



RAPID MEDIA MAPPING

KAZAKH-LANGUAGE REGIONAL MEDIA

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Rapid Media Mapping of Kazakh-Language Regional Media

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Executive Summary

The Rapid Media Mapping provides an evidence-based overview of the current state of independent Kazakh-language media across Kazakhstan's regions. The report highlights high-interest content areas, regional trends, and the information demands of audiences, as reflected through data-driven analysis. Conducted within the framework of the *Growing Local Independent Media for Meaningful Engagement in the Regions Phase 2 (GLIMMER-2)* project, this study is designed to inform future planning and implementation of programme activities.

The research draws on three main sources of data:

- **Content Analysis (300 pieces of content):** publications from 19 regional online media outlets between January 2024 and June 2025.
- **Google Trends Data (700 queries):** audience search queries and information interests.
- **In-depth Interviews (15 respondents):** online interviews with regional media representatives.

The analysis shows that regional Kazakh-language media outlets struggle to provide sufficient coverage of socially significant and complex topics. Content is often brief and superficial, with insufficient resources for investigative work or for producing visual formats. While audience demand for in-depth journalistic reporting remains high, regional media outlets are unable to meet it fully.

The findings underscore the urgent need for professional, technical, and institutional support. The evidence presented in this report provides specific steps for strategic efforts to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of independent regional media.

Content Analysis Summary of Findings:

- Most frequently covered topics: local government (21%), security and crime (13%), and health (8%).
- Least covered topics: human rights, gender, environment, as well as finance and entrepreneurship (less than 1%).
- The majority of publications are short texts; visual formats such as video, podcasts, and infographics remain rare.
- Gendered division in content focus: male authors tend to focus on political and economic issues, while female authors more frequently cover social and cultural topics.

Google Trends Summary of Findings:

- Top queries: practical and routine topics such as “weather”, “YouTube”, “homework answers” (ГДЗ – short for ГОТОВЫЕ ДОМАШНИЕ ЗАДАНИЯ, meaning ‘pre-written homework responses’ in Russian), and “translator.”
- Trending queries: growing interest in digital platforms and government services, e.g. “ChatGPT”, “e-application”, “BilimClass (online school)”, and “Nomad Casino.”
- Kazakh-language searches: limited overall, but relatively higher in Atyrau and Almaty regions.
- News-related searches: a blend of local news (traffic accidents, tenders, police) and geopolitical topics (United States, Russia, Trump).

Interviews Summary of Findings:

- Most commonly used platforms for news consumption: Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, and YouTube.
- Audience engagement methods typically used by regional media outlets: comments, surveys, messaging applications, and offline meetings.
- Main challenges faced by media outlets:
 - Lack of funding;
 - Shortage of professional staff and technical capacity;
 - Pressure from the government and difficulties in accessing accurate and timely information, primarily from official sources.
- Underrepresented audiences: rural populations, young people, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and women.
- Identified areas of support: media training, technical equipment, legal and financial support, as well as improved networking opportunities within the media sector.

1. Introduction

Purpose and Significance of the Research

The primary purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of Kazakh-language regional media in Kazakhstan, identifying thematic, platform, format, and regional characteristics of the information landscape. Regional media in Kazakhstan play a crucial role in ensuring local communities' access to information. Analysing the content, editorial focus, and development dynamics of regional independent media contributes to a better understanding of the country's information culture and its democratic potential.

The research findings will directly inform the editorial and institutional support planned for three regional partners within the *GLIMMER-2* project and will also serve as the basis for support to content producers under the small grants scheme.

One of the defining features of the country's current media landscape is the weakness of independent Kazakh-language media at the regional level and the imbalance in information production. In a context where state-owned or state-funded media dominate, the sustainability and professional development of independent Kazakh-language regional outlets require particular attention. This Rapid Media Mapping aims to provide a data-driven overview of the current state of independent Kazakh-language regional media, analyse the quality and scope of content production, and identify critical gaps and opportunities.

Relevance of the Research

As of 2025, Kazakhstan has approximately 4,821 registered media outlets, according to a nationwide survey conducted by the Institute of Public Policy.¹ This includes 235 TV channels, around 100 radio stations, and more than 1,200 news agencies and digital publications. The remainder comprises print media and other forms of mass communication. This marks a slight decline from May 2023, when the total number of registered media stood at 5,590, including 3,889 periodicals, 202 TV channels, 88 radio stations, 1,121 news agencies and online outlets.²

However, in addition to officially registered media, Kazakhstan also has numerous independent authors and creative collectives who operate their own media resources without formal registration. Following the Soviet-era tradition, the state media policy is implemented largely from major cities such as Astana and Almaty and

¹ "Kazakh Audience Turns to Social Media as Primary News Source, Study Finds," 1 July 2025, <https://astanatimes.com/2025/07/kazakh-audience-turns-to-social-media-as-primary-news-source-study-finds/>

² "Mass media in Kazakhstan," 27 June 2023, <https://www.gov.kz/article/128139?lang=en>

financed directly from the state budget. At the regional level, since 2012, media holdings have been created in each region as a mechanism for managing local media.

These holdings bring together the main outlets responsible for implementing state information policy. Yet, because state holdings manage media in a uniform way, they often fail to account for local specificities and information needs. As a result, new independent authors, influencers, bloggers, and small editorial teams have emerged in the regions, attempting to cover issues outside the framework of state orders.

For this study, as shown in *Figure 1*, Kazakhstan’s 17 administrative regions were grouped into five macro-regions — Centre, East, North, South, and West — to capture regional diversity more clearly. Given that the mapping exercise focuses on the development of Kazakh-language regional media, it was also important to consider the varying extent of Kazakh-language use across regions.



Figure 1. Kazakhstan's Administrative Regions Grouped into Five Macro-Regions: Centre, East, North, South, and West

The most recent census conducted in 2021 indicates that the highest proportion of residents proficient in Kazakh is in the southern regions (Turkistan, Almaty and Zhambyl), while proficiency is lowest in the north (North Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Pavlodar and Karaganda).³ Importantly, census data also shows a significant gap between knowledge of Kazakh and its actual daily use. For example, in Almaty city,

³ “Перепись населения 2021” (Census 2021), <https://stat.gov.kz/national/2021/>

78% of residents report knowledge of Kazakh, but only 30% use it daily. Daily use, in this context, includes not only spoken language but also information consumption. In Kostanay, North Kazakhstan and Pavlodar, both knowledge and daily use are very low. By contrast, Kyzylorda, Turkistan, Zhambyl and Mangystau have both strong ethnic Kazakh majorities and high levels of Kazakh-language use, including media and information consumption. In Central Kazakhstan, knowledge levels are high, but daily usage is low.

This shows that the majority of Kazakh-language information consumers are concentrated in the South, West and Centre. Yet the mapping revealed that even in these regions, independent Kazakh-language online media remains scarce.

For this Rapid Media Mapping, Internews experts defined independent regional Kazakh-language media as outlets that operate primarily within a specific region of Kazakhstan and are not fully reliant on state funding. Based on expertise and input from journalists and media experts in the regions, the research team identified 19 online media outlets that matched the criteria. Some operate their own websites, and others function exclusively through social media platforms. Notably, not all of these outlets consistently produce original journalistic content.

Given this context, the study addresses one of the most pressing issues in Kazakhstan's media development: the need to improve the quality and sustainability of independent regional Kazakh-language media. The mapping is guided by the following key research question:

What thematic, geographic and demographic gaps and opportunities exist in the Kazakh-language regional media landscape, and how can this evidence inform strategies to strengthen media sustainability?

To answer this overarching question, several sub-questions were explored:

1. Which key themes dominate content in regional media?
2. How are different content formats, such as text, video, and audio, distributed across regional media?
3. What types of media outlets contribute to regional content production, and how does their overall quality compare across the Kazakh-language media landscape?
4. What is the gender distribution of authors, and how does it relate to thematic choices in regional media?
5. How are media outputs shaped by the unique social, cultural, or political contexts of each region?

These questions defined the structure of the research and informed the selection of key indicators used in the content analysis.

2. Methodology

The study draws on a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative in-depth interviews, media mapping, structured content analysis, and a comparative overview of relevant Google Trends search data. Fifteen in-depth interviews with regional media professionals provided insights into editorial practices, audience engagement, and thematic coverage. A media analysis matrix mapped 19 independent Kazakh-language media outlets across five regions, highlighting geographic disparities. Approximately 300 content pieces were analysed using a structured coding framework, complemented by Google Trends data to assess regional information demand. The study used content analysis as its primary research method. A database of selected sources was compiled to support both quantitative and qualitative examination of the thematic and substantive features of regional media. The timeframe covered is January 2024 to June 2025.

Data Sources:

In-depth Interviews (15 respondents)

Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with regional media editors, journalists, and independent content producers. These interviews explored challenges in content production, audience demand, and editorial practices.

In compiling the list of interviewees, Internews experts relied on their own professional networks and identified independent experts who actively share informed perspectives on Kazakh-language media in the online spaces. In total, more than 20 potential interviewees were shortlisted.

Key questions included:

1. Which media outlets and content producers disseminate information in Kazakh in your region?
2. On which platforms do media actors in your region cover socially significant topics?
3. What were the most important issues in your region over the past 18 months (January 2024 – June 2025), and how were they reflected in local media?
4. Do media representatives in your region sufficiently cover topics of local importance? If not, why?

5. Which themes are often covered by local media and content producers? Which themes are only marginally covered? Which themes are not covered?
6. How do content producers in your region engage with audiences (e.g. WhatsApp groups, offline meetings, responding to readers' comments)?
7. What are the main obstacles for independent Kazakh-language media in your region? Why?
8. What support is most urgently needed by regional newsrooms and content creators?
9. Which regions and audiences are underrepresented?

The interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform. Audio records provided insights into active online media outlets, events, and themes in each region, and were used to compile a media analysis matrix.

Media Analysis Matrix (19 media outlets)

An Excel database was compiled listing independent online Kazakh-language media outlets from across the country. The list was developed based on recommendations from regional journalists and media experts, along with suggestions made by Internews experts. Each selected media outlet was chosen based on prominence and relevance within its respective region.

Outlets were grouped geographically:

- West (4)
- East (2)
- South (6)
- North (4)
- Centre (3)

The mapping revealed significant imbalances. Some regions, such as Southern Kazakhstan, have a high concentration of media outlets, whereas others (East and Centre) are more sparsely covered. For this reason, a larger number of outlets were sampled from the South. This allowed for a more accurate illustration of regional disparities when compared to the content analysis results.

Content Analysis (≈300 materials)

Around 300 publications produced by the sampled outlets over the past 18 months were analysed. The methodology was based on the content analysis framework of

the Internews-developed Media-Specific Organisational Capacity Assessment (M-OCA) tool.

For consistency, content was sampled from the third Wednesday of each month, from January 2024 to June 2025. Where no content was available on that day, or multiple items were published, experts applied professional judgement to select the content most relevant to the analysis.

Each item was coded according to:

- Date of publication
- Thematic focus
- The author's gender
- Article format
- Headline
- Platform of publication
- Presence of gender stereotypes

Comparative Analysis – Google Trends

Google Trends data was used to complement the content analysis, covering the same period (January 2024 – June 2025). The study examined regional online information demand by compiling a database of search data, identifying which themes attracted the most searches, tracking shifts in information needs across regions, and highlighting broader public interest.

Methodological Limitations

- State-owned media outlets were excluded from the study.
- In some regions, the number of independent Kazakh-language outlets is very small, leading to imbalances in available sources.
- Google Trends data at the regional level is limited and may not fully represent actual audiences and their information needs. Therefore, insights into audience demand were also gathered through interviews conducted as part of this research.
- The majority of Google Trends search queries were in Russian, limiting the accuracy of insights into the real demand from Kazakh-speaking audiences.
- Content analysis sampling relied on the judgment of a small number of experts; no validity coefficient was calculated.

Despite these limitations, the combined dataset and methodology provided systematic answers to the research questions and enabled evidence-based analysis of regional media development trends.

3. Results

3.1 Content Analysis Findings

The content analysis of around 300 publications revealed that regional media demonstrate a selective focus in their coverage, with some topics receiving significantly more attention than others. Outlets frequently cover culture and law-related topics, while complex socio-economic issues receive little attention, as illustrated in the following topic breakdown and visualised in *Figure 2* below.

Most frequently covered topics:

1. Local government and administration – 21% (55 publications)
2. Security and crime – 13% (34 publications)
3. Health and psychology – 8% (21 publications)

Moderately covered topics:

1. Arts and culture – 10% (28 publications)
2. Business, sport, economy, social issues – 5 % (10–15 publications each)

Rarely covered topics:

1. Human rights and gender
2. Environment, climate, ecology
3. Budget, finance, entrepreneurship

The rarely covered topics were featured in no more than 1–3 publications, accounting for only 0.37%. This limited coverage is largely attributed to a lack of journalistic capacity in these underreported areas.

Human rights, ecology and finance are the least covered topics by independent Kazakh-language regional media outlets

The content analysis of around 300 publications revealed that regional media demonstrate uneven thematic priorities over the past 18 months. Outlets frequently cover culture and law-related topics, while complex socio-economic issues receive little attention.

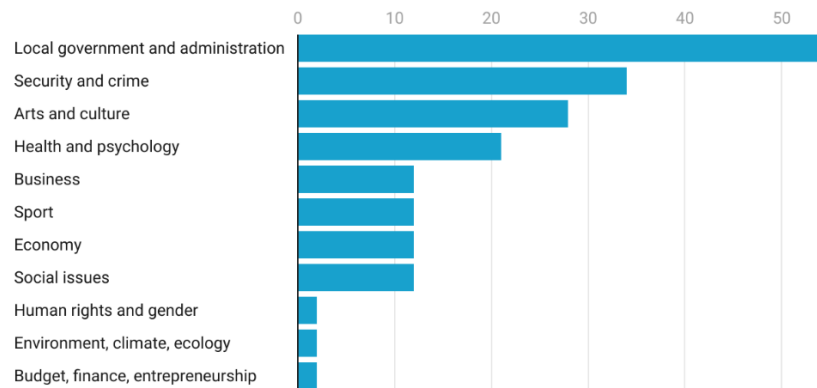


Figure 2. Thematic Priorities in Independent Kazakh-Language Regional Media: From Most to Least Covered

Regional variations:

West: legal issues such as human rights and gender equality appear, but economic and security issues are poorly represented.

Centre: partial coverage of human rights and gender topics, but minimal focus on economy, ecology, or social policies.

South: publications are largely devoted to culture and legal issues, with other topics receiving minimal attention.

North: a strong focus on culture (literature, history, traditions), leaving socially important areas underrepresented.

East: government and administration frequently appear alongside cultural topics, but human rights and economy receive minimal attention.

Overall, public interest issues, such as human rights, gender, ecology, and financial transparency, are insufficiently covered across all regions, while everyday governance, security, and crime are heavily prioritised.

Content Format Distribution

The analysis of formats shows that the regional media content is dominated by short texts (42%), indicating a focus on quick and concise delivery. Long text follows with 18%, while video, news briefs, and short videos account for 5%, 4%, and 3%

respectively. *Figure 3* below presents a breakdown of the most common content formats, providing a clear visual summary.

Most common content formats

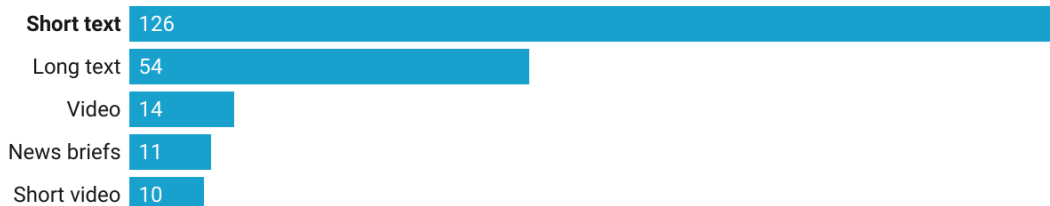


Figure 3. Most Common Content Formats Used by Regional Kazakh-Language Media Outlets

Among regional Kazakh-language media outlets, the least common formats include photo reports, podcasts, documentary films, infographics, as well as fact-checking materials, essays, poems, and other literary texts. Taken individually, each of these accounts for less than 1% of the total content produced. *Figure 4* below provides a visual representation of their share.

Less common content formats



Figure 4. Least Common Content Formats among Regional Kazakh-Language Media Outlets

Overall, visual and multimedia formats are rarely used, indicating a lack of diversification and a weak capacity to provide complex, engaging, and dynamic materials.

Gender Distribution and Thematic Preferences

The gender composition of authors significantly influences thematic priorities and the tone of public discourse. In this dataset, 51% of the content did not indicate the author's gender (most of which can be assumed as consisting of reproduced or repurposed material from other sources), while 27% was authored by women and 22% by men.

Male authors – more active in politics, governance, economy, and business, often providing commentary on state administration and economic processes.

Female authors – focus on social issues, culture, daily life, and community well-being, highlighting social welfare and cultural values.

Regional gender dynamics:

South and East: female authors are more active, broadening the social discourse by highlighting community concerns.

West: male authors dominate, with an emphasis on politics and the economy.

North: female authors are slightly more active, focusing on culture, health, and social issues, while male authors lean towards history and literature topics.

Centre: male dominance is notable, though in some cases the author's gender was not identifiable.

Exploring authorship and thematic trends suggests that gender differences heavily influence how public discourse is shaped. Male authors drive political and economic narratives, while female authors expand social and cultural perspectives.

3.2 Google Trends Findings

As part of the Rapid Media Mapping, Google Trends was used to examine how audiences in different regions search for and engage with information online. The analysis covered the period from January 2024 to the end of June 2025, focusing on search keywords and their specific patterns of demand. Data points were drawn from both the News category within Google Trends and general search activity in the Google search engine.

In presenting the findings, each region is considered individually rather than clustered into West, East, North, South, or Central. This approach was taken to ensure that the distinct information-seeking characteristics of each region are clearly visible. Unfortunately, Google Trends does not yet provide disaggregated data for the newly established regions of Ulytau, Abai, and Jetisu (created in 2022). Moreover, the data is likely to be more comprehensive in areas with reliable internet access, meaning rural or less-connected locations may be underrepresented. In addition, Google Trends does not allow filtering search queries exclusively in Kazakh, which limits the ability to fully capture Kazakh-language search behaviour.

Approach and Categories

Google Trends enables comparative analysis of regional search patterns. Two categories of queries were examined:

Top – the most frequently searched terms in each region. Scores are shown on a relative scale, where 100 is the most popular query and 50 indicates that the query was searched half as often.

Rising – keywords that have experienced the fastest growth in search volume compared with a previous period. Queries marked as “Breakout” indicate an exceptionally sharp increase, usually where the term was rarely searched before but suddenly became trending.

All regional TOP and Rising queries were aggregated into a single Excel database. In total, 700 entries were analysed: 350 from the News category and 350 from general Google search results. For quantitative comparison, Breakout terms were assigned a high numerical value (1.1) and then normalised using a min–max scale.

Key Search Trends

Most Common TOP Queries:

General and everyday terms such as “погода” (weather), “ютуб” (YouTube), “майл” (Mail), “гдз” (school homework answers), “переводчик” (translator), “күнделік” (digital gradebook), and “аниме” (anime) were frequently searched. These reflect routine interests in weather, education, translation tools, and entertainment.

Most Common Rising queries:

Over the past 18 months, searches for “chatgpt”, “telegram web”, “nomad casino”, “білім класс” (Bilim Klass platform), and “е-өтініш” (e-Otinish government service) have shown significant growth. This suggests increased public engagement with digital tools, interest in artificial intelligence, and growing reliance on online state services.

Other Popular Search Queries:

In the Atyrau region, popular search queries included “жол апаты” (road accident), “orda.kz” (an independent analytical news portal), “тендер” (tender), and “eatyrau.kz” (a regional e-government portal), reflecting interest in local incidents, government services, and independent news sources.

In the Akmola region, popular search queries included “енбек.кз” (labour portal), “самрук тендер” (“Samruk” tender), “рувд” (district police), and “поиск судебных дел РК” (court case search), reflecting public interest in employment, governance, and judicial matters.

In the Aktobe and West Kazakhstan regions, health-related search queries such as “медицина” (healthcare) and “жедел жәрдем” (emergency care) dominated online activity, highlighting strong public interest in medical services.

Kazakh-Language Searches

Search activity in Kazakh was disproportionately lower than in Russian and was primarily focused on education “білім класс” (Bilim Klass platform), “күнделік” (digital gradebook). Notably, Almaty and Atyrau regions showed the highest levels of Kazakh-language queries, including terms such as “қазақша аударма” (Kazakh translation), “қазақша реферат” (Kazakh-language research paper), and “тест жауаптары” (test answers). These were largely linked to education, student resources, and e-government services, indicating growing demand for Kazakh-language digital content in these areas.

Most Searched News Topics and Media Outlets

Kostanay and Pavlodar, along with the West Kazakhstan region, generated the greatest number of news-related searches. Queries often centred on geopolitics, social issues, and legal matters.

News outlets such as Orda.kz emerged as the most frequently searched platform, alongside Zakon.kz, Ranking.kz, Nur.kz, and Eatyrau.kz, indicating a growing recognition of both national and regional online media brands.

Cross-Regional and International Interest

Several regions (West Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Pavlodar) frequently searched for information about other cities and countries, including “США” (USA), “Россия” (Russia), “Украина” (Ukraine), “Астана” (Astana), and “Алматы” (Almaty). Other popular queries included the US Senate, Donald Trump, “Samruk” tenders, budget planning, and court cases, illustrating demand for national and international information beyond local issues.

The research into search queries also showed an increasing interest in Russian platforms – such as Mail.ru, List.ru, Vk.com, and Russian TV – especially in border regions, where audiences often seek coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war. This highlights the need to strengthen Kazakh-language content as a credible alternative.

Regional Focus

In their online searches, residents of Kostanay, Atyrau, West Kazakhstan, and North Kazakhstan most often looked for local news, using queries such as “қостанай жаңалықтары” (Kostanay news), “атырау жол апаты” (Atyrau road accident), “бқо тендер” (West Kazakhstan tender), and “петропавл полициясы” (Petropavl police). These audiences showed strong interest in local infrastructure, accidents, housing, employment, and government services.

Residents of Akmola, Mangystau, Aktobe, Kyzylorda, and Turkistan were least likely to search for local news, instead more often seeking national or international content. This may reflect the limited availability of local online news sources or a stronger interest in events in major cities within Kazakhstan and abroad.

Limitations of Google Trends Analysis

It is important to note that Google Trends data provides only a partial view and does not capture the full spectrum of public interests. Searches in Kazakh are especially underrepresented, as the platform does not allow filtering specifically for Kazakh-language queries, limiting the assessment of Kazakh-language search behaviour. The findings are further constrained by unequal internet access and the fact that the analysis reflects only Google users, excluding searches and algorithms on social media platforms where news consumption is particularly high. To mitigate these limitations, the results were cross-checked with insights from local experts during interviews.

3.3 Interviews Findings

Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with media representatives across 15 regions of Kazakhstan. The interviews covered questions related to events that occurred in the period between January 2024 and June 2025. The analysis below summarises common trends as well as regional specificities in response to the main research questions. For this part of the analysis, a more detailed regional breakdown is also presented to highlight interview-based insights at the level of individual regions, rather than broader groupings.

Kazakh-Language Media and Content Producers

In most regions, Kazakh-language media outlets backed by state funding continue to dominate (newspapers and television channels). Alongside these, however, independent content producers – bloggers, journalists, and civic activists – are increasingly active on platforms such as Instagram and Telegram. For example:

Atyrau, Mangystau, and Turkistan regions: Bloggers and small independent websites producing Kazakh-language content have a strong presence.

East Kazakhstan: Outlets such as [Didar](#), [Rudny Altai](#), and [Altaynews.kz](#) were highlighted by local experts.

Mangystau: Newspapers [Mangystau](#), [Tumba](#), and [Zhanaozen](#), all under the Mangystau Media holding, were noted.

Atyrau: Outlets such as [Atyrau](#), [Prikaspiyskaya Kommuna](#), [Akzhaiyk](#), and [Atyrau Zhanalyktary](#) publish in Kazakh, though often with limited volume.

However, the scope of coverage in Kazakh-language regional media remains narrow. As one journalist from South Kazakhstan observed, *“Local journalists cannot fully cover all topics because they all receive tenders from the local administration. As a result, they tend to avoid political issues and instead focus on routine coverage of social affairs, sports, and culture. If activists hold rallies about human rights, local media do not cover those at all. If they cover elections, they do not report on irregularities or violations that occur. Political protests, human rights struggles, and interethnic issues are either underreported or framed in overly simplistic terms, often as ordinary crimes. Any material critical of the authorities or criticism of regional or city governors is never published.”*

In terms of platforms, Instagram is the most widely used across all regions. Telegram channels, YouTube, and WhatsApp groups also see significant use. While official websites continue to play a role, they are generally less interactive and less accessible than social media.

Local media experts observed that Kazakh-language outlets primarily distribute regional soft news on their main platforms – covering entertainment, lifestyle, and sports – while rarely producing original reporting on hard news, such as politics, economics, or major events.

A journalist from North Kazakhstan noted that key public issues are often sidelined by local outlets: *“Important topics are mainly shared on Facebook. Whether it is*

regional newspapers, district newspapers, or websites, they are unable to publish or support the articles by journalists and individuals raising public concerns. Therefore, social problems, like issues in healthcare and education, as well as problems in agriculture and road construction, end up being addressed only on people's personal social media pages."

Overall, Kazakh-language content remains constrained, with much of the output still dominated by Russian-language producers.

Key Issues Raised in the Past 18 Months and their Coverage

Interview responses show that coverage of key issues between January 2024 and June 2025 varied by media type and region. Independent outlets were often reported to provide more detailed coverage, while state media tended to be brief or one-sided. According to respondents, certain topics were covered more extensively than others, with differences across regions and media types.

Between January 2024 and June 2025, the following key issues were raised across all regions. These topics have shaped the regional media agenda, although interview findings suggest that not all Kazakh-language outlets addressed them with journalistic depth. The topics included:

- Floods and ecological crises (forest fires, air pollution)
- Labour disputes
- Road and infrastructure quality
- Education (schools, teacher shortages)
- Health services

Region-specific issues included:

- **Kyzylorda:** Poor quality of education and shortage of teachers
- **Mangystau:** Water shortages and unemployment
- **East Kazakhstan:** Environmental concerns and dependence on coal heating
- **Atyrau:** Transportation and road problems
- **Zhambyl:** Youth unemployment and drug abuse

Interview responses further highlighted that independent outlets try to take the initiative to investigate and report on key social issues, filling gaps left by state media, which tends to focus on official narratives and readily available information. Nevertheless, local independent media still fall short of providing thorough, well-researched coverage on these topics.

Comprehensiveness and Prominence of Reporting on Key Issues

Interview findings highlight considerable variation in how issues are reported, both in depth and prominence. Respondents noted that some issues are covered in detail, while others receive only limited or minimal reporting, reflecting perceived gaps and inconsistencies in media coverage.

Topics most commonly covered:

- Infrastructure (roads, utilities)
- Government activities
- Education and healthcare
- Environmental concerns
- Social issues, youth activities, and cultural events

Topics lacking in-depth reporting:

- Environmental issues
- Rural concerns
- Migration
- Religious affairs
- Women in rural communities

Topics with minimal to no coverage:

- Corruption and oversight of state procurement
- Issues of persons with disabilities
- LGBTQ+ topics
- Concerns of ethnic minorities

As a journalist from East Kazakhstan explained, *“Poor road conditions, obstacles related to tourism, environmental issues, and language problems are covered to some extent. Corruption is not written about at all, while issues in rural areas receive little coverage.”*

Adding to this, a journalist from West Kazakhstan pointed out the superficial treatment of pressing local issues: *“The most urgent problem in our region is the shortage of drinking water. Although it is mentioned in the media, there has been no storytelling or investigative work that examines the problem in depth and from all angles. Reports simply state ‘there is no water,’ followed later by ‘the water has*

arrived,' and that is where coverage ends. Media outlets exist, but the information they provide is weak from an analytical standpoint."

Audience Engagement Methods

Responses indicate that audience engagement relies on a mix of digital and occasional in-person channels, reflecting both how outlets reach their communities and the ways audiences interact with media.

Audience engagement is typically maintained through:

- Instagram comments
- WhatsApp groups
- Direct messages
- Occasional offline meetings or public hearings

For instance, in the Aktobe region, certain media outlets organise focus group discussions, using platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp to engage with their audiences.

Barriers Facing Kazakh-Language Independent Media

Responses suggest that Kazakh-language independent media face multiple challenges that affect both production and reach. Interviewees emphasised that resource limitations, staffing gaps, and platform-level obstacles limit the ability of outlets to maintain visibility and engage effectively with audiences.

The main challenges identified were:

- Insufficient funding
- Lack of technical equipment
- Shortage of professional Kazakh-language journalists
- Weak audience engagement
- Limited access to information from state institutions and, in some cases, political pressure

As a journalist from West Kazakhstan noted, the lack of financial support directly undermines both motivation and capacity, with newsroom staff overwhelmed by daily news production and independent media figures often unpaid for their work. Another journalist from the same region stressed that local executive authorities actively limit independent media, as outlets linked to state orders or administrations

avoid sensitive topics such as acute social issues or high-profile cases, knowing such material will never be published.

Additionally, respondents observed that platforms like YouTube often fail to promote Kazakh-language content through algorithms, further restricting visibility.

Support Needs

Interviewees identified key areas where support could make the greatest difference for independent Kazakh-language media. They highlighted gaps in professional skills, access to resources, legal guidance, and opportunities for collaboration, emphasising that targeted assistance in these areas would strengthen both the quality of reporting and audience engagement.

Respondents identified several priority support areas:

- Professional training (investigative journalism, multimedia tools, data journalism, ethical use of AI)
- Provision of technical equipment (cameras, audio recorders)
- Financial grants
- Legal support
- Capacity-building in marketing and monetisation
- Stronger networking opportunities

Interviewees highlighted priority support areas for independent media across different regions. One media expert from the Zhambyl region emphasised the need for capacity building, stating: *“We need training in fact-checking and working with data as a first priority.”*

A journalist from West Kazakhstan highlighted the need for well-rounded professional capacity building: *“Training, professional development, exchanges, and internships are needed in media management and media business operations – not only as a content producer but also as a commercial project, a media company. Secondly, we need to be taught how to find sources of funding for media and how to successfully implement projects. Thirdly, a series of trainings is needed on current topics such as media, data analytics, fact-checking, personal brand building, AI, video, photo, visualisation, copyright, and many others.”*

Another journalist from West Kazakhstan underlined that a shortage of staff and time prevents deeper coverage: *“Our media representatives are not covering important topics sufficiently. The main reason is a shortage of staff. In the Atyrau*

region, there are many issues that require in-depth, expanded coverage, but such work takes time. Meanwhile, we are expected to produce daily news or respond to assigned stories. Priority is often given to issues raised on social media that spark a public reaction or to sensational content. Under such conditions, it becomes difficult to produce investigative work, as there is simply not enough time.”

Finally, a journalist from Central Kazakhstan emphasised the importance of ethical training alongside technical skills: *“It would be useful to retrain journalists on the core principles of journalism and revisit journalistic ethics. For example, during the promotion of nuclear power plants, some of my colleagues used sources in ways that were deeply inappropriate. I tried to intervene because asking individuals affected by nuclear testing to endorse nuclear power stations is absolutely inhumane.”*

Underrepresented Regions and Audiences

Interview findings indicate that certain social groups and geographic communities remain consistently underrepresented. Respondents pointed to systemic gaps in reporting that leave vulnerable groups with limited visibility, reducing opportunities for their voices and concerns to be heard in the public sphere.

The most underrepresented groups include:

- Rural populations
- Ethnic minorities
- Young people
- Women
- Persons with disabilities
- The unemployed
- Border communities (people living near the Russian and Chinese borders)

These groups remain systematically underrepresented in both local and national coverage.

Conclusion

The Rapid Media Mapping has provided an overview of the current state of the Kazakh-language regional media space, highlighting both the gaps and the opportunities. The findings help to identify concrete areas where support for regional media is most urgently needed.

First, a **thematic imbalance** is evident. While governance, culture, and security

dominate coverage, critical issues such as human rights, ecology, finance, and gender remain severely underrepresented. This demonstrates the urgent need to strengthen the capacity of regional media to report on issues of high societal importance.

Moreover, **audience demand** – as reflected in the interviews with media experts – **is broad and diverse**, ranging from everyday matters to international affairs. At the same time, while Kazakh-language searches remain limited overall, the higher demand in certain regions points to a clear need for quality content in Kazakh.

Interviews with media representatives revealed that the **main barriers faced by regional outlets include funding shortages, staff capacity gaps, lack of technical resources, and restrictions on access to information**. These factors hinder the production of high-quality, in-depth journalism. Furthermore, **entire segments of the population** – such as rural communities, youth, women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities – **remain largely overlooked**.

Overall, these findings serve as an important reference point for identifying priority areas where regional media require targeted support. The mapping highlights specific steps required to:

- Strengthen professional skills within editorial teams;
- Provide technical and legal support;
- Encourage the use of new formats, and
- Improve audience engagement.

The findings of this research are particularly relevant for comprehensive and longer-term support to regional Kazakh-language media outlets, helping them refine their editorial strategies and strengthen sustainability.

All in all, the research demonstrates a significant opportunity to expand the capacity of regional media, produce quality content in Kazakh, and provide credible alternatives to external narratives. Integrating these findings into future support programmes will contribute to the professional and institutional development of independent media actors.

Recommendations

As Rapid Media Mapping was conducted over a short timeframe and closely aligned with the objectives of the *GLIMMER-2* programme, it cannot provide an exhaustive picture of the state of independent Kazakh-language media across all regions.

Nevertheless, the analysis offers valuable insights into current audience demand, the challenges faced by independent online outlets, and the systemic gaps in content production.

For instance, the content analysis demonstrated that Kazakh audiences increasingly consume media via social media platforms, particularly Instagram. This trend is also reflected in external research: according to the 2024 study conducted by the United Research Technologies Group (URTG) for Kursiv Media, some of the main social platforms used by the Kazakh-speaking audiences are Instagram, YouTube, and Telegram.⁴ This underlines the need for targeted training to equip journalists with the skills to create high-quality content tailored to specific social media platforms.

Over the past 18 months, one of the most frequently searched terms on Google in Kazakhstan was ChatGPT, reflecting the growing public interest in artificial intelligence tools. Yet both the content analysis and interviews revealed that the topic of technology, including AI, remains almost completely absent from Kazakh-language media. Journalists themselves highlighted the urgent need for training in this area. This suggests that targeted initiatives to support ethical use of AI in Kazakh reporting are timely and necessary.

Another key concern is the increasing reliance on Russia-based platforms for news, especially in areas where audiences seek coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war. This trend underscores the importance of strengthening Kazakh-language content as a credible and relevant alternative.

Building on these findings, the following priority areas are identified:

a) Address thematic imbalance in content development

Encourage regional media outlets to diversify coverage to include underrepresented but socially significant issues: human rights, environment and climate change, financial transparency and accountability, as well as gender equality. Embedding these issues into everyday reporting through relatable human-centred storytelling will engage wider audiences and spark public conversations. This can be further supported through dedicated training and grant opportunities for journalists covering these topics.

⁴ “Исследование аудитории потребителей медиаконтента на казахском языке” (Research on the audience of Kazakh-language media content consumers), <https://kz.kursiv.media/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/issledovanie-auditorii-potrebitelej-mediakontenta-na-kazahskom-yazyke.pdf>

b) Promote inclusive and locally relevant storytelling

Support the production of content that reflects the lived realities of underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, rural women, and young people. Enable local content creators to more effectively reflect regional contexts and day-to-day priorities.

c) Strengthen digital skills and innovation in content production

Deliver professional training on artificial intelligence, data journalism, and multimedia storytelling (e.g. infographics, podcasts, short-form video). Support the production and distribution of high-quality Kazakh-language content optimised for platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, TikTok and YouTube.

d) Provide institutional and financial support to independent outlets

Equip independent editorial teams with essential tools (cameras, audio recorders, editing software) and offer small grants to strengthen their financial sustainability. Enhance legal support and managerial capacity to ensure professional growth and long-term stability.

e) Foster networking and collaboration

Facilitate opportunities for regional media to exchange experience, undertake joint projects, and share best practices. Build partnerships with national and international independent media organisations to expand expertise and visibility.