



Live from Brussels

A study of the Brussels press corps



Council of the European Union
General Secretariat

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Executive Summary

This study aims to shed light on the composition, work environment and individual-level perceptions of EU correspondents. Two data sources, the interinstitutional accreditation database and an online survey, were used to provide a deeper understanding of journalistic life in Brussels, and of the role the EU institutions play in it.

The accreditation database shows the diversity of media types, geography and work experience present within the Brussels press corps. In this respect, the press corps based in Brussels is a fair representation of the EU, geographically speaking, and of its diversity in terms of media landscape. The survey has also enabled a closer look at the issue. Its results show not only who Brussels journalists are, but how they work, and how they see their relationship with the EU institutions changing as a result of larger societal challenges such as digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some of the key findings are the following:

- For many journalists, a position in Brussels is a temporary, mid-career posting. In addition, a sizeable proportion of pan-European media and news agencies is represented within the press corps. However, most journalists work for national media and produce their coverage for national audiences. The findings also show that many journalists are in a way generalists: they cover EU affairs, but are also very often asked to cover other foreign or domestic affairs (e.g. NATO, Belgium). In fact, only about 20% of journalists in the 2021 survey sample cover EU affairs only and a majority cover both EU and other foreign affairs (68%).
- The Brussels press corps is still characterised by a gender imbalance, and in 2020 only 37% of journalists accredited to the EU institutions were female. However, this imbalance has improved over time. In 2002, the first year for which we have data available, 28% were female.
- Reporting on the EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the agendas of many Brussels journalists over the past two years. In addition to COVID-19, however, many EU journalists focus on traditional EU-related issues. These issues cover such areas as the economy, migration and external relations. When reporting on them, journalists tend to focus on conflict and responsibility.
- When asked about the output of their work, Brussels journalists participating in the 2021 survey indicated they remain focused on the "classic" formats of reporting. Accordingly, they only seldom work directly on technological innovations, such as data visualisation or social media stories.
- Nevertheless, journalists agree that their working conditions over the last 5 years have overall been impacted by increasing demands to acquire technical skills and to engage with their audiences directly.
- EU-wide news media focused on EU affairs only and media from English-speaking countries with an international reach are seen as playing a considerable role as "agenda setters" in Brussels. However, the national media and home market they are serving remain important to journalists.
- About half of the correspondents participating in the survey believe that social media are important when reporting or producing stories related to EU affairs. Among the various platforms available, Twitter is largely seen as the most important one, and information gathered on Twitter is considered the most credible compared to that found on other platforms.
- Brussels correspondents rely on press services provided by the EU institutions. The 2021 survey also shows that they attach significant importance to official events and communication activities organised by all three main EU institutions. Here, off-the-record briefings

are seen as the most valuable sources of information. Other formats such as press conferences also remain popular.

- Brussels correspondents believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased interest in EU affairs. However, they do not expect this trend to last beyond the pandemic. Their assessment of the EU institutions' adaptation to the situation is positive. The expectation is that hybrid press activities will become the norm in the future, but a very large majority of Brussels journalists expect access to these hybrid formats to be limited to EU-accredited media only. Should this not be the case, they expect this would have a negative impact on the size of the Brussels press corps and on the quality of the coverage of EU affairs. Moreover, they think that it would not have a significant positive impact on the quantity of coverage.
- As regards the Council's media products, the survey shows they are relevant and valued by journalists. In particular, press releases and background briefs are the most frequently used.



Introduction

The General Secretariat of the Council strives to provide a high level of service to journalists. To constantly improve our service, this study aims to better understand the working situation and dynamics of the Brussels press corps and register its opinion on some of the key features and products of the EU institutions' press services. Results will feed into the overall assessment of the EU's communication with the media.

When this survey was drawn up, it was noted that the amount of academic research focusing on Brussels correspondents is limited (e.g. Raeymaeckers et al., 2017; Terzis, 2008). Most of what is published is based on small-scale and single-country qualitative interview studies (e.g. Lecheler, 2008). This means that recent challenges, such as changing work environments, the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of digitalisation have not been considered systematically. Therefore, this study also aims to fill parts of this large knowledge gap about the Brussels press corps as a distinct group of journalists operating from the European Union's capital.

The findings are based on two data sources, (1) the EU interinstitutional accreditation database, and (2) an online survey among journalists accredited to the EU institutions conducted in September-October 2021. **The accreditation database** administers journalists' annual accreditation to the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. Data accessed for this study from the database was fully anonymised, listing only aggregate-level information such as socio-demographics, nationality, and media outlets. While the data used in the study refers to 2020 accreditation information, a historical perspective of the available accreditation data, from 2002 to 2020, is provided in Annex 1.

The questionnaire (see Annex 2) made use of validated measures from academic literature,

as well as existing published surveys such as the **Worlds of Journalism Survey**. Where necessary, questions were adapted to fit the specific research interests for this study. All questions were programmed into the online survey management system, **EU Survey**¹, where the final survey was also published.

The study focused on journalists who are based in Brussels and who cover EU affairs. This means that the sample for the survey consists of 862 journalists accredited at the time the survey was sent in September (2021: N = 862). A total of 181 journalists completed the survey, a response rate of 21% - a high rate for an online survey in this domain. As described in this report, the survey sample contains Brussels-based respondents from EU member states and third countries, varying in level of experience and topical focus. This means that the sample is comparable to the overall group of EU accredited journalists, most notably in terms of ratio of gender, age, media type, and nationality of journalists.

The survey data was downloaded from EU Survey, checked for anonymity, and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, a statistical analysis software. The study's focus is on general trends among journalists, which means all findings presented in this report are based on aggregate-level data analysis. This makes it impossible to identify individual participants in retrospect. When interpreting findings, the following is of particular importance: answer options for a number of questions in the survey were formulated in the format of Likert-Scales (e.g. "1 - do not agree" to "7 - fully agree"), which is common in measurements of perceptions, opinions and experiences. For most of the visualisation used in this report, answers were then grouped within these scales to show general trends. This means that answers which lay above, on or below the middle point of a 7-point scale were grouped into meaningful subgroups, and then used to calculate percentages (i.e. on a scale from

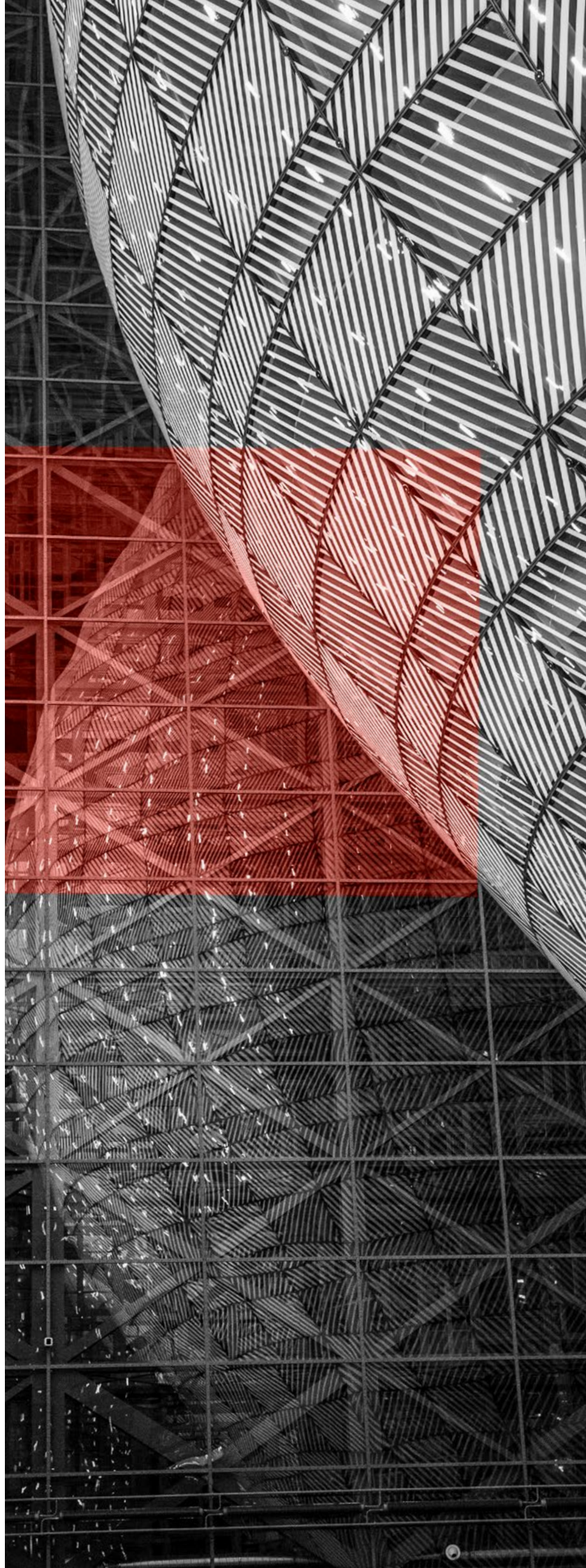
1 The tool is supported by the European Commission's ISA² programme, which promotes interoperability solutions for European public administrations.

1=do not agree to 7= fully agree, those who answered 5-7 are recoded into participants who “tend to agree”). All visuals contain notes that explain this recoding logic.

Certain limitations apply. As stated above, findings from both the accreditation database and the 2021 survey are taken into account. However, both data sets were analysed separately, so a direct comparison of answers is not possible. The origin of a result is always indicated in the text of the report. In addition, most of the measures chosen were based on previous research and existing surveys (e.g. the Worlds of Journalism Survey). However, these measurements do not always capture the true granularity of attitudes among journalists in their daily work.



The survey was developed and the present report written in close collaboration with Prof. Dr. Sophie Lecheler at the University of Vienna (Austria), and was based on a literature review of research on Brussels journalism. Sophie Lecheler has more than 15 years of research experience in the field of political journalism and EU politics. She has published a number of articles on the EU press corps. Her current research focuses on the impact of digitalisation on news production and she has led a number of international research projects. For example, she is currently a lead on a multi-national funded project studying the impact of data-driven methods on election campaigns and campaign reporting across Europe.



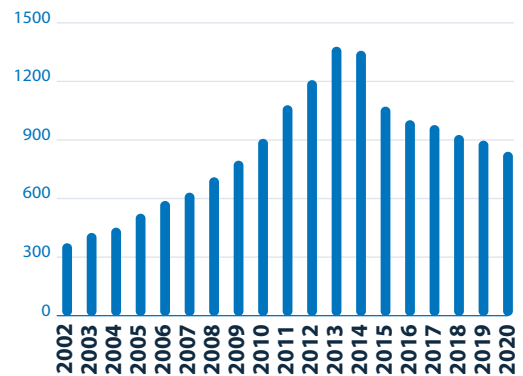
1.

The Brussels

Press Corps

The size of the Brussels press corps has evolved over time. After a constant increase since 2002, when it consisted of fewer than 400 journalists, it reached a peak of 1,330 journalists in 2013. Its overall size has, however, been progressively decreasing since then and stood at 811 in 2020. More information on key trends in the evolution of the Brussels press corps over the years can be found in Annex 1, which provides a closer look at data from the EU interinstitutional accreditation database.

Number of single journalists accredited at the EU institutions (2002-2020)



Socio-demographics

The Brussels press corps is composed of journalists working for media both from EU member states and third countries, with varying experiences and social profiles.

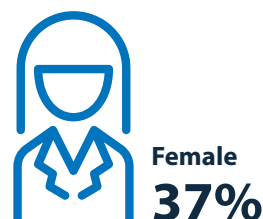
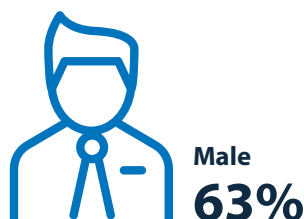
Age

The EU interinstitutional accreditation database shows the average age of Brussels correspondents in 2020 to be 45 years old. This corresponds to the 2021 survey sample. However, both the accreditation and survey data also show that the press corps is diverse in that aspect, as there is a wide variation of ages with journalists as young as 23 working alongside those aged 65 and up. This age ratio is also relatively constant across member states. Accreditation data also suggest relatively little change in the age profile of journalists in Brussels over time - for a number of years now, a posting in Brussels seems to be a predominantly mid-career position.

Gender

In terms of gender balance, the EU interinstitutional accreditation database shows that, in 2020, 63% of journalists within the Brussels press corps were male. The same ratio is also observed in the 2021 survey, where 62% of journalists are recorded as male, and 36% as female (and 37% women in the 2020 interinstitutional accreditation database²). Gender ratios within the Brussels press corps do not depend on media type or age of the journalist. Moreover, they don't significantly differ across member states. In addition, gender imbalance within the press corps has improved over time. For example, in 2002, 28% were female, and the accreditation database identifies 33% of journalists as female in 2010.

Composition of the Brussels press corps in 2020 by gender*



* Based on EU interinstitutional accreditation data.

2 Discrepancies within the survey data are connected to answer options used in the 2021 survey, which also included options for transgender / non-binary / other / prefer not to answer.

Nationality

Naturally, more journalists are from the largest EU countries. However, not all member states are represented in proportion to their size and/or the media market they represent within the press corps. The accreditation data show that all member states, as well as a large proportion of the EU neighbourhood countries, are represented to varying degrees within the Brussels press corps. The largest groups within the press corps in 2020 were journalists with Belgian (120 journalists accredited, 15% of the full press corps in 2020), German (12%), and French nationality (10%), followed by journalists from the UK (10%), Spain (8%), and Italy (8%). These groups are then followed by a number of smaller and larger pre-2004 enlargement states, including journalists from The Netherlands, Denmark and Greece. Lastly, several smaller and post-2004 member states are represented by only a small number (<5) of accredited journalists. These include Estonia, Lithuania, and Slovenia. This shows that the number of EU correspondents is only to some degree related to a home countries' population size (this is illustrated by comparing, e.g. 15

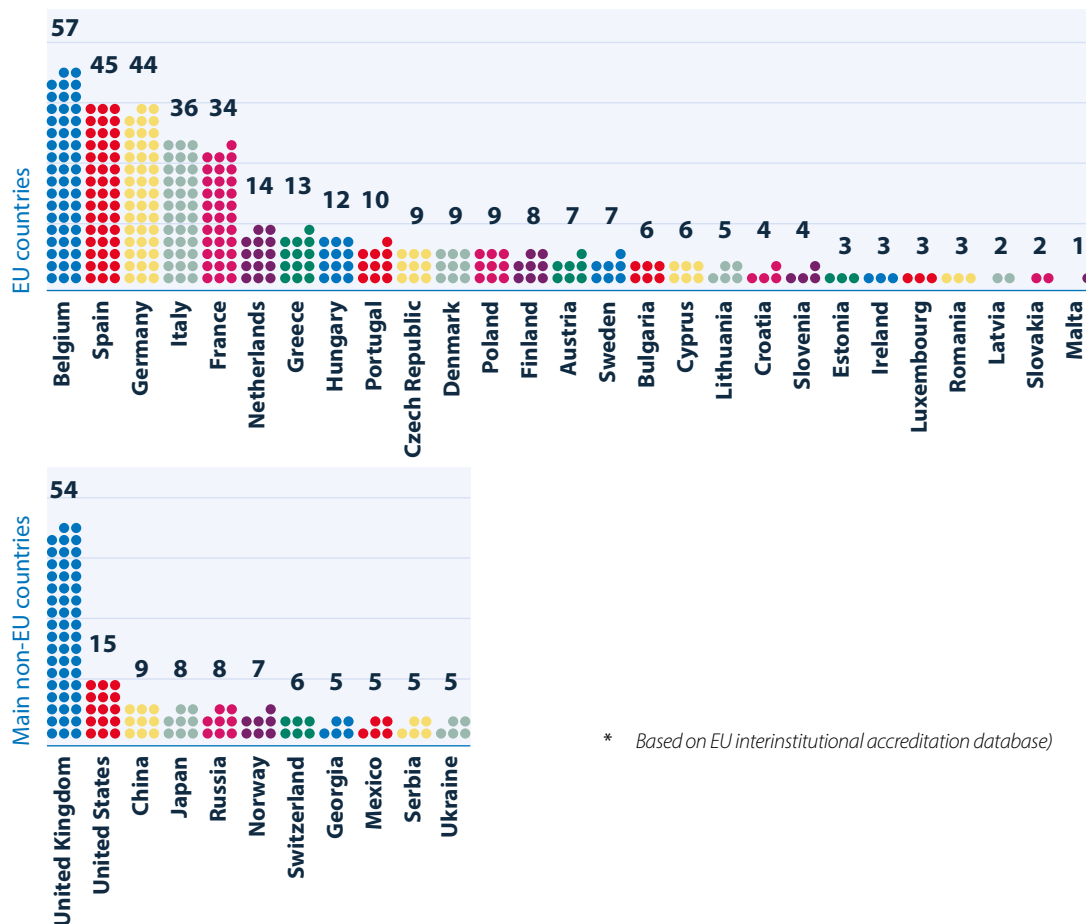
journalists with Polish nationality and 19 with Danish nationality in 2020).

Overall, in 2020, 520 Brussels correspondents were from EU member states. The remainder were from candidate states, EU neighbourhood states, and other non-EU countries across the globe (the proportion of non-EU journalists in the press corps in 2020 stood at 36%).

Organisations

The accreditation database also shows that the organisations journalists work for are from across Europe, as well as from third countries. The data are often but not always closely linked to their own nationality. The data show that most media organisations represented in the press corps in 2020 were from the UK (21%), Germany (12%) and France (12%). The data also point to a high number of media organisations based in Belgium (19%), which however also include online-only pan-European and global media, as well as some specialised media with a pan-European or global reach.

Number of accredited news organisations by country in 2020*



* Based on EU interinstitutional accreditation database)

Employment Conditions

Based on the EU interinstitutional accreditation database (2002-2020), journalists are stationed in Brussels for about 8 years on average. However, a more detailed analysis shows that the range of stays is large, spanning from less than one year to the full 19 years covered in the database. Similarly in the survey, journalists indicated stays varying from a few months to more than 40 years. The available data therefore show that for the press corps overall, the posting duration is skewed towards shorter periods, with more than 50% of journalists in the 2020 accreditation database indicating a stay shorter than 5 years.

An overwhelming majority of these journalists work as reporters and/or news writers for news media such as traditional (online and print) newspapers. They work full-time and produce stories for predominantly national media audiences.

There is a sizeable group of freelancers and part-time journalists within the Brussels press corps. The 2020 accreditation database shows that 29% of journalists work as freelancers. This corresponds to the 2021 survey sample, in which about 22% stated that they work as freelancers, while about 6% said they work part-time with one media organisation.

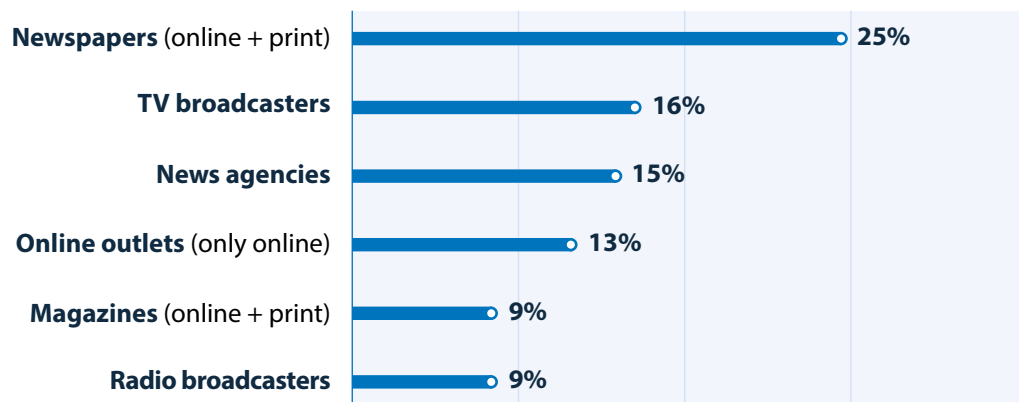
In the survey, almost half of participating freelance correspondents worked for print media such as newspapers and/or magazines. Online-only news outlets were the second largest employer.

As may be expected, most journalists in Brussels cover EU affairs for national audiences. However, a significant number (18% in both accreditation data and survey sample) serve a pan-European or even global audience. These journalists are mostly employed by news agencies, with some working for online-only news outlets.

Only about 20% of journalists in the 2021 sample cover EU affairs exclusively. A majority cover both EU and other foreign affairs, for example NATO and/Belgium (68%). Open-ended questions indicate that a number of Brussels correspondents also cover business news, the economy, and the financial markets.

A variety of media types are represented within the press corps, with print and online newspapers accounting for the largest group of correspondents (25%). This group is followed by correspondents working for TV stations (16%), news agencies (15%) and other online-only news outlets. Key players in terms of Brussels news desks are public broadcasting companies, pan-European online media and news agencies, such as ARD, Politico, or AFP.

*The largest media types present in Brussels in 2020**



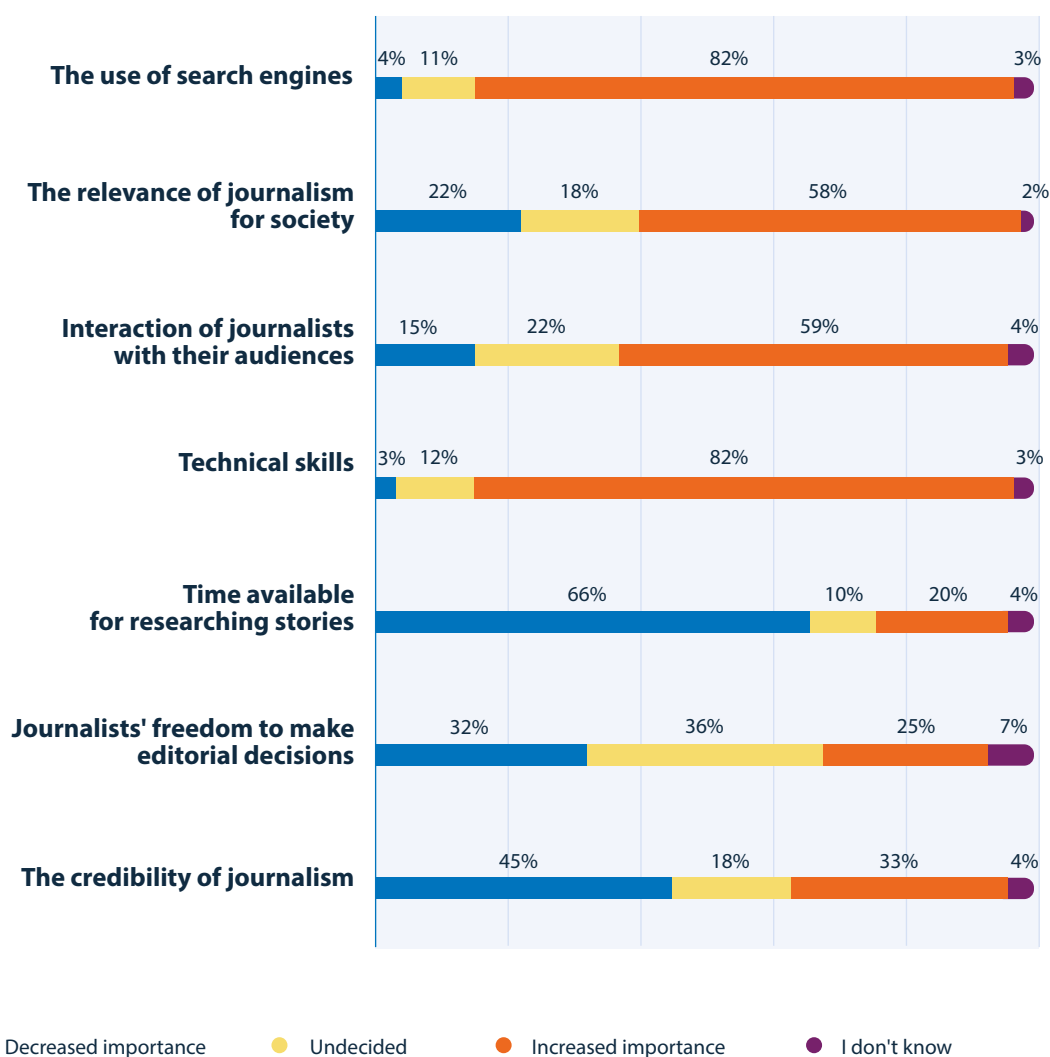
* Based on the EU interinstitutional accreditation database

Brussels correspondents surveyed for the 2021 study mostly work for newspapers and online-only news outlets. Other media markets are served, too. Most importantly, a sizeable proportion of journalists work for news agencies (31% work full- or part-time for an agency). These cater for global audiences mentioned above and act as a multiplier towards other media.

Lastly, in the 2021 survey, participating Brussels correspondents were asked to assess to what extent their working conditions have changed

over the past five years. While journalists clearly indicated that the demand to interact with their audience and to acquire technical skills had become more important in their work, results were less clear on a number of other challenges they were asked about. On average, journalists were for instance ambivalent on whether they had less time or less freedom to make their stories now compared to 5 years ago. Results did show, however, that journalists believed the relevance of journalism for society had increased.

Perception of changes in journalism - how has the importance of the following aspects evolved*



* Journalists were asked whether there had been an increase or a decrease in the importance of certain aspects of their work over the past 5 years (from 1- decreased a lot to 7- increased a lot). In this graphic, answers 1-3 are shown as "decreased importance", answers 4 - undecided, answers 5-7 - increased importance.

2.

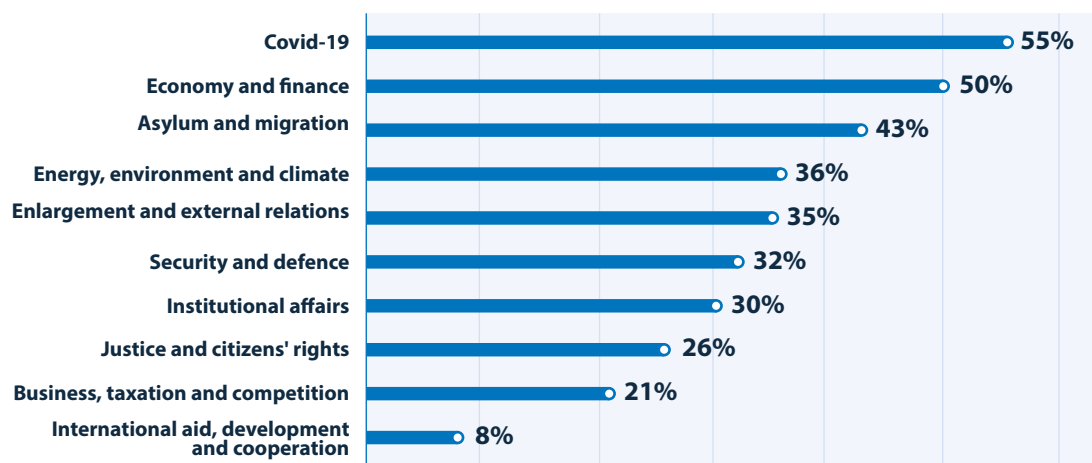
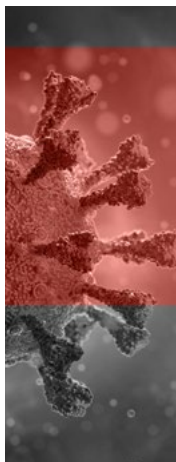
Topics & Framing
in EU Coverage

Brussels correspondents in the survey were asked to pick a maximum of four topics they cover most often when reporting on EU affairs. Here, many responded that their focus was on economic and finance-related topics. However, they are inevitably influenced in their topic choices by more general current events.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of journalists identified COVID-19 as a major topic, with around 55% of journalists stating that this was one of their four major topics. This was followed by business and the economy,

including reports on taxation and trade, and external relations. A third topic cluster was current affairs and events currently high on the EU agenda, such as asylum and migration, the environment, and citizens' rights. There is variation in "minor" topics such as transport and travel. However, there is a remarkably constant choice of "main topics" across different media types. Topic choice is also not dependent on the country of origin of the Brussels journalist. This suggests shared news values when covering EU affairs in Brussels.

Top 10 of the most popular news topics covered by journalists*

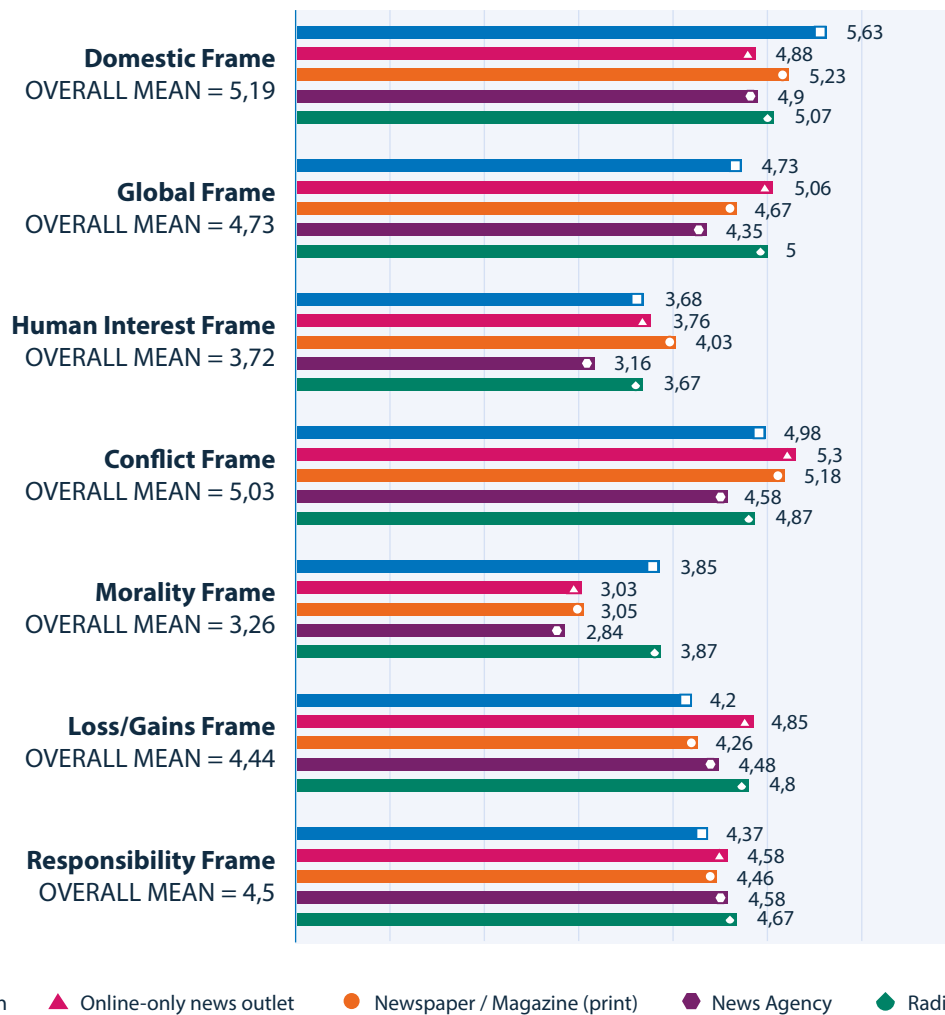


* Journalists were asked to choose the four topics they cover most often out of a list of 19 proposals. This graphic shows the topics that were selected as one of their top four by the highest number of journalists.

The 2021 survey also asked participating journalists about their involvement in a number of novel or less classic journalistic genres during their everyday work. Example are their use of immersive technologies (i.e., virtual reality and augmented reality), data visualisation and social media audiovisual storytelling. Only a few journalists found that their work was determined by formats such as social media stories. Interestingly, this focus on classic reporting over technological innovation in day-to-day EU reporting does not systematically differ across media types within this sample of journalists.

Lastly, beyond topic choices and changing formats, Brussels correspondents were also asked which journalistic angles they deemed most important when covering EU affairs. The results suggest that they focus on EU affairs most relevant to their home audiences, that is, Brussels correspondents use national angles when reporting European stories. Almost equally important is a focus on underlying conflicts in Brussels - between institutions, member states, or other actors. The focus is on who is responsible and the financial losses or gains of a specific conflict.

Main angles used in crafting a story, by type of media*



* Journalists were asked: "When you think of the way you craft a story, how regularly do you use the following angles in your EU coverage?" The options were: "Human face" of an EU event (= Human interest frame); Impact on domestic audience (=Domestic frame); Attribution of responsibility (=Responsibility frame); Underlying conflict (=Conflict frame); Financial losses or gains dimension (=Loss/Gains frame); Moral message (=Morality frame); Impact on other countries or globally (=Global frame). Answers were measured on a 7-point scale with 1 indicating "never", and 7 indicating "all the time". This visualisation is making use of mean scores, which is the average of answers on the 7-point scale..

3.

Agenda Setting & Perception of Competition

Previous research on the Brussels press corps has demonstrated that there are a handful of media outlets operating in Brussels that do not only serve their audience, but that also function as important agenda setters for

other journalists covering the EU. Moreover, journalists who work in Brussels were seen as relatively independent of the harsh competition that defines the journalistic profession in the domestic market.

Agenda Setters

Therefore, in the 2021 survey, participating journalists were first asked to indicate which category of media might qualify for the term as “agenda setter”. Answer options focused on “EU-wide media dedicated to EU affairs only”, “National news media available in other EU languages”, “Media from English-speaking countries with an international reach” or “National news media focused on national audiences”³. Responses from journalists show that the most important agenda setting media for Brussels journalists are media stemming from English-speaking countries. This is closely followed by EU-wide media focusing specifically on EU affairs. Interestingly, for journalists with a longer history in Brussels, news media distributed in languages other than their own become more important as agenda setters.

In addition, participating journalists were asked in an open-ended question which three news media organisations they see as having the most influence in Brussels, and which

three they may turn to when researching a story. Among those surveyed, the most influential organisations were identified as pan-European and English-speaking media. The Financial Times, in particular, was mentioned by 71% as one of their top three. For the pan-European media, it is those that have relatively large news desks in Brussels, such as Politico and Euractiv, that were most cited with 61% and 36% respectively. Almost equally important seemed a select group of established and large national print media such as Le Monde, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and The Guardian. The choice for the latter group was dependent on the nationality of journalists themselves.

A similar pattern emerged when journalists were asked which media they use when researching stories about the EU. Here, again, the Financial Times, Politico and Euractiv mattered the most, closely followed by large news agencies such as Reuters, AFP and DPA.

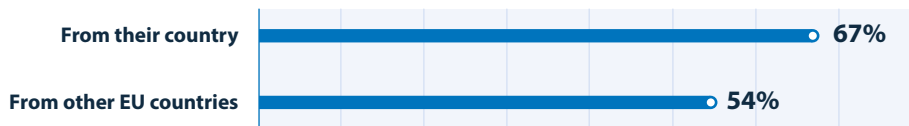
3 The exact question wording was: “To what extent do you think the following media set the agenda in EU affairs news coverage?” (1- not at all to 7- very much)

Perceptions of Competition

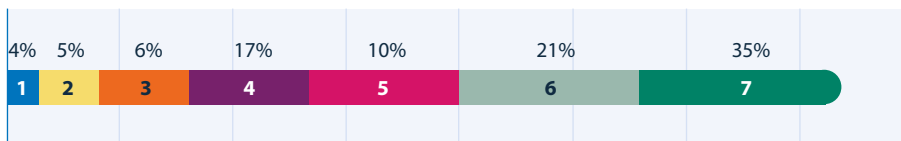
In addition, the journalists surveyed stated that they feel a stronger competition with their colleagues in Brussels than with the ones in their home countries. Even so, Brussels correspondents establish close ties with other foreign journalists while working in Brussels. Specifically, perceptions of competition within the sample show a varied picture of how “close” and “distant” Brussels correspondents feel with others in and

outside Brussels. A Brussels journalist’s closest working relationship is with other Brussels correspondents from their own country - closely followed by correspondents from other countries. As a rule, participants in the survey described both relationships as relatively close, with no significant variation across media type or nationality of journalists.

Brussels correspondents' feeling of proximity to fellow Brussels-based colleagues*



Feeling of competition of Brussels correspondents with colleagues back home compared to Brussels based ones**



* Journalists were asked how they would describe their relationship with a number of members of their professional network, ranging from 1 (very distant) to 7 (very close). Percentages indicate the number of journalists who feel a close relationship, namely an answer of 5 and up on the 7-point scale.

** Journalists were asked to indicate with whom they feel more in competition during their work, ranging from 1 (colleagues back home) to 7 (colleagues in Brussels)

The Brussels press corps is thus a close-knit community. This community is also shaped by collaborations with colleagues at home, most importantly when exchanging information with editors at home, or when working on stories together. The survey data indicate that it is, however, less common for Brussels journalists to attend press conferences for colleagues who are still situated at home. This shows a relatively high level of work autonomy. The data also reveal a tendency

for those from radio and online-only outlets to take over more tasks for their colleagues at home. Even so, the survey does not produce significant differences in this regard. This means that the work autonomy of Brussels journalists is not related to the number of years a journalist has worked in Brussels, as well as of the type of media, and the geographic location of a home desk.

4.

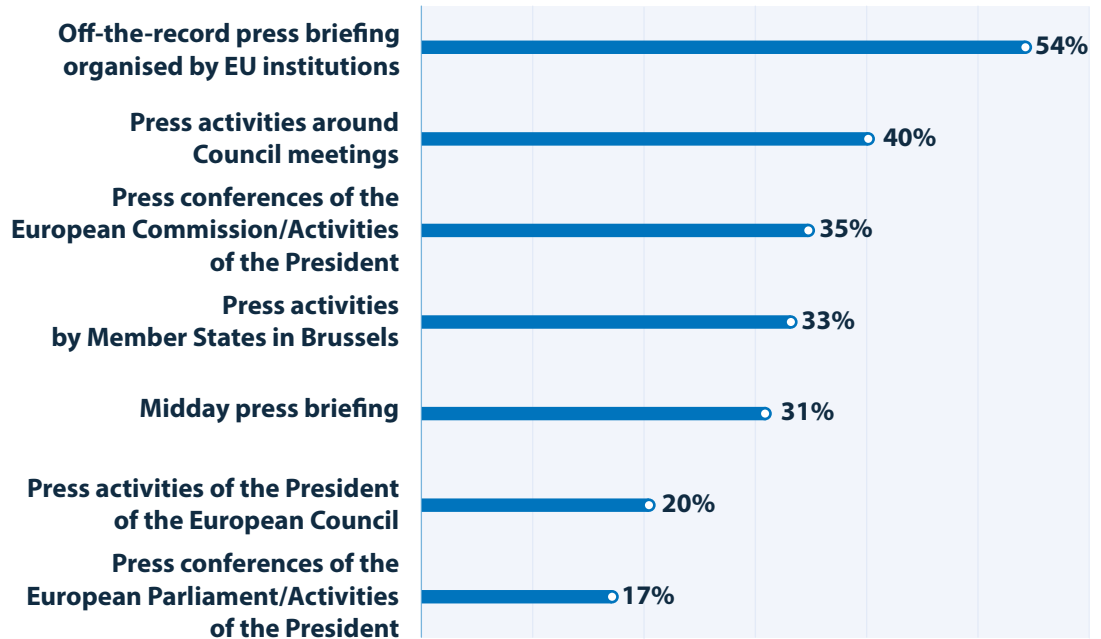
Sourcing Practices

Brussels correspondents surveyed regularly rely on press services provided by the EU institutions, and they use rather traditional channels of communication to connect with their sources.

Participants in the 2021 survey showed that they attach significant importance to official events organised by the EU institutions, such as the midday briefing, or press conferences held by the European Commission, European Parliament and press conferences held

in connection with Council meetings. In addition, the press activities of member states are seen as an important source of information. However, what surpasses these activities are off-the-record press briefings held by EU institutions. Interestingly, there is general agreement on the importance of activities across media types, so the different production needs between audiovisual and print media do not disrupt the importance of off-the-record information and on-the-record press events.

*The most important press activities according to Brussels journalists**

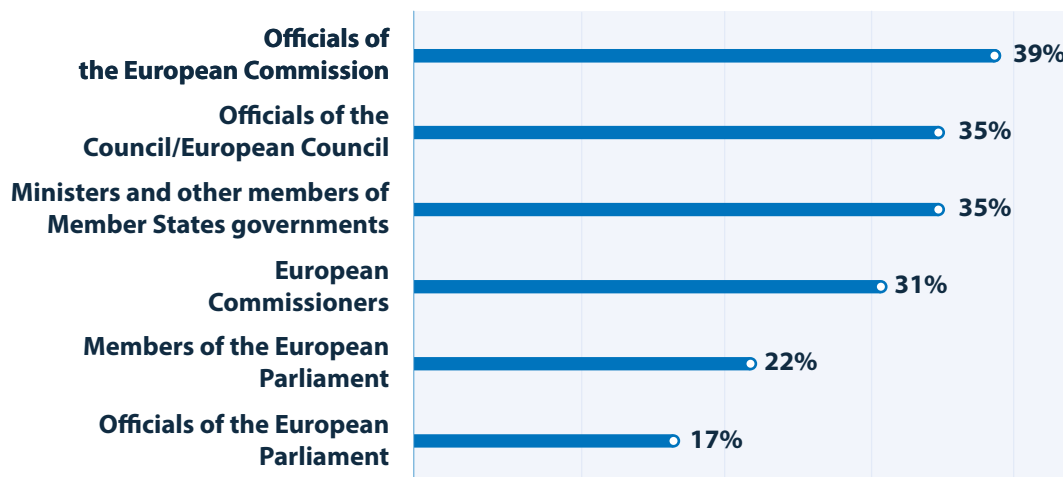


* Journalists were asked how important they considered the following aspects for their work, from 1-not important to 7-very important. This graphic shows answers indicating "very important".

Journalists were also asked in the survey to rate specific sources in terms of their importance in their daily work. Here, sources within the main EU institutions were generally perceived as the most important, followed by national political actors and other experts (e.g. academics). There is no clear ranking according to specific functions. This means

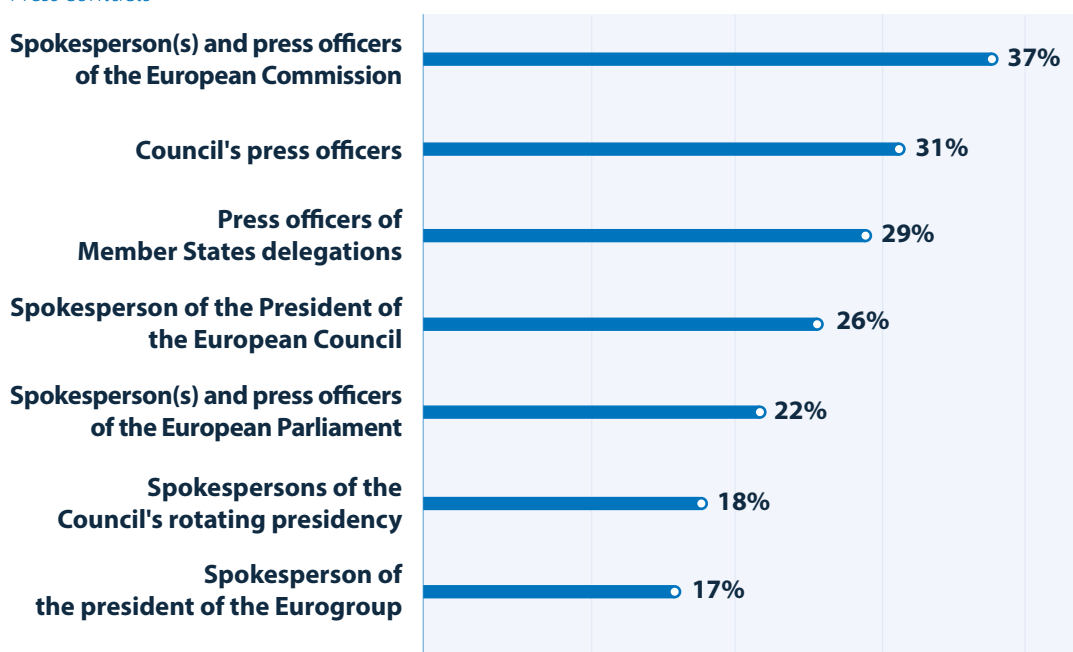
that both political figures and media contact points within the institutions (i.e., Commission and Council spokespersons and press officers) working for the same institution were seen as having similar relevance when researching a story. This indicates a close and trusted relationship between officials and media professionals in Brussels.

Importance of sources according to Brussels journalists
Institutional sources*



* Journalists were asked how important they considered the following sources when working on a story, from 1-not important to 7-very important. This graphic shows answers indicating "very important."

Importance of sources according to Brussels journalists
Press contacts**



** Journalists were asked how important they considered the following persons for their work, from 1-not important to 7-very important. This graphic shows answers indicating "very important."

When it comes to journalists contacting their sources at the EU institutions and beyond, the most important channels remain the "traditional" ones. These include e-mail, telephone, press conferences and, of course, physical meetings. The findings also confirm

that text messaging and direct messaging services, such as WhatsApp and Signal have become increasingly central in exchanging proprietary information between journalists and sources in Brussels.

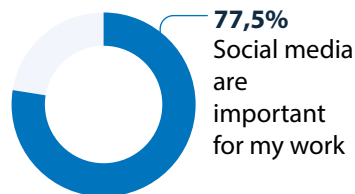
The Impact of Social Media

Across the survey sample, about half of correspondents argue that social media are important when reporting or producing stories about EU affairs. There seems to be a certain tendency in the survey data for journalists working for print media to classify social media as more important compared to their colleagues in TV and radio. Even so, the differences between media types are not statistically significant. In short, this means that social media matter for all types of journalists, working on all types of topics, and for all types of media outlets. When asked how positive or negative the impact of social media has been on their work, journalists generally find that the impact has been positive. However, this assessment depends on the age of journalists:

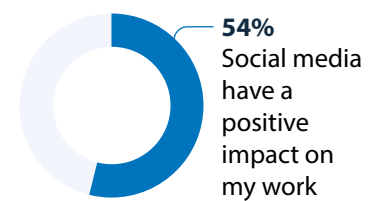
social media are perceived as more positive among younger Brussels journalists, regardless of the media they work for.

When using social media channels to source stories, Brussels correspondents make use of different platforms and account types. The most important, and by a large margin, is Twitter - a social media platform popular with journalists across Europe and media types. A majority (59%) of the journalists surveyed stated that they used Twitter "all the time" in their work, while only 6% opted for Facebook. On Twitter, accounts belonging to EU officials and public figures are the most important for all journalists. Social media is also used by journalists to connect with their colleagues.

*How important are social media for reporting or producing your stories?**



*Overall, how would you rate the impact of social media on your work as a journalist?**



* The response options ranged from 1 - not at all important, to 7 - extremely important. The graphics present answers of 5 and above.



EUPEAN COUNING

-  **John Doe**
CEO
-  **Jane Smith**
COO
-  **Mark Johnson**
CFO
-  **Emily White**
HR Director

5.

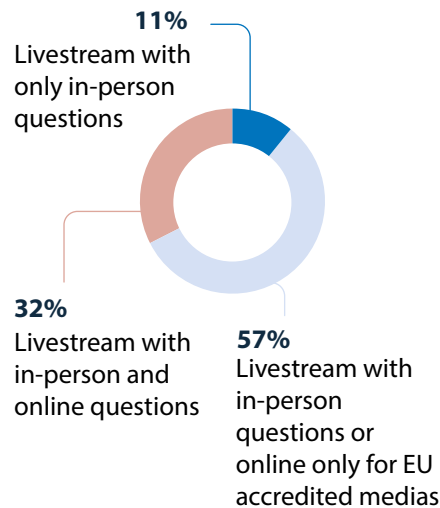
Impact of the COVID-19
Pandemic

At the time of data collection in September 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the topics Brussels correspondents covered most often. The survey also aimed to examine to what extent journalists find that the pandemic has lastingly changed their work in Brussels and interactions with EU institutions. 43% of journalists within the survey argued that the pandemic had led to increased interest in EU affairs shown by their colleagues back home. In addition, the journalists surveyed considered that the institutions had adapted well to the challenge brought by COVID-19. There was also widespread agreement that lockdowns and other restrictions had made journalistic work

in Brussels more difficult, and had rendered relationships with other colleagues more distant.

Interestingly, Brussels journalists were not confident that the pandemic would continue to result in an increased journalistic interest in EU affairs. Only about 12% tended to agree that the pandemic would lead, in the longer term, to an increase in interest in covering EU affairs. This finding is constant across member states and media types. In addition, when asked whether they expected to resume traveling for work (e.g. meetings, summits) after the pandemic, 72% of journalists agreed that they did.

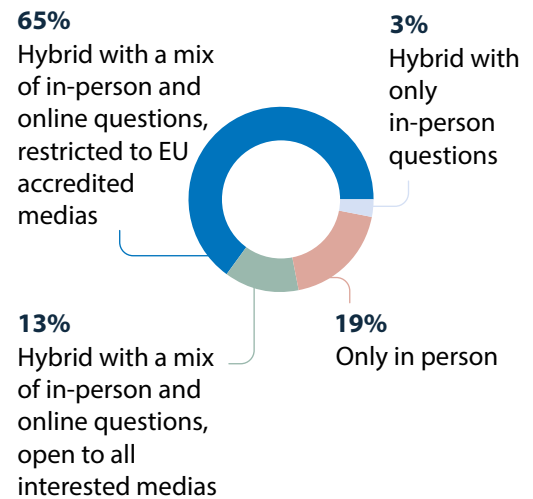
*Once the EU institutions re-open their press centres, how do you expect press conferences of the EU institutions to be conducted?**



* Journalists were asked to select one option out of these three. Results indicate the percentage out of the total number of respondents

Brussels correspondents look positively at the idea of allowing for online and hybrid meeting formats, both on and off the record, when conducting press work after the restrictions linked to the pandemic are lifted. However, there is a strong view among the journalists surveyed that the possibility to access and ask questions online should be limited to Brussels correspondents. Specifically, some 56% of correspondents in this survey expect press conferences to be conducted in a hybrid format, but with questions online restricted to EU-accredited media. Similarly, 65% stated they wished for off-the-record press briefings in hybrid format - with access to the online participation only for EU-accredited media. This pattern is stable across member states and media types.

*Once the EU institutions re-open their press centres, how do you expect off-the-record press briefings of the EU institutions to be conducted?****



** Journalists were asked to select one option out of these four. Results indicate the percentage out of the total number of respondents

Journalists were also asked about the potential impact of access for all (incl. non-EU accredited press) to virtual press events (e.g. briefings, press conferences) at the EU institutions. Overall, Brussels correspondents thought such an opening would have detrimental effects on the Brussels press corps. A large majority (79%) stated that they believed such an opening would lead to a reduction of the size of the Brussels press corps, while only 30% believed that such access would, in fact, increase the quantity of coverage of EU affairs. In addition, 64% said that this would not improve the overall quality of reporting on EU affairs. Again, this assessment does not vary across countries and media types.



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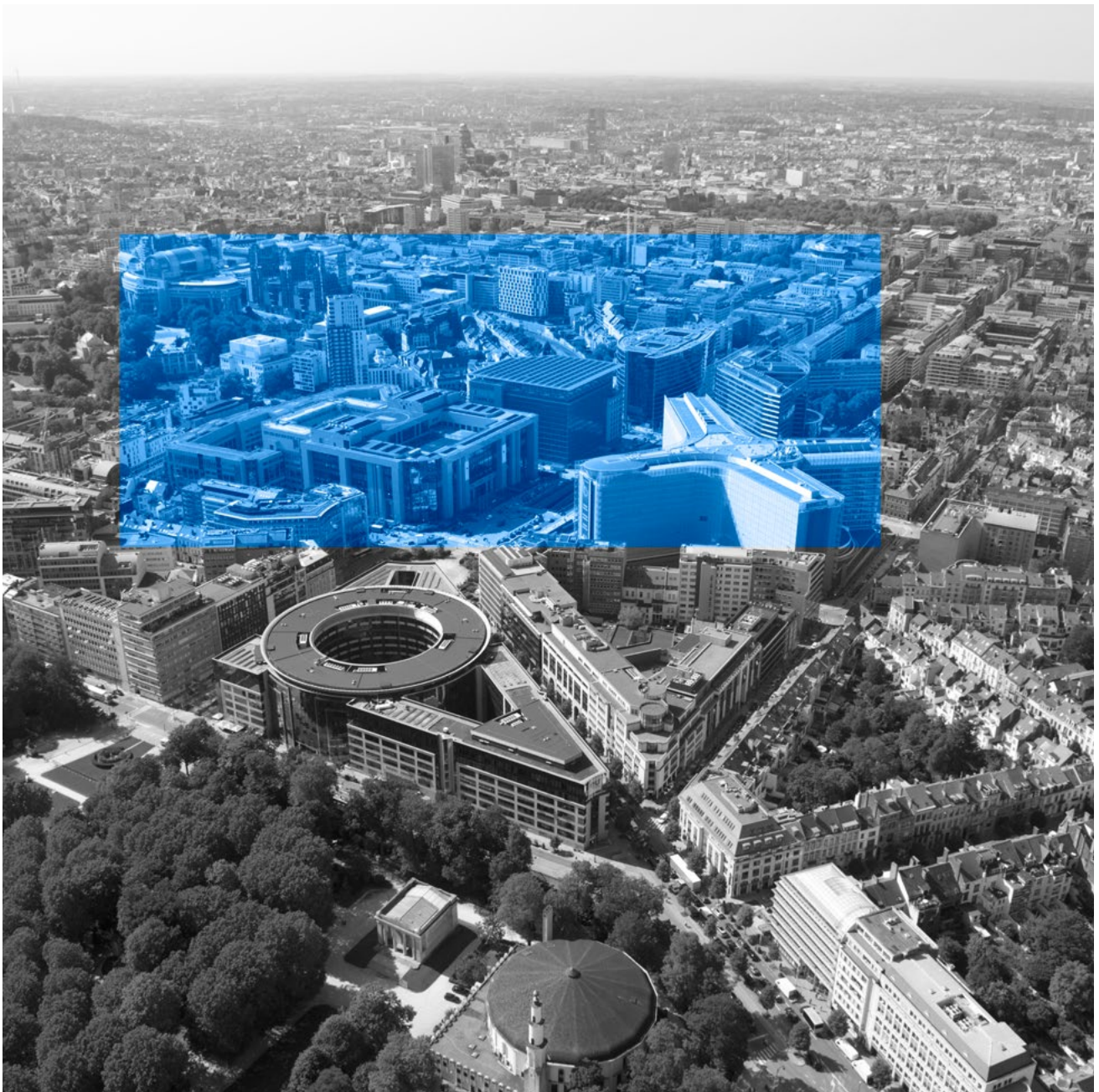
Perceptions

of the EU institutions'

press services

The 2021 survey shows that press activities by the EU institutions (e.g. press conferences, briefings), including the midday briefing, play an important role in the work of Brussels correspondents (see chapter on sourcing practices for more insights on this). Interestingly, there is relatively little variation in how political figures are viewed compared to press officials. Rather, the three main institutions and their press officers are seen as “sourcing teams” with influence during the sourcing process.

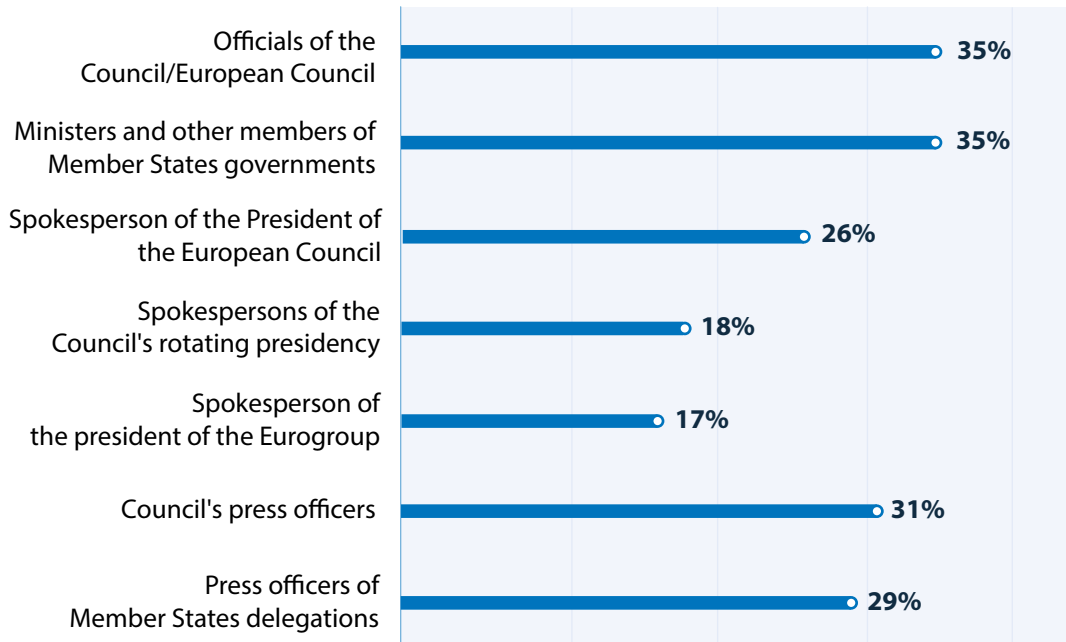
As a rule, high importance ratings across institutions indicate that EU institutional sources have a central place in journalistic work, with the most important role ascribed to leading figures within the institutions and their press services - alongside national contact points. In the survey, this status is independent of the number of years a correspondent has been working on EU affairs. Beyond that, for important sources, there is no relation between the number of years spent in Brussels and the importance of different persons as sources.



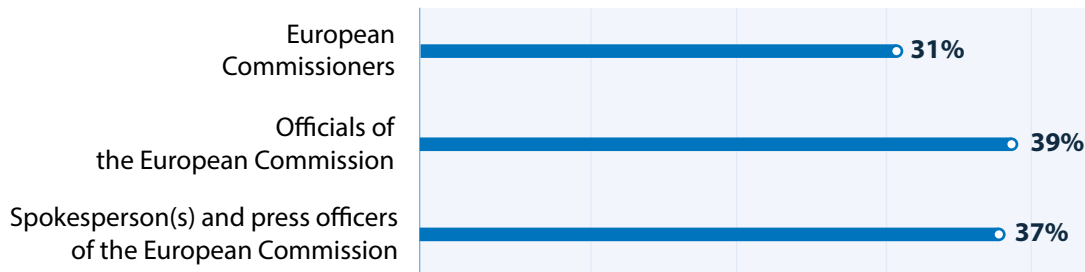
Perceptions of source importance, by Institution*



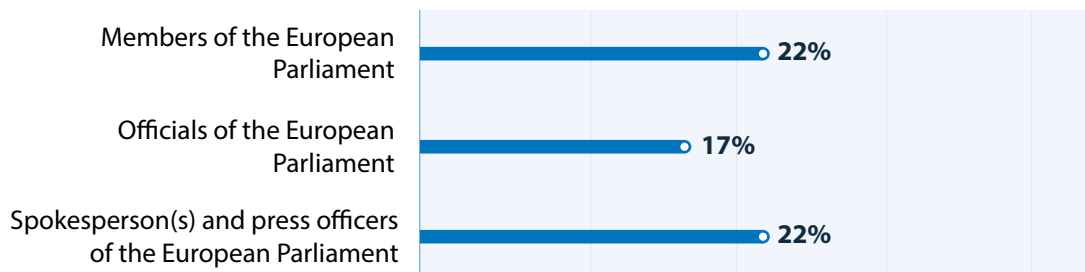
Council and Member States



European Commission



European Parliament



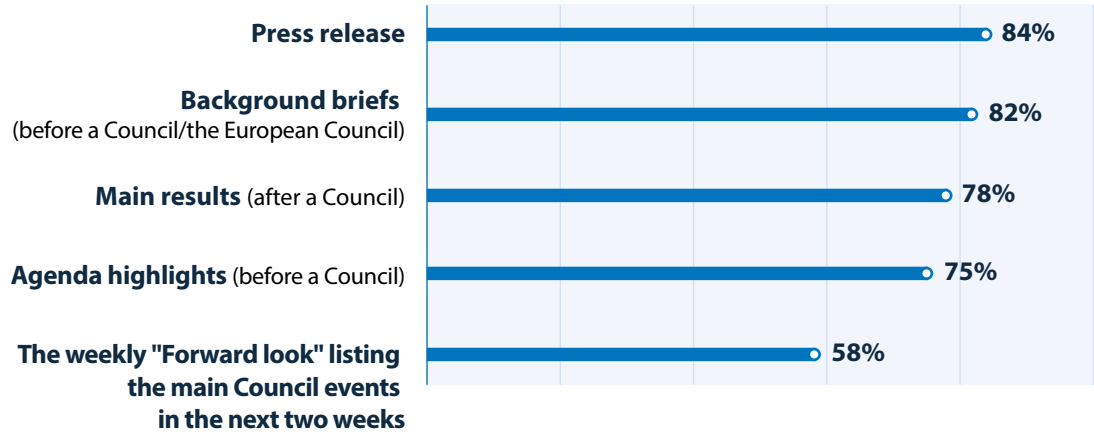
* This graphic presents information based on the following questions: "How important the following sources are for you when working on a story?" and "How important are the following persons responsible for media work?" (see questions 31 and 32 in annex 2). For both questions, options varied from 1- not at all important to 7- very important. Visualised here are answers indicating "very important"

Perceptions of the Council's Media Activities

The survey also looked specifically into how the Council's media activities are viewed by Brussels journalists. Overall, the survey suggests a positive uptake of the activities offered. When asked about how often they make use of Council media products, journalists find press releases and background briefs before a Council the most relevant. Specifically, 84% and 82% of journalists in the sample make frequent use of press releases and briefs respectively (35% and 39% state they use them "all the time"). This is followed

by main results after a Council, agenda highlights before a Council, and finally the weekly "Forward look". Importantly, there are no statistically significant differences in the use of media services between media types, or depending on the length of stay in Brussels. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for correspondents employed by online-only media to make more use of all press services, compared with journalists working for other media.

Perceived importance of Council media products*



* Journalists were asked how often they make use of these Council/European Council written media products in their work, from 1-never to 7-all the time. This graphic shows answers of 5 and above.

Outlook

Much of the previous academic literature on the Brussels press corps suggests that a posting as a Brussels correspondent is a prestigious and stable mid-career placement, offered to those on a permanent contract working for well-funded media (e.g. Baisnee, 2002; Lecheler, 2008). To an extent, this is what this study also seems to support. However, the data first suggest that, across the member states, there is a wide variety of experience, contract types and age groups present in Brussels. This means that there are those in fixed-term entry-level positions, as well as those who have worked in Brussels for many decades. Second, the wide range of lengths-of-stay indicates that a Brussels posting is not always a stable one. Third, there is a substantial number of journalists who work as freelancers, and a large number of journalists who cover not only EU affairs, but also other foreign or even domestic affairs. All this suggests that the Brussels press corps has been transformed by the same challenges that have hit national media markets over the past decades: a move from permanent long-term contracts towards freelance work, leading to an increase in instability and perhaps insecurity of news work (e.g. Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Štětka et al., 2021).

This study shows that a correspondent's age is related to their ability to integrate technological skills and social media into their daily work. The younger a journalist, the more positive they believe the impact of social media is on their work. However, journalists across all ages stated in this survey that digitalisation has put pressure on them to learn new technical skills. This is certainly true, although only few said they actually used new formats and technologies (e.g. data visualisation) in their daily work in Brussels.

The focus in this study was on how journalists interact and adapt to the press services offered to them by the EU institutions. Results support previous research on the relatively close and interdependent relationship between the press corps and press services working with them (e.g. Martins et al., 2012). Perhaps unsurprisingly, journalists stated that off-the-record briefings and high-status institution sources are the most important sources of information in their work (e.g. Van Aelst et al., 2010). However, this survey also showed that journalists rely strongly on on-the-record press information issued by the institutions, such as midday briefings, press conferences, and press releases. This finding is somewhat at odds with the academic literature, which suggests that journalists have only limited interest in scripted press events (e.g. Sellers & Schaffner, 2007). Beyond the close relationship between journalists and officials in Brussels, one other potential explanation for increased interest in press services may be the COVID-19 pandemic, which has rendered in-person meetings and traditional networking difficult. More research is needed to explore this hypothesis, however.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the working day of Brussels journalists. They work even more from home, and they stated that they believed that interest in EU affairs had increased since 2020, but they did not expect this to last. While this must be the focus of future studies, there is a strong reason to believe that the pandemic has firmly introduced online-only and hybrid meeting formats in Brussels. The Brussels journalists in this survey strongly supported hybrid solutions, but only if they are limited to the accredited press corps.

Annex 1.

Evolution of the Brussels press corps' composition 2002-2020

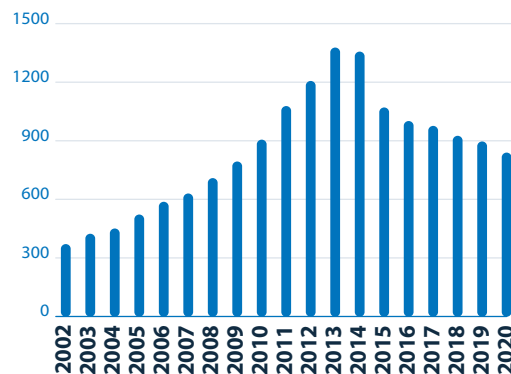
The findings presented below are based on data from the EU interinstitutional database 2002-2020⁴.

The journalists

- How many journalists are accredited to the EU institutions?

The data from the interinstitutional database suggest that the presence of accredited journalists at the EU institutions increased from around 360 in 2002 to around 1330 in 2013. From 2013 to 2020, this figure decreased, with the number of accredited journalists standing at around 800 in the year 2020.

Number of single journalists accredited at the EU institutions (2002-2020)



- How old are they?

The analysis shows that the average age of journalists in Brussels remained stable,

oscillating between 41 and 43 years old during the period in question.

- Are they mostly men or women?

The results show that for each year between 2002 and 2020 there have constantly been more male than female accredited journalists in Brussels. However, it seems that the gender balance has improved throughout this period. In 2003, the ratio male/female journalist was around 2.65 (2.65 male journalists for every female reporter). This figure reached its minimum value in 2020, with a ratio of about 1.70.

- How long do they remain in Brussels?

Taking 2020 as a year of reference within the 2002-2020 framework, data tell us that a journalist spends on average 7.92 years in Brussels (out of a total of 19 years). Nevertheless, the data also suggest that this number is skewed towards shorter stays, with more than 50% of journalists in the 2020 accreditation database declaring a stay shorter than 5 years.

- How many of the journalists are freelance?

The analysis shows an increase in the proportion of freelance journalists from 2002 (around 25 % of the total number of journalists accredited) until 2020, when freelance journalists accounted for up to around 30% of the total.

4 Considering the timespan used for this analysis, the IT tool used for accreditation has considerably evolved over time, making it impossible to thoroughly check the consistency of data. Detailed results are therefore to be taken with caution.

The media

• Where are media organisations from?

The available data show that, between 2002 and 2020, the Brussels press corps was from news organisations based in 77 countries around the world. In addition, media organisations from “pre-2004” EU Member States⁵ were the most represented (around 55 % each year, 2002-2020). However, it seems that the proportion of organisations from “post-2004” Member States (which joined the EU after 2004) doubled after the 2004 enlargement - from around 6 % in 2002 to around 12 % of the whole sample in 2020.

• What about the scope of news organisations?

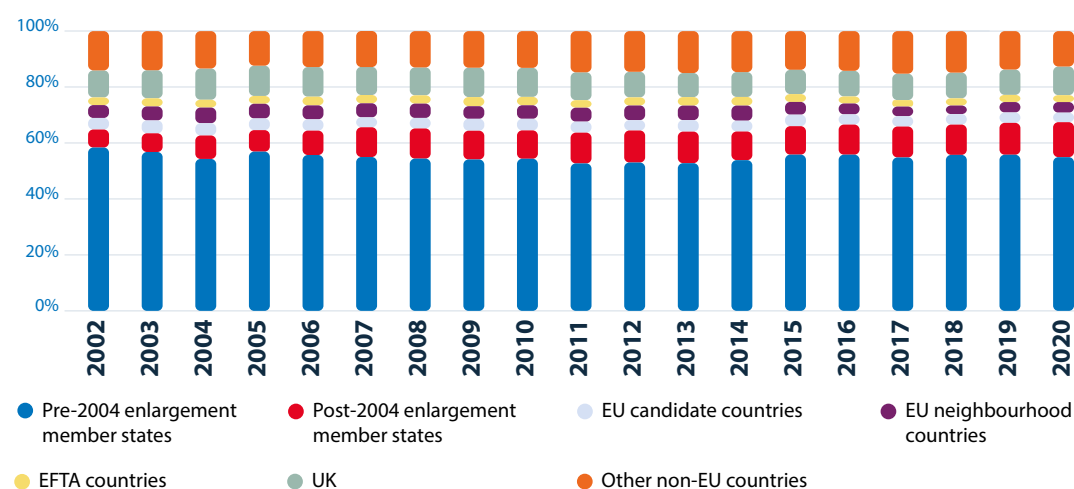
The available data suggest that most news organisations in Brussels were mostly national news media (around 50-60 % of the total for each year), while outlets with a Europe-wide scope (around 20 % of the total for each

year) or a regional scope (around 10 % of the total for each year) were significantly less represented. Moreover, the analysis shows that the vast majority of news organisations making up the Brussels press corps have a generalist focus on politics (71 % of the total outlets in 2020). The second largest group comprised economic/financial news organisations, which represented only 5 % of the total in 2020.

• What are the most common media types?

The analysis suggests that newspapers (which have both a print and online edition) were the most represented news organisations in Brussels throughout the examined period, accounting for around 25% of the total for each of the years in question⁶. The data also show that the presence of TV broadcasters increased from 2002 (around 12 % of all media organisations) until 2020 (around 16 % of the total). At the same time, outlets that are published only online consistently represented around 15 % of all media organisations in the 2002-2020 period.

Country of origin of news organisations (2002-2020)



5 See above

6 The following media types were considered: newspapers (online + print), TV broadcasters, news agencies, online outlets (only online), radio broadcasters, magazines (online + print), production companies

Annex 2.

Survey questions

MEMBERSHIP BRUSSELS PRESS CORPS

Q1. Are you a journalist holding a permanent accreditation to the EU institutions in Brussels?

- Yes
 No

Q2. For how many years have you been based in Brussels?
 ___ years

Q3. And how many years have you been working on European affairs?
 ___ years

Q4. In your daily work, do you work on:

- EU affairs only
 EU affairs and other foreign affairs (e.g., Belgium, NATO)
 EU affairs and other national affairs (e.g., entertainment, lifestyle)
 Other, please specify:

(open-ended)

WORKING CONDITIONS

Q5. Which of the following categories best describes your current employment?

- Full-time employment with one media organisation
 Part-time employment with one media organisations
 Freelancer *[if selected, show Q5_subq]*
 Other, please specify:

(open-ended)

Q5_subq. For how many news outlets do you work?

(open-ended)

Q6. Which of the following categories best describes your current position in your newsroom?

- Editor
 Department head
 Reporter / News writer
 Producer
 Trainee

Other, please specify:
(open-ended)

Q7. What type of medium are you mostly working for? If you work for more than one, please select the two media you are mostly working for.

(two responses allowed)

- Television
 Radio
 Newspaper/Magazine (print)
 Online-only news outlet
 News agency
 Production company
 Other type of media outlet

Q8. In which country is/are your medium/media (predominantly) distributed?

- Pan-European
 Global
 Non EU - United Kingdom
 Non EU - United States of America
 Non EU - EFTA countries (Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein)
 Non EU - other non EU countries (e.g. Japan, Turkey, China, etc.)
 Austria
 Belgium
 Bulgaria
 Croatia
 Republic of Cyprus
 Czech Republic
 Denmark
 Estonia
 Finland
 France
 Germany
 Greece
 Hungary
 Ireland
 Italy
 Latvia
 Lithuania
 Luxembourg
 Malta
 Netherlands
 Poland
 Portugal
 Romania
 Slovakia

- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden

Q9. Journalism is in a state of change. During the last 5 years, do you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work?

7-point scale: 1- decreased a lot to 7- increased a lot

- The use of search engines
- The relevance of journalism for society
- Interactions of journalists with their audiences
- The importance of technical skills
- Time available for researching stories
- Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions
- The credibility of journalism

AGENDA SETTING

Q10. To what extent do you think the following media set the agenda in EU affairs news coverage?

7-point scale: 1- not at all to 7- very much

- EU-wide news media dedicated to EU affairs only (e.g., Politico, Euractiv, Euronews)
- National news media available in other EU languages (e.g., France24)
- Media from English speaking countries with an international reach (e.g. FT, BBC, Wall Street Journal)
- National news media focused on national audiences

Q11. In your personal view, which three news media organisations have the most influence in Brussels overall?

(open-ended)

Q12. Please name three media outlets that you regularly turn to when researching a story about EU affairs.

(open-ended)

NETWORK

Q13. How would you describe your relationship with the following members of your professional network?

7-point scale: 1- very distant to 7- very close

- Brussels journalists from my country
- Brussels journalists from other EU countries
- EU officials from my country
- EU officials from other EU countries
- National officials (based in the Permanent Representation) from my country

- National officials (based in the Permanent Representation) from other EU countries

WORK AUTONOMY

Q14. How often do you collaborate with colleagues who are based at home (i.e. in your country of origin and working for your media) ...?

7-point scale: 1- almost never to 7- all the time

- ... to exchange information for possible stories
- ... to actively contribute to stories
- ... to cover an important event in Brussels (e.g. an EU summit)
- ... by attending a press briefing or press event in Brussels on their behalf?

Q15. With whom do you feel more in competition during your work?

7-point scale: 1- colleagues back home to 7- colleagues in Brussels

TOPICS & FRAMING

Q16. When reporting on EU affairs, which four topics do you cover most often?

(four responses allowed)

- Culture, education and youth
- Employment and social rights
- Consumer affairs and public health
- Economy, finance and the euro
- Covid-19
- Business, taxation and competition
- Research and innovation
- Enlargement, external relations and trade
- International aid, development and cooperation
- EU regional and urban development
- Transport and travel
- Asylum and migration
- Institutional affairs
- Food, farming and fisheries
- Agriculture and rural development
- Statistics
- Security and defense
- Energy, environment and climate
- Justice and citizens' rights

Q17. When you think of the way you craft a story, how regularly do you use the following angles in your EU coverage?

7-point scale: 1- never to 7- all the time

- "Human face" of an EU event
- Impact on domestic audience / my country
- Attribution of responsibility
- Underlying conflict
- Financial losses or gains dimension

- Moral message
- Impact on other countries or globally

Q18. In your daily work, how often do you directly participate in the production of the following?

7-point scale: 1- never to 7- all the time

- Social media stories (e.g., on Instagram)
- Short video or audio content for web/social media
- Visualisations and/or infographics
- Virtual Reality or Augmented Reality productions
- Investigative journalism pieces

COVID-19

Q19. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about working as a Brussels correspondent during the COVID-19 pandemic?

7-point scale: 1- strongly disagree to 7- strongly agree

- My colleagues back home have become more interested in EU affairs during the pandemic.
- My relationship with other journalists back home has become more distant.
- National lockdowns have made researching new stories more difficult.
- It was more difficult to verify the information I received about EU related topics (COVID-19 and others).
- The Council has successfully adapted its way of conducting press activities to the COVID-19 crisis.
- The European Commission has successfully adapted its way of conducting press activities to the COVID-19 crisis.
- The European Parliament has successfully adapted its way of conducting press activities to the COVID-19 crisis.

Q20. And how do you think your work will develop after the end of restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic?

7-point scale: 1- strongly disagree to 7- strongly agree

- I will resume traveling for work (e.g., going to informal meetings and summit in the country holding the presidency), just as before the pandemic
- Journalists working for media organisation in the Member States will cover EU affairs more often.

Q21. Once the EU institutions re-open their press centres, how do you expect press conferences of the EU institutions to be conducted?

- Livestream with only in-person questions
- Livestream with in-person questions or online only for EU accredited medias
- Livestream with in-person and online questions

Q22. Once the EU institutions re-open their press centres, how do you expect off-the-record press briefings of the EU institutions to be conducted?

- Hybrid with only in-person questions
- Only in person
- Hybrid with a mix of in-person and online questions, open to all interested medias
- Hybrid with a mix of in-person and online questions, restricted to EU accredited medias

Q23. If virtual press events (press conferences, briefings) of the EU institutions are open to all journalists (other than Brussels correspondents), what impact do you think this will have? Rate the following statements:

7-point scale: 1- strongly disagree to 7- strongly agree

- This will increase the quantity of coverage of EU affairs.
- This will improve the overall quality of coverage of EU affairs.
- This is likely to lead to a reduction of the number of correspondents from national media based in Brussels.

NEWS PRODUCTION PROCESS

Q24. How important do you consider the following activities in Brussels for your work?

7-point scale: 1- not important to 7- very important

- Press activities of the President of the European Council
- Press activities by Member States in Brussels
- Off-the-record press briefing organised by EU institutions
- Press conferences of the European Parliament/Activities of the President
- Press conferences of the European Commission/Activities of the President
- Press activities around Council meetings
- Midday press briefing

Q25. How important are social media for reporting or producing your stories?

1- not important at all to 7- extremely important

Q26. In your work as a journalist, how often do you use social media accounts authored by the following figures ?

7-point scale: 1- never to 7- all the time

- Academics and experts
- Journalists
- EU officials
- Press officers/spokespersons
- National officials
- Political figures (EU and national)
- Regular citizens

Q27. How often do you use the following social media platforms in your work as a journalist?

7-point scale: 1- never to 7- all the time

- Twitter
- YouTube
- Facebook
- Instagram
- TikTok

Q28. Overall, how would you rate the impact of social media on your work as a journalist?

7-point scale: 1- very negative to 7- very positive

Q29. And how credible do you find information from the following social media platforms in your work as a journalist?

7-point scale: 1- not at all credible to 7- very credible

- Twitter
- YouTube
- Facebook
- Instagram
- TikTok

SOURCING**Q30. How often do you use the following channels when making contact with your sources?**

7-point scale: 1- never to 7- all the time

- Pre-arranged physical meetings
- Telephone (phone calls)
- Text messages (SMS, WhatsApp, Signal, etc.)
- Messages on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- E-mail
- Spontaneous interactions the corridors of the European institutions
- Receptions and other events
- Press conferences and other press events (e.g. briefings)

Q31. How important the following sources are for you when working on a story?

7-point scale: 1- not at all important to 7- very important

- Officials of the Council/European Council
- Ministers and other members of Member States governments
- Officials of the European Commission
- European Commissioners
- Officials of the European Parliament
- Members of the European Parliament
- Other national politicians
- Other journalists
- Lobbyists
- Academics
- Civil society organisations

Q32. And how important are the following persons responsible for media work?

7-point scale: 1- not at all important to 7- very important

- Council's press officers
- Press officers of Member States delegations
- Spokesperson of the President of the European Council
- Spokespersons of the Council's rotating presidency
- Spokesperson of the president of the Eurogroup
- Spokesperson(s) and press officers of the European Commission
- Spokesperson(s) and press officers of the European Parliament

COUNCIL**Q33. How often do you make use of the following Council/European Council written media products in your work?**

7-point scale: 1- never to 7- all the time

- Press release
- The weekly “Forward look” listing the main Council events in the next two weeks
- Main results (after a Council)
- Background briefs (before a Council/the European Council)
- Agenda highlights (before a Council)

SOCIO DEMOGRAPHICS

Q34. How many years have you been working as a journalist?

__ years

Q35. How old are you ?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- Above 64

Q36. What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Non-Binary
- Other, please specify:
- Prefer not to answer

Q37. What is your nationality?

- Non-EU (e.g. US American, Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Japanese)
- Austrian
- Belgian
- Bulgarian
- Croatian
- Cypriot
- Czech
- Danish
- Estonian
- Finnish
- French
- German
- Greek
- Hungarian
- Irish
- Italian
- Latvian
- Lithuanian
- Luxembourgish
- Maltese
- Dutch
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Romanian
- Slovakian
- Slovenian
- Spanish
- Swedish
- British

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