CZECH JOURNALISTS: MORE EXPERIENCE, A HIGH LEVEL OF AUTONOMY, BUT PROBLEMATIC WORKING AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND INEQUALITY BETWEEN CENTRE AND REGIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the data from the research on Czech journalists, conducted as part of the international comparative project, the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS), in 2022–2023. The questionnaire survey was completed by 331 respondents who conform to the definition of a professional journalist by WJS, thereby earning 50% or more of their income and/or devoting 50% or more of their working time to journalism. The journalists were from all regions of the Czech Republic and across all media types. Their regional diversity was used to compare specific indicators related to media reach. The findings suggest that journalists remain in the field much longer than before, while facing unfavourable economic conditions and unpleasant or even hostile behaviour from the audience, yet still maintaining a high level of professional autonomy. They also shift their role perception beyond basic reporting, which they still consider crucial, to the role of more active actors in the public sphere. However, gender inequality persists and differences in perceptions of the owners' influence on journalists' work and poor economic security confirm the worsening position of regional and, especially, local media.

KEYWORDS

Czech journalists • Worlds of Journalism Study • journalists' working conditions • journalistic roles • autonomy

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NOVINÁŘI A NOVINÁŘKY V ČESKU: VÍCE ZKUŠENOSTÍ, VYSOKÁ MÍRA AUTONOMIE, ALE PROBLEMATICKÉ PRACOVNĚ-EKONOMICKÉ PODMÍNKY A NEROVNOVÁHA MEZI CENTREM A REGIONY

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ABSTRAKT
Článek přináší data z výzkumu českých novinářek a novinářů pro mezinárodní srovnávací projekt Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS), který probíhal v letech 2022–2023. Dotazníkového šetření se zúčastnilo 331 respondentů, kteří vyhovovali definici profesionálního novináře WJS, tedy vydělávali žurnalistikou 50 % a více svých příjmů, (a)nebo jí věnovali 50 % a více svého pracovního času. Novináři a novinářky byli ze všech krajů České republiky a ze všech mediatypů. Jejich regionální různorodost byla využita pro srovnání jednotlivých ukazatelů s ohledem na dosah médií. Výsledky výzkumu ukazují, že novinářky a novináři v oboru setrvávají podstatně déle než dříve, čelí nepříznivým ekonomickým ukazatelům a nepříjemným až nepřátelským projevům ze strany publika, přetrvává i genderová nerovnost. Přesto si stále udržují vysokou míru pracovní autonomie a posouvají se ve vnímání své role nad rámec základního informování, které pořád považují za klíčové, do role aktivnějších aktérů ve veřejném prostoru. Rozdíly ve vnímání vlivů vlastníků na jejich práci a slabší ekonomické zabezpečení však jen potvrzují zhoršující se postavení regionálních, a zejména lokálních médií.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA
čeští novináři • české novinářky • Worlds of Journalism Study • podmínky práce novinářů • novinářské role • autonomie

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been 20 years since journal Mediální studia (Media Studies) published Volek and Jirák's (2006) study on selected attributes of Czech journalists' professional self-conception. It presented the results of the first Czech research of this kind, conducted in 2003–2005 within the Czech Journalist grant project. It examined how journalists perceived their work, who they were, and what values they held.

This was followed by research for the Worlds of Journalism Study in 2012–2014 (hereafter also WJS 2), with both basic findings (Němcová Tejkalová & Láb, 2016) and more detailed results published in relation to changes in Czech media ownership (Hájek et al., 2015a) or journalists' trust in various social institutions (Tejkalová et al., 2017). A further phase of the Czech Journalist project was carried out by Volek and colleagues in 2015, focusing on journalists' position in the post-transformation period, their typology, and the experiences of different generations (e.g. Moravec et al., 2015; Volek & Urbániková, 2017). Over the past two decades, numerous graduate theses at all Czech university departments dealing with journalism have mapped different types of journalists' attitudes.

A considerable portion of scholarly attention consists of studies dealing with journalists in particular segments of journalism or with their attitudes in selected thematic areas, for example, in the regions (Waschková Císařová, 2024) or in media until recently owned by politician and businessman Andrej Babiš (Kotisova & Waschková Císařová, 2023; Waschková Císařová & Kotišová, 2022). In recent years, interest in gender issues has grown, including research carried out by Ženy v médiích, z.s. (the Women in Media association), examining journalists' working conditions, work-family reconciliation, and experiences of harassment and violence (Urbániková et al., 2024), followed by a qualitative study by Řičicová and Hájková (2026) on female journalists' reconciliation strategies when planning to start or expand a family.

Among the technological, professional and social transformations journalism has undergone over the last decade, the most pronounced include the entry of so-called peripheral actors into the journalistic field, the expansion of social media, and the question of whether journalists need to rely on them to transmit information to audiences. Other challenges include attacks on journalists and a perceived reduction in autonomy linked to ownership and political changes in some societies.

Building on earlier authors (McNair, 1998; McQuail, 1999), Volek and Urbániková (2017, p. 40) describe journalism as a fluid occupation, a semi-profession that "escapes stronger professional regulation" and is therefore "much more manipulable and open to abuse than other, more firmly professionalized occupations." The notion of fluidity is especially apt for how peripheral actors (Maares & Hanusch, 2022) can enter a borderless stream or a field (Němcová Tejkalová & Hájek, 2016): first bloggers, then influencers,

and creators of informational YouTube channels or Instagram profiles. Their contribution may be positive, broadening the range of public voices, increasing attention to minority topics, or enriching information, especially for younger audiences. However, the dissemination of disinformation narratives or political propaganda disguised by the formal features of online media can also manipulate audiences and increase social polarization, manifesting as more aggressive behaviour towards journalists, threats and intimidation, and in extreme cases physical attacks.

The topic of safety and well-being, particularly in connection with the technologization and internetization of journalism (Jirků, 2020), is increasingly the subject of scholarly studies (e.g. Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2023). These changes affect professional routines, increase multitasking and pressure on journalists (Harro-Loit & Josephi, 2019), and have deepened over the past decade, among other things, because of growing demands for self-promotion on social media.

All these trends were taken into account in constructing the questionnaire for Worlds of Journalism Study 3 (hereafter WJS 3), whose Czech findings, based on data collected in 2022–2023, are presented in this paper. The WJS has long provided an inside view of journalism through journalists' own eyes. The disadvantage of subjective perception is balanced by random sampling, a standardized questionnaire (331 questionnaires were collected for WJS 3 in Czechia, representative by media type and region), and the possibility of comparison with earlier data. Czechia is included in the international comparative study for the second time; the first research was conducted in 2012–2014 (WJS 2), with 291 respondents in the Czech Republic. Having access to the original WJS 2 and WJS 3 datasets allowed us to formulate research questions for the Czech context around key themes in journalism studies in recent years – gender, the precarity of journalistic work, safety, and regional differences – as well as changes in these conditions over time.

We therefore defined the following research questions, each including a temporal comparison:

- RQ1: Under what conditions do journalists in Czechia work?
- RQ1a: How did these conditions change between WJS 2 and WJS 3?
- RQ2: How do Czech journalists perceive their professional autonomy?
- RQ2a: How did this perception change between WJS 2 and WJS 3?
- RQ3: How do the position and conditions of female journalists differ from those of male journalists?
- RQ3a: Was there any shift between WJS 2 and WJS 3?

- RQ4: How do the position and conditions of journalists in the regions differ from those working in nationwide media?

- RQ4a: Was there any shift between WJS 2 and WJS 3?

Comparing the previous survey with the current one, we can see, for example, a gradual balancing of the proportions of younger and experienced journalists; gender differences in forms of employment have somewhat diminished (although pay and hierarchical inequalities persist); and journalists still retain relatively high autonomy in deciding which topics to cover. In the context of Central and Eastern Europe, this should not be taken for granted, and efforts to reduce inequalities and maintain high levels of autonomy remain necessary. The research also produced negative findings: journalists' incomes are far from spectacular, with a persistent gap emerging when considering the conditions for journalists in urban centers compared with more remote areas.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Transformation of the Czech media landscape and its impact on the media environment

Over the past two decades, media ownership in the Czech Republic has undergone major structural changes, although ownership relations have become relatively stable in recent years. Research in Central and Eastern Europe points to close links between domestic investors, economic-political elites and dominant media groups (Hájek, Vávra & Svobodová, 2015; Štětka, 2015). According to Örnebring (2012), the region is characterized by the instrumentalization of the media to advance power interests and maintain clientelist ties. Media thus often lose their watchdog role and become part of power structures (Surowiec & Štětka, 2020). Moreover, small and concentrated media markets are more susceptible to owner influence (Puppis, 2009).

After 2008, foreign investors broadly withdrew from the Czech media market and were replaced by domestic entrepreneurs, often with political ambitions (Hájek et al., 2015; Štětka, 2015). As Hájek et al. (2015) document, using WJS 2 findings, journalists working in media affected by this change faced greater uncertainty, heavier workloads, and less specialization. At the same time, they placed greater emphasis on professional ethics and normative values. According to Waschková Císařová and Kotišová (2022), Andrej Babiš's acquisition of the MAFRA publishing house by was followed by a gradual erosion of editorial autonomy. The ownership change also altered organizational culture (Kotisova & Waschková Císařová, 2023). While some people left, others stayed and tried to maintain

professional standards despite structural pressures.

Ownership also has a major impact on local and regional media, a relatively vulnerable part of the Czech media landscape. Waschková Císařová (2023, 2024) shows that independent local titles are rapidly disappearing, and many regions are becoming "news deserts" with substantially limited news coverage. Their place is taken by centralized publishing chains or municipal newsletters that serve local political and business interests rather than public scrutiny, thereby threatening journalism's ability to perform a watchdog role over local elites. Political pressures on local and regional journalism deepen this trend (Hájek, Vávra & Svobodová, 2015).

Economic pressures, the breakdown of print and distribution infrastructure, and slow digitalization also contribute to the decline of local and regional media. Metyková and Waschková Císařová (2020) report a major deterioration in material and working conditions in local newsrooms after 2015. Commercialization and centralization following the acquisition of VLM by the Penta investment group led to layoffs, cost-cutting measures, and weakened editorial autonomy. Journalists lost not only physical space but also their ties to communities they had previously helped to shape. Internationally, the Czech situation resembles trends described elsewhere (Mathews, 2022; Wadbring & Bergström, 2017).

2.2. Working conditions, (in)stability and the precarization of journalistic work

The journalistic work environment is characterized by financial and social instability, as reflected in a shift away from traditional employment relationships and long-term positions. This trend, visible even before the 2008 financial crisis (Volek & Urbániková, 2017), was intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially through further newsroom cost-cutting and a decline in long-term jobs and freelance journalists job offers (Dawson et al., 2021; Libert et al., 2021; Rick, 2024).

According to van't Hof and Deuze (2022), precarity is symptomatic for the media practice because assignment-to-assignment work, often shaped by the structural logic of media production, inherently entails instability. This applies even to people working under good conditions, such as permanent contracts, well-designed arrangements for reconciling work and care, or regular professional training. The instability of journalistic environment is also reflected in the growing number of journalists working as freelancers outside traditional employment relationships. In this context, precarity is systematically rationalized as both a consequence of current technological and economic transformations in journalism and as the "price" of creative freedom or time flexibility (Cohen, 2016).

Although freelancing can offer greater flexibility, autonomy and control over the work process in a digitalized environment, it can also be understood as a media companies' strategy to reduce production costs. This can intensify the exploitation of independent professionals, resulting in longer working hours, lower pay, or income insecurity (Cohen, 2016). In the Czech context, this form of work is also often associated with circumventing labor regulations, especially through the so-called švarcsystém (see also Urbániková et al., 2024), in which journalists are required to operate as self-employed persons even though their working conditions correspond to standard employment relationship.

2.3. Gender-based barriers in journalism

Journalistic working conditions are gendered. Combining family and working life is a major social challenge, particularly affecting women's career progression, across sectors. The difficult position of mothers (and fathers with intensive caring responsibilities) in the Czech media labour market is documented by Urbániková et al. (2024), while Řičicová and Hájková's (2026) qualitative study based on 14 in-depth interviews provides detailed insight into the problems they face. Combining work and family care is complicated by employers' frequent reluctance to allow mothers or fathers to work from home or use flexible working hours. Women also experience wage stagnation after returning from maternity leave (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017; Sampaio-Dias et al., 2024).

More generally, gendered newsroom hierarchies create barriers through both vertical and horizontal segregation. Owners, senior managers and editors-in-chief are more often men, and many specialized desks, such as sports, politics or economics, are predominantly male. A frequently mentioned phenomenon is the glass ceiling: barriers that prevent women's career advancement and limit their representation in decision-making positions in newsrooms and other institutions (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017).

Czech and international research (Posetti et al., 2020; Urbániková & Čaladi, 2024) also points to various forms of sexual violence, harassment and threats, which female journalists encounter much more often than male journalists, both online and offline. Urbániková et al. (2024, p. 41) also find that almost half of women in Czech newsrooms have experienced sexual harassment not only from audiences but above all from colleagues or supervisors.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research data for WJS 3 were collected through a questionnaire survey conducted from July 2022 to November 2023. The questionnaire was an adapted Czech translation of the standardized WJS questionnaire (Worlds of Journalism Study, 2021), prepared by project members in collaboration with the Scientific and Statistical Advisory Committees between 2019 and 2022. Compared with the previous wave, it included new areas (e.g. technology use, safety, and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic). At the same time, most questions were phrased to preserve comparability with the previous data collection.

3.1. Who are journalists?

For population surveys, defining the basic unit of research is crucial – in our case, the journalist. In WJS 2 (2012–2014), respondents had to be professionals working in news rather than lifestyle media. The Methodological Manual defined professionalism as "[a] person who earns at least fifty percent of his or her income from paid labor for news media and is involved in producing and editing journalistic content, as well as editorial supervision and coordination" (Worlds of Journalism Study, 2012, p. 1). Photojournalists and camera operators were included only if they decided what to shoot and also processed the material.

WJS 3 changed this definition. The key change in identifying professional journalists – the corpus on which WJS 3 is based (some countries, including Czechia, also collected questionnaires from so-called peripheral journalists, but this article does not use them) – was the addition of people who may not earn at least half of their income from journalism but spend at least half of their working time on it (Worlds of Journalism Study, 2022). This adjustment reflected the situation in some countries, especially in the Global South, where people work half-time or more in journalism but cannot earn an income commensurate with to that workload and, therefore, need another job. We also encountered isolated cases of this asymmetry between working time and income while collecting data in Czech regions.

3.2. Population mapping and sample selection

In the previous WJS 2 wave, we struggled with the lack of a mapped population. Although we contacted the newsrooms of the largest employers and obtained information from most of them on the number of journalists meeting the WJS professional definition, regional figures were estimated only from basic research into periodicals, and even this was extremely time-consuming for the small research team. For the latest data collection, we adopted a more sophisticated procedure. In the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years, together with more than 200 journalism and media studies students

at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, we mapped the outputs of all media in Czechia. We created a list of publicly available contacts from which participants could be randomly selected. We also again asked nationwide media for the number of journalists meeting the research criteria and compared the figures supplied by cooperating organizations with the number of journalists we had identified. The staffing situation in Brno and the South Moravian Region was discussed with Lenka Waschková Císařová, head of the Department of Media Studies and Journalism at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University.

The total estimated population was rounded up to the nearest ten, resulting in 2,150 journalists working at least half-time in news media (or earning at least half their income from journalism). From this, we calculated a minimum representative sample of 326 journalists at 95% confidence. We distributed it proportionally according to the number of journalists in individual media outlets across nationwide and regional media, taking the mapped regional population size into account.

3.3. Data collection and research ethics

Data were collected by members of the research team and by trained interviewers in accordance with the WJS 3 Field Manual (Worlds of Journalism, 2022). Because some respondents did not complete some of the mandatory questions (each required at least 326 respondents), we collected five additional questionnaires in the appropriate regions/nationwide media, bringing the total to 331 respondents. In total, 886 journalists were approached, producing a response rate of 37.35%. All nationwide news media were represented in the sample; regional media were represented in proportion to their regional populations and willingness to participate.

Respondents were informed about the research and its aims, gave informed consent to participate, and were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time (one journalist did so before the end of data collection and their questionnaire is not included). The team's procedures were approved on 12 May 2022 by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University. Interviewers most often completed questionnaires during face-to-face meetings, telephone calls or video interviews; a smaller share was completed by respondents themselves and sent to interviewers.

3.4. Data analysis

The data were transferred to an SPSS analysis template prepared by the WJS centre at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and submitted for checking along with the other datasets (Lauerer et al., 2025). They were approved for analytical use in August 2024. Publication of country studies was subsequently delayed while awaiting countries whose teams were late in collecting data, so that a comparative global dataset and a summary report with broader research reach could be published (the report appeared only in autumn 2025).

Frequency analysis provides a comprehensive view of the current state of the journalistic profession in Czechia. This basic picture is supplemented by comparisons of selected aspects by gender, years of experience, age, and media reach. Relationships between variables are analysed using Cramer's V (V) and eta (η) association coefficients and Pearson's linear correlation coefficient (r), Spearman's ρ (r_s), and Kendall's tau-b (τ-b). Statistical significance was set in advance at $\alpha = 0.05$. Specific p-values are also reported to distinguish levels of statistical significance: $p \leq 0.05$ is marked with one asterisk (*), $p \leq 0.01$ with two (**), and $p \leq 0.001$ with three (***). Statistical outputs are therefore reported, for example, as r = 0.208**, WJS 3.

3.5. Research limitations

The fundamental limitation to bear in mind when reading and interpreting the results is that they are journalists' self-assessments. Their responses are not verified by prior or subsequent analysis of their work. As noted above, a clear, externally established definition of a professional journalist may also exclude other potential participants from the population and sample; on the other hand, comparative research would not be possible without it. In terms of representativeness of the defined population, WJS 3 can be considered representative and broadly informative of the population as the whole, unlike WJS 2, in which the Czech journalistic population was mapped more narrowly. This is due to the extensive, multi-year mapping process and the collection of several thousand contact details from which participants were randomly selected. A further limitation is the time-specific validity of responses, since publication takes time due to dataset checks, collective writing, and peer review; however, this is a standardized feature of scientific work affecting most research studies of this scale.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis focuses on various aspects that shape journalists' everyday experience and fundamentally affect the quality of their working conditions – from forms of employment and influences on their work to feelings of (in)security while doing the job. It also addresses perceived autonomy in journalistic practice and examines how it is affected by characteristics such as participants' gender and media ownership and reach.

4.1. Selected sociodemographic characteristics of journalists

A review of the sociodemographic characteristics relevant to this article (much more extensive statistics from the Czech part of WJS 3 are provided in the

research report on the Czech study website; Němcová Tejkalová et al., 2025) is possible to start with the finding that men continue to predominate in Czech journalism in nationwide, regional and local media. Between WJS 2 and WJS 3, the share of women fell slightly from 43% to 41%. This inequality is caused above all by the combination of journalism's high time demands and low flexibility, with basic conditions often set by male supervisors, together with the long-term socialization of Czech journalists into the traditional social expectation that women will primarily be caregivers and devote less time to work (see also De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017; Řičicová & Hájková, 2026 or Sampaio-Dias et al., 2024). Other factors may also play a role, such as insecurity caused by gender-based violence or verbal attacks, which are also examined below.

Over the past decade, the age composition of journalists has changed markedly. WJS 3 shows a more even distribution across the 30–59 age groups. This is reflected in an increase in median age to 41, compared with 33 in WJS 2. The development is positive: a more even age distribution and the presence of older, highly experienced journalists point to greater stability within the field and a gradual correction of the generational discontinuity caused by the 1989 revolution. The change is most pronounced compared with the first study by Volek and Jirák (2006) and WJS 2, as well as with the more recent data of Volek and Urbániková (2017).

This pattern is also reflected in the increase in journalistic experience. In WJS 3, the median number of years of journalistic experience increased from 8 to 15 compared with WJS 2, suggesting that journalism is becoming a longer-term occupation, or that conditions enabling people to remain in the field have improved. Journalism in Czechia is, therefore, less often a job people do for only part of their professional lives before moving to fields such as PR or advertising. Nevertheless, Table 1 shows that very few people still remain in journalism after age 60, which may create livelihood problems as the retirement age rises.

The relationship between age and gender is statistically significant but weaker (WJS 2: V = 0.206*; WJS 3: V = 0.186*). Table 1 nevertheless reveals analytically interesting differences the representation of women and men by age. In the 18–29 group, women have a markedly higher share than men in both waves, the proportion then reverses, and men form a clear majority in the older age groups. The decline in numbers of women coincides with the period of increased burden associated with motherhood and documents newsrooms' inability to reconcile professional and private life in ways that prevent women

from leaving the field, as described in the previous Czech (Řičicová & Hájková, 2026; Urbániková et al., 2024) and international literature (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017; Sampaio-Dias et al., 2024). Compared with WJS 2, fewer women aged 50–59 now return to journalism, suggesting that if they find other work after a parental break, they are more likely to remain in it (or leave again to care for ageing parents). The 60+ group is balanced, but with only 18 respondents, no broader conclusions can yet be drawn.

Table 1. Age distribution by gender in WJS 2 and WJS 3 (%)

Wave / category	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+
WJS 2 – Women	54.4	37	35.7	43.8	—
WJS 2 – Men	45.6	63	64.3	56.3	100
WJS 2 – Share of age group	35.4	37.1	14.4	5.5	7.6
WJS 3 – Women	58.3	37.5	33.3	35.9	50
WJS 3 – Men	41.7	62.5	66.7	64.1	50
WJS 3 – Share of age group	18.1	26.6	26.3	23.6	5.4

Methodological note: Figures for women and men show the percentage distribution of gender within each age category (100% = the given age group). "Share of age group" shows the percentage representation of the age category in the full respondent sample (100% = the entire sample for the given wave). — means no respondent was represented in the category. Source: WJS 2 (N = 274), WJS 3 (N = 331).

While the relationship between media reach and age is not statistically significant in WJS 2, it is significant in WJS 3.[1] Table 2 suggests that journalists over age 39 are more strongly represented in larger regional newsrooms than in nationwide. One possible explanation is that, with the start of family life, housing in the capital becomes less affordable on relatively modest journalistic salaries, prompting some journalists to relocate and offer their experience elsewhere.

Table 2. Media reach by respondents' age groups in WJS 3 (%)

Age group	Nationwide	Regional	Local
18–29	60	31.7	8.3
30–39	54.5	36.4	9.1
40–49	33.3	55.2	11.5
50–59	28.2	55.1	16.7
60+	44.4	44.4	11.1

Methodological note: Percentages show the distribution of media types within each respondent age group (100% = the given age group). Source: WJS 3 (N = 331).

[1] V = 0.186**, WJS 3.

4.2. Economic and legal aspects of journalistic working conditions

Comparison with WJS 2 shows major changes in journalists' working conditions, especially in types of employment contract. The most pronounced change concerns full-time contracts, which fell by 21 percentage points. Whereas 86% of journalists in WJS 2 worked full-time, only 65% do so now (Table 3). This decline suggests a gradual deterioration in stable employment. The development, which is the same across nationwide, regional and local media, is linked to long-term economic pressure on media organizations, especially after the 2008 financial crisis and as a result of the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A sharp decline in advertising revenue, particularly in print media, led to budget cuts and job reductions. This created space for more flexible but less secure forms of cooperation, such as short-term contracts, short-term work agreements, or freelance journalism (similar developments are reported in many other countries by Dawson et al., 2021; Libert et al., 2021; Rick, 2024). This trend corresponds to the rising share of freelancers in our study: from only 9% in WJS 2 to 22% today. In combination with stagnant financial remuneration (see below), the disadvantages for journalists in WJS 3 – instability and weaker legal protection – outweigh the advantages such as greater flexibility or control over one's work.

Table 3. Type of employment relationship in WJS 2 and WJS 3 (%)

Type of employment relationship	WJS 2	WJS 3
Full-time	86	65
Part-time	4	8
Independent professional / freelancer	9	22

Methodological note: In addition to the options above, the WJS 3 questionnaire allowed "other", covering various atypical employment relationships. Source: WJS 2 (N = 291); WJS 3 (N = 331).

The Covid-19 pandemic also changed perceptions of working from home. Some respondents still do not use this option, while others work from home for dozens of hours per week. A median of 15 hours per week worked from home nevertheless indicates a trend towards greater workplace flexibility, which may also help reconcile work and family responsibilities, the absence of which had particularly prevented women from remaining in the profession. It also reflects broader technological innovations that allow journalists to adapt working conditions more flexibly to circumstances.

When considering working hours, wages are an important consideration, as they shape both journalists' motivation and their working conditions.

During data collection, respondents reported their net monthly income by selecting predefined categories. To estimate the median of grouped data, interpolation between categories was used following Zheng et al. (2017)[2]:

$$M_e = L + \left(\frac{n/2 - F}{f_m} \right) \times d$$

The median category was first identified using cumulative percentages. In WJS 3, the 50% threshold fell in the CZK 30,001–36,000 category. Interpolation then refined the estimated median net income to CZK 34,057 for WJS 3, while the national median gross wage in 2023 was CZK 39,685 (Czech Statistical Office, 2024). In WJS 2, the estimated median net income of journalists was almost CZK 12,000 lower, at CZK 22,351, while the median gross monthly wage of employees in Czechia was CZK 22,288 (CSO, 2014)[3]. The increase in median income suggests an improvement in journalists' economic situation. However, wages remain low compared with other occupations, as reflected in the doubling of the share of people holding another paid job alongside journalism doubled from 23% to 46%.

Employment arrangements in Czechia differs between women and men, especially in legal status, careers and earnings. Journalists in our dataset partly confirm these assumptions. Contrary to expectations, women and men are distributed fairly evenly across different employment arrangements. As Table 4 shows, full-time employment dominates for both genders, with a slightly higher share among men (64% of women and 66% of men). Freelancing is slightly more common among women (24% versus 20% of men); the remaining rare forms of employment are similarly represented.

[2] For grouped-data interpolation, M_e is the median, L is the lower boundary of the class containing the median, n is the total number of respondents, F is the cumulative number of responses before the median class, f_m is the frequency of the median class, and d is the interval width.

[3] The Czech Statistical Office (CSO) publishes only gross monthly wage data because net income differs by each employee according to individual deductions (e.g. children, tax allowances, disability, bonuses). Following the CSO recommendation, comparison with the wider Czech workforce therefore uses gross monthly wages.

Table 4. Scope of employment relationship by gender in WJS 3

Gender	Indicator	Full-time	Part-time	Independent professional
Women	N	85	10	33
Women	%	64	8	24
Men	N	131	16	40
Men	%	66	8	20
Total	N	216	26	73
Total	%	65	8	22

Source: WJS 3 (N = 331).

Unequal representation of women and men is visible in career positions (Table 5). Men are four percentage points more likely to hold top-management roles (10% of men versus 6% of women) and six points more likely to be in middle management (30% versus 24%), while women are ten points more likely to hold positions without decision-making authority (70% versus 60%). In Czechia, this pattern is again the same regardless of media reach and is commonly associated with the glass ceiling and stereotypical perceptions of women as primary caregivers. Many women temporarily withdraw from the labour market due to motherhood, because employers often fail to provide adequate support, such as financial contributions to nurseries or childcare groups, or the direct provision of childcare. After parental leave, women often return to positions that do not align with their qualifications, which can hinder career growth (see the section on reconciling family and working life in Urbániková et al., 2024, pp. 21–31).

Table 5. Career position by gender in WJS 3

Gender	Indicator	No managerial role	Middle management	Top management
Women	N	94	32	8
Women	%	70	24	6
Men	N	118	59	20
Men	%	60	30	10
Total	N	212	91	28
Total	%	64	27	9

Source: WJS 3 (N = 331).

Unequal career conditions are also linked to financial remuneration, which has long been lower for Czech women than for men. The difference is also evident in journalism, where female journalists earn, on average, one pay category less than their male colleagues. After tax, women's average net pay falls in the CZK 30,001–36,000 category, while men's falls in CZK 36,001–42,000.[4] From a long-term perspective, there has been no marked change in pay

[4] $\eta = 0.220^{***}$, WJS 3.

inequality. In WJS 2, women were mainly in the CZK 20,001–25,000 after-tax category, while men were in CZK 25,001–30,000.[5]

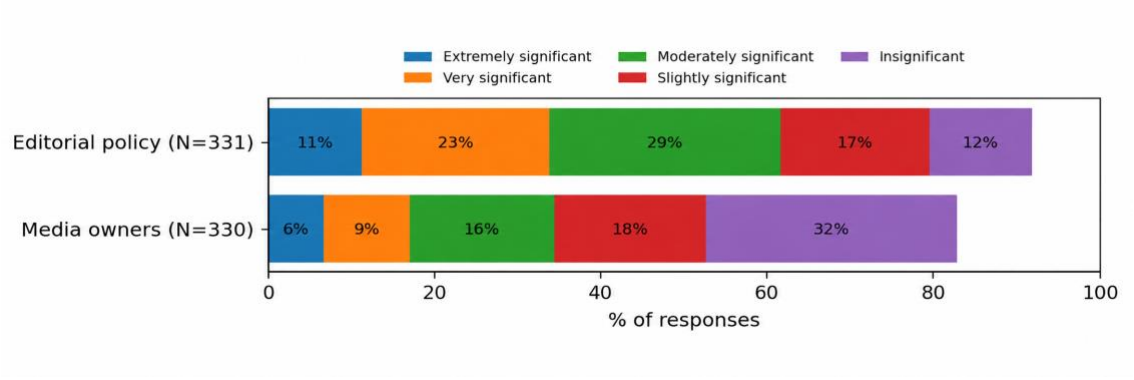
By media reach, the best-paid journalists are those working for nationwide media.[6] On average, they earn CZK 36,001–41,000, one pay category more than in regional media (CZK 30,001–36,000) and two categories more than in local media (CZK 24,001–30,000). The inability to make a living from journalism is one of the most common reasons for the disappearance of local media and the growth of news deserts –areas of the journalistic map that lack standard news coverage (Waschková Císařová, 2023, 2024).

In WJS 3, the distribution of men and women across local, regional and nationwide media was largely even, with no statistically significant association between gender and media reach. In WJS 2[7], however, some gender differences between media types were still apparent. In local and regional media, representation was balanced. Women made up 45% of journalists in local media, while men made up 55%; in regional media women slightly predominated (54% versus 46%). Nationwide media, however, were strongly male-dominated: men accounted for 68% of journalists, while women accounted for only 32%. WJS 3 therefore suggests that gender differences in the distribution of journalists among local, regional and nationwide media are weakening.

4.3. The influence of media owners and editorial policy on journalistic work

This section examines the perceived importance of media ownership and editorial policy for journalistic work and regional differences, comparing the more recent findings with WJS 2. Respondents answered on a five-point scale from "extremely significant" to "insignificant". Figure 1 shows the percentages for all significance responses; in the text, "extremely significant" and "very significant" are combined as "highly significant".

Figure 1. Selected influences on journalistic work in WJS 3



Methodological note: Respondents could also answer "Does not apply to the respondent's work / my work." This option, which makes up the remainder to 100% in each case, is omitted from the figure for clarity. Source: WJS 3.

[5] η = 0.176**, WJS 2.
[6] η = 0.401***, WJS 3.
[7] V = 0.178*, WJS 2.

One expected influence on journalistic work is that of media owners. The issue resonated strongly in the Czech context in the past (see Waschková Císařová & Kotišová, 2022; Kotisova & Waschková Císařová, 2023). In WJS 2, 25% of journalists regarded owners' influence as highly significant. WJS 3 shows that this perceived influence weakened: 15% described it as highly significant. The 10-point decline may reflect several factors within broader changes in media and journalistic practice. It suggests changing dynamics between journalists and employers: digitalization and transformation in content distribution may create room for greater independence. At the same time, oligarchization may still be present in strategic decision-making and media orientation, but may now be taken for granted. The largest ownership changes in Czechia occurred more than ten years ago, and many journalists entered an already transformed environment and know no other.

Media reach is a significant variable in relation to ownership in WJS 3. Journalists in local media, which have the smallest reach, more often perceive owners' influence as highly significant than their colleagues in nationwide media.[8] The difference is 13 percentage points: 24% in local media versus 11% in nationwide media. It is even larger when the "slightly significant" and "insignificant" responses are combined: almost two-thirds (62%) of nationwide journalists perceive owners' influence as slight or insignificant, compared with 42% in local media. Differences between local and broader regional media also exist, but are less pronounced.

An interesting relationship with ownership structures is the correlation with self-control mechanisms, specifically self-censorship. Journalists who perceive a stronger influence of owners also report greater importance of self-censorship.[9] Greater owner control may therefore lead to greater self-monitoring as journalists try to adapt to editorial policy or owners' economic interests (compare the effect on autonomy of remaining in media then owned by Andrej Babiš in Kotišová & Waschková Císařová, 2023). Journalists in regional and local media perceive self-censorship as more important in their work, due to their proximity to information sources and to the people they write about. If such people hold power, unfavorable coverage can logically affect journalists' lives; ordinary neighborly relations may also deteriorate.

[8] (V = 0.177**, WJS 3).
[9] (r_s = 0.242***, WJS 3).

Table 6. Perceived influence of self-censorship by reach of main medium in WJS 3 (%

Reach	Extremely significant	Very significant	Moderately significant	Slightly significant	Insignificant	Not relevant to my work
Nationwide	4.9	4.9	4.9	21	28.7	35.7
Regional	6.7	6.7	13.4	27.5	24.2	21.5
Local	7.9	10.5	10.5	31.6	26.3	13.2

Methodological note: Percentages show the distribution of perceived self-censorship influence within the reach of the main medium. V = 0.169. Source: WJS 3 (N = 330).*

Another aspect examined is editorial policy. Its perceived importance has also declined. In WJS 2, half of the respondents (50%) considered editorial policy highly significant; in WJS 3 this fell by 16 percentage points to 34%. Correlation analysis shows a moderately strong positive relationship in WJS 3 between the perceived importance of owners' influence and that of editorial policy.[10] WJS 2 was conducted in 2012–2014, during the most substantial ownership shifts in the Czech media scene, which brought changes in leadership and middle management loyal to new owners, followed by mass departures and transfers of journalists across media houses. The then-perceived importance of these influences can be interpreted as a reflection of a situation in which many journalists resisted editorial policies shaped by new ownership structures. The decline from 50% to 34% may therefore result from the stabilization of ownership structures.

4.4. Perceived professional autonomy

The influence of media owners and editorial policy is directly related to perceived professional autonomy. Compared with WJS 2, the share of journalists who perceive complete or substantial freedom in deciding which events to cover increased from 71% to 77%, while freedom to decide which aspects of a stories or report to emphasize increased from 75% to 82%. This suggests a shift towards greater independence and can be linked to increasing years of journalistic experience. More experienced journalists have greater freedom in emphasizing particular aspects of news[11] and feel freer to decide which story or topic to cover.[12] Experience thus develops

[10] (r_s = 0.410***).
[11] τ-b = 0.123**, WJS 3.
[12] τ-b = 0.103*, WJS 3.

the ability to assert oneself in the editorial process and increase autonomy. WJS 3 also found a statistically significant difference[13] between men's and women's decision-making freedom. Men report complete freedom in choosing topics almost twice as often as women, which may be connected to men's greater representation in decision-making positions.

Table 7. Degree of freedom in choosing topics by gender in WJS 3 (%)

Gender	Little freedom	Some freedom	Great freedom	Complete freedom
Women	2.2	27.6	56.7	13.4
Men	0.5	18.3	55.8	25.4

Source: WJS 3 (N = 331). Methodological note: Percentages show the distribution of freedom in choosing news topics within gender.

Media reach also affects autonomy. While no statistically significant gender differences were found, journalists in nationwide media perceive greater freedom in deciding which aspects of reports to emphasize: 87% perceive such freedom, compared with 78% in regional and 76% in local media.[14] In larger media houses, the lower perceived autonomy in the regions may also be connected with the subordination of regional "branches" to nationwide headquarters in key decisions.

Individual autonomy, however, does not automatically mean that journalists perceive the Czech media themselves as free (the relationship between perceived influence of media ownership and self-censorship needs to be taken into account). A substantial share of respondents (42%) believe that Czech media have little or only some freedom. This discrepancy suggests that journalists may feel a sense of freedom in everyday decision-making while operating in an environment they perceive as partly restrictive. Significant circumstances include perceived government censorship[15], police influence[16], economic influences such as dependence on advertisers [17] and business entities[18], organizational variables such as time limits[19] and self-censorship[20], and the influence of external interest groups[21].

4.5. Negative audience behaviour and safety threats

Over the past ten years, the ways audiences provide feedback on journalistic

[13] V = 0.180**, WJS 3.
[14] V = 0.123*, WJS 3.
[15] r_s = 0.156**, WJS 3.
[16] r_s = 0.176***, WJS 3.
[17] r_s = 0.127*, WJS 3.
[18] r_s = 0.126*, WJS 3.
[19] r_s = 0.125*, WJS 3.
[20] r_s = 0.163**, WJS 3.
[21] r_s = 0.131*, WJS 3.

work have changed substantially. Feedback most often takes place in comment sections attached to journalistic content on social media, where various forms of hate speech also frequently appear. Some of this content is produced by real social-media users, while other critical or hateful content is generated by chatbots or trolls. In connection with these newer trends, WJS 3, unlike WJS 2, focused on journalists' safety, especially work-related threats, attacks and intimidation. Czech journalists increasingly encounter negative or hostile audience behaviour, indicating growing toxicity in the media environment and affecting not only working life but often personal life as well (see Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023; Urbániková et al., 2024).

Journalists encounter negative audience behaviour at least sometimes, regardless of gender (see Table 8). Similar proportions experienced audiences disparaging their work (55% of women, 52% of men) and humiliating or hateful expressions (45% of women, 47% of men). Questioning of morality affected men more (34%) than women (29%). Media reach also plays an important role: the greater the reach, the more frequent the negative audience reactions. Disparagement of their work was experienced at least sometimes by 66% of journalists in nationwide media, compared with 45% in regional and 42% in local media.[22] Humiliating and hateful reactions were experienced by 56% in nationwide media, 41% in regional and 34% in local media.[23] Greater public visibility therefore brings greater exposure to criticism and hate.

For more serious forms of danger, such as threats, men and women face different risks. Men more often experience work-related threats and intimidation (19% versus 13% of women). In comparison, women more often experience workplace bullying (13% versus 5% of men).[24] Sexual harassment is gendered: 5% of women reported it in connection with their work, while no man did. These findings differ markedly from those of Urbániková et al. (2024), in which harassment was reported more often. That questionnaire, however, was not distributed to a random sample of journalists (and was therefore not representative), and according to its demographics (Urbániková et al., 2024, pp. 51–58), people more affected by the topics may have been more likely to respond. Conversely, some female journalists may have hesitated to mention sexual harassment to WJS 3

[22] V = 0.222***, WJS 3.
[23] V = 0.169**, WJS 3.
[24] V = 0.160*, WJS 3.

interviewers because of the topic's sensitivity, so its real prevalence may be higher.

Table 8. Incidence of threats by respondents' gender (%)

Type of threat	Gender	Sometimes	Often	Total
Audience disparaging work	Women (N=134)	27	28	55
	Men (N=197)	32	20	52
Humiliating and hateful expressions	Women (N=134)	25	20	45
	Men (N=197)	30	17	47
Questioning morality	Women (N=125)	22	7	29
	Men (N=193)	22	12	34
Pressure	Women (N=127)	20	4	24
	Men (N=194)	17	4	21
Threats and intimidation	Women (N=134)	12	1	13
	Men (N=197)	15	4	19
Workplace bullying	Women (N=126)	11	2	13
	Men (N=194)	4	1	5
Sexual harassment	Women (N=134)	4	1	5
	Men (N=197)	0	0	0

Source: WJS 3.

These findings are followed by respondents' personal concerns, which may potentially lead to leaving journalism. Furthermore, 16% expressed concern for their mental health, with this concern being more prevalent among women than men. Specifically, 23% of women, compared with 11% of men, agreed that journalistic work negatively affects their mental health.[25] One tenth of all respondents were concerned that they might lose their job in the following 12 months.

In difficult situations, journalists most often received support directly from newsroom colleagues (85%) or from media organizations (63%), similar to findings reported by Urbániková et al. (2024). An alarming finding is that a substantial share of respondents (38%) believe that people who harm journalists in the Czech Republic will go unpunished. This may point to weaknesses in the Czech environment, such as insufficient support for journalists from professional organizations or a general tolerance for increasing aggression towards the media.

5. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to answer four research questions. Regarding the first, on journalists' working conditions in Czechia and their change between WJS 2 and

[25] V = 0.177*, WJS 3.

WJS 3, journalism in the Czech Republic is gradually becoming a field in which people remain for a substantial part of their working careers. At the same time, pay growth does not keep pace with rising living costs, so more and more journalists hold another paid job alongside journalism. Fewer are in standard employment relationships. In the context of social polarization, a large part of the journalistic population must face negative audience behaviour, including insults and various forms of humiliation and, in fewer cases, threats, pressure or even physical violence.

The answer to the second research question, concerning perceived professional autonomy and its change between the two waves, is more optimistic. Despite restrictive circumstances affecting media generally in Central and Eastern Europe, Czech journalists retain a high degree of autonomy in choosing the topics they cover and the aspects they emphasize. This autonomy is directly related to years of professional experience, with more experienced people enjoying greater freedom of choice. Compared with ten years ago, the perceived influence of owners on journalistic work has fallen markedly overall, though this does not necessarily mean that their real influence has weakened.

In answer to the third research question on gender differences and their development, WJS 3 confirms that female journalists' position and working conditions in Czechia still differ from those of men. Gender inequality in WJS 3 is not primarily expressed in types of employment relationship (this is the one area in which there was positive change compared with WJS 2) but especially in career advancement, financial remuneration and perceived autonomy. Women are much more likely to occupy positions without managerial authority, while men are overrepresented in management. This hierarchical difference is accompanied by persistent pay inequality and a lower perceived degree of freedom in deciding which topics to cover.

Men's and women's career trajectories also differ: female journalists are more represented in younger age groups, but their representation declines with age, which is associated with difficulties in reconciling work and family life. WJS 3 data also show that women face specific forms of threat, particularly workplace bullying and sexual harassment. These experiences may constitute another structural barrier to women remaining in journalism.

The final research question concerns differences by media reach and their change between WJS 2 and WJS 3. Journalists in regional and especially local media work in less stable and more economically precarious conditions than their colleagues in nationwide newsrooms. Their work is associated with lower pay and a stronger perceived influence of media owners. This is also reflected in higher perceived self-censorship, while regional and local journalists report lower autonomy, particularly in deciding

which aspects of stories to emphasize. This difference can also be interpreted as a result of the organizational hierarchy of media houses, in which regional newsrooms often function as subordinate units of nationwide centres.

Compared with WJS 2, regional inequalities appear to have deepened rather than diminished over time. This confirms the worsening position of regional and local media, which in the long term may threaten their ability to perform watchdog and information functions in the public sphere. Addressing all the structural inequalities that WJS 3 has revealed among journalists and types of media is therefore the greatest challenge facing the Czech media environment.

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