t identify with her. They just didn’t see themselves in her, someone to mentor, in the same way that they might if it was someone who looked like them... I think she just felt like she didn’t have the same support basis that other people on her team did.”*



A senior news leader from another country in the global north offered a powerful example of how being “othered” and feeling different culturally inhibits the career development of people of color.

*“The feedback was that these [diverse] members of staff were too afraid to tell their managers they wanted a career change. They didn’t feel supported, they weren’t being put forward to speak on calls, they couldn’t get the big assignments. In some cases, sort of micro aggressions, but in others they didn’t feel like they were heard or could speak out.”*

Another senior female news leader from the global north explained how career-enhancing it is to cover big events such as the Olympics and how female and Black editors tend to get excluded from these assignments, thus not enjoying the same career boost as their white male colleagues.

*“Certain people never get to go to the Olympics. The Black editors have never been, it’s always a white person. We have to make sure we are challenging that and looking at the list of people getting those opportunities, because those opportunities help you get the experience so that you can get the next job. There are women that are left out consistently, and people of color, so they’re not ready for the next job.”*

A 2021 study by The Washington Post Newspaper Guild shows that Black journalists were underpaid, devalued and hindered in their career growth. They were overlooked for merit raises and promotions despite outperforming colleagues and being asked to take on extra tasks outside their roles, unlike their white colleagues.<sup>50</sup> Another 2020 study from the US found that Black journalists had little opportunity for job advancement, were overlooked for management positions, and were pigeonholed into token positions.<sup>51</sup>

50. Chick, 2022  
51. NABJ, 2020

## As many as a fifth of the news leaders interviewed had not been approached by anyone with a story of exclusion

A noticeable minority of the news leaders interviewed for this project (22%) had not been privy to any stories of exclusion or inequity. They were more likely to be men and from the global south.

*“I have never been approached by a woman with a story of exclusion... more than other [news providers], I think we’ve made more progress in terms of inclusion... So it’s not a familiar story [here].”*

Another news leader from a different country in the global south suggested that women may be withholding their stories of exclusion for fear of being reprimanded and judged harshly.

*“I think women have dealt with some of the issues that they’ve raised, but I think there’s still that fear to come openly and maybe use the gender card to try and advance or raise a complaint.”*

## Top leadership’s buy-in to the problem of the lack of racial diversity/cultural inclusion is often reactive rather than truly driven by an appetite for change

George Floyd’s brutal murder in the US reignited the Black Lives Matter movement, and sparked protests and calls for systemic reform across the US and globally. George Floyd’s story was mentioned in many of the interviews with senior news leaders from the global north, in the context of the news industry’s reaction to the racial injustice that it epitomized. Many news organizations in the UK and the US had been jolted out of their complacency to introspect and examine their own processes and policies. In the words of one editor, this atrocity was a catalyst for change in newsrooms:

*“With race, I don’t think we’d be even where we are now had it not been for the murder of George Floyd...And it’s terrible that it took that kind of atrocity to get even the incremental change we’re seeing. We’re still nowhere near where we need to be, so it’s that interaction between what’s happening already in the newsroom, on the grassroots level, and also events outside...when you see something happening, that you think, ‘Well, this is an opportunity to make a change.’ Really make the most of those external opportunities, because that’s where the change happens; when those two things meet.”*

Approximately two years after George Floyd’s death, some of the news leaders interviewed for this project have made the assessment that some news organizations had responded with “a knee jerk reaction” rather than a forensic exploration of the systemic, organizational, and individual barriers that obstruct racial diversity and inclusion. Moreover, there were some mentions of a senior leadership backlash which have also been reflected in research from the US. A news editor of color from the global north shared their take on the efforts to make the newsroom more inclusive and more racially representative of the population:

*“I think what happened for a lot of people that I’ve spoken to, and for me, was that people had been pushing in that direction unofficially, the door was opened a crack...And I know that I and others went into it thinking, ‘Well, we’re just going to try and have some faith and take this opportunity... The door has opened again.’ But the work was pretty much on the shoulders of those people. It slipped into the groove again, of what not to do. And then talking to other people, including people who work in law, employment law, in terms of race in the [country], it was perceived that the people who were tasked with that were suddenly facing quite a big backlash towards the two-year mark after George Floyd was murdered.”*

Because the news boards’ engagement has been so reactive according to some of the people of color interviewed, interventions

undertaken to rectify the problem have felt “gimmicky”. They often lacked targets and accountability measures. One senior news leader of color from the global north shared a story of a colleague who was on the senior leadership board of an organization and was asked to share his experience as someone from a racial minority.

*“There was one person of color who was on the board, he was pushed forward, but other people on the board didn’t turn up for that session. So if you’re not listening to the experience in your own company, and taking responsibility for that, and saying: ‘I’m really sorry, this is really shit, we’re going to do something about it’, then there’s a problem.”*

The same person perceived a lack of genuine desire to change.

*“...there is also that lack of support and lack of willingness to change, really change, take action, not just come up with another scheme. I don’t have the energy anymore to just keep going, it feels like bashing my head against the brick wall.”*

### **The impossible expectations placed on victims of racial injustice to resolve the problem of their own underrepresentation and/or exclusion from leadership**

Following George Floyd’s murder, according to news leaders of color in the global north who were interviewed for this project, news leadership teams have often placed expectations on leaders of color to educate the rest of the leadership team and get involved in DEI projects to drive solutions. According to a senior leader from the global north this is partly linked to the fact that the proportion of people who are not white in journalism/ leadership teams in the US and the UK is very small, which makes it hard to convey what the issues are and, worse, creates the assumption that those affected should educate the rest. Another senior news leader of color from the global north explained the burdensome expectations that fell on people of color who



were themselves trying to process the story:

*“And in 2020, in the midst of a pandemic, explaining to xx white leaders about why the story about ‘that guy who was killed in America by the policeman’ - that’s how it was referred to - was playing well with [local] audiences, to explain, essentially, racism to xx white people on Zoom is a lot for one person to take on.”*

At the same time, some interviewees felt that leadership teams’ response to the people diving into the problem of racial injustice at their behest was to put additional pressure on them through being defensive and pushing back on problem findings. Consequently, leaders who are women of color operate in a triply stressful environment. Firstly, they are being thrust into a situation that is deeply upsetting and opens them to enormous toxicity and personal vulnerability. Secondly, often victims of discrimination themselves, they are expected to come up with solutions to eliminate the discrimination, without been granted sufficient power to do so. Thirdly, this in turn can result in female leaders of color worrying about the impact their DEI efforts might have on their own future career progression, which is already under pressure, as exemplified by the account of a senior female leader from the global north:

*“Women of color are consistently discouraged from applying for leadership roles. There is a perception that we are good enough to make the work happen, but not to lead the work, so you’re the worker bee, but you’re not supposed to be a leader. I have heard that over and over again, and experienced that myself”.*

Another news editor from the global north gave a gripping account of the multi-faceted challenge they have been facing in their news organization:

*“... the words that were used, that I feel leaderships were pushed into, were, ‘Let’s be open. We have to have these open conversations. It’s going to be really difficult.’ All sorts of great stuff, like, ‘We have to prioritize certain things, whether it be hiring*

*Black people, because they’re the least represented. We’ve got to be measuring things.’ But as things progress, a lot of that just slipped away. What you might find, as a person tasked with leading that work, is that open and difficult conversations are no longer welcome. And it’s made clear through various means, often targeted at the people of color who are in those difficult conversations. And then it becomes really clear what you’re up against, and you might ask yourself how much you can continue with this. You might start to think about how that’s affecting your career. And after all these two years, people have been asked to ultimately help the business, because that’s what this is about. It’s about strategic adviserships for leaderships, who clearly have not taken this on themselves, but were handing this responsibility to people who have very little prospect of reaching that level of leadership themselves.”*

### **Interventions aimed at improving representation or inclusion of racially diverse staff are rarely measured, which limits their success**

To make change happen, leadership teams have to be “*uncomfortably deliberate*”, in the words of a female political editor from the global south. According to many interviewees for this project, leadership teams are often not prepared to feel the discomfort that exploring the problems of racial or gender inequity brings. As a result, they rarely commit to diversity or inclusion targets that would make them accountable within their organizations. A senior news leader from the global north summed up the challenge.

*“There are many diversity projects that don’t have any real KPIs, they don’t have any accountability, they’re just projects so that people can say, ‘Oh, yes, we’re doing something about gender/race’... but there’s nothing measurable at the end of it. Nobody’s shifting the dial because nobody’s accountable.”*

Another senior news leader from the global south highlighted the performative nature of some of the interventions which stop at measuring representation, without veering into inclusion at all.

*“It really is not something that you can attend to by a box ticking exercise, and I think that has been the failures of the last while. ‘Okay, we have two women editors. Yay, pat for us, out of five women editors’, that’s where the conversation starts and ends. Changing cultures has to be equally important.”*

The News Leaders Association (NLA) in the US had conducted an annual diversity survey since 1978, producing a report that was a key tool for understanding gender, racial, ethnic, disability and veteran diversity efforts in journalism in the US. However, as mentioned in the Introduction to this report, in 2020 the NLA was forced to pause the survey due to disappointingly low participation rates from news organizations. In 2022 the survey response rate fell to its lowest level of 12% of all organizations contacted, despite a big email campaign targeting thousands of news organizations.<sup>52</sup> Meredith Clark, who had led the diversity survey in recent years, resigned from the project, greatly disillusioned with the news industry’s unwillingness to hold itself accountable for how representative it is of the population at large.<sup>53</sup>

### **The interviewed women of color news leaders feel disproportionately burnt out, isolated and/or dismissed**

The women from a racial minority who were interviewed all shared one common characteristic: they were the support pillar, the “go to” person for their managers, peers and those working under them when it came to matters of race. Whether they had been supported during the months following George Floyd’s death or not (and there were instances of both), women of color simply felt exhausted because they were the shoulder that everyone cried on. Some were burnt out and did not

have an ounce of energy left to keep going. Others redoubled their efforts in spite of their exhaustion. In the words of a senior female leader of color from the global north, who had not been supported by anyone in the months following George Floyd’s death:

*“People [of color] don’t have that resilience [to keep fighting discrimination within news and media] and even I’ve run out of steam.”*

Two female senior leaders – from the global north and south – shared their concern about the isolation that people of color, especially women, experience in news. A senior news leader from the global north revealed the bias that she felt people of color were subjected to in the organization where she worked:

*“There’s so much inherent, implicit, and explicit bias against people of color in this business, it never ends. I am constantly dealing with issues related to people of color not feeling respected, not being included, and now, because we have [internal social media platform], sometimes you can see them disrespect people, being called the wrong names, people being paid differently. We’re much better than a lot of places, but it’s just not being heard... it’s so automatic, and it’s painful.”*

Another [white] female leader from the global south recalled a story of racial injustice that she was ashamed to have been unaware of at the time until her former colleague opened up about it years later.

*“There was one story that stood out for me of a woman who’s my contemporary and a woman of color. We were in the same newsroom [and] for me, the experience was positive. I was able to progress. Her experience was completely different. She found the environment completely alienating. There were very few people of color in the organization. And to my shame, I never appreciated her alienation until much later.”*

52. Scire, 2022  
53. Scire, 2022



Life in news organizations can be particularly lonely for women of color in senior leadership roles or in newsrooms. A senior female news leader of color from the global north divulged thoughts and feelings of acute loneliness.

*“It’s very lonely. Especially, I would say, 2020 was a very lonely place, and to not even be asked how you’re doing [after George Floyd’s death], and your take on the story, is just mind boggling to me.”*

In March 2021 Stacy-Marie Ishmael, the (Black) editorial director of the Texas Tribune in the US, defined 2021 as *“an absolute brutal year for many people, and especially for nonwhite people”* before stepping down from her role.<sup>54</sup> Research into Black journalists in the US has uncovered that they are disproportionately exhausted, with many factors feeding into this exhaustion, such as witnessing and reporting on the scale of loss during the pandemic within their communities; being subjected to racism while reporting on it; and often being dismissed when putting ideas forward for stories to cover in newsrooms where they continue to be marginalized.<sup>55</sup>

A Press Gazette survey about racism and bigotry in the UK media, conducted in the UK in 2021, uncovered that 41% of the media professionals who responded to the survey said they had personally experienced or witnessed racism or bigotry in the newsroom.<sup>56</sup> The figure rose to 55% for those who worked in the tabloids, 53% for those who worked in broadsheets and 59% for those who worked in broadcast media. Black journalists were most likely to have known racism in the workplace, with 74% responding affirmatively when asked whether they personally had experienced or witnessed racism whilst working in the UK media.

54. Gold, 2021

55. Gold, 2021

56. Mayhew, 2021

## Fear of being blamed or seen as insensitive often prevents white leaders from fully engaging with the issue of racial injustice in newsrooms and news leadership. They often don't want to feel the discomfort

The interviews with senior news leaders, particularly in the global north, revealed that fear often inhibited white leaders in their actions with regards to racial injustice in news. Their fear might be driven by two main underlying concerns: being personally blamed for the existing racial injustice and, to a lesser extent, saying something insensitive which would upset a colleague of color. Both concerns can lead to superficial engagement with the cause at best and disengagement with the problem at worst. The first concern was encapsulated powerfully in the thoughts of a white male senior news leader from the global north.

*"If you go around trying to say: 'You only have 37% of women in your stories, you're biased against women' that's incredibly divisive, and there could be another [structural] reason for that. I just think that [talking about bias] could be very toxic because it's assuming that a person is biased, and [then] basically the corner is up. I think there's a lot of fear about talking about gender and racial issues openly, and I think that if we were more open and a little more empathetic towards each other, and not so quick to stereotype or characterize other people, I think we'd come a long way."*

A female senior news leader of color from the global north pondered over the deactivating impact that fear and guilt have on making progress in gender diversity in news leadership:

*"I got more support from the organization outside of the news department. I think it's a fear of looking bad and feeling guilty, and just being uncomfortable about the conversation, but you don't learn, you don't get past that until you've had those uncomfortable conversations. These are the feelings that people do try and avoid."*

Another female news leader from the global north also picked up on the barriers that self-protection creates against unpacking and resolving the problem.

*"People might misinterpret questions about institutional bias as personal accusations of racism on their part, which is classic, textbook stuff, that we read about. There is a need for open discussions and willingness to enter into it in an open spirit of listening to people who experienced this stuff, to make that switch."*

Out of the 41 interviews conducted for this project, only one (white female) news leader openly reflected on her own racial bias, in the context of being determined to work through it to advance racial diversity and inclusion in her newsroom.

*"Being a leader made me realize my own blind spots in questions of diversity and representation. I was constantly looking at who I surrounded myself with and who I was getting inputs from, so I wasn't insulated - and if, particularly, there were senior women of color in my newsroom, who may not have been direct reports to me... I realized early on that I needed to make sure I was hearing from them regularly... Because it's a majority white newsroom in a majority white business, right?"*

At the start of this chapter we asked ourselves how easy it is to hear women's voices once they are in the boardroom. To answer this key question, we examined the responses of a subset of the 41 senior news leaders who were interviewed globally for this project. Firstly, we found that women's seats around the decision-making table are still limited and secondly, once seated at the table, their voices often remain faint. The vast majority of the news leaders interviewed believe that newsrooms and news cultures are still dominated by men, across both the global north and south. Women's lower representation in news leadership teams and the gendered approach to assigning beats in newsrooms are the biggest obstacles to women's inclusion in decision-making at the most senior level. These barriers are underpinned by significant

power and authority gaps between men and women, which are particularly exacerbated for women of color. These two gaps result in the relentless need for women leaders to prove themselves over and over again. All-boys clubs still operate in news and parenting responsibilities continue to inhibit women's professional and pay growth. A significant minority of the interviewed leaders question the existence of a male bias in news or believe that women have not made their case for change well enough. The voices of women of color in news leadership are particularly faint if they are heard at all. The plight of women of color in South Africa, the UK, and the US is crushing because they are confronted with racial discrimination on top of all the other downsides that come with being a woman in a news organization. These women are being disproportionately sidelined, their careers frequently stagnating due to racial and gender exclusion. They often face the soul-destroying and impossible expectation that it is they who should resolve the problem of their own underrepresentation and exclusion from newsrooms and leadership in the face of a

fearful leadership team often unwilling to truly engage with the problem in the first place. This frequently results in burnout and the disproportionate attrition of women of color from news organizations.

In the next two chapters we will explore solutions to these pernicious barriers to women's (including women of color's) equal footing in news leadership. We will explore the learnings from groundbreaking practitioners in the field of diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as news organizations across the global north and south which have made positive change in their efforts to resolve some of these barriers. In the chapter that follows we will be zoning in on the groundbreaking research about the most prevalent organizational biases that lead to the exclusion of people of color. One of these biases is in-group favoritism and homophily i.e. the tendency for people to have affinity with those similar to them, which often unwittingly enhance the privilege of the majority group, primarily that of (white) men.

# Chapter 8

## Why diversity does not guarantee inclusion: the role of culture

### Key biases affect organizational culture

We often discuss organizational culture without having a clear definition of what it actually means. In this report, the definition of organizational culture includes organizational vision, mission, strategy, and other overtly agreed intentions and goals; organizational systems and work processes (including hiring, performance evaluations, assignments, sponsorship, pay, promotions, compensations, policies); and the unwritten rules about how to navigate the organization which assist or obstruct employees' career progress and their wellbeing.

*Bias Interrupted: Creating Inclusion for Real and for Good* - authored by Joan C. Williams who is considered a leading expert in untangling and addressing structural inequalities in organizations - documents how bias affects a wide range of organizational work processes, concluding that white men in the US are (often dramatically) more likely to perceive processes as fair than any other group. Many of the

biases that affect people of color also affect women and first-generation professionals, i.e., gender, income, and race are interlinked to augment privilege or discrimination. In Williams' words, "*Like interest, bias compounds.*" In her book, Williams presents five key biases that stand in the way of achieving gender and racial equity in organizations. Most senior news leaders who were interviewed for this project spontaneously brought up stories illustrating these biases in their perspectives, pointing to the universal nature of Williams' findings and how they transcend US culture and specific industries. This explains why we have devoted a whole chapter to it.

### Why diversity does not translate into inclusion

One of the most widespread myths that we come across in the news industry is that if an organization hires enough of an underrepresented group - be it women or people of color - the diversity and inclusion problem will be solved. Time and again this strategy turns out to be costly and yet not

particularly successful, as The New York Times case study included in this report powerfully illustrates. Improved diversity does not automatically lead to inclusion in the culture and decision-making of the organization. Why? Because there is a power imbalance between those who are already integrated within the culture, privy to its unwritten rules, and those who have just joined and are on the periphery. *“Expecting women or people of color to champion members of their own group may be unrealistic – not to mention unfair – because championing diversity can be costly for those who step up.”*

Instead of championing diversity within the organization, marginalized groups are often pushed to compete with each other to carve out space for themselves at the decision-making table alongside the dominant group, which typically consists of [white] men.

According to Williams, in-group favoritism and homophily enhance the (often unwitting) privilege that white men have in an organization. In evidence, she quotes a study of architects that highlighted that white women, and women and men of color were twice as likely as white men (50% vs. 25%) to think that there were unwritten rules that they didn't know. 50% of Black women vs. only 20% of white men felt left out of informal information-sharing networks.

A very senior news leader from the global south shared the inclusion challenges she faced as she rose up the power ladder:

*“...when I got into a decision-making role as Executive Editor, that's when I started to feel the barriers...the culture was different because I felt that I was the only woman in a decision-making capacity, and maybe it wasn't intentional, but I was kept out, they would go out and drink and decisions would happen.”*

Even when women or people of color are more represented rather than being lone individuals, instead of supporting each other with what Williams calls in-group favoritism, they often

encounter the tug-of-war bias, whereby they are pitted against each other. This is most likely to happen when a representative from a minority group is a token appointment — e.g. one or a few women in a sea of men — as was the case with the senior leader who shared her perspective above.

## Organizational barriers to change: five key gender and racial biases

The five gender and racial biases that Williams writes about have been derived from analysis of 18,000 responses to her team's Workplace Experiences Survey (WES), provided by employees in different industries and organizations in the US over nearly a decade. The survey results consistently found the same five patterns of bias, all of which were mentioned by some of the 41 senior news editors interviewed for this project and are quoted below.

1. **Prove-it-again bias** is revealed in the expectations that force less privileged groups, such as women or women of color, to prove themselves more than other groups, such as white men or men. White men are typically judged on potential, whereas women are judged on performance.

A senior news editor from the global south shared her experience of having had to prove herself more than her male colleagues to be promoted:

*“It took me at least 12-13 years to become an editor [when I moved media]. I don't think it took the men that long - my previous boss went from a newspaper into television and still had a leadership position. I had to forgo my leadership position.”*

Another female senior editorial leader from the global north described the strategy that women leaders had to employ to effect change, which involved being near-perfect at their jobs.

Another senior female news leader from the global south echoed this strategy of having to exceed expectations to progress:

*"[As a woman] you have to put together a compelling story, a compelling brand. They cannot ignore me... or they cannot drive me into irrelevance because what I have built today is the dominant brand in its space. It is one of the most credible, respected, and influential - and it's bringing in the most amount of money. I think that just makes it hard for them to not acknowledge the success or the leadership or my role."*

2. **Tightrope bias** refers to some groups finding themselves between a rock and a hard place, needing to be politically savvy to succeed than other groups. Office politics hits women and minority groups harder than others. For example, being authoritative and ambitious are seen as desirable qualities for white men, but women walk a tightrope: if they are seen as too authoritative they risk being disliked, and if they are seen as not authoritative enough they are perceived as unqualified. People of color who are assertive may be perceived as angry, feisty, or untrustworthy, but unless they are assertive, they are unlikely to progress upwards.

Many female news leaders, especially women of color, who were interviewed for this project reported being stuck between a rock and a hard place. This is an account of a female senior news editor from the global north reflecting unprompted on the tightrope:

*"You speak up and then you see that you're tagged as challenging, you're resistant when it's just - 'No, I'm here and I'm doing a job and I represent the newsroom and this is their point of view. I'm not getting emotional; I'm not being difficult.' I did feel like my male counterparts were held to a different standard and I always had to modulate and moderate my tone, and I felt like I had to think a lot harder. Men could get more emotional or angry and if I did, I would get executive coaching - the men would just be the men."*

A male senior leader reflected on the unfair judgment women faced when being assertive:

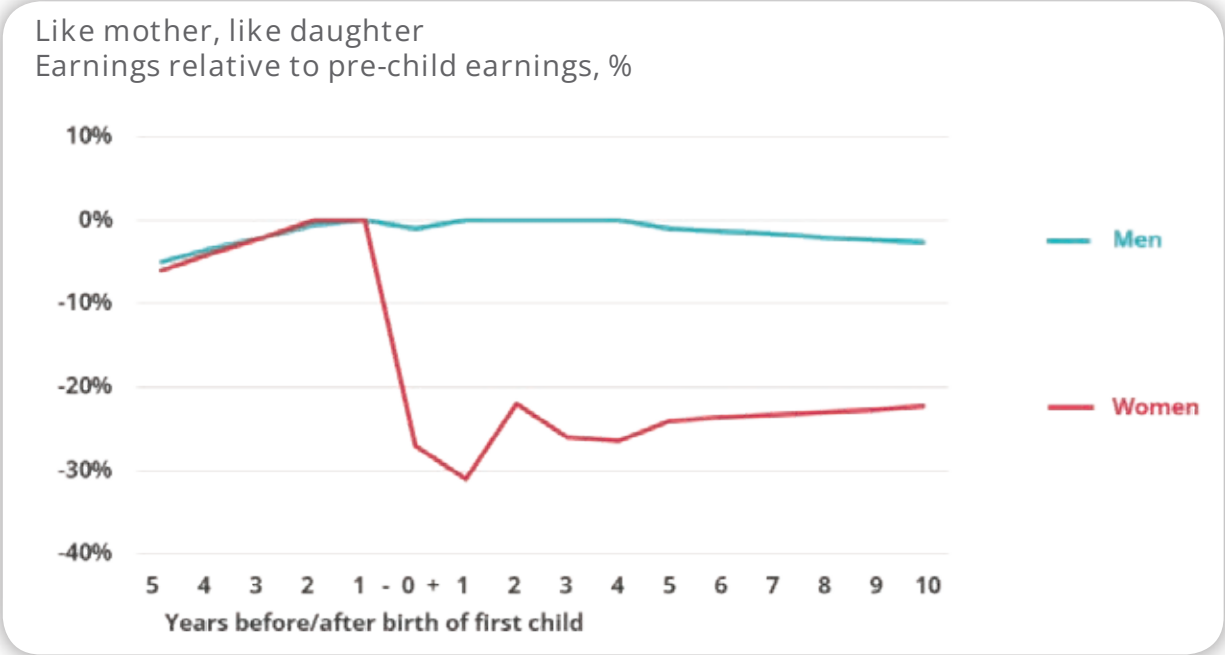
*"I think there is certainly a real prejudice against women who are assertive. There is an unfairness. When I'm assertive, they just expect it of me. Because our vision of a boss and past editors, are men who look like me and sound like me... When it's a woman, and they are assertive, people tend to label them 'bossy', 'aggressive', and all the rest."*

3. **Tug-of-war bias** concerns the conflict that can emerge within a discriminated group, for example when bias against women and minority groups fuels competition within these groups. We often read or hear that women can be harder on other women or that women do not support each other's growth enough. This is often misattributed to women's personalities being unsupportive or power-hungry but there are systemic reasons for it. Bias against a group creates a conflict within the group. At the heart of this in-group conflict is the desire to fit in with the dominant group or indeed to acquire power by proxy. The tug-of-war bias explains why gender bias is passed from woman to woman as well as from man to man. It can also dissuade women or people from minority groups from participating in initiatives aimed at supporting their group. People of color of all genders are often first-generation professionals who are forced to prioritize financial security over any group identity.

When asked to identify the key drivers for improving women's inclusion in news leadership, 30% of the 23 senior news leaders interviewed suggested women leaders supporting other women to rise through the ranks. Interestingly, all those who believed this to be a driver were women, the underlying expectation being that women should support other women more than men should. Overall, it was a view held by almost half of the women who responded to this question (47%).



**Figure 20: Impact of having children on women’s earnings (2018)**



Source: The Economist, 2018

4. **Racial stereotyping** further disadvantages people of color. Williams cites examples of Asian Americans being seen as a great match for technical work but less capable of being great leaders, while Black professionals have reported high levels of social isolation and shocking levels of disrespect. According to a senior news executive in the global south, women in news, and especially women of color, are seen as “workhorses”: great at doing the work, but not at leading. This was echoed by an interviewee - a very senior female news leader from the global north - who opened up about the frequent dismissal that women of color experience in news organizations when it comes to leading or to story angles:

*“There are women of color who have been at [my organization] a very long time, that are just dismissed. There are women who’ve complained: ‘I brought this story forward because I know what’s happening in the community’ and my white supervisor says, ‘That’s not a story.’”*

Another perspective offered by a female senior editor of color from the global north demonstrates the interplay between two biases: tightrope and racial stereotyping.

*“I’ve even had [racial stereotyping] from quite high up, a senior [white] woman in an editorial meeting [who] didn’t like that I’d challenged her on an idea. She literally said - and I didn’t raise my voice at all - ‘No need to be so aggressive’. I had to say, ‘I’m not being aggressive, I’m just giving my point of view of what I think would be best for the output’. Three white male board members came up to me afterwards and said, ‘You had a really good point’. [They] didn’t say it in the room, though.”*

5. **Maternal wall bias** manifests in mothers being stereotyped as less committed and competent. According to Williams, this is the strongest form of gender bias. She quotes the study by sociologist Shelley Correll and coauthors that found that in the US, mothers are half as likely as those without children to get promoted, 79% less likely to

get hired, and earn less than women who have identical qualifications but no children. The dramatic impact on women's earnings of having children, relative to the impact on men's earnings, is shown in Figure 20.<sup>57</sup>

When asked why gender diversity in news organizations did not necessarily lead to women's inclusion in decision-making, more than half of the 19 senior news leaders who answered this question (58%) mentioned parenting as a key barrier specifically for women in this respect. News editors pointed out that the lack of work-life balance affected women more significantly through the long hours and frequent trips that journalism demands. They also alluded to the societal expectations that women restructure and adapt their careers to accommodate childcare much more than men.

One anecdote related by a female senior leader from the global north interviewed for this project drives home the reality of maternal wall bias in a world of male-dominated attitudes:

*"This is a direct quote - the editor of the team told [my colleague] on her first day in a new job that she had great journalistic credentials and that he really liked her work. He casually added: 'Just make sure you leave your womb at the door.'"*

The attitude was so shocking that the anecdote continues to circulate within the news organization years later.

**Bias can be interrupted by small, systematic, incremental, measurable changes to work processes and with individual training. It is critical to tackle systemic and organizational bias, not just individual bias**

Williams optimistically argues that small steps can lead to big changes so long as they are measured and applied systematically rather than sporadically. *"We've all been looking for*

57. The Economist, 2018



*the grand gesture to solve the problem in one fell swoop. It doesn't exist. What does exist is a series of 1 percent changes that, with persistence, can help root out the bias that too often subverts our ideals of meritocracy."*

The best place to start interrupting bias is at the level of organizational systemic processes, such as hiring, assignments, performance assessments, and promotions. *"We need to stop focusing nigh exclusively on helping people navigate systems that remain fundamentally unfair. We need to change the systems."* Measuring the effectiveness of change is critical because you can only change what you can see.

Williams has found that one-off training workshops, so often provided in news organizations, do not lead to sustained results. *"You can't change a culture by doing anything just once, or once a year."* She advocates **against sensitivity-based training** that aims to interrupt unconscious stereotypes because these are automatic and incredibly hard to shift. Instead, she argues that training should focus on circumventing stereotypes by **focusing on changing behavior** directly, thus correcting the bias outcome. *"Stereotype activation is automatic, but stereotype application can be controlled...behavior does not hinge on changing implicit biases."* Williams calls this change concept *"cognitive override"*.

**The most effective training is anchored in social interaction; provides evidence that bias exists externally in the world (rather than in the person being trained) and on how it manifests at work; and gives autonomy to the participants to devise their own solutions for how to interrupt it.** Depersonalizing

the training helps with what Williams calls *"identity threat"*, which activates people's self-defense through a perceived threat to their dignity, or to their sense of competence or self-worth, thus being counterproductive. The interviews conducted with senior news leaders for this project included examples where feelings of threatened identity were expressed. None was more memorable than the statement by a very senior male news leader from the global north shared earlier in this report who argued that it was not a good idea for organizations to try to unpack individual bias because it was divisive and could be very toxic.

According to Williams, projecting the bias onto the external world rather than the person undergoing the training helps leaders and employees safely generate ideas on how to interrupt it, while feeling in control and committing to the suggested action themselves. Ultimately, achieving diversity and inclusion can be done with *"data, metrics, and persistence"* and through ensuring that championing diversity within the organization is not a precarious career move. **Williams' research suggests that the best way to accomplish change is to have the dominant group (white men in the global north and men in the global south) take the lead in implementing these concepts.**

In the following chapter we will be converting the insights from Chapter 7 and the suggested solutions approach from this chapter into practical interventions on how to improve women's representation and inclusion in decision-making in news leadership and in news culture.

# Chapter 9

## Solutions for how to close the diversity and inclusion gap in news leadership in high-profile beats

*“Diversity is not a crisis or a problem. It’s actually a solution,”* reflected a senior female news leader of color from the global north with passion and frustration, perhaps in equal measure. With passion because she knew how many profound and important perspectives were hidden behind unheard journalists in newsrooms and members of the public beyond them; with frustration because she was exhausted from battling the same challenges cyclically, with no sustainable resolution in sight. In her foreword to *Belonging*<sup>58</sup>, Karen Blackett OBE opens with a remarkably similar observation: *“Diversity is not a problem to fix. It is the solution.”* This chapter focuses on how to dismantle the brick wall that keeps women and women of color from boardrooms or from expressing their views once inside them. It draws upon the wisdom of the 41 senior news

editors who shared their perspectives as part of this project. They were asked what they thought were the key drivers for women/ethnic minorities’ inclusion in decision-making in high-profile news beats or to rank different initiatives that exist to improve women’s representation and inclusion in news organizations. Many were asked about the one thing in the news industry that they would change immediately if they had a magic wand. Their views were aggregated and are presented on the pages that follow. Furthermore, the ideas build on the recommendations<sup>59</sup> and checklist for news providers<sup>60</sup> generated in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*, and on change principles derived from behavioral science insights. The solutions often blend gender and race because the interviewees often blended the two (where relevant) and it

58. Jacob et al., 2020

59. Kassova, 2020a, pp. 80-81

60. Kassova, 2020a, pp. 166-167

**Figure 21: The most important interventions to implement to improve women’s representation and inclusion in decision-making (2022)**

	No. of interviewees	% of all who answered question	Area of focus
Changing the culture in the newsroom to be more inclusive	9	47%	Org. resources: culture/ inclusion in decision-making
Developing and implementing gender equality policies	9	47%	Org. resources: people/policies
Measuring gender representation in outputs and setting targets	9	47%	Org. resources: analytical/ content and outputs
Tackling unconscious gender biases among news leadership	6	32%	Org. resources: culture change/ bias
Tackling gender biases of individual journalists in newsroom	3	16%	Org. resources: people/bias
Hiring a Chief Diversity Inclusion and Equity Officer	1	5%	Org. resources: strategic/ change in leadership

Source: Author’s interviews with 19 senior news leaders from across the global north and south (2022)  
 Q: Which two of the following six interventions are the most important for news organizations to implement to improve women’s representation and inclusion in decision-making in news organizations...

would be impractical to attempt to draw two separate sets of solutions.

**Changing the newsroom culture to be more inclusive; implementing gender equality policies; and measuring progress are perceived to be among the more successful tools in driving higher representation and inclusion in news organizations**

Senior news leaders were asked to choose the two types of interventions (among six) that they thought were the most promising in improving women’s representation and inclusion in decision-making in news organizations. None of the interventions, which encompassed culture, policies, biases, measurement/targets, and leadership structure received the endorsement of a

majority of the interviewed leaders. However, just under half selected three as powerful tools for change: changing the newsroom culture, developing and implementing the right policies (especially related to equal pay, childcare, and safety), and setting/measuring targets for gender representation in outputs (see Figure 21). In Chapter 7 I reported that a substantial majority of the interviewed news editors (84%) believe that newsroom cultures are still dominated by men. When asked about the one thing he would change immediately if he could, one senior male editor from the global south focused on the importance of changing newsroom culture:

*“I think newsrooms are quite hostile environments to young girls... I think that, for me, the first thing to do will be to change that.”*

## The key drivers for the inclusion of women in news leadership: retaining talent, being intentional about change and introducing targets, improving women's representation in top-tier management, and modelling success on women trailblazers in high-profile beats

The most important driver of inclusion of women in senior decision-making - according to 70% of the 23 senior news editors who were asked that question - is the news organization's **ability to retain and develop editorial talent in-house** (see Figure 22). When asked for their opinion on the key drivers for improving women/minority groups' inclusion in editorial decision-making, many highlighted this factor's importance and news organizations' general underperformance in this area. The perception among many was that news companies struggle to retain and develop their talent, often because they are unaware of the problems, or are unwilling to tackle them. As we saw earlier in Chapter 7, in global north countries and in South Africa, this problem was perceived as particularly acute in relation to retaining and developing news leaders who are women of color. As previously stated, there is a need to encourage and support these groups through the processes of recruitment and promotion. In the words of a male senior news editor from the global south:

*"[Today] there are so many openings and opportunities to excel... I would intentionally dedicate action to promoting and mentoring women [into] positions in the newsroom, end of."*

Another senior female news leader from the global north summarized the opportunity to retain diverse talent as follows:

*"I would get creative. Unless you can make news organizations places where women can thrive and get paid properly and have opportunity, nothing else will change on what comes out of those news organizations. I do believe that this is a first step."*

**Being deliberate and strategic about organizational change, including setting targets**, was spontaneously highlighted as a key factor driving inclusive decision-making by more than half of those interviewed (52%). According to Laura Zelenko - a senior executive editor and founder of New Voices at Bloomberg (see the Bloomberg case study that follows this chapter) - to achieve impact in improving representation of women editors and content contributors, news organizations need to be intentional at all levels. A senior female editor from the global south eloquently articulated the opportunity:

*"You have to be uncomfortably deliberate about the inclusion and empowerment of women. And when I say, 'uncomfortably deliberate', you have to go above and beyond your normal HR policies for those roles... [if] a woman is less qualified, less skilled or whatever it may be, and they count them out for that particular role, the question has to be, 'Why?' Because that female was not supported and not empowered along the way."*

A male senior news leader from the global north pondered the positive impact of quantifying and tracking representation and inclusion efforts.

*"I think what helped at [organization] is being very purposeful about data: we did a fairly extensive staff study of what our leadership, our staffing and our community was, and how representative we were of the overall area... in staffing and in leadership. And tried to be very intentional about that. It's very refreshing. This is probably the first place I've been where we're actually quantifying what the gaps are numerically - and with data."*

To make its culture more inclusive, The New York Times is expanding cultural expectations to become part of employees' formal assessment (see The New York Times case study that follows this chapter).

**Figure 22: Key drivers for improving inclusion in news leadership, especially in high-profile beats (2022)**

	No. of interviewees	% of all who answered question	Area of focus
Retain and develop talent	16	70%	Org. resources: people/culture
Be deliberate about organizational change driven by targets	12	52%	Org. resources: strategic/analytical
Improve representation of women in top-tier management	11	48%	Org. resources: representation in leadership
Model organizational success on women editors/reporters who excel in high-profile beats	11	48%	Org. resources: people/culture
Support women’s professional networks/ women should support other women	8	35%	Communities/networks
Secure senior leadership buy-in	7	30%	Org. resources: people/strategic
Support family balance/improve provision of childcare	6	26%	Org. resources: people/policies
Develop coalitions with men	6	26%	Communities/networks

Source: Author’s interviews with 23 senior news leaders from across the global north and south (2022)  
 Q: What are the key drivers for improving inclusion in news leadership, especially in high-profile beats such as politics, business, and health? (open-ended)

The interviews with senior news leaders revealed that they frequently, rightly or wrongly, automatically perceived **increased representation of women in editorial roles in high-profile beats as the solution to improving their inclusion in decision-making.** Just under half (48%) thought that having more gender and racially diverse leadership teams was the key to improving inclusion. They would use their magic wands to increase women’s and minority groups’ representation in senior roles and in newsrooms as a way of improving women’s overall presence in news – encompassing their representation, inclusion, or portrayal (see Figure 23).

*“Start by ensuring that every news team is exactly a representation of the population... We can’t be having broader conversations if that itself is still up for debate... There just needs to be physically more women in the room.”*

This was the perspective of one senior female news leader from the global south. Another female news leader from the global north was definitive about the need to diversify representation at the highest leadership level.

**Figure 23: The one thing to change immediately in the news industry to improve women’s and minority groups’ representation, inclusion, or portrayal in the news (2022)**

	No. of interviewees	% of all who answered question	Area of focus
Improve representation of women/ethnic groups at the top: more women leaders	13	48%	Org. resources: strategic/ change in leadership
Ensure equal pay	7	26%	Org. resources: people/policies
Change culture to be more empathetic/ open to remove barriers for women	6	22%	Org. resources: strategic/ culture change

Source: Author’s interviews with 27 senior news leaders across the global north and south (2022)  
 Q: If you had a magic wand, what is the one thing you would change immediately in the news industry to improve women’s and minority groups’ representation, inclusion, or portrayal in the news? (open-ended)

*“...the only way that I think that real change will come [will be] when those boards at the top have really, really diversified. It’s too easy to say... ‘Our [apprentice/intern] schemes are really diverse’ - but they’re not staying, are they? It has to be top down - I don’t think anything else will really, really shift the dial.”*

The findings in this report point to representation being an important hygiene factor in empowering women and minority groups, but not truly a driver of their inclusion in decision-making.

Just under half of the interviewees who were questioned about the key drivers of inclusion highlighted strong examples of women journalists and editors running and excelling in high-profile beats such as politics, economy/ business or foreign affairs. Modelling future success on these women trailblazers was seen as an important step forward.

**Allyship, whether through networks, support groups, or female or male colleagues, is seen as critical for women/women of color’s inclusion in organizational decision-making**

The women news leaders interviewed, including those of color, almost always

referenced how important allyship had been for their career progression, for maintaining good mental health, or for combating the isolation which arose from the continuous pressures engendered by being part of a minority group in news leadership. One senior female news editor from the global north shared her perspective on the difference that women supporting other women makes in news leadership:

*“I definitely have seen a difference. There have been many times where I’ve been the only female manager in the room, then I’ve been one of two, then one of four, you see that difference as the numbers grow, and that women start supporting one another... Women need to support one another.”*

A third of the interviewed senior leaders mentioned **external professional networks, in-company support groups or the support of other women acting as enablers** as a driver of inclusion (see Figure 22).

A senior female news leader from the global north reflected on the importance of in-house, cross-departmental female leadership support groups in helping women feel more integrated.



*“I think it was essential for that kind of [women leaders’] support group to have been created to give us all the confidence and fortitude, that we’re all not experiencing things in isolation.”*

Another offered her ideas about the effectiveness of senior individuals and support groups in propelling women to leadership roles:

*“There are people [at my organization] who are very interested in growing the voices at the table, and [support for increasing female leadership] sometimes comes from other leaders who are sponsoring women. There are also women’s groups at different news organizations, so for instance, we have an employee resource group that focuses on women, and they support each other, and promote each other.”*

A quarter of those asked about the drivers of inclusion highlighted the **important role that men leaders hold as allies** for women and minority groups. Their perceived role is encapsulated powerfully in this quote from a male senior news leader from the global south:

*“There must be a concerted effort to build networks of solidarity amongst progressive men in the organization with women who are advancing other women and trying to get them into more senior positions. This sort of coalition can make a massive difference because they [men] can do the calling out - and it’s helpful to have men in that camp who are calling out the discriminative behavior, or the silencing of voices [resulting from] the boys’ club calling on the familiar voices again and again and again.”*

### **Buy-in from both senior leadership and grassroots underpin the most successful initiatives for change**

Almost a third of the interviewed news leaders who were asked about the drivers of inclusion mentioned the importance of ensuring **buy-in**

**for change at the very top of the organization** (see Figure 22). They argued that without it there was little chance of success. In the words of a senior male editor from the global north:

*“The mechanism [for change] - you’ve got the business and you’ve got the owners, who apply policies. And so, it’s about convincing them. Senior editors are very busy, they’re operating as machines and so, if they’re told these things from above, they do do them.”*

Laura Zelenko, who is leading a very successful battery of initiatives for improving women’s representation at Bloomberg, argues that senior endorsement and visible regular tracking of progress through data underpin the success at Bloomberg.

At the same time, the BBC’s 50:50 initiative<sup>61</sup> – arguably amongst the most successful global initiatives in improving diversity in news outputs – has also been driven from the grassroots. According to Lara Joannides – Creative Diversity Lead at BBC News and 50:50 who was interviewed for this project – it is imperative that journalists who are involved in any diversity and inclusion initiatives buy into the vision and the process.

*“...one of the things that we noted was, it really has to be voluntary. We’re actually quite strict with ourselves, as a 50:50 team, in terms of applying this principle, where the team has to want to do it. There were instances where departments were signed up by the senior editor, which is great, because we do need senior buy-in. But then, there were certain teams within those departments who weren’t brought on board. They were just told: ‘You must do this’, and if they didn’t quite get it, for whatever reason, those teams ended up costing us as a 50:50 team so much time and effort with absolutely no results in the end.”*

**The BBC 50:50 initiative is championed by the BBC’s leadership while being driven at grassroots level, which has proven to be a powerful and winning combination to drive change.**

61. See the BBC 50:50 case study in Kassova, 2020a, pp. 132-134

A senior news leader from the global north reflected that without genuine engagement at an individual journalist level, any efforts are doomed to stall.

*“...I’ve worked really hard on changing culture, but you have to get the individual journalists who are doing the stories to help with that effort... when you involve individual journalists, they push the effort, sometimes past the news leadership. We tapped into a power I didn’t know that we had.”*

### **The role of social norms, tackling bias, and the impact of DEI officers are potential blind spots for news leaders when thinking about improving gender and minority groups’ inclusion**

Most of the questions about the barriers and drivers for inclusion of women and minority groups that were put to the senior news leaders as part of this project were open-ended, aiming to gauge their spontaneous views. The existence of pro-male social norms, which was highlighted in the previous *Missing Perspectives* reports, was a noticeable gap in

their responses when asked to identify the barriers to inclusion. This systemic lens that is locked in people’s upbringing and attitudes was almost entirely missing as a perceived barrier that needs to be tackled. The interviews also revealed a very weak, or even non-existent belief in the positive impact on change that a dedicated Chief DEI Officer or DEI Director would generate. Only one person mentioned this role as being important when presented with a list of interventions (see Figure 21). In addition, there was scarce endorsement of interventions which aim to tackle individual journalists’ biases (endorsed by 16%) and only moderate endorsement of interventions that aim to tackle institutional biases at a news leadership level (endorsed by 32%). Joan Williams, in her *Bias Interrupted* - a focus of the previous chapter - has addressed the self-protection mechanism that is part and parcel of being human and acts as a barrier to embracing initiatives that aim to intercept unconscious bias. To circumvent this resistance, she advises that any training in this area is depersonalized but also culminates in a list of actions that the person undergoing training commits to. This will help in applying any newly gained self-awareness to real work situations.

# Practical solution ideas for making change happen at the news leadership-level: from raising awareness to breaking down barriers and creating new habits

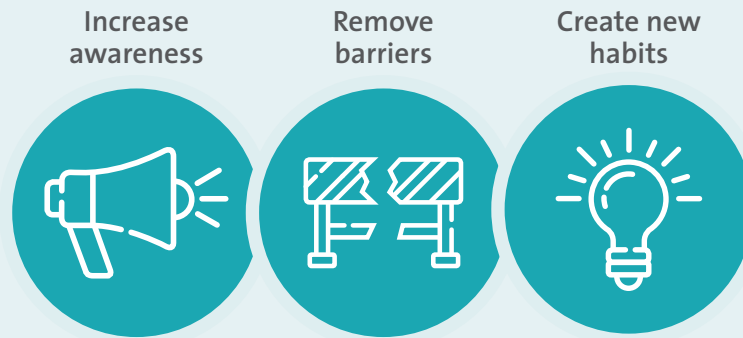
Insights from behavioral science<sup>62</sup> argue that to make change happen, be it including more women or women of color in decision-making or anything else, three key elements need to align (see Figure 24). Firstly, we need to be aware and accept that there is a problem that needs to be resolved. Secondly, we need to identify the barriers (e.g., habits, biases) that prevent change from taking place and thirdly, we need to develop new habits that replace the old habits, enabling new ways of working or behaving to be established. While behavioral scientists have traditionally focused on change

at an individual level, I would argue that the same principles apply if we seek to introduce change at an organizational or societal level.

The news leaders who were interviewed for this project generously shared numerous ideas for improving women and women of color's inclusion in decision-making in news leadership. These ideas are presented below, grouped according to whether they aim to improve awareness, break down existing barriers, or create new habits at an organizational or individual level.

62. Behavioral science builds an understanding of how people react psychologically and respond behaviorally to interventions, environments, and stimuli.

Figure 24: Elements which drive change at societal, organizational, and individual levels



Source: AKAS analysis (2022)

## Raising awareness of the problems is key



### RAISING AWARENESS AT AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL:

1. Sensitize leadership through gender and racial sensitivity training including unconscious bias. Raise awareness of existing gender stereotyping in high-profile beats (e.g., politics, economics, health, foreign affairs)

A male news leader from the global south articulated the case for the importance of unconscious bias training to tackle the gendered assignment of beats:

*"...To also include in our training programs, gender sensitivity modules - because sometimes people are biased, and they are not even probably aware of it. We all benefit at different levels from the rewards of discrimination... if you're a white person, if you walk into restaurants and sometimes you are treated differently than a Black person, because of your skin color, you will benefit, despite the fact that you are not racist, from a systemic problem that has been in place for centuries. Ditto for a male reporter. A male reporter and a female reporter enter the newsroom, and the editor feels, 'Oh, she's female, she's probably going to get married next year so I shouldn't put her in a*

*difficult beat like business, she should go cover entertainment'. He's being well-intentioned, but it's really from a place of ignorance, because [in effect] he has been discriminating against the females. So training, to get people to identify and become familiar with their biases that they are not even aware of, is also one way to redress the problem."*

2. Create a more empathetic/caring culture by consciously toning down the competitive "win-lose" journalistic attitude in newsrooms

When asked how they would use a magic wand to immediately change the news industry, a fifth of interviewed leaders chose to change the culture to be more empathetic (see Figure 23). One quote from a senior news leader in the global north stood out for its emblematic description of an environment that had led to burnout and the shutting down of perspectives. They were explaining what difference female leaders had made to the newsroom culture:

*"[Before that] it was just a one-dimensional leadership style: 'Are we winning? Are you losing? I don't care how you feel, I don't care that I worked you for a year and you haven't been home - are we winning? Oh, we're winning. Okay. We're losing? We're losing. It's your problem.' So, it was literally that one dimensional leadership versus three-dimensional leadership that understands that high performance goes with healthy minds and*

*healthy bodies, and healthy home lives and healthy workplaces.”*

### 3. Roll out engagement surveys of employees which measure perceived inclusion of employees and leaders

A female senior news editor shared her experience of the positive impact of engagement surveys:

*“One good thing that the company did do was these engagement surveys of employees. What surfaced, very clearly, was that gap in female engagement in the news organization, across the board... that was a good tool to put numbers to the qualitative feedback they were getting... The survey showed that women did not feel supported or engaged, and that did kick off some more institutional focus on the gap in participation or engagement. And that followed years of us privately saying, ‘This isn’t an environment where women feel like they can thrive, or we all feel like we’re hitting a glass ceiling here.’”*

### 4. Measure and track the success of DEI initiatives. Measure diversity and inclusion intersectionally

The New York Times in their case study argue that having diversity in a news organization does not equate to having an inclusive culture. Any measurement of success has to track progress in diversity (through counting) as well as in inclusion (through surveys and interviews). The Managing Editor of Mint in India, Sruthijith KK, whose news leadership team is significantly more gender-diverse than in the average news organization in India, argues that diversity needs to be approached intersectionally, factoring in identity categories such as ethnicity, regionality, religion and others (see the Mint case study that follows this chapter). Otherwise, organizations risk perpetuating privilege within each gender.

### 5. Beware of reacting to external trigger events and then recoiling in discomfort. Accept fear and guilt as part of the journey to change

Chapter 7 explored evidence from the global north which suggested that George Floyd’s murder triggered a knee-jerk reaction among many news leadership teams, creating a number of conversations and initiatives aimed to improve the representation of minority groups, which were subsequently shut down. As shown in Chapter 7, some fizzled out partly because the motivation was reactive rather than born out of an earnest desire for change, and partly because of the uncomfortable fear and guilt that surfaced for the white majority in news leadership teams.



### RAISING AWARENESS AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL:

### 6. Educate yourself about the taxing experiences of minority groups in the newsroom or news leadership. Be more empathetic than competitive

A female news editor from the global north explained the importance of leaning forward and educating oneself about matters such as racial discrimination. The alternative is to place a psychological burden on the person from a racial/ethnic minority or women by asking them to fill in knowledge gaps for you. Another senior female news editor highlighted the importance of allowing a more empathetic and collaborative rather than competitive approach in newsrooms.

*“... it wasn’t easy at first to get to that point where I could say something and be respected and not get a black mark instead. Then my rise was roughly, I remember around 2014/15. They sent me to xx to try to take that combination of good journalism and empathy and wanting to create a good culture where people want to work.”*

## 7. Set up informal check-ins/mentoring sessions with people who are not direct reports

Taking responsibility for hearing all perspectives, especially when the leadership team was more homogeneous in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or other identity-defining categories, served a senior female news leader well in both her leadership and her journalism.

*“When there were senior women in my newsroom – high-level women of color but not my direct reports – I realized early on in my tenure that I needed to make sure I was hearing from them regularly. So I created touchpoints for some of them, where I would meet with them once every two weeks, individually. These were check-ins. I realized that if I was going to build successful career paths for people of color and women who are underrepresented, that I had to show specific interest in them. And therefore, I would probably hear more, in return, about the dynamics within a newsroom, that I wouldn’t be exposed to if I didn’t make those connections.”*

## 8. Voluntary reverse mentoring

One idea that was brought forward by some leaders was for senior members of news leadership who want to truly understand the pressures of journalists from marginalized groups, to consider asking to be mentored by a junior member of staff, thereby demonstrating their openness to listening and learning. In the words of a senior news leader:

*“Some of the younger people coming in now are coming in with a much, much firmer and more passionate sense of identity, and the stories and things that aren’t being talked about. We need to almost reverse-mentor, so that we go to those people and say, ‘What are we missing here?’”*

However, emphasis must be given to the voluntary nature of such initiatives because they may place additional burdens on more junior staff members from marginalized communities.

## 9. Gender/racial/cultural sensitivity and unconscious bias training at individual journalist level

*“I would put in place programs to change the knowledge [self-awareness] profiles of people [in news organizations], starting from the youngest, so that we’ve armed them with knowledge and skills and attitudes that they wouldn’t have had otherwise...and gender sensitivity, cultural knowledge – knowledge about what the culture that you live in does to you. The tools to manage, to know what’s happening to you, and the tools that give you confidence to manage those patriarchies.”*

This was the case made for individual training by a senior female leader from the global south. Given the criticality of grassroots endorsement of any company-wide initiative, it is important that individual journalists are well-versed in the problems that women and minority groups face.

## Breaking down the barriers that lead to women of all colors’ exclusion from decision-making



### BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS AT AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL:

## 10. Develop and put in place equitable policies. Place special emphasis on safety policies

In its recommendations, *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News* outlined seven policy areas that news organizations should address to counteract gender inequity. These are: an overall gender equality policy including equal pay; parental leave & childcare assistance; flexible working; recruitment; return to work after a career break; sexual harassment; and career development and training.

A senior editorial lead from the global south encapsulated the need to make the environment for women journalists safer and to resolve the ever-restrictive childcare problem for women.

*“... If I could guarantee safety to all my women colleagues - and the safety of access to their stories - just mobility, that’s huge for all of us here. And then give them the infrastructure support of taking care of their child because the child becomes our responsibility as well.”*

The Safety Gap chapter in Part 2 of this report explores the extraordinary safety problem that women face. Part of the problem that female journalists have reported is that news organizations remain largely unresponsive to the safety plight of their female journalists. This points to the urgent need to crystallize specific safety policies designed to protect women journalists. It is important to expand any sexual harassment policies to a general safety policy, ensuring that the institution protects women from general misogyny online and offline, at the workplace and on social media.

## 11. Introduce a policy of transparency on pay gap reporting

Tracking the pay gap is proving to be an effective tool in redressing it. For example, introducing legislation which forced all UK companies who have a headcount of 250 or more to report their gender pay gap from 2017 produced positive results in the UK. When these reporting requirements were eased during the COVID-19 pandemic, the gap again widened.<sup>63</sup>

A senior female news leader from a high-profile beat in the global south summed up her battles around ensuring she was paid fairly.

*“I think you need to be built in a certain way, to be pushy and get to a leadership position. I have asked for [a pay rise] because I felt I was getting*

*much lower than I deserved... The problem is, a lot of us don’t know what our peers get paid.”*

Another female leader from a different country in the global south shared her frustration at the persistent pay gap at leadership level. She believes this should be tackled more urgently than any of the other gaps.

*“The pay gap is something that cannot be a reality in 2022, particularly because you now have more women in leadership, and what you find is that their low payment has been justified.”*

## 12. Measure the diversity and inclusion baseline, introduce targets, and track success. Consider quotas temporarily

To create sustained change, news leadership teams must be guided by evidence. Setting representation targets, tracking progress against them and adapting processes to meet them is key to success, suggested a male senior leader from the global south:

*“I probably will put a positive discrimination policy in place, but then only for a period, to bring in more women, to also widen our recruitment process to specifically target women, because if there is underrepresentation... you will then have to expand the recruitment process and make it more robust to particularly attract women. And then do that until you have parity in place... to ensure equality and see the parity going forward.”*

## 13. Review recruitment processes to accommodate diverse talent

One of the steps taken by The New York Times, as outlined in their case study that follows, was to change the way they recruit, develop, and promote everyone in the organization, to ensure fairness and foster diversity and inclusive decision-making. A senior female

63. Urquhart, 2021

news leader from the global north remarked on the importance of adjusting the recruitment process to attract diverse talent.

*“In the interview itself, we need to think about the questions we’re asking. If we’re supporting people to get them to the interview stage, just to ask them the same old questions that we’ve always asked - that are designed to get the same old people we’ve always got - then it’s not going to make a difference. So, think about doing things differently - like a competency interview, but also to follow that up with a strengths-based interview.”*

**14. Launch mentorship and bursary portfolio programs, media and confidence-building training, and initiatives that aim to increase a sense of belonging for women of all colors**

In Part 3 of this report, we will be analyzing the initiatives that exist globally, that aim to redress gender inequality in news. One of the key gaps that has been identified is the scarcity of initiatives that focus on making cultures more inclusive of women. There is a need to create more such initiatives, targeting them at everyone within an organization. In addition, to boost women’s confidence which has been held back by centuries of systemic discrimination, media training programs that contain confidence building modules would be beneficial to women’s professional growth.

*“There has to be some sort of levelling of the playing field, and that comes through deliberate programs, like mentorship programs, like a bursary portfolio for females’ skills development. And somehow, to create the equitable outcome, it has to be secured in favor of females - so that you can have more women ready to take up positions that are meaningful and push the envelope”*,

commented a senior news leader from the global south.

On this issue, Bloomberg’s Laura Zelenko shared that the organization’s New Voices

training program has been successful not only in boosting women’s visibility as contributors on TV news, but also in boosting their overall confidence to progress in their careers. Dr Yemisi Akinbobola, CEO of African Women in Media (AWiM), believes that media training tailored to women journalists helps them thrive and progress in their careers (see the case study about AWiM following this chapter).

**15. Allyship: develop support groups for women of all colors, with men, and beyond the newsroom**

The evidence presented earlier in this chapter points to the success of several types of allyship initiatives in improving the representation and especially the inclusion of women in news organizations. These include:

- external industry support groups
- internal cross-departmental support groups
- in-departmental support groups
- individual leaders supporting women journalists
- peers supporting peers.



**BREAKING EXISTING BARRIERS AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL:**

**16. Take on DEI initiatives for a finite period. Work in a “relay” manner to avoid burn out**

As shown in Chapter 7, women news leaders of color who often lead DEI initiatives on top of their daily jobs, frequently reach a point of complete mental exhaustion and physical burnout. To avoid getting to this point, it is important for news organizations and individuals to ensure that a person’s tenure working on these challenging initiatives is limited and that the work is handed over to someone else, preferably to an expert with extensive DEI experience. A senior female news leader reflected on how the process of work could be optimized and made more bearable.



*“But I also feel and see around me and read in all the literature, and hear from other people, that there does come a point where you get burnt out. And a really good thing about what’s happening now is that people accept the concept of being burnt out and are more willing to think, ‘How do we manage that?’ And for me, and lots of other people, it’s, ‘Well, maybe at this point, it’s like a relay. You do your time; you try to be really aware of the point at which you can’t help them to do any more. And then you hand over to other people.’ You do what you can within the bounds of staying healthy and sane, and having a career....”*

## Developing new habits



### DEVELOPING NEW HABITS AT AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL:

- 17.** Walk the talk: be explicit about your endorsement of racial, ethnic and gender diversity in the organization’s strategy and values

According to SK, Mint’s Editor-in-Chief, to improve its representation of women in leadership and in coverage, a news organization must integrate that intentionality into the organization’s strategy and values. This approach is also evident at The New York Times with its whole-company effort to make the news culture more inclusive.

- 18.** Share responsibility for change across the organization

In its DEI strategy and action plan for a more inclusive culture, The New York Times stipulated that the work must span all functions and departments, and that the responsibility for transforming the culture lies with everyone (not one person, group or function). This prevents unfair and unrealistic expectations being placed on news leaders/ journalists from minority groups to solve their own discrimination problems.

- 19.** Develop talent retention programs. Launch initiatives that support the promotion of middle managers e.g., senior editor workshops

Bloomberg’s Zelenko shared the organization’s successful approach to promoting women by creating an initiative that aims to develop senior reporters into editors.

*“You look at the reporter level, we’re majority women, that’s not uncommon. You look at the editing level, and I don’t think we hit 40% globally, and if you look at certain teams, it might be under 20%. So how do you change that? So we designed a workshop, we call it a Senior Editor Workshop for Women... for people that we know have strong editing skills that have, for some reason, not been brought into that space. We’ve tracked what’s happened to those women after they’ve gone through the program. I think we’ve put more than 60 through. One has left the company, only one, and the majority have been promoted into new roles.”*

Another senior news editor from the global north reflected on the critical role that a minority journalism workshop had played in her career choice and progression.

*“I got into journalism because I took part in a minority journalism workshop in my hometown newspaper, and I was just encouraged very much to spread my wings, to try new things. They really supported my career and helped me learn new skills, so that bolstered me as I travelled through. I had mentorship from an early age, which I think is really, really key.”*

A senior news leader from the global south also reflected on the clear gap in programs aiming to prepare women for senior leadership:


*“Improvement is important: at a junior level, at a middle management level - because it is the middle management level that is a funnel for top leadership - and then what are the training opportunities available for women, and for setting them up for senior management?”*

One senior news leader suggested that to recruit a diverse team and then be able to retain them, it is important to **dedicate managers who monitor and create opportunities for all members of staff.**

*“We have just hired, in the newsroom, a person focused on newsroom talent and career development, and a separate person focused on recruiting. One of the issues is that editors are really busy, they are doing everything from assigning to editing, to making sure people are safe and secure, so things like who gets to go [on assignments] gets left off the table, and people go to who they’re comfortable with and who they work with. And that leaves out a whole bunch of people, so we’re really trying to make an effort to look at who’s getting those opportunities.”*

**20.** Launch initiatives that support individual women’s psychological and physical safety and wellbeing

In view of the unique safety and inclusion challenges that women/women of color news leaders and journalists face across all the countries of focus in this study and beyond, which are evidenced in this part and Part 2 of the report, it is imperative to develop programs that aim to support women’s mental health and safety as well as their wellbeing. These programs could be based on individual coaching and/or group support.

 **DEVELOPING NEW HABITS AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL:**

**21.** Lean forward if you are from the majority group in the news leadership/newsroom. Be proactive, not reactive. Champion the career progression of women and women of color

Almost every interviewed senior news editor who is a woman/woman of color highlighted key people in the newsroom they worked in

who had helped them to grow and develop. Here is a powerful account – one of many – from a senior female news editor of color:

*“There are individuals who definitely aided my growth and who, from day one have recognized what I’ve done. There are also people who have been there who have said: ‘We see you, we see your commitment’. I’ve always had those people who have said: ‘We want more from you. We expect more’, and they’ve certainly given me opportunities.”*

If you are a [white] man in a position of power, lean forward.

**22.** Do not expect women or minority groups to lead and resolve their own underrepresentation or exclusion. Offer to support. Take initiative. If you are a woman of color, do not take on DEI initiatives if this is too emotionally taxing

The analysis of the interviews conducted for this project and laid out in Chapter 7 revealed the extraordinary pressure and high expectations that are placed on women, and especially on women of color, to resolve their own discrimination or exclusion, within a context of an existing power imbalance that is not in their favor. To stop this from happening, individual leaders and journalists must be aware of this pressure and actively seek to alleviate it by championing the cause of women/women of color in the news. Offer to support, and reduce expectations of the role that women and women of color should take in their own empowerment. If you are a woman or a man of color, only get involved in DEI initiatives if you are in a strong frame of mind. Grant yourself permission not to be involved, especially if you feel that you have limited resources at your disposal to resolve the structural issues. Remember that the power mostly sits with (white) men in the global north and men in the global south, and that they hold the most powerful tools to make change happen. If you are a man, lean forward.

# Trailblazers who are advancing women's inclusion in news leadership

## Introduction to four case studies

Part 3 of this report will focus on an analysis and overview of 168 news initiatives that have been implemented by 118 organizations in six regions globally. These initiatives, which AKAS researched over several months, are dedicated to tackling various aspects of the gender inequality that persists in news. At the forefront are news organizations which stand out for their innovative efforts to bring about change in women's representation and inclusion (including for women of color in countries with multi-racial populations) in decision-making at a senior level in their organization and/or in high-profile beats such as business/economics. The New York Times in the US, Mint in India, and Bloomberg across the globe are among the trailblazing organizations

featuring as case studies in this section. They are joined by the international NGO, African Women in Media, which aims to improve women's representation and inclusion in news media and coverage at a pan-African level.

The following four case studies are anchored in interviews with Mint's Editor-in-Chief Sruthijith KK, Bloomberg's Senior Executive Editor and founder of New Voices, Laura Zelenko; a spokesperson from The New York Times; and AWiM's founder Dr Yemisi Akinbobola. The interviews not only explore the work of each of these organizations in improving gender equity at leadership and organizational level, but also what has been learned along the way and what future endeavors are planned or envisaged in the areas of gender and racial equity.

## Case study: The New York Times in the global north

The New York Times is the most read English-speaking newspaper website in the world. It reaches 90m monthly unique visitors in the US online<sup>64</sup>, has 4m YouTube subscribers and 52m Twitter followers. 56% of its US audience are women.<sup>65</sup> 1,665,684 external websites link to The New York Times, of which 1,192 are governmental and 7,829 educational.<sup>66</sup>

In 2020 (and since), women represented 52% of both staff and leadership (a majority for the first time) at The New York Times; people of color represented 33% of the staff and 23% of leadership. The New York Times has set a goal of increasing the representation of Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic colleagues in leadership by 50% by 2025.<sup>67</sup> They have also introduced a new procurement process<sup>68</sup> to promote transparency, integrity, fairness, competition, diversity, and accountability. In an update in July 2021<sup>69</sup>, they published for the first time data around staff retention and promotion by race and ethnicity to offer a complete picture of their current situation and where they need to improve. Their next report will be published in 2022 and they are confident they are currently on track to meet DEI goals and targets.

On reading The New York Times's diversity report<sup>70</sup> and watching Deputy Managing Editor Carolyn Ryan interviewed on CNN in February 2021, I was struck by the sophisticated narrative around the need for cultural change and why high levels of representation are not enough for inclusion in decision-making. *“Over the past several years, we’ve added hundreds of staffers of color to our company into our newsroom, but our culture really hadn’t changed. Our workplace culture was essentially the same culture that was ... in the 90s... There are unwritten rules for how you get ahead, how you get the good beats, how you get the good assignments. That kind of culture really hurts people of color,”* stated Ryan.<sup>71</sup>

I approached The New York Times editorial team for an interview to understand the successes and learnings from its cultural transformation and was re-directed to the communications team. A spokesperson responded to my questions in writing. The answers which follow have been edited for brevity.

**Q: What prompted The New York Times to announce so transparently in February 2021 that the newsroom culture wasn't inclusive enough and needed to change?**

A: Our diversity, equity and inclusion assessment and strategy came after a clear signal from our staff — including but not limited to members of the newsroom — who told us that covering our world better means elevating and drawing more fully on the deep talent within our ranks. Our call was to transform the culture of The New York Times to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The newsroom was part of the company-wide call to action, and subsequently the newsroom formulated a more specific plan informed by months of work by a committee of newsroom journalists.

64. Comscore, average of 2021 numbers

65. Comscore, average of 2021 numbers

66. Ahrefs, 21 March 2022

67. The New York Times, 2020

68. The New York Times, 2022

69. The New York Times, 2021

70. The New York Times, 2020

71. CNN, 2020



## Diversity had not translated into an inclusive culture

At The Times, we had made significant progress in diversifying the company but there was still more work to be done. People of color — and particularly women of color — remained notably underrepresented in leadership. And the company’s focus had primarily been on building a more diverse staff, with less attention paid to building a more inclusive culture. While welcoming more people of color to The Times was important, it is their experience once they are here that determines whether they are able to contribute to their fullest potential and rise into positions of leadership. Transformation and progress does not just come from DEI programs and initiatives, but embedding equality and inclusion into your culture.

Several months of interviews and analysis led us to conclude that The Times was a difficult environment for many of our colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds and demographics. This was particularly true for people of color, many of whom described unsettling day-to-day workplace experiences and did not see themselves reflected in leadership at The Times.

## The New York Times started by acknowledging what was already working

Our mission attracts a diverse group of extraordinarily talented people to The Times. In past employee surveys, 95 percent of Times employees said they felt pride in working here and the majority of employees reported fulfilling careers and positive experiences. The Times has also made meaningful efforts in recent years toward achieving greater diversity, including rolling out unconscious bias training; requiring diverse candidate slates and interview panels in hiring; publishing a diversity and inclusion report annually; and launching a newsroom fellowship program to help diversify our industry.

**Q: The New York Times has announced that transforming its culture is the most important element of its strategy. What are the elements included in that transformation?**

### **The pillars of an inclusive culture: a behavioral framework, DEI being tied to mission, empowered teams, and a full launch of the strategy**

A: We have identified elements of our culture that have made The Times an unwelcoming place for certain employees. We are committed to changing our company culture to address this challenge, including:

- Creating a company-wide behavioral framework that identifies the standards expected of all employees and managers to ensure effective people-leadership
- Explicitly tying diversity, equity and inclusion to our mission and values, which is a central component of the behavioral framework; and integrating the framework intentionally into our day-to-day programs, practices, processes, and interactions across the company
- Entrusting responsibility for continuing the work we have begun to functional leads and implementation teams with the authority and resources necessary
- Completing the launch of the Inclusion and Strategy Execution Office and building on our recent communications enhancements to ensure leaders consider a variety of voices and perspectives
- In the newsroom, we are changing the way we recruit, develop and promote all journalists — reporters, editors, producers, coders, designers, operations managers and others — as well as taking steps to support this work on an ongoing basis to encourage diversity, ensure fairness and foster greater inclusiveness in our culture. We have put in place infrastructure and initial steps to provide ongoing support for this work, including:
  - A new Culture & Careers department, run by newsroom leaders in partnership with H.R., to provide guidance, support and resources to managers and employees in building career paths and improving newsroom culture
  - New initiatives and programs to promote career development and mobility, creating internal opportunities for employees to grow and advance their careers
  - Better systems for personnel decisions, with panels of newsroom leaders using a new, clearer process to ensure consistency and equity
  - Creating diversity, equity and inclusion plans by department, making these a core commitment, with clear goals and plans for achieving them
  - A wider range of voices shaping our report, using a range of forums and new tools to ensure that more people from a variety of backgrounds and roles in the newsroom participate in the creative process.

### **Diverse newsrooms result in broader audiences**

Increasing the diversity of our newsroom — more people of color, more women, more people from outside major metropolitan areas, more younger journalists and more non-Americans — is critical. We believe a diverse workforce enables us to create the strongest news report and tell the best stories that resonate with a broad audience and more fully reflect the world we serve.

**Q: What have been the key learnings in your journey since the report was launched in February 2021?**

### **Shared responsibility for change**

A: Our DEI strategy and action plan spans all functions and departments, and it is up to all of us (not one person, one group or one function) to transform our culture and create an environment that



makes everyone feel welcomed and supported. We must continue to build and routinely evaluate systems and people practices to enable sustainable change.

### **Changing culture takes time, and requires tenacity and multiple perspectives**

We have also learned that it is important to be thoughtful in how we approach this work in order to be successful. It takes time, patience, and persistence to transform a culture sustainably.

Involving voices and inputs from a range of backgrounds and experiences has been a key driver of our success. In the last year, employees have helped make The Times a better place to work across a wide range of issues – from redefining our hiring practices, to improving fertility benefits, creating new policies like childcare reimbursement during the pandemic, and establishing our new series of Global Days Off.

### **Leadership development curriculum**

Representation in the various leadership roles matters and makes our work at The Times stronger. We aim to build infrastructure that develops strong, diverse leadership pipelines, and provides a leadership development curriculum and mentorship opportunities. The people management curriculum offered to new managers has been enhanced, and we are revamping our mentorship program to better support growth and career paths. The honesty and transparency of our report has drawn a lot of great leaders and talent to The Times as they want to be part of this work. The Times has also hired nearly a dozen new deputies to support newsroom leaders and expand their capacity to focus on leadership, development and other team needs in addition to the core demands of running the news report. We will continue adding more such roles as well as further infrastructure to support and enable excellence in leadership.

**Q: When the report was released top executives at The New York Times said that they were committed to bringing about fundamental changes to the company's workplace culture. Could you share some of the changes that have worked particularly well?**

A: Company-wide, being direct about our challenges, our goals and how we plan to address them, and regularly discussing each across the organization, has been the most important first step to ensure our commitment is taken seriously and prioritized by the whole company.

The next step was to ensure the company had a shared understanding of what we want our culture to be and develop a company-wide behavioral framework to be our guide. This framework distills our six values — independence, integrity, curiosity, respect, collaboration, and excellence — into observable behaviors, defining how we should approach our work, as well as engage with, manage and lead each other. The framework tackles three parts of our plan to change our culture: first, tying diversity, equity, and inclusion to our values; second, setting clear expectations and norms for our employees; and third, outlining clear expectations for effective people leadership.

Of course, changing culture takes time, and it is still early days. In the newsroom, in addition to the early steps described above, we have launched a new development program that has given employees the opportunity to embed in a different area of the newsroom to get valuable experience, grow, learn new skills, collaborate, build relationships, recharge, and possibly find what their next job could be — within The Times. We have also expanded our commitment to having an impact on DEI in the wider journalism industry with career development and mobility programs like The New York Times Fellowship Program (a one-year work program for up-and-coming journalists). We recently launched The New York Times Corps (a pipeline program for early-college students to receive career guidance from Times journalists over a multiyear period) and Editing Residency program, announced a soon-to-launch local investigative journalism fellowship program led by outgoing executive editor Dean Baquet, and started an employee giving initiative, seeded with Times funding, to support several outside organizations dedicated to increasing diversity in journalism, technology and media.

**Q: What are your plans for improving the inclusion culture in the next two to three years?**

A: While we may very well launch new programs and initiatives building on those we already have, we primarily want to give our existing strategy and plan the time it requires to take shape and have its full impact, rather than spinning up new initiatives before others have had time to have their full potential impact.

### **Cultural expectations becoming part of formal assessment of employees**

We wanted to ensure there was a shared understanding of expectations for all employees. Excellent work will always be a key determinant of success at The Times. But we will increasingly rely on this broader set of expectations as we consider career paths and opportunities for our staffers at every level of the company and are beginning to formally include them as part of the annual performance review.

### **Holding yourself accountable**

Additionally, for several years now, we have published diversity data to hold ourselves accountable for progress in diversifying The Times and its leadership. We will also provide updates on progress beyond diversity data. Making The Times a more equitable place where all employees have equal opportunities for success will continue to be a top priority for our team.



# Case study: Mint in the global south

## What is Mint?

Mint is a leading business newspaper based in Delhi, India. It reaches 18m monthly unique visitors online<sup>72</sup>, and has 253,000 YouTube subscribers and 2m Twitter followers. 41% of its audience are women.<sup>73</sup> 223,353 external websites link to Mint, of which 128 are governmental and 770 educational.<sup>74</sup>

In 2016 the Guardian reported that Mint was “*breaking ground in an industry that has largely been dominated by men and counts 50% women among its staff.*”

When it launched in 2007, Mint was reported to have made gender equality part of its business plan, creating the role of gender editorial consultant to ensure diversity.<sup>75</sup>

I speak with Mint’s Editor-in-Chief, Sruthijith KK (referred to as SK), about Mint’s standing in diversity and inclusion since he took over the top editor job more than a year ago (having previously been part of the launch team as copy editor). Despite his impressive career ascent in the last 15 years, SK comes across as humble. He admits to having made an exception in speaking with me about Mint’s D&I work, diverging from Mint’s ethos of doing things “*without drawing attention to them*”. He is also quick to clarify that he cannot take credit for Mint’s initial gender equality strategy, and instead is keen to give credit to the founding editor Raju Narisetti who “*had been conscious of the need to place gender as a key value in the organization’s journey.*”

*“In many ways Mint was ahead of its time. It was conscious of diversity and inclusion before these dimensions became talking points in India. Now, of course, everybody cares and talks about them”,*

concludes SK.

## What makes Mint exceptional?

### Gender diversity is viewed multi-dimensionally and supported by policies

SK explains that Mint’s diversity efforts cover several dimensions: newsroom staffing, leadership, and coverage. The latter spans the diversity of issues relevant to women, as well as diversity in expert voices “*making sure that we are not just calling the same cohort of predominantly male experts.*” Mint has adopted a policy that stipulates that its coverage should include at least one external expert voice; a further policy mandates at least one woman contributor to its op-ed pages in every issue of the daily.

It is this multi-layered approach to diversity that has allowed Mint to publish unique stories/story angles written by women journalists, tackling sensitive issues that are relevant to women. SK talks with excitement about a story that a female journalist in the newsroom has been working on at the time of the interview.

72. SimilarWeb, February 2022

73. SimilarWeb, Desktop and mobile demographics – Gender, Traffic-share as of February 2022

74. Ahrefs, 21st March 2022

75. Davidson, 2016

*“So, while corporate India and many employers like to talk about diversity, one of our star reporters is working on a story questioning why the most fundamental needs of workers are not being met: access to a clean, hygienic washroom. She is covering important developments like the violence that erupted in an Apple factory in Chennai, drawing a direct link between the unrest and the lack of hygienic washrooms for workers, and for women workers especially, which is a big problem because they face issues like UTIs [urinary tract infections] when using unhygienic or overcrowded washrooms in the workplace.”*

### **Mint has maintained near gender parity in the newsroom**

Currently, 49.5% of journalists in Mint’s newsroom are women, a figure significantly higher than the proportion of women journalists reported for India in *The Missing Perspectives of Women in News*, which found that in 2019, 24% of journalists in top English newspapers and 18% in top Hindi newspapers were women.<sup>76</sup> According to SK, however, nowadays this high proportion is not unusual for English language newsrooms based in metropolitan areas such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Chennai, although it is perhaps higher than in regional/Hindi-language newsrooms. AKAS’ 2022 research into gender representation at editorial level has corroborated a significant gap between national/English-language and regional/Hindi-language publications in their gender balance.

### **Conscious meritocracy has resulted in a proportion of women leaders that is higher than the national average**

*“Where we are doing better than other news outlets, is in leadership roles held by women.”* SK concedes and is proud of Mint’s higher than average representation of women in its leadership, currently standing at 41% of the editorial leadership team. This compares to the 14% of women in top level news management in India reported by Byerly a decade ago (the latest available data at a country level<sup>77</sup>). SK attributes Mint’s success in gender diversity in the newsroom and news leadership to its consciously meritocratic approach to attracting talent.

*“We have incredibly brilliant women journalists and business journalists in India. In the process of trying to attract top talent, it just so happens that so many of the people whose work we want to bring to Mint are women.”*

### **New female voices are co-shaping the newspaper’s discourse on pivotal societal issues**

SK speaks with great pride about Mint’s prestigious op-ed page. He quotes Arthur Miller’s reflection that: *“A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself”* and goes on to explain that the op-ed page is where the big ideas are born and discussed. He observes that

*“men are much more eager to be published. And it is always easier to rely on experts who already have a pedigree, a standing, they know how to write for media. This is certainly a reflection of how society distributes value between men and women.”*

In addition, men are more likely than women to be able to afford PR support to push their op-eds; to occupy the higher echelons of business; and to prioritize their careers over family responsibilities. These barriers present structural inequalities which are overlaid onto men’s existing cultural dominance. Despite all these barriers, SK is pleased that Mint has been able to create a

76. UN Women, 2019

77. Byerly, 2011 and 2016

*“roster of up-and-coming women commentators who tend to be university professors or scholars and who have started writing pretty regularly, authentically. Among the younger generation of women there is more willingness to write.”*

## What has Mint learned along the way?

### In a society as complex as India’s, diversity needs to be approached in an intersectional manner

SK reviews staffing data periodically, usually twice a year. With women constituting 49.5% of journalists in the newsroom and 41% of editorial leadership, he believes that while it is a work in progress, Mint is in a good place in terms of gender diversity.

*“Our approach to diversity and inclusion has become more intersectional. I would like it to be more intersectional than it is today. We would like to think that we are all here on merit, but privilege plays a role”*,

he states. He cites the multifarious sources of privilege: caste, education, religion, socio-economic background, a metropolitan location.

*“We don’t want a newsroom populated by people solely from a certain group. We want a mix from urban and rural, from south and north, as well as underrepresented groups, such as people from the north-east or Dalit or Muslim women. A diverse newsroom results in a richer harvest of stories and perspectives. We have a serious diversity issue, but it is not currently in gender.”*

### Measuring and improving women’s share of voice as business experts is an ongoing challenge

In India in 2020, the proportion of women quoted in the news as protagonists, experts, or sources was six times lower than that of men — a mere 14% — the lowest of all the countries measured.<sup>78</sup> SK admits that Mint too has more work to do in increasing the number of women’s expert voices in its publication. He acknowledges the limitations of Mint not systematically measuring women’s contribution to the paper’s outputs in the way it measures their proportions in staff/leadership.

### Conscious leadership goes hand in hand with continuity of organizational values

SK suggests that it is important for news leaders to be conscious and deliberate in their diversity and inclusion efforts while still ensuring continuity in institutional values.

*“I think that it is very important that leaders are conscious, aware of and willing to work on better intersectional inclusion and diversity in the newsroom and in the product we put out. They should also be mindful of the history and promote continuous values.”*

Mint has stated explicitly in several written documents that it stands for freedom, independence, and an unbiased chronicling of Indian society.

*“Mint has always supported inclusion and stood for women’s rights. It has always flagged the decreasing share of women in the workforce in India, which is now worse than, say, 20 years ago.”*

78. Kassova, 2020a, Media Ecosystems Analysis Group 2020

While SK perceives Mint's staff to be progressive, he reflects on the need for written statements to make explicit Mint's currently implicit ambitions for diversity.

### **What next?**

From an organizational perspective, SK and his leadership team are in an early exploratory phase of launching a fellowship for journalists from backgrounds that are underrepresented, whether due to caste, geography, or socio-economic background, aiming to give their careers a head start.

From a societal perspective, SK is hoping for a time when Indian society removes the barriers that women face which result in continual unfair encounters at work.

*"I wish for a society where it would be perfectly safe and normal, and culturally acceptable for women to work late nights. I also wish for a society which accepts assertiveness not only from people who look like me but also from women leaders, without deeming them 'aggressive' or 'unhinged'."*

# Case study: Bloomberg (global)

## What is Bloomberg?

Bloomberg is the global leader in business and financial data, news, and insight. It reaches 36m monthly unique visitors online<sup>79</sup>, and has 1.2m YouTube subscribers and 8m Twitter followers. 35% of its website audience are women.<sup>80</sup> 646,597 external websites link to Bloomberg, of which 710 are governmental and 4,014 educational.<sup>81</sup>

In 2018 Bloomberg News launched the New Voices initiative, which includes media training, representation tracking tools, and a database of female experts. It provides media training to female executives in business and finance across the globe to get them TV-ready for interviews on Bloomberg Television and other outlets. Initially launched in four cities, it has since expanded to 13 locations: London, New York, San Francisco, Washington DC, Mumbai, Dubai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Sydney, Johannesburg, Toronto, Tokyo, and Zurich. To date, the program has trained more than 400 female executives. The training includes message structuring, mock video sessions, and feedback and is conducted by an independent firm. As part of this initiative Bloomberg also expanded their database of female experts from 500 names in 2018 to an impressive 8,000 in 2022.

I speak with Laura Zelenko, a senior executive editor and founder of New Voices, who is accompanied by the Head of Communications at Bloomberg Editorial & Research. Zelenko's competence and passion, anchored in decades of editorial leadership experience, are arresting. Having experienced first-hand the feeling of being the only woman in a room full of leaders, then one of two, all the way to being one of many, Zelenko's understanding of representation, equity, and inclusion is not only conceptual, but deeply personal.

Zelenko explains that the New Voices initiative faced structural, organizational, and individual journalistic biases. Historically, journalists have often reached out to the same experts they have always used, who are mostly men. At the same time, firms and banks that Bloomberg reports on have been dominated by male experts. By identifying female executives in firms to be media trained, Bloomberg has simultaneously tackled the two sides of the problem of women's marginalized representation as experts, Zelenko explains. Another part of the strategy for improving women's representation in news has been to expand the database of female experts, which is now 14 times bigger than it was three years ago.

## What makes Bloomberg exceptional?

### Tripling female guests on Bloomberg TV in three years through the New Voices initiative

Bloomberg has set itself the goal of improving women's representation as financial experts across all platforms. "*The clearest indication of change has been our representation on Bloomberg TV*", affirms Zelenko, referencing the growth in the share of voice of women experts on Bloomberg TV from 10% in 2018 to 30% at the end of 2021. In view of the structural challenges in the distinctly male-dominated finance industry, although far from parity, this growth is noteworthy.

79. SimilarWeb, February 2022

80. SimilarWeb, Desktop and mobile demographics – Gender, Traffic-share as of February 2022

81. Ahrefs, 21st March 2022

*“With the gained momentum and the repetition, and the constant reporting out, it’s starting to become more part of the everyday workflow, so I am very confident that we can reach 33% this year, or hopefully higher.”*

states Zelenko, sounding even more positive about the future.

### **Visible regular tracking and senior endorsement underpin success**

Zelenko had noticed a prevalent overly positive bias among the journalists in the newsroom, which manifested in their belief that gender representation was better than it was.

*“What’s similar almost in every case is that editors believe their representation is better than it actually is when we get the data and report it out regularly.”*

Zelenko is convinced that the best way to break down journalists’ resistance to changing their behavior is to track data publicly and to secure the most senior endorsement.

*“You have to get to a point where you see results. And I think that was the hardest part. The most important thing is to protect the integrity of the data.”*

A big part of the success of the initiative, she argues, is the fact that women’s representation in content is not only tracked regularly but is also endorsed and amplified at the most senior level.

*“We’re tracking this every week, and reporting out, and we’re putting newsroom-wide notes from the Editor-in-Chief saying where we are, and so it’s very public.”*

Teams can be held accountable by slicing the data in different ways, looking at different metrics, different Bloomberg properties (e.g. front pages, top pages, TV, print), teams, individuals, or the performance of particular stories. For example, Zelenko is able to identify the top 20 journalists globally who quote or cite women most frequently.

The main goal for Bloomberg is to show an upward trend in women’s representation across different products with different baselines.

*“I had one booker ask me why we had a 30% [representation of women on Bloomberg TV] target; he said it seemed random. I said that’s this year’s target to give us something to work towards; once we hit that, next year is going to be higher. We set it to push ourselves, but it’s not the limit.”*

### **Saying no to manels through policies**

Zelenko shares that one policy has had particular success at Bloomberg: precluding journalists from participating in all-male external panels as moderators or participants.

*“At first, some journalists found this to be a nuisance that their request to participate was rejected; but then they realized how the initiative was having impact. They would go back to the organizer and say we could help them find a female expert for the panel or make it clear that the organizer had to change the makeup for Bloomberg to participate. More and more of our journalists say to me this is an important thing to stand for.”*



### The New Voices training has a spillover effect for women's careers

In Zelenko's view, one of the benefits of the New Voices initiative media training program is that female senior executives who complete it are not exclusively tied to Bloomberg TV. She is excited to report that a high proportion of these women not only go on Bloomberg TV, but are also getting promoted.

*"There is a spillover effect into their careers. By having this platform, they gain a bigger platform for their own work and career progression."*

### Senior workshops designed for women editors are propelling women's careers

Bloomberg has designed inclusion workshops specifically for women journalists globally, focusing on long form, magazine level editing in response to a finding that women editors' representation is worse in the biggest enterprise and investigation teams than in other areas. More than 60 women have completed the training, with the vast majority being promoted into new roles, all of which are editorial.

### Addressing the internal mobility challenge helps to hold on to diverse talent

Another inclusion workshop titled "Hear Your Voices" has been designed to help first level managers — who are directly responsible for an increasingly diverse workforce in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity — make sure they understand their roles in helping retain top diverse talent, making their coverage more inclusive, and supporting career growth. This new initiative has been well received.

## What has Bloomberg learned along the way?

### To achieve holistic impact you need to be intentional at all levels

Improving leadership and source representation has been difficult, admits Zelenko. *“It’s not that everyone was suddenly on board. It takes a lot of messaging.”* Achieving discernible improvement requires intentional work at all levels.

*“When I think of my role in making sure that we have representation in our coverage, I am looking at representation at every level of the workforce (reporters, editors, managers, anchors) as well as in coverage through sourcing.”*

Zelenko argues that to achieve success it is important to be very clear in your intentions with regard to both coverage and representation in teams. And to do that you need to change the culture in the organization. And that isn’t easy.

### The best way to break down barriers is to showcase the improved content

Another bias that Zelenko has observed among journalists in the past is a belief that bringing in more women experts would be detrimental to the quality of the content.

*“When the journalists think they are being forced to check a box, that’s a problem. It was once common for people to suggest that identifying and bringing on more female experts would somehow lower the quality of our coverage; I rarely hear that anymore and it’s easy to point to improved coverage every week. But the more people are on board, the more senior managers are repeating the messaging, the more examples you can show of what works, the more successful the initiative becomes.”*

According to Zelenko, the argument most successful in persuading a journalist to change what they do focuses on how better representation improves coverage; how it makes it more relevant, more accurate, less biased, and more complete.

*“It’s also important for recruiting and retention as the next generation asks questions about representation - both in the workforce and in our content”,*

she adds. She gives examples showcasing interviews that would not formerly have happened; stories that have won awards.

### It is harder to shift representation in print or online than on TV and requires broader metrics

The number of guests on any given day on Bloomberg TV globally is in the dozens; but the stories that Bloomberg publishes in print daily are in the thousands. At this scale, it is more challenging to alter the makeup of the representation of experts.

To track progress online and in print, Bloomberg utilizes a broader set of metrics. Bloomberg News, and Bloomberg Businessweek and Bloomberg Markets magazines track the proportion of stories which have at least one female expert. These magazines also track the bylines of the biggest enterprise stories, as well as the gender of the freelance photographers. For Bloomberg Businessweek they track the gender of the bylines on features and the gender representation in photos.

In Bloomberg Businessweek, representation of female experts in stories was at a monthly average of 52% between June 2021 and January 2022. In January, Bloomberg’s Breaking News and Markets





teams, together with the Economics teams — representing about a quarter of the staff — more than doubled the number of stories that quote or cite at least one female expert compared to the same month a year ago.

### What next?

Zelenko's aim going forward is to expand the lens of representation in Bloomberg's tracking by including race and ethnicity. This new initiative started very recently, acknowledging that achieving racial and ethnic representation is a big challenge. Zelenko's team has started to implement this goal by asking guests on TV to self-identify in terms of race and ethnicity. Self-identification is the only way to get data, she argues. Her team has also launched Black Executive and Latinx training cohorts in the US, both of which include women and men and have proved successful. Bloomberg aims to build dashboards across platforms to understand the long-term trajectory of representation as a way of making everyone feel accountable for improving gender, ethnic, and racial makeup across platforms and teams.

# Case study: African Women in Media

## What is African Women in Media?

African Women in Media (AWiM) is an innovative international non-governmental organization, whose goal is to raise the profile and visibility of African women in media. It does so through multiple initiatives, among them an annual conference, a database of women experts, a training program and a news content offer. AWiM has 4.2K Twitter followers, 2.2K Facebook followers, and 2.4K subscribers to its newsletter.

Since its inception in 2016, AWiM has experienced rapid growth. In 2021 the AWiM conference was held virtually. It attracted 500 registrations and 380 active participants, a more than tenfold increase in attendance compared to its inaugural conference in 2017 in which 30 women and one man participated. Collectively, last year's attendees and speakers represented 45 countries. In the same timeframe, AWiM has successfully established SourceHer<sup>82</sup>, an online database of African women experts across 60 fields from 28 countries in Africa and the African diaspora so far; AWiMLearning, a learning management platform through which it delivers media training exclusively for women; and a news platform, AWiMNews, which focuses on reporting issues that affect African women.

I speak with AWiM's co-founder Dr Yemisi Akinbobola - a former journalist, now academic, based in Birmingham, UK - who talks with conviction about the reasons that propelled her to set up the NGO; the importance of improving African women's representation in media; the innovative opportunities that bridging the gap between journalism and academia provides; and the benefits of joining up the abundant local knowledge that African women journalists and associations possess. Akinbobola shares that she set up the organization in the year she won the CNN African Journalist of the Year award, as a way of creating a much-needed, but until then lacking, forum for women journalists from Africa and the African diaspora to share their lived experiences, challenges, and visions for the future.

*"It was really me reflecting on my journey, and what I needed at the time, and was not finding, and creating it because I realized that other women were experiencing the same thing. They needed more space for this kind of collective reflection on their experiences."*

## What makes African Women in Media exceptional?

### Overcoming the gendered allocation of opportunity through training and a conference targeting women

The annual conference that AWiM organizes is a flagship initiative which Akinbobola devotes much time to reflecting on. After five conferences, she remains convinced that a conference that prioritizes women is the right way to circumvent the barriers that arise from the male-favoring bias that exists in news organizations. According to Akinbobola, typically, women journalists in African countries are rarely given the opportunity to attend conferences or training because these are usually reserved for their male colleagues:

*"Women journalists were always missing out on opportunities for training because their male colleagues were always favored over them, in terms of training and conference attendance."*

In her view, providing training that is reserved exclusively for women, and conferences that prioritize women, creates a safe environment for women to share their experiences freely and learn from

82. <https://sourceher.com/>



one another. She acknowledges that this results in men hearing less about women's challenges first hand, but it is a trade-off she considers worth making to avoid the *"gendered allocation of opportunities in skilling up and research."*

### Media training tailored specifically to African women

African Women in Media set up a training platform (a learning management platform) which functions as an environment where knowledge about women's challenges in media in Africa is consolidated.

*"We have developed our own pedagogical approach that speaks to the experiences and issues faced by African women journalists who are our main target audience",*

explains Akinbobola.

The aim of this modular training pedagogy is to arm women with the skills they need to thrive as journalists, covering e.g. safety, digital journalism, and reporting gender angles. The numbers in each cohort of participating women have ranged from 25 to 200. In addition to the formal program, AWiM also draws its trainees together into communities of practice which are formed based on participants' specific areas of interest. This allows trainees to learn from each other as well as the formal program, while also preparing the ground for them to revisit and share their successes, and offer mutual support long after their training has been completed.

## Elevating African women's voices through a SourceHer database

AWiM's SourceHer database of women experts was launched in 2021 in response to the need for more African women experts to feature in media content.

*"The idea is that if, for example, you are a news producer and you want to know about biodiversity in Namibia, then we have female experts in that field you can find in the database."*

Funded by Fojo Media Institute, SourceHer is searchable by subject area, industry, and country. Currently AWiM is planning to utilize the expertise contained in the database by drawing on it to roll out a series of newsletters as well as media training for the women experts.

## What has African Women in Media learned along the way?

### It is necessary to raise awareness of gender bias across genders

I ask Akinbobola what weight should be given to collaborating with men, given that the power in news still resides mostly with them and therefore their role in moving things forward is important. She agrees that everybody needs to be involved in the conversation. One of the ways AWiM has ensured that this is the case has been to settle on a 75:25 split between women and men speakers at their annual conferences.

*"We are more deliberate in having male speakers at the conference now, because we do recognize the importance of them hearing these stories. There is a lot more we can do in terms of direct one-to-one conversations with media organizations and leadership."*

Akinbobola speaks with enthusiasm about the conferences' positive impacts in challenging gender bias. For example, stories shared by women journalists from different African countries at the 2018 conference had a direct and profound effect on Dr Johnson Babafemi Akintayo, a media executive and lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication at Nigeria's Babcock University. Not only did the stories he heard challenge his gender blindness but they were able to completely overturn it, with Dr Babafemi becoming an active champion of gender equality as a result of his experience at the conference. This culminated in an article he wrote for African Women in Media, in which he shared his journey from bias to awareness and action.<sup>83</sup>

Akinbobola also remembers other "lightbulb moments" when raising women journalists' awareness of existing discrimination and bias has led to improved self-care.

*"For example, in our research one of the respondents was talking about different types of sexual harassment that she'd faced. This helped others draw healthy boundaries by raising their awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment."*

### Consolidating effort among media associations and the news industry will enhance progress

The African Women in Media conference in Nairobi in 2019 shone a light on how much local knowledge was being produced but not consolidated.

83. African Women in Media News, 2018

*“I spent time meeting with different media associations, women in media associations, and realizing that there’s a lot of local knowledge being produced. These associations knew the pain points, and knew what the issues were in terms of media, but this knowledge wasn’t always shared or implemented.”*

In her work in recent years, Akinbobola has recognized the danger of NGOs dedicated to advancing gender equality in news being siloed.

*“I feel that there could be better collaboration across associations, but at the same time, I think we also have to recognize, inasmuch as we use the continental name ‘African Women in Media’, we are talking about several countries with many different cultures, and they don’t necessarily have to be collective.”*

### **There are many more countries in Africa than those in the Eastern Southern region**

There continue to be many different silos, not only among non-governmental organizations but also among foreign agencies who support initiatives in Africa, concludes Akinbobola.

*“You find that there is concentration of support in particular regions, and I find that concentration usually to be the Eastern Southern axis, or Nigeria”,*

she observes. She elaborates that money is usually concentrated on particular countries around specific issues — typically media accountability and corruption.

### **What next?**

One of Akinbobola’s hopes for African Women in Media’s future is to focus on developing partnerships with major global news providers who could co-produce and co-publish stories with AWiMNews, drawing on the local knowledge of African women journalists and experts.

She also sees a need for greater communication between media scholarship in terms of research and curricula development, and civil society’s interventions in media industries.

*“Academia moves slower than these industry-focused interventions need. This is an important conversation we need to have with academic funding bodies and publishers too.”*

If she had one wish however, it would be that there were clearly articulated gender policies in all newsrooms in Africa. This would ensure that

*“all media organizations in Africa [...] have a clear funnel of progression for everyone, regardless of their gender; that there is transparency in career progression and collaborative will rather than tokenistic positioning of women in leadership.”*