

Country fact sheet

Estonia



Context

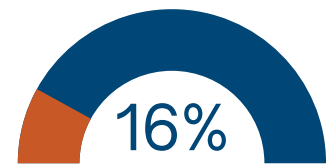
‘News deserts’ are occasionally discussed in Estonia. The issue of insufficient news coverage in the outskirts arises periodically, as evidenced by an analysis of the University of Tallinn. This discussion revolves around the **closure of numerous local news outlets**.



The legal framework in Estonia does not provide a specific definition for ‘local media’ and ‘community media’. In practice, **local media is commonly associated with specific regions and municipalities**.



A 2023 study emphasises that even regions deemed ‘covered by a local newsroom’ may be considered news deserts. This is attributed to the fact that **journalists lack the necessary resources to fulfill their professional watchdog role**.



Regarding the press, there are 151 local media outlets (encompassing citizen initiatives, local government publications, and cultural movements' information brochures). However, **only 25 are professional journalistic outlets contributing to the media landscape**.

The media landscape beyond bigger towns in Estonia

Rural areas are prevalent on both the islands and the mainland of Estonia, for example, in Northern-Western Estonia or certain areas within the Western regions. In these areas, **local media outlets exist, but their distribution faces challenges, including a decreasing number of selling points and low internet penetration**.

The public service media ERR (*Eesti rahvusringhääling*) maintains a stable network of local correspondents or branches, ensuring widespread coverage. However, **the main news agency BNS poses a higher risk, as it operates primarily from the capital city**.



Concerns over **decreasing points of sale, distribution companies, and workers**, especially in rural areas, reflect challenges in ensuring timely newspaper delivery.

Gaps in the state support and in data collection

Regarding public financial support, there is a partial agreement on sufficiency, acknowledging measures like VAT reduction, home delivery grants, and COVID-19 crisis funds. However, **concerns persist due to its irregular provision and anticipated changes in VAT rates**. Notably, the support predominantly benefits print journalism, leaving **gaps in support for TV and radio**, underscoring potential imbalances.

Insufficient data on community and local media outlets leads to **challenges in assessing revenue trends and financial support**.

Compromised professional standards

Besides the journalists in Estonia facing different work-related challenges, the **effectiveness of journalists' organisations at the local level is questioned**. Critical perspectives, including those from practitioners, highlight scepticism toward them. The lack of clear actions and trustworthiness raises concerns, and meetings predominantly occur in larger cities, leaving many local journalists isolated.

Furthermore, while larger local news outlets generally adhere to codes of conduct, **smaller regional outlets may not consistently follow professional standards**, sometimes disseminating unedited information from local governments **without performing a watchdog role**.

A very concentrated market

Ownership concentration in Estonia is high: **Eesti Meedia affiliation covers a significant portion of local outlets, in the largest municipalities**.

While most outlets maintain autonomy, the overarching concentration raises concerns about the lack of media plurality.



Editorial independence under review

In Estonia, there is **no regulation preventing political control of the media** through direct or indirect ownership. This results in cases where political control is evident.

The Estonian **PSM ERR does not have local branches**, but relies on correspondents displaced at the local level. In terms of independence, its Board consists of politicians or politically motivated individuals, allowing for **occasional interference**. In addition, the **budget dependency on the government** and Parliament also raises concerns.

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