



JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Education trends and training needs

(July 2009)

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Albanian Media Institute and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

Introduction

Albanian media have gone through many stages of development since the publication of the first opposition newspaper *Rilindja Demokratike* in 1991. By contrast to year 1991, when there was only one opposition paper and only one state-owned TV station, there are now over 20 daily national newspapers. In addition, there is a high number of electronic media that broadcast in the country.

Alongside this boom of media outlets, a new generation of journalists emerged in the 1990s, rich in passion and ambitions but poor in professional skills. Proper education for journalists in Albania was nowhere in sight during the Communist period. The Journalism Department was closed down in 1973, but even this limited education was ideological rather than professional at the time.

The background of Albanian journalists reflects to a significant degree on the quality of their reporting. For this purpose, knowing who is who in Albanian media, where they come from, what is their education and what are their perspectives for improvement, would assist in identifying other ways of raising the professional level of Albanian journalists and media.

Since education starts at school, the monitoring first presents the data on current status of journalism education and then follows with the current situation in Albanian daily newspapers, the preferences and needs of the editors and then those of the journalists themselves.

Classical University Education

Albania does not have a significantly consolidated tradition in the field of journalism education. The first school was the one established within the Department of Political-Judicial sciences, fashioned after the Soviet model. This school lasted for ten years, until the early 70s, and it later was succeeded by different kinds of courses, taught by the same teachers.

The new school, part of the Department of History and Philology, was started in 1992. Its establishment was viewed as a necessity due to the increase in the number of newspapers of different orientations and their usage of a great many number of new journalists. The Albanian press during the transition period has experienced gradual transformation from propagandistic journalism to an informative one. Journalism now tends to be a business and as such it exacts perfect professionalism.

This school, the only journalism one in the university system until recently, has seventeen years of experience now and has produced now 13 generations of journalists. It is difficult to track and to estimate how many of these students that graduated journalism have worked in the media. However, to have an idea of how many potential journalists or media employees we could have had during this time, the following table will be useful.

Enrollment figures in the journalism branch (1992-2009)

Academic year	Students registered	Academic year	Students registered
1992-1993	32	2001-2002	61
1993-1994	44	2002-2003	57
1994-1995	33	2003-2004	77
1995-1996	44	2004-2005	118
1996-1997	48	2005-2006	111
1997-1998	36	2006-2007	107
1998-1999	42	2007-2008	50
1999-2000	50	2008-2009	76
2000-2001	49	2009-2010	81
TOTAL	378	TOTAL	738

So, in total, when the generation that was enrolled in academic year 2009-2010 graduates, the total number of students that will have graduated from this faculty would be 1,116. As it can be seen from the figures presented, the number of students that were enrolled in the first decade of the school is almost the half of those that enrolled in the second decade. This significant increase in number of enrolled students can be explained by two factors: increasing interest on receiving a journalism degree and education and entering the profession, as well as reformation and better reputation of the faculty of journalism.

In fact, ever since its first year of establishment, the journalism department at the public university has undergone significant change in the curricula. From the classical 4-year degree, it has now adopted recently the two-tier system, in accordance with the Bologna process. The department now issues two degrees: first level (bachelor) and second level (master's.)

The number of students enrolled for the academic year for the first level degree is the following:

Year 1	80 students
Year 2	80 students
Year 3	60 students
TOTAL	220 students

The first level degree offers four profiles of journalism where students can choose from: art/culture journalism, political journalism, economic journalism, and general journalism.

The number of students enrolled for the academic year for the second level degree is the following:

Year 1	90 students
Year 2	100 students
Year 3	74 students
Year 4	77 students
Year 5	75 students
TOTAL	416 students

The second level degrees also offer opportunities to become more specialized in the profile of journalism desired. The profiles offered are the following:

1. Public relations
2. Media marketing
3. Media management
4. European journalism
5. Intercultural communication

It is evident that there has been significant reform in the curriculum and department of journalism at the public university ever since its establishment. The branch has continuously benefited from foreign scholars that were attached to it time after time, with the assistance of foreign embassies and organizations. However, it is clear that as with every area of education in the country, this branch also has further needs to reform and improve and the process will be ongoing. In addition to the public university, there is

only one other private university offering journalism degrees. However, this degree was recently started, and no conclusions can be made on its quality and main traits offered in such a short time.

Working journalists in practice

The background of Albanian journalists reflects to a significant degree on the quality of their reporting. For this purpose, this monitoring attempts to identify the main trends in the Albanian media landscape in these terms. The main aim of the monitoring was to identify the background and education of Albanian journalists. Collecting data on their age, education, and skills, not only reflects the way this influences their reporting, but might also serve as a potential training needs assessment in further professionalization of the media in the country.

Methodology

The collection of data on education and background of journalists is focused only on daily mainstream newspapers. Albanian media scene has about 250 publications, of different frequencies, as well as a plethora of electronic media. It would be impossible to track and follow all these media, along with their information on their working journalists. For this purpose the data for this research was confined to the 20 daily newspapers published in the capital. The number of daily newspaper is 26; however, the six remaining newspapers are sports newspapers and with this specific, it would not be helpful in achieving an overall general impression on the media scene as a whole.

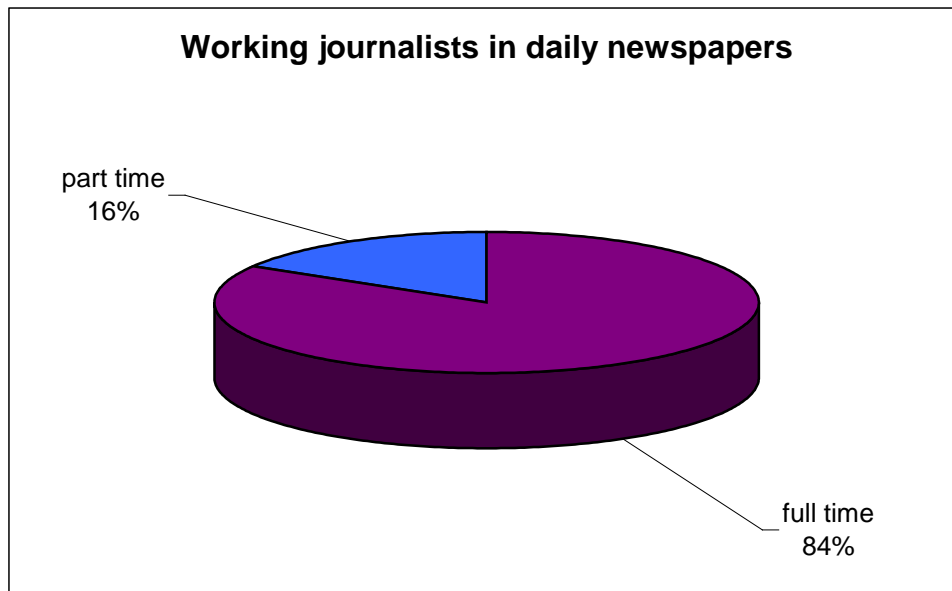
The main form used to collect data for the collecting this information is the drafting and filling of questionnaires by the editors of the main daily newspapers. Information required included number of employees, their education degrees, the area of studies, other non-academic training, and future interest in further training and professional skills. Some of the newspapers refused to provide information on these matters, considering them confidential. However, the return rate of the forms was close to 80%, which is a high rate and one that offers opportunity to reach a generally reliable overview of the existing situation and needs.

In order to have a fuller picture of the current needs and of the main trends in the landscape of Albanian dailies' journalists, we also drafted a questionnaire for the journalists themselves. The main points referred to in the questionnaire included working experience, degree received, working area, and future training needs. The journalists were selected randomly and the questionnaires were anonymous. The total number of journalists surveyed in this form was 75.

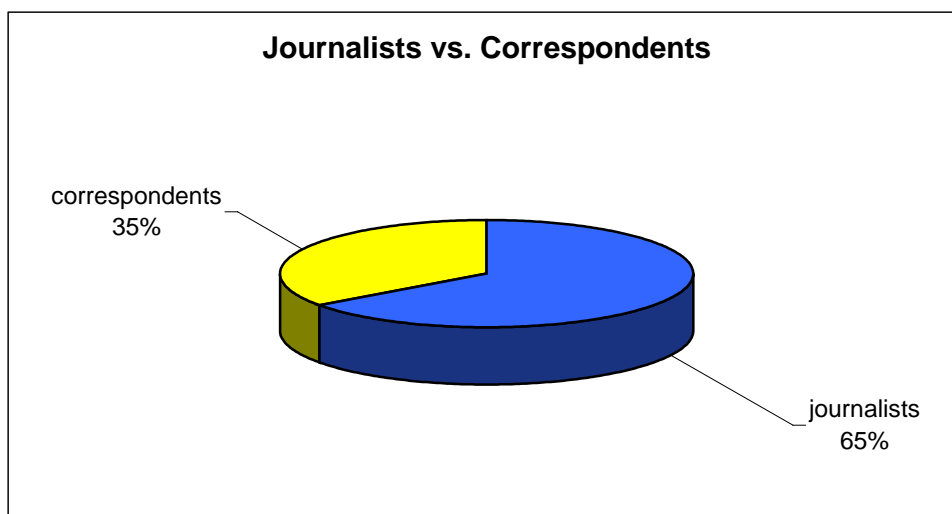
- ***General data on Albanian dailies' landscape***

As it was mentioned in the methodology section, the questionnaires filled by the editors-in-chief of the daily newspapers included information on number of employees, working

modalities, age of employees, their education degrees, their gender, and work experience. The data provided by the editors-in-chief in this regard are analyzed below:

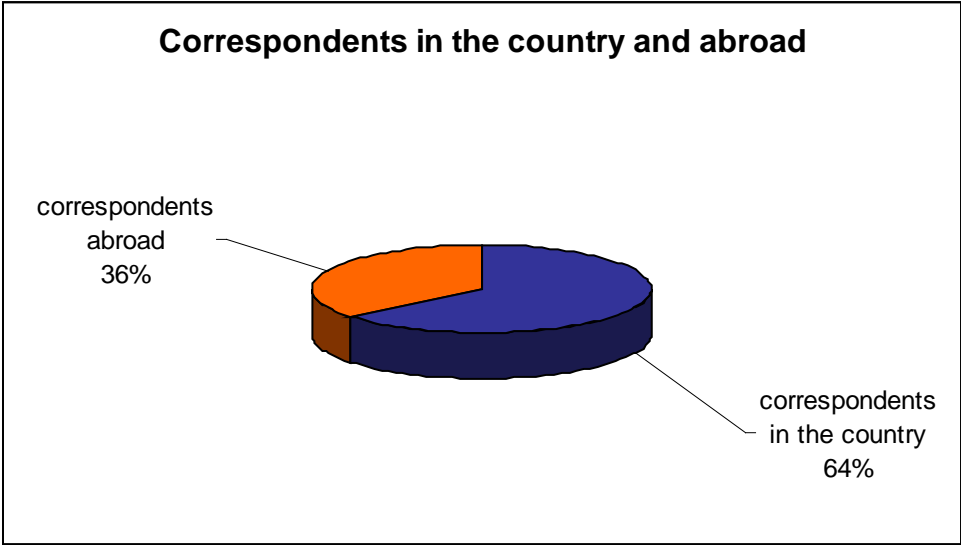


The above chart shows the working modalities of journalists employed in the daily newspapers that provided data on this matter. According to this information, the overwhelming majority, 84% of working journalists, work full time. Only the remaining 16% works part-time. This can be explained by the great overload of work that journalists in daily newspapers face, at a time when most of them complain that they are understaffed.

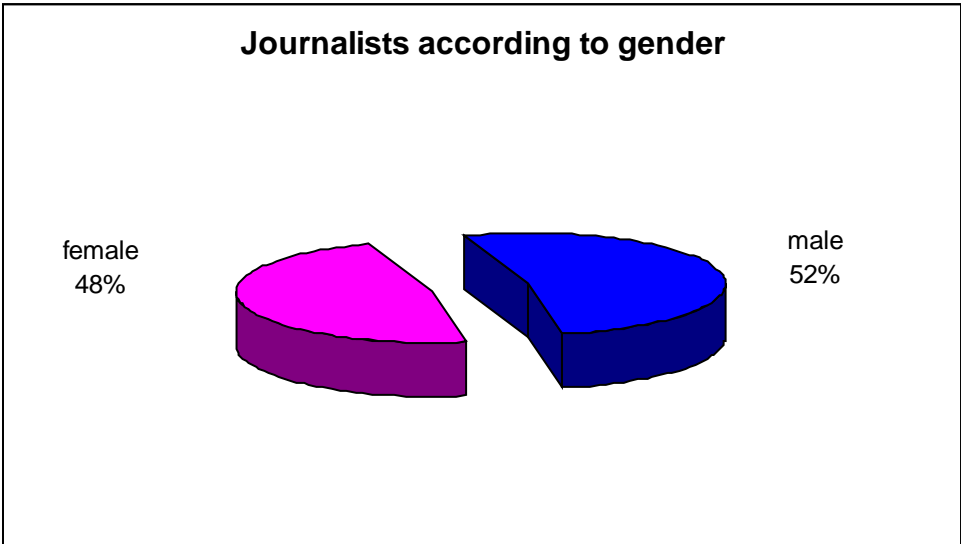


This chart shows the division of working journalists in correspondents and journalists: 35% and 65% respectively. When reading this figure, it should also be added that most

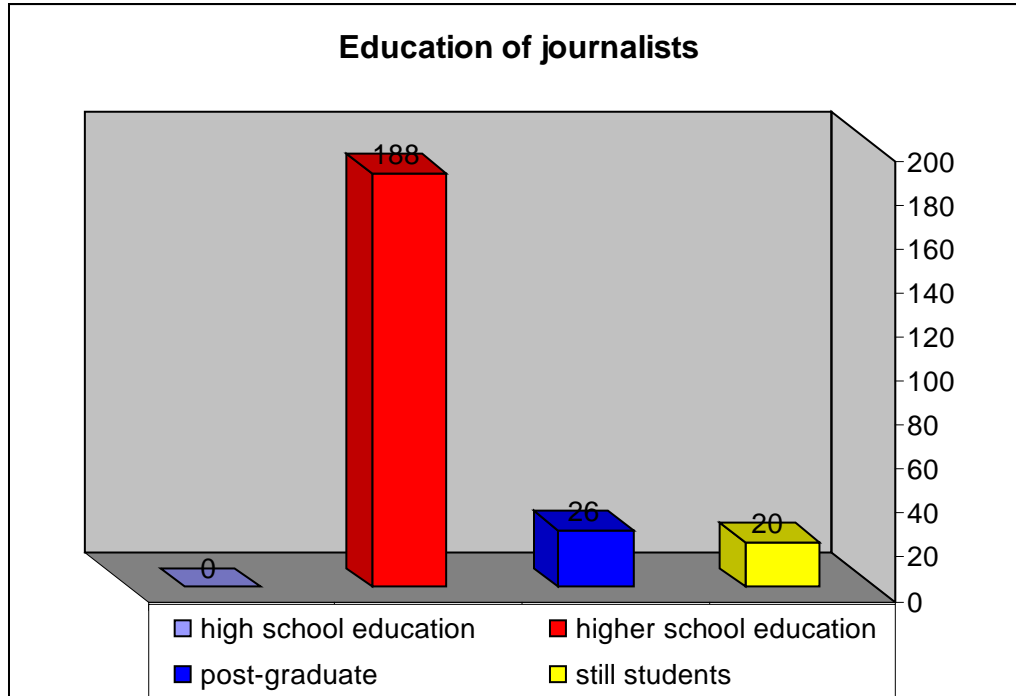
dailies have correspondents in other cities and that they are considered correspondents just because of their location, and not because of their workload, which might be similar to that of colleagues in the capital.



Many newspapers claim that they have correspondents abroad, although the reports coming from abroad are rarely produced by correspondents; they are provided by news agencies in most cases. However, as the figures provided show, 36% of the correspondents work abroad, whereas the remaining 64 % is in the country. It should also be clarified that the editors seem not to make a clear-cut distinction between correspondents and collaborators; hence reporters or occasional columnists. This is the reason why this figure needs to be taken with some reserve.



The data provided show that the ratio of working male journalists to female ones is almost equal: 52% to 48%. However, although there is a high number of female journalists, few of them are appointed in leading positions, as previous research and observations has shown.

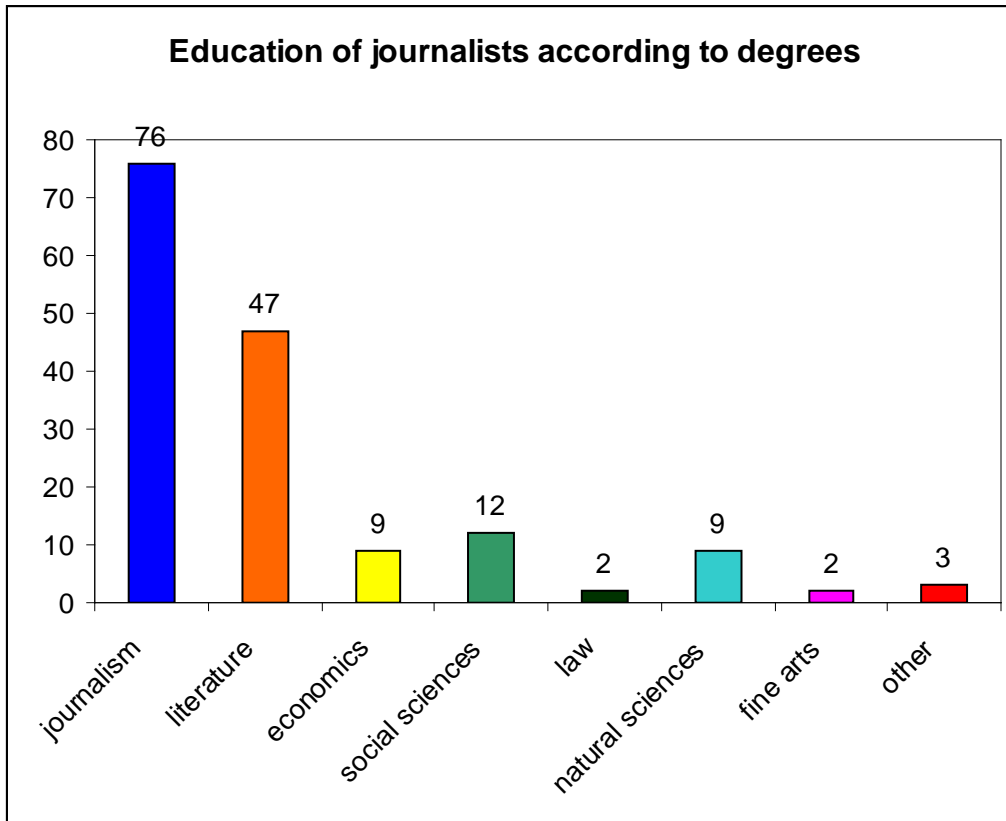


This chart depicts the education level of journalists employed in the newsrooms of main daily newspapers. As it can be seen, the predominant majority already have a university degree. According to the figures provided by the newspapers, 80% of them have received a higher education diploma, while 11% also have a post-graduate degree. Hence, compared to few years back, when the same figures were collected, there seems to be a significant improvement in the education level of working journalists. Although the previous figures pertained to all media outlets in the country and a strict and accurate comparison cannot be made, it can be said that the level of education of journalists has improved significantly.

This is also true when you notice that there are no more persons with high school diploma that work in the mainstream daily newspapers. This also reflects the overall existing trend in the country, where receiving a higher education diploma is becoming more frequent as time goes by.

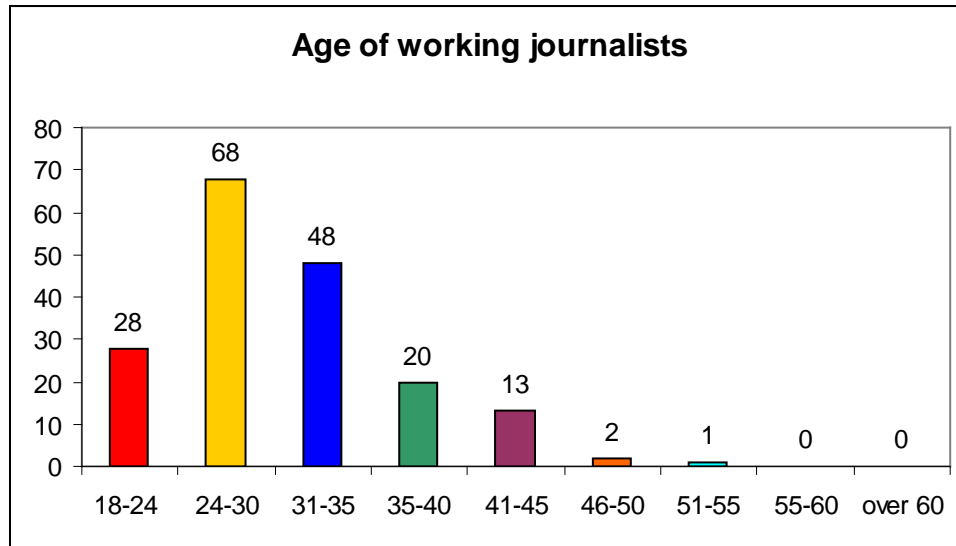
In this context, it is also worthy to note that about 8% of the working journalists are still students. In fact, a great part of the current students of journalism are employed in all kinds of media. This is also related to the easy access to the profession: hiring of journalists is usually based on interviewing. However, this part will be tackled further.

While the level of education of journalists is certainly a good sign and a significant indication, it is also important to see what are the degrees of education of these working journalists. The following chart depicts the situation in this regard:

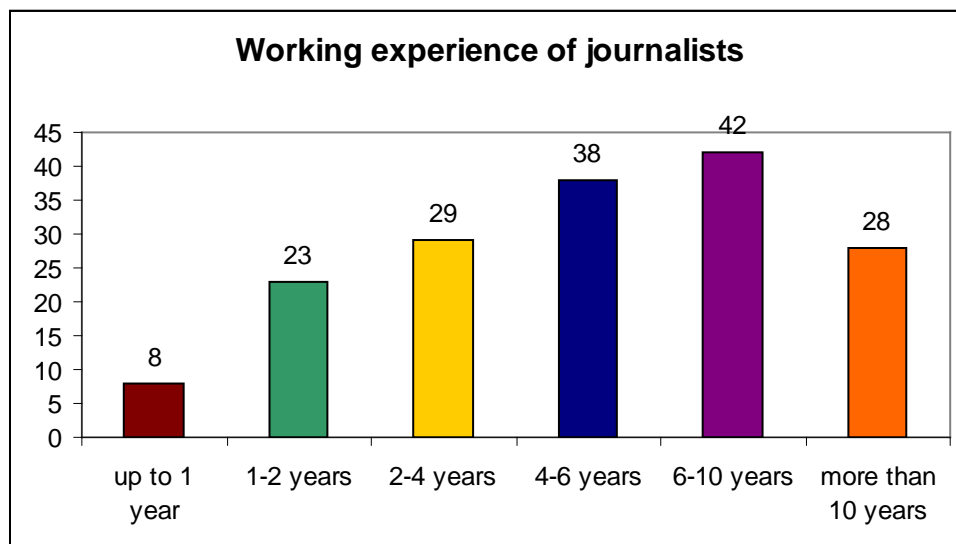


As it can be seen from the chart, the prevailing number of working journalists possesses a journalism degree, or 47% of them. Although this is the most widespread degree among working journalists, it is still not a significantly high one: these are all working journalists in national daily newspapers that are being considered, and not even half of them have majored in journalism. This figure confirms an important trend: journalism degree is not absolutely necessary for pursuing a career in journalism.

The other more popular degree is that of Albanian language and literature, possessed by 29% of working journalists. Social sciences follow with 7%, and economics and natural sciences are at a tie with 5%. As it can be seen, there is a variety of degrees among working journalists in mainstream daily newspapers. This leads to the conclusion that a large number of them has learnt journalism skills on the field, and, as such, formal education skills are not exactly solid in this area.



This chart represents the age-groups of journalists employed in mainstream daily newspapers. The overall trend of working journalists in the media landscape has been that of young journalists prevailing over more experienced ones: age group 18-24 has usually been the prevailing one in previous similar research. The figures provided by the daily newspapers in this context indicate a different trend: the prevailing age groups are 24-30, and 31-35. This shows that the age group that used to prevail in research carried out eight years ago, is still on journalism, more or less. This shows that the labor market in this area has gained a certain stability. So, the group with highest percentage is that of 24-30, or 37%. The group immediately following is that of 31-35, with 26%. The youngest group has 15% of the total number of journalists, followed by the age group 35-40 with 11 %. Hence, there seems to be a trend where persons with some experience after graduation are preferred; or, it might be the case that majority of persons that have started to work during or right after graduation are still in the profession.

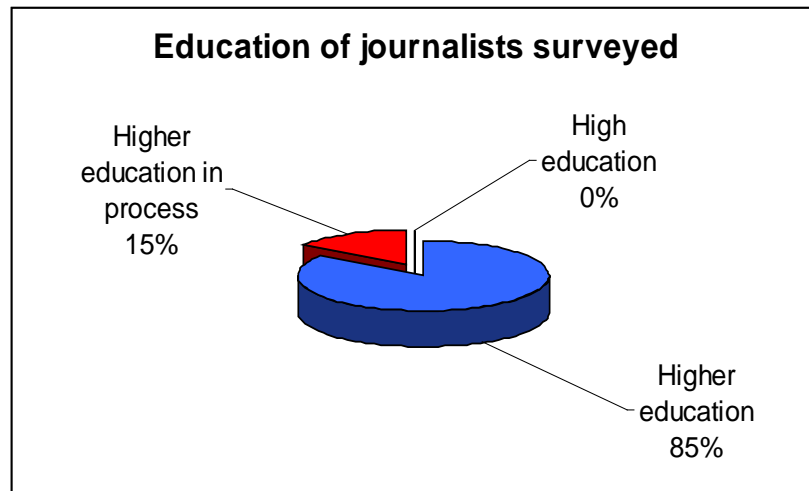


In fact, this chart shows the years of experience of journalists that work in main daily newspapers. According to these figures, most working journalists in these newspapers have between 6 and 10 years of working experience: 25% of them. They are followed by those that have 4-6 years, or 22% of the total number. The third and fourth groups are almost at a tie with each other: those that have 2-4 years of experience and those with more than 10 years of experience constitute respectively 17% and 16% of the total number. The working experience chart confirms the same trend that the one concerned with age of working journalists showed: most of these people have been in the profession for some time now, although young journalists are still going strong: 18% of working journalists do not have more than two years of experience.

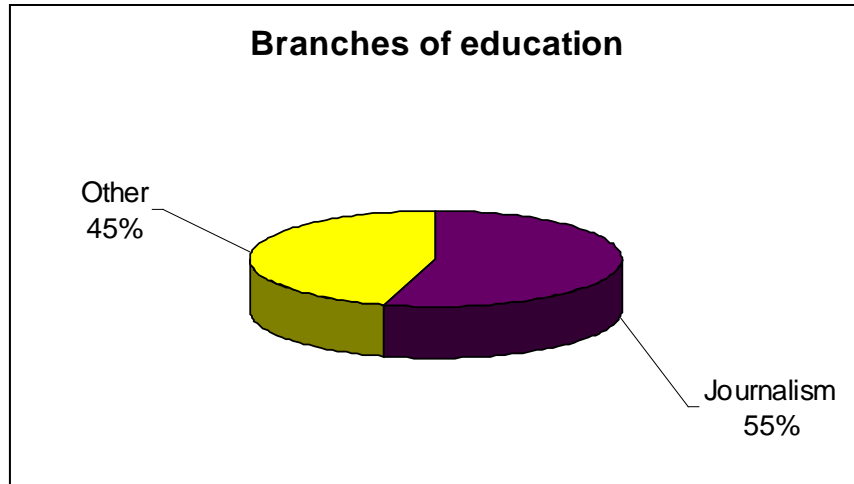
- ***Training needs of journalists***

In addition to general data on working journalists, editors were also asked to provide their preferences on training needs as well as describe the main problems that exist in further education and qualification of journalists. The same was asked to the pool of journalists that was interviewed for this purpose. Comparing the data from these groups would shed more light on the real needs and problems regarding journalists' qualification in the country.

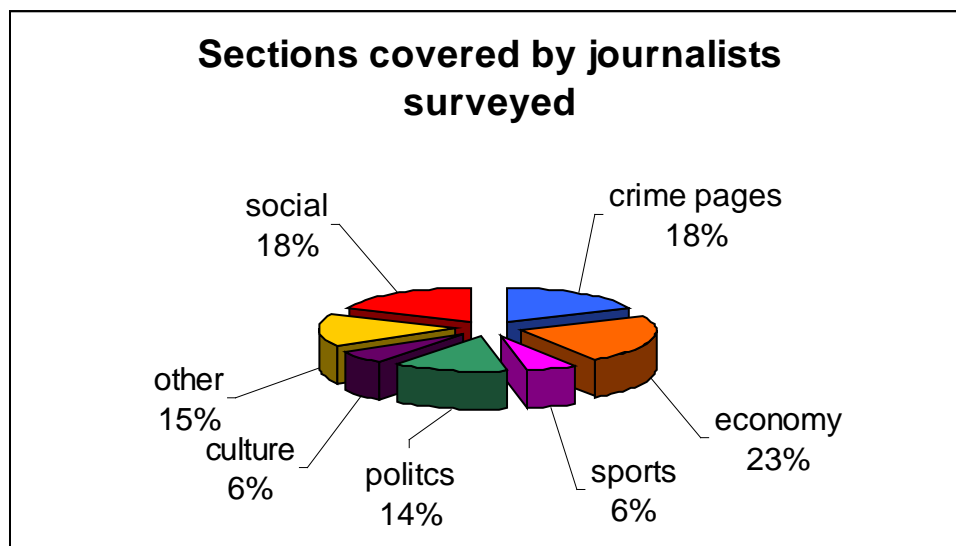
The first questions were background questions referring to existing education degree, their preferences, work experience, work beat, and other similar information. This information would be necessary in order to view how much the existing background influences the journalists' choices and preferences for future needs.



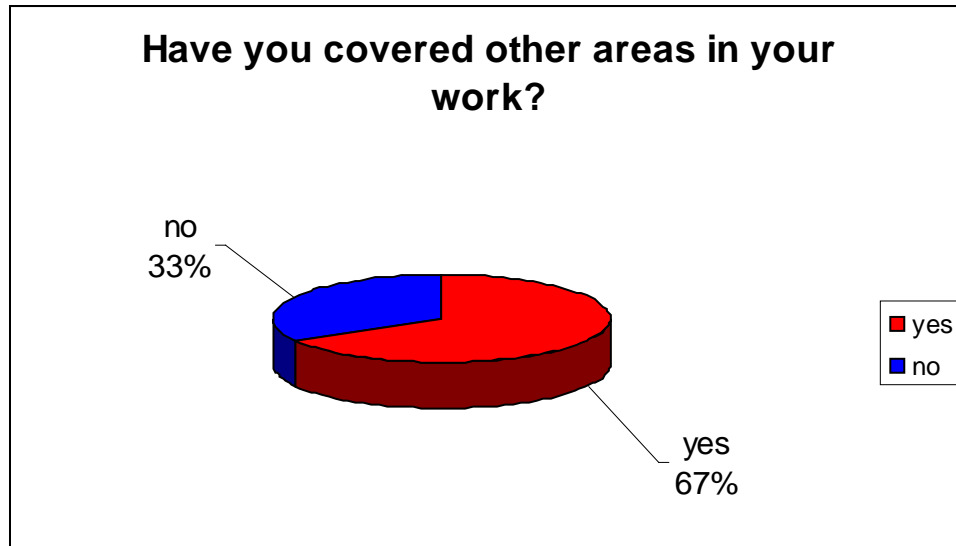
The above chart shows the education degree of journalists that participated in the survey. Most of them already had a diploma, 85% of them more specifically. The remaining 15% of them are in the process of getting one, while a few were getting the second degree.



This chart shows the branches of education that the journalists have pursued or are in the process of doing so. Journalism degree is definitely more popular than the others, with 55%; however it is just a little bit over half, so there is no absolute preference in this case.

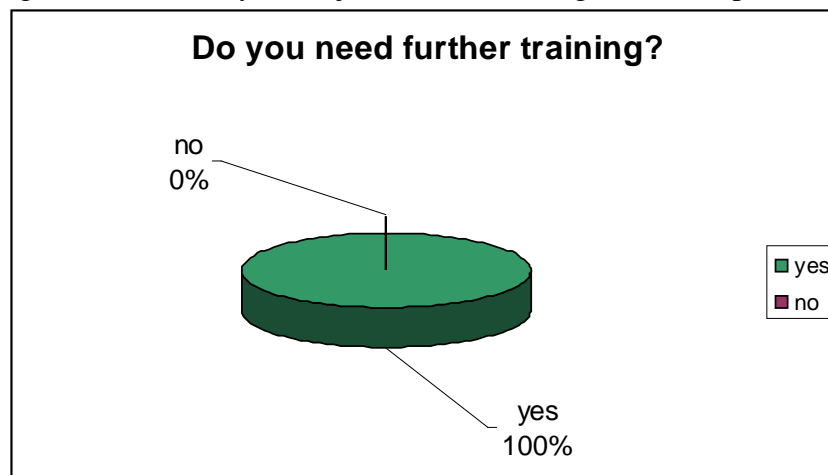


Another question asked to journalists was that of what section they cover in their media outlet, since their working area would also potentially affect their preferences for training courses. The above chart shows the division according to the sector they cover.

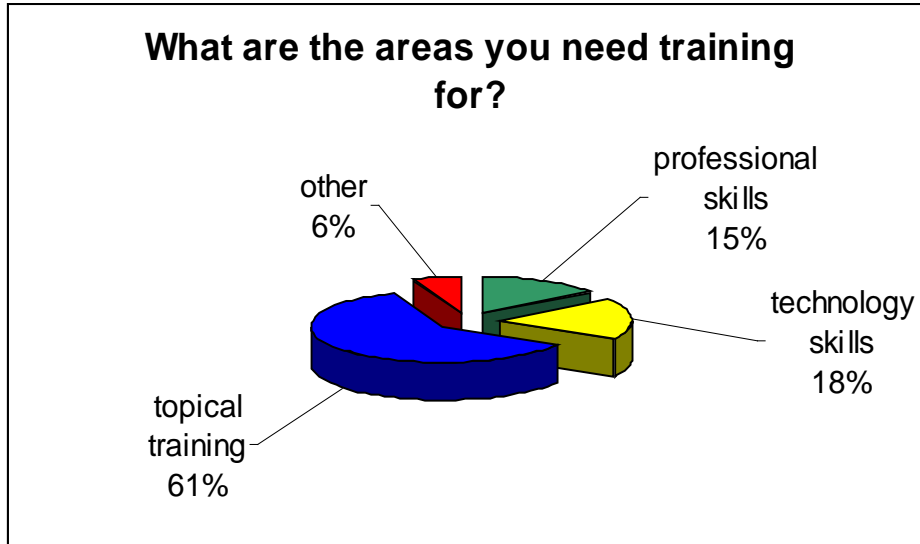


While it is important to ask what sections the journalists cover, it is equally important to ask whether they have covered any other sections or just one, as this is a widespread practice in Albanian media, related to high mobility of journalists from one newspaper to the next. As a result, this mobility does not contribute to specialization of journalists in one area, being able to improve their level of professionalism. In fact, the journalists surveyed are no exception: 67% of them said they have also covered other areas during their work, while 33% of them had been stable in their area of work.

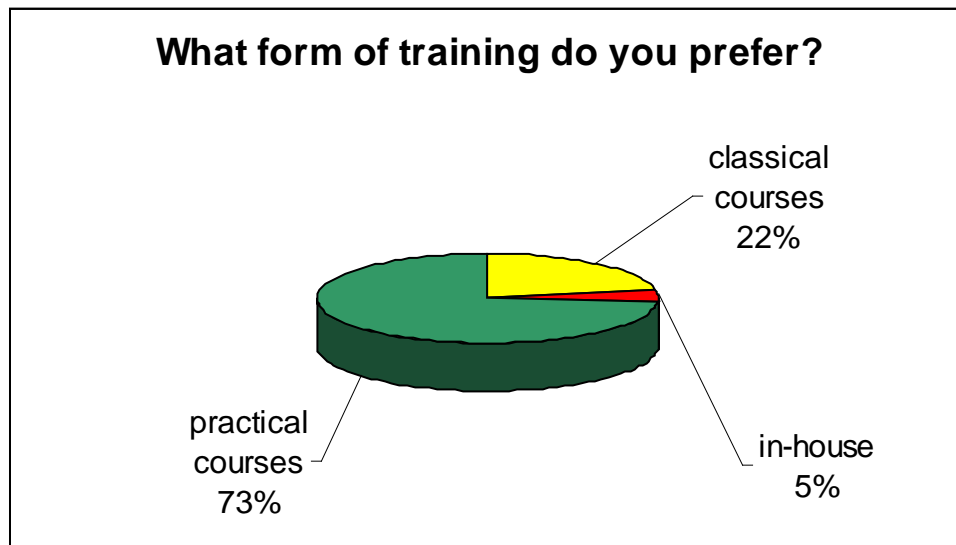
The following charts will analyze the journalists' training needs and problems.



This chart is self-explanatory: 100% of the journalists interviewed said they needed further training in their profession. Although training has been almost a mania to some degree, it is clear that young journalists think they have yet to benefit from training opportunities offered in order to improve professionally.



Further on, the journalists were asked to detail their preferences on the training area that they would desire most. The overwhelming majority, 61% of them, chose topical training, or issue-based training, where journalists are introduced to the topic more in-depth and learn how to report on it. Technology skills were the second preference, with 18%, related also to the emergence of new media and respective emerging needs. Finally, professional skills received 15% of the preferences. This might also be related to the fact that a great part of this training is offered at school; hence, complimentary training on other issues and approaches is more preferred.



Along the same lines, the journalists were asked what form of training they would prefer. The overwhelming majority, 73% of them, indicated they would prefer practical courses, which usually end up with producing a supplement or any other final product. 22% were in favour of classical courses, whereas only 5% of them chose in-house training.

It would be interesting to compare these results with the way that the editors-in-chief responded to the same question. In fact, the editors-in-chief are quite divided in their preferences on this topic. Many of them chose practical courses, but also in-house courses, and sometimes classical courses. Many of them chose more than one course; often even all three of the courses. Hence, it is difficult to come up with a conclusion in this regard. Perhaps the only safe conclusion would be that editors would certainly need more training for their journalists.

The editors seem to be in agreement, however, when it comes to their needs on training areas. Almost all of them indicated that they would prefer topical training, although some of them chose all three of the training areas. Two others also pointed out the need for investigative journalism, something that is missing to a large degree in Albanian media.

When asked what is the factor that mostly influences their hiring choices, editors-in-chief were divided over professional experience and devotion to work, which ended almost in a tie. Only a few of them pointed out education as a major criterion in hiring a journalist. Only one editor emphasized the need to have new ideas in your work as another requirement.

The final question asked to editors was related to what they would suggest for improving the professional level of journalists. There were different replies, on different angles to this question. Some of the main trends were related to the need for continuous training, improvement of infrastructure for journalists, and greater need for practice at the journalism school, perhaps enabled by the media outlets themselves or the Albanian Media Institute. Another suggestion was the establishment of a monthly or any other regular professional forum of editors-in-chief in order to discuss the problems and identify potential solutions in this area.

Conclusions

In this array of data, it is difficult to pinpoint an accurate map of trends and preferences, since they also depend on professional specifics and preferences of persons and media interviewed. However, it can be safely concluded that both journalists and editors pointed out the need for further training, in different forms. Topical courses and practical ones were more preferred by both groups.

In addition, the editors were dissatisfied with the lack of a fair balance between theory and practice after formal education. Overall they suggested that journalists need more training and practice combined, offering different solutions in this regard.

Another need both editors and journalists expressed, also related to the previous experience on topical training, is that of opportunities for journalists to consolidate one reporting area or profile. Investigative reporting training was also highly rated among the professionals interviewed for this purpose.