

# Gender perspective advances in the media: initiatives for its incorporation into the Spanish press

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## Abstract

Incorporating a gender perspective in the media entails implementing strategies to work with information in a democratic way. The mobilisation of *Las Periodistas Paramos* in Spain in 2018 influenced a change towards such a perspective, which is also one of the most relevant innovations identified in Spanish media. The purpose of this work is to draw, for the first time, a map of the initiatives adopted by the Spanish press to incorporate the gender perspective into its newsrooms. To do this, style guides and other initiatives aimed at providing guidance on the introduction of the gender dimension are examined, and semi-structured interviews are used to find out how four women journalists responsible for such an incorporation carry out their work. The results show a substantial, although also uneven, presence of initiatives in the 21 newspapers analysed. Most of the style guides –10 of them have one and nine of them have been accessed– are outdated, obsolete or being updated. Most also contain aspects related to the gender perspective, although they do not include this term explicitly and often do not adapt to today's reality. In the newspapers that do not have a Style Guide or other types of measures, a sensitivity towards the subject is perceived. On the other hand, four newspapers have a gender editor whose main function is to ensure that the perspective is transversal and reaches all sections, genres and content. These professionals make a positive assessment of their still brief trajectory and agree that journalism has advanced considerably and done important pedagogical work in society in terms of gender, although it seems that this figure will remain necessary for quite some time.

## Keywords

Women; Journalists; Press; Newspapers; Communication; Writing; Language; Stereotypes; Gender perspective; Feminism; Sexism; Gender editor; Gender gap; Bias; Inequalities; Equality; Style guides; Spain.



## 1. Introduction

The media play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and are powerful instruments in bringing about social change (Gallego-Ayala, 2015, p. 19). Their alliance with feminism is therefore of vital importance in societal re-education, the changing of gender role stereotypes and the elimination of gender-based discrimination (Williams, 2000). However, the media also reflect the cognitive foundations of society within a system where inequality reigns (Meuli, 2017), and improving the presence of women in political-media discourse has thus been suggested as a way to democratically strengthen their symbolic and substantive representation (Padovani et al., 2022).

The underrepresentation and invisibility of women in media content and the limitations they experience in attaining decision-making positions in media organisations have been on the international agenda since the mid-1990s (Padovani et al., 2022). The *Fourth World Conference on Women (United Nations, 1995)*, held in Beijing in 1995, included among its objectives

“increasing women’s participation and access to expression and decision-making in and through the media”

and

“promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.”

It also called on governments, the media, and the research community to promote more gender-balanced media content and structures, and even noted the existence of a link between communication, gender equality and democracy. More than twenty-five years later, the 2021 *Media for Democracy Monitor Project (MDM)* described the persistence of inequalities in many areas of the media as being a democratic challenge (Trappel; Tomaz, 2021). Furthermore, the *Council of Europe* has required the European media industry to make increasing efforts to improve its structures and products (Mannila, 2017, p. 5) in the face of widespread discrimination and gender inequality in this sector (McCracken et al., 2018).

In Spain, the *Gender Violence law* and *Equality law* of 2004 and 2007, respectively, had already established the media’s responsibility in gender issues. On March 8, 2018, female journalists launched the *Las Periodistas Paramos* movement (*LPP – We, the women journalists, stop*), an initiative that brought to light demands they had regarding their work situation and the role of women in newsrooms and media content (*Las Periodistas Paramos*, 2018). Amongst other things, the *LPP* demanded new approaches, including the presentation of news with a gender perspective, and this at a time when significant changes were already starting to be noted (Prieto-Sánchez, 2018). Although these changes have not yet been fully implemented across all media outlets, they provide evidence of the social transformation that can be brought about by collective actions (Sánchez-Mora; Rodríguez-Lara, 2015).

However, the latest Spanish *Annual Report on the Journalistic Profession* finds that female journalists continue to encounter difficulties in reconciling work and family life, in achieving promotions, and in reaching managerial positions (*Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid*, 2021). In view of this,

“it is unlikely that the media can contribute to fostering gender equality, and therefore to strengthening democratic practices, unless they assume gender equality as a basic principle of their operation” (Padovani et al., 2022).

Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to examine the initiatives adopted by the Spanish press to incorporate the gender perspective into their newsrooms, thus complementing existing studies on the working conditions of female journalists which, although indirectly, also have an impact on this perspective.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Women in the media

Gender studies oriented towards the role of women in the media can be divided into two categories, the first of which has a direct influence on the second: (a) gender issues in newsrooms (inequality in job opportunities, promotion, salary, and sexism) and (b) the representation of women in the media (Steiner, 2017). Within the first category, the existence of labor inequality between male and female journalists has been noted in Spain for decades (among others, Franquet, 1982; Fagoaga; Secanella, 1984; Gallego-Ayala et al., 1998; Soriano, 2005; Garrido, 2008; Martínez-Rodríguez, 2014; García-Sáiz, 2018; De-Miguel-Pascual; Parratt-Fernández; Berganza-Conde, 2019; Iranzo-Cabrera, 2020; Cáceres; Parratt, 2021). We also find studies within this first category, though somewhat scarcer, on the journalist as a content producer (among others, Ufarte, 2007; De-Miguel et al. 2017; Cáceres; Parratt, 2022).

As for the second category, it was not until the 1990s that the production of scientific work related to the image of women in the media began to gain strength in Spain (De-Pablos-Coello et al., 2005). Numerous studies have provided evidence both of the invisibility of women and the influence of male stereotypes in media content (e.g., García-de-Cortázar-Álvarez; García-de-León-Nebreda, 2000; Sánchez-Aranda; Berganza-Conde; García-Ortega, 2003; Gallego-Ayala, 2003; Blanco-Castilla, 2005; Gómez-y-Patiño, 2011, among others). The *MDM* confirmed in 2021 that, with rare exceptions –Nordic countries<sup>1</sup> and, more recently, the United Kingdom and Germany– women are still poorly represented, rarely appear as expert voices, are often excluded from economic and political news (Padovani et al., 2022) and front pages (Franks, 2013), and are overrepresented in health, cosmetics, or design issues (Edström; Mølster, 2014, p. 66). In Spain, women’s opinions are relegated to places of less informative relevance (Prieto-Sánchez, 2018) and micro-sexism

is still detected in the representation of gender roles, sexist language or female hypersexualization (**Peralta-García et al.**, 2019, p. 181). Sports pieces, too, continue to contain sexist biases and present an androcentric view (**Mayoral-Sánchez; Mera-Fernández**, 2017; **Ramon-Vegas et al.**, 2020), and while there has been an increase in the coverage of gender violence (**Zurbano-Berenguer; García-Gordillo**, 2016), this for years has transmitted the role historically granted to women by society (**Bach-Arús**, 2000, p. 115), from a viewpoint of “morbid sensationalism” (**Fraga**, 2007) and a “non-existent gender perspective” (**Soria-Ibáñez**, 2016, pp. 149-150).

Following in the wake of **Van-Zoonen** (1998), other recent works have focused on the relationship between the absence of women in positions of responsibility in the media and news content<sup>2</sup>—which relegates gender issues to second place—and news with female sources (**Prieto-Sánchez**, 2018). In this sense, journalism with a gender perspective would positively affect both the construction of the journalistic text and the context in which it is produced (**Oliveira**, 2020, p. 18).

## 2.2. The gender perspective

Gender is not a topic, but a focus of social communication

“that has been mutating in the last thirty years in the light of changing social contexts” (**Actis; Gariglio**, 2021).

Currently, the adoption of gender perspective in the media involves implementing strategies for the presentation of information in a democratic way, thus promoting equality in the process of news construction (**Alberti-Garfias et al.**, 2010). The mobilization of *LPP* in 2018 was the impulse for a change towards that perspective (**Galarza-Fernández; Castro-Martínez; Sosa-Valcárcel**, 2019). This has been one of the most relevant innovations seen in the Spanish media and is evidenced by the inclusion of feminism in the editorial principles and in the production of content with a feminist approach in sections on equality (**Carvajal et al.**, 2022). Ana Requena, editor-in-chief of gender at *eldiario.es*, explains that

“until recently, the readership was very masculinized, now (...) you have an audience to attract who will not accept that women are systematically ignored, that only men are given columns, or (the publication of) deplorable depictions of gender violence” (*Diario Digital Femenino*, 2020).

Introducing gender perspective into reporting involves

“getting to the bottom of journalistic discourse, questioning some conventions and apparently immovable principles, and unveiling in a critical but constructive way the unfavourable mechanisms through which a discourse is presented as regards the needs and the equitable treatment of news” (**Gallego-Ayala**, 2015).

Although these adjustments are not always simple, partly because the male professionals who manage news content are not trained in this regard (**Soria-Ibáñez**, 2016), they should occur naturally and democratically (**Oliveira**, 2020, p. 21), and in all types of news coverage, not only when stories about women are being covered (**Sharma**, 2012, p. 4). To this end, *Unesco* (2019) created the *Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media* for the media to use at their own discretion. Meanwhile some authors prefer self-regulation and the implementation of their own actions to increase gender awareness in journalism (**Mateos-de-Cabo; Gimeno-Nogués; Martínez-Martínez**, 2007; **Iranzo-Cabrera**, 2020)

In relation to the latter, the news media use “style guides”, a set of internal rules that all staff must abide by, which establish in a generic way how to write for each distinct organisation (**Parratt; Paniagua; Abejón**, 2017, p. 77), and which must be updated periodically

“taking into account the evolution of social, verbal, visual and symbolic languages” (**Yriart**, 1998, p. 46).

It can be assumed, therefore, that including gender perspective in them would help to break down stereotypes and achieve an “awareness of gender sensitivity” among professionals (**Córdoba-Barquero**, 2020) which, in turn, would be reflected by the content produced. In this regard, a study by **Cáceres** and **Parratt** (2021, p. 39) revealed that women press journalists in Spain hardly receive any guidelines for using inclusive and non-sexist language when reporting. This is not surprising considering that when the study was carried out the newspapers’ style guides did not include any recommendations for reporting on equality or on the treatment of issues that directly affect women. Therefore, it would be necessary to check whether these guides are still in force and whether, if they have been updated, they have modified their contents with relation to the gender perspective.

The publication of manuals or self-regulatory documents regarding the use of inclusive language in the media has increased, however, such as the *Fundéu* (2019) and the *Canary Islands Institute for Equality* guides (**Coronado-Sopeña**, 2019), in addition to previously existing protocols such as the action plan instigated by the *Government of Cantabria* (2007), or the decalogue created specifically by the newspaper *Público* (*publico.es*, 2008) for reporting on gender violence, among others. However, as with the style guide situation, there is not yet any complete and up-to-date information regarding the initiatives taken by the Spanish media in this area.

Other recently adopted changes are the creation of special sections on feminist issues and what is commonly referred to as the gender portfolio, under the direction of individuals occupying roles which are so new that they have hardly been analyzed academically<sup>3</sup>: the gender correspondent, gender editor, gender editor-in-chief or equality specialist—among other titles. These new roles are in charge of acting

“cross-sectionally within the entire newsroom and across all topics in order to promote cultural change and ensure the responsible treatment of news from a gender perspective” (**Lezaeta; Latorre; Carvalho**, 2020).

The pioneer in the institution of this role was *The New York Times*, in 2017. Its gender editor, Jessica Bennett, refers to this perspective as

“a lens from which we see the newsroom as a whole (...); more than simply producing new content, it also means thinking about tone, visual presentation, who writes the pieces, who appears in those photographs, what sources are cited” (Sharma, 2012, p. 7).

In Spain, *El País* was the first media outlet to create a gender correspondent, in 2018, Pilar Álvarez (*Laboratorio de Periodismo*, 2021), followed by *eldiario.es*, which appointed Ana Requena as editor-in-chief of gender in September of the same year.

However, the creation of this role has not gone uncriticised. Pérez-Soler and Roca-Sales (2019) hypothesize about a possible opportunistic motivation behind its creation and Oliveira (2020, p. 19) argues that

“commercial interests go further than social responsibility and, thus, the creation of gender editors by large media groups reflects the desire of these newspaper companies to profit from a gender equality agenda.”

The new role also faces difficulties. For example, some female editors in the Argentinian media point not only to the efforts needed for the gender perspective to be implemented across the board, but also to the obstacles they encounter in the way of fulfilling their roles with greater autonomy and decision-making power (Heb, 2022). These obstacles are justified by those who see the adoption of the gender perspective as a one-off movement and, consequently, that these editors would have

“a reduced impact because (the gender perspective) is not part of the newspaper’s editorial line nor is it proposed by the company as an integral part of the journalistic task” (Meuli, 2017).

Finally, it is worth asking whether it would be desirable for this role to exist only until the gender perspective ceases to be

“an artificial complement, something you do only if you have a boss who insists on it” (Sharma, 2012, p. 7)

and instead becomes accepted and normalised across all newsrooms.

### 3. Objectives

As indicated above, the purpose of this paper is to map, for the first time, the initiatives taken by the press in Spain to incorporate the gender perspective into their editorial offices<sup>4</sup> and to examine the way they operate. We seek to answer the following research questions:

- Q1. Do the style guides of the Spanish press contain directives regarding the gender perspective?
- Q2. Does the press have other documents and/or sections aimed at incorporating the gender perspective into newsroom?
- Q3. Do newspapers have an individual responsible for incorporating the gender perspective?
- Q4. How does this individual carry out their work?

### 4. Methodology

In order to create a map of the initiatives taken throughout the Spanish press to promote gender perspective in their newsrooms –and thus respond to Q1, Q2 and Q3– we first carried out a survey of news publications. To this end, the most widely read newspapers in Spain were selected. To include digital national news publications, the most recent ranking available at the time this stage of the research began was used –corresponding to the first quarter of 2022– and was provided by *GfK (Growth from Knowledge)*. From an initial total of 50 titles, economic and sports publications were eliminated, resulting in a final list of 21 general news publications.

Secondly, the newspapers were contacted by telephone and, in some cases, by e-mail between May and July 2022, so as to obtain the information necessary to complete the map. That is, to find out if the publications have style books, and if so, to access and examine them, in order to locate possible guidelines or directions referring to the treatment of gender issues. Another objective was to find out if they have any other documents created specifically to provide guidance on the incorporation of the gender perspective to the publication, as well as other possible initiatives. Three newspapers did not allow access to their style books –*El Español*, *El Mundo* and *La Nueva España*. In the case of the first two, information was obtained by contacting editors on their staff. The examination was carried out using qualitative methodology and the technique of discourse analysis, which made it possible to locate possible guidelines or directions regarding the treatment of these issues. To this end, the following variables were considered in relation to the presence of gender issues:

- sexist language;
- sexist violence;
- attention to equality;
- gender-related terms; and
- indications on gender.

Finally, after confirming that four newspapers have established a role responsible for the gender perspective in their editorial offices, the qualitative technique of the semi-structured interview was used to find out how this work is carried out (Q4). The professionals who occupy this position agreed to be interviewed and to have their answers published for academic purposes. The meetings

took place in June 2022 through *Microsoft Teams* and lasted between 47 min. and 01 h 39 min. They were self-transcribed using the tool incorporated into *Teams* for this purpose and were subsequently edited manually to organize the responses according to thematic criteria. The subjects were asked, among other things, about their backgrounds, time spent in their roles, and the initiatives in place behind the creation of their role. Other open-ended questions revolved around their functions, the changes they have achieved since holding the position and the difficulties they face, as well as their opinions as to whether their role is necessary.

“ This study’s novelty lies in mapping, for the first time, the initiatives adopted by the Spanish press for the incorporation of the gender perspective into their newsrooms ”

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Map of initiatives for implementing the gender perspective in the Spanish press

Table 1 shows the map of initiatives taken by the newspapers analysed in this study for the implementation of the gender perspective in their newsrooms, which are developed further in sections 5.2. and 5.3. It contains a list of Spanish newspapers ranked by readership for the first quarter of 2022 according to data provided by *GfK*. For each of these publications, the map shows whether they have a style guide; if they do, the existence of any directives therein regarding the incorporation of the gender perspective is shown. Also shown is whether the publications have other types of initiatives aimed at promoting this perspective; and, finally, whether a specific role has been created to oversee its implementation. Cases where publications have not provided access to documents they claim to have are shown with a dash; those that have not responded at all to any requests for information are shown with a question mark.

Table 1. Initiatives to implement the gender perspective in the Spanish press

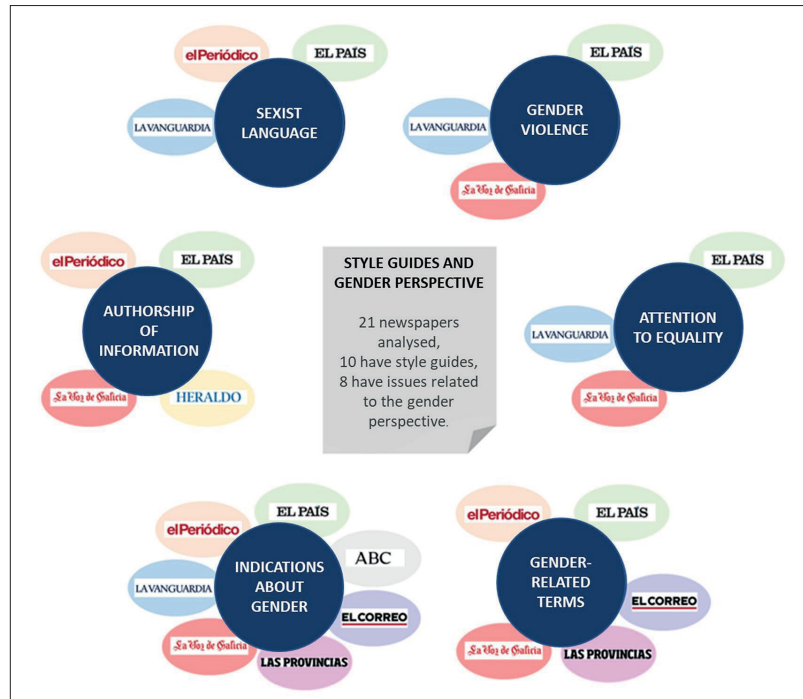
Newspaper	Style guide	Gender issues in the style guide	Other initiatives	Specific role
<i>El Mundo</i>	✓			
<i>El País</i>	✓	✓		✓
<i>20 Minutos</i>			✓	
<i>ABC</i>	✓	✓		
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	✓	✓		
<i>El Español</i>			✓	
<i>El Confidencial</i>				
<i>elDiario.es</i>				✓
<i>El Periódico</i>	✓	✓	✓	
<i>OKdiario</i>			—	
<i>La Razón</i>				
<i>The Huffington Post</i>				
<i>Las Provincias</i>	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Público</i>			✓	✓
<i>Heraldo de Aragón</i>	✓	✓		
<i>La Voz de Galicia</i>	✓	✓		
<i>El Nacional.cat</i>				
<i>El Correo</i>	✓	✓		✓
<i>La Nueva España</i>	✓	—	✓	
<i>Libertad Digital</i>	?	?	?	?
<i>Ideal</i>			—	

## 5.2. Style guides and other initiatives

### 5.2.1. Style guides

Of the 21 newspapers studied, 10 have style guides, but most of these are outdated. Some are in disuse, such as those of the *ABC* (Vigara-Tauste; Consejo de Redacción de ABC, 2001), *La Vanguardia* (Camps, 2004), *El Correo* and *Las Provincias*—both from the Vocento group (Martínez-de-Sousa; Vocento, 2003)— and *El Periódico* (*El Periódico de Catalunya*, 2007). Those of *El Mundo* (*El Mundo*, 2008)—also in disuse— and *Heraldo de Aragón* (*Heraldo de Aragón*, 2008) are in the process of being updated. Meanwhile *El País* published a new edition in 2021 (*El País*, 2021), and in January 2022 *La Voz de Galicia* published the document “Additions and amendments” (*La Voz de Galicia*, 2022) to complement its 2002 guide (Ríos-Álvarez; Faginas-Souto, 2002). *La Nueva España* and *Ideal* claim, respectively, to have a style guide and a document for internal use, to which they have not provided access.

An exhaustive examination of the books—except for that of *La Nueva España*, to which access was not provided— reveals that, except for *El Mundo*, all of them contain issues related to the gender perspective, although this term is not mentioned explicitly. The following six types of directives appear in an unequal manner (Graph 1): use of sexist language, gender, gender-related terms, treatment of gender violence, attention to equality and authorship of the pieces.



Graph 1. Gender perspective in style guides

#### Use of sexist language

Allusions to the use of sexist language are present in the style guides of *El Periódico*, *La Vanguardia* and *El País*. While the first says that feminine nouns serve “the purpose of banishing sexist uses of language”, although their use is not mandatory (2007, p. 3), the second advises users “to be especially prudent in avoiding linguistic sexism” and not to fall “into artifices of the type “la jueza, los/as alumnos/as” typical of “politically correct language” (Camps, 2004, p. 32). *El País*’ recently updated guide is very different and contains a section with such specific considerations as not giving informative relevance to women’s clothing because “it is not more important than that of men” or not only asking women about their work-life balance, but also asking men too (2021, p. 33). This newspaper is the only one that mentions the use of microsexisms, with a definition (p. 470) and some terms to be avoided (p. 35).

#### Directives about gender

Directives about gender are more frequent. *El País* tries to avoid gender duplications and the generic masculine (2021, pp. 33-34) and *La Vanguardia* speaks of gender instead of sex, “an incorrect Anglicism” (Camps, 2004, p. 177). The *ABC* contains clarifications on the gender of nouns that are confusing, where gender/sex is not indicated by word or profession terminations, and also where gender is commonly indicated in the roles and professions held by women (Vigara-Tauste, 2001, pp. 84-86). The criteria of *El Periódico* are more conservative, saying that

“the use of the generic masculine does not go against sexual equality”,

although it also

“expands the list of female voices and includes some which refer to positions, professions or titles that in other times were only associated with men” (*El Periódico de Catalunya*, 2007, p. 8).

The style guide of *La Voz de Galicia* says that when the reference is feminine and the element expressing the whole is masculine, the feminine quantifier is admissible, “but Grammar considers this construction to be very forced” (Ríos-Álvarez; Faginas-Souto, 2002, p. 65). In its document “Additions and amendments” (2022) it adds that the feminine forms of the names of professions and positions should be used when they exist.

As for *Las Provincias* and *El Correo*, the out-of-use style guide they share points out that

“another problematic issue are those who prefer (especially unionists and politicians) to mention both genders when addressing a collective”,

and so, generally, in these publications,

“only the traditional form will be used, in which the masculine is a generic representative of both genders.”

In addition, the feminine form of trades, positions, and jobs “poses a problem because some (...) are in favour of calling themselves *lawyer, engineer* (abogado, ingeniero) –with the masculine terminations– instead of the feminine ones, which can be applied freely” (Martínez-de-Sousa; Vocento, 2003, p. 92).

“The map drawn up by this study shows a considerable, though disparate, presence of initiatives for the implementation of this perspective in the 21 newspapers analysed”

Conversely, *El País* opts for use of the feminine in such positions and accepts the forms approved by the Royal Academy of Spanish –*judge, councillor* (jueza, concejala) –although it respects the decisions of those writers who do not want to use these terms in their opinion pieces (*El País*, 2021, p. 175).

### Gender-related terms

As with non-sexist language, and in line with the social changes experienced in recent years, the use of gender-related terms is covered in several books. *El País* accepts the use of recently coined words –for example, vicarious violence, mansplaining, manspreading, microsexism, sisterhood or patriarchy– and advises avoiding others such as *gestación subrogada* (surrogate motherhood) –which it considers a euphemism– *lío de faldas* (uproar), *consolador* (dildo), or *mandona* (bossy) (2021, p. 35). For its part, *El Periódico* considers expressions such as gender violence, gender equality or gender perspective incorrect because

“the masculine and feminine genders are grammatical categories, not to be confused with the masculine or feminine sex, which are biological categories” (2007, p. 123).

*El Correo* and *Las Provincias* also reject the term gender violence and replace it with domestic, family, or sexist violence (Martínez-de-Sousa; Vocento, 2003, p. 445). *La Voz de Galicia* simply includes similar concepts (Ríos-Álvarez; Faginas-Souto, 2002, pp. 65-66), with some minor additions to its document of modifications.

### Sexist violence

Despite being a topical issue in the media, sexist violence appears little and unequally in the style books. While *La Vanguardia* rejects “the incorrect modernity of ‘gender violence’” (Camps, 2004, p. 177), *La Voz de Galicia* alludes briefly to the non-identification of the victims (Ríos-Álvarez; Faginas-Souto, 2002, p. 10). *El País* is more in keeping with current realities, and is against publishing morbid images of the victims, their social networks, or denigrating images when reporting on prostitution and the trafficking of women. It advises special care in news stories and opinion pieces on male violence because these cases

“are not events, but rather must be addressed as a structural problem”

and includes a very complete list of criteria to be followed (2021, pp. 30-33).

### Attention to equality

Neither is attention to equality mentioned often. For *La Voz de Galicia* it is a “subject of special attention”, but without specifying the type of equality (Ríos-Álvarez; Faginas-Souto, 2002, p. 8), while *La Vanguardia* rejects news stories

“that involve any type of discrimination for reasons of ideology or religion, sex, race, or social or cultural origin” (Camps, 2004, p. 479).

Only *El País* explains that a general awareness has spread of the need for equality between women and men in all legal and social areas, which

“has not only had repercussions on the lexicon of the news media, but also on their substantive treatment and on the spaces destined to reflect this reality” (2021, p. 13).

Finally, *El País* (2021), *El Periódico* (2007), *Heraldo de Aragón* (2008) and *La Voz de Galicia* (Ríos-Álvarez; Faginas-Souto, 2002) agree with respect to the authorship of the news in not using a genderless form to refer to the editors, opting instead for “el periodista” (the journalist “el redactor” (the editor) or “los periodistas” (the journalists).

### 5.2.2. Other initiatives

Apart from style guides, some newspapers have created specific documents with directives regarding the gender perspective in their newsrooms. This is the case with *Público*, which, in addition to the *Mujer* (Woman) section, has the “Guía rápida para escribir sobre violencias y asesinatos machistas” (Quick guide to writing about violence and sexist murders), which states that “gender violence is not an event” (*Público*, n.d., p. 2) and deserves special treatment - and recommends its staff to use the “Taller de comunicación y género” (Communication and gender workshop) of *Oxfam Intermón*: <https://www.informarsobreviolenciamachista.com>

*Heraldo de Aragón* has at its disposal the ethical code of *Henneo*, the media group to which it belongs, and which promotes “equality between men and women in the media (...) around the world, through a program signed with the *European Commission*” (*Henneo*, n.d.).

*OKdiario* also claims to have an internal code for gender issues, though we were not given access to it.

Other types of actions are the special sections for women *MagasIN*, of *El Español*, and *mujer.es*, of the free newspaper *20 minutos*,

“one of the first Spanish newspapers to subscribe to the initiative of the *European Parliament Office* in Spain #DóndeEstánEllas (where are the women), which promotes the equal presence of women and men in all types of activities organized by the newspaper” (Samitier, *20 minutos*).

For its part, *El Periódico* collates coverage of feminism together under the label “feminism” and in May 2022 created a weekly newsletter about feminism, *Con Letra de Mujer* (In Women’s Handwriting).

Other newspapers say that, although they do not have specific documents,

“they are guided by the normal rules of language and talk to each other when a new concept or coverage emerges” (Riestra, *Huffington Post*)

and

“we try to be sensitive and let common sense prevail” (Gómez, *La Voz de Galicia*).

They also follow the slogan of

“not getting carried away by alternative currents and preach equality between men and women as a factor of welfare and social development, but without bias” (Montañés, *ABC*),

working with

“common sense and respect for all people, and their diversity, although (publications) often make mistakes or fall short of their objectives.”

## 5.2. Gender portfolios

The creation of gender portfolios is another of the initiatives adopted by some media to ensure the application of a gender perspective in the newsrooms. At the head of these portfolios is a figure whose name differs according to the type of media –gender correspondent, gender editor-in-chief and gender coordinator, among others– but with a common function: to include gender equality in journalistic texts.

Its recent incorporation to the profession (as previously mentioned, in 2017 *The New York Times* was the first newspaper to create a role as gender editor, while in Spain the pioneer was *El País*, in 2018) may explain the reason why, as far as we have been able to confirm, the position of gender editor exists in only four of the 21 newspapers analysed. These are *El País*, *eldiario.es*, *Público* and *El Correo*. *El Periódico* has an editor specialized in gender (Patricia Martín) who works closely with the rest of the newspapers of the *Prensa Ibérica* group, especially with *El Periódico de España*, which in turn has another specialized editor (Violeta Gallardo). However, neither of the two positions have the responsibilities or are held in as same high esteem as the role considered here.

The need for a professional role in charge of coordinating issues referring to gender equality began to crystallize in the Spanish press in 2018, after the feminist strike of *8M* and the *Las Periodistas Paramos* movement. In May of that year, *El País* created the position of gender correspondent to which Pilar Álvarez was appointed. In September, *eldiario.es* chose Ana Requena as editor-in-chief of gender. A few months earlier, in mid-2017, *Público* had proposed that Marisa Kohan would be the gender coordinator of the newspaper, although she was not officially appointed to this role. For this reason, it is understood that the first Spanish newsroom to have a gender portfolio was *El País*.

As previously mentioned, all four professionals in charge of gender in the newspapers studied were interviewed:

- Isabel Valdés, gender correspondent at *El País* since February 2022, when she replaced Pilar Álvarez;
- Ana Requena, editor-in-chief of gender at *eldiario.es* since 2018;
- Marisa Kohan, gender coordinator at *Público* since 2017; and
- María José Tomé, who in early 2022 became the head of gender at *El Correo*.

Except for Isabel Valdés, all of them are the first to hold these positions in their respective publications.

### The reasons

Asked about the reasons that they believe were behind their newspapers’ decisions to incorporate such a role, Valdés and Requena agree in pointing to the two major feminist events of 2018 (*8M* and *LPP*), and also included the #MeToo movement, which had started a year earlier:

“After the feminist strike of *8M*, the newspaper realized that it needed someone in this role, although I think that at the time it was more of an aesthetic manoeuvre than anything else” (Valdés, *El País*).

“Most of the style guides are outdated, obsolete or being updated, most also contain aspects related to the gender perspective, although they do not include this term explicitly and often do not adapt to today’s reality”



However, they also point out another important factor: the evolution of the newsrooms themselves. In the case of *El País*, Valdés states that the demands of the female professionals had existed for years, since

“it is a progressive and left-wing newsroom, where there has always been a gender perspective, with many women and many feminist men.”

Similarly, in *eldiario.es*,

“although social context influenced the decision, journalism with a gender perspective was not alien to us, as it is one of the hallmarks of the newspaper and we already had people working on it” (Requena, *eldiario.es*).

In the case of *Público*, it was an ideological decision solely, taken to assert the newspaper’s position.

“A process of rethinking and redefining itself had begun and a process which we called ‘the flags of *Público*’ was undertaken, key issues on which we wanted to focus, such as historical memory, the climate crisis and feminism. And we wanted to reinforce that area of feminism with someone to give it a boost” (Kohan, *Público*).

In *El Correo* it was an initiative of its managing editor, José Miguel Santamaría, responding to the need

“for half of society to be well represented in the news, and to make better, more comprehensive, and non-exclusive journalism” (Tomé, *El Correo*).

Therefore, the creation of this role in the Spanish media responds to different demands:

a) The demands of society. Although *8M* was the most visible event, there was also

“a critical mass that had been asking for changes in terms of gender perspective for some time. Thanks to social media, this criticism reached the news media in a clearer, more direct and resounding way” (Requena, *eldiario.es*).

b) The demands of the newspaper staff themselves. It started with the *LPP* movement, but it had already been gradually gathering shape with the conviction that egalitarian journalism was better journalism.

c) Market demands. The existence of a new readership to whom it was necessary to adapt, and the need to incorporate more women into this readership caused

“from that time onwards, a more conscientious analysis of who our readership were, which even led to a remodelling of the masthead and some sections” (Kohan, *Público*).

## Name

To try to define this new role, it is important to remember that there is no one name for it, since in each media outlet it is referred to differently. Thus, in *El País* the position is known as “gender correspondent” because

“the intention is that she should go beyond the area she covers and reach other sections, that she should be a figure of consultation, of decision at some point...” (Valdés, *El País*).

At *eldiario.es*, the term “gender editor-in-chief” was chosen, to

“put her on an equal footing with the positions that already existed, (and) so that it is clear that she has the same status as the other editors-in-chief and transfers this idea both within and outside the newsroom” (Requena, *eldiario.es*).

In *El Correo*, she is known as the “gender editor” because “at the end of the day, her function is to edit content” (Tomé, *El Correo*). Finally, at *Público*, she is referred to as the gender coordinator because, according to Kohan, her mission is not to edit texts but to “coordinate and mark strategic lines” (Tomé, *El Correo*).

## Defining the position

Despite the different job titles and the reasons that led the different publications to choose one over another, the professionals interviewed coincide in defining their position as being one that takes charge of ensuring that the gender perspective is a cross-sectional issue that reaches across all content in their publications, resolving doubts raised by their colleagues and promoting debates on equality.

The fact that only one person, and not a team, is in charge of the whole gender perspective, implies an enormous workload that is not always possible to take on. According to Requena, a good option, therefore, would be for the person in this role to oversee a team of specialists to assist with the workload, “while also not forgetting idea of transversality.” However, she also believes that having one’s own team for gender issues could be counterproductive, since

“it would create the feeling that it is a ghetto and could make the other sections think that, since there is already a group in charge of gender, they can ignore this issue.”

Despite acknowledging being overloaded with work and being unable to cover all the tasks they would like to, the participants in this study maintain that the attitude and awareness of their colleagues are a great help:

“I am lucky to work in a newsroom that is very advanced in this area, which makes everything much easier” (Valdés, *El País*);

“We are a small publication that has been working on this issue since the beginning and the resulting work dynamic across the different sections means I don’t have to be constantly vigilant. In addition, people who join us already have these types of concerns and perspectives, and are eager to apply them” (Requena, *eldiario.es*);

“I work in an environment where there are three key figures who are feminists: the editor-in-chief, the deputy editor and the managing editor, all with a very clear vision on these issues” (Kohan, *Público*).

“Some newspapers have created specific guides to provide guidance on the treatment of gender issues in their content, as well as specific sections on women’s issues”

### Specific training

Regarding the need for specific training for these roles, all the participants agree. The four interviewees acknowledged that they were self-taught, since when they studied Journalism there were hardly any subjects, masters, or courses on gender. Whether it is gained “by (working in the) profession or academic training” (Requena, *eldiario.es*), they think that this is a task “that cannot be done without knowledge” (Kohan, *Público*) because “important decisions have to be taken for which a solid foundation is needed” (Requena, *eldiario.es*) and because “all the academic research that is being done can be applied (practically) in the day to day work of the newsrooms” (Tomé, *El Correo*). Valdés goes a step further and adds that, in addition, “(the training) has to be feminist.”

### Is it necessary to be a woman?

And is it necessary to be a woman? Are these roles designed for women, or could a man do the job? There are differences of opinion on this issue. For some,

“at the moment it has to be a woman, because they have been training for much longer and are much better prepared (for the role)” (Valdés, *El País*)

and because

“(men) have already usurped enough of our editorial areas for (one) to take on this task (too)” (Tomé, *El Correo*).

For others, conversely,

“a man could do this job as long as he is trained for it” (Kohan, *Público*),

since

“what is needed is to have a gender perspective. If you don’t question certain things, you are not going to have a gender perspective, even if you are a woman” (Requena, *eldiario.es*).

Kohan even states:

“I wish there were many more men who could have a voice in this. From the perspectives of both feminism and journalism, we should ask ourselves where the men are in this debate.”

But what does the work of a gender specialist consist of? What are her specific functions?

### Her principal day to day tasks

They are as follows:

a) Answering queries from colleagues. In the case of *El País* and *eldiario.es*, the queries come, above all, from their different regional newsrooms

“especially from the largest ones, those that handle a greater volume of news” (Requena, *eldiario.es*),

because in addition,

“cases of gender violence are covered in each regional edition, and the treatment of these issues always raises questions” (Valdés, *El País*).

In *El Correo*, Tomé says she is especially vigilant with the Sports section, although it not necessarily the section where most queries are raised, as,

“from the point of view of the subjects covered, it is excessively masculinized” and the “People” section, “where it is easier to perpetuate certain stereotypes.”

Regarding the type of questions most frequently asked, all the participants point to those referring to the treatment of cases of male violence. Kohan and Requena cite those related to language<sup>5</sup>, and Requena adds prostitution and trans legislation.

b) To verify that there is parity in the sources used in different pieces. The interviewees agree that it is important to guarantee the presence of female voices, not only in informative texts, but also in opinion pieces.

c) To propose topics for the different sections that have traditionally been ignored because they affect or are of special interest to women.

d) To ensure that the treatment of topics is appropriate, and that the gender perspective is taken into account.

e) To write their own pieces.

To this list of tasks, Requena and Valdés add those of meeting with management or attending editorial meetings

“to make contributions, to warn of issues to which we should be attentive or to make reflections after a specific publication” (Requena), and to write a weekly newsletter.

### Assessment

Less than five years after its implementation in some Spanish media, the heads of the gender portfolios consulted make a positive assessment of their work because “although slowly, in recent years progress has been made in many things” (Kohan, *Público*) and that “good journalism with a gender perspective” is being done (Requena, *eldiario.es*; Valdés, *El País*). Specifically, Tomé (*El Correo*) notes:

“There have been changes at an editorial level and at the level of mentality. We are more attentive, more vigilant and we have made women more visible in certain sections. In some ways, an educational task has been completed.”

Despite these advances, they are also aware that their position will be necessary in newsrooms for many years to come.

“If only it would stop being needed soon, but I’m afraid we have only just begun. We are still learning” (Tomé, *El Correo*).

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

This study’s novelty lies in mapping, for the first time, the initiatives adopted by the Spanish press for the incorporation of the gender perspective into their newsrooms. In this way, it complements other research on the working conditions of female journalists, which also indirectly influence this process of incorporation.

One of the main innovations detected in the Spanish media is the active adoption of the gender perspective (Carvajal *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the map drawn up by this study shows a considerable, though disparate, presence of initiatives in place for the implementation of this perspective in the 21 newspapers analyzed. These initiatives, as Mateos-de-Cabo; Gimeno-Nogués; Martínez-Martínez (2007) and Iranzo-Cabrera, 2020, have already pointed out, have their origin in a self-regulatory attitude on the part of the newspapers.

The analysis of how these regulatory mechanisms operate has revealed that most of the style guides –10 of the 21 newspapers examined have one– are outdated, in disuse or in the process of being updated. Except for *El Mundo*, the nine to which we have had access feature gender perspective-related details, although they do not use this term explicitly, and in many cases are out of step with current realities. They contain directives, though not equally, referring to the use of sexist language, gender, gender-related terms, the treatment of sexist violence, attention to equality and the authorship of the pieces (Q1). In general, and as expected, the oldest style guides are the ones that are seen to contain fewer up-to-date directives, as opposed to the most recent one, which is being used by *El País*, and which was republished in 2021.

On the other hand, some newspapers have created specific guides to provide guidance on the treatment of gender issues in their content, as well as specific sections on women’s issues (Q2). In those publications that do not have a style guide or other measures, there is –at least verbally– a perceived sensitivity to the gender perspective.

This study has also confirmed that four of the 21 newspapers studied have a gender portfolio headed by a journalist –whose job title varies– who is responsible for implementing the gender perspective in the newsrooms (Q3). From the interviews with these professionals, it can be seen that their main role is to ensure that the gender perspective is cross sectional through the newsrooms, and that it reaches all sections, genres and contents. (Q4).

Although some authors (such as Pérez-Soler; Roca-Sales, 2019; Oliveira, 2020) point to possible opportunistic or commercial motivations behind the creation of this role, the interviewees see genuine interest in their publications towards making gender issues visible. The assessments they make of their still brief careers are positive, and they conclude that journalism has advanced considerably in gender issues and has even done important educational work in society –as Williams (2000) and Gallego-Ayala (2015) also state. However, this positivity contrasts with the study by Iranzo-Cabrera, Figueras-Maz and Mauri-Ríos (2022), according to which,

“the daily work of gender editors is hindered by a lack of support from management and an absence of independence in editorial decisions.”

In short, it seems that this figure will continue to be necessary until, as Padovani *et al.* (2022) argue, the media fully embrace gender equality as one of the basic principles of their operation.

In future research, it would be interesting to understand the trajectory of the gender editors –to discover if all newspapers will eventually have one and if, in the longer term, they will continue to be necessary– and to observe how and to what extent the gender perspective is being introduced into the editorial offices of Spanish newspapers and other media. It would also be opportune to find

“ Four of the 21 newspapers studied have a gender portfolio headed by a journalist whose main role is to ensure that the gender perspective is cross sectional through the newsrooms and that it reaches all sections, genres and contents ”

out whether the style guides that are currently being updated include the gender perspective more broadly and explicitly.

As for the limitations that have prevented the full completion of this investigation, the lack of response to the request for information by *Libertad Digital* and the reluctance of *La Nueva España* to share its style guide, and of *El Ideal* and *OKdiario* to provide access to documents for internal use that they claim to have, are notable.

“These professionals make a positive assessment of their still brief trajectory and agree that journalism has advanced considerably and has done important pedagogical work in society in terms of gender, although it seems that this figure will remain necessary for quite some time”

## 7. Notes

1. Conversely, another study pointed out in 2017 that women in Nordic countries are underrepresented as subjects of news stories, and as sources of information and opinion, as well as being stereotyped (Mannila, 2017, p. 5)
2. Some claim that gender affects the way news is written (Van-Zoonen, 1998) and, consequently, a greater presence of female journalists would increase the attention paid to women's issues and even increase readership if newspapers had more female editors and women in leadership positions (Zeisler, 2017, p. 3). Others argue that the open-mindedness of news is independent of the presence of women in newsrooms, and that the increase in female sources simply reflects an eagerness to attract female audiences (Steiner, 2017) and to reduce the perception that “news is for men” (Toff; Palmer, 2019).
3. Spinetta (2020), and Leiva and Kimber (2022) analyze this issue in Argentina and Chile, respectively. In Spain, Pérez-Soler and Roca-Sales (2019) offer some hints about this by comparing it with the situation in the United States, and Iranzo-Cabrera, Figueras-Maz and Mauri-Ríos (2022) approach it from the point of view of self-regulation.
4. This study focuses on initiatives created expressly for the implementation of the gender perspective in newsrooms. In this way, it complements studies on the working conditions of women journalists, which, as has been pointed out, many authors consider having an indirect influence on the implementation of the gender perspective.
5. Kohan defends the use of inclusive language and Valdés states that though she is not in favour of the duplication of linguistic genders “because it hinders reading and writing”, she also assures that “if you don't, you inevitably fall into patriarchal and androcentric language. So, you have to look for general feminine synonyms: teaching staff (*plantilla de profesoras*) instead of teachers (*profesorado*), for example.”

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