



South East European Network
for Professionalization of Media

CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE, SAME PERSISTING PROBLEMS

The Future of the Media in Albania – Facts and Trends

Ilda Londo

OUR MEDIA:

A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism,
counter polarisation and promote dialogue



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Author: Ilda Londo

Editor, regional lead researcher: Brankica Petković

Copy-editing and proofreading: Fiona Thompson

Technical editing: Mirela Rožajac-Zulčić

Graphic design: Špela Kranjec

Publishers:

Foundation “Mediacentar”, Sarajevo

Albanian Media Institute, Tirana

Peace Institute, Ljubljana

Sarajevo, January 2025



*This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union.
Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and the publishers
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Analysis of media in Albania and mapping of main trends through credible, regular, and complete data is a problematic endeavour. However, the data available show that it is safe to say that challenges for professional journalism remain formidable in Albania. Full formality of the media market has not been achieved, especially regarding online media, and to some degree print media. In addition, problems related to labour relations of media employees are still visible. Along with the interdependence of media owners from political and business interests, this certainly conditions the freedom of journalists to be independent and not to censor themselves accordingly.

Increasingly fewer students are choosing journalism and communication degrees, even though the number of online media seems to be increasing, at least where the online media are concerned. The concentration of major media groups owning several types of media outlets and the blurring of boundaries between new and traditional media in their staff and content production does not make it easy to see a visible trend in terms of journalists' statistics. However, it is clear that there is considerable market pressure to follow similar trends in reporting and format in the main media outlets, including prioritizing speed of publication and sensationalism over professional standards and ethics. Efforts to self-regulate exist, but it is too early to see an impact in this respect.

More specifically, the main conclusions derived from the data collected in the framework of this report consist in the following:

- Fewer students are choosing to study journalism, and the number of journalists in the country, while the data are not certain, appears to show a downward trend.
- Internal and external pressure against journalists persist, including regarding labour relations.
- Efforts to organize within the community are mostly crisis-driven and they are usually mostly fragmented, and internal organization of journalists within media outlets is still missing.
- Lack of transparency and the tendency for anonymity in online media is pervasive, leading to ethical problems and dubious professional practices, even though the traditional media are also far from immune from these problems.

- The traditional media market seems to be highly concentrated in terms of ownership, market revenue, and audience share, thus affecting the plurality of information.
- In the absence of cross-ownership regulation and a total absence of rules on ownership for online and print media, concentration across types of media markets is also clearly visible.
- Television still receives the highest share of the market and is considered the most used and trusted source of information by the audience, but social networks have gained ground as sources of information, especially among the youth.
- The media is neither the most nor the least trusted body or institution in the country, but the overall level of media literacy among the population seems low, as is their knowledge to use existing complaint mechanisms.
- Media legislation certainly needs improvement, though its most problematic aspect remains the weakness in implementation.
- The problems with other institutions regarding corruption, public information, fair elections, and rule of law in general certainly affects the social and political context and conduct of media in the country.

I.

INTRODUCTION

This report aims to provide the context against which journalism functions in Albania, highlighting challenges, needs, and opportunities, and also map the main trends that can be discerned with regard to the future of the media in the country. The public space and discussion are constantly shrinking or endangered, and media freedom and freedom of expression are not necessarily advancing in the global scene, and Albania cannot be said to be an exception in this case. At the same time, the role of a free, independent media, able to conduct public interest journalism, while crucial to the democratic health of a society, cannot work in a vacuum, but needs an environment that at least does not work against its development.

For this purpose, having a broader context against which to see and analyse the status of journalism in the country is a necessary exercise. The context includes the status of the rule of law and the relevant institutions, economic and social circumstances, and general status of institutions that affect the media environment. It is equally important to see and describe the situation with assisting organizations, especially civil society organizations, which are supposed to check and monitor state activity, on the one hand, but also contribute to conditions that lead to a more professional and responsible media.

In addition to analysing the environment that affects media development and professionalism, it is equally essential to critically assess the internal factors that influence media conduct. These factors include, but are not limited to, statistics and the situation of journalists, journalism education and training, the ability to organize to advance labour relations, representation issues that current media outlets and media coverage reflect, the ability to self-regulate, and other important issues.

The lack of data, or questions regarding their reliability, is a constant feature of the media landscape in Albania and remains a challenge when pursuing such research initiatives. In order to map the ongoing trends in the media area, the research relied mainly on secondary research, but in some cases, interviews were necessary to fill in the gaps. The data comes mainly from regular annual international or regional reports on the status of institutions, corruption, rule of law, and media literacy, and also from national statistics available for some of the indicators. Regional and national polls and reports on media use and media trust is another category of sources, as well as reports from public authorities and from local civil society organizations.

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Specific data sets are missing or in the best case are estimates, especially in relation to the media market and advertising, and in regard to statistics on the number of journalists. The transparency of online media, which is completely opaque, also plays an important part in the difficulties in achieving greater transparency on the situation of media in the country. These absences or approximations and estimates, when possible, certainly posed one of the major challenges in conducting this report and conducting an analysis of trends that has a solid foundation on data.

The transparency of online media, which is completely opaque, also plays an important part in the difficulties in achieving greater transparency on the situation of media in the country.

The data that were collected as part of this report are presented separately. The data collected and this report will be used to inform the second part of the research, planned to take place in 2025, which will be of a more qualitative nature and will see the involvement of media professionals and other relevant actors through focus groups and interviews.

The research on future of the media was conducted simultaneously in all countries of the Western Balkans and in Turkey, aiming to identify and analyse the current state of play and emerging trends in media, journalism, and democracy. In the first part of the research, carried out between April and September 2024, a large set of data on journalism, media landscape, ownership and finances, media representation and participation, media use, media trust, and democracy was gathered and analysed on the country level. The identified trends, risks, and opportunities will be further analysed through interviews and focus groups with different stakeholders in the second part of the research in 2025, resulting in recommendations for safeguarding journalism, media, and democracy. The research is a part of the regional project “Our Media: A Civil Society Action to Generate Media Literacy and Activism, Counter Polarization and Promote Dialogue”, implemented by nine media organizations from the Western Balkans, Turkey, and Slovenia in the period 2023–2026.

The factual data presented in the tables in this report are only a part of the extensive data collection presented in the separate data report, available at the website of the Our Media project.¹

¹ Link to the Our Media project website: <https://seenpm.org/our-media-publications/>

II.

GENERAL COUNTRY DATA

One of the main topics of public and political debate in the country is related to the trend of emigration of the population abroad, along with the tendency to move from rural areas to urban ones, and from smaller cities to the capital. While the Albanian population may still be considered relatively young, there is a tendency towards ageing, in view of the continuous emigration and the decrease in births. The literacy rate in the country has been more or less stable, though problems with the education system persist. The latest PISA test results ranked Albania quite low, adding to the questions on the quality of education. At the same time, both the country's GDP and the average salary have continued to increase in the last three years, according to official figures, but living costs also continue to rise. Recently, the Albanian Government also made the decision to increase the minimum wage. In the last 30 years, Albania has experienced continuous and massive emigration and has a sizable population abroad. The demographic question the country is facing, along with the fact that part of the population emigrating abroad are skilled professionals, may be considered one of the main topics for politics and decision-makers to tackle now and in the years to come.

Table 1: **GENERAL COUNTRY DATA**

Total population of the country in 2023	2,761,785
Population literacy rate in 2023	97.70%
GDP per capita in the country in 2023 (based on purchasing power)	USD 21,395.30
Average salary in the country in 2023	ALL 75,025

Source: INSTAT (2024)

III.

THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

Having accurate statistics and data regarding the media has been a continuous problem when discussing trends and policies regarding the media sector. Data are often not available and, in most cases, we have to deal with estimates, rather than ascertained and verified information. The degree of informality that continues to exist in parts of the media sector also contributes to such figures being estimates and perceptions, rather than verified facts.

One such statistic is related to the overall number of journalists. Estimates vary in this regard. The most conservative figure is the official one, coming from the tax authorities, which reports this figure to be 992 as of January 2024. Journalists and media organizations also view this figure with some reserve, especially when considering that online media, which have experienced a boom in recent years, have no obligation to be registered. Even though they may be registered as businesses or as NGOs, it is difficult to identify them as media for statistical purposes. In this context, the Union of Albanian Journalists estimates the number of journalists to be more than double the official figure, closer to 2,058. The dispute and uncertainty in this figure also make it impossible to judge whether we have more or fewer journalists overall than before.

What we can say with greater certainty, though, is that the number of students pursuing a journalism and/or communication degree is certainly dwindling. The students enrolling in these degrees in the 2023 academic year amounted to 139 across the whole country, compared to 217 students in 2021. The trend of fewer students pursuing such degrees becomes more pronounced if we compare the situation with ten years ago, in 2013, when this number was 366 students, so almost three times more than the current number. This trend may reflect also the emigration tendencies of the overall population, but also the lack of interest and incentives to engage in journalism.

Salaries of journalists seem to be estimated more or less at the average wage of the population, between EUR 720 and 750. However, there are huge differences within the pool of journalists, depending on the position and the kind of media outlet, as well as whether they are part of the media in the capital or in smaller cities. The Union of Albanian Journalists and other organizations

The number of students pursuing a journalism and/or communication degree is certainly dwindling.

denounce cases of delayed salary payments and other problems in labour relations, but not much has been achieved in terms of establishing trade unions within the media outlets or going towards negotiation of a collective agreement.

Reports on the situation of journalists reveal that they do not live in the safest of environments, both in terms of job security and labour relations, but also in terms of the external and internal pressure they experience because of their jobs. The Journalists' Safety Index claims that the number of attacks on journalists has increased from 14 in 2021 to 24 in 2023. For the most part, journalists experience verbal rather than physical attacks, with a few exceptions. They also have been victims of incidents when covering protests and similar events. However, the least documented part of the journalists' job remains the pressure and the climate that makes them retreat into self-censorship as a routine part of their duties.

In this context, the motivation for journalists to be devoted to their profession and ethical often comes from a personal sense of morality, ethics, and professional ambition, rather than from the environment they operate in. The media community is far from organized, even when it comes to problems directly affecting them, such as protesting or making demands regarding labour relations or freedom to report on public interest matters with professionalism. Against this background, it is not easy for self-regulation efforts to succeed. At a time when the most fundamental criteria of a journalist's work continue to be challenged, working towards self-regulation requires resources and organizational skills that are hard to come by. There have been various updates to the Code of Ethics, but there has been no formal commitment from media outlets to the Code.

A more positive development in this regard has been the establishment of the Alliance for Ethical Media, a body facilitated by the Albanian Press Council, which counts more than 30 media outlets in its membership and has established a mechanism for complaints from the public regarding ethical violations in the media. Data from the Council indicate that the number of complaints received has increased from 31 in 2021 to 67 in 2023, showing that there is greater awareness of the possibility to complain against media outlets and to engage in the self-regulation process. However, being a process that first of all has to happen within the media community, more remains to be done in this respect, especially in view of AI and other related phenomena that are expected to impact journalism, but have rarely been discussed so far.

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Table 2: **DATA ON JOURNALISTS AND JOURNALISM**

Overall number of journalists in 2023	Estimates range from 992 to 2,058
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the overall number of journalists growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Remaining the same (est.)
Number of students of journalism (and communication and media studies) in 2023/2024	139
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of students of journalism growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining 2023: 139; 2022: 159; 2021: 217
Average salary of journalists in 2023	N/D
Number of attacks on journalists (and media) in the country in 2023 (including threats, intimidation, smear campaigns, physical attacks)	24
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of attacks on journalists growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing 2023: 24; 2022: 18; 2021: 14
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of complaints to the relevant national-level self-regulatory body growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing 2023: 67; 2022: 25; 2021: 31

Sources: Bino (2024); Union of Albanian Journalists, Faculties of Communication; Albanian Media Council

IV.

THE FUTURE OF MEDIA

4.1. CONCEPT OF MEDIA

Albanian legislation does not offer a precise definition of what constitutes media. Article 3 of the Law on Audiovisual Media defines the main terms used in the text of the law; “Audiovisual media service provider is the natural or legal person who has the editorial responsibility for choosing the content of audiovisual broadcasting services and that decides the manner of its organization.” This law also refers to specific and technical terms for actors and services related to audiovisual media. By contrast, a few other laws make a general mention of the media, or the press, sometimes interchangeably, but lack a more precise definition. At the same time, public debate usually focuses on ethical and legal obligations of the media, especially in flagrant and sensitive cases. However, a more philosophical approach on the concept of the media, how to define it, and what preconditions should exist, along with ensuing obligations for the media, is rarely part of public discussions.

Table 3: DATA ON CONCEPT OF MEDIA

The definition of media is established in national regulation. YES/NO/Partly	Partly
The definition/concept of media and legal obligations arising from the legal definition of media have been the subject of public debate and contesting arguments. YES/NO/Partly	NO

Source: Law on Audiovisual Media (2013/2023)

4.2. MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The one thing that has remained constant about the media landscape in the past three decades is the lack of accurate data and statistics on its sections. Given that licensing and registration rules are obligatory only for audio and audiovisual media, the only accurate and official information comes from that sector of the media market. This is also the biggest generator of revenue in the media market. The audio and audiovisual media seem to have achieved a degree of stability, with relatively few changes in recent years in regard to the main audio and audiovisual players in the market.

By contrast, the print media outlets are on a steadily declining trend, reflecting the global trends affecting this industry in this period, but also coming to terms with the market needs and size in Albania. There are still seven daily newspapers being published in Albania, though this is fewer than three years ago. At the same time, weekly or monthly publications have almost totally disappeared and there have been local and regional print publications for a long time.

Some of these publications have transitioned to online media only, including local media outlets. More importantly regarding the media landscape, the number of online media has boomed over the years and is continuously changing. The dynamics of the landscape, and most importantly the lack of obligations to register and formalize the landscape, makes it impossible to have clear statistics on online media. According to estimates of the Union of Albanian Journalists, there are at least 750 online media operating in the country. While this might seem an impressive number, it does not necessarily translate into plurality or richness of information. The tendency to copy-paste content from one to another is a routine practice, lending a certain uniformity across many online media outlets, but also paving the way for the easy spread of inaccurate information without first verifying it.

Within the media landscape, a more stable section and one that certainly strives to uphold professional standards and is not affected by market pressure are the non-profit media. These media, supported by donor funds, are certainly few, although an exact number is missing, partly due to the difficulty in defining this category, as well as the changes in the landscape. However, a common characteristic is the tendency to cover public-oriented journalism stories and not necessarily focus on the latest news, as well as engaging new tools and methods in reporting, with a tendency to focus on investigative journalism, and passing on skills to new journalists and students.

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Table 4: DATA ON MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Total number of media in the country in 2023	N/D
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of media growing, declining, or remaining the same?	N/D
Total number of public service media in the country (national, local) in the country in 2023	1
Total number of private, commercial media in the country in 2023	N/D
Total number of private, non-profit media in the country in 2023	N/D
Total number of daily newspapers in the country in 2023	7
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of daily newspapers in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining
Total number of national TV channels with news content in the country in 2023	5
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of national TV channels with news content in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Remaining the same
Total number of online news media in the country in 2023	N/D
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of online news media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	N/D

Source: Audiovisual Media Authority

4.3. MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Accurate and verified information on audience and advertising has never been possible regarding the media market. In 2023 the representatives of the bigger television broadcasters were brought together by the regulator and an agreement to conduct audience research as an industry was reached, but it is still too early to see what the effects of this process will be. To date, data on audience reach has never been public, and experts have challenged such efforts in terms of size, methodology, and credibility. Simultaneously, data on advertising are also missing and are usually estimates, and data on the size of media outlets in the market are mainly derived from the annual balances they submit to the National Business Center.

To date, data on audience reach has never been public, and experts have challenged such efforts in terms of size, methodology, and credibility.

However, the consolidation and concentration process of the main media outlets in the market is such that even with the lack of clear data, it is not difficult to determine which are the main media groups in the country. The three main media groups, in terms of the number of media and their media market revenue, advertising, and audience share, are the Klan group, Top Media group, and Vizion Plus group. They all possess several media outlets within the same group, mainly radio, television, their online media version, and digital platforms. The owners of each group are members of the same family, and they are all from Albania; foreign ownership does not particularly feature among owners in the Albanian media. At the same time, they also have other businesses apart from media outlets, engaging in various economic sectors. Other important actors are the Focus group, owned mainly by Irfan Hysenbelliu, which owns a daily publication, an all-news TV channel, and a radio station, as well as online media, and the group owned and run by Italian and Albanian citizen Carlo Bollino, which owns an all-news TV station, an online news website, and a daily publication.

According to the BIRN Media Ownership Monitor, their market share ranges from the Klan group's 23.82% of the market, to the Top Media group with 17.05% of the market, and the Vizion Plus group with 4.93% of the market. The same report states that "the free-to-air TV market has a high audience concentration risk with four major owners (Frangaj family, Hoxha family, Hysenbelliu family, Carlo Bollino) reaching an audience share of 86.94%, in the year to 8 May 2023." At the same time, the print media market is rather small, but also highly concentrated, where the market leader, businessman Irfan Hysenbelliu, alone controls nearly half of the market with 48.55% of the market share, and the two largest owners have a market share of 71.15%. There are no data on the radio market and audience, or on online media. Hence, the market clearly presents signs of concentration regarding revenue, and possibly advertising share, as well as audience, translated in turn into the possibility to influence public opinion.

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The legislation does not address cross ownership, since there is no regulation of online media, while print media are regulated with two very general articles on media freedom, and no further rules are established. The audio and audiovisual media regulation establishes criteria on ownership, but these were further relaxed in 2016 after lobbying of the main media players on the verge of licensing of the digital platforms. While transparency on media ownership is provided by the regulator, data on all media companies are accessible in the online database that is public and contains data on all business companies. However, this transparency becomes more difficult in the context of online media, which might not necessarily be registered as a business or at all, and some basic information on the name of company to start the online search is essential, but not always available or public.

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Table 5: **DATA ON MEDIA OWNERSHIP**

Name the 3 biggest media owners in the country (owners of the biggest number of media and/or with the biggest audience reach and/or the biggest share in the advertising market). Add information about the country of origin for each of the 3 biggest media owners.	Klan group [Aleksander Frangaj, Albania], Top Media group [Hoxha family, Albania], Vizion Plus group [Dulaku family, Albania]
TREND in the past 3 years: Has the list of the top 3 media owners in the country changed? YES/NO	N/D
Media ownership concentration is regulated in the country. YES/NO/Partly	Partly
Is transparency of media ownership regulated by law? YES/NO/Partly	Partly
Media ownership is transparent in the country (credible information about who owns media is published). YES/NO/PARTLY	Partly

Source: BIRN Albania (2023); Law on Audiovisual Media (2013/2023)

4.4. MEDIA FINANCING

Transparency on media financing is also quite opaque, due to the overall lack of data on how the media market functions and the lack of obligations for print and online media. The main data in this regard come from analysis of the annual balances of the media outlets and estimates of the marketing agencies. It seems that the national advertising market has grown steadily through the years from an estimated EUR 35 million in 2021, a pandemic year, to EUR 72 million in 2023. It is difficult to calculate the shares for each media sector, but it is safe to say that the lion's share in this market undoubtedly goes to TV, with 76% of the market. The funding of the public broadcaster depends mainly on the licence fee, and the budget has been more or less stable. In 2023, the budget for the public broadcaster was approximately EUR 21 million, with 29% of the funds coming from the state budget to cover specific expenses. Questions on funding patterns and sources of online media remain among the biggest challenges regarding transparency and functioning of the media market, since there is less information available on them, as well as dubious practices in relation to ethics and professionalism.

The legislation and mechanisms in place for allotting public funding to media do not allow for a good analysis and solid conclusion regarding this process. Subsidies to the media are not envisaged in the law and are not practiced. Instead, many public institutions offer grants for projects related to media coverage or organization of public events. However, there is no transparency on the process and often the grants are channelled either through marketing agencies or to companies that produce part of the content in the media, not necessarily to the media itself. The failure to unify these entries into a specific category in the treasury budget payments makes the task of achieving transparency on the funding provided to media in this way even more difficult. However, in general it is agreed that commercial advertising is significantly more important than public funding through advertising or implementation of projects.

Apart from public funding and advertising, another type of funding is that provided by donors to non-profit media. This type of funding is usually reserved for content production, training, public awareness, networking, and capacity building. Over the years some non-profit media have become more stable and established their public profile, engaging in public service journalism. However, the usual question with these kinds of operations is related to their ability to survive in the long term and the trends of donor support in this respect.

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Table 6: DATA ON MEDIA FINANCING

Total value of the national advertising market (including all types of media) in 2023, in EUR	app. EUR 72 million
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total value of the national advertising market growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Share of TV in the value of the national advertising market in 2023	76%
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the share of TV in the value of the national advertising market growing, declining or remaining the same?	Growing
Total budget of the national public service broadcaster in 2023, in EUR	app. EUR 21 million
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total budget of the public service broadcaster growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining
Share of the total budget of the national public service broadcaster in 2023 received from the state budget	29.20%
Total amount of public funding (grants and subsidies) from the national government and local governments to media in the country in 2023	N/D
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total amount of public funding (grants and subsidies) to the media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	N/D
Obligations of public bodies, institutions, and companies to publish data on funding to media are regulated by law? YES/NO/Partly	NO
Data on allocated amounts of public funding to media outlets are published. YES/NO//Partly	Partly
Total amount of state advertising (advertising of state bodies, institutions and state-owned companies) in the media in the country in 2023	N/D

TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total amount of state advertising in the media in the country growing, declining or remaining the same?	N/D
Total amount of international donor funding to the media in the country in 2023	N/D
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total amount of international donor funding to the media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	N/D

Source: Maho (2024); RTSH (2024)

4.5. MEDIA REPRESENTATION

The exact percentage of female journalists is impossible to calculate, due to a lack of data on the number of journalists and other related statistics. The only statistics in this regard come from the audiovisual media sector, where 58% of the journalists working for television channels and 44% for radio stations are female. Overall, the perception has been that more than half of the journalists in the country are female, but this number tends to drop when it comes to the hierarchy in the newsrooms. Editors and media managers are for the most part men, though there are some notable exceptions. The board of the national regulator on audiovisual media is mostly composed of female members, while this is not the case at all for the public broadcaster’s Steering Council.

There are no data on the age of journalists and editors, and it is even more difficult to get information on their ethnic background. The fact that Albania is a highly homogeneous country in terms of ethnicity also does not help in exploring this topic further.

Along the same lines, the minority media sector in the market has always been highly volatile, due to a lack of funding, increasingly smaller communities in view of migration, and also the lack of public policies in mapping or supporting minority initiatives in the media. Albanian legislation does not provide for any media subsidies, including for minority media. On a more general note, there are no policies for positive discrimination for women, minorities, and other categories, and there are usually no formal criteria for employment or nomination policies.

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Table 7: **DATA ON MEDIA REPRESENTATION**

Share of female journalists in the country in 2023	58% for television and 44% for radio
Share of journalists with an ethnic minority background in the country in 2023	N/D
Share of women among news programme editors-in-chief and managers of the top 5 TV channels with news content in the country in 2023	58.33%
Share of persons under the age of 40 among news programme editors-in chief and managers of the top 5 TV channels with news content in the country in 2023	N/D
Share of persons with an ethnic minority background among news programme editors-in-chief and managers of the top 5 TV channels with news content in the country in 2023	N/D
Share of women on the board of the national regulatory authority for media in 2023	57% (4 out of 7)
Share of persons with an ethnic minority background on the board of the national regulatory authority for media in 2023.	N/D
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of minority media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	N/D
Minority media were supported by public funding in 2023. YES/NO/Partly	NO
Which minority communities are not served by own media or minority programming in national public service broadcasting?	Ethnic and linguistic minorities have access to broadcasting programming in their language in national public service broadcasting.

Sources: Audiovisual Media Authority (2023), BIRN Albania (2023)

4.6. MEDIA PARTICIPATION

The media in Albania are free to choose whether to engage with their public and in what form, and there is no specific legal obligation or unified form to address this. The main form of interaction with the audience has been that of telephone calls for some TV programmes, while for online media this has consisted in the comment sections below the stories on the website or on the social media platforms. In fact, the failure to set rules for and practice moderation of the comments sections was one of the arguments used by proponents of the need to regulate online media, due to a pronounced lack of ethics in communication, even though that regulation was ultimately not enacted.

The media in Albania are free to choose whether to engage with their public and in what form, and there is no specific legal obligation or unified form to address this.

The audio and audiovisual media can also be the subject of complaints from the public filed with the Council of Complaints of the audiovisual media regulator, and in that case the media is supposed to engage and respond, based on the decision made by the Council and the media's arguments. As part of the self-regulation process, a similar procedure can take place for those media that are part of the Alliance for Ethical Media, though the decision is not binding in any form.

Interaction with the public, media transparency, and accountability have changed very little over the years, failing to establish an ombudsman or positions within the newsrooms that deal with public reaction to its content.

Table 8: **DATA ON MEDIA PARTICIPATION**

<p>The majority of the media in the country commonly provide mechanisms for participation and interaction with citizens/ readers, listeners, viewers (comment sections, letters to the editor, forums, blogs, readers' editor, ombudsman, other type of complaint mechanism, membership, internship, focus groups,...). YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>Partly</p>
<p>TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of mechanisms for participation in the media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same (e.g. comment sections closing down or opening, ombudsman established or shut down etc.)?</p>	<p>Remaining the same</p>
<p>3 most common mechanisms of (citizen) participation in media in the country</p>	<p>Comments below an online article, comments on the social networks of the media</p>

V.

THE FUTURE OF MEDIA USE AND TRUST

5.1. MEDIA USE

As with many other aspects of the media landscape, public media consumption surveys are rare in Albania. However, regular reports that focus on governance, integration, or other aspects, routinely try to shed light on media habits of the population, including media trust.

In the last few years, online media and social networks have increasingly come to the fore as more people indicate that they use these to receive information and news. At the same time, television still remains the main source of news and information for citizens, a feature that has remained unchanged for years. The data also show that social media is the main source for the information for youth, which points to the ever-increasing contribution of social networks in influencing our behaviour. The distinction between information from social networks and online media is also difficult to make in this regard, since the boundaries have become increasingly blurred. Most traditional media and online media pay increasing attention to their online presence in social networks; hence, it is difficult to distinguish whether the persons being informed through social networks are in fact receiving information from traditional media, but in another form.

Independently of this, it is undeniable that social networks are an increasingly important part of Albanians' media consumption habits, with more than half the adult population using the main ones. Accompanying this process with a robust media literacy component through formal, non-formal, and informal education is very important. In recent years progress has been made in this regard through cooperation of civil society organizations with the Ministry of Education and the agency for preuniversity education, on the one hand, and a number of universities in the country, designing programmes that help build the capacity of teachers and students to cope with the basics of the information landscape and its development.

More people indicate that they use online media and social networks, but television still remains the main source of news and information for citizens.

More than half the adult population state they regularly use the main social networks.

Table 9: **DATA ON MEDIA USE**

Media type that is the most often used source of news and information for citizens in the country in 2023	Television
TREND in the past 3 years: The media type which is the most often used source of news and information for citizens in the country changed. YES/NO If yes, from which type to which type?	Remaining the same
Which media type was the most often used source of news and information for youth (age between 15 and 29) in the country in 2023?	Social media
Audience reach of the media type "Television" in the country in 2023	N/D
Top 3 most popular (most used, visited) social media in the country in 2023	TikTok (1.5 million users), Facebook (1.2 million users), Instagram (1.2 million users)
Top 3 most popular (most used, visited) social media among youth (age between 15 and 29) in the country in 2023	N/D
Top 3 most popular (most watched) TV news shows in the country in 2023	N/D
Media Literacy Index for the country in 2023.	38
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Media Literacy Index growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining in position, slightly growing in score
Media literacy is a separate subject in elementary or secondary schools. YES/NO/ Partly	No, but topics are integrated in several courses in a pilot project

Sources: Metanj (Subashi), Kuçi and Diori (2023); Datareportal (2024); Open Society Institute (2023)

5.2. MEDIA TRUST

Different polls show slightly different results on media trust, depending on methodology, question phrasing, sample, etc. In general, the media seems to be in the middle section in the ranking of institutions and public trust placed in them. In Albania, the media ranks below foreign organizations and actors, and domestic actors such as religious institutions, the army, parts of the judiciary, and civil society, trusted by 53% of the respondents in one of the polls. The polls show a slight increase in trust in the last few years.

Trust in media and journalists is not easy to gauge, and is also often influenced by a political discourse that is usually not friendly to journalists, especially those engaged in investigative journalism. While the media is plagued by many problems and standards of reporting have certainly suffered through the years, there are also citizens who consider the media to have a positive role, in part thanks to the investigation of topics that most of the media would not cover, but also by producing programmes that endeavour to make a small change in citizens' lives, through investigating a problem they might have with institutions, doing charity work, seeking support on a specific problem, etc. Even though these practices may often be ethically dubious, the component of active engagement from the media in some cases can also partly account for the trust placed in media in general.

Trust in media and journalists is not easy to gauge, and is also often influenced by a political discourse that is usually not friendly to journalists, especially those engaged in investigative journalism.

Table 10: **DATA ON MEDIA TRUST**

Level of overall trust in media in the country in 2023 (in percentage)	53%
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the level of overall trust in media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Top 3 most trusted media types in the country in 2023	2023: 53%; 2022: 45%; 2021: 48%

<p>TREND in the past 3 years: The order of the top 3 most trusted media types in the country has changed. YES/NO. Which media types have changed places among the top 3?</p>	<p>YES The perception of television as the most accurate has been consistent across the years, hovering around 42%. On the other hand, news portals ranked first for perception of credibility in 2022 (43.6%), while ranking last in 2023, and second in 2021 (39.6%). The ranking of social media has been more consistent: 42% in 2023, 33.1% in 2022, and 35.1% in 2021. Trust in newspapers seems highly volatile, from most trusted (47.2%) in 2023, to the least trusted (27.4%) in 2022, and then higher again in 2021 (33.9%). Overall, the data has not been consistent in this regard, making it difficult to see a clear trend.</p>
<p>In which place do the media stand in the ranking of the most trusted institutions in the country in 2023?</p>	<p>8th or 9th, with the same percentage of trust as education institutions</p>
<p>TREND in the past 3 years: Is the ranking (place) of the media among the most trusted institutions in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?</p>	<p>Remaining the same</p>
<p>In which place do journalists stand in the ranking of the most trusted professions in the country in 2023?</p>	<p>N/D</p>
<p>TREND in the past 3 years: Is the ranking (place) of journalists among the most trusted professions in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?</p>	<p>N/D</p>
<p>Citizens use self-regulatory mechanisms to submit complaints when they observe violations of professional conduct of media and journalists. YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>TREND: Is the number of citizens using self-regulatory mechanisms to submit complaints when they observe violations of professional conduct of media and journalists growing, declining, or remaining the same?</p>	<p>Growing 2023: 67; 2022: 25; 2021: 31</p>

Sources: Metanj (Subashi), Kuçi and Diori (2023); Regional Cooperation Council (2023)

VI.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The various reports assessing the political and social situation in the country in general show that while there has been progress in certain areas, others are either stagnating or regressing. The Democracy Index has grown slightly over the past three years. However, the Rule of Law Index shows a decline, while the Corruption Perceptions Index seems to have increased.

New judicial bodies established in the framework of judicial reform have started to investigate and prosecute persons who were so far considered untouchable, such as former presidents and prime ministers, as well as former ministers and members of parliament. This has led to increased trust of the population in the new judicial bodies, but these processes are still ongoing and what the overall effect on the justice system and on standards of democracy in the country will be remains to be seen.

The Press Freedom Index has deteriorated, indicating the existing problems with having a free media environment that would encourage professional journalism. Persistent problems with corruption, the rule of law, strength of democratic institutions, and overall fragile state of democracy in the country are certainly reflected in the possibility of media to conduct themselves in a professional manner and the ability to hold accountable the persons and parties in power.

Another factor that affects the possibility of more professional reporting is access to public information, which is often not provided to journalists. There tends to be a more propagandist approach to relations and communication of politicians with journalists, rather than providing the information that the journalists might ask for in the name of public interest.

Although the law on the right to information has been considered very satisfactory in most aspects, problems with implementation remain. The role of the Commissioner in charge of monitoring implementation of the law and resolving disputes has been efficient to some degree, but sometimes the inefficacy of mechanisms and incentives to make decisions binding and the failure of public institutions to always comply compromise the end results regarding transparency and implementation of the law.

Persistent problems with corruption, the rule of law, strength of democratic institutions, and overall fragile state of democracy also affect media professionalism and attitude vis-a-vis the persons and parties in power.

The approach of politicians and public relations with journalists veers more towards propaganda, rather than providing public interest information.

This is especially true regarding the reports that seek to achieve transparency on public spending, since state contracts and tenders have sometimes been kept secret or not provided to journalists or organizations that focus on transparency, amid claims that they are commercial secrets or classified documents.

Table 11: **DATA ON DEMOCRACY**

Democracy Index of the country in 2023	6.3
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Democracy Index of the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing 2023: 6.3; 2022: 6.4; 2021: 6.1
Rule of Law Index of the country in 2023 (according to the World Justice Project)	0.48
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Rule of Law Index of the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining
Corruption Perceptions Index for the country in 2023	37
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Corruption Perceptions Index for the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing 2023: 37; 2022: 36; 2021: 35
Media Freedom Index in the country in 2023	99 (2024)
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Media Freedom Index in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining in comparison with 2023 Growing in comparison with 2022
Is there is transparency and open public access to data about the spending of public funds? YES/NO/Partly	Partly
Legislation on access to public information follows international standards. YES/NO/Partly	YES

<p>There is a functional and credible independent institution supervising the implementation of legislation on access to public information, including the administration of complaints regarding denied access. YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>Partly</p>
<p>Were there government or parliament members under prosecution for charges of corruption or other criminal charges in 2023? YES/NO</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Does legislation allow political party ownership in the media in the country? YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>Partly</p>
<p>Is there significant political party ownership (i.e. ownership of a group of media of the same or different types, or a media outlet with a large audience or market share or a strong influence on public opinion) in the media in the country? YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>NO</p>

Sources: Economist Intelligence Unit (2023); World Justice Project (2023); Transparency International (2023); various laws

VII.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite improvements through the years, missing, incomplete, or unverifiable data continue to be a challenge in any analysis related to the media landscape, media market, journalists, and many other related aspects. While greater transparency has been achieved in terms of media ownership, advertising, audience data, and media funding are still mainly referred to as estimates. Furthermore, while the legal obligations to register and the data collected from the regulator shed more light on audiovisual media, the rest of the media outlets remain totally unaccounted for. This is especially the case for online media: while probably the most numerous and dynamic type of media, it is also the one we know least about.

While greater transparency has been achieved in terms of media ownership, advertising, audience data, and media funding are still mainly referred to as estimates.

At the same time, the number of journalists seems to be more or less stable and their salaries can be considered average compared to the rest of the population, at least from the estimates. The data collected from faculties of journalism and communication show that the number of students is almost one third of the number ten years ago. Studying journalism is not a prerequisite to become a journalist in Albania, but the fact that increasingly fewer students are choosing to study this degree poses questions for the future of the profession, or at least for the preferences of the population in this regard.

Problems with labour relations have persisted through the years and informality continues to be a feature of the media. Several organizations monitor the rights of journalists and labour relations and publicly denounce or report on any violations, but there remains room for improvement of the situation.

The number of journalists seems to be more or less stable and their salaries can be considered average compared to the rest of the population, at least from the estimates.

According to the reports of local organizations, attacks on journalists have increased in recent years, including incidents when reporting on protests. The same is true regarding court cases involving journalists, though in the absence of a proper definition of the term and classification of ongoing lawsuits, it is difficult to determine whether these are SLAPP cases.

In this context, there is an ambivalence in the public's trust on journalism, especially when considering the lack of a ranking of trust in different professions. Annual polls on trust in institutions usually rank the media in the middle of the range, less trusted than international organizations, the army, religious institutions, etc., but still more trusted than politicians and the judiciary, excluding the new judicial bodies.

According to polls, Albanian citizens seem to trust and follow television more, though online media and social networks have certainly gained in importance when it comes to getting information, especially among the young population. A considerable part of the population uses these networks, but given the blurring of boundaries and information in this environment, it is not possible to divide legacy media from online media.

One visible trait of the Albanian media landscape is the tendency of the market to concentrate around the major media groups, in terms of their market size and potential audience share.

Despite the manner of information, one visible trait of the Albanian media landscape is the tendency of the market to concentrate around the major media groups, in terms of their market size and potential audience share. This is certainly a concern when considering pluralism of information and viewpoints. This trend becomes even more worrisome given the tendency of media outlets to copy-paste from one another or the practice of many online media to republish from one to another or from the traditional media. A positive trend to underline in this regard is the donor-funded media, usually producing investigative stories and public-oriented journalism, which strives to fill the void that the traditional media does not always address or prioritize. Apart from internal problems and professional integrity deficiencies, the media in Albania cannot be analysed without mentioning the existing problems with public independent institutions and overall rule of law in the country. Legislation regarding freedom of information is mostly considered good, but problems with its implementation persist and have become more sophisticated, especially regarding the position of public institutions vis-a-vis journalists' requests for information. This resistance to providing what should be publicly available information certainly makes the job of journalists difficult. On a more general note, the shortcomings that are still experienced regarding corruption, the rule of law, education, and other areas of Albanian society are also bound to have an impact on the work of journalists, making the process of reporting on these areas a priority, but also a challenge bound to experience significant pressure and self-censorship.

A positive trend to underline in this regard is the donor-funded media, usually producing investigative stories and public-oriented journalism, which strives to fill the void that the traditional media does not always address or prioritize.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ilda Londo holds a degree in journalism and political science and is Research Coordinator at the Albanian Media Institute. She is the author of several research works, focusing on media development issues, media ethics and professionalism, analysing media content and narratives, etc.

CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE, SAME PERSISTING PROBLEMS

The Future of the Media in Albania – Facts and Trends

This publication is the result of research undertaken as part of the project **“Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarisation and promote dialogue”**. The second research series was conducted in the thematic framework titled **“The Future of the Media in the Western Balkans and Turkey”**, focusing, in 2024, on collecting and analysing the facts and trends on media and democracy in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey.

The project **“Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarisation and promote dialogue”** is jointly implemented by nine media development organisations from the Western Balkans and Turkey with the financial support of the European Union. The coordinator of the three-year project is the Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo. Partners in the project are the Albanian Media Institute in Tirana; Bianet in Istanbul; the Macedonian Institute for Media in Skopje; the Montenegro Media Institute in Podgorica; the Novi Sad School of Journalism; the Peace Institute in Ljubljana; the Press Council of Kosovo in Pristina; and the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM).