BENEDMO Trend Report 3

Outcomes and background of fact-checks published by BENEDMO partners in the first year of the second round of cooperation

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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. It focuses on the period from July 2024 to June 2025, but also provides a comparative overview of the previous BENEDMO period.

All fact-checks conducted by BENEDMO partners (Knack, Nieuwscheckers, VRT NWS and Factcheck.Vlaanderen) were compiled through an automated database, which was manually checked and adjusted where necessary. These fact-checks were categorised based on their publication period, the topic of the claim and the verdict of the fact-check. This report focuses on different, frequently occurring common themes.

Data collection and processing were conducted by Ferre Wouters (KU Leuven), while analysis and visualisations were carried out by Dominique Voss (ANP). This is the third edition of the BENEDMO trend report and builds further on previous reports. The first edition covered the period from September 2021 to August 2022, with a focus on the war in Ukraine, whereas the second report analysed topics and highlights for the period September 2022 to August 2023.

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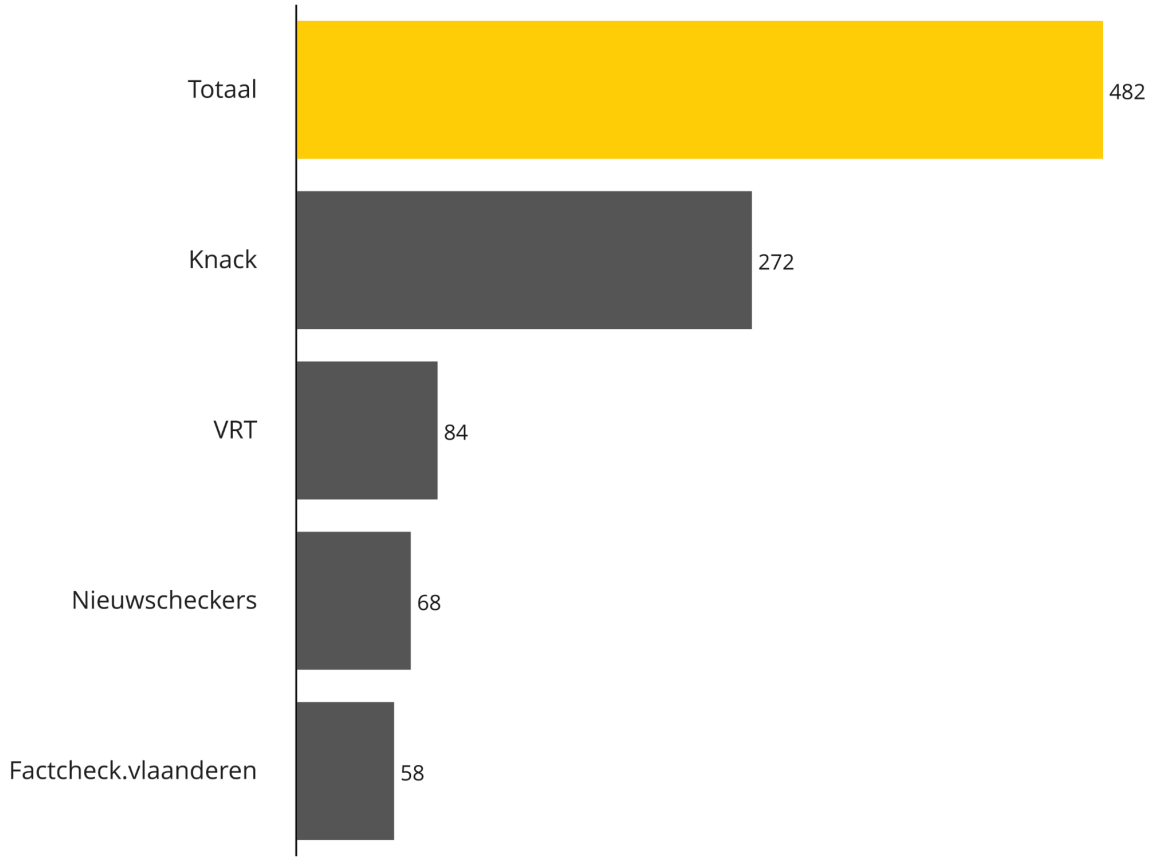
Fact-checks broken down by partner

The four fact-checking partners have been part of the BENEDMO consortium since the beginning. They continued to dedicatedly publish fact-checks during the first year of the continued collaboration. The graph below shows a breakdown of the fact-checks produced by the partners between July 2024 and June 2025.

A total of 482 Dutch-language fact-checks were published during that period. Of these, 414 were produced by Flemish media outlets, namely Knack, VRT NWS and Factcheck.Vlaanderen. Sixty-eight reports were published by Nieuwscheckers, a specialised fact-checking project affiliated with Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Number of fact-checks published by BENEDMO partners, by medium

Total fact-checks 1/7/24 - 31/6/25 | Trend Report BENEDMO



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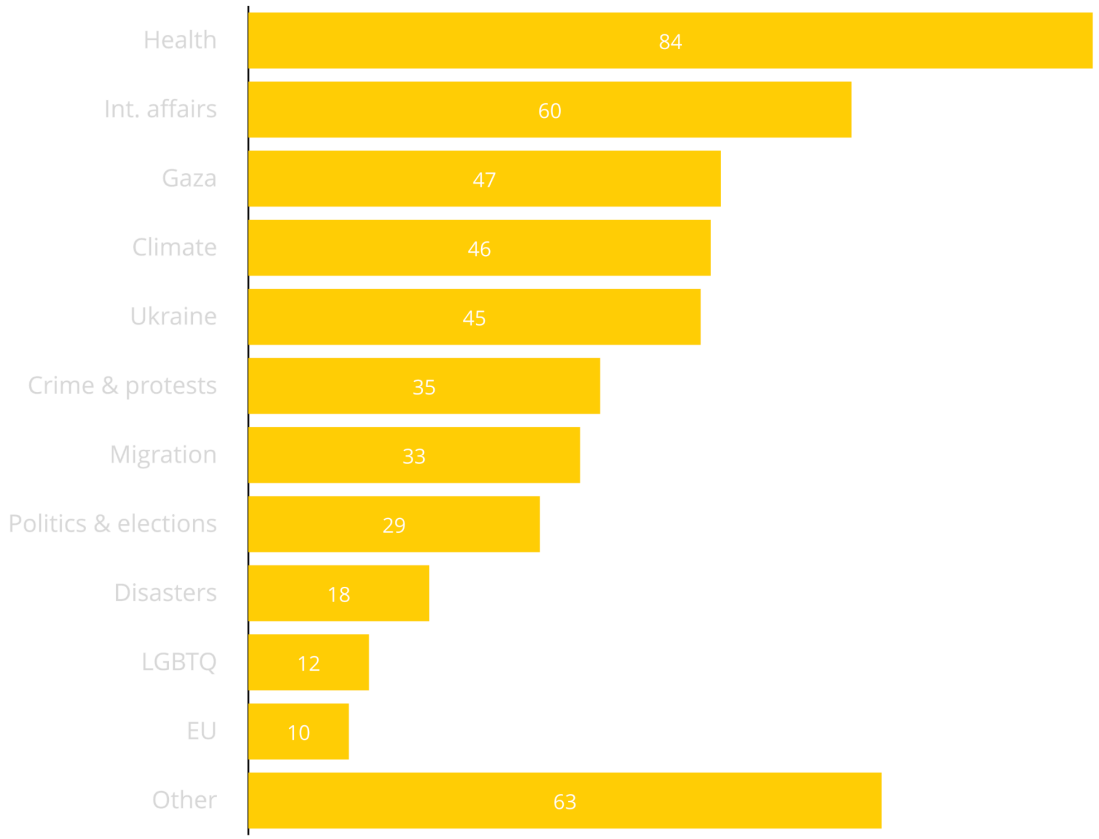
Fact-checks broken down by theme

The five most common main themes in the period from June 2024 to July 2025 were health (84 fact-checks), international affairs (60), the Gaza conflict (47), environment and climate (46) and the war in Ukraine (45). However, if we add up all conflict related factchecks (Gaza, Ukraine and other conflict areas such as Syria) this would be the number one theme (110 fact-checks).

Most common themes fact-checks BENEDMO

Total fact-checks 1/7/24 - 31/6/25 | Trend Report BENEDMO



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It is striking that the top 5 themes also featured prominently in previous years. Only international affairs is a newcomer. This can be explained by the attention to misinformation surrounding the American elections in November 2024, but also by the NATO summit that took place in The Hague, which prompted BENEDMO journalists to conduct a fact-checking marathon.

Fact check: Mysterious website spreads unproven claims about Kamala Harris and a car accident

A post on a mysterious website alleges that the Democratic presidential candidate and Vice President Kamala Harris was involved in an accident in 2011. It claims she ran over a 13-year-old girl and then fled the scene. However, the website is false and there is no evidence that Harris had anything to do with this.

Example of US elections (international affairs)

It is not surprising that health ranks number one. Following a journalistic collaboration by BENEDMO in March 2025, a survey revealed that the vast majority of general practitioners in Flanders and the Netherlands were confronted in their practices with patients who cited misinformation from social media. In response, viral misinformation on Dutch-language social media was identified and fact-checked, including false claims about tampons, toothpaste and all kinds of quack remedies.

Fact check: No, bras do not cause breast cancer

According to an Instagram video, bras can cause breast cancer by blocking lymphatic drainage and due to the chemicals they contain. Experts confirm that wearing a bra does not affect your lymph nodes. PFAS and BPA can indeed be present in sports bras. However, there is no scientific evidence that you can get breast cancer through skin absorption via a bra.

Example about health on social media

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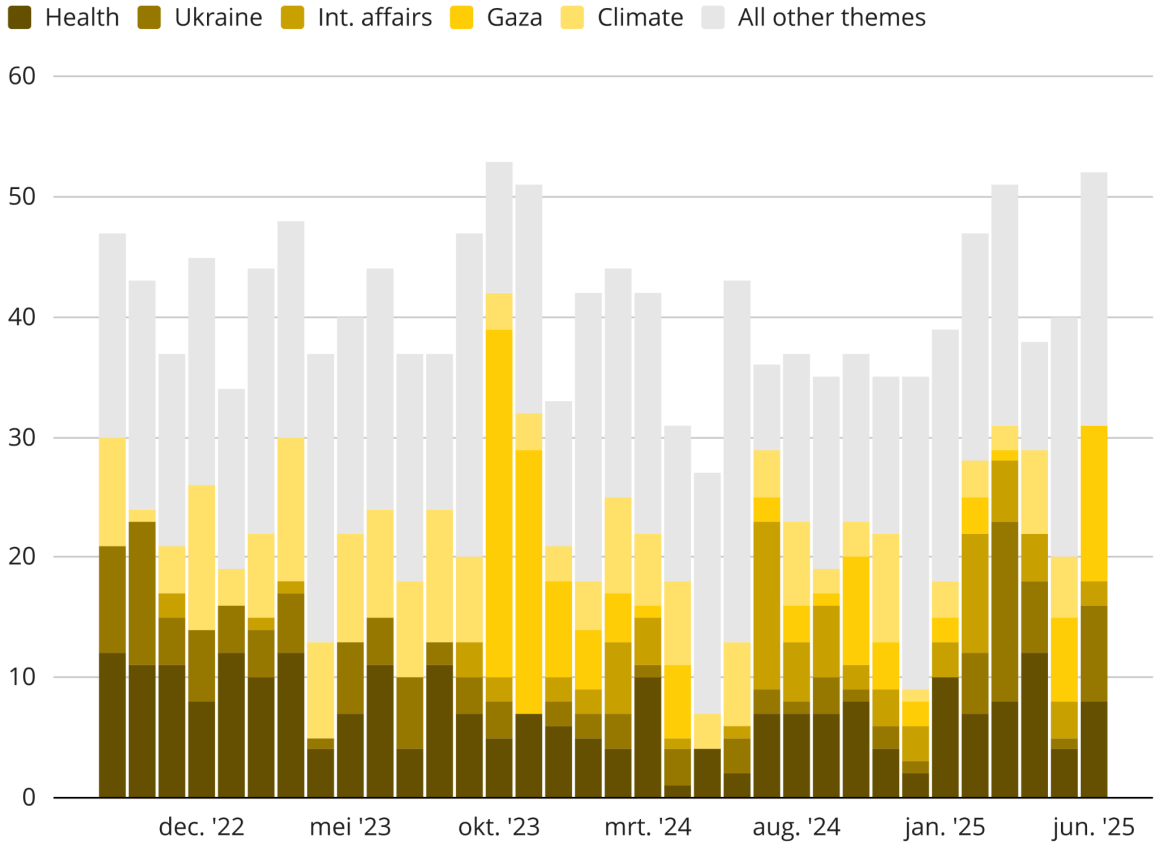
Themes over time

On a monthly basis, the BENEDMO partners published an average of 40 fact-checks in the first year of BENEDMO's continuation. Over the longer term, we see that health and climate are particularly recurring themes in fact-checks. fact-checks on conflicts fluctuate more. For example, after the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, the Gaza conflict was clearly the dominant topic, which remained present afterwards but to a lesser extent, and flared up again during specific events such as Iran's involvement. It is also striking that the war in Ukraine was more prominent again in the first six months of 2025, partly due to ongoing peace negotiations.

Number of BENEDMO fact-checks, broken down by most common themes, per month

Trend Report BENEDMO



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Furthermore, it is noteworthy that claims about international affairs often play a greater role than statements about national politics, which indicates that misinformation often circulates across borders. A notable exception is the period May and June 2024, when national politics was the dominant theme in the run-up to the European and Belgian elections.

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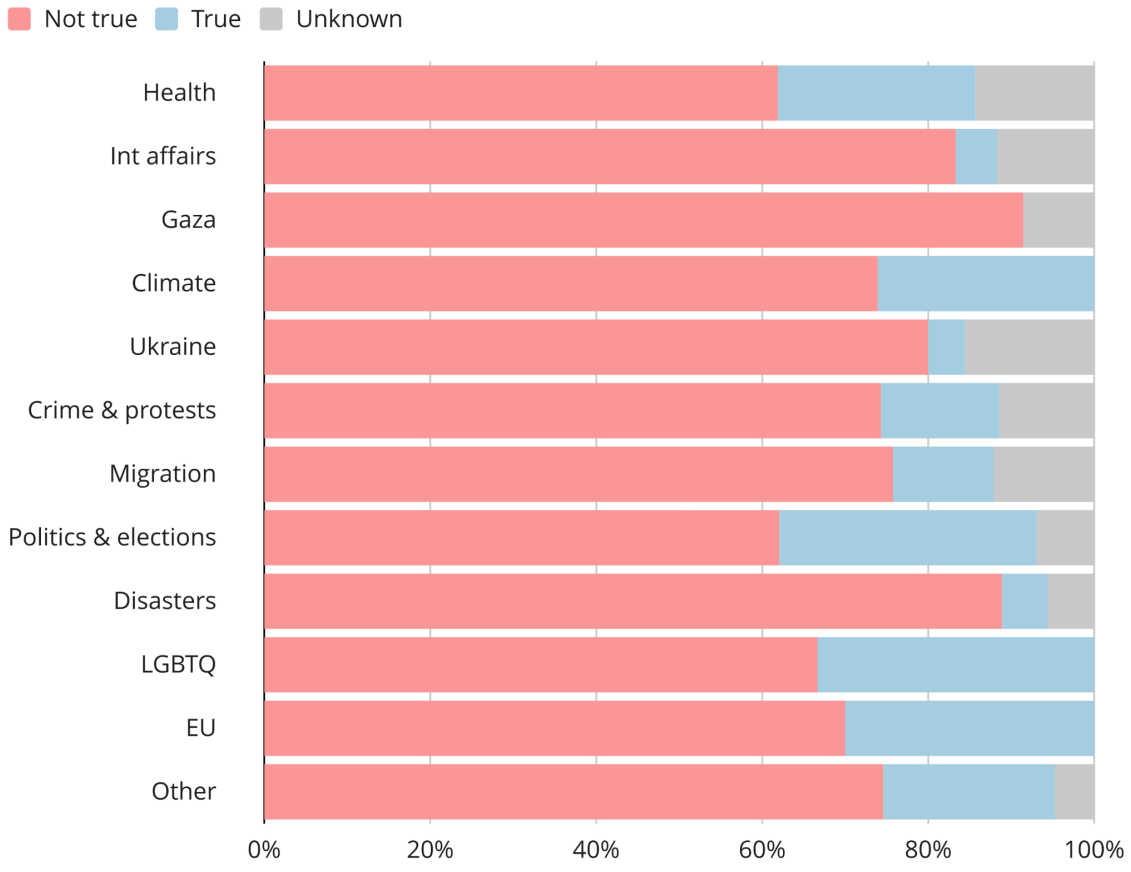
True or false?

Between July 2024 and June 2025, 76 fact-checks were rated as “true”. In 44 cases, there was insufficient evidence for the claim made. The majority – 362 publications – were ultimately rated “false”. That is three-quarters of the nearly 500 checks published. Broken down by theme, claims about conflicts and disasters in particular were found to be false in around 90% of cases. In contrast, checked content on health and politics had more balanced outcomes.

Ratings fact-checks, sorted by theme

Numbers are in % | Total fact-checks 1/7/24 - 31/6/25 | Trend Report BENEDMO



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In particular, verified information about the situation in Gaza frequently turns out to be false. It is a sensitive issue, with various assumptions being checked, especially regarding civilian casualties in Gaza. For instance, casualties from other regions are often wrongly attributed to Israel, while conversely, the number of Palestinian casualties is unfairly minimised or even denied.

Fact check: No, the population of Gaza did not grow by more than 2 per cent in 2024

A message is circulating on social media claiming that the Gaza population will have increased by more than 2 per cent in 2024. According to social media users, this proves that no genocide or famine is taking place in Gaza at all. However, the figures being used as the source actually pre-date the start of the war in Gaza.

Example about war in Gaza with 'false' verdict

Although most verdicts are false, it is important to note that fact-checks are more nuanced than simply refuting claims. Some figures or assertions are found to be unsubstantiated, for example because no or insufficient scientific research has been conducted on them.

Fact check: No evidence that 40% of healthcare work consists of paperwork

According to Els van Doesburg (N-VA), healthcare staff spend a large proportion of their time on administration: '40% of their time is spent on paperwork, not on care.' This figure originates from Zorgnet-Icuro, who derived it from a 2021 master's thesis. In the study, 23 employees from one department at Jessa hospital completed a questionnaire. However, representative figures for the Flemish healthcare sector are not available.

Example about politics with 'no evidence' verdict

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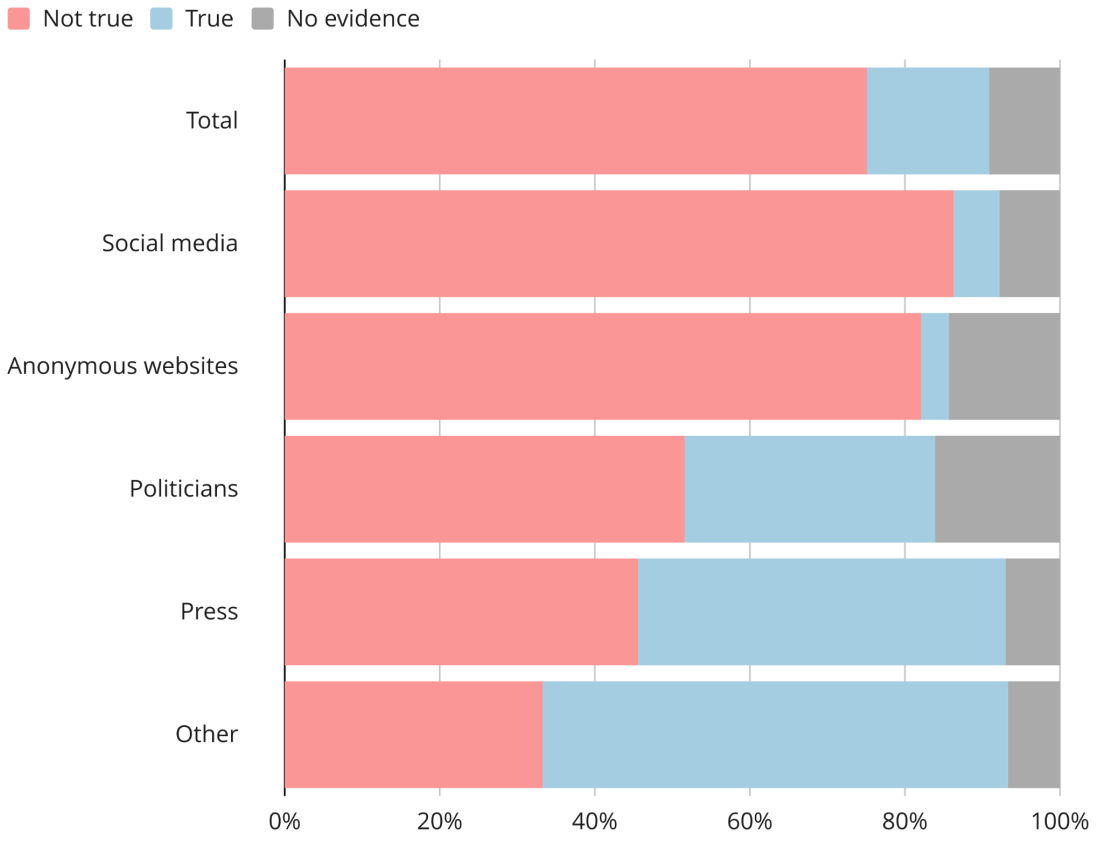
The source of the checked claims

As in previous years, most published fact-checks are based on social media posts. No fewer than two out of three, or 320 of the 482 checks, were prompted by posts on sites such as X, TikTok or Facebook. Fact-checks based on statements by politicians (62 times) and reports in the press or regular media (57) followed at a distance. Although fake news is often discussed in fact-checking, anonymous fake news websites are less common (28).

Unsurprisingly, claims on social media and fake news sites are most often found to be untrue. This is the case for more than 80 per cent of these sources. Press or regular media (75 per cent found to be untrue) and politicians (65 per cent untrue) are more balanced sources, with only half or less being labelled “untrue”.

Fact-check rating, sorted by source of claims

Numbers are in % | Total fact-checks 1/7/24 - 31/6/25 | Trend Report BENEDMO



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Various subjects of the checked claims originate from specific sources. For example, a third of the verified social media posts concern conflict situations, whereas more than half of the claims checked from traditional media relate to health. Some striking health news reports are presented mostly accurate, but occasionally turn out to be exaggerated.

Fact check: Plastic spoon in our brain is probably exaggerated

A recent study reveals that microplastic pollution accumulates in our brains. The total mass of microscopic particles in our brains is reportedly up to six grammes, or the weight of a plastic spoon. However, this amount is highly uncertain and likely an overestimation.

Example of press about health

As can be expected, more than half of the statements by politicians that were checked concern domestic politics. But other topics are also covered, such as migration and climate. This partly explains why the conclusions are often more nuanced or ambiguous for those topics. It could be about global climate change, but it could also concern very local natural phenomena.

Fact check: There are no hybrid wolves in the Netherlands

On 25 March, the House of Representatives debated the issue of wolves in the Netherlands. Gideon van Meijeren (FvD) suggested that wolves in the Netherlands are less shy than those in surrounding countries because we supposedly have wolf-dog hybrids here. However, DNA research shows that there are no hybrids roaming around in the Netherlands. Furthermore, hybrids are not less wary of humans.

Example of politician about environment

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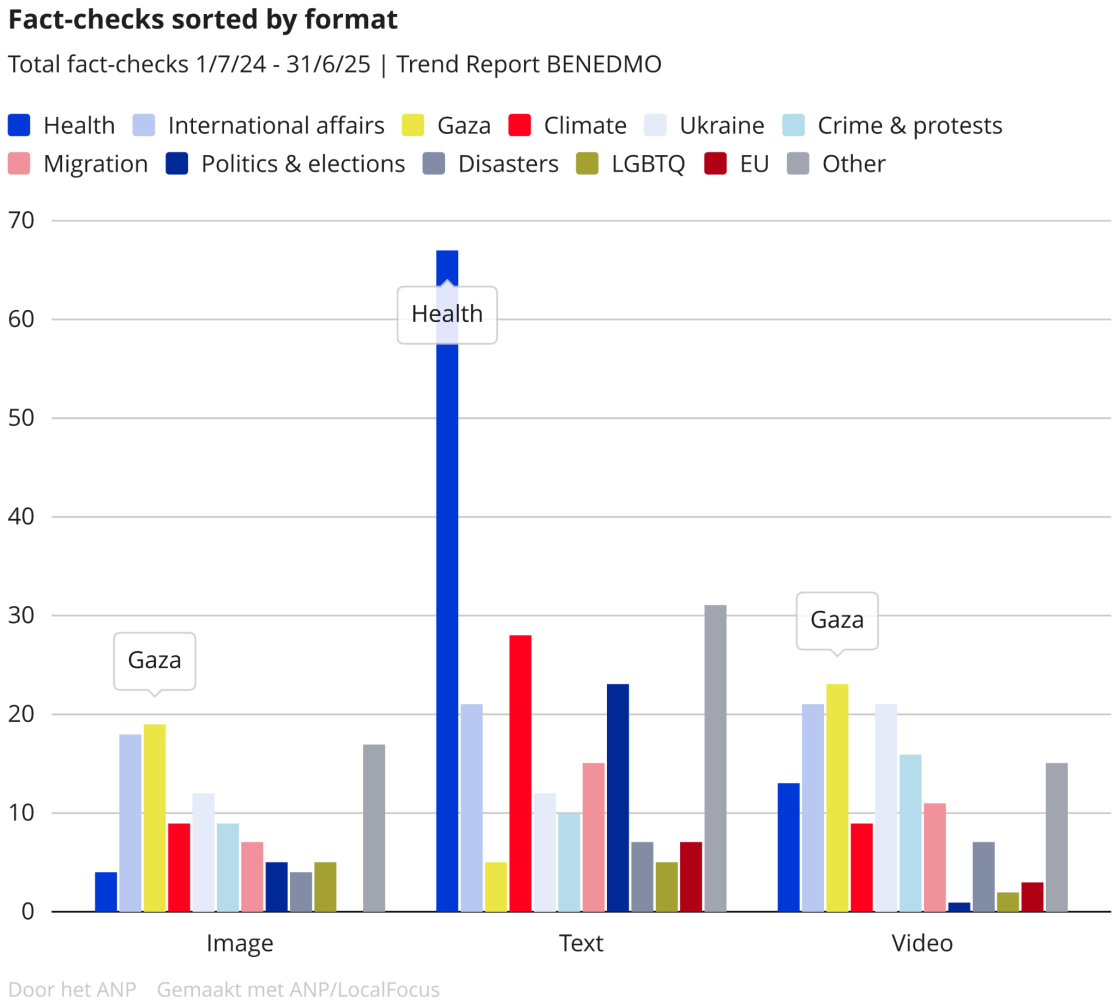
Fact-checks broken down by claim format

The BENEDMO partners conducted fact-checks based on reports in text, photo and audiovisual forms. Of the 482 checks, 231, almost half, were based on a text article. 142 publications were created in response to a video, and in 109 cases images were verified.

Broken down by theme, a clear divergence exists in the format of the fact-checked content. While health fact-checks are overwhelmingly based on text articles, text is also the proportionally more common format for fact-checks related to climate and politics.



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Fact-checks about conflict situations often involve visuals, especially regarding the Gaza conflict, but also the war in Ukraine (mainly videos). These involve photos or videos that have been fabricated, altered, or simply old footage taken out of context. While some of this is genuine war footage, the Ukrainian President has very often been the target of manipulated images intended to damage his or his wife's reputation.

Fact check: Photographs of Zelensky in a suit date from before the Russian invasion

Photos of Volodymyr Zelensky with WEF Chairman Klaus Schwab are circulating online. Social media users are accusing Zelensky of hypocrisy because he wore a traditional men's suit during that meeting, but did not for his most recent visit to the White House. However, the photo with Schwab dates back to January 2020, two years before the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since the invasion, Zelensky has consistently worn modest, military-style clothing.

Example on imagery about the Ukraine war

Other visuals were found to be completely fabricated or manipulated with the aid of Artificial Intelligence. 30 fact-checks specifically concerned generative AI, such as deepfakes or AI-generated images, of which the majority (19) were published in the last three months (April to June 2025). This demonstrates that it is still an emerging phenomenon. Scams often circulate on social media platforms that use deepfakes of famous people to lure them to their website.

Fact check: Beware of fake articles and messages about weather presenter Jacotte Brokken: scammers at work

Fake posts and news articles are circulating on social media once again featuring a VRT personality: this time, weather presenter Jacotte Brokken. Using sensational headlines and exciting false narratives, scammers are attempting to lure you to their website. Once there, they try to con you out of as much money as possible.

Example scam on Facebook using AI-video

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Conclusion

The fact-checking efforts by the BENEDMO partners in the first year of their renewed collaboration resulted in 482 Dutch-language checks, primarily focusing on a mix of conflict and health claims. While health was the largest single category (84 checks), conflict-related topics, including the Gaza conflict and the war in Ukraine, collectively dominated the work with 110 checks, often involving the verification of visual media, such as fabricated or out-of-context photos and videos. The vast majority of claims checked (75%) were found to be "false," a verdict that was especially common for claims concerning conflicts and disasters.

The primary source of fact-checked claims was overwhelmingly social media, prompting two out of every three fact-checks. This digital content, alongside a growing number of claims related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) manipulation, proved highly unreliable. Claims based on text, however, were more frequently used to spread statements on health, climate, and politics. The recurring themes like health and climate, alongside the volatile yet dominant presence of international affairs and conflicts, underscores the importance of fact-checking collaborations, with claims frequently circulating across borders.

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