

# WOMEN'S VOICE IN HUMANITARIAN MEDIA, NO SURPRISES.

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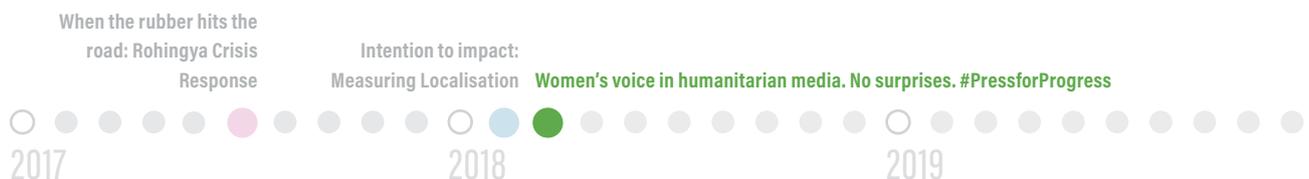
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Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

Humanitarian Horizons is a three-year research initiative. The program adds unique value to humanitarian action in Asian and Pacific contexts by generating evidence-based research and creating conversation for change. The program is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.



# INTRODUCTION

International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the achievements of women. It also marks a call for action to accelerate gender parity.

Gender parity does not exist for women's voices in the media. Neither does it exist in humanitarian media. Gender parity in humanitarian media is important to address inequalities in humanitarian action and how people perceive the role of women in humanitarian action, including by women themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Gender parity in humanitarian media is just one piece of the puzzle. Underrepresentation of women in humanitarian leadership reflects the global situation, in which women make up just 26% of senior managers and 20% of executives.<sup>2</sup> Women have limited access to positions of leadership in the humanitarian sector: of the 33 United Nations humanitarian and deputy humanitarian coordinators in January 2018, just 11 were women.<sup>3</sup>



**Gender breakdown of UN humanitarian and deputy humanitarian coordinators in January 2018**

## WHY MEDIA MATTERS

Media has an important role to play in advancing gender parity in the workplace because, through its representation of different social groups, it has the power to shape individual behaviour.<sup>4</sup> Media has significant influence on how people perceive women as leaders.<sup>5</sup> Research from the United States demonstrates that media shapes the perceptions of business leaders based on their gender,<sup>6</sup> and has a particular influence on the public's judgement of female politicians' likeability.<sup>7</sup>

Gender equality of experts in media matters because it sends a symbolic message about who has the

credibility to be an expert and can provide access to power. The experts quoted are provided authority and the means to frame policies, debates and decisions.<sup>8</sup>

Media also influences how women perceive themselves and their leadership aspirations. An experimental study from 2012 found women exposed to images depicting counter-stereotypical roles reported stronger non-traditional gender role beliefs, less negative self-perceptions and greater leadership aspirations than women exposed to images depicting stereotypical gender roles.<sup>9</sup>

# GENDER PARITY IN THE MEDIA

**“In many cases, media not only reflects inequalities between men and women, but also amplifies and entrenches them.”<sup>10</sup>**

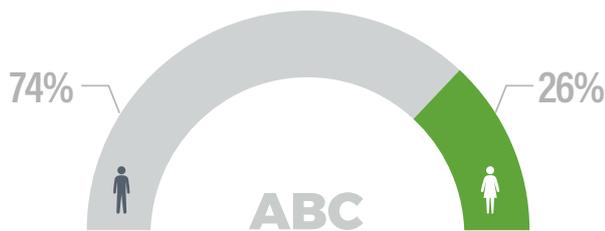
Underrepresentation of women as sources in media is evident and widespread and seems to have remained static in recent times. Studies report the following gender breakdown of sources:



Global media in 2015 - exactly the same as in 2010<sup>11</sup>



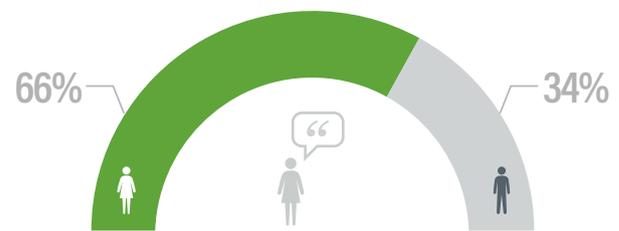
Australia's metropolitan print media in 2016<sup>12</sup>



Australia's ABC media in 2015<sup>13</sup>

Even in Finland, a progressive Nordic country, fewer than 30% of experts interviewed in the news media are women.<sup>14</sup>

Women are not only underrepresented in the media; they are often shown in stereotypical, less powerful feminine roles.<sup>15</sup> This is reflected in the topics on which women are quoted. In the 2016 analysis of Australia's media mentioned above, women were more likely than men to be quoted on stereotypical "female" issues, including parenting, childcare, paid parental leave, gender discrimination, family violence, and women in the workforce.<sup>16</sup>



Sources quoted on stereotypical female issues

Gender stereotypes, repeated and perpetuated by the media, can impact women's leadership. Gender stereotypes have been connected to workplace discrimination.<sup>17</sup> They are thought to produce bias in performance evaluations, resulting in equally competent women not advancing as far in an organisation as an equivalent-performing man.<sup>18</sup>

Gender parity for women's voices in media requires not only increased representation, but the portrayal of women in ways that are less beholden to gender stereotypes.<sup>19</sup>

**“Media tell us our roles in society. They tell us who we are and what we can be. They frame, interpret and amplify our policies and our politics. They tell us who has power and who matters.”**

**Julie Burton, President, Women's Media Center<sup>20</sup>**

# A SNAPSHOT: WOMEN IN HUMANITARIAN MEDIA

Humanitarian Advisory Group analysed articles from a mainstream news media outlet and a specialised humanitarian news media outlet over a four-week period in October 2017.

## The good news: women as authors of humanitarian media are equally represented in one mainstream media outlet:



Al Jazeera must be congratulated for its almost equal split of authorship over the period. This is a significant achievement; in a 2017 review of the 20 top news outlets in the United States, the Women's Media Centre found women produced only 37.7% of news reports.<sup>21</sup>

Female authorship in a specialised humanitarian news media outlet,<sup>22</sup> reportedly reaching millions of people every month, and with a substantial influence on humanitarian issues and policy, was less equal.



This is important, in part because female authors were more likely to quote female sources than male authors. The 2016 Women for Media Report found male authors quoted 17% women; female authors quoted 27% women.<sup>23</sup>

## No surprises. Underrepresentation in voice.

There was a significant disparity between the number of female and male sources quoted in the humanitarian media analysed.



The gender distribution of experts or officials quoted in humanitarian media reflects broader media analysis. The studies listed previously report 20–26% representation of women as sources in media, and less than 30% of women as experts in Finnish media.

While this underrepresentation is influenced by the gender difference in humanitarian leadership, it is still substantially less than the percentage of female leadership across the humanitarian sector as a whole (if the 33% female representation among humanitarian coordinators and deputy humanitarian coordinators can be used as a proxy across the sector). It is also lower than the number of women in the most senior roles from the United Nations more broadly (27%).<sup>24</sup>

Gaven Morris, Director of News at the ABC, suggests that while underrepresentation of women in media is partly due to underrepresentation at the top of fields such as politics, business and sport, it is “also to do with busy journalists needing to think more broadly and make the effort to inject fresh blood into their contact books”.<sup>25</sup> Lisa Cornish, Senior Reporter for Devex, says that media units will put her in touch with their heads of organisation, who are often male. She says it’s important to get the organisation to think about equality in leadership, but also about putting more female representatives forward to media organisations.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a high-level rapid analysis of two global news media outlets, including one specialising in humanitarian news. All articles on humanitarian issues in the four-week period from 2–29 October 2017 were identified. Author attribution in each report was used to determine gender, and corroboration was provided by a follow-on search. The gender of experts or officials quoted in the articles, such as formal spokespersons, mayors, chiefs, heads of agencies or departments and lawyers; the gender of victims, refugees, residents, bystanders or unnamed person gender was not. News media outlets were selected based on the ease of use of their search function over a specified period. Three major news outlets were excluded because their search function limited results to 100 items.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?



### Acknowledge the positive

Outlets like Al Jazeera, with gender parity in reporting, should be highlighted and celebrated.



### Build evidence

While this paper serves to start the conversation, more evidence about the gender disparity in humanitarian media is needed, based on more sources, with more analysis, including of the portrayal of women in humanitarian media.



### Understand the impact

Research the impact of unequal media representation on women in humanitarian leadership.



### Raise awareness

Awareness is powerful. Devex Senior Reporter Lisa Cornish says that being aware of this issue as a journalist is extremely important in broadening representation of women and specifically seeking them for interview. The evidence supports this. The ABC found the interview time dedicated to women increased from 20% to 26% in just 12 months after its first study of gender parity – an improvement which its Director of News attributed to increased awareness.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, a randomised control trial in the United States demonstrated that exposure to the science behind gender bias through training was effective in changing behaviours to address gender inequity, and concluded that such training should support the career advancement of women.<sup>27</sup>



### Support journalists and organisations to work together

Lisa Cornish highlighted the importance of involving both journalists and organisations in efforts to increase female representation. Resources are available to support journalists to seek out female sources, and to be mindful of the gender stereotypes that can be exacerbated through media. Organisations must continue to work to strengthen gender parity at senior levels, and can be proactive in suggesting female representatives for media requests. News media outlets can consider joining the UN Women Step It Up For Gender Equality Media Compact, in which media outlets are invited to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by disrupting stereotypes and biases in their reporting and increasing the number of women in the media, including in leadership roles.<sup>28</sup>

### Could Women for Media work in the humanitarian sector?

Women's Leadership Institute Australia's Women for Media initiative consists of an online database of over 200 female leaders.

It provides journalists with direct access to senior female leaders for interview or comment, aiming to increase the visibility of female leaders in the media and women speaking about their professional areas of expertise.

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