

Employment Conditions

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Journalists' working conditions have worsened dramatically worldwide over the past decades, even in regions with strong labor legislation and stable economies. Labor precarity is on the rise due to a variety of factors, with consequences extending beyond professional routines to affect journalists' health and the quality of information they produce (Gollmitzer, 2019; Nicoletti, 2020; O'Donnell & Zion, 2018; Örnebring, 2018; Rick & Hanitzsch, 2023; Steiner & Chadha, 2022).

The Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) provides a global snapshot of journalists' working conditions, examining employment type, income, weekly working hours, workload, and membership in professional associations. Most respondents are qualified professionals with substantial experience and generally stable employment contracts. Nevertheless, a significant proportion are undercompensated and work long hours, often taking on additional activities to supplement their income. Indicators of job insecurity are evident across all regions analyzed, though to varying degrees.

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT

Although digital intermediaries have weakened news organizations and their editorial offices economically (González-Tosat & Sádaba-Chalezquer, 2021; Nielsen & Ganter, 2018), most journalists in the 75 countries surveyed in the Worlds of Journalism Study 3 (WJS3) are employed full- or part-time, with freelancers accounting for an average of 13.9%. Part-time workers constitute a minority, averaging

12.4% globally, with the exception of Tanzania and Yemen. Comparisons between the Worlds of Journalism Study 2 (WJS2) and WJS3 for the 54 overlapping countries show an increase in freelancers by 4.6% and part-time workers by 2.9% (see Table 3).

Freelancing is most common in Latin America, averaging 22%, and exceeding 25% in five countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. In Western Europe, freelancers represent an average of 16.5% of journalists, with notable variation: more than a quarter in the United Kingdom and the highest proportion globally in Italy (40.4%). In Australia and Canada, freelancers make up roughly 10%, while in the United States, only 2.6% of journalists are freelancers.

Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have slightly fewer freelancers (14% on average), though Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia exceed 25%. Freelancing is less common in Africa and Asia, with no country on these continents exceeding the one-quarter mark. On average, 8% of journalists in Africa and 9% in Asia work as freelancers.

The highest proportion of part-time journalists, as well as freelancers, is found in Latin America (on average, 18%). In four countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Peru), part-time journalists account for more than a quarter of the journalistic workforce. In Africa, the average share of part-time journalists is similar (16%), though this figure is heavily influenced by Tanzania, where more than half of all journalists work part-time.

In Asia, an average of 13% of journalists hold part-time positions, with Yemen standing out: three-quarters of its

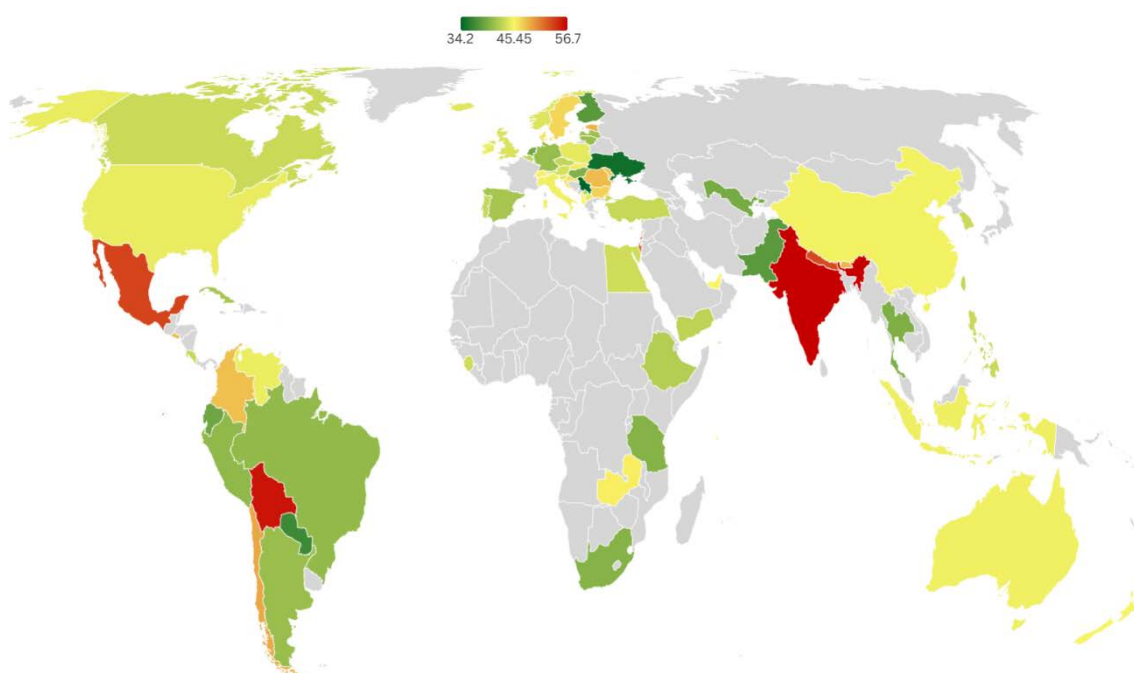


FIGURE 2: WORKLOAD OF FULL-TIME JOURNALISTS

Average working hours per week

journalists work part-time. In Western Europe, the average is slightly lower, at 12%, though Switzerland is an outlier, with nearly half of the surveyed journalists working part-time.

By contrast, CEE has relatively few part-time journalists, averaging 8%. Poland is an exception in this region, where almost one-third of journalists work part-time. In North America, the proportion is even smaller: only 2.1% of journalists in the United States and Canada work part-time.

WORKLOAD AND SPECIALIZATION

Globally, full-time journalists spend an average of 43.8 hours per week on work-related activities. In 10 countries, however, the weekly workload exceeds the 48-h limit established by the International Labour Organization for fair working time. These figures exclude additional hours spent on secondary roles beyond journalism, indicating that many journalists dedicate even more time to professional activities overall.

Regional differences in working hours are relatively minor compared to the variations between countries. Journalists in Bolivia, India, Israel, Mexico, and Nepal reported the highest workloads, with national averages exceeding 50 hours per week.

Even within the Global North, significant variation exists: journalists in Israel work roughly 14 hours more per week than their counterparts in Finland. These findings suggest that workloads are influenced not only by economic stability but also by local factors, such as labor laws, media systems, and levels of unionization.

Regarding specialization, 62.5% of respondents identified themselves as “generalists,” covering a range of topics rather than focusing on a specific beat. Generalists are the majority in Zambia, Slovakia, Yemen, North Macedonia, Indonesia, and Paraguay. Conversely, only a small number of journalists in Hungary, Uzbekistan, Taiwan, Poland, and 13 other countries report covering multiple beats. The prevalence of generalists reflects editorial restructuring driven by shrinking markets, technological changes, and the reorganization of newsroom work.

MULTIPLE INCOME SOURCES

Globally, at least 36.4% of surveyed journalists reported a second source of income in addition to journalism. These supplementary earnings come from activities such as advertising, public relations, corporate communications, education, and governmental work. Journalists with multiple jobs are particularly prevalent in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Peru, while the lowest rates of secondary employment were observed in Portugal, followed by New Zealand, China, and Sweden.

The distribution of secondary income highlights the absence of consistent patterns across countries, similar to other employment indicators. Local factors—including labor regulations, economic stability, media systems, and media ownership structures—play key roles in shaping employment conditions and financial security.

Across all regions, Latin America stands out: in almost all countries surveyed (except Costa Rica), at least one-third of journalists reported a secondary source of income.

In Peru, Cuba, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, more than half of journalists reported additional employment. These figures reflect widespread precarity in the region, driven by highly concentrated media markets, economic instability, political parallelism, and social inequality (Márquez-Ramírez, Amado & Waisbord, 2021; Hughes & Prado, 2011)—conditions common to nearly all countries surveyed in Latin America.

MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

On average, just over half of journalists globally (51.2%) belong to a professional association. Compared to WJS2 data across 54 countries, this represents an increase of 4.3 percentage points (see Table 3).

On average, the majority (69%) of journalists belonging to professional organizations work in Western European countries. Canada and Australia lag slightly behind the Western European average, while in the United States, more than half of journalists hold membership in a professional association.

Journalists' professional associations are traditionally numerous and substantial in Scandinavian countries (Schroeder, 2020; Pies, 2024). Survey data show that in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, all or almost all journalists are members of a trade association. By contrast, membership is lower in Southern Europe: slightly more than one-third of journalists in Spain and Italy are affiliated, and fewer than half in Portugal.

Journalists in CEE countries are least likely to belong to professional associations, averaging 36% across the region. The Czech Republic and Slovakia report the lowest percentages globally, with just over 10% membership. Compared to CEE, Latin American journalists are somewhat more active, averaging 44% membership. Meanwhile, in Asia and Africa, membership averages 53%, close to the global mean. Among the countries from these two continents, China and Nepal deviate the most, where 18.8% and 97.5% of journalists are members of a representative institution, respectively.

CONCLUSION

Most journalists in the countries surveyed hold full-time contracts, which provide better social protections than freelance or part-time work. At the same time, there is a clear trend toward increasing freelance and part-time employment over the past decade, driven, in part, by the platformization of news and the rise of global social networks.

Journalists' salaries often hover near national average wages, prompting many to seek additional paid work. Holding multiple jobs can increase the risk of conflicts of interest, particularly when supplementary work involves advertising or public relations.

The majority of journalists tend to be generalists rather than specialists, a pattern that appears to be growing. Membership in professional associations is also increasingly recognized as important; yet, on average, nearly half of the journalists surveyed do not consider it relevant. In authoritarian contexts—which have expanded since the previous WJS wave—joining a professional association can be especially challenging.

TABLE 3: EMPLOYMENT, WORKLOAD, SPECIALIZATION, MOONLIGHTING, AND UNION MEMBERSHIP

Country	Freelancers		Part-time workers		Average working hours ¹	Generalists		Additional jobs		Union members	
	WJS2	WJS3	WJS2	WJS3		WJS2	WJS3	WJS2	WJS3	WJS2	WJS3
Albania	0.7%	2.6%	8.8%	5.3%	45.38	53.6%	45.4%	19.2%	31.2%	36.1%	32.5%
Argentina	10.5%	29.2%	31.2%	28.4%	41.13	61.5%	71.6%	41.3%	50.8%	36.2%	37.3%
Australia	3.0%	9.8%	7.9%	12.7%	44.99	67.1%	62.3%	18.7%	17.8%	47.8%	61.5%
Austria	8.3%	9.9%	14.4%	22.8%	43.77	38.9%	44.9%	20.2%	29.1%	49.4%	51.6%
Belgium	18.1%	18.1%	6.6%	11.1%	42.91	51.4%	56.3%	24.7%	16.3%	62.3%	88.0%
Bhutan	5.7%	0%	11.5%	3.7%	48.37	77.8%	52.8%	5.0%	55.6%	27.9%	
Bolivia		29.1%		14.8%	55.84		32.9%		46.6%		71.3%
Brazil	5.1%	18.4%	35.4%	31.8%	40.83	44.9%	67.9%	23.3%	34.1%	40.8%	39.0%
Bulgaria	10.3%	22.1%	4.2%	5.2%	47.06	56.3%	73.2%	34.2%	33.8%	38.8%	37.0%
Canada	17.0%	9.7%	3.4%	2.1%	43.32	49.7%	60.9%	29.3%	21.0%	56.4%	63.5%
Chile	9.6%	8.8%	10.0%	4.5%	49.02	59.4%	76.2%	28.5%	50.5%	23.7%	24.0%
China	0.3%	0.4%	1.2%	1.6%	45.11	55.2%	72.4%	8.3%	12.9%	14.5%	18.8%
Colombia	5.6%	39.3%	11.2%	7.2%	47.88	52.1%	72.8%	27.4%	50.1%	27.8%	42.0%
Costa Rica		21.2%		10.0%	43.21		63.8%		28.8%		43.2%
Croatia	15.0%	17.3%	1.3%	0%	46.39	85.3%	79.6%	21.0%	50.5%	46.5%	46.3%
Cuba		11.5%		11.7%	41.66		74.6%		64.7%		60.1%
Czech Republic	8.6%	23.2%	4.1%	10.7%	43.02	80.8%	52.9%	23.3%	46.2%	7.3%	11.5%
Denmark	20.5%	18.3%	5.4%	7.0%	46.32	59.2%	47.7%	17.5%	26.7%	100.0%	100.0%
Ecuador	4.9%	26.5%	23.6%	18.3%	39.21	55.9%	72.5%	32.0%	47.9%	22.1%	26.3%
Egypt	6.0%	7.0%	10.3%	7.3%	43.54	49.3%	47.0%	30.0%	52.2%	54.3%	72.9%
El Salvador	4.4%	8.9%	26.4%	12.0%	48.20	71.6%	68.8%	32.5%	37.1%	30.7%	26.7%
Estonia	1.5%	3.1%	4.8%	5.9%	48.50	75.9%	75.1%	18.0%	50.8%	24.3%	26.2%
Ethiopia	4.3%	9.8%	1.7%	8.1%	42.19	75.1%	73.2%	15.3%	40.2%	16.3%	39.0%
Finland	17.5%	22.9%	3.6%	7.8%	38.24	52.1%	60.1%	13.2%	30.6%	91.3%	86.5%
Germany	17.7%	19.7%	7.9%	9.0%	41.02	40.1%	34.4%	17.2%	18.0%	53.4%	55.1%
Hong Kong	0%	12.6%	8.3%	4.8%	45.51	48.9%	62.1%	13.9%	30.6%	19.4%	48.3%
Hungary	9.6%	25.5%	26.1%	20.0%	40.08	64.2%	6.3%	39.3%	52.6%	23.5%	30.7%
Iceland	5.3%	9.3%	4.8%	14.4%	44.29	70.4%	73.4%	23.2%	25.9%	82.7%	77.0%
India	2.1%	7.0%	10.0%	10.4%	56.69	57.9%	63.4%	11.6%	44.0%	36.3%	71.5%
Indonesia	17.2%	21.2%	8.2%	15.9%	44.85	66.6%	85.1%	37.5%	53.4%	69.5%	77.6%
Ireland	12.5%	13.3%	3.3%	5.8%	44.78	36.5%	65.3%	19.6%	28.4%	64.7%	61.4%
Israel	12.4%	17.4%	11.5%	7.7%	51.80	35.0%	67.0%	36.6%	46.4%	50.5%	44.9%
Italy	32.3%	40.4%	4.8%	5.4%	44.97	67.7%	59.7%	27.5%		100.0%	35.4%
Kazakhstan		8.6%		20.2%			34.4%		69.9%		41.5%
Kosovo	2.9%	5.1%	8.7%	8.7%	42.01	60.6%	50.4%	15.2%	26.6%	46.6%	62.6%
Latvia	8.2%	4.1%	4.4%	4.7%	41.30	74.7%	67.6%	17.4%	31.8%	26.6%	27.2%
Lithuania		20.7%		4.4%	41.06		65.6%		31.2%		29.2%
Mexico	5.6%	9.8%	10.4%	7.5%	53.62	78.5%	80.1%	34.8%	41.3%	25.2%	27.0%
Moldova	2.3%	11.7%	11.3%	19.4%	47.49	62.9%	80.3%	33.0%	67.1%	29.2%	30.2%
Nepal		2.6%		19.8%	53.33		76.6%		31.2%		97.5%
Netherlands	36.9%	24.5%	16.9%	22.0%	39.33	39.1%	66.7%	32.7%	21.6%	34.5%	62.7%
New Zealand	6.3%	11.2%	6.1%	7.2%	45.34	62.2%	65.3%	23.8%	12.7%	33.5%	43.6%
North Cyprus		6.1%		4.7%	38.77		76.5%		16.1%		96.7%
North Macedonia		0.9%		1.9%	44.61		85.8%		13.5%		72.0%
Norway	18.8%	8.0%	4.7%	5.8%	44.13	63.0%	66.2%	25.9%	13.6%	100.0%	100.0%
Pakistan		17.4%		14.8%	38.33		71.4%		63.9%		74.1%
Paraguay		24.2%		26.0%	37.03		84.1%		55.5%		47.6%
Peru		23.4%		40.5%	40.68		74.8%		83.9%		61.9%
Philippines	6.7%	17.1%	3.5%	11.3%	43.19	53.6%	60.8%	38.3%	53.3%	62.1%	71.6%
Poland		36.9%		32.5%	44.45		23.7%		49.7%		29.8%
Portugal	6.6%	10.1%	0.2%	0%	43.14	54.3%	79.5%	11.9%	1.6%	39.0%	46.7%
Romania	1.5%	8.4%	11.1%	4.3%	48.10	76.2%	47.7%	27.6%	47.1%	22.0%	24.5%
Serbia	6.1%	8.6%	2.5%	2.0%	34.16	64.6%	71.6%	17.9%	23.4%	43.0%	29.6%
Seychelles		9.7%		7.1%	45.38		79.0%		25.4%		40.0%
Sierra Leone	10.3%	5.4%	20.5%	19.0%	43.46	71.0%	32.6%	22.1%	92.9%	79.2%	71.1%
Singapore	1.1%	2.7%	0%	1.7%	44.32	55.8%	73.5%	3.2%	13.6%	34.0%	44.0%
Slovakia		34.0%		6.9%	45.95		87.4%		37.0%		12.3%
Slovenia		8.6%		1.7%	44.43		73.8%		21.9%		64.7%
South Africa	13.8%	10.2%	4.9%	4.0%	40.16	76.0%	73.0%	29.6%	30.3%	43.5%	44.6%
South Korea	0.3%	1.6%	2.8%	1.9%	43.26	9.0%	45.1%	4.5%	44.9%	87.8%	70.2%
Spain	9.2%	10.8%	5.1%	8.9%	41.65	67.2%	69.3%	12.8%	15.9%	41.1%	34.5%
Sweden	17.0%	18.9%	7.3%	8.5%	46.93	34.1%	68.2%	12.6%	13.0%	68.9%	99.4%
Switzerland	7.7%	4.5%	35.2%	48.6%	45.66	52.2%	52.0%	21.3%	24.6%	56.8%	50.9%
Taiwan		0.2%		0.9%	42.96		22.8%		49.2%		30.2%
Tanzania	11.0%	15.7%	16.2%	51.4%	40.18	89.3%	75.1%	31.6%	86.8%	89.3%	57.8%
Thailand	18.2%	16.5%	13.7%	9.2%	39.88	71.8%	71.6%	39.7%	15.1%	45.3%	28.3%
Turkey	6.4%	5.4%	1.1%	13.5%	43.12	50.5%	38.8%	11.6%	25.7%	31.6%	52.6%
UAE	1.8%	6.3%	8.6%	7.1%	45.36	47.6%	32.8%	16.5%	28.4%	43.5%	54.7%
UK	16.6%	29.0%	6.9%	8.4%	43.96	47.1%	42.7%	26.7%	24.7%	43.8%	52.6%
Ukraine		12.0%		7.1%	34.91		77.8%		47.6%		44.9%
USA	0.7%	2.6%	0.2%	2.1%	44.70	79.3%	67.3%	14.3%	20.5%	52.2%	55.2%
Uzbekistan		3.3%		10.2%	39.63		16.3%		24.0%		34.9%
Venezuela		33.4%		17.8%	44.80		79.1%		48.5%		68.8%
Yemen		19.9%		75.6%	42.66		86.9%		66.7%		46.4%
Zambia		1.0%		17.7%	45.79		91.0%		21.1%		47.3%
Average²	9.3%	13.9%	9.5%	12.4%	43.82	59.3%	62.8%	22.9%	37.3%	46.9%	51.2%

¹Per week; full-time journalists only.²Average across the countries listed in the table (the original WJS2 sample included 67 countries)