

BENEDMO trend report 1 (Oct. '22)

Outcomes and background of fact-checks published by BENEDMO partners in the first year of cooperation, with a specific focus on the war in Ukraine.

*Ferre Wouters (KU Leuven)
Yordi Dam (ANP)*



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About the trend report

In this trend report, you will find an analysis of the fact-checks conducted by BENEDMO's consortium partners, in the period from September 2021 to August 2022.

Methodology

A manual compilation process was employed to gather all fact-checks conducted by BENEDMO partners, including Knack, Nieuwscheckers, VRT NWS and Factcheck Vlaanderen, as well as third-party entities such as DPA. These fact-checks were subsequently categorised based on their publication period, the theme of the claim under scrutiny and the resulting verdict of the fact-check. This report primarily focuses on the fact-checks conducted by BENEDMO partners, with particular attention directed towards checks related to the war in Ukraine.



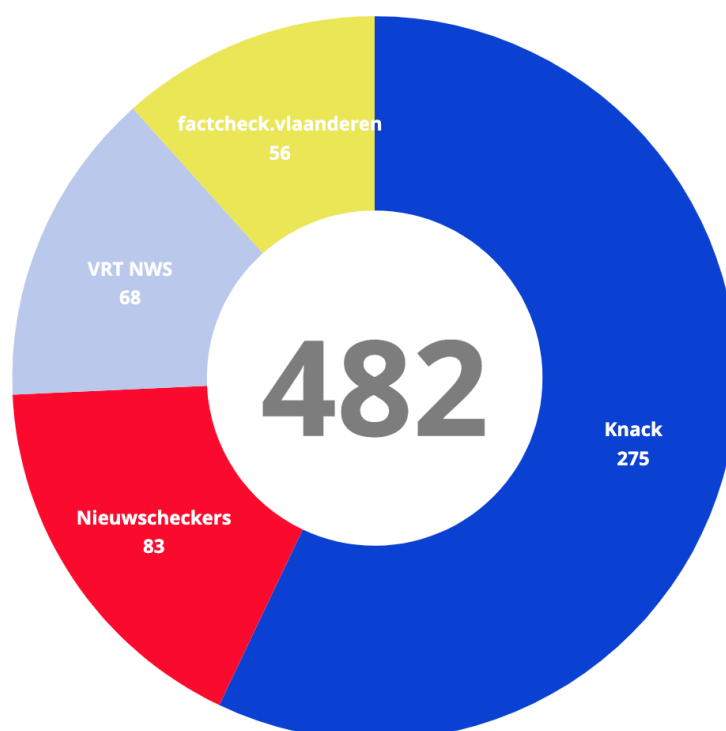
Fact-checks broken down by partner

Four partners within the BENEDMO consortium conducted fact-checks during the first year of collaboration. The chart below provides a breakdown of fact-checks conducted by these partners from September 2021 to August 2022.

During this period, a total of 482 Dutch-language fact-checks language were published. Of these, 399 were carried out by Flemish media outlets, specifically Knack, VRT News, and Factcheck Vlaanderen. An additional 83 fact-checks were conducted by Nieuwscheckers, a specialised fact-checking initiative affiliated with Leiden University in the Netherlands. Nearly half of the claims (47 per cent) underwent fact-checking within a week of their initial appearance. The quickest fact-check was published on the same day, while the slowest one took 92 days to materialise.

Aantal door BENEDMO-partners gepubliceerde factchecks, uitgesplitst naar medium

Periode sept. '21 t/m aug. 22



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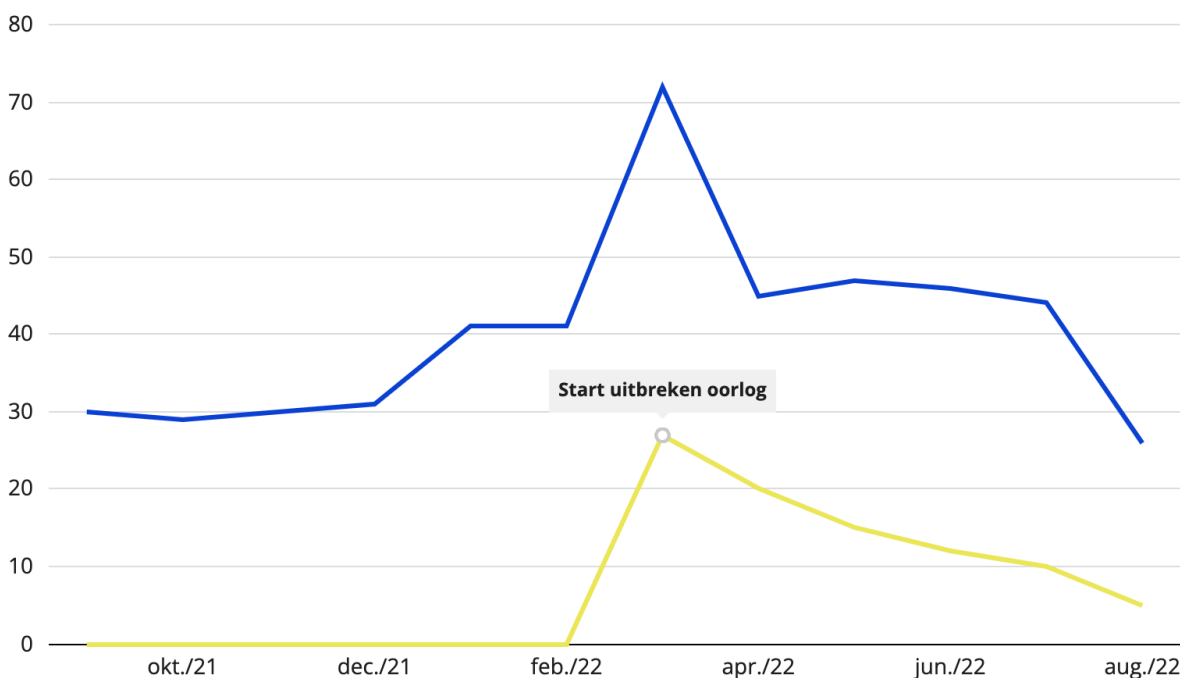
Fact-checks over time and the war in Ukraine

The monthly publication of fact-checks varies, ranging from approximately 30 to 70 articles. A notable spike was observed in March of this year. Towards the end of February, Russia invaded Ukraine, precipitating the current and ongoing conflict. The outbreak of the war brought with it a substantial influx of (potential) disinformation, a trend evident in the increased number of fact-checks specifically addressing reporting related to the war. The subsequent paragraphs delve into further detail about fact-checks pertaining to the war.

Gepubliceerde factchecks over Oekraïne per maand

■ Factchecks over Oekraïne ■ Totaal aantal factchecks

Totaal aantal factchecks gepubliceerd door BENEDMO-partners en factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne (sept '21 t/m aug. '22)



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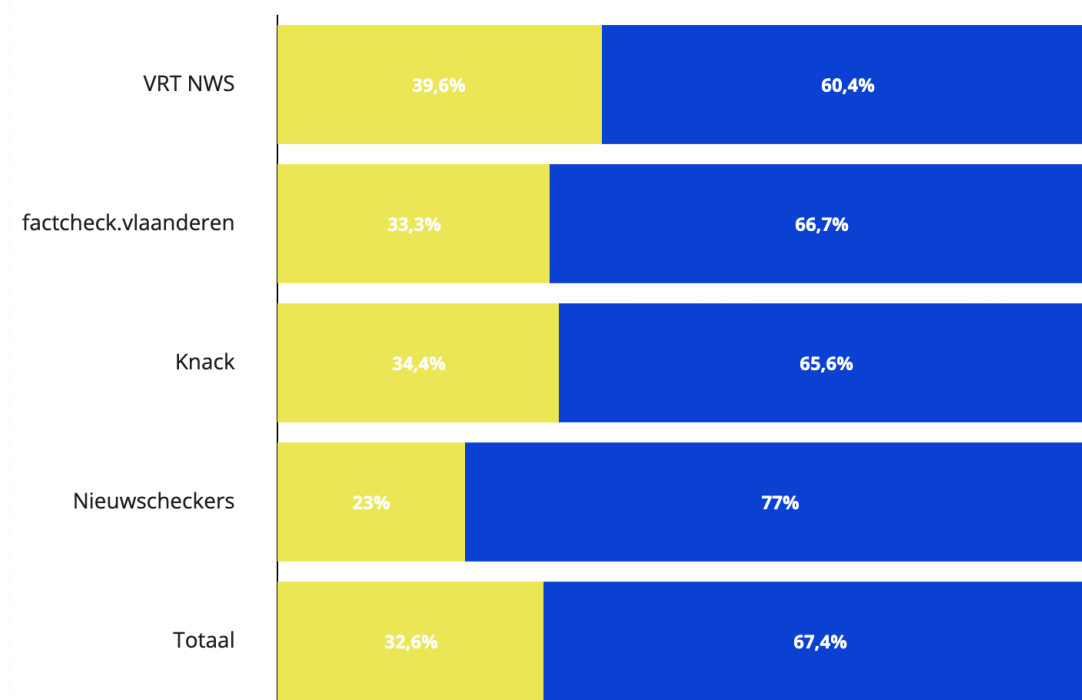
One in three fact-checks were specifically focused on Ukraine

Among the fact-checks conducted were instances such as a viral video featuring a singing Ukrainian girl [who was purportedly hit by bombs](#), a photo depicting French President [Macron allegedly experiencing distress](#) following a conversation with Putin and a claim concerning [Russian 'fake planes' purportedly altered on Google Maps](#) satellite images. These are just a few examples of reports related to the Ukraine conflict that were debunked by BENEDMO's fact-checking efforts. Over a span of six months (from 24th February to 24th August), BENEDMO's fact-checking partners collectively published a total of 88 reports about the war in Ukraine. This figure constitutes a third of all fact-checks published during that period.

Aantal factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne

■ Factchecks over Oekraïne ■ Factchecks overig

In de periode van 24 februari tot 24 augustus 2022, uitgesplitst naar maker

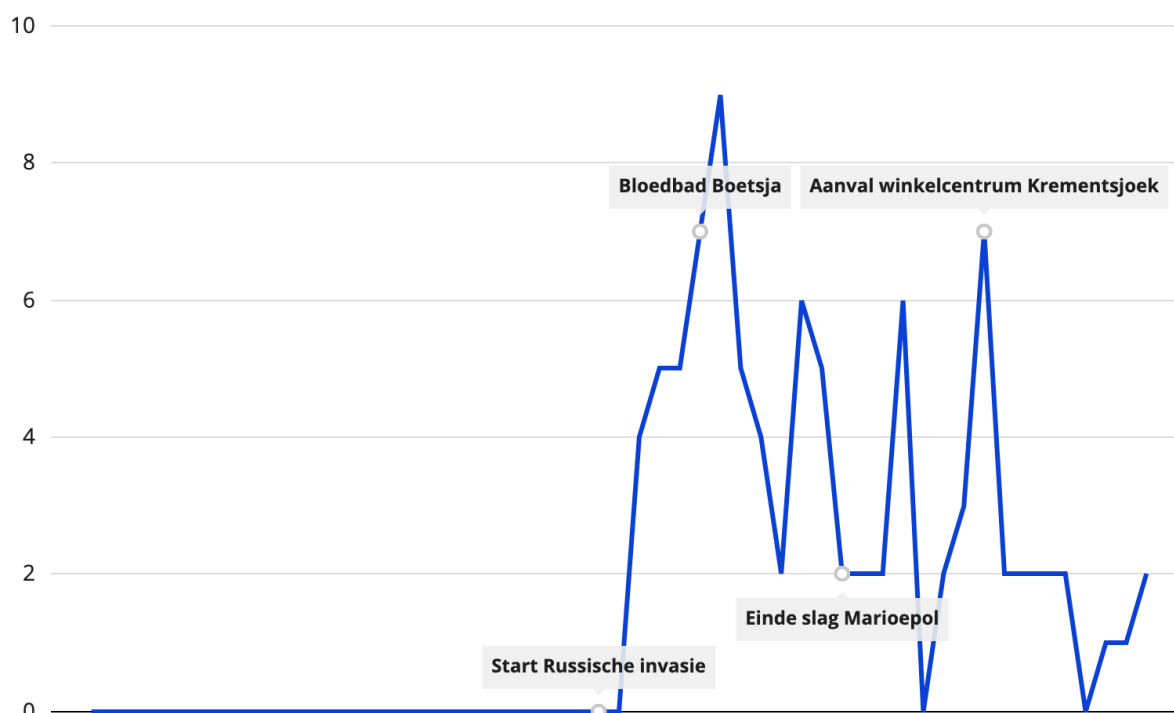


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Linking war events to the publication of fact-checks

There is a strong correlation between the number of fact-checks per week and several major events during the war. The chart below illustrates all fact-checks pertaining to Ukraine that have been published by BENEDMO partners. Since the outbreak of the war in late February, nearly every week has witnessed the publication of a fact-check addressing (erroneous) reports concerning the conflict. The massacre in Bucha, the attack on Kramatorsk railway station and the battle for Mariupol led to extensive disinformation. Consequently, many debunking fact-checks have been disseminated in response to these events.

Aantal door BENEDMO-partners gepubliceerde factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne, uitgesplitst per week + enkele opvallende gebeurtenissen (feb t/m aug. '22)



The most significant spikes in fact-check publications occurred in the aftermath or during two specific events: the Bucha massacre and the attack on the Kremenchuk shopping mall. Disinformation surrounding the Bucha incident carried a dual message: it either attributed responsibility for the massacre to Ukrainian soldiers or outright denied the factual account of events. Furthermore, evidence countering these claims was purportedly portrayed as staged.

Fact-check: No, this video does not suggest that Ukrainian soldiers staged the Russian massacre in Butchacha.

According to certain social media users, a video serves as evidence that the massacre carried out by the Russian army in the town was a staged event orchestrated by Ukraine. Reportedly, the soldiers themselves dispersed the corpses in the streets. This is untrue. The images are part of a more extensive report by the AP news agency. The soldiers inspect the corpses for potential booby traps.



Example about the Bucha massacre.

Regarding the shopping mall in Kremenchuk, two messages circulated. One denied the attack altogether, claiming it was a fire, while the other sought to minimise it by asserting that the mall was closed. Nevertheless, fact-checkers were able to verify the missile attack.

Fact-check: Yes, the video captures the moment a missile strikes the shopping mall in Kremenchuk

A video is circulating on the internet, purportedly depicting the moment a missile strikes a shopping mall in the Ukrainian city of Kremenchuk. After analysis, it was confirmed that the images were indeed authentic. In another video, we also witness a second missile striking near a nearby park.



Example about the attack in Kremenchuk.



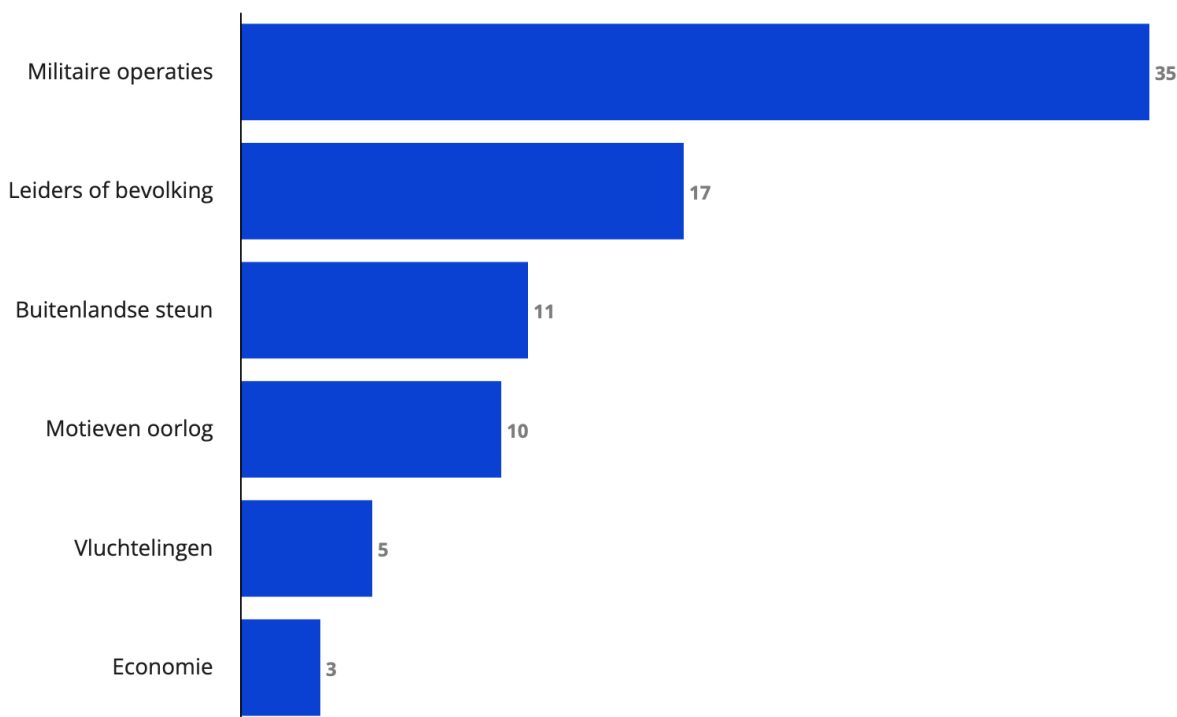
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What were fact-checks about the war focused on?

A total of 81 unique fact-checks were published about the war in Ukraine. Claims that underwent multiple checks were omitted from this analysis. Subsequently, we conducted a manual categorisation of these fact-checks based on sub-themes to discern the predominant subjects for which claims were scrutinised. The most frequently addressed subject pertained to fact-checks related to military operations (35), followed by checks of information concerning the leaders or populace of the respective countries involved (17). Additionally, there were checks on foreign aid (11) and the motives behind the war (10).

Factchecks oorlog Oekraïne: over welke thema's gaan de claims?

Aantal door BENEDMO-partners gepubliceerde factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne, uitgesplitst naar subthema (in periode feb. t/m aug. '22)



Fact-checks concerning military operations typically revolve around incidents such as attacks, casualties, and/or soldiers. These often delve into the authenticity of war-related images, which can be real, fake or old. The veracity of war images is, at times, unfairly called into question, as exemplified in the case of Bucha. At the same time, images from film sets are shared to create the impression that everything is staged.



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Fact-check: No, this video does not serve as proof that the war in Ukraine is staged

A video purportedly depicts Ukraine staging the war. This is untrue: the video shows a film set for a partly dramatised documentary focusing on the events in Irpin, Bucha and Hostomel from March 2022. The original uploader of the video emphasises that the footage was filmed in Hostomel for a film project covering historical events.



Example about military operations.

Disinformation is frequently disseminated with the intent of portraying Ukrainian President Zelensky in a negative light, including efforts to depict him as a drug addict.

Fact-check: The video purportedly showing cocaine on Zelensky's desk is fake

A video is circulating on social media appears to show Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in an online meeting, with items resembling cocaine and a bank card visible next to him. It turns out to be a video that Zelensky himself posted online on 6 March, to which the cocaine and bank card were added at a later stage.



Example about leaders or population.

Some fact-checks pertain to humanitarian aid, but there are also claims about other forms of foreign aid to Ukraine that have not always been found to be true.

Fact-check: No, Ukrainian bicolour has been added to alternative rainbow flag

An inclusive rainbow flag with added Ukrainian bicolour is circulating on the internet. Some people believe it is a new version of the LGBTQ+ flag. It was an ironic comment by an anonymous Twitter user, who was criticising another comment in which someone was being criticised the use of an older flag that wouldn't be inclusive for people of colour.



Example about foreign aid.



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The claim that Putin invaded Ukraine to ‘denazify’ the country is a well-known example of Russian disinformation about the motives of the war. Another example is the claim that Western labs in Ukraine were making bioweapons, such as monkeypox.

Fact-check: Monkey pox does not come from a laboratory

Conspiracy sites have disseminated narratives in the past week asserting that the monkeypox virus is a product of a laboratory strain. Concurrently, there are hints at a connection with bioweapon research in Ukraine. These are fabrications, fuelled by anonymous rumours and Russian disinformation about Western labs in Ukraine. Such conspiracy narratives recur periodically in the emergence of new pathogens.



Example about motives for war.

Outcome of fact-checks: many allegations proved false

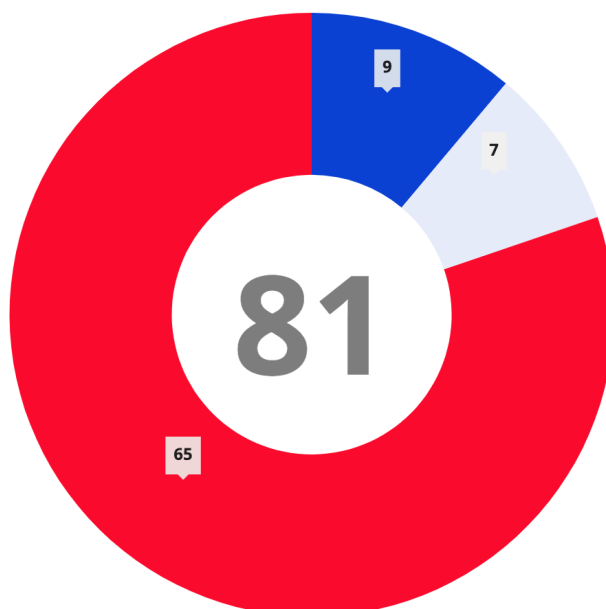
The importance of fact-checks during wartime is evident from the fact that a majority of the claims subjected to fact-checking were found to be at least partially false. Out of the 81 fact-checks conducted, the information in 65 proved to be (partially) incorrect.



Uitkomst factchecks over oorlog in Oekraïne

■ Waar ■ Niet te checken/geen bewijs ■ (Deels) onwaar

Factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne, uitgesplitst naar oordeel



Sentiment: pro-Russian vs. pro-Ukrainian

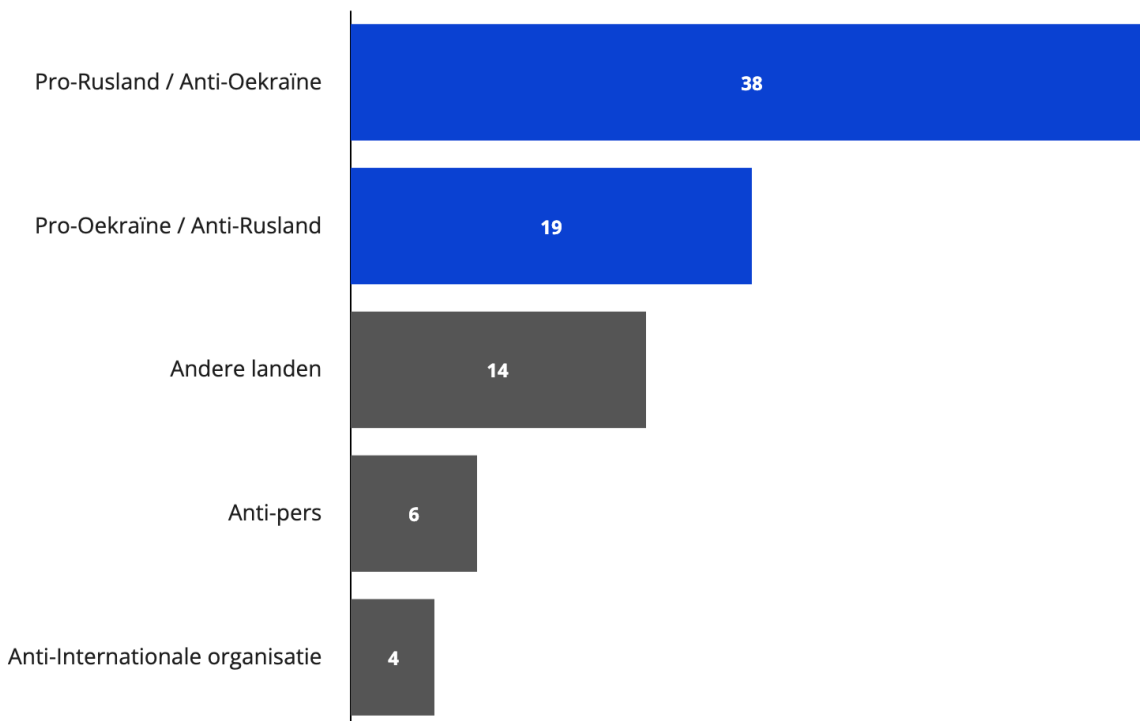
Like any war, the conflict in Ukraine is marked by two distinct perspectives. On the one hand, fact-checks were conducted based on reports reflecting a discernible pro-Russian sentiment, while on the other, claims were scrutinised from a pro-Ukrainian standpoint. Of the 81 published fact-checks pertaining to the war, the majority (47 percent) presented a pro-Russian and thus anti-Ukrainian perspective. Twenty-four per cent of these fact-checks were directed against Russia or in support of Ukraine, while 17 per cent shed an unfavourable light on other countries. Additionally, the press (6) and international organisations (4), such as the Red Cross, were also targets. It is worth noting that disinformation from Russian sources also targeted Ukrainian allies or the Western press, further tilting the balance towards a pro-Russian standpoint.



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Factchecks oorlog Oekraïne naar invalshoek

Aantal door BENEDMO-partners gepubliceerde factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne, uitgesplitst naar invalshoek van de gecheckte claim (feb '21 t/m aug' 22)



Before this analysis, we observed numerous examples of claims leaning towards an anti-Ukrainian or pro-Russian perspective. Additionally, fact-checkers encountered reports that presented a pro-Ukrainian angle but were not entirely accurate. One such instance involved a heroic narrative detailing the birth of a child in a Kyiv metro station during Russian bombings.

Fact-check: There is no evidence that a Ukrainian 'baby Mia' was born in the Kyiv metro

International news media reported on the birth of a 'baby Mia' during airstrikes in the Kyiv metro in February. They based their reports on an image shared by Ukrainian politician Hanna Hopko, who claimed that the child was born in a shelter. Several media outlets also included the mention of the metro station in their coverage. This particular detail was drawn from a May 2021 BBC article.



Example of pro-Ukrainian angle.



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Sometimes, allegations about the war circulated that were unrelated to both Russia and Ukraine. For example, there were claims that migrants from North Africa would exploit the situation to migrate to Europe.

Fact-check: 97.5% refugees coming from Ukraine to France have Ukrainian nationality

Several French and Flemish media outlets, as well as politicians, claim that 1 in 3 Ukrainian refugees in France is not from Ukraine. This figure was reported by *Le Figaro* newspaper, but they did not provide a precise source for the information. According to the French interior ministry, a total of 17,100 Ukrainian refugees arrived in France, out of which 16,696 hold Ukrainian citizenship. Therefore, the actual proportion of non-Ukrainian refugees is closer to 2.5 percent.



Example of another angle.

Source and file format of the checked claims

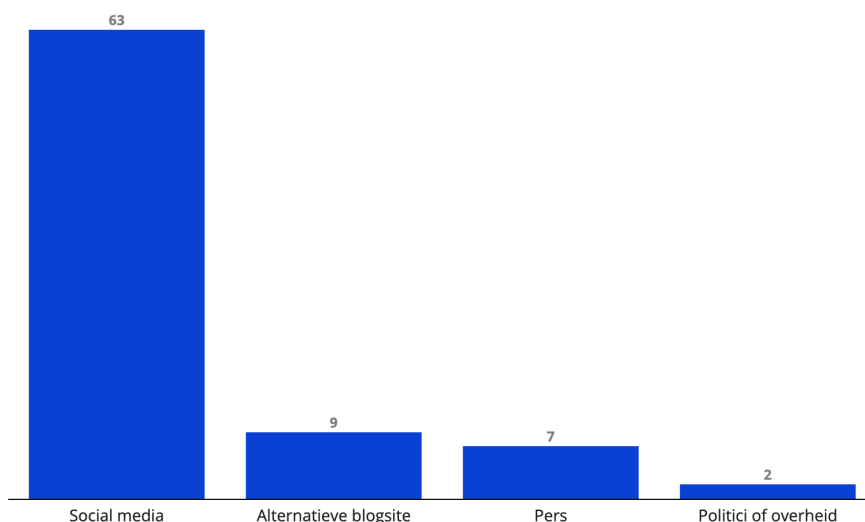
In this section, we focus on the source of the claims and the format in which they were presented, such as video, photo or text. Out of the 81 fact-checks conducted on the war in Ukraine by BENEDMO partners over six months, the majority originated from posts on social media. Many of these claims involved visual content in the form of videos and photos. Textual claims related to the war were less common and primarily sourced from alternative blog sites or mainstream press outlets.



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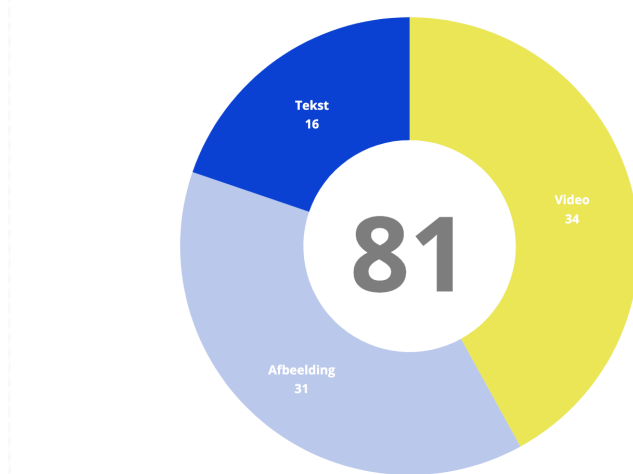
Bron claims die zijn gefactcheckt in kader van oorlog in Oekraïne

Aantal door BENEDMO-partners gepubliceerde factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne, uitgesplitst naar bron van de gecheckte claim (feb t/m aug. '22)



Format claims die zijn gefactcheckt in kader van oorlog in Oekraïne

Aantal door BENEDMO-partners gepubliceerde factchecks over de oorlog in Oekraïne, uitgesplitst naar format van de gecheckte claim (feb t/m aug. '22)



Conclusion: fact-checks by BENEDMO are more diverse compared to other Dutch-language fact-checking platforms

We have also compiled Dutch-language fact-checks from non-partner organisations, such as AFP and DPA, in a database on the BENEDMO website. These have been excluded from the quantitative analyses presented above.

By including Dutch fact-checks from non-BENEDMO partners, we can draw a comparison. On average, other platforms publish fact-checks more quickly, with 61 per cent fact-checked within a week (compared to 47 per cent for BENEDMO fact-checks). However,

this does not necessarily imply that BENEDMO partners work more slowly; it may indicate their willingness to tackle more complex fact-checks.

It is noteworthy that fact-checks from BENEDMO partners cover a wider range of topics. In contrast to BENEDMO, other platforms conducted almost no fact-checks on claims that ultimately proved to be true. The predominant source of these claims was social media (91%), which aligns with the fact that AFP and DPA are partners in Facebook's fact-checking programme. Additionally, BENEDMO fact-checks exhibit a more balanced approach, with other platforms conducting almost no fact-checks on pro-Ukrainian information (6%).

Conclusion

Between September 2021 and August 2022, BENEDMO's fact-checking partners published a total of 482 fact-checks. The spike in fact-check publications occurred in March 2022, coinciding with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, where one in three fact-checks centred on this topic.

A wide range of war-related claims were fact-checked, many of which concerned military operations and often featured a pro-Russian perspective. Fact-checkers primarily scrutinised visual content related to the war sourced from social media platforms.

In recent months, there has been a decrease in the number of fact-checks concerning Ukraine. However, given the evolving nature of the war since late September, we anticipate a resurgence in fact-checking activity.

This report represents BENEDMO's first trend analysis, and the same dataset will be monitored in the coming months to facilitate a similar assessment one year from now. This will provide more comprehensive insights into fact-checking trends in Dutch and Flemish media over time.

