

ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA ENVIRONMENT IN KENYA 2025



Table of Contents

Table of contents	ii
Abbreviations	iii
Foreword.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Executive Summary.....	1
1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Methodology	6
2.1. Study Design.....	6
2.2. Target Population	6
2.3. Sample Size determination.....	6
2.4. Sample size determination	6
2.5. Data Collection Methods.....	9
2.6. Data Analysis	9
2.7. Ethical Considerations	9
2.8. Limitations of the Study.....	9
3.0 Findings.....	10
3.1. Employment Conditions.....	11
3.2 Safety & Protection/Press Freedom.....	14
3.3 Finance and Ethics.....	16
4.0 Conclusion.....	18
5.0. Recommendations.....	21
6.0 References.....	23

Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

AKU: Aga Khan University

AMWIK: Association of Media Women in Kenya

CA: Communications Authority of Kenya

CATI: Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing

KEG: Kenya Editors Guild

KUJ: Kenya Union of Journalists

MBS: Moran of the Order of the Burning Spear

MCK: Media Council of Kenya

ICJ: International Commission for Jurists

TV: Television

OGW: Order of the Grand Warrior

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Foreword

The journalism landscape is undergoing profound transformation, shaped by demographic shifts, evolving employment models and growing socio-economic and safety challenges. This report presents a sobering yet essential examination of the current realities facing journalists, with a particular focus on age demographics, contractual security, financial instability and safety concerns.

This survey reveals that the profession is increasingly driven by a youthful workforce, particularly within freelance roles. While this reflects the energy and adaptability of a new generation of journalists, it also points to underlying structural limitations, most notably, a lack of stable employment opportunities. The disparity in contractual protections between employed and freelance journalists further exposes vulnerabilities that demand urgent policy attention and industry-wide reform.

The predominance of short-term and temporary contracts, alongside inconsistent access to employment benefits such as paid leave, underscores a fragile labor environment. These conditions not only threaten the livelihoods of journalists but also compromise the overall integrity and sustainability of the media sector.

The persistent safety concerns reported by journalists, who face physical threats, legal intimidation, and psychological harassment in the line of duty are alarming. These challenges erode press freedom and hinder the ability of the media to serve its critical role as a watchdog in democratic societies.

Equally troubling is the financial precarity that many journalists experience. Limited resources and inconsistent remuneration are not just economic issues, they have ethical ramifications, undermining the ability of journalists to uphold the principles of accuracy and independence and fairness.

This report is a call to action. Strengthening labor protections, ensuring fair compensation and creating safe working environments are not just matters of professional justice, but are prerequisites for a vibrant, free and ethical press. As stakeholders across the media ecosystem consider the findings, it is imperative that reforms are pursued with urgency and commitment to safeguard the future of journalism.

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We deeply appreciate the journalists who shared candid insights into their experiences, despite facing safety and financial challenges. Their participation, even in counties with limited media presence, enriched the data and highlighted the urgent need for industry reforms.

This collective effort delivers a report that captures the state of Kenyan journalism and drives policy reforms to bolster press freedom, journalist safety, and professional standards in the digital age.

Executive Summary

This report presents an in-depth analysis of the current state of the journalism profession in Kenya, highlighting critical challenges related to age demographics, employment security, financial stability, safety and the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in media practices. The findings are particularly relevant in the context of the World Press Freedom Day 2025 theme, which focuses on the intersection of press freedom and AI. The data reveals that most journalists, 65% of freelancers and 62% of employed professionals are under the age of 35. This points to a predominantly young workforce, particularly in freelance roles. This trend may reflect either a preference for flexible work among younger professionals or a lack of sufficient formal employment opportunities in the media sector.

There is a stark contrast in contractual security between employed and freelance journalists. While 75% of employed journalists have written contracts, 80% of freelancers operate without formal agreements. Furthermore, 71% of all contracted journalists lack permanent employment and 14% are engaged on short-term contracts lasting three to six months. These findings underscore the precarious nature of journalism jobs and the urgent need for labor protections and standardised contracting. Just over half (53%) of contracted journalists received paid leave while 47% did not, highlighting inconsistencies in employment benefits and enforcement of labor standards across the industry. Safety remains a pressing concern, with journalists reporting physical attacks, legal intimidation, psychological harassment and digital threats such as phone tapping. These risks compromise journalists' ability to work freely and independently, ultimately undermining press freedom. While most media outlets show moderate commitment to journalist safety, more robust and systematic protection is needed. Financial challenges are widespread, with 62% of journalists acknowledging that resource constraints compromise their ability to adhere to ethical standards. This financial insecurity is reflected in unethical practices, such as the failure to obscure minors' identities during the April 2025 Butere Girls Play coverage. Media organisations also suffer from delayed or inconsistent payments, exacerbated by reliance on advertising revenue, further undermining industry sustainability and professional ethics. The report further draws a direct link between current industry challenges and the sector's ability to adopt and leverage AI tools. Temporary contracts, lack of medical cover and high staff turnover hinder media outlets' capacity to invest in AI-driven innovations like automated

fact-checking and data journalism. Moreover, financial constraints limit investment in AI training and ethical frameworks, increasing the risk of misuse and ethical lapses. The findings call for coordinated action led by the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), in collaboration with the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG), Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ), and other industry stakeholders. Key recommendations include:

- Policy reforms to ensure contractual protection and enforce labor standards.
- Mandated AI training to support ethical and effective use of emerging technologies.
- Sustainable funding models to stabilise the industry and support innovation.
- Stronger journalist safety mechanisms, including AI-powered cybersecurity solutions.

0.1 Introduction

This research examines the media landscape in Kenya, where the media serves as a crucial channel for diverse viewpoints, offers entertainment, and bolsters democracy, reinforcing Kenya's status as a symbol of hope in East Africa and beyond. This pivotal role is safeguarded by the Constitution of Kenya 2010, widely regarded as one of Africa's most progressive frameworks for press freedom under Articles 33 and 34, which protect media operations from state interference or punishment for expressed opinions—though this freedom excludes propaganda for war, incitement to violence, hate speech, or advocacy of hatred, this is not a limitation but a call to exercise these freedoms responsibly and considerately, underscoring the gravity of these responsibilities (Kemunto, 2023; Kiprono, 2021). However, as Puddephatt (2011) argues, the mere absence of state interference does not ensure a vibrant media environment; rather, strategic state involvement is essential to foster a pluralistic and diverse media landscape.

The constitutional protection of media freedom is grounded in Article 33, which ensures freedom of expression - a cornerstone for other rights and freedoms, as it enables organising, informing, alerting, and mobilising to protect human rights. As Amartya Sen compellingly contends, this freedom is a prerequisite for social and economic progress, since transparent and open communication is essential for fostering inclusive economic and social development (Puddephatt, 2011).

To oversee and enhance professionalism within the media sector, the Media Council Act (2013) established the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), which is responsible for establishing standards and enforcing compliance. This regulatory framework is complemented by 21 additional laws governing the industry, including the Kenya Information and Communication Act, the Books and Newspapers Act, the Data Protection Act, the Access to Information Act, the Penal Code, and the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (Kiprono, 2021). Currently, a review is in progress to address concerns regarding the regulatory roles of the MCK, the Media Complaints Commission, the Communications and Multimedia Appeals Tribunal, and the Communications Authority of aiming to establish a streamlined and effective legal framework (Kiprono, 2021).

With relevant laws and regulation in place, the existence of media outlets across all 47 counties in Kenya is paramount and crucial for providing universal access to information through both conventional and digital channels. The importance of the media is underscored by the expansion of media entities, with the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) reporting a rise from 120 to 228 media outlets, and TV stations growing significantly from 6 to 182 (CA, 2023). The 2015 digital migration played a key role in creating a more diverse media environment, drawing substantial investment into both traditional and digital platforms (Kemunto, 2023). This shift to digital terrestrial broadcasting broadened the television sector, while the widespread use of phones has contributed to one of Africa's highest internet penetration rates, enabling Kenyans to access a broad spectrum of digital media (CA, 2025). Embedded in everyday life, the media keeps citizens informed about local and global events, encourages discussions on pressing matters like the 2024 Finance Bill, and acts as a watchdog, uncovering and addressing poor governance to ensure transparency and accountability.

The pursuit of media excellence in Kenya is bolstered by professional bodies and independent statutory organisations, such as the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG), Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ), and the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), which play vital roles in safeguarding journalists and advancing the media industry (Kemunto, 2023). However despite this supportive ecosystem, the sector faces significant challenges, where local and international stakeholders identify challenges such as, to mention but not limited to, limited media investment, lack of editorial independence, concentrated media ownership, restrictive media laws, financial challenges, unprofessionalism, threats towards journalists, physical assaults, and harassment, corruption, human rights abuses, measured adoption of Artificial Intelligence, government censorship and poor & delayed wages (Nyabuga, 2023).

Amidst the challenges and opportunities facing the Kenyan media, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) seeks to provide status update on professionalism, safety and financial stability to foster sustainable and ethical journalism. To achieve this, MCK initiated a thorough survey to assess the media environment across all 47 counties, collecting insights from journalists and media practitioners to inform policy development, training programs, and advocacy initiatives. The survey results, released on the eve of World Press Freedom Day, resonated with the theme 'Reporting in the Brave New

World – The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Press Freedom and the Media,’ tackling critical areas such as safety, convergence, collaborations, and capacity enhancement, which are vital as the sector adapts to AI’s influence on press freedom and media practices (UNESCO, n.d.).

2.0 Methodology

2.1. Study Design

The survey employed quantitative research methods. A structured questionnaire was administered by MCK media monitors and research officers to the participants.

2.2. Target Population

Data was collected from journalists accredited for the year 2024/2025. The sample included journalists from three main categories: National, Media Practitioners and Foreign Long-Term Journalists. Individuals classified as Students, Media Trainers and Public Communication Officers were excluded from the survey as they are not directly involved in the day-to-day operations of media houses.

2.3. Sample Size determination

A multistage sampling technique was employed as follows:

- **Stage 1:** Journalist data was stratified by county.
- **Stage 2:** Proportionate sampling was conducted to ensure fair representation from each county.
- **Stage 3:** Simple random sampling was applied within each county to select individual participants.

2.4. Sample size determination

The sample size was based on the percentage of eligible journalist categories against the entire 2024/2025 accreditation register. The sample size was determined using C.R Kothari (2014) method,

for sample size determination; $n = \frac{z^2 \times p \times q}{e^2}$.

Where:

z = level of confidence = 95%

n = sample size

p = proportion of students who use tobacco

q = proportion of students who never used tobacco

e = error term

The total number of accredited journalists in the 2024/2025 accreditation register at the time of survey was 5985. National, Media practitioners and Foreign long-term category journalists in the register were 1868 forming 31% of the register.

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.31 \times 0.69}{0.05^2} = 319$$

Add 20% non-response rate = $319 \times 20\% = 63$

Total minimum sample is $319 + 63 = 382$ but a higher number was preferred.

Proportionate sample by county

County	Total Number of Journalists	Percentage proportion	Sample
Nairobi	1198	64.13276	250
Nakuru	62	3.319058	13
Meru	20	1.070664	4
Isiolo	5	0.267666	1
Murang'a	6	0.321199	1
Nyeri	19	1.017131	4
Kitui	16	0.856531	3
Machakos	22	1.17773	6
Makueni	7	0.374732	1
Taita Taveta	9	0.481799	2
Tana River	1	0.053533	1
Mombasa	94	5.03212	20
Lamu	3	0.1606	1
Kilifi	16	0.856531	3
Kajiado	18	0.963597	4
Narok	11	0.588865	2
Kisii	47	2.51606	10
Nyamira	8	0.428266	2
Migori	9	0.481799	2
Homabay	8	0.428266	2
Kisumu	37	1.980728	8
Siaya	15	0.802998	3
Vihiga	15	0.802998	3
Kakmega	13	0.695931	3
Bungoma	24	1.284797	5
Busia	10	0.535332	3
Transnzoia	19	1.017131	4
Nandi	8	0.428266	2
Uasin Gishu	21	1.124197	4
Elgeiyo Marakwet	1	0.053533	1
Kericho	12	0.642398	3
Bomet	2	0.107066	1
Samburu	3	0.1606	1
Turkana	17	0.910064	4
Baringo	8	0.428266	2

Embu	7	0.374732	1
Tharaka Nithi	0	0	0
Kiambu	21	1.124197	4
Garissa	11	0.588865	2
Wajir	11	0.588865	2
Kwale	7	0.374732	1
Laikipia	4	0.214133	1
Nyandarua	3	0.1606	1
Mandera	2	0.107066	1
Marsabit	11	0.588865	2
West Pokot	7	0.374732	1
Kirinyanga	0	0	0
TOTAL	1868	100	395

Source: MCK Accreditation register

2.5. Data Collection Methods

Structured questionnaires, created using Google Forms, was administered to the sampled journalists by Media Council of Kenya staff via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).

2.6. Data Analysis

The data was exported and analysed using Microsoft excel.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

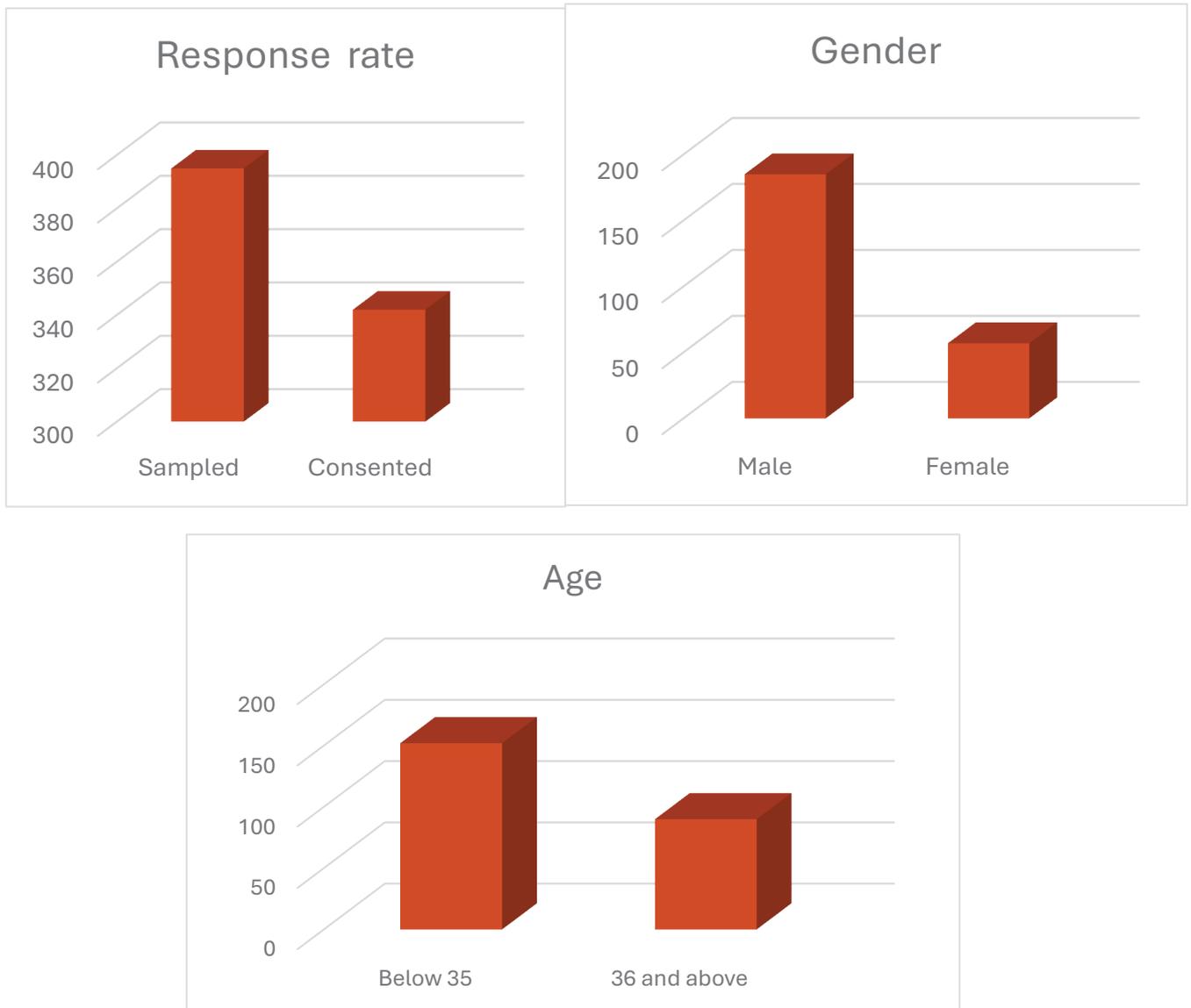
As research ethics demands, this survey considered and observed the necessary ethics. Participants' consent was sought, their autonomy and willingness to participate was highly considered. Personal details and identifiers were treated with a high level of confidentiality and only used by the research team for this survey.

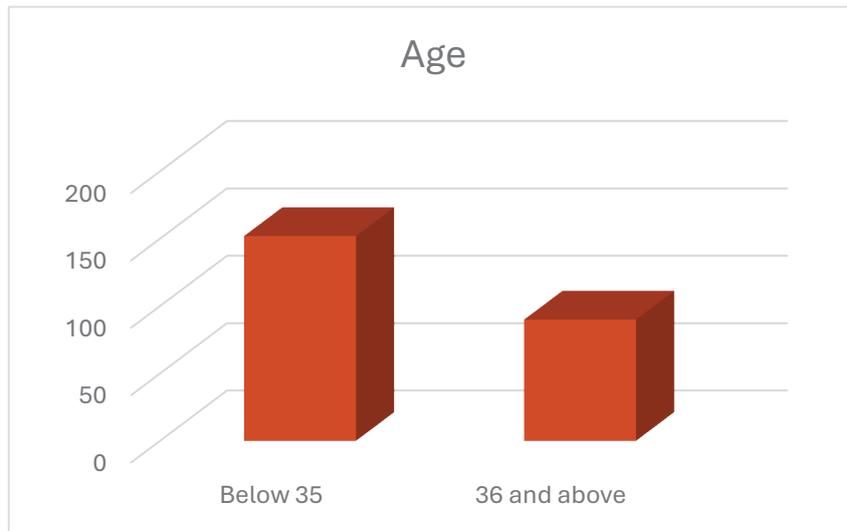
2.8. Limitations of the Study

Some counties in Kenya lacked even a single registered journalist who identified the county as their primary base of operation. Additionally, while certain counties had very few journalists, Nairobi had the highest concentration, potentially resulting in coverage imbalances and regional bias in the sample.

3.0 Findings

Out of a sample of 395 journalists, 242 consented and participated in the survey, yielding a response rate of 61%. Among the respondents, 24% were female and 76% were male. In terms of age distribution, 63% were aged 35 years or younger, while 37% were older than 35 years.

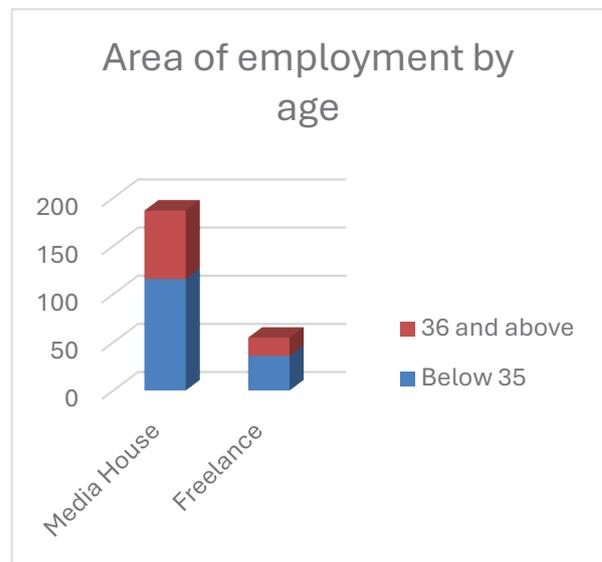
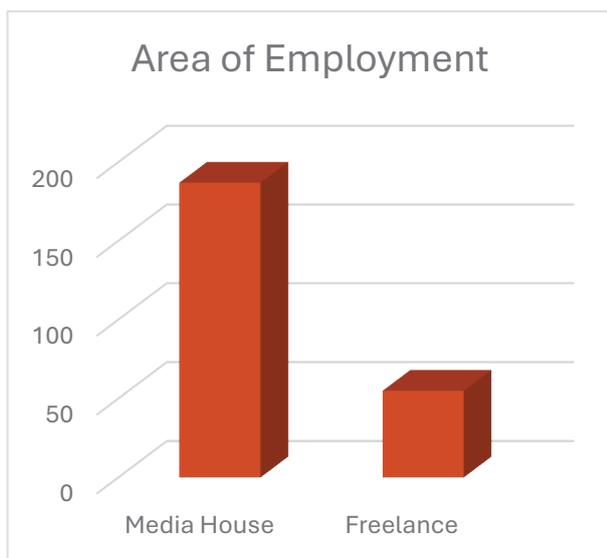




3.1. Employment Conditions

3.1.1 Area of employment

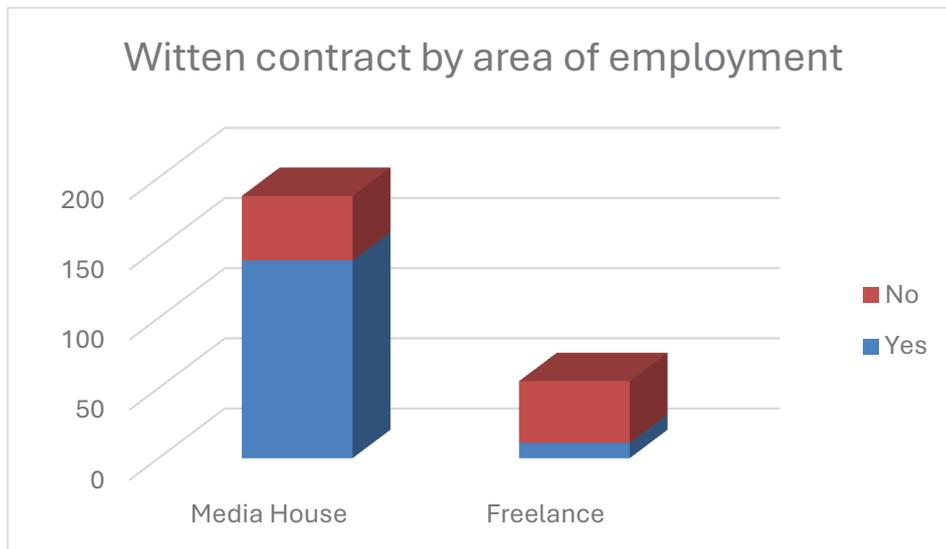
Among the journalists who participated in the survey, 23% identified as freelance journalists, while the remaining 77% were employed by various media outlets. Of the freelance journalists, 65% were under the age of 35, and 35% were over 35 years. Similarly, among those employed by media outlets, 62% were under 35 years of age, while 38% were over 35.



N=242

3.1.2. Written contract by area of employment

The majority (75%) of journalists working in media houses have written contracts whereas 80% of freelance journalists lack written agreements with any media outlets.



N=242

3.1.3 Contract duration

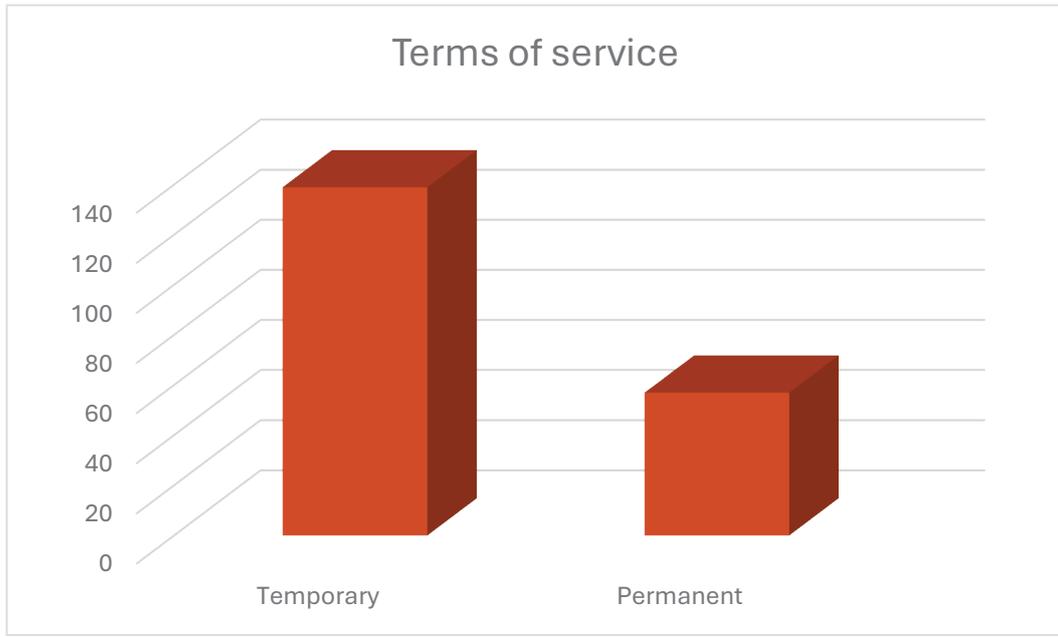
Journalists with contracts reported varying durations, as illustrated in the bar graph: approximately 45% hold one-year contracts, 41% have contracts extending beyond two years, while short-term contracts of three and six months each account for 7%



N=146

3.1.4 Terms of Service

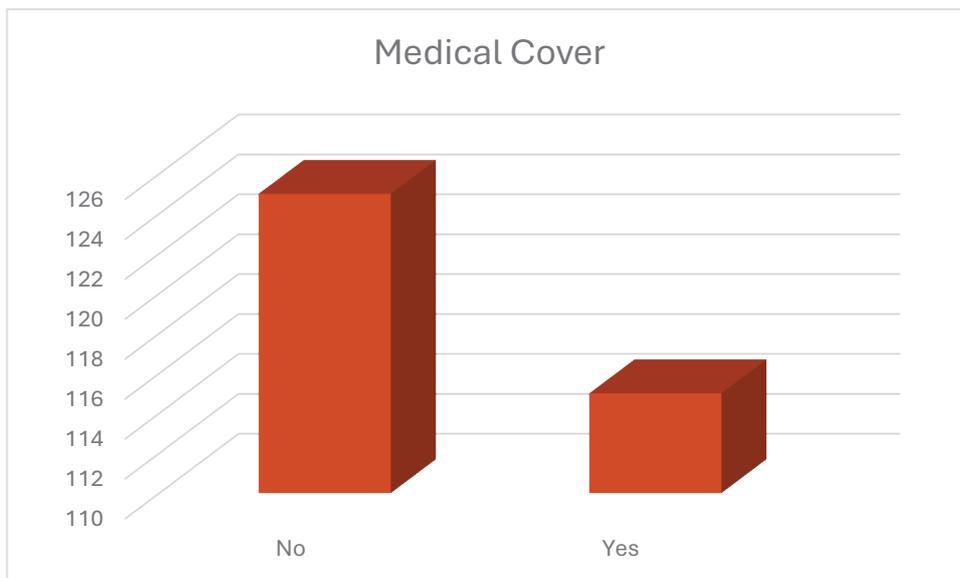
Among journalists with contracts, the majority (71%) are employed on a temporary basis, while only 29% hold permanent positions



N=194

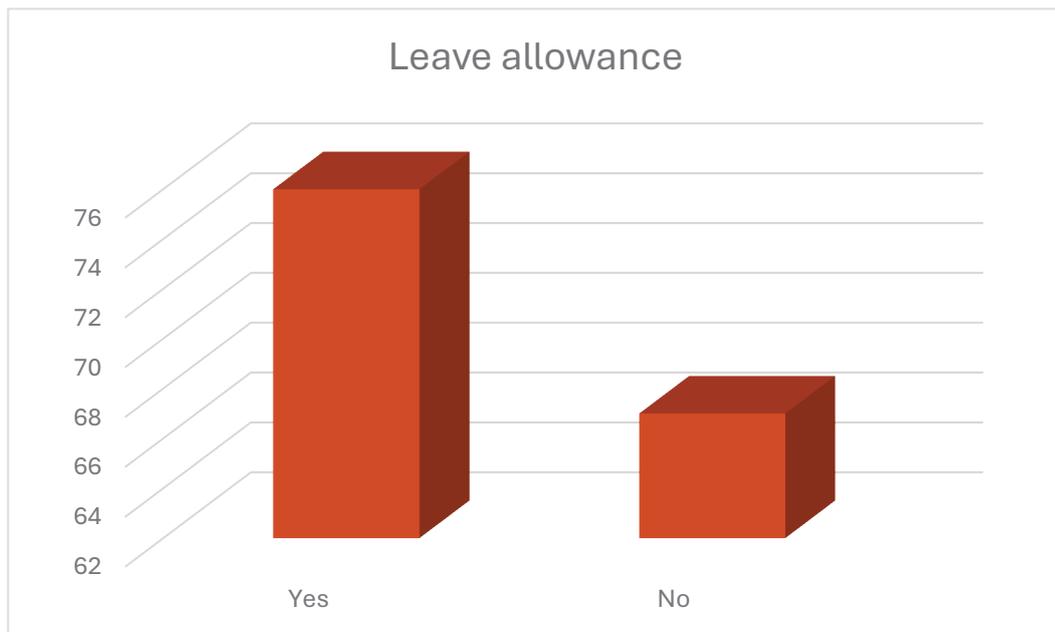
3.1.5 Medical cover

More than half (52%) of Journalists do not have medical cover. 48% have medical cover



3.1.6 Leave allowance

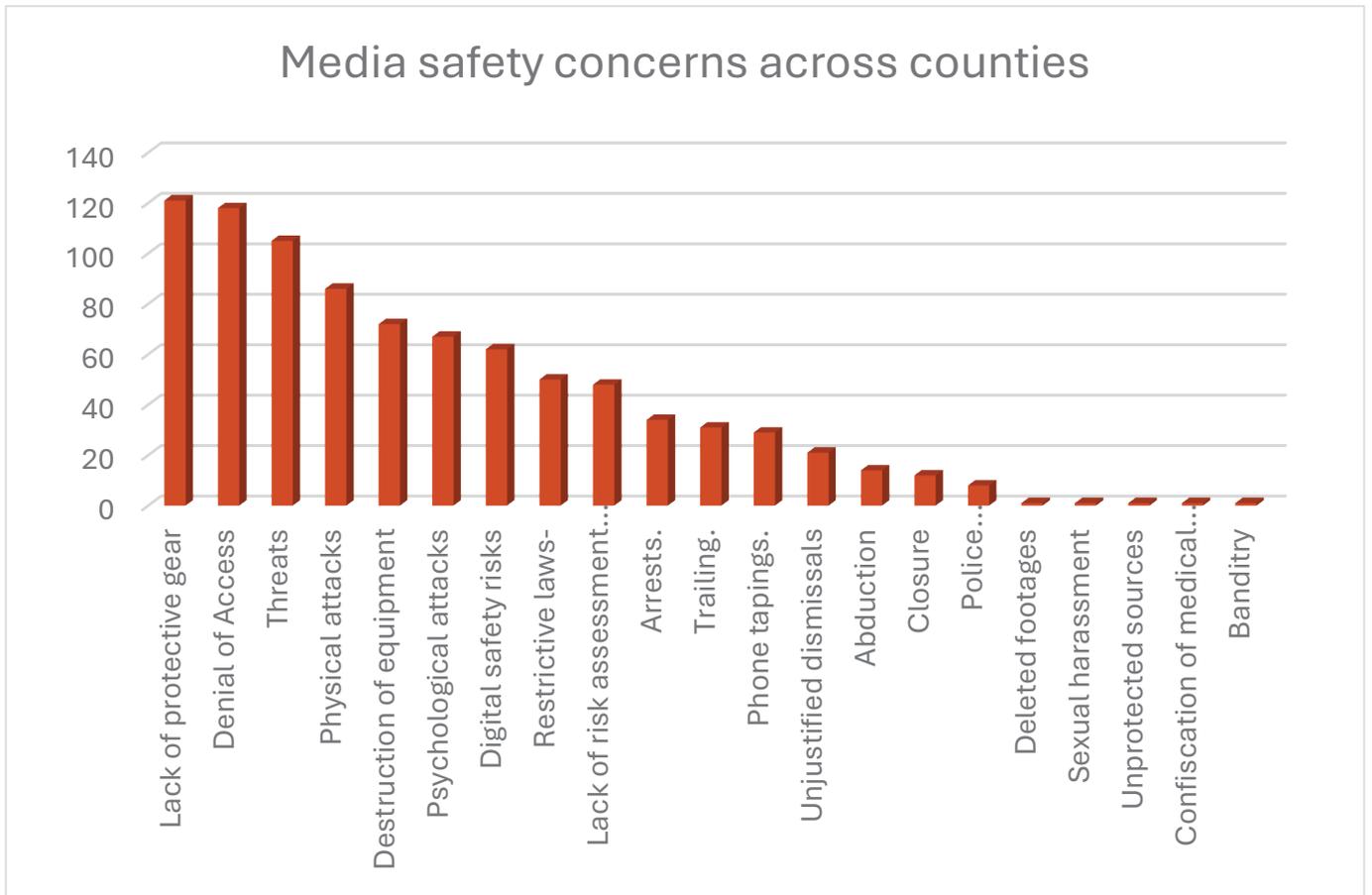
Out of the 152 contracted journalists, 143 responded to the question regarding leave allowance. Of these, 53% reported receiving a paid leave allowance, while the remaining 47% indicated that they did not receive this benefit.



3.2 Safety & Protection/Press Freedom

3.2.1. Media safety concerns across counties

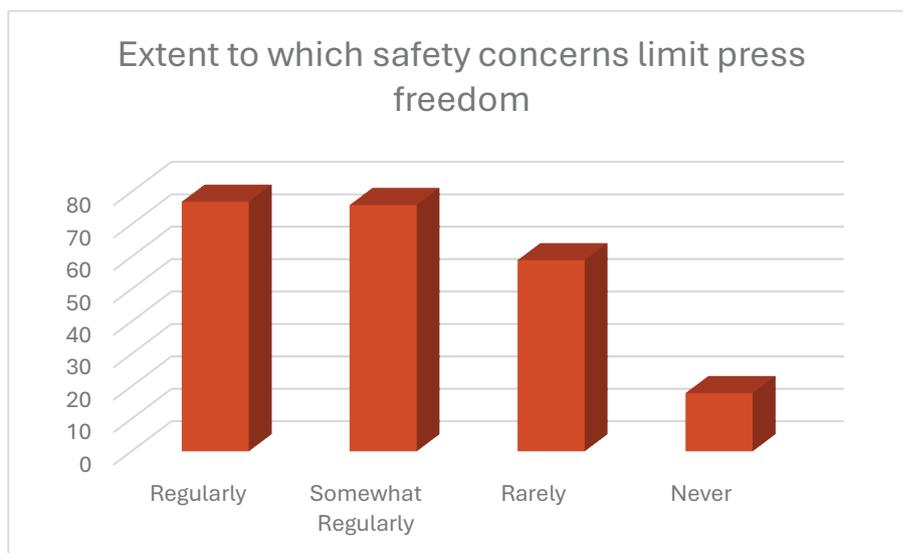
The leading safety concerns reported across counties included lack of protective gear, denial of access, threats and physical attacks. Other prominently mentioned issues were destruction of equipment, psychological harassment, restrictive laws and the absence of risk assessment protocols. Journalists also cited arrests, legal prosecution, phone tapping and unjustified dismissals as significant concerns. Additionally, abductions, media house closures and police harassment were noted as areas of concern.



N=242

3.2.2 Extent to which safety concerns limit press freedom

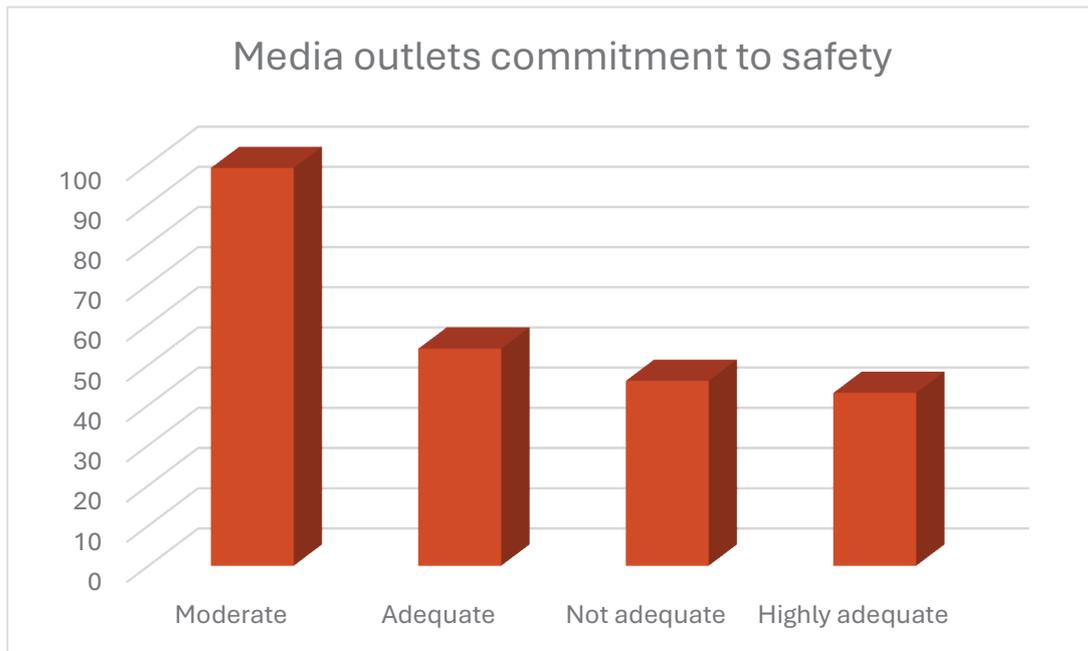
Safety concerns regularly limit press freedom for journalists



N=230

3.2.3 Media outlet commitment to safety of journalists on duty

Most of the respondents reported that their media outlets were moderately committed to ensuring the safety of journalists on duty.

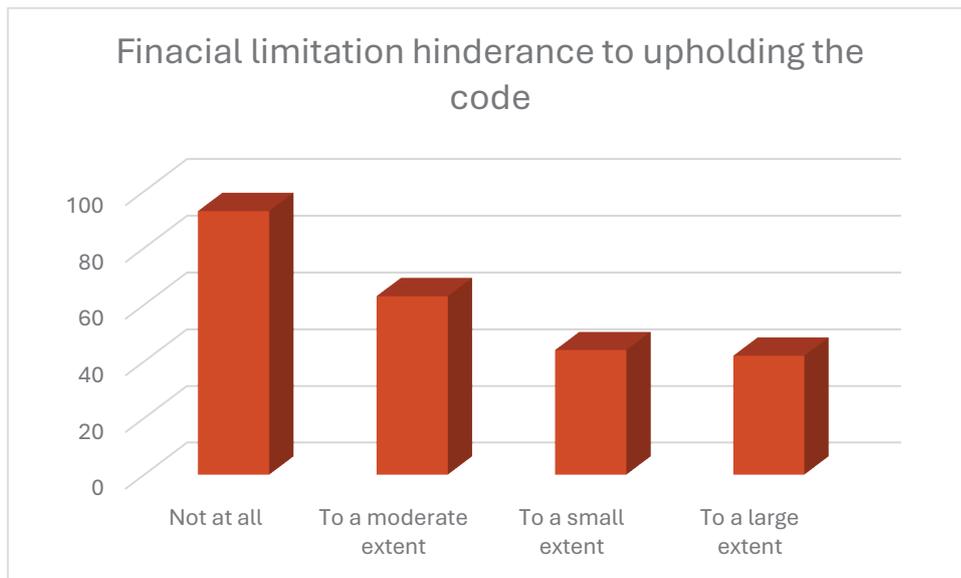


N=183

3.3 Finance and Ethics

3.3.1 The extent of financial limitations undermines journalists ability to uphold standards in the course of their duty

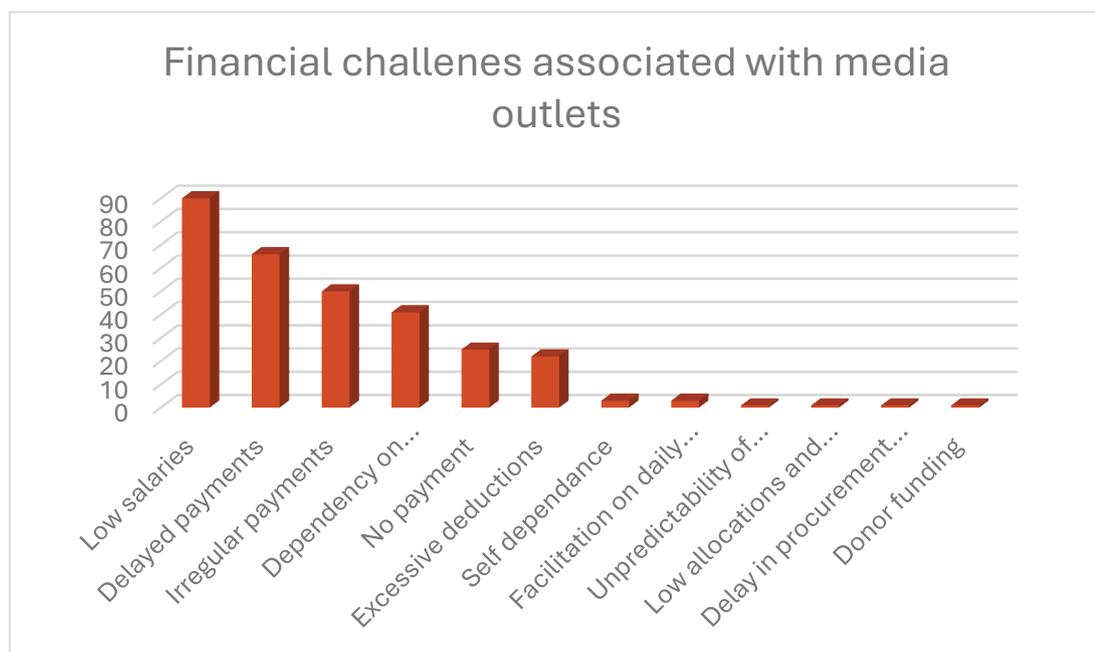
The survey revealed that financial limitations are a significant barrier to journalists adhering to the code of conduct. While 38% of respondents stated that financial constraints would not affect their adherence, 62% reported that financial limitations would hinder their ability to follow the code of conduct to varying degrees. Specifically, 26% said it would affect them to a moderate extent, 18% to a small extent, and 17% indicated that it would largely hinder their adherence.



N=242

3.3.2 Financial challenges associated with media outlets.

Media outlets are primarily confronted with challenges related to the payment of journalists. These challenges include low salaries, delayed or irregular payments, non-payment and excessive deductions. Additionally, a heavy reliance on advertising revenues has emerged as a significant challenge, contributing to low income for many media outlets.



N=183

4.0 Conclusion

The data shows that a majority of freelance and employed journalists are under the age of 35, with 65% of freelancers and 62% of employed journalists falling in this age bracket. This indicates a predominantly young workforce in the journalism sector, particularly within freelance roles, suggesting that younger professionals are either choosing or being directed toward freelance work, potentially due to limited formal employment opportunities.

The data further indicates a clear disparity in contractual security: 75% of journalists employed by media houses operate under written contracts, whereas 80% of freelance journalists work without any formal contractual agreements with media outlets. This highlights a significant vulnerability among freelance journalists, underscoring the need for stronger labor protection and standardised contracting practices in the media industry.

The data indicates that 86% of journalists are holding contracts for one year or more. However, a minority (14%) are on short-term contracts for three to six months, suggesting some instability within a portion of the workforce.

The survey reveals a significant reliance on temporary contracts within the journalism sector, with 71% of contracted journalists lacking permanent employment. This indicates limited job stability for the workforce.

The findings indicate that just over half (53%) of the contracted journalists who responded to the survey receive a paid leave allowance, while a significant proportion (47%) do not. This suggests a notable disparity in employment benefits among contracted journalists, highlighting potential inconsistencies in contract terms or enforcement of labor standards across employers.

The safety of journalists remains a critical concern across counties, with both physical threats and systemic challenges posing serious risks to their work. The prevalence of incidents such as denial of access, physical attacks, legal intimidation and psychological harassment highlights a hostile environment that undermines press freedom and the ability of journalists to operate safely and independently. Ongoing safety concerns are significantly limiting press freedom, as journalists face various threats and challenges that hinder their ability to report freely and without fear. This situation

compromises the ability of the media to function as a watchdog and provide accurate, unbiased information. Most respondents indicated that their media outlets exhibit moderate commitment to journalist safety, suggesting that while some efforts are made, there is room for improvement in ensuring comprehensive protection for journalists on duty.

Financial constraints are a substantial challenge for journalists, with over 60% of respondents acknowledging that their ability to adhere to the journalistic code of conduct is compromised to some degree due to limited resources. This suggests that financial insecurity within the industry may negatively impact journalistic integrity and ethical practices, as seen in rushed or unethical practices, such as the failure to blur children's faces on April 10, 2025 and coverage of the Butere Girls Play during the national drama festival by some media stations.

The financial instability within media outlets, marked by inconsistent or inadequate payments to journalists, undermines the industry's ability to retain skilled professionals and maintain ethical standards. The dependency on advertising revenue further exacerbates these issues, creating a cycle of financial uncertainty that affects both journalists and media organisations.

These findings reveal interconnected challenges, such as risky employment, financial instability, and safety risks, that erode journalistic professionalism and press freedom, resonating with the World Press Freedom Day 2025 theme on Artificial Intelligence (AI). The prevalence of temporary contracts and inadequate benefits like medical cover drives high turnover, weakening the industry's capacity to adopt AI tools for enhanced reporting, such as automated fact-checking or data analysis, which could strengthen professional standards.

Financial limitations, cited by 62% of respondents as impeding ethical compliance, restrict investments in AI training and ethical AI frameworks, increasing the risk of misuse that could worsen ethical breaches. Safety concerns, including digital threats like phone tapping, highlight the need for AI-powered cybersecurity solutions, but the moderate commitment of media outlets to journalist safety hampers their adoption. Consequently, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) in partnership with the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG), Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ), and other stakeholders, must leverage these findings to push for policy reforms, mandate AI-focused training, and promote sustainable funding models. By tackling these challenges, the MCK can utilise AI to bolster press freedom,

enhance journalist safety and elevate professional standards across Kenya's 47 counties, fostering a resilient media landscape in the digital era.

5.0. Recommendations

Media organisations should consider increasing the proportion of long-term contracts to promote job security and retain skilled journalists. Reducing reliance on short-term contracts may also enhance content quality by fostering continuity and deeper institutional knowledge among staff.

Media employers should explore strategies to increase permanent employment opportunities. Enhancing job security could lead to improved employee morale, retention and the overall quality of journalism.

Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ) could develop a standardised contract template for freelancers and mandate minimum welfare benefits, including medical cover and paid leave for all journalists, including those on temporary contracts.

Media outlets, professional bodies and the government should enhance their commitment to journalist safety by implementing more robust safety protocols, providing adequate protective gear and offering training on risk assessment and digital cybersecurity. A stronger focus on journalist well-being could improve both the quality of reporting and the security of those involved.

To safeguard press freedom, it is essential that media outlets and governments take proactive steps to address the safety of journalists. This includes enforcing laws that protect journalists, providing safety training and ensuring quick responses to threats or attacks, thereby allowing journalists to work without fear of retaliation.

MCK should mandate AI-focused training modules within its accreditation programs, teaching journalists to use AI tools for fact-checking, data visualisation and ethical content creation.

MCK should continue enforcement through regular monitoring of media outlets, issuing sanctions for violations flagged, while continuing incentivising adherence through awards.

To uphold ethical journalism, it is crucial that media outlets secure adequate funding and resources to enable journalists to work without financial pressure. This can be achieved through better compensation, increased investment in journalistic practices, improving payment structures such as timely and fair compensation and supporting journalists with the necessary tools and training.

Media outlets should diversify their revenue streams to reduce over-reliance on advertising and ensure more stable financial footing.

Financial Literacy for journalists is very important. This will give them an opportunity to reflect on, plan and use the limited financial resources effectively. MCK should develop modules specific to journalists and integrate such sensitisations in their programs.

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Mr David Omwoyo Omwoyo, MBS

Chief Executive Officer & Secretary to the Council

Victor Bwire, OGW

Director, Media Training and Development

Dinnah Ondari

Manager, Media, Monitoring and Research

Jerry Abuga

Manager, Corporate Communication and Public Affairs

Lorine Achieng

Senior Officer, Corporate Communication and Public Affairs

Jacob Nyongesa

Senior Officer, Research Planning and Strategy

Careen Mang'eni

Communications & Liaison Assistant

Data Analysis by:

Clarice Atieno, Officer Research

Eric Ndung'u, Officer, Research

Data collection by:

Vincent Rotich, Arthur Mbullo, Janet Nyakundi, Alice Gisairo, Benjamin Chacha, Boaz Kizito Mugoto, Brian Alili, Catherine Atieno, Cynthia Njuguna, Damaris Kipchumba, Diana Naisoi, Fardosa Abdi, Gabriel Mutinda, Pacilia Waigeria, Gladys Kipkeu, Ian Francis, Janet Kipyra, Kenneth Nkonge, Lilian Marube, Margaret Matunda, Maryline Maritim, Maureen Mwendu, Maurice Kangor, Celine Akello, Nancy Bosibori, Pacilia Njeri, Stella Jemtai, Walter Motanya, Evans Kiogora, Ben Kipkoech Serem, Momo El Kindy, Lucy Mwangi, Moses Muia, Bernard Muinde, Catherine Achieng & Alice Gisairo.



MEDIA
COUNCIL OF KENYA

Ground Floor, Britam Centre,
Mara /Ragati Road Junction, Upper hill,
P.O.BOX 43132 00100 Nairobi, Kenya

Tel(Office)

0111019200

Cell(Office)

0727735252 | 0702558233 | 0702558234 | 0702558453

Mombasa: 0111019220

• **Kisumu:** 0111019230

Meru: 0111019250

• **Nakuru:** 0111019240

Email :info@mediacouncil.or.ke



www.mediacouncil.or.ke

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