

## Young journalists in Switzerland: Results of a survey on aims, working conditions, and future prospects of journalists born in 1990 or later

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### Abstract

The study examines the job situation of young journalists in Switzerland. For this purpose, an online survey of 195 journalists in German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland born in 1990 or later has been conducted, providing data on socio-demographics, educational situation, career choice motives, type of employment, salary, working time, stress situations, job satisfaction, and future prospects. Young journalists have chosen their job mainly for reasons of self-fulfilment, but idealistic motives are also widespread, while material gain and status play no role in their career choice. A majority of the respondents are permanently employed in a full-time or part-time position, and the median gross monthly income is between 5000 and 6000 Swiss francs, with large differences depending on media and employment type. A high degree of autonomy is perceived at work. However, many young journalists work overtime, and two thirds state that they experience stress at work. They criticise insufficient financial resources and see the acceleration of work processes as a threat. Overall, job satisfaction of young Swiss journalists has decreased compared to previous studies. Respondents are rather pessimistic about the future of journalism, and a majority considers it unlikely that they will work as journalists for their entire professional life.

### Keywords

journalism studies, journalistic profession, working conditions, young journalists, Switzerland, survey

## 1 Introduction

Lacking resources have been an ongoing problem in journalism for several years. Changing habits in media use and digital platforms competing with traditional media in the advertising market are seen as the main causes for this crisis, which also affects the media in Switzerland and neighbouring countries (e.g., Eisenegger, 2019). Media companies react by cutting staff and merging or closing editorial offices, and various titles are forced to cease publication. Recent cases in Switzerland include the merger of the previously independent local editorial offices of the newspapers *Berner Zeitung* and *Der Bund* in Bern by their owner TX Group, the concentration of radio news production by SRF, the public-service broadcaster in the German-speaking part of the country, at one

studio in Zurich, as well as various magazines and local newspapers having closed down (Bühler & Moser, 2022). Even though several new online media entered the Swiss market in the past years, the overall number of jobs in journalism is decreasing, and the media content loses diversity (Vogler & Siegen, 2021).

The pressure to cut costs also affects the conditions under which the remaining journalists work: Permanent positions could be cut for cost reasons, and interns and freelancers, possibly working in precarious conditions, could be employed instead (Hanitzsch, Seethaler, & Wyss, 2019, p. 11). Journalists work overtime because the same work has to be done by fewer people, and they are in fear of losing their jobs (Heim & Graf, 2020, pp. 24–30). Unsatisfying working conditions may lead to an exodus from the profession



or prevent some young people from choosing it at all: Journalists who left their jobs state that they felt increasingly under pressure and doubted about the prospects within their own profession, while they found more attractive alternatives in other fields, for example in public relations (Albrecht & Bühler, 2021; Tröhler, 2022). The number of applications for schools of journalism in Switzerland, for example at Medienausbildungszentrum (MAZ) in Lucerne, has also decreased in recent years (Beck, 2021). Although there are overall less jobs in journalism than in the past, media companies observe that it has become more difficult to recruit suitable employees for open positions (Lüthi, 2022).

The ability to attract committed and qualified professionals, and to keep them in the profession to benefit from their experience, is essential for the future of media companies and for journalism in general. In order to understand the current developments, it is interesting to examine more in-depth the situation of young journalists, who entered journalism only a short time ago and still have a long career ahead of them: Why have they chosen this profession, and which factors may influence their decision to keep it for a longer term or to leave it? The goal of this study is thus to analyse aims, working conditions, and future prospects of journalists in Switzerland at the beginning of their career. Regarding their aims, the focus will be on career choice motives and role conceptions. Working conditions include formal factors such as employment type and duration, working hours, and the salary, but also the perception of stress and job satisfaction. The analysis of future prospects allows to investigate whether young professionals can imagine to stay journalists for a longer term and what would be reasons for them to leave the profession.

The study is based on the data of a standardised online survey, in which a total of 195 media professionals born in 1990 or later took part in February and March 2021. It is the first comprehensive survey specifically aimed at young journalists in Switzerland. In some parts, it provides an update for this group to the latest general survey among Swiss journalists, conducted for the “Worlds of Journalism Study” (WJS) in 2015 (Ding-

erkus, Dubied, Keel, Sacco, & Wyss, 2018). However, the questionnaire goes further into detail than the WJS with questions on working conditions and future prospects, which can be considered particularly relevant for young journalists in the context of the discussion about the declining attractiveness of the profession. The focus on journalists aged 30 or younger allows to compare respondents of more or less the same generation, who can expect that the biggest part of their professional life is still ahead of them. Furthermore, since their education is not long time ago or sometimes still ongoing, their views on future prospects are comparable to those of journalism students, which have already been analysed in other European countries (Hanitzsch, Lauerer, & Steindl, 2016).

## 2 Conceptual foundation and state of research

Earlier surveys about journalists’ ideals, aims, and attitudes often refer to systems theory (e. g., Keel, 2011; Marr, Wyss, Blum, & Bonfadelli, 2001): Journalism is perceived as a subsystem of society and the goal is to explore how journalists see their functions for the society as a whole and for other subsystems. A more recent approach laying more stress on individual actors and taking greater account of dynamic developments is discursive institutionalism. According to this concept, journalism is understood as an institution following norms and rules for news gathering (Sparrow, 2006, p. 155). Young media professionals learn journalistic norms and rules during their training and will use them as a guide for decisions in their everyday professional life. However, these norms and rules are constantly negotiated and questioned in professional and social discourses. Journalism as an institution constituted by norms and rules is thus not static, but can adapt to changing conditions. The discourse that shapes the institution of journalism is accessible by surveys among its members, i. e., journalists (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, pp. 3–7). Questions on role conceptions, but also on career choice motives, thus give an insight how journalists perceive the norms and rules of their profession.

The way in which journalists can actually implement their aims and ideals in their daily work depends on various factors. A well-known model to systematise the factors influencing journalistic work is the hierarchy of influences model by Shoemaker and Reese (1996). At the core of this model, which is visualised as a set of concentric circles, are the journalists' individual attitudes. Beyond this individual level are the routine level, which includes work routines and professional standards, the organisational level dealing with policies and economic imperatives of media organisations, the social-institutional level capturing the influence of institutions in politics and society, and the social system in which journalism operates (Reese, 2019). In surveys among journalists, questions on working conditions such as payment, working time, or the perception of stress and autonomy at work allow to explore influences on the organisational and on the social-institutional level. Hanitzsch et al. (2016, pp. 467–468) refer to six major developments on these levels in recent years that have an impact on journalistic work: (1) declining revenues from advertisements, especially in the print media sector, (2) changes in media use, with traditional mass media losing young audiences, (3) the loss of the information monopoly of traditional media due to the Internet, and, as a consequence, (4) the change in function of journalists from “gatekeepers” to “gatewatchers”; (5) decreasing trust in journalistic news offerings, and (6) cost-cutting measures at media companies affecting the staff.

In order to systematically analyse the professional field of young journalists, it is useful to define exactly who is a journalist. Since the job title is not protected by Swiss law (Impressum, 2014), and since there is no consensus in academia how the profession should be defined (Donsbach, 2009, p. 82), the membership criteria of professional associations offer a point of reference for what constitutes the group of journalists. Professional associations in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland agree that a journalist is a person who spends a substantial part of his or her working time on journalistic activities or training. Journalistic activity is understood as the creation of contributions for the editorial part of a news media product

(Deutscher Journalisten-Verband, 2020; Impressum, 2021; Österreichischer Journalisten Club, 2020; Syndicom, 2021). Kaltenbrunner, Karmasin, Kraus, and Zimmermann (2007) suggest three possible approaches to define the population of a survey among journalists: Professional affiliation is determined either by membership in a professional organisation (formal approach), by performing journalistic activities in a media organisation (structural-institutional approach), or, in the broadest sense, by a professional activity in which journalistic norms and rules are observed (individual approach).

In the first comprehensive survey among Swiss journalists dating from 1998, the 2020 participants whose data were analysed were largely recruited through the membership directories of professional associations (Marr et al., 2001). One decade later, the follow-up study by Keel (2011) with 2509 respondents used this selection method only for print media; journalists of other media types were contacted via their media companies. The most recent major study on Swiss media professionals, for which 909 journalists were interviewed between 2014 and 2015 as part of the international Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS), also recruited the participants via the media companies (Dingerkus et al., 2018). This allowed to collect data from journalists who were not organised in professional associations and provided information on the importance of these associations: A majority of 57% of the respondents in Switzerland stated that they were members of professional associations (Dietrich-Gsenger & Seethaler, 2019, p. 55).

Regarding the state of research on Swiss journalists' working conditions, the WJS provides some general findings. A large majority of the respondents view recent changes in their profession critically and mention increasing competition, less time for research, heavier workloads, and longer working hours (Seethaler, 2019, pp. 219–224). Similar findings were made in a study conducted at the University of Fribourg in 2014, in which around 1000 Swiss journalists participated: Many respondents complained about the lack of time for in-depth research and for maintaining networks (Puppis, Schönhagen, Fürst, Hofstetter, & Meissner, 2014, p. 24).

Furthermore, despite increased pressure and rising living costs, the average salary has remained constant at around 6300 Swiss francs since 1998, with large differences depending on the type of media (Lauerer, Dingerkus, & Steindl, 2019; Marr et al., 2001, p. 66).

The working conditions of Swiss media professionals have also been examined in studies commissioned by professional organisations and trade-unions. In 2006, the journalists' associations Comedia (which later became Syndicom), Impressum, SSM (Schweizer Syndikat Medienschaffender / Syndicat suisse des mass media / Sindicato svizzero dei massmedia), and the Association of Swiss Specialist Journalists (SFJ-AJS), in cooperation with the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB-USS), conducted a survey on the wage situation in which 1150 journalists participated (Oesch & Graf, 2007). A new edition of the study with 1190 respondents was published in 2020 (Heim & Graf, 2020). In addition to the wage situation, this study also examined stress factors, working hours, perception of future prospects, and job satisfaction. Questions on stress and fear of losing one's job were formulated in the same way as in the Swiss Health Survey conducted in 2017 (FSO, 2019, p. 28), which allows comparisons between journalists and the population as a whole. In the 2020 survey, as in 2006, large differences in income could be found depending on the type of media, and freelance journalists were significantly less paid than permanent employees (Heim & Graf, 2020, pp. 8–18). On average, respondents worked 2.4 hours more per week than they were paid for; one fifth felt they were under constant pressure to meet deadlines (Heim & Graf, 2020, pp. 25–28). Sixty percent of freelance journalists and 25% of permanent employees rated their current work situation as insecure, compared to 16% of respondents from all occupational groups in the 2017 Swiss Health Survey. Around 90% of the survey participants considered it difficult to find an equivalent new employment if they lose their current job (Heim & Graf, 2020, pp. 28–30, 33). Various other studies have examined how journalists experience stress situations and discuss factors such as time pressure, lacking work-life balance, fear at work or for one's job, bad working atmo-

sphere, or restrictions on autonomy at work (e. g., Beck & Münger, 1998; Bodin, 2000; Puppis et al., 2014).

Information on the situation of young journalists in Switzerland is partly available from the data of the major Swiss journalist surveys. However, the under 30-year-olds only make up a minority in each of these surveys (11% in the study by Marr et al. (2001), 6% in the study by Keel (2011), 14% in the WJS (Dietrich-Gsenger & Seethaler, 2019, p. 57). Moreover, the authors only partially address specific findings on this age group in their publications, which makes comparisons over time difficult. Accordingly, young journalists are strongly represented at private radio and television stations and in local and regional departments (Dietrich-Gsenger & Seethaler, 2019, p. 59; Keel, 2011, pp. 147–148, 163–164; Marr et al., 2001, pp. 98–100). Their share is very high in the salary bracket below 4000 Swiss francs (Keel, 2011, p. 202), and they often have fixed-term contracts (Lauerer et al., 2019, p. 84). In their perception of journalistic roles, they identify more strongly than older colleagues with audience-oriented role conceptions such as the animator and the service provider (Keel, 2011, pp. 234–235). Finally, their willingness to recommend their profession to other people tends to decrease (Keel, 2011, p. 250).

Surveys of journalism students on the perception of their intended profession have been conducted in various other European countries, namely by Hanitzsch et al. (2016) in Germany, Nygren & Stygbrand (2014) in Sweden, Russia, Poland, Finland, and Estonia, Hovden, Bjørnsen, Ottosen, Willig, and Zilliacus-Tikkanen (2009) in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, as well as Hanna and Sanders (2007) in the United Kingdom. Many participants in these surveys were already working in journalism alongside their studies, and they were specifically asked about career choice motives and their perception of the future of journalism. Among other findings, it became clear that students were more pessimistic about their prospects with increasing professional experience. In Western Europe, economic factors such as the influence of advertising or the concentration of media ownership, as well as worsened working conditions, for example due to

accelerated work processes, were seen as the main problems of journalism. Nevertheless, many students were not deterred from starting a career in journalism by these problems, and their motives to become a journalist could mainly be attributed to personal fulfilment (Hanitzsch et al., 2016, pp. 478–479).

### 3 Method

The situation of young journalists (up to the age of 30) in Switzerland is examined in this study by means of a standardised online survey. Beside the collection of socio-demographic data and information on the educational situation, the focus is on the following aspects and research questions:

- › RQ1: Career choice motives and role conceptions: Why have the respondents decided to become journalists? How do they identify with journalistic roles?
- › RQ2: Formal working conditions: Are journalists employed full-time or part-time, for a limited or unlimited period? How many hours of overtime do they have per week? What is the wage situation?
- › RQ3: Stress and job satisfaction: To what extent do the respondents suffer from stress, and to what causes do they attribute this stress? Are they satisfied with their career choice?
- › RQ4: Future prospects: How do the respondents see their own professional future and the future of journalism in general? Can they imagine to stay journalists for a longer term? If not, what would be possible reasons to leave the profession?

In order to ensure compatibility, questions and items used for the survey are based on existing studies. The WJS (Dingerkus et al., 2018) and the previous general survey among Swiss journalists by Keel (2011) are the main sources for questions and answer options regarding socio-demographic data, educational situation, media type, and the perception of journalistic roles. Type and duration of the employment, the wage categories, and job satisfaction are also measured in the same way as in the WJS. Other sources are used to get a deeper insight into particular aspects:

The question on working overtime was taken from the trade union study by Heim and Graf (2020), while the perception of how much time is available for various tasks was measured in the same way as in the survey by Puppis et al. (2014). Questions on stress situations correspond to those as used by Heim and Graf (2020), but their original source is the Swiss Health Survey from 2017 (FSO, 2020). Most items on career choice motives and future prospects are taken from the survey among journalism students by Hanitzsch et al. (2016). An additional question about possible reasons to leave journalism is based on the measurement of the intention to change one's job in the Randstad Employer Brand Research study (Randstad Germany, 2021).

A combination of the formal and the structural-institutional approach was used to determine the sample of the survey. The questionnaire, available in German and French, was intended to reach journalists aged 30 or younger, based in German- and French-speaking Switzerland and working for one or more media companies at the time of the survey or until at least 2019. The majority of respondents was recruited via the Swiss Association of Young Journalists (JJS), Impressum, Syndicom, and SSM – all of these associations had agreed to forward the link to the questionnaire to their members. A total of 707 journalists were contacted, 399 of them by JJS alone, an organization specifically aimed at journalists up to the age of 30. In addition, one research university and three universities of applied sciences in Switzerland distributed the questionnaire among their former and current students in the fields of journalism, communication, and media. Attention was also drawn to the project via social media. Cases not belonging to the target group were sorted out at the beginning of the questionnaire by means of control questions on year of birth and work for a media company. The survey was online from 23 February to 14 March 2021 and provided evaluable data from a total of 195 people. Respondents born in 1990 who had already reached the age of 31 at the time of the survey were retained in the sample (see Table 7, supplementary material).



Of the respondents who entirely filled in the questionnaire, 118 (61 %) are female and 77 are male. This share is almost in accordance with the gender proportions among the members of JJS (as of July 2022, 226 women, i. e., 59 %, and 156 men according to the JJS general secretariat); already the WJS has found a majority of women among Swiss journalists aged 30 and younger, in contrast to the higher age groups (Dietrich-Gsenger & Seethaler, 2019, p. 58). The median age is 27. With a share of almost 87 %, German-speaking Switzerland is overrepresented; 11 % of the respondents are from French-speaking Switzerland, 2 % indicated another language region. Thirty-three percent of all journalists in the sample work mainly for a paid daily newspaper, 17 % for the online edition of a print medium, radio or television station, 14 % for private radio stations, 10 % for private television, 9 % for a stand-alone online medium, and 7 % each for public-service radio and television. About two thirds of the survey participants can be described as academics: 47 % have a Bachelor's or Master's degree from a research university (more than half of them in the field of communication or journalism), 22 % have a degree from a university of applied sciences, usually in communication or journalism. The most common journalistic education is an internship or traineeship that lasted less than one year (experienced by 61 % of all respondents), followed by longer practical trainings on the job (29 %), and studies and courses at journalism schools (for details on socio-demographics and education, see the supplementary material, Tables 7 to 10). Compared to data from Swiss journalists in the late 2000s (Keel, 2011, p. 188), the importance of shorter internships and degrees from research universities and universities of applied sciences has further increased, while longer internships and diplomas from journalism schools have become less frequent.

## 4 Results

In accordance with the research questions, the overview of the survey results is divided into four parts: career choice motives and role conceptions (RQ1), formal working

conditions (RQ2), stress and job satisfaction (RQ3), and future prospects (RQ4). Where possible, the findings will be compared with results from previous studies in which journalists were asked the same questions.

### 4.1 Career choice motives and role conceptions (RQ1)

In terms of career choice motives, young Swiss journalists confirm the findings of earlier studies. Like in the survey among journalism students in Germany conducted by Hanitzsch et al. (2016, p. 473), the strongest motives can be assigned to the field of self-fulfilment: 93 % of the respondents indicate that the pursuit of a varied and exciting activity was an important reason for choosing the profession (n=195). Other important motives are getting to know interesting people (85 %), the opportunity to be creative (82 %), the joy of writing (65 %), and the great independence in the job (57 %). A number of idealistic motives are also stated as important reasons for becoming a journalist: the commitment to freedom and democracy (55 %), acting against injustice (49 %), controlling people of power (44 %), and being able to help people with problems in their everyday lives (35 %). In contrast, the prestige of the profession (18 %) and material aspects such as job security (10 %) and attractive salaries (6 %) are of little importance. The approval ratings for the latter two items are even lower than in the German survey by Hanitzsch et al. (2016, p. 475), in which they were still considered important motives for becoming a journalist by around one fifth of the respondents.

Regarding role conceptions, Table 1 shows that the results of the present study largely coincide with those of the survey of Swiss journalists of all ages conducted for the WJS project in 2015 (Dingerkus et al., 2018, p. 125; Hanitzsch & Lauerer, 2019): Most young Swiss journalists identify with the role of the neutral disseminator and find it very or extremely important to report things as they are. The roles of detached observer and analyst also receive high approval. Political roles such as providing information people need to make political decisions, motivating people to participate, and providing a platform to let people express different views, as well as promoting tolerance and cultural diversity,

**Table 1: Importance of journalistic roles (n = 195)**

Role	Mean	Strong agreement in %
Report things as they are	4.8	98.5
Be a detached observer	4.2	83.6
Provide analysis of current affairs	4.3	82.6
Provide information people need to make political decisions	4.2	81.5
Tell stories about the world	4.0	71.3
Motivate people to participate in political activity	3.9	68.2
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	4.0	68.2
Let people express their views	3.7	63.1
Educate the audience	3.7	60.0
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	3.6	59.5
Monitor and scrutinise political leaders	3.4	48.2
Advocate for social change	3.4	47.2
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	3.4	46.2
Monitor and scrutinise business	3.2	43.1
Provide entertainment and relaxation	3.3	37.9
Be an adversary of the government	3.0	31.8
Support national development	2.9	28.2
Influence public opinion	2.8	26.2
Set the political agenda	2.7	16.9
Convey a positive image of political leadership	1.5	0.5
Support government policy	1.6	0.5

Note: Values are measured on a five-level scale: 1 = not important at all, 2 = rather unimportant, 3 = partly important, 4 = very important, 5 = extremely important; “Strong agreement” includes percentage of responses with values 4 and 5; items correspond to those as used by Dingerkus et al. (2018).

and educating the audience, are still important to many respondents. Role conceptions related to monitoring and scrutinising government or business, but also the service provider and entertainer roles, which used to be rather popular among younger journalists according to previous studies (Keel, 2011, pp. 234–235), seem to be less relevant. The approval rate for the entertainer role among young Swiss journalists in 2021 is only slightly higher than among Swiss journalists of all ages in the WJS (Hanitzsch & Lauerer, 2019, p. 155). The difference is more important for the service provider role (providing advice, orientation and direction for daily life; 60% in the present study, 39% for all Swiss journalists in the WJS). Apart from this, there are no essential changes in role conceptions compared to previous surveys, which indicates that young journalists still adopt the values of the profession shared by their older colleagues.

**4.2 Formal working conditions (RQ2)**

Table 2 provides an overview of young journalists’ formal working conditions in Switzerland. Forty-five percent of the survey participants have full-time employment, 29% work part-time, and 24% work on a freelance basis. Over 80% of the survey participants who gave an answer regarding their employment (n = 176) work on a permanent basis, while 19% are employed on a fixed-term basis. Compared to the data in the WJS survey from 2015, the proportion of both freelance and fixed-term employment among young journalists in 2021 is thus higher than among journalists of all ages six years earlier – a total of 8% of all Swiss respondents then worked as freelance journalists, and around 10% had a fixed-term employment contract (Lauerer et al., 2019, pp. 81–84). Nevertheless, permanent full-time employment is still the most common type of employment also among young journalists. In contrast to the aforementioned study, there are no significant gender differences in the current survey, neither in terms of employment type (full-time,

**Table 2:** Formal working conditions: Percentages of employment type and duration, salary brackets, and weekly overtime

	Women (n <sub>min</sub> = 102, n <sub>max</sub> = 118)	Men (n <sub>min</sub> = 70, n <sub>max</sub> = 77)	All (n <sub>min</sub> = 172, n <sub>max</sub> = 195)
Employment type			
Full-time	46.6	41.6	44.6
Part-time	25.4	35.1	29.2
Freelance	25.4	20.8	24.1
Other type	2.5	2.6	2.6
Employment duration			
Permanent	81.1	81.4	81.3
Fixed-term	18.9	18.6	18.8
Gross monthly salary			
≤ 4000 francs	34.5	23.4	30.0
4001–6000 francs	38.1	40.3	39.0
6001–8000 francs	25.6	32.5	28.4
> 8000 francs	1.8	3.9	2.7
Overtime per week			
< 1 hour	21.8	16.7	19.8
1 to 3 hours	37.3	36.1	36.8
3 to 6 hours	33.6	33.4	33.5
> 6 hours	7.2	13.9	9.8

Note: The questions on employment type and duration, and on gross monthly salary correspond to those as used in the WJS (Dingerkus et al., 2018; Lauerer et al., 2019); salaries were measured in categories of 1000 Swiss francs each: 1=0 to 1000 francs, 2=1001 to 2000 francs, 3=2001 to 3000 francs, ..., 10=9001 to 10000 francs; none of the respondents reported a monthly salary of over 10000 francs; respondents working part-time were asked to indicate their salary for a 100% employment; the question on overtime per week was asked in the same way as in the study by Heim and Graf (2020).

part-time, or freelance) [ $\chi^2(3, N=195)=2.516, p=.472$ ] nor in terms of duration (permanent or fixed-term) [ $\chi^2(1, N=176)=0.002, p=.961$ ].

In terms of gross monthly income, the median is between 5000 and 6000 Swiss francs, but about a third each of the respondents earn less than 4000 Swiss francs, between 4000 and 6000 Swiss francs, and more than 6000 Swiss francs per month. Compared to earlier Swiss studies, the proportion of journalists aged 30 or younger in the wage bracket up to 4000 Swiss francs has not increased: in 1998 it was 37%, in 2008 it was 42% (Keel, 2011, p. 202).

The wage significantly depends on the employment type. Seventy-one percent of all freelance journalists earn less than 4000 francs per month from journalistic activities (n=41), compared to 20% of the fully employed journalists (n=87). Only 14% of the part-time employed (n=57) stated that they would be in the lowest wage category if they worked full-time. The differences between the three groups are confirmed by a

Kruskal-Wallis test [ $H(2)=46.460, p<.001$ ]. Dunn-Bonferroni tests show that the wage differences between full-time employed journalists and freelancers [ $z=6.288, p<.001, r=.548$ ], as well as between part-time employed journalists (calculated on their full-time salary) and freelancers [ $z=5.975, p<.001, r=.600$ ], are strongly significant. On the other hand, there is no significant difference between the salary classes of full-time and part-time employed journalists [ $z=-0.196, p=.845, r=.016$ ].

The media type is also an important factor. Since journalists could give multiple responses when indicating the main media types that they are working for, the income distribution was calculated separately for each medium. This produced some remarkable results: 59% of the journalists mainly working for public-service radio and television (n=27) have a monthly salary above 6000 francs, compared to only 4% at private radio stations (n=25) and 18% at online-only media (n=17). In contrast, 44% of the journalists



**Table 3: Available time to do the daily work (nmin = 120, nmax = 192)**

I have enough time to ...	Mean	Strong agreement in %
write my own articles or features.	3.9	68.0
check obtained information and its sources.	3.7	60.4
revise the content of media releases.	3.6	51.5
do all daily work in a way that is satisfactory for me.	3.4	47.3
revise reports from news agencies and correspondents.	3.2	43.3
conduct in-depth investigations on-site.	2.8	24.8
establish and maintain my own network of sources.	2.7	23.8

Note: Values are measured on a five-level scale: 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=very often; "Strong agreement" includes percentage of responses with values 4 and 5; journalists who chose the answer option "not my duty" are considered missing cases; items correspond to those as used by Puppis et al. (2014).

**Table 4: Frequency of encountered stress situations (n = 193)**

Stressful situations	Mean	Strong agreement in %
I have to think about too many things at the same time.	3.9	71.0
I experience stress at work.	3.8	65.8
I must hurry to do my job.	3.8	64.8
My work requires me to hide feelings.	2.5	19.2
I struggle to balance work and private life.	2.7	18.7
I encounter tensions when dealing with colleagues or clients.	2.5	17.1
I have little autonomy in how I do my job.	1.9	5.2
I am sometimes afraid at work (for my safety or that of others).	1.6	4.1

Note: Values are measured on a five-level scale: 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=mostly, 5=always; "Strong agreement" includes percentage of responses with values 4 and 5; items correspond to those as used in the 2017 Swiss health survey (FSO, 2020, p. 114).

mainly working for private radio stations and 53 % of the employees at online-only media, but only 4 % at public-service media, earn less than 4000 francs per month.

Compared to their male colleagues, young female journalists are more represented in the lowest wage bracket and less among salaries above 6000 francs. Women are over-represented among freelance journalists (66 %) and among collaborators of private radio stations (68 %), where the wages are generally lower, and less present in public-service media (55 %) with their well-paid jobs. However, the overall difference regarding wage categories between female and male journalists is not statistically significant according to a Kruskal-Wallis test [ $H(1) = 3.108, p = .078$ ].

Regardless of the level of employment, a large majority of all respondents indicate that they work unpaid overtime. In over 40 % of all cases, it is more than three hours per week. On average, the difference between effective and paid working time is a good three and a half hours per week. This is one hour more

than the value found by Heim and Graf (2020, p. 26) in their survey of Swiss journalists on behalf of journalists' associations.

Despite the long working hours, about half of the respondents say that they have too little time to do all their daily work in a satisfactory way. For a majority of respondents, there is enough time for essential activities such as writing articles or features, and checking sources (Table 3). However, they complain about the lack of time for in-depth investigations and for maintaining their network of informants – only a quarter of the respondents are satisfied with the situation in these fields. These are similar values to those found by Puppis et al. (2014) among Swiss journalists of all ages almost a decade ago.

### 4.3 Stress and job satisfaction (RQ3)

The long working hours and the impression that there is still not sufficient time to do the job in a satisfactory way have an impact on the mental health of young journalists. A majority of the survey participants indicate that they have to endure frequently or constant-

**Table 5:** Possible reasons for leaving journalism (n = 185)

Possible reasons for leaving journalism	Mean	Strong agreement in %
Lack of work-life balance	3.5	60.5
General desire for change	3.2	50.3
Uncertain future of one's own job	3.0	45.9
Lack of opportunities to advance personally	3.1	43.8
Lack of identification with the company culture	3.0	42.2
Desire to earn more money	3.0	41.6

Note: Values are measured on a five-level scale: 1 = do not agree at all, 2 = rather disagree, 3 = partly agree, 4 = strongly agree, 5 = very strongly agree; "Strong agreement" includes percentage of responses with values 4 and 5; items are based on those as used in the Randstad Employer Brand Research study to measure the willingness to leave a job in general (Randstad Germany, 2021, p. 13).

ly three of the stressful situations they were asked about: Over 70 % state that they have to think about too many things at the same time, and two thirds each experience stress at work or have the impression that they always have to hurry at work (Table 4). Other stressful situations, such as hiding one's feelings at work, problems with finding the balance between work and family life, and conflicts with colleagues or customers, are mentioned as frequent or constant problems by one fifth of the respondents. Fear at work (for one's own safety or that of others) is mentioned only occasionally, and most respondents do not perceive a lack of autonomy in their job.

Many young journalists are thus frequently confronted with stressful situations, but a clear majority of 85 % state that they can cope with stress well or fairly well (n = 194). Compared to earlier studies, however, job satisfaction has declined over time. While a majority of 59 % say they would recommend their profession to other persons, 25 % would rather advise against it, and 17 % are unsure (n = 195). Previous Swiss surveys recorded significantly higher percentages in this field: In 1998, 83 % recommended their profession to others, and in 2008, it was still 69 % (Keel, 2011, p. 250). The differences in job satisfaction according to age and stress perception are striking. Among respondents aged 19 to 24 (i. e., born in 1997 or later), 75 % would recommend their job to others (n = 48), while only 53 % among the 25- to 31-year-olds (n = 147) would do the same [ $\chi^2(2, N = 195) = 8.015, p = .018$ ]. This could be a sign that satisfaction decreases with growing professional experience. Similarly, journalists stating that they experience higher amounts of stress at work are less

likely to recommend their job to others [ $\chi^2(2, N = 194) = 7.438, p = .024$ ]: The approval rate is 72 % among journalists who say that they do not mostly or always experience stress (n = 67), but only 52 % among those who do so (n = 127). The median salary of journalists who recommend their jobs to others is between 5001 and 6000 francs per month, while it is only between 4001 and 5000 francs among those who do not encourage others to become journalists and those who are undecided. However, the Kruskal-Wallis test does not confirm that job satisfaction depends on the salary [ $H(2) = 2.917, p = .233$ ].

#### 4.4 Future prospects (RQ4)

Overall, job satisfaction is limited. This is also matched by the finding that 53 % of the respondents consider it rather unlikely that they will spend their entire professional life in journalism. Only 42 % consider this prospect likely, 5 % are undecided (n = 195). Table 5 documents that more than 60 % see the lack of work-life balance as the most important reason for leaving journalism in the future, followed by a general desire for change, the uncertain future of one's job, lack of opportunities to advance personally, lack of identification with the company culture, and the desire to earn more money.

Only 49 % of the respondents are optimistic about their own professional future in journalism, 27 % are pessimistic, and 24 % are undecided (n = 184). However, the future of journalism itself is seen even more pessimistically: 46 % are rather pessimistic, 24 % optimistic, and 30 % undecided (n = 189). Table 6 gives an overview of the reasons for this critical view: 87 % of the respondents consider insufficient financial resources to be a major

**Table 6: Perception of challenges and problems in journalism (n = 193)**

Challenges and issues that may be a danger for journalism	Mean	Strong agreement in %
Lack of financial resources	4.3	86.5
Concentration of media ownership	4.1	74.1
Acceleration of work procedures	4.0	73.6
Profit expectations by investors	3.9	63.2
Increasing psychological stress on journalists	3.7	58.5
Competition from Internet platforms	3.6	56.0
Influence of advertising on journalistic content	3.5	49.7
Influence of public relations and lobbyists	3.2	33.7
Insufficient professional ethics	3.0	31.1
Limited access to information	2.8	26.4
Insufficiently educated journalists	2.8	26.4
Partisan journalism	2.8	22.3
Intertwining media and politics	2.8	18.7
Deficiencies in journalism education	2.6	18.1
Physical threats to journalists	2.5	16.1
Self-censorship	2.5	12.4
State intervention in the media sector	2.2	11.4
Censorship	2.0	8.8
Legal provisions	2.2	7.8
Foreign investments in Swiss media	2.2	6.7

Note: Values are measured on a five-level scale: 1=do not agree at all, 2=rather disagree, 3=partly agree, 4=strongly agree, 5=very strongly agree; “Strong agreement” includes percentage of responses with values 4 and 5; items correspond to those as used by Hanitzsch et al. (2016), adapted to the situation in Switzerland in the item on foreign investments.

problem in journalism. A majority of respondents also name the concentration of media ownership, the acceleration of work procedures, the profit expectations by investors, the increase in psychological stress on journalists, and competition from Internet platforms as major challenges and issues. The young journalists thus consider economic factors and deteriorating working conditions as the greatest dangers for journalism. The influence of external actors on journalism is seen as less of a problem. In this context, the respondents rate the influence of economic actors via advertising and public relations as more problematic than the influence of political actors or state intervention.

**5 Discussion and conclusion**

In a standardised online survey, 195 journalists born in 1990 or later from the German- and the French-speaking part of Switzerland were asked about their professional situation, in particular their education, motives for choosing the profession, role concep-

tions, formal working conditions, stress and job satisfaction, as well as their view of their own future and the future of journalism. This is the first comprehensive study in Switzerland specifically aimed at young journalists. However, the data can be compared with findings from earlier Swiss studies and with surveys of young journalists and journalism students in other European countries.

With regard to education and employment types, the current study confirms the findings from the WJS (Dingerkus et al., 2018; Lauerer et al., 2019): The degree of academisation of young journalists is high, and the classic access to the profession still consists of rather short internships at editorial offices. Compared to the data of all Swiss respondents from the WJS, the share of both freelance and temporary employment is significantly higher among journalists aged 30 or younger in 2021. Nevertheless, permanent full-time positions are by far the most common form of employment among young media professionals.

Compared to the studies by Hanitzsch et al. (2016) and Dingerkus et al. (2018), ca-

reer choice motives and role conceptions (RQ1) have not changed significantly: The most important reason for young people to become journalists is the prospect of an exciting, varied, and creative job, followed by idealistic motives related to the functions of journalism for society. Material motives are even less important than in the previous surveys. Young journalists in Switzerland continue to identify most strongly with the role models of the neutral disseminator, the detached observer, and the analyst. The findings on role conceptions also support the theoretical notion of journalism as a discursive institution whose norms and values are passed on to a new generation.

While young journalists are oriented towards the common ideals and goals of the profession, the findings on working conditions (RQ2), as well as on stress and job satisfaction (RQ3), indicate that the implementation of these ideals is sometimes difficult. On the positive side, the proportion of journalists in the lowest salary bracket has not increased compared to previous Swiss surveys (Dingerkus et al., 2018; Keel, 2011), and the respondents still perceive a high degree of autonomy in their work. The situation with working hours is more problematic: Almost half of all respondents work more than three hours of unpaid overtime per week. Calculated over a year, this adds up to 20 days of overtime, which often can neither be compensated nor offset. At the same time, about half of the respondents also state that they have too little time to complete their tasks in a way that is satisfactory to them. This situation leads to stress – a majority of respondents indicate that they are regularly exposed to stressful situations. In particular, time pressure leads respondents to feel that they have to think about too many things at the same time and that they are constantly in a hurry.

These stress factors may have an impact not only on the individual health of workers, but also on the future of the industry as a whole. The survey shows distinctly lower job satisfaction than the studies by Keel (2011) and Dingerkus et al. (2018). Especially journalists with more work experience would no longer recommend their profession to others without reservations. Regarding the respondents' own future prospects (RQ4), a major-

ity considers it unlikely that they will work as journalists for their entire professional life. Principal reasons given for a possible change are the lack of work-life balance, the uncertain future of one's job, and the lack of opportunities to advance personally. Overall, respondents are rather pessimistic about the future of journalism. In their view, the lack of resources and other economic constraints, as well as the resulting poor working conditions, are a major threat to the industry.

Due to the research design, this study provides a rather broad overview of the current situation of young journalists in Switzerland. There would definitely be potential for more in-depth studies, especially on aspects such as time management, mental health, and motives for leaving the profession. It would also be valuable to repeat standardised surveys regularly, compare their findings over time, and thereby trace developments. A major limitation of the study is the representation of different language regions: Since the survey was only conducted in German and in French, it does not provide information about young journalists in the two smaller Swiss language regions. Furthermore, the proportion of responses from French-speaking Switzerland was very low, which made comparisons by language region impossible. Previous surveys among Swiss journalists found overall similar working conditions in the three major language regions (Puppis et al., 2014, pp. 39–40), but observed in fact some differences, notably higher job satisfaction in French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland than in German-speaking Switzerland (Dingerkus et al., 2018, p. 126) and more complaints about diminishing time resources in French-speaking Switzerland than in the other regions (Puppis et al., 2014, p. 24). Average wages are similar in all three language regions, but the lowest proportion of very low incomes is found in French-speaking Switzerland. This could be an effect of the collective labour agreement between publishers and journalists in print and online media in this region, which provides for minimum wages for employees and freelancers (Heim & Graf, 2020, p. 13).

A reason for the overrepresentation of German-speaking journalists in this study is the recruitment of the survey participants

through professional associations: JJS as the leading Swiss association specifically aimed at young journalists has so far almost exclusively been active in the German-speaking part of the country. Future studies in Switzerland should thus pay more attention to a balanced representation of the different language regions. One could also argue that the recruitment process has led to an overrepresentation of journalists who are members of professional organisations. However, still 45 % of the respondents have stated that they do not belong to such an organisation.

Young people continue to choose the profession because of the interesting and varied job profile and for idealistic reasons, and they also accept downsides such as irregular working hours or working under time pressure. However, to keep the quality level of news coverage and to ensure that the profession remains attractive for newcomers, that committed professionals stay in journalism in the long term, and that job satisfaction increases again, it is essential that media companies care for good working conditions.

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### Conflicts of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited). <https://www.hope.uzh.ch/scoms/article/view/j.scoms.2023.02.3604>

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