

# MAPPING LOCAL MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC MOLDOVA

This activity is part of the project supported by Sweden “Media Literacy Advancement and Support to Moldovan Media” and implemented by Internews in Moldova, which aims to contribute towards the growth of a diverse, independent and financially viable media landscape in Moldova, and to empower Moldovan youth to navigate their complex information environment.



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The media landscape in Moldova has undergone a remarkable transformation over the last decade. Local media outlets, once perceived as extensions of LPAs, have experienced a significant shift towards greater independence. This transformation has resulted in a more diverse and dynamic media environment.

The majority of Moldova's rayons benefit from media coverage, either through local outlets or neighboring ones that cover regional events. However, the study revealed an exception in the Donduseni rayon, where no local media outlet has its newsroom or mentions coverage when needed. Additionally, there are seven 'gray' rayons with inconsistent media coverage.

One notable characteristic of local media is its 'urbanization.' Active local media outlets primarily operate in local urban areas, such as local and regional towns. The most densely covered rayons in terms of media presence include Balti, Drochia, and Soroca in the north; Orhei and Nisporeni in the center; and Cahul, Basarabasca, Comrat, and Cimislia in the south. The period between 2011 and 2020 witnessed the most prolific decade in the establishment of local media outlets. Language plays a crucial role in Moldova's local media landscape, with over two-thirds of active outlets predominantly using Romanian or bilingual content in both Romanian and Russian languages.

Local media exhibits hesitance in diversifying its operating platforms. Many media outlets do not have online websites, are absent from social media, or are cautious about establishing and disseminating their content online or through social media platforms. Ownership transparency in local media varies significantly from the national media landscape, with most outlets having founders who also serve as administrators. The prevalent legal form for local media outlets is the 'limited liability company' (SRL), although there are also media outlets

that operate as 'public associations' (AO), non-commercial organizations (NGO), or are under the administration of Rayon Councils.

Despite the progress, challenges persist in the local media sector. Among the most acute issues are audience reach, human resource limitations, and funding constraints, particularly for broadcasting media such as TV and radio. This report delves into the above-mentioned findings in greater detail, providing a comprehensive understanding of the local media in Moldova.

The situation of the local media sector in the Republic of Moldova has changed significantly in the last ten years. Although local media outlets still face many challenges, the progress lies in the fact that they are much more independent than a decade ago. Many, if not the majority of local media outlets, have shed the label of being an appendage of local public administrations (LPA). Currently, very few media outlets depend on or are controlled by local/regional/municipal authorities.

Internews in Moldova commissioned a research project to map the local media landscape. Victor Gotisan, a media researcher, coordinated the mapping, and Tatiana Etco, a media expert, collected the data. The data and information for this report were gathered between April and June 2023. The research report aimed to map the local media landscape in Moldova, excluding Chisinau municipality, the Transnistrian region and national media institutions. The research's purpose was to identify the presence and media coverage in different regions of the country. As a result, a database was developed and a quantitative and qualitative analytical report about the local media was drafted. The research findings were integrated into an interactive map, visually presenting the locations and public interest data of the identified local media outlets.

The objective of mapping Moldova's local media landscape, excluding the capital and Transnistrian region, was to assess media accessibility in the regions, uncover communities lacking information access, and pinpoint regions with inadequate media representation.

As of July 2023, out of the 113 identified local

media outlets, only 68 are currently active. These 68 local media outlets are distributed relatively equal across the entire country: 16 in the north region, 18 in the center region, and 17 each in the south region and the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (UTA Gagauzia) & Taraclia. Most of the rayons (districts) in Moldova have media coverage: either there are local media outlets active in the rayon, or media outlets from neighboring rayons cover local, regional, or national events if they take place or are organized there. However, there is one rayon that lacks media coverage: Donduseni, in the north region. In the case of this rayon, either no local media outlet has its newsroom located in this area, or none of the media managers interviewed during this study mentioned this rayon to cover when needed. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are seven 'gray' rayons from the perspective of media coverage among the 68 active ones identified:

- Edinet, Riscani, Donduseni – in the north region,
- Telenești, Calarasi, Dubasari – in the center region,
- Stefan Voda – in the south region.

However, except Donduseni rayon, all these rayons have been mentioned by some managers of local media as being covered from a media perspective when necessary.

The 68 active local media outlets have their newsrooms in 31 different localities. Except two media outlets (Radio Pro Mingir and Radio Cultura Divina), all the others are located in urban areas (cities). The densest rayons in terms of media coverage are: Balti, Drochia, and Soroca in north region; Orhei and Nisporeni in centre region; Cahul, Basarabeasca, and Cimislia in

<sup>1</sup> The deetatization of public periodical publications was done at the recommendation of the Council of Europe, when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) recommended Moldova to deetatize not only the print media outlets that were owned by the state or LPAs, but also the audiovisual media outlets that had local public authorities as founders. Thus, in September 2010, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted the Law on the Deetatization of Public Periodical Publications ([https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=106615&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=106615&lang=ro)). The law establishes the legal mechanism regarding the requirements, method, and process for transitioning of media outlets financed by the state and/or by local public authorities to other forms of ownership. In this regard, over the past 13 years, the majority of local media institutions have been deetatized. However, at the moment, there are still local media institutions – 6 out of a total of 68 identified active ones - in which either the Rayon Councils are still listed as founders, or they are still managed by individuals employed in LPAs (Rayon Councils), or they continue to be funded from local public budgets. <sup>2</sup> A total of 68 local media outlets have been identified and grouped based on their media format into 7 categories: TV (exclusive), TV+Online, Radio (exclusive), Radio+Online, Print (exclusive), Print+Online, and Online. Among these, 2 are TV (exclusive), 12 are TV+Online, 9 are Radio (exclusive), 4 are Radio+Online, 9 are exclusive newspapers, 13 are newspapers with an online extension, and 19 are online media outlets. It should be noted that the online platforms of TV stations, Radio stations, or newspapers were not classified as separate media outlets. Thus, if a TV has a website, it was counted as a single institution, and the same applies to a Radio station or newspaper with an online presence. Regarding ownership, 62 media institutions are privately owned, and 6 of them are still under public ownership (administered by Rayon Councils). Additionally, in 8 cases (out of those in private ownership), a single owner possesses two media institutions, which were counted as separate entities on this list.

south region; and Comrat and Taraclia in ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia.

The decade between 2011 and 2020 was the richest in terms of the launched local media outlets: 22 out of the 68 active local media outlets were founded during this period. In the period 2001-2010, 20 local media outlets were launched, while in the first decade after the country's independence, 1991-2000, 15 local media outlets started their activities.

The local media 'speaks' mainly Romanian language. Over 70% of the active local media outlets either produce content exclusively in Romanian language or are bilingual – producing content in both, Romanian and Russian languages.

Many of the local media outlets – approximately 40% – still use official email addresses on domains such as @mail.ru, @rambler.ru, and @yandex.ru. At the same time, convergence in the case of local media is a relatively slow process. Only two-thirds of the total active local media outlets, 45 out of 68, have an online platform (website).

The ownership transparency in the case of local media is not a significant issue as it is in the case of national media. In most cases, the founders of local media outlets are also the administrators or/and their final beneficiaries. The most popular legal form under which the majority of local media outlets are registered and operate is 'limited liability company' (LLC; SRL in Romanian). 45 local media outlets are registered and operate as LLCs, 12 have the legal form of a public association (PA; AO in Romanian) and/or non-commercial organizations, and 6 have mentioned Rayon Councils as founders and/or administrators. Additionally, 8 companies and/or individuals are either founders and owners or administrators of two different local media outlets.

Measuring the audience for local media, along with the lack of human resources and funding, remains one of the most significant challenges, especially when referring to the broadcasting sector (TV and radio). Currently, there are no real and credible studies providing audience data for local broadcasting media. Half of the active local media outlets (34) have between 1 and 5 employees, while 12 media outlets have between 6-10 employees. The most common sources of funding for local media are grants, advertising revenue, video/photo services, and subscriptions and/or retail sales. Grants are the dominant source of funding – accounting for over 50% of the budget – for 20 local media outlets, while advertising is the primary funding source for 8 media outlets.

The aim of mapping the local media landscape in Moldova was to analyze the availability of media in the country's regions (excluding the capital city and the Transnistrian region), to determine the existence of communities with limited access to information, and to identify areas with insufficient media coverage.

**The mapping of local and regional media outlets was conducted based on 10 criteria:** year of establishment, contact information (email, phone, website), media type format, language, coverage area, ownership transparency, audience, newsroom personnel, key persons (director, editor, producer, etc.), and sources of funding.

### Methodology

The research process was conducted in several stages:

**Desk based research and mapping.** The first stage, the quantitative one, focused on identifying all the media outlets that have been active and continue to be active. In the process of quantitative mapping, a total of 113 local and regional media outlets were identified, of which only 68 are active. As a starting point in collecting information based on the 10 criteria, were consulted and analysed open-source databases of national media organizations such as the Association of Independent Press (API) and the Independent Journalism Center (CJI), databases and reports of the Audiovisual Council, online resources of local/regional media outlets (websites, social media pages), etc.

**Semi-structured interviews with representatives of nearly every local media outlet.** In the context of these discussions, in addition to collecting information based on the 10 criteria, the experts also asked questions regarding the presence or existence of other local media outlets in the same locality and/or rayon.

**Geographic Coverage.** The mapping of local media took into account only the media outlets from the four regions of Moldova (north, center, south, and ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia). This study does not include the local media from the Transnistrian region. Accessing data about media from this region proved to be a

complicated process, considering the political situation and limited data accessibility. However, it is not excluded that in the future, this research may will include the local media outlets from the Transnistrian region as well.

**Challenges.** The major challenges were largely related to collecting information on certain criteria (e.g., sources of funding). Information about funding sources is sensitive, and it was collected verbally, mostly via discussions with local media managers. In many cases, the media managers mentioned the funding sources without providing too many details. At the same time, this information was not possible to cross-check with other sources for verification.

Another challenge is the subjectivity of the data collected from representatives of local media outlets during interviews (such as data on personnel, funding sources). Researchers did not have alternative options for double-checking this type of information (e.g., personnel numbers, funding sources, etc.), which also presents a limitation for the current analysis.

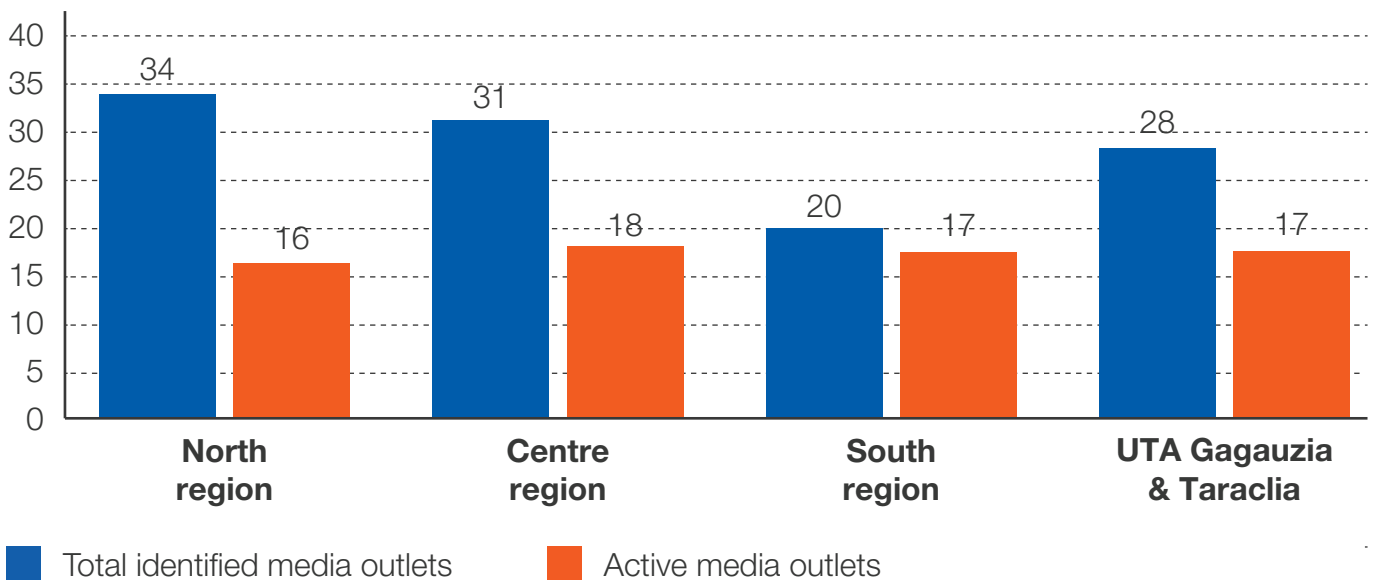
## 1. Territorial coverage and distribution of local media: general context

### 1.1. Territorial coverage and distribution

During the research process, 113 local and regional media outlets were identified. Out of these, 68 media outlets are currently active, while the remaining 45 media outlets are not active. In the north region of the country, 35 media outlets were identified, with 17 of them being

active. In the center region, 31 media outlets were identified, out of which 18 are active. In the south region, 20 media outlets were identified, with 17 being active. In ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia, 28 media institutions were identified, and 17 of them are active.

#### Density of local media, per region



## 1.2. Location

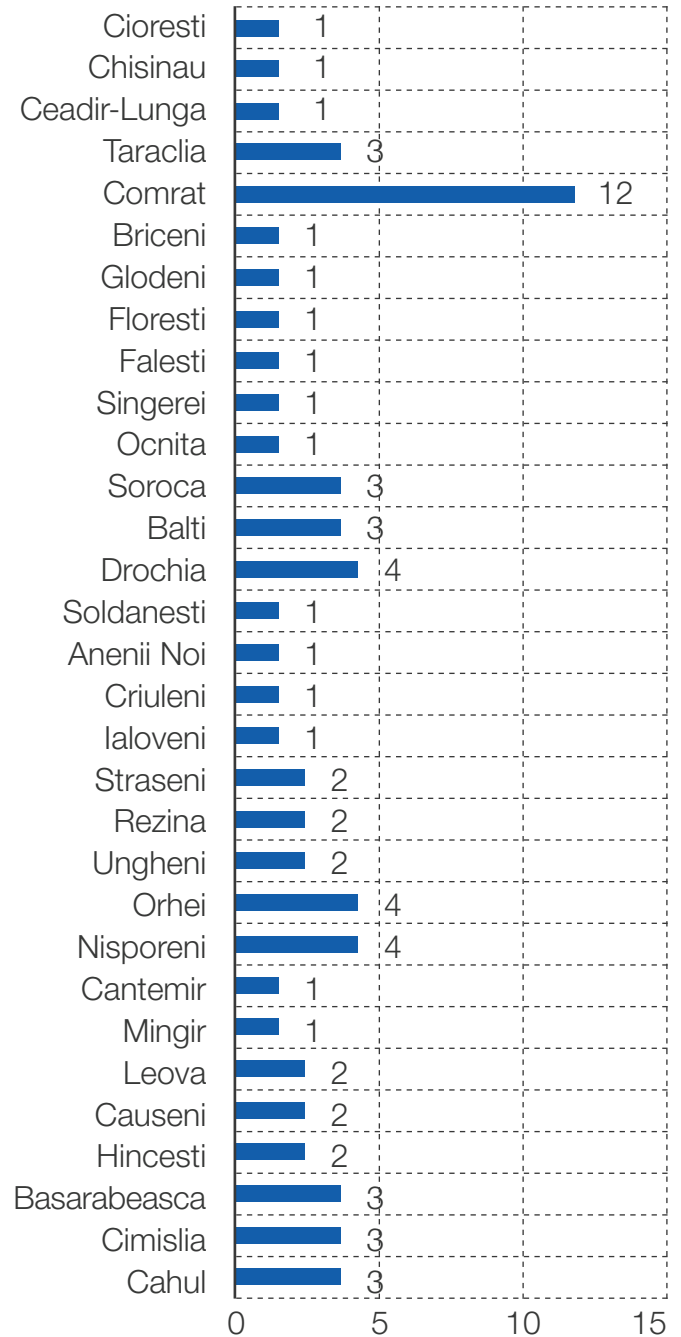
If speaking about the localization of the newsrooms, then the majority of them are located in urban areas. 66 local media outlets have their newsrooms in cities, and only two media outlets (Radio Pro Mingir, Radio Cultura Divina) are located in rural areas.

All 68 active local media outlets have their headquarters and/or newsrooms in 31 different localities. Thus, 17 media outlets from the south region have their headquarters located in 8 different localities (7 cities and 1 village). Three of them are situated in Cahul, Cimislia, and Basarabeasca each, 2 are in Causeni, Hincesti, and Leova each, while Cantemir and Mingir village (in Hincesti rayon) each have one media newsroom. Additionally, it is worth noting that in several cases, 2 media outlets have their newsrooms at the same address, as they share the same founder. This includes Bas-TV and Bas-FM, Ziua de azi and Vmeste, Media TV and Radio Media, Ştiri de sud and Leova.org, as well as Studio-L and Radio-Dor.

The 18 media outlets from the center region of the country have their headquarters located in 9 different cities and 1 village. Among these, 4 local media outlets are based in Orhei city. In Nisporeni, Ungheni, Rezina, and Straseni cities, there are 2 media headquarters each. Additionally, one local media outlet each has its headquarter in Ialoveni, Criuleni, Anenii Noi, Soldanesti cities, and in Cioresti village (Nisporeni rayon). In the center region, 2 media outlets have their newsrooms at the same address: Art-FM and Art-TV.

In the north region of the country, the headquarters of the 16 active media outlets are concentrated in 9 different localities, all of which are urban. Among these, the most media-covered locality is Drochia city, where 4 local media outlets have their headquarters. Additionally, 3 media outlets each have their headquarters in Balti and Soroca, while Ocnita, Singerei, Falesti, Floresti, Glodeni, and Briceni cities each have one media outlet located. In the north region, 2 media outlets have their headquarters registered at the same address: Drochia TV and Drochia FM.

**Media outlets by newsroom address**



Most of the media outlets from ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia are concentrated in Comrat, with 12 out of the total 17. Additionally, 3 media outlets have their headquarters in Taraclia city, and one



each is located in Ceadir-Lunga and Chisinau. In terms of shared addresses, the media outlets ATV Guciuk and Bugeac FM have their headquarters registered at the same location, and the same applies to regional public media broadcasters GRT FM and GRT TV.

In terms of the location of the local media outlets, there are 7 'gray' districts (where none of the 68 identified active local media outlets have their headquarters), among them:

- Edinet, Riscani, Donduseni – in the north region,
- Telenești, Calarasi, Dubasari – in the center region,
- Stefan Voda – in the south region.

However, except Donduseni rayon, all these rayons have been mentioned by some local media managers as being covered from a media perspective when necessary.

### 1.3. Area of coverage

The majority of the rayons from Moldova are media covered: either there are media outlets located in the rayon, or media outlets from neighboring

## 2. Type and format of local media

Based on the type of media, most outlets are print media. Out of the 68 identified media outlets, 22 have print format (newspapers). Among them, 13 media outlets have both a print version and an online platform. In around 80% of cases the content published on online versions by these media is the same as the one published in their print version. On the other hand, almost half of the local print media (9 out of the

rayons cover local, regional, or national events that happen or are organized in these rayons. However, there is one district that is 'uncovered' from a media perspective: Donduseni, in the north region. Either no local media headquarter have been identified in this rayon, or none of the media managers mentioned Nisporeni as a rayon that they cover when needed.

If speaking about the most densely covered rayons (with 3 or more media outlets) from a media perspective, then they are:

- In north region: Balti, Drochia and Soroca;
- In centre region: Ungheni, Orhei and Nisporeni;
- In south region: Cahul, Basarabeasca and Cimislia;
- In ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia: Comrat and Taraclia.

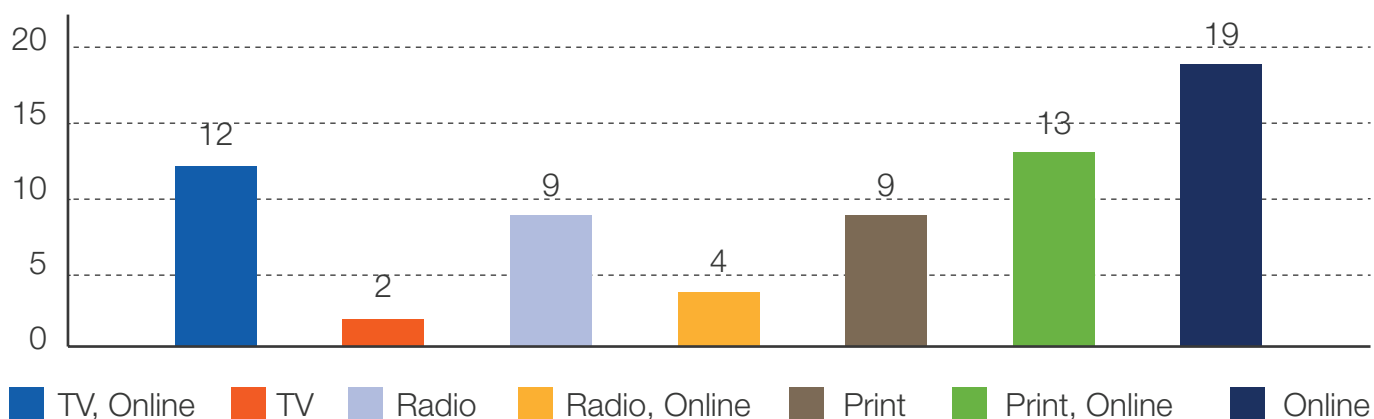
At the same time, there are local media outlets that cover different regions from a media perspective, for example: TVN (north and center), Ecoul Nostru (north and centre), Radio Pro Mingir (center and south).

<sup>3</sup> Please see the map 'Media Density/Coverage in the regions'.

22 identified) do not have an online platform and operate solely in print.

Nineteen media outlets – from 68 – has exclusively online format, with 7 located in the south region. Also, other 3 regions – north, center, and ATU Gagauzia – have 4 media outlets in online format each

### Type/format of local media



Out of the 14 identified local and regional TV channels, 12 broadcast their content on TV, but also have an online platform where publish their content. Other 2 TVs do not have websites.

Regarding the 13 identified radio stations, only 4 have also an online platform.

In the case of local media, convergence is a rather slow process. Almost 1/3 of all local media outlets (20 out of 68 identified) do not have an online platform (website). As a result, local media remains a relatively conservative and tra-

### 3. Year of foundation

Out of the 68 active local media outlets, 22 of them were founded/launched during the years 2011-2020. Most of these media outlets are exclusively online, for example: Laf.md (Comrat), Tuk.md (Taraclia), Nokta.md (Comrat), Nordnews.md (Balti), Ziuadeazi.md (Cahul), etc.

In the first decade after the independence of Moldova – 1991-2000 – 15 out of the 68 active local media outlets were founded. This period was dominated by launching print media outlets (newspapers), many of them have survived to the present day. Among them: Unghiul (Ungheni), SP (Balti), Gloria Drochiana (Drochia), Observatorul de Nord (Soroca), Ecoul Nostru (Singerei), Est Curier (Criuleni), etc. Additionally, many of the active broadcasting media outlets (TVs and Radios) were also founded during this period, such as Studio-L TV (Causeni), Albasat TV (Nisporeni), Media TV (Cimislia), Elita TV (Rezina), Bas-TV (Basarabasca), and others.

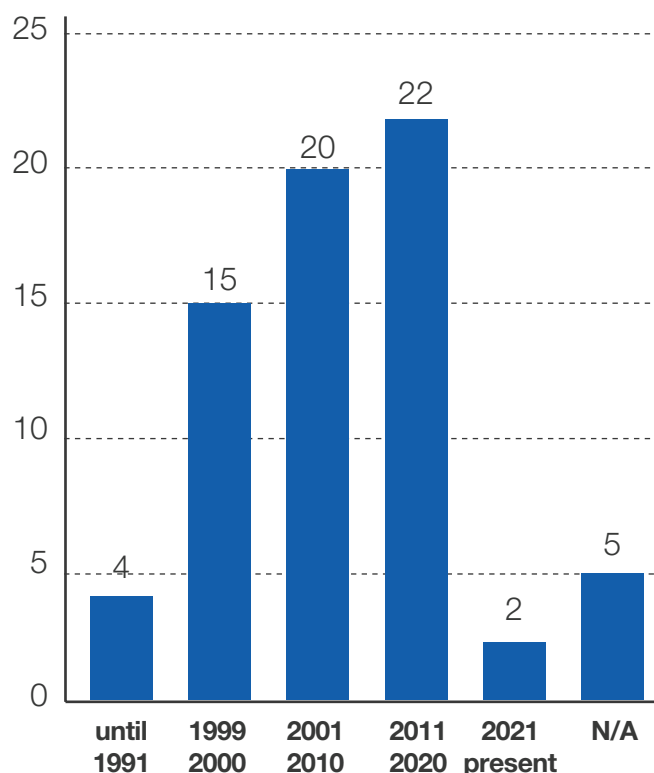
In the period from 2001 to 2010, 20 out of the 68 active local media outlets were founded. This transitional period towards new media is marked by the launch of several TV and radio stations, as well as launching the first local online media outlets. Here are some examples: Drochia TV (Drochia), Radio Media (Cimislia), Sor TV (Soroca), NTS-TV (Taraclia), Gagauzinfo.md (Comrat), Ialoveni Online (Ialoveni).

Out of the total of 68 local media outlets, 4 were founded before 1991 (all of them from ATU

ditional sector, and it shows reluctance in adopting media convergence and diversifying content dissemination platforms. The main reason, according to representatives of local media, is the lack of finances for developing new online platforms (websites). Also, several other causes can be mentioned, namely:

- Lack of digital capacities and skills within local media;
- Lack of human resources (specialists) to manage and administer online platforms (websites).

**Number of local media outlets based on the year of foundation**



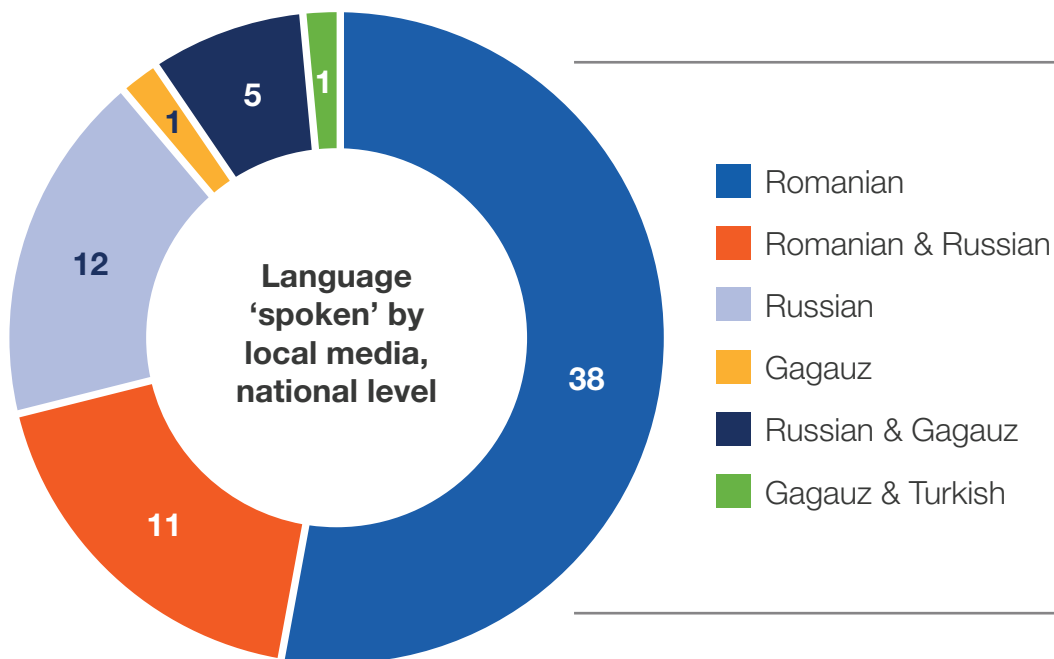
Gagauzia – GRT TV & GRT Radio, Ana Sösü and Svet), and 2 were founded after 2021, both in south region: Vmeste (Cahul) and Stiri de sud (Leova).

At the same time, in the case of 5 local media outlets, either the year of foundation was not identified, or the representatives of these local media outlets could not provide this information.

## 4. Language

Local media ‘speaks’ mostly Romanian language. Approximately 72% or 49 out of the 68 identified local media outlets either produce content solely in Romanian language (38 media outlets) or are bilingual (11 media outlets) – producing content in both Romanian and Russian. Around 18% or

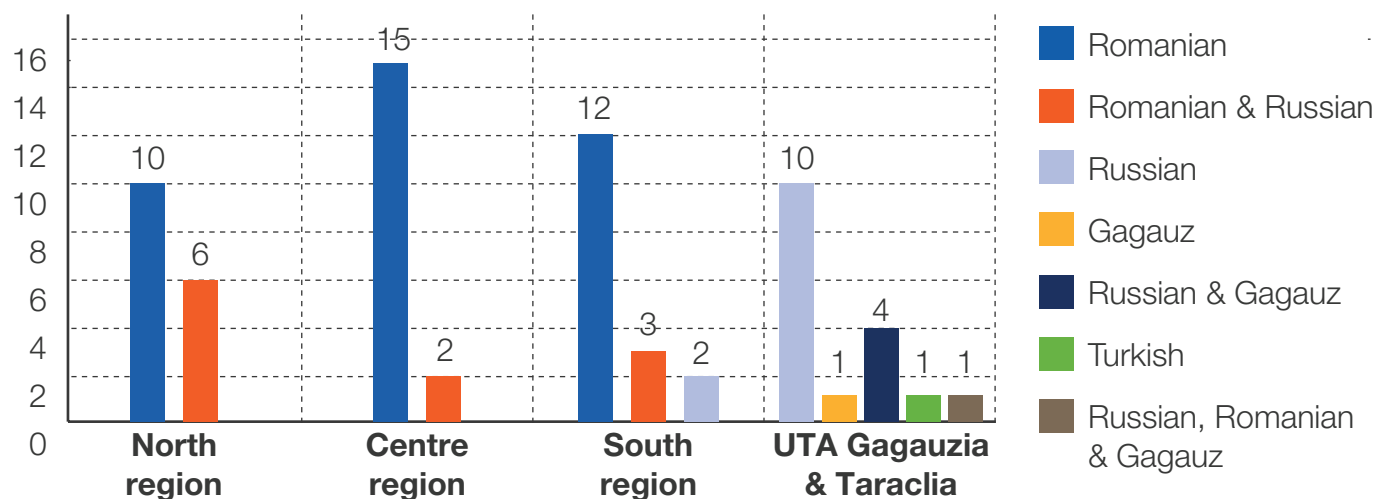
12 out of the 68 identified local media outlets produce content solely in Russian language, 5 media outlets in Russian and Gagauz, one in Gagauz and Turkish, and another exclusively in Gagauz.



In the north region, 6 media outlets are bilingual and produce content in both – Romanian and Russian languages, while 10 media outlets have content exclusively in Romanian language. Similarly, centre region is also dominated by lo-

cal media outlets that publish and/or broadcast content in Romanian language – 15 media outlets out of a total of 17. There are 2 other media outlets that are bilingual, producing content in both Romanian and Russian.

### Language ‘spoken’ by local media, per region



The south region is slightly more diverse in terms of the language ‘spoken’ by local media. Thus, 12 media outlets (out of the total of 17) produce content in Romanian language, 2 media outlets – in Russian language, and 3 media outlets are bilingual (Romanian and Russian).

In UTA Gagauzia & Taraclia, the majority media outlets produce content in Russian language. Thus, 10 out of the 17 identified media outlets

produce content exclusively in Russian language. Additionally, 5 media outlets are producing content in Russian and Gagauz. One media outlet produces content exclusively in Gagauz language, while another produces content in both Russian and Turkish. In this region, only the regional public media broadcaster – GRT (TV and Radio) – produces and broadcasts some content in Romanian language.

## 5. Ownership transparency, type of ownership, management and financing

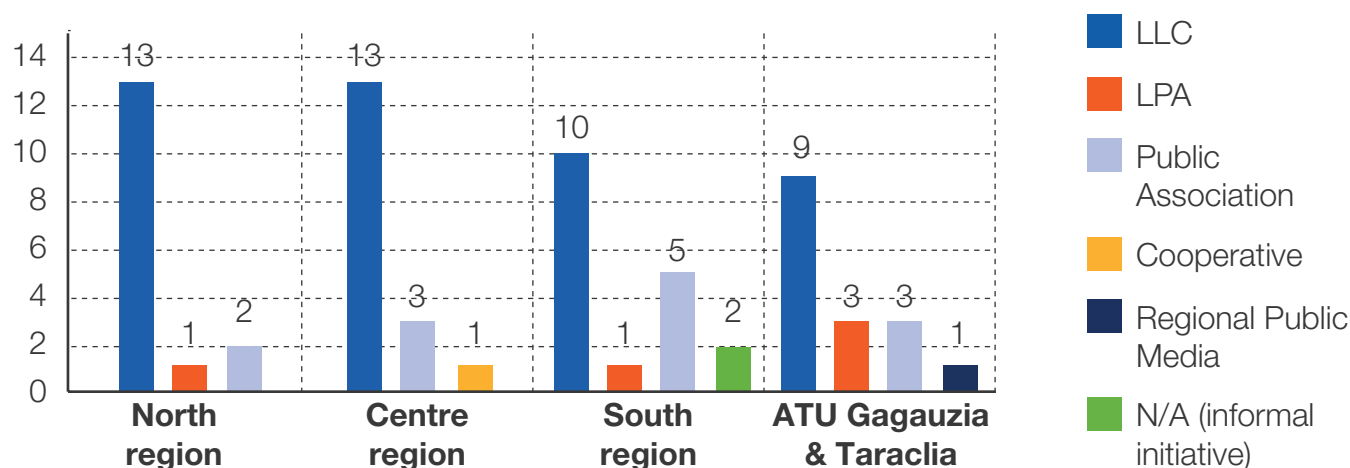
### 5.1. Ownership transparency

In the case of local media, the ownership transparency is not as a significant issue as it is in the case of national media. For the most active local media outlets, the founders, administrators, or final beneficiaries have been identified. In most of the cases, the founders also act as administrators, and therefore, they are the final beneficiaries.

The majority of the identified media outlets are registered and operate as limited liability companies (LLC/ in Romanian S.R.L.). Out of

the 68 local media outlets, 46 are organized as LLCs: 13 in north region, 13 in centre region, 10 in south region, and 9 in ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia. There are 12 media outlets registered as public associations (PO/ AO in Romanian). One local media outlet has a legal status as a cooperative, while two local media outlets have no legal status. The representatives of these two media outlets mentioned that they are administered by informal initiative groups.

#### Legal status of local media, per region



Even though the law on the de-ethatization of public periodicals was adopted back in 2010, there are still local media outlets managed or financed by LPAs (Rayon Councils) or LPAs representatives. Thus, 6 out of the 68 identified

local media outlets continue to be managed and/or administered by Rayon Councils and/or representatives of LPAs. These include one media outlet in the north region, one in the south region, and four in ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia.

Additionally, Gagauziya Radio Televizionu – TV and Radio – is the regional public media broadcaster founded by the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia operating in accordance with the provisions of the Audiovisual Media Services Code (CSMA) and local normative acts.

Mapping revealed that 7 companies and/or individuals either found/own or manage two different local media outlets:

- North region: LLC ‘Satelrom-TV’ founded and managed by Vera Bulgaru, owner of Drochia TV and Drochia FM;
- Centre region: LLC ‘ART-CLUB’ founded and managed by Dumitru Triboi, owner of Art-TV and Art-FM.
- South region: LLC ‘LV-Topal’ founded and managed by Vladimir Topal, owner of Bas-

TV and Bas-FM; LLC ‘Pro Media’ founded and managed by Andrei Bargan, owner of Media TV and Radio Media; Public Association ‘Cahul 2030’ founded by Vitalie Hotnogu and Stefan Boitan, owner of Ziuadeazi.md and Vmeste.md; Ion Calalb is the manager of the online platforms Stiridesud.info and Leova.md.

- ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia: LLC ‘BIZIM DALGAMIZ’ founded and managed by Semion Lazarev, owner of Rodnoie Radio and Eni Ay TV; LLC ‘RTV-MEDIA-CENTER’ managed by Elena Ianac, owner of Bugeac FM and ATV.

## 5.2. Sources of funding

The data about the sources of funding of local media were the most challenging to collect. Moreover, the credibility of the information regarding the funding sources is subjective, especially considering that this data, mostly were gathered from the discussions with local media managers and could not be verified from other sources.

Five out of 68 identified local media outlets mentioned that they do not have operating budgets or any sources of funding, and their activities are carried out on a voluntary basis. In the case of 10 media outlets, the funding sources were either not identified or were not disclosed by the interviewed media managers.

In the case of the majority of local media institutions (40), the funding sources were identified based on the percentage they constitute from the total organizational budget or based on a general mention of the funding sources that form the budget. Most media outlets mentioned having multiple funding sources. Nearly half of the active media outlets institutions (30) stated that they have at least two funding sources, while 22 of them mentioned having three or more funding sources. The three main sources of funding for local mass media are: grants, advertising,

subscriptions and/or retail sales. Although advertising revenue is mentioned by most media institutions (44), it covers a very small share (in many cases insignificant, up to 10%) of their total budget. On the other hand, grants serve as the primary source of funding for 20 local media outlets, and according to many media managers, it is the funding source without which they could not exist or operate. If referring to the three main sources of funding identified for local mass media, then:

### Grants

- 20 media outlets – which accounts for almost 30% of all identified active local media – rely on grants as their main/dominant source of funding (i.e., more than 50% of the institution’s budget is constituted by grants);
- 25 local media outlets – or approximately 37% - have mentioned grants as one of their funding sources.

### Advertising

- 44 local media outlets have mentioned advertising as one of their funding sources;
- in the case of 8 media outlets, advertising is their main/dominant source of funding (i.e., more than 50% of the institution's budget is constituted by advertising).

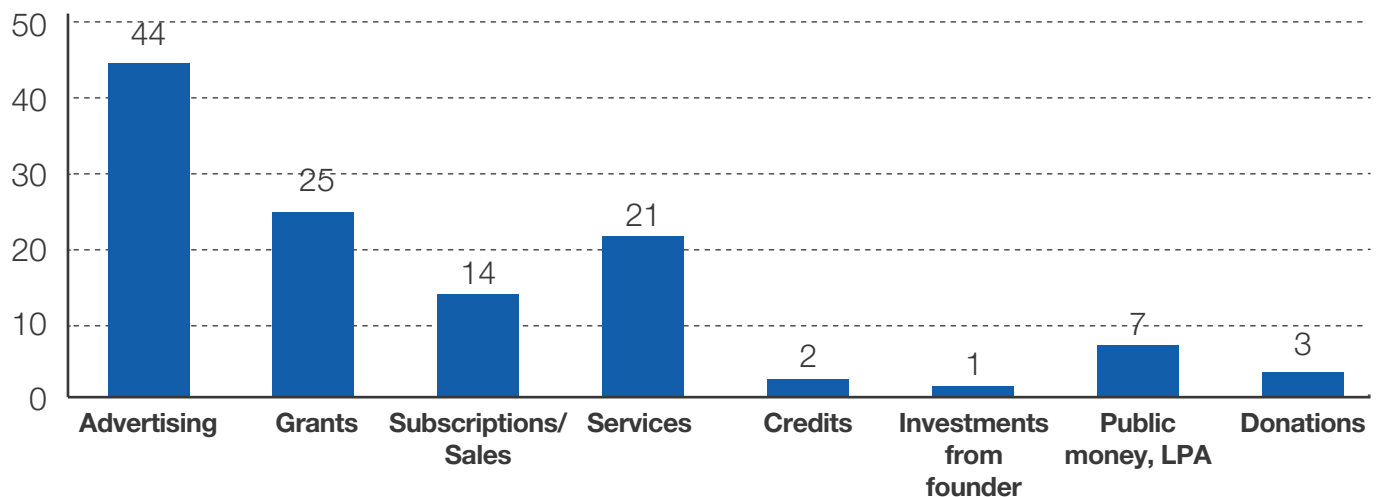
### Sales

- 14 local media outlets, mostly newspapers, have mentioned subscriptions and/or retail sales as one of their funding sources, and for 8 of them, this is their main/dominant source of funding (i.e., more than 50% of the institution's budget is constituted by subscriptions and/or retail sales).

### Other sources

Among other funding sources mentioned by media managers and identified during the research are: 'service provision (basically, video and photo)' (21 media), 'loans/credits' (2), 'investments from the founder' (1), 'funds from the Rayon Council and/or City Hall' (6), 'donations' (3), and funds allocated from the local budget of the People's Assembly of Gagauzia in the case of the regional public media Gagauziya Radio Televizionu (GRT).

## Number of media outlets mentioned these sources of funding



## 6. Audience measurement

Audience measurement, along with funding and the lack of human resources, remains a significant challenge for local mass media, especially when referring to the audiovisual sector (TV and radio).

In the process of research, the experts have tried to identify any type of audience data of each local media outlet. Thus, for television and radio, the audience was based on measurements provided by the specialised companies in offering this service. For online media, the focus was on identifying the number of unique monthly visitors, and for print media, the focus was on the weekly and/or monthly circulation of the newspapers.

For all media institutions, researchers tried to identify their audience on social media channels: Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and TikTok. It is important to mention that many of these data were provided by the representatives of these media outlets, and their accuracy cannot be precisely checked.

Local TV and radio stations, almost entirely, lack accurate audience data or audience market studies that reflect their popularity levels in the region and/or at the national level, including the profile of their audience.

In the case of online platforms of media outlets (websites), experts received data on the number of monthly and/or daily unique visitors during discussions with managers of local media outlets. As for audience data on social media platforms (Facebook, Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Odnoklassniki, VKontakte), the data collection was done through various methods, such as:

- a. within the interviews with the managers of local media outlets;
- b. individually checking and verifying the number of followers and/or subscribers.

For the print media (i.e., newspapers), experts attempted to identify the circulation data of the publications during the discussions with representatives of local media outlets. Subsequently, the received data were verified and cross-checked with open data regarding circulation (open databases, technical info mentioned in the print version of the newspapers, etc.).

Measuring the audience for the local broadcasting sector is a rather complicated, if not impossible, process. Currently, there are no market studies or companies that measure the audience for local television and radio stations. [TV MR MLD](#), the official representative of the international company AGB Nielsen in Moldova, is the only entity that conducts audience measurements on the broadcasting sector at the national level. However, local TV stations cannot afford to benefit from such measurements, mainly due to the monthly fee required by TV MR MLD and also, the lack of a local advertising market.

In some cases, to identify their audience, local TV and radio stations are contracting audience services provided by sociological (poll) companies. However, these companies collect data through the interview method (surveys), which does not provide accurate and precise audience data.

Another trend identified in the process of gathering the information about the TV audience is that representatives of local media mention the total number of the population residing in

the rayon (or region) area as the audience size for their media outlet (e.g., the population of Causeni rayon is 70 thousand inhabitants, or the population of the entire country – TV audience of 2.7 million viewers).

Similarly, data regarding the audience of media outlets' websites were collected based on the information provided by local media managers. Most of the time, they provided data on website traffic provided by the web analytics service, Google Analytics. Unfortunately, in the case of website audience data, the information provided by local media managers could not be verified or cross-checked simply because there are no platforms (e.g., Gemius) that offer open access to such information.

For 12 out of the 68 local media outlets, no audience data sets (circulation, unique visitors, subscribers, followers, etc.) were identified. The representatives of these media outlets either could not provide such data, or in their case, there was no accessible audience data available (e.g., some of these local media outlets do not even have social media pages that could reflect the number of followers/subscribers they have).

According to the collected data, in the north region, the most popular media outlets are: Nordnews (approximately 350 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, 97 thousand followers on Facebook, and almost 15 thousand subscribers on YouTube), SP (approximately 350 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, 33,5 thousand followers on Facebook, and almost 3,7 thousand subscribers on the YouTube channel), and Observatorul de Nord (approximately 200 thousand unique monthly visitors and 24 thousand followers on Facebook). Among the print media, the highest circulation was declared by Observatorul de Nord (4,4 thousand copies weekly), Glia Drochiana (3,6 thousand copies weekly), and Patria Mea/Ziarul de Falesti (approximately 1,5 thousand copies per week).

## Most popular local media outlets

North Region	
Name of media outlet	Audience/Circulation
<b>Online</b>	
Nordnews	350 000 unique monthly visitors on web, 97 000 followers on Facebook, 15 000 subscribers on YouTube
SP	350 000 unique monthly visitors on web, 33 500 followers on Facebook 3 700 subscribers on the YouTube
Observatorul de Nord	200 000 unique monthly visitors on web 24 000 followers on Facebook
<b>Presa scrisă</b>	
Observatorul de Nord	4 400 copies weekly
Glia Drochiană	3 600 copies weekly
Patria Mea/Ziarul de Falesti	1 500 copies weekly
Centre Region	
<b>online</b>	
Elita TV	30 000 unique monthly visitors on web, 15 000 followers on Facebook 5 000 subscribers on YouTube
Albasat TV	85 000 unique monthly visitors on web 4 500 followers on Facebook
Expresul	24 000 unique monthly visitors on web 9 500 followers on Facebook
<b>Print media</b>	
Unghiul	6 500 copies weekly
Opinia Libera	3 000 copies weekly
Expresul	2 000 copies weekly



<b>South region</b>	
<b>online</b>	
Ziua de azi	70 000 unique monthly visitors on web 38 000 followers on Facebook 17 000 on Instagram
Studio-L	42 000 unique monthly visitors on web 27 000 followers on Facebook 11 500 subscribers on YouTube
Bas-TV	30 000 unique monthly visitors on web 4 300 followers on Facebook 1 500 thousand on Instagram
<b>Print media</b>	
Gazeta de sud	2 000 copies weekly
Curierul de Hincesti	1 500 copies weekly
<b>ATU Gagauzia &amp; Taraclia</b>	
<b>online</b>	
Nokta	148 000 unique monthly visitors on web 23 000 followers on Facebook 13 500 on Instagram 11 000 subscribers on the YouTube
Tuk	138 000 unique monthly visitors on web 10 000 followers on Facebook 7 900 on Instagram 2 700 subscribers on the YouTube
<b>Print media</b>	
Vesti Gagauzii	4 500 copies weekly

In centre region, according to the collected data, the most popular media outlets are: Elita TV (approximately 30 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, 15 thousand followers on Facebook, and almost 5 thousand subscribers on YouTube), Albasat TV (85 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website and 4,5 thousand followers on Facebook), and Expresul (24 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website and 9,5 thousand followers on Facebook). Among the print media, the highest declared

circulation figures were declared by Unghiul (6,5 thousand copies weekly, 5,2 thousand in Romanian and 1,3 thousand in Russian), Opinia Libera (approximately 3 thousand copies weekly), and Expresul (2 thousand copies weekly).

In the south region, Ziua de azi is the media outlet with the highest audience (over 70 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, 38 thousand followers on Facebook, and 17 thousand on Instagram). It is followed by Studio-L

TV (42 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, 27 thousand followers on Facebook, and 11,5 thousand subscribers on YouTube) and Bas-TV (approximately 30 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, 4,3 thousand followers on Facebook, and 1,5 thousand on Instagram). An example worth mentioning here is the online platform Hincesti 24 and its Facebook community of approximately 71 thousand followers, which is one of the largest among all local media outlets. Among the print media, the newspapers Gazeta de Sud have the highest circulation (approximately 2 thousand copies per week) followed by Curierul de Hincesti (1,5 thousand copies per week).

## 7. Staff of local media outlets

The lack of qualified human resources is one of the biggest challenges faced by local mass media. 34 or half of the 68 local media outlets have between 1 and 5 employees, including freelancers and/or volunteers. In the case of 12 media outlets the newsrooms are between 6 and 10 employees, while for 11 other local media outlets, the information about the personnel is either not accessible or the representatives of these media outlets chose not to provide this kind data.

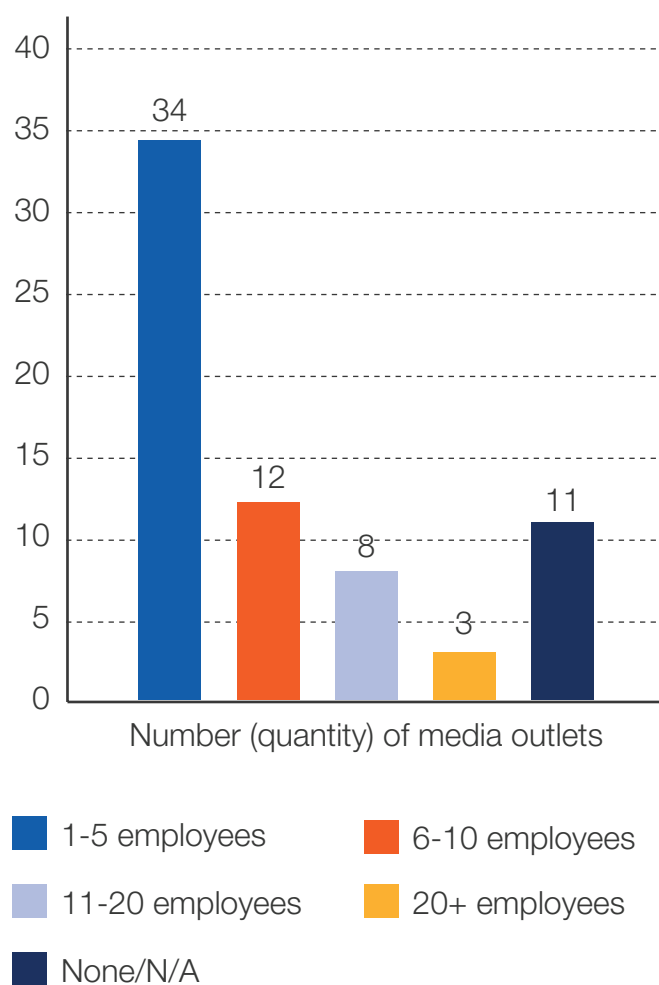
Furthermore, 8 local media outlets have teams composed of 11 to 20 persons, and 3 local media outlets have a staff of over 20 employees. The biggest newsrooms of local media outlets are:

- North region: SP (40 persons), Nordnews (20), Observatorul de Nord (14);
- Centre region: TV6/Orhei TV (62 persons), Albasat TV (11), Elita TV (10);
- South region: Studio-L (13 persons), Cahul Expres (7), Bas-TV (7);
- ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia: GRT TV & GRT FM (55 persons); Nokta (15), Tuk (12).

Almost all the managers of local media outlets have mentioned that it is very difficult, or even almost impossible, to find and hire qualified personnel for their newsrooms. Even if they manage to hire, some of them leave shortly after. In

In ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia, the online platform Nokta has an audience of 148 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, 23 thousand followers on Facebook, 13,5 thousand on Instagram, and almost 11 thousand subscribers on the YouTube channel. It is followed by Tuk with 138 thousand unique monthly visitors on the website, almost 10 thousand followers on Facebook, 7,9 thousand on Instagram, and 2,7 thousand subscribers on the YouTube channel. Among the print media, the newspaper Vesti Gagauzii has the highest circulation, with almost 4,5 thousand copies weekly.

### Staff of local media outlets



\* all staff, including freelancers, part-time employees and volunteers  
 \*\* in the case of GRT the number of staff was calculated separately for the TV service and the radio service

most cases, there is not a significant turnover of staff in local media. The teams are mostly established, and on average, over a year, one-two employees might leave the local newsrooms.

Another characteristic of local media outlets is that they still do not have a clear demarcation between the editorial, administrative, and commercial departments. In most cases, with some small exceptions (i.e., Nokta, Studio-L, SP, Observatorul de Nord, Tuk, etc.), the same

individuals who are content producers are also responsible for management, fundraising, and/or administrative tasks.

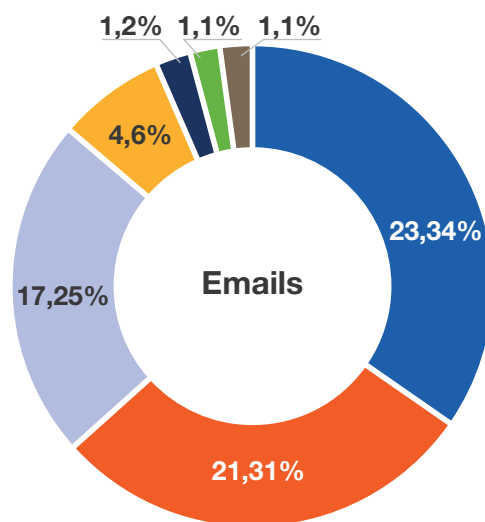
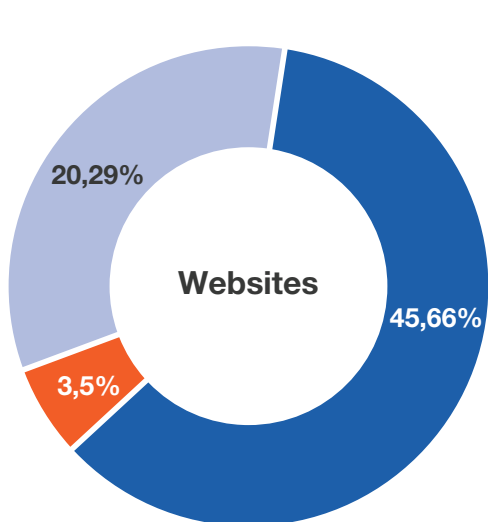
In the case of all 68 local media outlets, key individuals could be identified, either the executive director, the editor-in-chief, or the administrator of the company.

## 8. Contacts

Out of the total of 68 active local media outlets, 67 of them have an official email address, and in the case of one media institution (Desteptarea newspaper from Nisporeni), either it was not found, or it does not have an available email address. Among these, 23 media outlets have email addresses on the @gmail domain, 21 on

the @mail.ru domain, 17 on their own domain, 4 on the @rambler.ru domain, 1 on the @yahoo.com domain, and 1 on the @yandex.ru domain.

Except from two media outlets (Vmeste from Cahul and Desteptarea from Nisporeni), all the other 66 have an official phone number.



Only 45 out of the 68 local media outlets have an online platform (website), other 3 local media managers mentioned that they use Facebook to post/share their produced content (Ziarul de Falesti, Desteptarea, Rezina in Obiectiv). The remaining 20 media institutions do not have a website. Among the active media outlets, the

highest number of media outlets without websites was identified in ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia (7), followed by centre region with 6 media outlets without online platforms, south region with 5 local media, and north region with 4 identified media outlets without an online platform.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. In July 2023, in Moldova were active 68 local media outlets. Their distribution though the country was more or less equal: 16 local media outlets in the north, 18 in the center, 17 in the south, and 17 in ATU Gagauzia & Taraclia.
2. In terms of media coverage, there are 7 'gray' rayons without coverage (where none of the 68 identified active local media outlets have their headquarters). Three of these rayons are in the north region (Edinet, Riscani, Donduseni), three are in center region (Telenesti, Calarasi, Dubasari), and one is in the south region. However, except for Donduseni rayon, all other 'gray' rayons have been mentioned by local media managers as being covered if and when necessary.
3. The 68 active local media outlets have their newsrooms located in 31 different localities. With the exception of two media located in rural areas, all other 66 are situated in urban areas. The densest rayons in terms of media coverage and presence are Balti in the north, Orhei in the center, Cahul in the south, and Comrat in ATU Gagauzia.
4. The decade 2011-2020 was the most productive period in terms of founding local media outlets. One-third of the 68 local media outlets launched their activities during this decade. In the years 2001-2010, 20 local media started their activities, and in the first decade after independence (1991-2000), 15 local media outlets were launched.
5. More than half of the local media outlets publish and/or broadcast content in Romanian language, and one from six media outlets are bilingual – Romanian and Russian. Similarly, every sixth local media outlet produces content exclusively in Russian, and 5 media outlets develop content in Russian and Gagauz languages.
6. Compared to national media, local media is much more transparent in terms of ownership. At the same time, two-thirds of the local media outlets are registered and/or operate as limited liability companies (LLC/S.R.L.). At the same time, 8 companies and/or individuals own two different local media outlets each.
7. Funding, or rather the lack of it, is the biggest challenge faced by local mass media, alongside issues such as audience measurement and a shortage of qualified personnel. Advertising has been mentioned as one of the sources of funding by 44 local media outlets; however, the percentage it forms in their budgets is very small, often up to 10%. On the other hand, grants remain the main source of funding for local mass media, without which, according to local media managers, they would not be able to exist. Attempts to diversify funding sources (e.g., providing video and photo services, crowdfunding, etc.) have often proven to be ineffective. The main reasons are that local media lack the capacity and skills to implement these business models and also, the representatives of local media tend to abandon them shortly after starting to implement them. Almost all active local media outlets are dependent on a single source of funding, whether it's grants, advertising, subscriptions, or sales.
8. Audience measurement is one of the biggest challenges faced by local mass media. Moreover, the awareness of the importance of knowing the audience among local media representatives is still very low.
9. The lack of qualified personnel is a significant challenge for local mass media. Local media managers encounter great difficulties in identifying new employees. Most local editorial teams consist of 1 to 5 employees or up to 10 employees.
10. Convergence in local mass media remains a relatively slow process. Only 2/3 of the total active local media institutions - 45 out of 68 - have an online platform (website).
11. Almost half of the local media outlets have their official email addresses on domains such as @mail.ru, @rambler.ru, and @yandex.ru.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Media coverage.** This study has focused more on the quantitative aspects of the research. Nevertheless, the researchers also conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from nearly every local media outlet to discuss and verify aspects related to the 10 identified criteria. The conclusion based on the information and data collected is that, quantitatively, the Republic of Moldova, in general – as well as its regions, to some extent – has a good coverage in terms of number of active local media. To determine if there is a need for even more local media outlets (both qualitatively and quantitatively) in a particular region, rayon, or locality in order to cover those identified ‘gray spots’, we believe more detailed and comprehensive needs assessments studies are required. These additional studies should put emphasis on the qualitative aspects of the research, including market analysis.

**Audience.** Local media outlets should make greater efforts to identify their audience and understand the media consumers’ needs and content preferences. By doing so, they will have a better understanding of their media consumers’ profile and what type of media content is worth investing in. Additionally, based on audience data, media can develop financial offerings that allow them to sell advertising space more effectively.

**Financing.** Relying on a single source of funding – regardless of what it is – is an unsustainable practice in the long run. Media managers should start thinking of the media outlets as businesses, which involves experimenting and implementing new business models. This will help diversify their sources of funding.

**Convergence.** Currently, in 2023, many local media outlets still do not have a website. Local media managers need to understand that, in a digital world, media convergence is not a ‘nice to have’ but a ‘must-have’.

**Security.** Local media must be aware of the danger posed by registering and storing information on external online domains (e.g., official email addresses of newsrooms), especially those from the Russian Federation. Therefore, media convergence must go hand in hand with increasing the level of digital security and stocking data on secure online platforms, whether internal or external.

**Transparency.** One of the biggest challenges in the process of working on this study was accessing basic information about local media outlets (e.g., address, contacts, team, media type, brief history of the institution, editorial policy, etc.). Such data, which should seemingly be transparent and easily accessible, proved to be very difficult to collect in many cases. In this regard, to demonstrate openness and transparency, local media should make such information transparent and readily available.