

## Northern Cyprus

SANEM ŞAHİN & VASVİ ÇİFTÇİOĞLU

### INTRODUCTION

Northern Cyprus, officially the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), is a self-declared state recognised only by Türkiye. While it has a democratic political system, growing interference from Türkiye has raised concerns, particularly regarding press freedom and electoral integrity. Economically, the country is heavily reliant on Türkiye due to international isolation and currency instability. Socially, it grapples with issues like corruption, minority discrimination, and unresolved tensions with the Republic of Cyprus.

The media landscape comprises a mix of state-owned and independent outlets. Despite legal protections for press freedom, journalists often face political and legal pressures from authorities and political figures. Independent media remain active and diverse, but there are growing concerns about censorship and self-censorship.

The journalistic environment in Northern Cyprus is marked by increasing political and economic pressures that undermine media independence. Many media owners are businesspeople with various financial interests, often using their news outlets for their business interests. Diversity and pluralism are threatened by direct interference in editorial work as well as by sanctions, lawsuits and criminal proceedings used against media and journalists who criticise authorities and powerful groups.

### BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The media sample in Northern Cyprus comprised 45% female and 55% male journalists. The average age of the journalists is 44.8 years (SD = 11.3; Median = 43). The survey participants are highly educated: 66.1% hold a Bachelor's degree, 19.8% have a Master's degree or equivalent, and 2.5% possess a Doctorate. Additionally, 79.5% of respondents received formal education or professional training. Of these, 76.1% obtained their education or training at a university or college, 48.4% through apprenticeships or cadetships, and 62% via short-term courses.

### JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

The results show that the majority of participants are affiliated with established media organisations. Most respondents are employed in private or commercial media, while a smaller but still significant segment works in state-run media. Only a very small number reported having no main medium affiliation.

Respondents work across a broad range of media platforms. The largest group is employed by internet-native outlets, followed closely by those working for newspapers, news agencies and television. Radio, magazines, and non-traditional roles are less frequently represented. Employment patterns show that the vast majority are on full-time permanent contracts, indicating a high level of job stability. Full-time fixed-term contracts and part-time roles are less common. A small number of respondents are freelance or self-employed. Financially, most respondents earn their entire income from journalism, reflecting a strong professional commitment to the field. A smaller group supplements their earnings through additional sources.

The data also reflect a typical hierarchical structure within media organisations. Most respondents do not hold any management role, which shows the workforce is largely composed of non-managerial staff. A smaller, yet notable segment occupies middle management positions. The smallest group consists of individuals in top management roles.

On average, journalists have 19.9 years of experience (SD = 10.0; Median = 20), indicating a well-established group. They typically work an average of 45 hours per week, though workloads can differ depending on roles and organisations. There is a strong culture of unionisation as an overwhelming majority of respondents – 96.7% – are members of a union, while only 3.3% are not.

Workplace stress is a common experience. Only a small fraction (5.7%) said they rarely or never feel stressed.

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

In Northern Cyprus, the most commonly experienced threat among journalists is demeaning or hateful speech, which many report encountering at least occasionally (see Table 1). Stalking is also a significant issue, with a notable portion of journalists affected. Public discrediting of journalistic work is another frequent concern, often accompanied by other forms of threats and intimidation.

The most widespread concern, however, is the lack of accountability (see Table 2). Most journalists believe that those who harm members of the press in the country often go unpunished. In addition to these external threats, journalists express deep concern for their emotional and mental well-being, with more than half reporting this as a serious issue.

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	122	7.4%	11.5%	28.7%	24.6%	27.9%
Public discrediting of your work	122	3.3%	3.3%	20.5%	23.0%	50.0%
Surveillance	122	3.3%	6.6%	12.3%	13.1%	64.8%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	121	2.5%	2.5%	10.7%	14.9%	69.4%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	122	0.8%	0.8%	2.5%	10.7%	85.2%
Legal actions against you because of your work	122	3.3%	5.7%	6.6%	16.4%	68.0%
Stalking	117	6.0%	17.9%	11.1%	17.1%	47.9%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	119	4.2%	9.2%	16.0%	21.0%	49.6%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	121	0.8%	0.8%	1.7%	5.8%	90.9%
Other physical attacks	120	0.8%	0.8%	3.3%	14.2%	80.8%
Coercion	122	1.6%	4.1%	8.2%	25.4%	60.7%
Questioning of your personal morality	121	0.8%	6.6%	9.9%	14.9%	67.8%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	121	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	8.3%	89.3%
Others disseminating your personal information	121	0.8%	1.7%	2.5%	10.7%	84.3%
Workplace bullying	119	3.4%	0.0%	10.1%	10.9%	75.6%
Abductions	121	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	2.5%	96.7%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	122	0.8%	0.8%	3.3%	9.8%	85.2%
Intimidation that targets family	120	0.8%	0.0%	5.8%	10.8%	82.5%

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	122	23.8%	2.49	1.23
Concerned about physical well-being	122	47.5%	3.22	1.18
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	122	54.9%	3.39	1.22
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Northern Cyprus go unpunished	122	72.1%	3.83	1.10

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

In Northern Cyprus, the most highly valued journalistic roles include shining a light on society's problems, being a detached observer, and providing a platform for public expression. Monitoring those in power and promoting peace and tolerance were also important functions in the context of this divided island. In contrast, roles like supporting government policy, portraying political leaders positively, and encouraging political participation were considered far less important.

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	122	96.7%	4.66	0.60
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	122	95.1%	4.42	0.74
Shine a light on society's problems	122	99.2%	4.81	0.41
Motivate people to participate in politics	122	30.3%	2.66	1.34
Provide analysis of current affairs	122	95.1%	4.47	0.65
Let people express their views	122	95.9%	4.61	0.57
Provide information people need to form political opinion	121	72.7%	3.82	1.23
Advocate for social change	119	78.2%	4.01	0.97
Influence public opinion	120	80.8%	4.05	1.00
Set the political agenda	120	70.0%	3.85	1.10
Promote peace and tolerance	122	94.3%	4.61	0.69
Educate the audience	121	75.2%	3.86	1.07
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	122	91.0%	4.34	0.90
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	117	47.0%	3.19	1.36
Support national development	122	94.3%	4.43	0.83
Support government policy	113	14.2%	1.92	1.29
Convey a positive image of political leaders	116	15.5%	2.04	1.27
Provide entertainment and relaxation	119	46.2%	3.22	1.15
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	116	46.6%	3.10	1.39
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	117	59.8%	3.44	1.16
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	118	34.7%	2.93	1.24
Support efforts to protect public health	122	94.3%	4.44	0.69
Counteract disinformation	121	93.4%	4.52	0.71
Discuss future implications of current events	121	92.6%	4.30	0.69

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

The results show complex and sometimes contradictory beliefs among journalists. A strong majority believe that journalists should alert audiences when a source is untruthful and that it is possible to represent objective reality. They also agree that journalists should be part of the communities they report on. The results suggest journalists balance truth and objectivity with interpretation, intuition and ethical responsibility.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	122	50.8%	3.29	0.98
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	121	26.4%	2.69	1.06
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	122	39.3%	3.02	1.01
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	121	46.3%	3.19	1.10
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	122	82.8%	4.13	0.86
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	121	47.9%	3.22	1.04
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	122	58.2%	3.54	1.02
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	122	63.1%	3.58	1.04
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	122	87.7%	4.19	0.79
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	121	63.6%	3.65	1.17
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	122	88.5%	4.28	0.77

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

The results indicate that a significant majority of journalists believe ethical decisions in journalism should always be guided by professional standards, regardless of the situation or personal judgment. A smaller portion supports the idea that there may be extraordinary circumstances that justify deviating from them. Techniques such as claiming to be someone else, using hidden recording devices, or accessing confidential documents without authorisation are more widely accepted as controversial reporting methods, with most methods being considered justifiable only on occasion rather than always.

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	121	93.4%	4.36	0.66
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	122	38.5%	2.85	1.19
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	122	30.3%	2.64	1.21
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	119	22.7%	2.45	1.20

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	121	8.3%	53.7%
Using hidden recording devices	122	4.9%	46.7%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	119	6.7%	47.9%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	121	6.6%	35.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	120	0.8%	15.0%
Paying people for confidential information	121	2.5%	24.8%
Accepting money from sources	119	1.7%	2.5%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	120	2.5%	11.7%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	119	5.9%	23.5%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	121	1.7%	5.0%

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

A majority of journalists report the greatest sense of autonomy in deciding which aspects of a story to emphasise, followed by their freedom to choose which news stories to cover. However, their perceptions of overall media freedom in Northern Cyprus are lower, suggesting they distinguish between individual editorial control and broader media environment.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	122	59.0%	3.61	1.22
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	122	72.1%	3.80	1.17
Media freedom in Northern Cyprus	120	40.0%	2.93	1.28

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

The results show that journalists perceive journalism ethics, editorial policy, and ownership as the most powerful influences. Business-related influences, such as business managers and profits, suggest commercial pressures also play a role. Internal newsroom dynamics, including peers and supervisors, are strong influences. External pressures such as government censorship, politicians and public relations are perceived as less influential.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	121	64.5%	3.79	1.23
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	120	67.5%	3.90	1.05
The business managers of the news organization	113	69.0%	3.88	1.14
The owners of the news organization	114	70.2%	3.94	1.23
Editorial policy	119	75.6%	3.97	1.18
Advertising considerations	104	51.9%	3.40	1.45
Profit expectations	98	55.1%	3.31	1.45
Audience research and data	106	53.8%	3.37	1.36
Availability of news-gathering resources	116	60.3%	3.66	1.14
Time limits	113	60.2%	3.58	1.14
Journalism ethics	116	81.0%	4.12	1.08
Self-censorship	107	60.7%	3.61	1.28
Personal values and beliefs	104	50.0%	3.37	1.37
Colleagues in other media	112	17.0%	2.54	1.09
Friends, acquaintances and family	105	13.3%	2.46	1.06
Feedback from the audience	113	46.9%	3.37	1.15
Competing news organizations	109	24.8%	2.87	1.18
Media laws and regulation	115	57.4%	3.55	1.13
Access to information	118	69.5%	3.86	1.05
Government censorship	114	49.1%	3.25	1.45
Government officials	114	46.5%	3.16	1.44
Politicians	115	42.6%	3.05	1.41
Business people	111	36.9%	2.82	1.35
Public relations	111	32.4%	2.91	1.30
Relationships with news sources	114	54.4%	3.48	1.21
Police	105	31.4%	2.98	1.21
Issue advocacy groups	102	34.3%	2.99	1.14
Scientists or health experts	107	37.4%	3.05	1.14
Religious groups and institutions	81	12.3%	2.17	1.12
Military	88	36.4%	2.93	1.34
Organized crime and criminal groups	79	19.0%	2.16	1.36
Terrorist groups	66	15.2%	1.92	1.33

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.)