

Moldova

NATALIA VASILENDIUC & MARIN ELADI

INTRODUCTION

By 2025, the Republic of Moldova, which was officially granted EU candidate status on 22 June 2022, is still on the enlargement agenda. Despite robust reform impetus and investment in growth-related sectors, Moldova's economic recovery and convergence towards EU income levels are exposed due to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, energy price shocks, and the persistence of Covid-19 effects. The nation also faced unprecedented refugee flows (the highest per capita in Europe). Though the outlook is reasonably good, risks encompass drawn-out conflict, energy price instability, and the parliamentary elections of 2025.

The pro-European government has changed the media landscape of Moldova since 2021, combating Russia's disinformation and propaganda aimed at derailing the nation's EU path. Parliament amended the Law on audiovisual media services on 2 June 2022 to include "disinformation." *TV6*, *Prime TV*, *NTV Moldova*, and rebroadcasts of Russian programs were suspended, and access to over 70 Russian or pro-Russian websites was closed.

Russia's conflict also harmed Moldova's media economically. Two of the biggest media holdings belonging to a fugitive oligarch collapsed in 2023, yet another Russia-backed oligarch still owns a large network that gets around some of the limitations. Media in Gagauzia and Transnistria continue to be largely pro-Russian.

The internet is Moldovans' main source of information but also a main conduit of Russian propaganda. Watching Romanian TV is common, and most press publications are now only online. There were 2.1 million internet users in Moldova, which was 61% of the population.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The Moldovan journalist sample is dominated by women: 72.8% women, 26.6% men, and 0.7% others. The respondents are on average 33.6 years old (SD = 12.1; Median = 30). The educational level is as follows: 43.9% bachelor's degree or equivalent, 23.9% master's degree, and 2.6% doctorate. Plus, 55.4% report having undergone formal education or professional training in journalism; among them, 75.1% via a university or college, and 86.4% via apprenticeships/cadetships, with short courses being well-liked too (53.8%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In our Moldovan sample, a majority of journalists (58.7%) hold no management role, whereas 23.9% serve in middle management and 17.4% are top managers. As for the reach of their main medium, nearly two thirds (63.6%) work for media with national audiences, 9.8% for local, 12.8% for regional, and 4.3% for transnational ones; 9.5% do not report a single main medium. Regarding ownership, private/commercial outlets are most common (40.8%), followed by public service (19.4%) and non-profit (18.8%) media; smaller segments work in state-run (7.6%) or community media (0.7%), with 12.8% again indicating no main medium.

Most respondents (60.3%) have a full-time permanent contract, 10.3% a part-time permanent contract, 9.9% a full-time fixed-term contract, 6.6% a part-time fixed-term contract, and 11.6% freelance or are self-employed. On average, they have spent 11.2 years (SD = 9.9; Median = 9) working as journalists. About one third of them (30.2%) are union members. A fifth (19.7%) primarily cover a specific beat or subject area.

While just under a third (32.9%) earn their total income from journalistic work alone, the remaining 67.1% combine journalism with additional income sources, thus indicating that many of these journalists have work outside the newsroom. Internet-native platforms (44.0%) represent the background of the most frequent type of main employer, followed by television (22.8%), radio (9.3%), and newspaper (9.3%) outlets, among others.

On average, full-time journalists work 47.5 hours per week (SD = 12.5; Median = 40). In terms of stress levels, more than half (53.5%) report feeling stressed often or very often in their jobs, while only 19.1% feel stressed rarely or never.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Demaneing or hateful speech directed at journalists was among the most common safety threats experienced by Moldovan journalists (see Table 1). Although not used so often public discrediting has become the second most experienced threat. Despite being experienced less frequently, additional threats, such as surveillance or hacking or blocking of social media accounts are becoming more worrying. Episodes of intimidation and different types of more subtle coercion persist. A broad majority of surveyed journalists are worried about their physical or emotional well-being, while nearly one-third express concern about losing their job (see Table 2). Distressfully, almost 70.0% of the surveyed journalists say that those who harm journalists would go unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	305	2.0%	11.8%	23.0%	21.6%	41.6%
Public discrediting of your work	305	3.0%	7.5%	17.4%	22.3%	49.8%
Surveillance	305	0.3%	5.9%	20.0%	20.7%	53.1%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	305	0.7%	4.6%	10.2%	13.4%	71.1%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	305	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.6%	97.0%
Legal actions against you because of your work	305	0.3%	1.0%	6.9%	6.2%	85.6%
Stalking	305	0.0%	0.7%	6.6%	11.1%	81.6%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	305	0.0%	3.6%	12.8%	20.0%	63.6%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	305	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	4.6%	94.4%
Other physical attacks	305	0.0%	0.3%	2.6%	7.2%	89.8%
Coercion	305	0.7%	1.3%	11.8%	18.7%	67.5%
Questioning of your personal morality	305	0.7%	0.7%	11.1%	18.0%	69.5%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	305	0.7%	0.3%	4.6%	7.9%	86.6%
Others disseminating your personal information	305	0.7%	0.3%	6.6%	8.9%	83.6%
Workplace bullying	305	0.0%	0.7%	5.2%	10.8%	83.3%
Abductions	305	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	98.7%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	305	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	3.0%	94.8%
Intimidation that targets family	305	0.0%	0.3%	1.3%	7.5%	90.8%

Question: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

TABLE 2. WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	303	28.1%	2.66	1.35
Concerned about physical well-being	303	47.2%	3.18	1.38
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	303	61.1%	3.63	1.27
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Moldova go unpunished	303	68.0%	3.96	1.15

Question: "Thinking about your work, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ROLES

Moldovan journalists reflect a contrasting vision of roles. They show strong support for interventionist roles while remaining attached to more traditional approaches (see Table 3). The most important role is influencing public opinion by counteracting disinformation, while educating the audience remains a very crucial role as well. The role of positive influence in the form of exposing secrets and providing additional understanding by shining light on society's problems is supported by almost 85% of responders. Promoting peace and tolerance were viewed as a very important role as providing needed information so that people can form a political opinion. The data suggest that these roles were top priority for most of the journalists. Providing analysis of current affairs and supporting public health are very important as at the same time letting people express their views. On the other hand, conveying a positive image of political figures is the least important role.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	305	60.3%	3.77	1.11
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	305	59.0%	3.78	1.07
Shine a light on society's problems	305	84.9%	4.42	0.76
Motivate people to participate in politics	305	42.3%	3.23	1.19
Provide analysis of current affairs	305	75.1%	4.15	0.88
Let people express their views	305	69.5%	4.03	0.92
Provide information people need to form political opinion	305	71.8%	3.99	1.00
Advocate for social change	305	60.7%	3.73	1.14
Influence public opinion	305	34.4%	3.00	1.19
Set the political agenda	305	24.9%	2.72	1.20
Promote peace and tolerance	305	76.7%	4.28	0.95
Educate the audience	305	81.3%	4.36	0.89
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	305	68.9%	3.97	0.95
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	305	56.1%	3.66	1.10
Support national development	305	66.2%	3.94	1.02
Support government policy	305	14.4%	2.33	1.07
Convey a positive image of political leaders	305	2.6%	1.46	0.76
Provide entertainment and relaxation	305	24.9%	2.82	1.16
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	305	39.3%	3.24	1.28
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	305	34.4%	3.09	1.18
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	305	21.0%	2.73	1.08
Support efforts to protect public health	305	63.9%	3.88	0.96
Counteract disinformation	305	85.9%	4.48	0.85
Discuss future implications of current events	305	63.0%	3.85	0.93

Question: "Please tell me how important it is to do each of the following in your daily work." (Scale: 5 = Extremely important; 4 = Very important; 3 = Moderately important; 2 = Slightly important; 1 = Not at all important.)

JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

Moldovan journalists are strongly agreeing on being fair and alerting audience when a source's claim is untruthful. They also strongly believe that it is possible to represent objective reality in reporting (see Table 4). The standard deviation in this case shows a solid cohesion among the interviewed journalists. Four out of five responders strongly agree that objective reality is attainable in their activity. More than 60.0% consider they should intuitively know what the final story will be. Three quarters of the responders believe their role is to present facts the way they are and that is sufficient for understanding reality. But at the same time almost half of the responders have the opinion that things are either true or false and not somewhere in the middle. The respondents strongly agree that journalists should let the facts speak for themselves and that they should make their opinions transparent in their work.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	305	39.0%	2.87	1.38
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	305	40.7%	2.97	1.27
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	305	33.8%	2.71	1.30
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	305	48.5%	3.34	1.27
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	305	84.9%	4.30	0.94
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	305	39.0%	2.94	1.29
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	305	60.7%	3.57	1.11
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	305	75.7%	4.08	1.06
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	305	36.1%	2.97	1.36
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	305	66.9%	3.86	1.34
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	305	90.5%	4.58	0.82

Questions: "The following statements deal with beliefs related to how journalists know what they know. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." / "Using the same scale, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following beliefs." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Moldovan journalists strongly consider that professional standards are very important and are superior to personal judgment or any situational considerations for ethical reporting (see Table 5). At the same time, controversial reporting methods such as accepting money from sources and publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified are firmly rejected (see Table 6). Concomitantly, a large number of journalists find using hidden recording devices and using confidential business or government documents without authorization justified. The number of journalists that find it acceptable to claim to be somebody else and financially reward people for confidential information remains high.

TABLE 5. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment	305	82.0%	4.24	1.01
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	305	61.3%	3.57	1.25
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	305	41.6%	2.88	1.47
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	305	25.2%	2.28	1.40

Question: "The following statements describe different responses journalists may have to ethical problems. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

TABLE 6. JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROVERSIAL REPORTING METHODS

	N	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Claiming to be somebody else	305	4.9%	53.1%
Using hidden recording devices	305	9.8%	78.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	305	4.3%	54.8%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	305	4.9%	54.1%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	305	3.0%	26.6%
Paying people for confidential information	305	5.2%	43.0%
Accepting money from sources	305	2.6%	11.1%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	305	3.6%	26.6%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	305	2.0%	21.0%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	305	3.9%	14.1%

Question: "Which of the following, if any, do you think may be always justified, or justified on occasion, and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?"

EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Moldovan journalists have reported a relatively medium amount of media freedom and reasonable high amount in their editorial autonomy (see Table 7). Nearly three quarters of journalists declared to have almost a great deal of freedom in selecting the news and deciding which aspects of the story should be emphasized. At the same time, only 34.4% of the respondents have declared that they enjoy complete media freedom.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	305	71.8%	3.99	0.85
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	305	71.1%	3.93	0.87
Media freedom in Republic of Moldova	305	34.4%	3.14	0.84

(Scale: 5 = Complete freedom; 4 = A great deal of freedom; 3 = Some freedom; 2 = Little freedom; 1 = No freedom at all.)

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Moldovan journalists are highly influenced by ethics, media law and regulations in addition to the availability of news-gathering resources (see Table 8). The standard deviation in this case shows a strong interrelatedness among the interviewed journalists. Editorial supervisors and higher editors as well as audience research and data and time limits play a very important role. In contrast, personal values and beliefs play a relatively moderate role. Self-censorship is on the same level as the influences from the management and owners of the news organizations. The professional activities and editorial policies of Moldovan journalists were least affected by external political factors, such as politicians, government officials, pressure groups, businesspeople or terrorists.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	284	21.8%	2.70	1.05
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	287	54.7%	3.61	1.16
The business managers of the news organization	265	39.6%	3.26	1.19
The owners of the news organization	252	37.7%	3.03	1.41
Editorial policy	275	59.6%	3.67	1.14
Advertising considerations	265	23.0%	2.45	1.27
Profit expectations	261	39.5%	3.06	1.41
Audience research and data	275	50.5%	3.49	1.23
Availability of news-gathering resources	285	59.6%	3.72	1.12
Time limits	289	53.6%	3.54	1.18
Journalism ethics	280	69.6%	3.98	1.04
Self-censorship	265	32.8%	2.84	1.35
Personal values and beliefs	277	40.4%	3.20	1.25
Colleagues in other media	282	16.7%	2.54	1.04
Friends, acquaintances and family	278	9.0%	2.07	1.02
Feedback from the audience	297	51.9%	3.56	1.05
Competing news organizations	282	26.2%	2.81	1.17
Media laws and regulation	281	61.2%	3.76	1.02
Access to information	296	71.3%	3.98	0.97
Government censorship	264	26.1%	2.56	1.33
Government officials	255	14.1%	2.18	1.17
Politicians	262	11.5%	2.10	1.12
Businesspeople	269	8.6%	1.98	1.03
Public relations	270	20.0%	2.62	1.08
Relationships with news sources	292	43.8%	3.33	1.18
Police	259	15.1%	2.18	1.17
Issue advocacy groups	267	25.1%	2.76	1.17
Scientists or health experts	267	24.0%	2.74	1.15
Religious groups and institutions	248	7.3%	1.82	0.99
Military	243	6.6%	1.73	1.00
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	235	6.4%	1.63	0.93
Organized crime and criminal groups	236	7.2%	1.67	1.02
Terrorist groups	232	7.8%	1.60	1.05

Question: "Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work as a journalist." (Scale: 5 = Extremely influential; 4 = Very influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 1 = Not at all influential.)