



## Country Report

# Journalists in the Czech Republic

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## Backgrounds of Journalists

In general, we can say that according to our survey results, Czech journalists in the news media are quite young, well-educated, and slightly more often men than women. Of the 291 interviewed journalists in the Czech Republic, 56.7 percent (165 individuals) were male and 43.3 percent (126) were female, which reflects the situation in the news media. The same can be said about the quite low average age of journalists – 35.68 years ( $s=9.44$ , while half of the respondents were younger than 34 years), since there is a generation gap caused by the societal changes after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The general level of education of the journalists is high. The majority holds a college or university degree: 22.9 percent completed Bachelor's studies, 41.3 percent graduate programs, and 3.5 percent even a doctorate. 8.3 percent of journalists studied at a university, but did not earn a degree. The remaining journalists started to work after high school. The majority of sampled journalists with a university or college degree specialized in journalism or communication studies (38.0% in journalism, 13.1% in another communication field, 11.7% in both journalism and some other communication field).

## Journalists in the Newsroom

85.6 percent of the interviewed journalists in the Czech Republic were fully employed, 4.1 percent were part-time employees, 8.6 percent were freelancers, 1.7 percent referred to other forms of employment. Almost two thirds of those employed (65.6%) worked under a permanent contract, 34.4 percent a temporary one.

On average people spent 10.79 years ( $s=8.15$ ) working as journalists, and about half of them had 8 years of professional experience. The vast majority of sampled journalists (80.8%) had to work on various topics, only 19.2 percent had “the luxury” to concentrate only on a specific beat. The lack of professional experience is connected with the low average age. Combined with the absence of concentrated work on one or two specific topics, this can be a handicap while covering greater societal issues when a lot of experience and focus are needed.

On the whole, the interviewed journalists worked for 1.23 newsrooms ( $s=.59$ ); 23.3 percent of them had other paid jobs besides journalism. Only 7.3 percent were members of a professional journalists' organization. This is related to a very low willingness of Czechs to enter any organization, since in the Communist past everyone was forced to join some organization and a democratic society is also perceived as the freedom not to be a member of any party or organization.

The majority of the journalists within the sample worked in print dailies (36.4%), then in weekly newspapers (22%), in radio (15.8%), in television (10.7%); 6.5 percent worked for an online outlet of some offline outlet, 4.8 percent for an exclusively online outlet; only 2.7 percent of the interviewed journalists worked for a news agency and 1.0 percent for a magazine.

## Journalistic Roles

The differences between the most and least important roles according to Czech journalists are very big. While almost 100 percent of journalists viewed their role to “report things as they are” as very or even the most important, only 1.4 percent of interviewed journalists perceived “support of government policy” to be very important. The second most important perceived journalistic role to “be a detached observer” falls in accordance with the liberal Western tradition of journalism implemented in the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution as the normative ideal. Still, there was quite a strong tendency to educate the audience among the sampled Czech journalists. On the other hand, journalists did not consider it important to be an adversary of the government or to motivate others to participate in political activity. In general, we can say that Czech journalists convey a normative view of media as a place where non-distorted events are presented and information necessary for political decisions as well as for everyday life management can be exchanged.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	289	98.3	4.91	.38
Be a detached observer	289	91.0	4.53	.77
Provide analysis of current affairs	287	66.9	3.84	.97
Let people express their views	287	66.6	3.83	1.16
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	281	65.8	3.84	1.12
Educate the audience	285	52.3	3.49	1.08
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	285	51.9	3.44	1.25
Provide information people need to make political decisions	284	46.1	3.17	1.32
Monitor and scrutinize business	289	39.1	3.14	1.21
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	285	38.2	3.09	1.24
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	282	35.5	2.93	1.28
Tell stories about the world	274	32.8	2.72	1.42
Set the political agenda	288	31.6	2.91	1.15
Provide entertainment and relaxation	286	31.1	2.96	1.12
Support national development	280	26.1	2.65	1.25
Advocate for social change	279	25.4	2.71	1.28
Influence public opinion	283	22.3	2.63	1.20
Motivate people to participate in political activity	286	18.2	2.32	1.23
Convey a positive image of political leadership	281	4.3	1.51	.90
Be an adversary of the government	275	1.8	1.54	.85
Support government policy	279	1.4	1.35	.71

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means of little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

## Professional Ethics

The vast majority of Czech journalists expressed the extreme importance of professional ethics. Most respondents claimed that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics regardless of situation and context. But in the same time more than half of journalists agreed that what is ethical depends on the specific situation and that it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.

There is quite a strong contrast between the general proclamation of the importance of professional ethics and the specific list of acceptable “exceptions”. There are several factors for this contradiction in the Czech Republic. The first includes large ownership changes in recent years, when foreign (Western) owners left the Czech media landscape and Czech media were purchased by local business elites. With Western owners leaving the Czech Republic, Western standards of journalism somewhat

weakened. The second factor is the low importance and passive role of professional associations in the Czech Republic, so no one is actually cultivating journalism culture.

Concerning the justifiability of controversial reporting methods, most Czech journalists find use of hidden microphones or cameras, getting employed in a firm to gain inside information, using confidential documents without authorization, and claiming to be somebody else or paying for confidential information acceptable on occasion. The least warranted practices were accepting money from sources, altering photographs, publishing stories with unverified content and altering or fabricating quotes from sources.

*Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "strongly" and "somewhat agree"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	290	86.9	4.33	.91
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	287	60.3	3.37	1.26
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	286	59.8	3.52	1.14
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	287	31.7	2.61	1.24

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

*Table 3: Justifiability of controversial reporting methods by journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Using hidden microphones or cameras	288	17.0	72.6
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	285	13.7	63.5
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	282	10.6	69.9
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	258	7.4	32.9
Claiming to be somebody else	284	4.9	61.6
Paying people for confidential information	284	4.2	54.9
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	284	3.9	38.4
Altering photographs	281	2.1	18.5
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	284	1.8	42.3
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	284	1.1	20.4
Publishing stories with unverified content	284	.4	21.5
Accepting money from sources	287	.3	1.4

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

## Professional Autonomy and Influences

According to the survey results, Czech journalists perceived quite high levels of professional autonomy. 71.1 percent of respondents reported to have complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting stories which they wanted to cover. A slightly higher number of sampled journalists (75.5%) said they enjoyed a great deal of freedom or complete freedom in making decisions on which aspects of their stories should be emphasized. When it comes to participation in editorial coordination, we find less autonomy and a higher influence of formal staff hierarchy, since less than half of the

interviewed journalists (48.6%) reported always or very often participating in editorial coordination (e.g. meetings and news management).

There are two dominant most important perceived influences on the work of Czech journalists: journalism ethics and access to information for the stories they cover. Next, the great majority considered their personal values and beliefs, as well as practical matters such as media laws and regulations, the availability of news-gathering resources and time limits to be very or extremely influential. On the other hand, the journalists within our sample regarded pressure groups, religious considerations and the influence of government officials the least important for their work. In general, we can say the influence of external subjects was perceived as much less important than the influence of aspects directly connected with journalistic routines and the influences of peers.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	286	90.2	4.42	.83
Information access	286	86.0	4.38	.83
Your personal values and beliefs	286	73.8	4.02	1.02
Media laws and regulation	287	70.0	3.95	1.12
Availability of news-gathering resources	286	69.9	3.91	.99
Time limits	289	67.1	3.80	1.02
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	282	60.3	3.60	1.06
Feedback from the audience	290	57.9	3.58	1.14
Relationships with news sources	285	52.6	3.43	1.19
Editorial policy	276	50.0	3.43	1.07
Your peers on the staff	287	44.3	3.37	1.01
Managers of the news organization	280	39.3	3.04	1.22
Audience research and data	268	36.2	3.04	1.15
Friends, acquaintances and family	288	33.0	2.87	1.33
Competing news organizations	289	27.7	2.90	1.04
Owners of the news organization	257	24.5	2.61	1.28
Advertising considerations	263	16.7	2.30	1.23
Military, police and state security	266	15.8	2.14	1.19
Colleagues in other media	291	15.1	2.43	1.00
Profit expectations	261	14.9	2.16	1.17
Censorship	279	14.0	1.85	1.27
Politicians	285	9.8	1.86	1.08
Public relations	285	6.3	2.06	.97
Business people	286	5.9	1.65	.95
Government officials	287	4.9	1.57	.89
Religious considerations	268	4.5	1.54	.93
Pressure groups	286	2.8	1.47	.78

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

## Journalism in Transition

When asked about changes in journalism, most respondents answered with aspects connected with the digital turn of the profession. With digitalization and the rise in importance of social networks, the overall acceleration of the journalism profession for most journalists increased the importance of the use of search engines, interaction with their audiences, technical skills and average working hours. Simultaneously, the time available for researching stories decreased and the credibility of journalism strongly decreased. This can be the result of a long-standing practice of politicians blaming journalists for all the troubles in the country. The questions about changes



in journalism were only presented to journalists with five or more years of professional experience.

*Table 5: Changes in journalism*

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	215	94.4	.0
Technical skills	215	87.9	.5
Average working hours of journalists	214	75.2	2.8
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	211	58.8	7.1
The relevance of journalism for society	213	32.4	23.0
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	205	23.9	17.6
The credibility of journalism	212	13.7	49.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	210	7.6	34.3
Time available for researching stories	211	7.1	61.6
Having a university degree	208	8.2	24.0

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of the following aspects of work in the Czech Republic. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

*Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism*

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter	217	95.9	.9
User-generated contents, such as blogs	212	79.2	3.3
Profit making pressures	208	71.6	4.3
Advertising considerations	209	69.9	6.2
Competition	213	69.5	6.1
Pressure toward sensational news	212	69.3	6.1
Public relations	212	62.3	5.2
Audience involvement in news production	213	57.7	9.4
Audience feedback	214	54.7	8.9
Audience research	201	49.8	7.0
Western ways of practicing journalism	154	37.7	17.5
Journalism education	210	21.4	29.5
Ethical standards	213	18.3	43.7

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in the Czech Republic. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

## Journalistic Trust

Concerning issues of trust, there is in general a high trust of the journalist in the news media. There is a very high level of trust in the military, but here we have to mention that there are very few occasions of necessary contact between the media and military in the Czech Republic, so it is probably the expression of lack of bad experiences. There is quite a high level of trust in the judiciary and police. On the other hand, the level of trust is quite low in the cases of religious leaders and trade unions, which as institutions do not have any higher influence in the country. There is quite a low level of trust in the government, the parliament, political parties and politicians in general. Here again we can see the problematic relation between media and politics mentioned above.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	263	41.8	3.29	.83
The military	251	39.4	3.19	.94
The judiciary/the courts	262	35.1	3.15	.90
The police	262	30.9	3.12	.81
Religious leaders	243	7.4	1.80	1.00
Trade unions	251	6.8	2.14	.95
The government	253	5.9	2.17	.87
The parliament	254	5.5	2.24	.84
Political parties	256	.8	1.78	.66
Politicians in general	256	.8	1.88	.68

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete trust, 4 means you have a great deal of trust, 3 means you have some trust, 2 means you have little trust, and 1 means you have no trust at all.

## Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	1191 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified systematic sampling for newsrooms and convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	291 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face, telephone, mail/e-mail and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	65%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	10/2012-03/2014