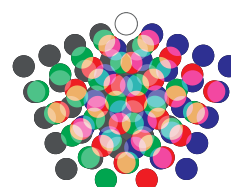


# Limited capacity and big goals

Suggestions for a more effective  
media strategy for smaller  
(intersex) NGO's



A study commissioned by  
**Stichting NNID, Nederlandse organisatie voor seksediversiteit**



**NNID**  
NEDERLANDSE ORGANISATIE  
VOOR SEKSEIVERSITEIT

# Limited capacity and big goals

Suggestions for a more effective media strategy for smaller (intersex) NGO's

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# Samenvatting Nederlands

Intersekse is vaak erg onzichtbaar en onbekend in de maatschappij. Dat geldt in veel landen, maar ook in Nederland. Uit onderzoek blijkt dat twee derde van de Nederlanders niet precies weet wat intersekse betekent (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). Meer kennis draagt bij aan acceptatie, zo blijkt uit hetzelfde onderzoek. Zichtbaarheid in de media kan aan kennisverspreiding bijdragen. Dit onderzoek is erop gericht om kleine NGO's, intersekse-organisaties in het bijzonder, te ondersteunen bij het opstellen van een effectieve mediastrategie met een focus op het vergroten van de zichtbaarheid van hun doelgroep. Om dit te bereiken is een case study verricht naar de mediastrategie van de Nederlandse organisatie voor seksediversiteit, NNID.

## 1.1. Zichtbaarheid van intersekse

Hoe heeft NNID een verschil gemaakt in de zichtbaarheid van intersekse in de Nederlandse media? Deze eerste deelvraag is onderzocht door middel van een bronnenonderzoek naar de Nederlandse media. Media-aandacht in kranten, op websites, en in tv- en radiofragmenten is daarvoor geanalyseerd om tendensen te ontdekken in de zichtbaarheid van intersekse. Hierbij is voortgebouwd op het onderzoek van Lianne Gijben (2021). Om een beeld te krijgen van de bredere zichtbaarheid in de maatschappij, is er een Google Trends analyse gedaan. Hiermee is gekeken hoe vaak er naar termen als "intersekse" gezocht is door de Nederlandse bevolking in de afgelopen jaren.

Om het aandeel van NNID hierin te onderzoeken is gebruik gemaakt van een tweede deelvraag: Hoe ziet NNID's mediastrategie eruit? Hiervoor zijn jaarplannen en jaarverslagen van de organisatie geanalyseerd en zijn NNID-medewerkers geïnterviewd.

## 1.2. De volgende stap

De derde deelvraag focust op het verbeteren van de mediastrategie: Hoe kunnen NNID en vergelijkbare organisaties hun mediastrategie verbeteren om het contact met de media zo effectief mogelijk te maken? Om deze vraag te beantwoorden is er gebruik gemaakt van zogeheten mixed methods. Zo zijn er conclusies getrokken aan de hand van het eerder besproken mediaonderzoek en de Google Trends analyse: welke onderwerpen en aanleidingen komen voor bij intersekse-berichtgeving? Dit is aangevuld met literatuuronderzoek naar sociale bewegingen en de media, en met interviews gehouden met communicatiemedewerkers van alliantiepartners COC Nederland en TNN. Tot slot zijn enkele van NNID's persberichten geanalyseerd en langs de gegeven suggesties van de andere organisaties gelegd.

Bij het formuleren van de suggesties is er rekening gehouden met de beperkte capaciteit van kleine organisaties zoals NNID. Voor grotere organisaties zullen andere tips relevanter zijn.

## 1.3. Resultaten en suggesties

Het bronnenonderzoek laat zien dat er sinds 2017 een groei is in zichtbaarheid van intersekse in de Nederlandse media. Dit was

onder andere het resultaat van gezamenlijke inspanningen van NNID en alliantiepartner COC Nederland om ook in Nederland de I toe te voegen aan het acroniem LHBT. Ook zijn intersekse personen zelf in driekwart van de media-uitingen aan het woord geweest, wat een indicatie geeft van het mensenrechtenperspectief dat in bijna alle media-uitingen gehanteerd werd. Dit perspectief wordt in het bijzonder door NNID gehanteerd en geadviseerd, en verving grotendeels een puur medische kijkwijze (Gijben, 2021). De groei van intersekse zichtbaarheid is ook in de Nederlandse samenleving waarneembaar. In 2021 werd er achtmaal vaker per week "intersekse" als zoekopdracht in Google gegeven dan in 2017. Ook werd er vanaf 2021 consistent vaker naar "intersekse" gezocht dan naar de voor sommigen gevoelig liggende term "hermafrodit" en werd vanaf dat jaar de zoekterm "lhbti" ten opzichte van "lhbt" gangbaarder.

Uit het onderzoek komen de volgende suggesties:

- Bied ondersteuning aan geïnterviewde intersekse personen. Uit het bronnenonderzoek werd duidelijk dat intersekse in de media voornamelijk met persoonlijke verhalen belicht werd. Omdat het belangrijk is om de juiste begeleiding te bieden, is het aan te raden om een gids op te stellen met tips en advies voor intersekse personen die in contact komen met de media.
- Stel een Mediawijzer op voor mediamakers. Om snel op mediaverzoeken te kunnen reageren is het aan te raden om eveneens een gids voor mediamakers op te stellen, waarin informatie te vinden is over intersekse, correct taalgebruik, belangrijke cijfers en het belang van zichtbaarheid van intersekse in de media.
- Maak persberichten aantrekkelijk en benadruk steeds het belang van intersekse zichtbaarheid. Persberichten kunnen aantrekkelijker gemaakt worden door middel van "schokkende" cijfers en menselijke voorbeelden. Ook zouden ze, waar mogelijk, verbonden moeten worden aan de actualiteit, omdat dit meerwaarde biedt aan journalisten. Er is een mogelijkheid om persberichten over onderzoeksrapporten onder embargo te versturen om de exclusiviteit te vergroten. Daarnaast kan er achter een persbericht aangebeld worden naar redacties. Het is bovendien sterk aan te raden om het belang van berichten over intersekse te benadrukken.
- Maak gebruik van een top-down benadering. Hierbij worden internationale mensenrechtenstructuren ingezet om overheden te stimuleren zich in te spannen voor intersekse-inclusie. Ook wordt ingezet op het normstellende karakter van de overheid, die naar voren komt in wetgeving en zichtbaarheids campagnes.

De bovenstaande suggesties zullen nu door NNID en andere (intersekse) organisaties in werking gesteld moeten worden. Een terugblik op de doorgevoerde veranderingen en de ontvangst van de Mediawijzer zal aantonen welke veranderingen effect hebben gehad en waar nog verbetering nodig is.

# Table of contents

<b>Samenvatting Nederlands</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1. <i>Zichtbaarheid van intersekse</i> .....	3
1.2. <i>De volgende stap</i> .....	3
1.3. <i>Resultaten en suggesties</i> .....	3
<b>Table of contents</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
1.1. <i>Research Questions and Design</i> .....	7
1.2. <i>Relevance</i> .....	7
1.3. <i>Reading Guide</i> .....	7
<b>2. The Importance of Media: A Theoretical Framework</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1. <i>Visibility and Acceptance</i> .....	8
2.2. <i>Emancipation</i> .....	8
2.3. <i>Asymmetrical Dependency</i> .....	8
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>9</b>
3.1. <i>Case Study</i> .....	9
3.2. <i>Current Media about Intersex</i> .....	9
3.3. <i>Visibility and acceptance</i> .....	9
3.4. <i>Suggestions</i> .....	9
3.5. <i>Validity</i> .....	9
<b>4. NNID's Strategy for Intersex Visibility in Dutch Media</b> .....	<b>10</b>
4.1. <i>Intersex in Media</i> .....	10
4.2. <i>NNID's gender media strategy and strategic communications</i> .....	10
4.3. <i>Visibility and Acceptance</i> .....	10
4.4. <i>Conclusion</i> .....	11
<b>5. The Next Step: Suggestions for a Future Media Strategy</b> .....	<b>12</b>
5.1. <i>Government</i> .....	12
5.2. <i>Media Requests</i> .....	12
5.3. <i>News Offering</i> .....	12
<b>6. Conclusion &amp; suggestions</b> .....	<b>13</b>
6.1. <i>The Current Situation</i> .....	13
6.2. <i>Suggestions</i> .....	13
6.3. <i>Implementation</i> .....	13

<b>7. Literature list .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>8. Appendix A .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>9. Appendix B .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>10. Appendix C .....</b>	<b>17</b>

## List of abbreviations

<b>COC</b>	COC Netherlands
<b>FRA</b>	EU Fundamental Rights Agency
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NNID</b>	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Seksediversiteit The Netherlands Organisation for Sex diversity
<b>LGBTI</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and intersex
<b>LHBTI</b>	Lesbisch, homo, bi, trans, intersekse
<b>TNN</b>	Transgender Netwerk Nederland

## Summary

Intersex and intersex issues are in many countries still invisible. This is the case as well in Dutch society, where almost two-thirds of the population does not know what intersex is, even though knowledge does contribute to acceptance (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). **This rapport offers smaller NGO's – intersex organisations specifically – tools to improve their media strategy to increase (intersex) visibility, contributing to knowledge distribution and acceptance.** The discussed research is a single case study of NNID, The Netherlands organisation for sex diversity, NNID, which was established in 2013.

This research shows that NNID's effort in working on intersex emancipation, is likely to have left a mark in intersex visibility, as from 2017 onwards intersex visibility in Dutch media and society has increased. This was partly a result of the Dutch government adding the I to LGBT on advice of NNID and alliance partner COC (Dutch LGBTI advocacy organisation). Furthermore, most articles were written through a human rights lens, a perspective pushed by NNID specifically. Moreover, Dutch people have more often googled intersex and used the acronym LHBTI instead of LHBT.

## Preface

When I was a young teenager I first read about intersex. I read a book about a girl who found out she was intersex as a teenager. Throughout my teenage years, I became more activist and more aware of diversity in all its forms. However, besides using the I in the LHBTI acronym, I did not actively support or think about intersex people. Then I became an intern at NNID. I wrote this report to help organisations improve intersex visibility for people like my younger self who have heard about sex diversity but do not actively think about it or for others who have never heard about sex diversity or intersex before.

This publication was commissioned by NNID to help organisations similar to NNID improve their media strategy. As will be shown, an

A challenge for organisations like NNID is a lack of time and capacity to implement a media strategy. A media guide, containing information about intersex and sex diversity, misconceptions and how to talk to intersex people respectfully, could help negotiate this lack of resources. A manual for intersex people, guiding them through interviews with journalists, is another helpful suggestion. Furthermore, press releases from intersex organisations should always be linked to a current event and illustrated with personal experiences. A good practice of NNID is their top-down approach, employing international legal structures to create change in a national context, and making use of the government as norm-setting. This top-down approach is specifically suitable for smaller organisations and/or organisations advocating for a largely invisible or not easy to mobilize group: the strategy is aimed at yielding maximum of results with little effort and does not require investments from the group the organisation is advocating for. These are a few of the steps, organisations could take to improve their media strategy, for a more expansive list see Appendix C. A year into these improvements, a reflection on these improvements is recommended.

effective media strategy can lead to more intersex visibility, which is crucial for acceptance. Visibility has increased, and there is hope it will increase even more in the future to improve the acceptance of the people who have not been part of the debates for a long time.

I would like to thank the people at NNID for welcoming me into the organisation and teaching me more about sex diversity and the work they are doing. I would particularly like to thank Bente Keulen and Mir Abe Marinus for their help and advice with this research. I hope this research will help NNID and similar organisations in reaching their goals.

*Irene van der Sanden*

# 1. Introduction

In 2021, Dutch theatre producer and dancer Marleen Hendrickx produced a play about intersex (marleenhendrickx.nl, n.d.). Together with five other intersex people, she showcased their experiences through music, dance, and theatre. TV show host Humberto Tan discovered the play and invited Marleen and the players to his TV show. Many local newspapers followed the story and interviewed the players from their region (Van Beers, 2021; Wijnands, 2021).

Throughout the years, intersex attention in media has known its ups and downs. This research aims to help smaller human rights organisations, for which this is a relevant goal, to increase media attention for the group they advocate for. It will do so by using NNID as its case, increasing intersex visibility. The Dutch intersex organisation, established in 2013, distinguishes itself from other Dutch intersex organisations through its human rights perspective and advocacy work. DSDNederland and the Dutch Klinefelter Association, among others, support intersex people from a medical standpoint as patient organisations (NNID, z.d.-b). **The human rights perspective is used to fight against “normalising” operations on intersex children and to encourage listening to the experiences of intersex people.** Traditional media like newspapers, tv and radio are tools NNID uses to spread their message and reach its societal and political goals. These goals are:

- “Promoting the visibility and acceptance of sex diversity, and intersex especially, in society.
- Promoting the equality and emancipation of intersex people.
- Promote the (societal) interests of intersex people” (NNID, z.d.-a)

## 1.1. Research Questions and Design

The main goal of this research is to discover in which ways smaller human rights organisations, and intersex organisations specifically, can create and improve an effective media strategy. Looking at the case of NNID, the aim of the media strategy is to increase the visibility of intersex and sex diversity from a human rights perspective in the media. The strategies of Dutch organisation NNID have been studied and analysed as a case study. By comparing the Netherlands to Flanders where no intersex organisation with a stable source of funding is active, the following questions will include the dimension of NNID having obtained significant funding, and the effect of that on the visibility and acceptance of intersex. The questions this report will answer are:

1. How has NNID made a difference in the visibility of intersex in Dutch media?
2. What does NNID’s media strategy look like?
3. How could NNID and other similar organisations improve their media strategy to make contact with the media as effectively as possible?

By giving a current overview of intersex presence in Dutch media, information is gathered on which narratives and information are still missing and which frames are now being used. NNID’s success is being measured by analysing media outings on intersex and sex diversity throughout the years. This, combined with analysing NNID’s current media strategy, will provide an overview of the organisation’s existing best practices and show how the strategy changed the media’s perspective on intersex. Furthermore, an

extensive analysis will be used to give suggestions for further improvement of said media strategy. It will provide NNID and similar NGOs with more tips and tricks to increase visibility in the media. This report will not only help NNID in their future media strategy, it also aims to provide a pathway and suggestions for other smaller NGOs, specifically working on the topic of intersex.

## 1.2. Relevance

In small organisations such as NNID, workloads are heavy and taking the time to pay sufficient attention to media contacts and communications is easily overshadowed by other tasks. However, when raising awareness and increasing visibility are at stake, the importance of media contacts cannot be stressed enough. The importance of increasing intersex visibility in the Netherlands is illustrated by a study in 2020, which found that two-thirds of Dutch people did not know what intersex was (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). A year before, the Eurobarometer (2019) found that the European population’s attitude towards intersex people is significantly less positive than towards LGB people. In 2019, 62% of intersex people in the EU experienced discrimination (FRA, 2020). These numbers show the relevance of visibility and acceptance of intersex in society. As will be explained more thoroughly in the next chapter, organisations such as NNID can enhance this visibility and acceptance through media. Media visibility and narratives can strongly influence society’s narrative. This study, then, finds ways for social movement organisations to improve their media strategy.

## 1.3. Reading Guide

Chapter 2 will show the importance of media for social movement organisations. It demonstrates this importance, as well as the difficulty of contact with the media by using scientific literature. An in-depth description of the research methods that were used for this report is provided in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the visibility and acceptance of intersex people in Dutch media and Dutch society will be shown. Chapter 5 gives suggestions for an improved media strategy. Finally, in Chapter 6, the research questions will be answered, and tips for implementation will be given.



## 2. The Importance of Media: A Theoretical Framework

NNID strives for the visibility, acceptance and emancipation of intersex people and sex diversity in Dutch society. These goals can be reached through media, among others (see Andrews & Caren, 2010; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; McCombs et al, 1997; Pilny et al, 2014). Media attention is an essential source for organisations to reach their goals (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). This chapter elaborates on this importance of media for social movement organisations. Firstly, media's influence on a subject's visibility is discussed. Media's influence on the public discourse and acceptance will then be explained. Afterwards, the link between media and politics is made. Lastly, the asymmetrical relationship between the media and social movement organisations will be discussed.

### 2.1. Visibility and Acceptance

Media attention increases a subject's visibility in society.

Organisations need media to spread their message and goals and communicate with their supporters (Carroll & Ratner, 1999; Molotch; 1979). Furthermore, media helps mobilise society because spreading an organisation's message through media reaches a larger audience than an organisation spreading its message itself (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Visibility could then play a crucial role for Dutch intersex organisations, as a large part of Dutch society does not know what intersex is or has never heard of it (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). A growth in the visibility of intersex in media could cause an increase in society's knowledge about it.

Visibility, and more importantly how media frames a specific topic, can result in a change in public opinion and even acceptance.

Media influences both which conversations are held by the public and what people think (McCombs et al, 1997). The media does this by framing a subject in a certain way (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Baran & Davis, 2009). Frames are used to shine a light on specific events, causes, and consequences, and not on others (Gamson, 2004). It ensures people will think of some subjects as important and others as unimportant. Social movement organisations could, then, raise people's sympathy for their cause through the media, when the media frames their cause in the right way (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). When the media writes articles about intersex from a human rights standpoint, for example, there is a higher chance of more acceptance of intersex people. Furthermore, knowledge centre Rutgers and UZ Gent conclude that knowledge about intersex is "strongly related to the attitudes with respect to intersex people" (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020, pp. 40), indicating the importance of knowledge dissemination to a broad audience, such as through media.

### 2.2. Emancipation

Society's opinions and views influence policy makers' decisions (Ferre et al, 2002). Thus, the political changes the Dutch intersex movement aims to make can be contributed to through the media's influence on public opinion.

Mass media can directly influence the political agenda, as media attention for a social movement can notify politicians of its goals and motivate them to put it on the political agenda (Walgrave & Vliegthart, 2012). When a radio show many politicians listen to

makes an item about intersex, this could move politicians to delve into the subject. Politicians observing media is a way for them to learn about social movement organisations and could result in them taking on ideas from these organisations. For this to happen, organisations need to have standing in the media. Having standing means that the media does not just talk about a movement or organisation but also with said organisation. The organisation has a voice and is taken seriously (Gamson, 2004). Media attention makes social movement organisations relevant actors in a debate (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

### 2.3. Asymmetrical Dependency

Visibility and standing are important, but media attention is scarce (Andrews & Caren, 2010). Media are gatekeepers; they decide which subjects and which organisations receive attention. This creates an asymmetrical dependency (Carroll & Hackett, 2006). Social movement organisations are dependent on media, as media attention can contribute to visibility, acceptance and emancipation. Media are dependent on, among others, social movement organisations since that is where they get their news. However, the dependency is asymmetrical because many organisations fight for media attention, whereas journalists can choose from a large group of subjects and decide what gets media attention (Carroll & Ratner, 1999). Another complication is that social movement organisations often lack knowledge on attracting media attention. This study aims to build knowledge on attracting media attention for NGO's and intersex organisations specifically.



## 3.3. Methodology

### 3.1. Case Study

This research is a qualitative case study analysis, focusing on a single case; NNID. Because it is a single case study, all aspects of media attention can be looked at (Gerring, 2016). NNID was chosen because it started receiving government-subsidy earmarked to be used for intersex emancipation in the Netherlands in 2018. This enables this research to determine, at least to some extent, the effect of this stable source of funding. Furthermore, NNID's top-down approach and associated strategic communications make for an interesting, different case.

### 3.2. Current Media about Intersex

To analyse the current state of intersex visibility in Dutch media, a source research was conducted. A list of newspapers mentioning intersex from an earlier research (Gijben, 2021) was supplemented with other media sources, such as website articles and tv and radio segments about intersex and sex diversity. The list includes sources from 2017 until October 2021, the moment this study started. As 2017 is one year before NNID received a government subsidy, it is possible to measure the effect of this subsidy. Media sources were found by searching specific terms on Google, Youtube and Twitter. For continuity, these terms were copied from *30 Years of Intersex in Dutch Newspapers* (Gijben, 2021) (see Appendix A).

Content and discourse analyses were performed on these sources. The content analysis focused on finding which sources concerned intersex and whether they had directly quoted an intersex person. Furthermore, it focused on whether NNID was mentioned or cited. The discourse analysis determined the frames that were used; already drafted codes were used to find a medical or human rights frame (see Appendix B).

To get a good view of NNID's media strategy during the last five years, annual plans and records of 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 were analysed. The year plans were compared with the actual activities taking place. Furthermore, two NNID employees who have been in contact with the media were interviewed about this strategy.

### 3.3. Visibility and acceptance

As discussed in the introduction, European studies show high rates of discrimination and low rates of acceptance in Europe and in the Netherlands (Eurobarometer, 2019; FRA, 2020). The number of Dutch intersex respondents in these studies concerning discrimination is low. This lowers their reliability but still provides an indication. The Dutch number corresponds with the European outcomes. A recent study by Van Ditzhuijzen and Motmans (2020) provides an additional picture of the current visibility and acceptance of intersex people in Dutch society specifically and is used in this paper. The study analyses the Netherlands and Flanders. As the latter does not have a government-subsidized intersex organisation, the effect of such an organisation will be discernible.

Furthermore, to determine whether media attention has caused an increase in visibility and acceptance of intersex people in Dutch society, a Google Trends analysis was conducted. This tool was used to determine how often Dutch people googled 'intersekse' (intersex), 'intersekse personen' (intersex people) and 'seksediversiteit' (sex diversity) in the past five years. Comparisons were made between search terms 'intersekse' en 'hermafrodiët' (hermaphrodite) and between 'LHBT' and 'LHBTI' to determine possible shifts in perspectives/discourse.

### 3.4. Suggestions

Suggestions for a future, more effective media strategy have been obtained in different ways. Firstly, relevant literature was consulted. Additionally, the results from the aforementioned source research led to some suggestions. Furthermore, interviews were held with NNID employees and with communications employees from NNID's alliance partners COC and TNN. These employees were asked what their organisation's contact with the media looks like and if they have any tips for intersex organisations looking to expand their influence and visibility in the media. Lastly, some of NNID's press releases were analysed.

### 3.5. Validity

A weakness of this study is that many factors will determine a social movement organisation's success. It is not possible to measure precisely which strategies contributed to an increase in media attention for intersex, as external factors could have also played a role. The validity of this research was increased by measuring processes over time (Giugni, 1999, pp. XXIV). Media attention was measured over several years. This increases the possibility of recognizing the mechanisms that underlie creating media attention (Giugni, 1999).

The validity of this research was further increased by building on earlier research by Gijben (2021). Lists of terms relating to intersex and codes pertaining to medical or human rights frames were critically examined and then used to increase the internal validity of the research.

Lastly, different research methods were used to analyse the same phenomenon. For example, when analysing the visibility of intersex in Dutch society, the results from a Google Trends analysis and a research report interviewing Dutch people were used. Using multiple research methods strengthens a study (Patton, 2002).

## 4. NNID's Strategy for Intersex Visibility in Dutch Media

### 4.1. Intersex in Media

Earlier research on the visibility of intersex in major Dutch newspapers indicated that since 2017 a growth has occurred in the number of times intersex appeared (Gijben, 2021). When including tv and radio segments, as well as website articles, this **increase of intersex visibility in Dutch media** is further confirmed. In 2017, intersex appeared 63 times in Dutch media. In 2020 this was 72 times.

The share NNID had in these media appearances has also increased. From 2017 until 2021, NNID was mentioned or quoted in 35,9% of media about intersex. In 2017 this was only 26,3%. Intersex people were quoted in 69,7% of all media outings about intersex between 2017 and 2021. A small growth between 2017 and 2021 was noticeable. The large presence of intersex people's voices could be the cause of the significant presence of the human rights frame in media. From 2017 onwards, more than 90% of media publications about intersex used a human rights frame. The shift from using mostly medical frames to using mostly human rights frames happened in 2017, and the use of the human rights frame in media has only grown since then (Gijben, 2021). NNID's efforts have likely been an important factor in this shift.

### 4.2. NNID's gender media strategy and strategic communications

Central to NNID's media strategy are its strategic communications, resulting from the organisation's **top-down approach**. As a result of limited resources, NNID works with a small team and is forced to work effectively and efficiently. Therefore, focus lies on processes that require relatively little work but result in a maximum of change. More specifically, **NNID makes use of the international intersex movement and structures of international law, including the processes of several UN human rights convention committees**. In this way, NNID motivates the Dutch government to work on intersex and sex diversity acceptance and emancipation.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, **this strategy allows NNID to advocate for intersex people without having to rely on them**. This is a necessity because intersex people are often not openly intersex because of recommended secrecy and medicalisation, rendering the group largely invisible. Instead, NNID relies mainly on the government to create change in society and on the assumption that inclusive media attention will follow the government's lead.

An illustration of this top-down approach is the addition of the I to the Dutch LHBTI acronym (Lesbians, Homosexuals, Bisexuals, Transgender people, Intersex people) in government policies and communications. By simultaneously contributing to the international intersex movement and working together with COC (Dutch LGBTI advocacy organisation) and TNN (Dutch transgender advocacy organisation), NNID put pressure on the Dutch government and relevant departments to include intersex. This led to more inclusive governmental communications and policy changes (for example adding intersex as a possible ground for asylum seeking). Furthermore, it enabled intersex organisations to apply for government-subsidies, allowing for an additional stable

source of funding. As a result of this governmental inclusion and NNID forming an alliance with TNN and COC, Dutch media started including intersex when talking about LGBTI issues from 2017 onwards (Gijben, 2021). This increased intersex visibility in the Netherlands, as will be shown in the next paragraph, and has contributed to more knowledge about intersex in Dutch society.

In addition to the top-down strategy, **NNID's media strategy** consists of five elements. **First, when a journalist contacts NNID, the organisation might give interviews or advice on how to best report on intersex issues. Second, NNID calls the media to account for mistakes in their reporting about intersex. Third, NNID has contacts with journalists on how to be intersex-inclusive. Fourth, when a journalist asks NNID to bring them into contact with an intersex person to interview, the organisation guides the intersex interviewee. Last, NNID sends press releases, for example, about research results or calls to Dutch Parliament, together with alliance partners TNN and COC. In the latter case, media contact is directly aimed at influencing Dutch politics and is used to contribute to NNID's top-down approach.**

### 4.3. Visibility and Acceptance

In 2020, research institutes Rutgers and UZ Gent conducted research on knowledge and opinions on intersex in the Netherlands and Flanders (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). They asked respondents if they knew what intersex was and what they thought of intersex and intersex people. The inclusion of two regions in the study is useful because the Belgian region does not have intersex organisation with significant funding, whereas the Netherlands does.

There was a significant difference between Dutch and Flemish respondents when asked if they thought they knew what intersex was. 50,7% of Dutch respondents answered "yes" or "a little" to the question. For Flemish respondents, this was 45,5% (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). After providing the definition of intersex and repeating the question if they had indeed known what intersex was, it became apparent that **only 36,7% of the Dutch respondents and 32,9% of the Flemish respondent had had actual prior knowledge of intersex**. The relative difference between the Dutch and Flemish respondents remained.

However, there was not a significant difference to be noted in the acceptance of intersex people by Dutch and Flemish respondents. Relevant questions on this topic were answered irregularly, making it more challenging to compare Flanders to the Netherlands. Flemish respondents were more accepting of intersex people in response to the statement "I would rather not hang out with people who are intersex" (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). Dutch respondents answered more positively than Flemish respondents on statements such as "Intersex should not be a taboo" and "I would feel comfortable when a close colleague would be intersex". There is no significant difference in acceptance of intersex people between Dutch and Flemish respondents. **Van Ditzhuijzen and Motmans do conclude that respondents who had prior knowledge of intersex responded significantly more positively on the questions about the acceptance of intersex people.**

Furthermore, in Flanders and the Netherlands, when having an intersex baby, a large number of respondents would wait with a

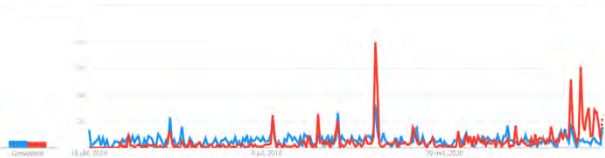
<sup>1</sup> Until recently (2021), NNID played an vital role in the international intersex human rights movement as well, helping other intersex organisations to reach relevant UN treaty committees.

medically non-necessary surgery until their child could make the decision themselves (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). Notably, 67,6% of Dutch and 61,9% of Flemish respondents agreed with this statement. Interestingly, when the statement is written on a more abstract level (“If a child does not have distinctive male or female sex characteristics, it should be surgically corrected”), Flemish respondents are more critical of sex-normalising surgeries. 32,9% of Flemish respondents agreed, against 40,4% of Dutch respondents. It is difficult, then, to draw any conclusion on the public opinion on the medicalization of intersex, based on these numbers.

A Google Trends analysis shows **the visibility of intersex has increased in the Netherlands in the past five years**. An increase in Dutch people searching “intersekse” (intersex) and “intersekse personen” (intersex people) on Google took place in 2020 and 2021 (Google Trends, z.d.-a). In 2017, internet users entered these terms into the search machine on average 0,9 times per week. In 2021, this was 8,2 times.

A comparison was made between the terms “intersekse” and “hermafrodiet” (hermaphrodite). Before 2021, people predominantly entered “hermafrodiet” into the Google search bar (Google Trends, z.d.-b). This is often perceived as a derogatory term nowadays. In 2021, “intersekse” took the upper hand, “Hermafrodiet” is used for plants and animals, so the results are not fully interpretable. However, three of the five most popular related search terms are about humans. Therefore, combining this with the fact that more people searched “intersekse” than the outdated “hermafrodiet” in 2021 shows an increase in the correct use of language for intersex people by Dutch society. This increase could be the result of the increased visibility of intersex in Dutch media and NNID’s efforts in this.

As discussed, in 2017 the Dutch government added the I for intersex to the Dutch LHBTI acronym. As Gijben (2021) showed in her research, media follow this addition, contributing to a steep increase in the number of times news articles mentioned intersex. Many articles that mention the LGBTI community write down the meaning of the acronym, thus adding a reminder that the I stands for Intersex. A few years later, the effect of this change in language becomes visible in other public usages of the acronym. In 2020, “LHBTI” instead of “LHBT” was more popular on Google (Google Trends, z.d.-c). In 2021 this trend was even more consistent. This indicates that there is more inclusiveness of intersex people in the LGBTI community and more visibility of the I in Dutch society.



Blue=LHBT Red=LHBTI

Source. “Google Trends Vergelijken” by Google Trends, z.d.-c

#### 4.4. Conclusion

NNID’s media strategy entailing both a general media strategy and strategic communications, has brought success. Visibility of intersex has increased, as shown by the media analysis and the Google Trends analyses. Furthermore, the comparison between the

Netherlands and Flanders showed that knowledge about intersex is greater in the Netherlands than in the Belgian region, indicating the positive effects of an intersex organisation with stable sources of funding. NNID implemented a top-down approach to achieve this, which was combined with a general media strategy focused on responding to requests, contacting media when mistakes are made in reporting on intersex issues, advising journalists on inclusiveness, guiding interviewees, and sending out press releases.

## 5. The Next Step: Suggestions for a Future Media Strategy

While success has been made, and an increase in visibility of intersex in both media and among Dutch people is noticeable, we are not there yet. NNID still faces challenges. For example, Dutch media continues to confuse sex and gender, and to use terms as “interseksueel” (intersexual) instead of “interseks persoon” (intersex person). Furthermore, NNID being a small organisation results in a lack of capacity to spend time and energy on media. The following suggestions could help NNID and organisations with similar struggles improve contact with the media and intersex visibility in media.

### 5.1. Government

Firstly, NNID’s current top-down strategy of working on changing policy and policy changes trickling down into media visibility is working. Focusing on urging the government to include intersex in policies regarding LGBTI or other societal issues and working with alliance partners such as TNN and COC, is an excellent way to increase its visibility in society. When intersex is often mentioned, the media will adopt this. Secondly, NNID and other intersex organisations could **urge the government to create campaigns** surrounding intersex and intersex acceptance. In 2019, the government launched the “Iedereen is anders” (Everyone is different) campaign, informing young people about different sexual orientations and helping them discover their gender identity (Movisie, 2019). This campaign also focused on informing parents and professionals on how to support LGBTI people. Even though the campaign focused on the LGBTI community, including the I, intersex was not actively included in the campaign. A campaign similar to this, but entirely focused on intersex and sex diversity, directed at intersex people, parents, and non-intersex people, would create more visibility and acceptance.

### 5.2. Media Requests

Media often come to NNID with requests to interview an intersex person. ‘The press’ door is open wider when they want something than when you bring something’, said one of NNID’s alliance partners. This statement is in line with the theory on asymmetrical dependence. Media decides which subjects and organisations receive attention (Carroll & Hackett, 2006). The stories journalists prefer are personal ones. Most articles mentioned in Chapter 4 were personal stories about intersex people. NNID has a list of intersex people that might be willing to talk to the press about their experiences. TNN gives interviewees media training to make them more resilient in interviews. While this is a great suggestion, it costs a lot of time. As a time-efficient alternative, **a guide for intersex interviewees to help them with their first interview would be helpful.**

Media requests are numerous. Therefore, it is essential to consider which requests to respond to carefully. Publications with a large audience or radio shows many politicians listen to, are a good start. It is helpful to **prioritize beforehand which media outlets and stations should be handled with more attention**, and to register these considerations in the organisation’s media strategy. These should be media outlets with a larger audience, audiences with politicians and audiences with less knowledge about intersex. As indicated in Chapter 2, media attention can make politicians aware

of a problem. Thus, a media outlet with a politicians’ audience is valuable (Walgrave & Vliegthart, 2012).

When a request comes in, responding needs to be done quickly. News moves fast. Due to a lack of capacity, reacting immediately is challenging. Therefore, **creating a media guide containing essential information for media makers on intersex and sex diversity** is important. This guide, a “Mediawijzer”, is already in the making at NNID and includes what intersex is, which terms to use for intersex people, what to say and not to say to an intersex person, and why the I is added to LHBTI. The document will be sent to the press when a request comes in. It makes it easier and less time-consuming to respond to journalists’ requests.

When contact with a journalist is made, this contact must be maintained. Having an extensive network is important because that journalist might come back for another story about intersex.

### 5.3. News Offering

When offering news or information to the media, NNID should do so in an attractive manner, and the importance of giving media attention to intersex needs to be clear. **When sending out a press release about research results, using shocking numbers and vivid personal examples is essential.** For example, when NNID sent out a press release about Rutgers’ research on knowledge and opinions on intersex, they could have written down that only 36,7% of Dutch people know what intersex is. A quote from an organisation’s director is also important. Illustrating a press release with personal experiences adds strongly to its appeal. For example, personal stories of an intersex person’s experience with a doctor should be added to press releases concerning intersex people and the medical world. Furthermore, research reports could be sent under embargo, which contributes to the exclusivity of the information, making it more attractive to journalists. Finally, it is crucial to link a press release to something currently happening. The press wants news that is current and linking a press release to a current event could increase the chances of your news or information being shared. For example, press releases during Pride Month or Intersex Awareness Day have a higher chance of being picked up than a press release on any regular day. When a press release is sent out, it can be helpful to call certain journalists or offices. They could remember your name after the call and will come to the organisation for news or information in the future. A new contact within the media is made. A more extensive network increases an organisation’s standing in the media (Gamson, 2004). **Media talks with, instead of about, the organisation.**

These relatively small adjustments increase the chances of gaining media attention. As seen before, media attention can lead to visibility, acceptance and policy change (Carroll & Ratner, 1999; McCombs et al, 1997; Walgrave & Vliegthart, 2012). The adjustments do not require a major investment in resources and will contribute to the organisation’s network and to intersex visibility.

## 6. Conclusion & suggestions

### 6.1. The Current Situation

Media attention on intersex has grown in the years between 2017 and 2021 in the Netherlands. NNID was also mentioned or cited more in 2021 than in 2017, and a clear increase in how often intersex people are quoted is visible. An increase in how often Dutch people googled “intersekse” was noted, and since 2020, people have primarily used “LHBTI” instead of “LHBT” in their Google searches, following the Dutch government and the media adding the I to the acronym in 2017. This growing visibility of intersex in Dutch society is much needed when looking at the level of intersex acceptance, as shown in Van Ditzhuijzen & Motman’s research (2020). However, it must be noted that increased visibility might not only lead to acceptance by some people but might also add to the already worrying numbers of hate crimes and hate speech directed at intersex people and the intersex community (OII Europe, 2021, pp. 5).

On the one hand, NNID’s media strategy consists of strategic communications in a top-down approach, meaning they focus on institutions such as the UN and the Dutch government to work on intersex emancipation and improve intersex visibility in the media. The addition of the I in LHBTI is a successful example of this strategy. This top-down approach is specifically suitable for smaller organisations and/or organisations advocating for a largely invisible or not easy to mobilize group: the strategy is aimed at yielding maximum of results with little effort and does not require investments from the group the organisation is advocating for. On the other hand, NNID’s media strategy includes giving advice and interviews, contacting journalists about being intersex inclusive and supporting intersex people in media. NNID has responded to press requests and has sent out press releases.

Having compared the Netherlands to Flanders, research suggests that NNID’s success is possibly due to the organisation receiving stable funding, government-subsidies among others, allowing for a professional organisation. Knowledge of intersex is significantly more present among Dutch respondents than Flemish respondents (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020).

### 6.2. Suggestions

Even though intersex visibility is increasing and NNID has booked successes with the government regarding intersex inclusion, knowledge about intersex is still lacking in Dutch society. Research shows that almost two-thirds of Dutch respondents do not know what intersex is, while knowledge is key to a positive attitude

towards intersex people (Van Ditzhuijzen & Motmans, 2020). Media is a powerful tool to reach both the general public and to influence politicians, as discussed by Carroll & Ratner (1999), McCombs et al (1997) and Walgrave & Vliegenthart (2012) – a tool which can be employed to create a shift regarding societal attitudes towards intersex. It is crucial, then, for NNID and other smaller human rights organisations to maximize their contact with the media, to reach their political goals and therefore work indirectly on intersex visibility, and in their communication with journalists working directly on intersex visibility.

Journalist requests will keep coming, and press releases will continue to be written, but how smaller NGO’s, intersex-organisations specifically, deal with this could change and become more effective with the following suggestions (for an extensive list of suggestions, see Appendix C):

- Increase your network of journalists and focus on maintaining that network.
- Create a guide for intersex interviewees to support them in their contact with the media.
- When news is offered, make it human, personal, sometimes shocking, and always related to current events. A combination of a good story with an important message is the key to success.
- Be aware of which media requests reach the largest, or still missing, audience. A strict outline of this in a media strategy helps to prioritize and formulate quicker responses to media requests.
- Create a document like a media guide, which will help with quick responses.
- Employ a top-down approach and/or improve the top-down approach by urging the government to include intersex in more policies and to set up intersex-related government campaigns.

### 6.3. Implementation

This report looked at NNID’s relationship with the media. Suggestions were given on how this and other organisations could improve this relationship. The first step for any organisation implementing the suggestions is to assess the applicability of the suggestions, prioritize the suggestions keeping in mind any limited capacity and assess the implementation process. As the research on NNID shows, if possible, obtaining a stable source of funding is strongly recommended, enabling an organisation to gain experience and knowledge and build their standing with the media.

A reflection, after one or two years, on the visibility of the target group in media and the contact with media will show whether the changes that were made have been effective and what can be further improved.



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## 8. Appendix A

Search Word
Intersekse
Interseksuelen
Seksediversiteit
DSD/intersekse OF intersekse/DSD
Disorders of Sex Development
Hermafrodiet
Hermafroditisme
Echt Hermafroditisme
Mannelijk pseudo-hermafroditisme
Vrouwelijk pseudo-hermafroditisme
Pseudo-hermafroditisme
Hypospadie
Interseksualiteit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Androgeen Ongevoeligheid Syndroom OF AOS</li> <li>- Compleet Androgeen Ongevoeligheid Syndroom</li> <li>- Partieel Androgeen Ongevoeligheid Syndroom</li> <li>- Morris-syndroom</li> </ul>
Androgenitaalsyndroom OF Androgenitaal syndroom
Anti-Müller-Hormoon
Conditions Affecting Reproductive Development (CARD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gonadale dysgenesie</li> <li>- Syndroom van Swyer</li> </ul>
Klinefelter Syndroom OF Syndroom van Klinefelter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MRK-Syndroom</li> <li>- MRKH-Syndroom</li> </ul>
Turner Syndroom OF Syndroom van Turner

Source. "30 Years of Intersex in Dutch Newspapers" by L. Gijben, 2021, pp. 15.



## 9. Appendix B

The medical frame	The human rights frame
Only uses the term 'Disorders of Sex Development' (DSD), and sometimes "Differences" (instead of disorder).	Only uses the word 'intersex', rejects the term DSD.
Research from a medical perspective (intersex is seen as a medical issue)	Research from a social scientific perspective (sees the views and perspectives of society as the issue)
Sees sex as binary: human bodies should look like the normative standards that have been set up for male and female bodies.	Sees sex as a spectrum: human bodies come in an endless amount of different variations and do not have to look like the normative standards that have been made for men and women.
In favour of surgeries on intersex children, also when they are not medically necessary.	Strongly against non-consensual, medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex people (but not against medically necessary surgeries)
Focuses on the medical treatment of intersex people and strives to improve the medical treatment for intersex individuals	Advocates for and defends the rights of intersex people, emphasises the bodily autonomy, integrity and right to make decisions of intersex people and children
Argues that parents can make choices for their children	Argues that parents should not make choices for their intersex children
Rejects the term 'intersex' and the idea that intersex can be a part of the LGBTI community	Argues that intersex people can call themselves however they want to and can choose themselves whether they want to be part of the LGBTI community
Focuses on hospitals, patients and denies the diversity of sex	Focuses on society, individual experiences and the diversity of sex
Wants intersex to continue to be medicalised	Wants to demedicalise intersex

Source: "30 Years of Intersex in Dutch Newspapers" by L. Gijben, 2021, pp. 16.

## 10. Appendix C

Suggestions for an improved media strategy – towards more (intersex) visibility in the media:

- Obtain a steady source of funding, such as longer-term government-subsidy
- Top-down strategy
  - Urge the government to include intersex and sex diversity in their policies, using UN human rights conventions and other international mechanisms
  - Urge the government to create media campaigns ABOUT intersex
- To improve response time on media requests
  - Develop a media strategy, including protocols and a priority list
  - Develop a media guide, containing essential information including intersex in the media
  - Anticipate on themes that will most likely become news
  - Check for mistakes, but be lenient, considering a lack of capacity
- Develop a media training guide
- Make press releases interesting
  - by adding a personal story (which also illustrates the importance of more intersex visibility)
  - by including shocking numbers (which can also contribute to illustrating the importance of intersex visibility)
  - by including a quote from the organisation’s director
  - by sending information under embargo
  - by linking it to a current day event
  - by stressing the importance of news coverage of intersex issues
- Develop a network
  - Create alliances with likewise organisations to create more standing and contacts
  - Call journalists or news offices after a press release

### English

For more publications in English, see: [thisisintersex.org/publications](https://thisisintersex.org/publications)  
More information on intersex in English: [thisisintersex.org](https://thisisintersex.org)  
Database on intersex rights in English: [intersexrights.org](https://intersexrights.org)

### Nederlands

Voor publicaties in het Nederlands zie: [seksediversiteit.nl/publicaties](https://seksediversiteit.nl/publicaties)  
Informatie over intersekse in het Nederlands: [seksediversiteit.nl](https://seksediversiteit.nl)  
Informatie over Stichting NNID: [nnid.nl](https://nnid.nl)

***Dutch media  
continues to  
confuse  
sex and gender  
and to use terms as  
“interseksueel”  
(intersexual)  
instead of  
“intersekse persoon”  
(intersex person).***