

## Country Report

# Journalists in Finland

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## Backgrounds of Journalists

A typical journalist in Finland is likely to be female in her early forties with a university degree from journalism or communication. Of the 366 interviewed journalists, 202 were women, which accounts for 55.2 percent of the overall sample. On average, Finnish journalists were 43.40 years old ( $s=10.01$ ), and half of the surveyed journalists were younger than 43 years. Their level of education is fairly high: 74.6 percent held a university or a college degree. It is notable that about half had an MA degree. However, only 1.1 percent of journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, while 13.1 percent had undertaken some university studies but had not completed their studies. Of those respondents who had studied in a higher education institution (with or without a degree), 63.4 percent had specialized in journalism and/or communication. Across the whole sample of Finnish journalists, 55.6 percent had specialized in journalism and/or communication.

## Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Finland held a full-time position (78.1%), whereas 3.6 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 17.5 percent worked as freelance journalists. Of those with full or part-time employment, 87.3 percent said they held permanent positions, and 12.7 percent worked on a temporary contract.

On average, Finnish journalists had worked as journalists for 17.27 years ( $s=9.88$ ), with the median falling at 15 years. Over half of the journalists worked as general reporters (52.1%) whereas the rest (47.9%) focused on a specific beat, most typically current affairs, culture or politics. A vast majority of Finnish journalists (83.0%) only worked for a single newsroom, and the average was 1.77 newsrooms ( $s=2.22$ ). 13.2 percent of journalists had additional jobs outside of journalism. Finnish journalists are well organized: 91.3 percent of respondents were members of a professional association.

Most Finnish journalists said they worked across mediums, but when prompted to choose one, the majority in the sample stated they worked mainly for print media. 30.9 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 27.3 percent to magazines, and 11.2 percent to weekly newspapers. In broadcasting, 12.8 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service radio, and 10.7 percent for private or public television. Only a few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (2.7%). Working primarily for online media was not very typical for the interviewed journalists either: 3.8 percent reported to work for online newsrooms of traditional media, and 0.5 percent for stand-alone online news sites.

## Journalistic Roles

With regard to professional role orientations, Finnish journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to be a detached observer, and to provide analysis of current affairs (see Table 1). The relevance of these “classic” Western roles was fairly undisputed among journalists as can be seen from the relatively low standard deviations. As the fourth most important role there emerged the importance of telling stories about the world, which indicates that a more interpretative or narrative role seems important for Finnish journalist on top of the observational and analytic ones. This can also relate to a relatively high proportion of magazine journalists in the sample.

There was also strong consensus over what was not regarded important. Supporting government policy and conveying a positive image of political leadership were clearly regarded as the least important roles.

The additional roles that can be regarded to reflect the professional orientation of journalists in Finland can be characterized as “critical-democratic”. These roles were regarded as very or extremely important by the majority of the respondents: to let people express their views, promote tolerance and cultural diversity, monitor and scrutinize political leaders, provide information people need to make political decisions, monitor and scrutinize businesses, and educate the audience.

Furthermore, separating themselves from the more politically active and assertive roles also united the majority of the respondents. Acting as an adversary of the government and setting the political agenda were regarded little important or unimportant by over half of the respondents.

*Table 1: Roles of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	366	91.5	4.55	.72
Be a detached observer	366	91.5	4.51	.73
Provide analysis of current affairs	366	85.8	4.30	.79
Tell stories about the world	364	76.9	4.09	.87
Let people express their views	366	69.1	3.84	1.01
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	363	67.5	3.89	1.03
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	365	63.8	3.73	1.30
Provide information people need to make political decisions	363	62.3	3.61	1.25
Monitor and scrutinize business	364	55.8	3.55	1.24
Educate the audience	365	50.4	3.46	.99
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	366	42.6	3.34	1.01
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	366	38.0	3.22	1.02
Influence public opinion	361	34.1	3.12	.98
Advocate for social change	363	30.9	2.98	1.04
Provide entertainment and relaxation	364	28.3	2.99	1.07
Support national development	359	27.6	2.94	1.02
Motivate people to participate in political activity	365	20.8	2.57	1.15
Set the political agenda	353	15.0	2.37	1.07
Be an adversary of the government	347	11.0	2.08	1.09
Convey a positive image of political leadership	364	1.1	1.25	.55
Support government policy	357	.0	1.20	.45

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant

## Professional Ethics

Finnish journalists demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always

adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of context (see Table 2). Furthermore, almost two thirds of the respondents disagreed with the view that ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment and even more distance was expressed towards the idea that it would be acceptable to set aside moral standards in extraordinary circumstances. Slightly more variation was found in the case of situational ethics: more than a third of journalists said that journalists' ethical decisions depend on the specific situation.

However, the picture was more mixed with regard to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. When working on an important story, a large majority of journalists found it acceptable to use confidential business or government documents without authorization and to utilize re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, at least on occasion (see Table 3). Also, most journalists thought it was justifiable to do undercover research to gain inside information, to use hidden microphones or cameras, to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, or to claim to be somebody else. The techniques that were most clearly renounced, however, were taking money from sources and altering or fabricating quotes from sources.

*Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "strongly" and "somewhat agree"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	366	97.8	4.65	.59
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	365	36.2	2.60	1.36
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	365	25.8	2.40	1.24
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	365	15.6	1.97	1.15

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

*Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	333	17.7	61.9
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	352	11.1	73.0
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	356	10.1	55.1
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	356	9.6	67.7
Using hidden microphones or cameras	362	3.3	66.9
Claiming to be somebody else	356	2.5	62.1
Publishing stories with unverified content	363	2.2	43.8
Paying people for confidential information	357	1.1	40.3
Altering photographs	353	1.1	23.5
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	355	.8	29.9
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	366	.8	1.4
Accepting money from sources	365	.5	.0

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

## Professional Autonomy and Influences

Finnish journalists reported a relatively high degree of professional autonomy. Three out of four respondents (74.5%) said that they had complete or a great deal of

freedom to select their stories, and even more freedom was perceived in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story (79.9% regarded to have complete or a great deal of freedom). In addition, Finnish newsroom culture appears rather inclusive in the light of these results: 74.0 percent of respondents reported that they participate in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often”.

Despite the sense of autonomy, news production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interview, “journalism ethics” was on top of the list among Finnish respondents (see Table 4), which is in line with the strong commitment to professional ethics reported above. It was followed on the list by media laws and regulations.

In addition, a clear majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by the scarcity of news-gathering resources as well as time. Moreover, their work was heavily influenced by editorial policy. This indicates that internal factors related to organizational features seem to impact Finnish journalists’ work more than external ones.

This observation was confirmed by the bottom of the list. The respondents reported very little influence by censorship, government officials, politicians, pressure groups, military and the police, business people, owners, advertising considerations, profit expectations, managers of the news organizations, and PR. The influence of colleagues in other media and friends, acquaintances and family was also minor. All this suggests that Finnish journalists regard themselves distant from direct political, government, business and personal influences.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	366	88.8	4.34	.73
Media laws and regulation	365	75.9	3.99	.99
Time limits	366	69.1	3.86	.85
Availability of news-gathering resources	356	68.5	3.87	.90
Editorial policy	363	66.1	3.78	.93
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	361	47.4	3.43	.83
Your personal values and beliefs	363	42.4	3.38	.96
Information access	361	40.7	3.08	1.22
Relationships with news sources	365	33.4	3.06	1.04
Audience research and data	357	24.9	3.02	.87
Your peers on the staff	350	21.7	2.90	.89
Feedback from the audience	366	21.0	2.89	.90
Competing news organizations	366	19.1	2.90	.82
Government officials	361	14.7	2.24	1.10
Friends, acquaintances and family	362	11.0	2.46	.94
Profit expectations	332	9.9	2.04	1.06
Politicians	361	8.3	1.96	1.00
Managers of the news organization	339	7.7	2.05	.96
Owners of the news organization	338	7.4	1.83	.97
Colleagues in other media	366	5.2	2.28	.83
Public relations	359	5.0	2.07	.86
Military, police and state security	363	5.0	1.69	.92
Pressure groups	363	3.9	1.88	.91
Business people	364	3.8	1.82	.85
Censorship	357	2.5	1.35	.74
Advertising considerations	328	1.5	1.58	.77

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.



## Journalism in Transition

Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to the surveyed Finnish journalists, the overall importance of technical skills and the use of search engines had most profoundly increased over the last five years (see Table 5). Moreover, a clear majority of the respondents saw that interaction with audiences and the average working hours had increased.

At the other end, most of the interviewed journalists felt that the time available for researching stories had decreased, as well as journalism's public credibility. They also thought that their professional freedom had decreased. The only thing whose importance had remained relatively constant was having a degree in journalism or a related field.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With the exception of journalism's ethical standards, whose influence had remained more or less constant, influence from all the other sources mentioned in Table 6 had increased considerably. The increase was regarded particularly big in competition and profit-making pressures as well as social media and user-generated content. The increase of the importance of audiences was somewhat smaller in comparison but still noteworthy. Thus, the most strongly perceived influences in Finland arise from the domains of economy, technology and audience behavior.

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

*Table 5: Changes in journalism*

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
Technical skills	338	95.3	.3
The use of search engines	338	93.5	.6
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	332	78.9	8.7
Average working hours of journalists	326	66.3	4.3
The relevance of journalism for society	338	32.8	24.3
Having a university degree	316	32.0	18.7
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	311	24.1	21.5
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	325	13.8	44.3
The credibility of journalism	331	10.9	54.7
Time available for researching stories	337	6.8	79.8

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in [country]. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

*Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism*

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook or Twitter	339	97.3	.3
Competition	338	93.8	2.1
User-generated contents, such as blogs	339	93.2	.6
Profit making pressures	337	91.7	.6
Audience involvement in news production	338	82.5	2.4
Pressure toward sensational news	335	71.6	4.5
Advertising considerations	313	66.8	6.7
Audience research	324	62.7	3.7
Audience feedback	333	51.7	8.4
Public relations	321	44.5	10.0
Journalism education	301	44.2	16.3
Ethical standards	332	33.1	30.4

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in [country]. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

### **Methodological Information**

<i>Size of the population:</i>	7726 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally random sampling for newsrooms and purposively chosen based on quota & convenience sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	366 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	Method, method and method
<i>Response rate:</i>	50-55%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	03/2013-08/2013