

Country Report

Journalists in Estonia

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The average Estonian journalist is a woman in her early 40s and holds a university degree in journalism or communication. Estonia is among the 19 countries (out of 66 surveyed countries) where majority of journalists are women. Of the 274 interviewed journalists, 160 were women, making for a proportion of 58.4 percent of the overall sample. On average, Estonian journalists were 40.94 years old ($s=11.11$), while half of the journalists were under 40 years old. 81.7 percent of the respondents held a university degree: 27.1 had Bachelor's degree, 54.2 percent held Master's degree, one respondent had a doctorate. Another 10.3 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Of those respondents who held a university degree, 44.8 percent had specialized in journalism, 8.1 percent in communication and 3.2 percent in both journalism and communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The vast majority of journalists interviewed in Estonia held a full-time position (93.4%) whereas 4.8 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, four were freelancers and one worked under other contractual conditions. Of those with full or part-time employment, 87.3 percent said they held permanent positions.

On average, Estonian journalists had worked as journalists for 13.54 years ($s=9.37$). However, only about a fifth (20.8%) of journalists have over 20 years professional experience indeed most of today's journalists (41.2%) have less than 10 years; another 38 percent have worked as journalists from 10 to 20 years. 43 journalists (15.7% of the whole sample) are veterans who have continued working as journalists since Estonia's pre-independence years and have experience of working under Soviet censorship.

The majority of Estonian journalists (75.9%) were 'universalists', they worked on a variety of topics and subjects. More than a half of the respondents (58.5%; $s=1.43$) worked for only one newsroom, whereas about a third (31.1%) worked for two to three newsrooms. 18 percent of journalists had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. A minority of the interviewed journalists (24.1%) were members of the Estonian Journalists' Union, which indicates a low popularity of the professional organization among Estonian journalists.

The majority of Estonian journalists (70.8%) work for one particular type of medium, 22.4 percent can be regarded 'multimedia journalists' working for two or three different types of media. 26.3 percent of all interviewed journalists worked for a daily newspaper; 22.6 for a weekly newspaper; 15.7 percent for magazines. 12.4 percent worked for television and 10.6 for radio. Six people (2.2%) worked for a news agency. In Estonia, there is only one news agency – a regional branch of the

Baltic News Service. 7.7 percent of the interviewees worked for an online outlet only and 1.1 percent for an online issue of a traditional medium.

Journalistic Roles

Four “classic” roles: to report things as they are, to be a detached observer, to educate the audience and provide news that attracts the largest audience are fairly unanimously seen as the most important (see Table 1) among Estonian journalists, as the relatively low standard deviations suggest. Especially ‘educating audience’ is historically rooted role in Estonian journalism.

Estonian journalists clearly distance themselves from the political power: very few of them would support government policy or are ready to convey a positive image of political leadership. At the same time only a minority of Estonian journalists perceive themselves as adversaries of the government.

Estonian journalists seem not to have any consensus concerning the roles that in one or another way guide people: provide information people need to make political decisions, motivate people to participate in political activity, support national development and set the political agenda. They also have different views on providing entertainment and relaxation and monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders.

Generally, Estonian journalists tend to perceive their role as a critical but neutral observer who tries to serve as many people as possible, accepting also the right of people to express their views. Traditionally they see themselves as educators of the public. They have different views on the activist type of roles.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	274	94.9	4.70	.59
Be a detached observer	274	91.2	4.45	.69
Educate the audience	267	85.0	4.25	.79
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	273	80.6	4.23	.91
Let people express their views	273	79.5	4.06	.97
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	266	77.4	4.12	.97
Provide analysis of current affairs	274	73.4	4.06	.90
Tell stories about the world	263	63.9	3.80	1.18
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	273	56.0	3.55	1.14
Influence public opinion	274	55.5	3.60	1.02
Advocate for social change	273	54.9	3.53	1.06
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	274	53.3	3.43	1.23
Support national development	272	51.8	3.42	1.26
Provide information people need to make political decisions	273	48.0	3.29	1.25
Monitor and scrutinize business	274	47.8	3.36	1.21
Provide entertainment and relaxation	272	44.5	3.22	1.25
Set the political agenda	273	43.6	3.15	1.23
Motivate people to participate in political activity	273	34.1	2.93	1.21
Be an adversary of the government	271	15.5	2.45	1.15
Support government policy	271	3.3	1.77	.90
Convey a positive image of political leadership	272	2.2	1.55	.78

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

Estonian respondents almost unanimously (93.1%) agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Concurrently, half of the journalists agree that ethical decisions depend on specific situation and 23 percent of journalists accept exceptions. This controversy may be to an extent explained by the fact that the Code of Ethics of the Estonian Press emphasizes utilitarian principles: journalists should carry out moral reasoning depending on the specific situation. Only a minority of journalists (18.1%) believes that individual journalists should set their own standards, and do not need an external authority for guidance.

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	274	93.1	4.49	.73
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	274	52.2	3.23	1.29
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	270	23.0	2.33	1.26
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	270	18.1	2.27	1.23

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.

Concerning controversial reporting techniques, Estonian respondents are most loyal to private individuals and to the value of privacy. For example, paying for information is acceptable for only 7.9 percent of respondents. In Estonian journalism, paying for information has never been a widespread practice.

Truth is another value that is important for Estonian journalists: very few journalists accept that fabricating stories or publishing stories with unverified content is acceptable.

Deceptive practices of information gathering, such as using hidden microphones or cameras, exerting pressure on unwilling informants or claiming to be someone else and getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information are acceptable on occasion by about half of the Estonian respondents. Only a small proportion of respondents (between 9-13%) regard these practices as fully acceptable.

More than half (57.5%) of the Estonian respondents believe that using confidential business and government documents without authorization is justified on occasion. Making use of personal documents or images without permission is much less acceptable (only 22.5% see it as justified on occasion). This reflects the tendency that Estonian journalists are more loyal to private individuals than to power-holders. Also the Code of Ethics of the Estonian Press declares: “the critical observation of the implementation of political and economic power is the main obligation of the press.”¹

¹ http://www.asn.org.ee/english/code_of_ethics.html

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	263	26.2	51.3
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	273	12.8	53.8
Claiming to be somebody else	271	11.4	51.3
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	268	10.8	57.5
Using hidden microphones or cameras	271	10.7	53.1
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	267	9.4	47.6
Paying people for confidential information	267	7.9	47.9
Accepting money from sources	272	6.6	5.5
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	271	3.0	22.5
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	262	2.7	10.3
Publishing stories with unverified content	273	2.6	10.6
Altering photographs	259	1.9	20.1

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

Journalists in Estonia believe they have a fairly high degree of professional autonomy. 83.7 percent of respondents said they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories and 93.1 percent had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding what aspects to emphasize in a news story. It is quite common that journalists in Estonian newsrooms participate in editorial meetings: 73.6 percent of them reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often”.

Journalistic work is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the survey, “journalism ethics” and “access to information” were placed on top of the list among Estonian respondents (see Table 4). The latter correlates with the considerable consensus among journalists that availability of newsgathering resources is influential. The relationship with news sources is mentioned as very important or an important influencing factor by nearly two thirds (60.1%) of journalists.

While the majority of Estonian journalists perceive ethics as highly influential, only one third of the respondents perceive media law and regulations as influential. This is explainable as there are few court cases against media organizations and almost no lawsuits against journalists in Estonia. Although few journalists believed that ethical considerations are matter of personal judgment (see Table 2), 72.6 percent of Estonian journalists believed that personal values and beliefs are extremely influential in their daily practice.

The majority of Estonian journalists declare they work under time pressure, but here the consensus is not so clear: about one third of journalists do not perceive time pressure as critical as the rest of their peers.

Internal stakeholders (editorial supervisors, peers in the newsroom) are perceived as more influential than external stakeholders (e.g. business people, friends, government officials, colleagues in other media). Factors of influence belonging to the economic field (owners and managers, market competition and profit expectations as well as advertising) seem not to have much relevance for Estonian journalists. About a third of journalists, however, consider influence of competitors in other news organizations as important.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	274	86.9	4.28	.88
Information access	274	80.7	4.11	.95
Your personal values and beliefs	274	72.6	3.96	.95
Availability of news-gathering resources	270	67.4	3.84	.99
Time limits	274	63.9	3.69	1.09
Relationships with news sources	273	60.1	3.62	1.08
Feedback from the audience	274	54.4	3.53	.96
Editorial policy	267	48.3	3.31	1.15
Audience research and data	268	44.0	3.21	1.09
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	249	40.6	3.27	.99
Your peers on the staff	273	36.6	3.19	.94
Media laws and regulation	269	35.3	2.94	1.25
Competing news organizations	274	34.3	2.87	1.24
Managers of the news organization	255	25.5	2.72	1.16
Profit expectations	259	18.5	2.20	1.29
Advertising considerations	263	17.5	2.14	1.21
Owners of the news organization	243	16.0	2.17	1.24
Friends, acquaintances and family	273	15.8	2.38	1.07
Public relations	274	12.8	2.26	1.03
Colleagues in other media	274	8.0	2.21	.98
Pressure groups	273	7.3	1.80	.98
Government officials	273	6.6	1.78	.93
Censorship	267	6.0	1.50	.92
Religious considerations	253	5.9	1.68	.99
Business people	271	4.4	1.67	.89
Politicians	273	4.0	1.64	.85
Military, police and state security	274	3.6	1.70	.88

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

The past five years have brought about a rapid technological development in the media and this clearly reflects in the responses of the survey. The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

According to Estonian journalists, the use of search engines and the importance of technical skills had most profoundly increased (see Table 5). The Internet has also enabled more active interaction with the audiences – nearly half of journalists regarded it as having increased.

Estonia is among the few countries where journalists do not place a high value on professional education: 35.5 percent of respondents argued that the importance of journalism education has decreased, as well as the importance of having a university degree (24.6%). They were also critical concerning the credibility of journalism – 40.8 percent of them thought that it had decreased within the past five years.

The unfavorable economic conditions have influenced the intensity of the work in newsrooms: journalists feel the increasing time pressure (54.2% of respondents stated that the time available for journalistic research has decreased and 58% that the average working hours have increased). Nearly one fifth of respondents were concerned about decreasing relevance of journalism in society.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	216	91.2	.0
Technical skills	217	89.9	1.4
Average working hours of journalists	205	58.0	5.9
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	213	49.3	15.0
The relevance of journalism for society	214	41.1	19.6
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	199	29.6	17.1
Having a university degree	211	22.7	24.6
The credibility of journalism	211	19.0	40.8
Time available for researching stories	212	15.1	54.2
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	211	12.8	35.5

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Estonia. 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.

Along with the changes in various aspects of journalistic work, influences on journalism are changing as well. Influences have strengthened for all the sources presented in Table 6, except journalism education, influence of which has weakened according to 39.3% of respondents. Most remarkably, the influence of social media has strengthened, which indeed, has also strengthened the influence of user-generated content.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook or Twitter	217	93.5	0.9
User-generated contents, such as blogs	215	88.4	5.6
Audience involvement in news production	213	75.1	3.8
Competition	213	74.2	5.2
Profit making pressures	210	69.0	3.3
Audience feedback	214	66.8	4.7
Advertising considerations	209	61.7	5.7
Pressure toward sensational news	206	57.8	6.3
Public relations	212	52.8	6.1
Audience research	211	47.9	7.6
Ethical standards	218	42.7	22.9
Journalism education	206	16.0	39.3

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Estonia. 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.

Journalistic Trust

Concerning trust in public institutions, Estonian journalists expressed high confidence in the police (72.6%), in the judicial system (71.8%) and the military (69.8%) (see Table 7). Estonian journalists also have reasonable faith in their own institution, the news media.

The generally low public trust in politicians and political institutions in Estonia is also reflected in journalists' opinions. Only about one fourth of respondents expressed complete or great deal of trust in the Parliament (Riigikogu) and Government (Valitsus). Political parties are not trusted by the vast majority of journalists.

Estonian journalists have varying views concerning the trust in religious leaders ($s=1.18$), which can be at least partly explained by the fact that Estonia is predominantly a secular country.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The police	252	72.6	3.81	.74
The judiciary/the courts	252	71.8	3.80	.79
The military	245	69.8	3.83	.82
The news media	250	44.0	3.38	.71
Trade unions	245	31.0	3.04	.87
The parliament (Riigikogu)	252	26.6	3.03	.88
The government (Valitsus)	252	26.2	2.98	.90
Religious leaders	232	21.6	2.49	1.18
Politicians in general	251	6.4	2.41	.82
Political parties	251	4.8	2.20	.83

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete trust, 4 means you have a great deal of trust, 3 means you have some trust, 2 means you have little trust, and 1 means you have no trust at all.

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	905 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally systematic sampling for newsrooms and simple random sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	274 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face
<i>Response rate:</i>	93%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	05/2012-10/2013