



Country fact sheet Bulgaria

Context

The term ‘news deserts’ is not in use in public debates on the state of the media in Bulgaria. Nonetheless, problematic developments in the local media sector are frequently discussed, mostly in research carried out by journalistic and academic organisations, by NGOs, and sometimes by media industry professionals.

However, there **is no structured discussion** in the country aimed at promoting policy measures to enhance the condition of local and regional media.



The **Severoiztochen** region is the area with the lowest number of local and regional media outlets in the country, and among the regions with lower internet penetration.

Still, there is no proved correlation between economically deprived areas and news deserts.



A clear deterioration of the local media market

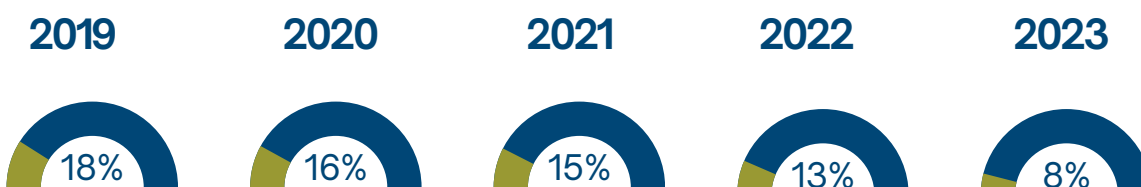
Amidst the lack of precise data on audience or market shares in local media sectors and geographical areas, media experts point out to the deterioration of the local media market.

The situation regarding revenue trends is problematic, with a **declining number of media outlets** and a decrease in the number of points of sale for newspapers.

The **state does not support local and regional media**, other than public service media, through specifically dedicated subsidies or other policy measures.



The Reuters Digital News Report indicates a decline in the weekly reach (offline) of regional or local newspapers in Bulgaria





Tough working conditions

The private local media sector has been facing poor working conditions, low wages, lack of trade union protection, delayed or unpaid wages for months, and other **violations of labour and social security** legislation.



Unclear criteria for allocation of state advertising

Distribution of state advertising, including funds for information campaigns under EU programmes, has long been a disturbing issue since there are **no publicly accessible criteria** on the allocation of state advertising.



SLAPPs are not yet defined in Bulgarian law

A study on SLAPP cases in the country has identified 57 cases in between 2000 and March 2023.

The number of cases against **local outlets** and **journalists** is 15 (26% of all identified cases)



Pervasive political and commercial influences

In Bulgaria, **political parties and party leaders can legally own media companies**. In the past few years, politicians and family members have had ownership over local and regional media outlets (TV, online, print), often providing positive coverage of the respective political subject.

Political actors, including local government institutions, are among the leading sources of external pressure in all local media sectors. In parallel, **local media are reluctant to investigate issues that could affect local advertisers** or the non-media business interests of their owners.



Public interest at stake

Local and regional media content does not adequately meet the critical information needs of local communities. The most serious problem stems from the **close ties of the local press with local governments**, as a result of which critical coverage of political life is severely limited.

Political and economic dependencies of local outlets prevent them from sufficiently protecting the public interest, and **undermine readers' trust**.

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