


— 2019



NEW MEDIA - OLD PROBLEMS 2019

**Research on Digital
Media Situation**

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SUMMARY

The report *"New media – old problems"* presents findings of the research with journalists employed by digital media and is a follow-up to the 2018 survey that was the first survey in this area in Montenegro. The report summarizes the findings of two years of research and monitoring of the situation in online media and offers recommendations for improving and solving identified problems. The document in front of you is part of the project "Union to Union - Digital media organizing campaign 2019", which is traditionally implemented by the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM) with the support of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Swedish Union of Journalists. The main goal of the project is to strengthen the unions in the fight for better working conditions in digital media, while last year's research and this year's research represent a way for the representatives of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, as well as international and domestic public, to get acquainted with the situation in this field.

The research was conducted by **Bojana Lakovic Konatar** for the needs of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, using:

- Qualitative Documents Analysis (QDA), i.e. analysis of published studies in this field by other organizations, academies, NGOs, individual researchers, as well as analysis of legal and by-law solutions made by public institutions and media announcements;
- Survey with journalists employed by digital media in Montenegro. The survey involved 30 journalists from 16 media outlets, which is almost half of the estimated total number of journalists employed by portals;
- Qualitative interviews – a total of four interviews with representatives of the academic community, trade unions in the region and international organizations;
- Official statistics collected from available websites or other published sources.

The research showed that there were currently 61 electronic publications registered on the website of the Agency for Electronic Media (AEM), but 45 were media outlets. Fact that the method of registration and method of keeping in the register are the same for both media and websites of individual non-governmental organizations is problematic, which further complicates the record keeping.

The majority of employees in these media are female journalists, and most of them have a degree in completed studies. The research confirmed that employees of the digital media have 15 to 25 years of work experience, which is not surprising given the fact that they mainly work for some other type of media (radio and television) including a portal as well.

For the second year in a row, it has been confirmed that journalists in the digital media are mostly full-time employees, but this can also be explained by the fact that they are mostly employed by local public service broadcasters. The majority of respondents (63%) work as journalists, but a large number of employees perform several functions at the same time.

In addition, almost all employees are, sometimes or always, in charge of some extra work, while as many as 73.3% of them are not paid extra for that extra work.

The research finds that the workday of a journalist in digital media lasts the same as the workday of colleagues in other media (on an average eight hours). The TUMM has previously recognized this as a problem that we have tried to address in the negotiation of a new Branch Collective Agreement in the field of media, since the nature of work in digital media is much different than nature of work in other media. The TUMM proposed to employers in the media field to limit the working day to six hours for employees in portals, administrators and journalists who, in addition to journalistic work, perform technical tasks as well and to provide more frequent breaks for them in order to reduce the adverse health impact.

As many as 63% say they work overtime, and just over 13% of employees have the luxury of getting the job done during regular working hours. Yet, every other respondent never gets the compensation to which they are entitled for working overtime.

The situation is even worse when it comes to working during the holidays or on weekends, because almost 67% of respondents always work on weekends and holidays. Still, more than half of the employees get paid for that work.

According to the responses of journalists, their salaries are at the level of salaries of employees in other media. The largest number of respondents said that their salary amounted to 500-600 euros. This is also a significant difference in comparison to the data provided to us by editors and owners of this media last year, although last year a large number of private media (which also employs a large number of journalists) refused to answer the questions and participate in the research.

The majority of employees receive salary regularly (73%) and via a bank account (83%), but there are also those who receive part of their earnings "on hand", or illegally, which is a practice that must be stopped. Digital media journalists mostly work in newsrooms and half of respondents say they publish more than five texts a day.

The opinion of experts from Montenegro, as well as the region and the international community, is that the problems are common to all digital media, regardless of borders, but that some of the possible solutions are: education of employees and managers, better regulation of this field and union organizing of employees.

INTRODUCTION

There are currently 165 media outlets¹ operating on the polarized media scene in Montenegro, out of which 61 or 37% are electronic publications or portals. Of course, this is only the number of registered portals, since the number of active portals is much higher. Only this information shows the importance and influence of online media in creating public opinion in Montenegro. However, media pluralism still does not reflect the pluralism of opinion, since these media are also most often polarized in the same way as traditional ones.

Although they represent relatively young and new media, which offer many opportunities, digital media in Montenegro is almost a completely unutilized resource. Aside from the fact that legislators do not understand the nature of these media, owners and editors often do not cope in the online sphere, that is, they do not know how and for what purposes they can use the portals.

The global development of the media scene and contemporary trends, as well as the emergence of online media, have spread fear about the possible weakening of traditional media. This thesis has not been implemented in Montenegro either, which is especially evident in the fact that all print media are still published and that a significant number of

registered publications in Montenegro are actually online versions of print or electronic media.

Establishment of electronic publications - portals in Montenegro started relatively early, even in the late 1990s. However, these media did not have all the features of real portals, so 2000s are considered as the beginning of the digital era. Since then, until today, the number of online media has been increasing almost daily. This is confirmed by the fact that 21 new portals have been registered in Montenegro in 10 months. The fact that there are many media outlets that do not even respect this recommendation about registering on the website of the Agency for Electronic Media (AEM) but act in a completely unregulated environment still remains as a problem. However, thanks to these media, citizens at least have a greater choice of information in theory.

Working conditions in these media still remain a big problem. Since very few resources are needed to set up a portal, including its employees, it is often the case that the portal is run and edited by one person, with editorial staff consisting of one or two journalists. Many of these media do not even respect the basic working rights of employees. All of these are the reasons that have led us from the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro to conduct a research on the situation in this area for the second year in row in order to be able to call attention to problems and help solving them, especially through unionization of employees.

¹ 160 electronic media are currently listed on the Agency for Electronic Media's website: 24 AVM operators, 61 electronic publications, 35 commercial radio broadcasters, 14 commercial TV broadcasters, 14 local public radio broadcasters, 5 local public TV broadcasters, 2 non-profit radios and 5 media functioning within the Public Broadcasting Service - Radio Television of Montenegro. In addition to electronic ones, 4 daily newspapers and 1 weekly newspaper are published in Montenegro. Source: Agency for Electronic Media, Register: <http://oemcg.org/emiteri-operatori-i-publikacije/>

The regulation of freedom of expression, as a basic condition necessary for the normal functioning of the media, has not changed during 2019. This freedom is still prescribed by the Constitution of Montenegro, as well as by a set of currently amending media laws. Namely, in the first half of 2018 process of amending the Media Law and the Law on the National Public Broadcaster of Radio-Television of Montenegro was initiated, and process of amending the Electronic Media Law started this year. All these changes have not yet got their official outlines since all these laws are still in draft form. The process of amending the media laws was, first of all, initiated due to the obsolescence of certain legal solutions, since some of them date back to 2006. However, according to the existing drafts, the opportunity to regulate the existence of digital media, i.e. online media or portals was not taken.

According to the legal solutions that are still in force, the functioning of the online media - portals in the Montenegrin legislation is regulated by the Electronic Media Law. The common name of this kind of media recognized by the Law is "electronic publication"². Currently, pursuant to Article 8 of the Electronic Media Law and Article 4 of the Rulebook on Electronic Publications³, this name includes portals as independent media, as well as portals as forms of print or electronic media.

"Electronic publications are editorially designed websites and/or portals that contain electronic versions of print media and/or media informati-

on in a manner accessible to the general public, regardless of their scope."⁴

The Rulebook specifies that electronic publications, i.e. websites and/or portals, contain programmatic content with the transmission of sound or image records, in a manner that is accessible to the public. In addition to what portals are, Article 5 of the Rulebook on Electronic Publications prescribes and specifies what electronic publications cannot be. Thus, electronic publications are not considered to be "newsletters, catalogs and other publications intended solely for advertising, business communications, educational process or internal work of legal persons, religious, non-governmental and other organizations, school newsletters, 'Official Gazette of Montenegro', official newsletter of the local self-government and other official newsletters, as well as posters, leaflets, prospects, banners and video pages with or without moving picture"⁵.

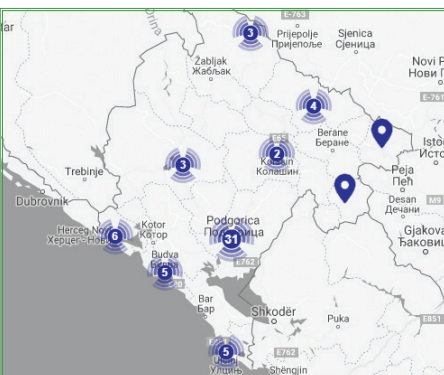
The draft laws on media and on electronic media do not envisage any additional obligations, nor explain these media in more detail. Namely, Article 44 of the Draft Law on Audiovisual Media Services (hereinafter referred to as: the Electronic Media Law) provides that the Agency for Audiovisual Media Services (i.e. AEM) shall adopt general and individual acts "regulating more closely the rights and obligations of the AVM services providers and electronic publications in accordance with this Law and regulations issued pursuant to this Law."⁶

² Law Amending the Electronic Media Law, Article 8
³ Council of the Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro, Rulebook on Electronic Publications, (Podgorica: Agency for Electronic Media, 2016)

⁴ Law Amending the Electronic Media Law, Article 8
⁵ Council of the Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro, Rulebook on Electronic Publications, (Podgorica: Agency for Electronic Media, 2016),
⁶ Draft Law on Audiovisual Media Services, Article 44

Apart from not knowing when the new solutions will come into force, we do not know in what way the regulator will act and what obligations and rights will be prescribed to electronic publications, i.e. online portals. Clearly, the existing solutions do not fulfill their purpose, at least not completely. Namely, on the website of the Agency for Electronic Media, it is possible to see which electronic publications are registered in Montenegro. Thus, a total of 40 publications were registered from the beginning of 2016 to the end of 2018, while additional 21 such publications were registered during 10 months of 2019, thus 61 were registered in total.

Picture 1. Screenshot of the AEM website and electronic publications registry



However, despite the recommendation that electronic publications be registered on the Agency for Electronic Media's website⁷, a simple search on the Internet will show that there is a large number of news media that have not yet been registered. This was also noticed by the regulator, who announced on its website that a number of electronic publications was not recorded in the electronic publications register "and that they did not provide easy, direct and permanent access to data that enable identi-

fication of the service provider"⁸. That is why they invited these media to register and update the data in accordance with the Law.

"If they do not make a supplement of the identification information, the Agency will initiate proceedings for establishing misdemeanor liability for violation of Article 46 of the Law and imposing a fine (in accordance with Article 146 of the Law)."⁹

This article defines that a legal person shall be fined from 500 to 6,000 euros if it "does not allow the service user to access the information about the name of the AVM service provider, the address of the headquarters or residence, the e-mail address or the website of the AVM service provider or the competent authority of the AVM service provider or the competent regulatory authority (Article 46, paragraph 2)."¹⁰ In addition, it is specified that the responsible person in the legal entity and the natural person will also be fined for the same offense, with a fine amounting to 100 to 2,000 euros.

The problem is also that there is a large number of publications registered on this site that do not represent news media but only online editions of print media or web presentations of certain non-governmental organizations. All this makes it difficult to keep any record of online news media, but it also does not allow the imposition of any obligations that are common to all of them.

Out of the total of 61 registered electronic publications, 45 are online news media, 4 are electronic or online version of print media, while 12 are NGOs' websites.

⁷ Agency for Electronic Media, Register of Electronic Publications, URL: http://aemcg.org/emiteri-operatori-i-publications/?title&select-emiter_category%5B0%5D=electronicpublications&selectemiter_category%5B0%5D=electronicpublications, accessed on 20/10/2019

⁸ Agency for Electronic Media, AEM Invites Electronic Publications to Harmonize their work with Electronic Media Law, URL: <http://aemcg.org/obavjestjenja/aem-uputita-poziv-elektronskim-publikacijama-da-usaglase-rad-so-zakonom-o-elektronskim-medijima/>, accessed on 20/10/2019

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Electronic Media Law, Article 146

The AEM registry provides insight into information such as the name of the “service”, the founder, date of issue and type of service, as well as the platform on which it is broadcasted, language, TIN. Regarding information on management structures, registered electronic publications also provide information on the director, responsible person, but also provide the address and contact information of the publication. Some media outlets even provide links that lead to a page where users can register to individual portals. There is the highest degree of disagreement in the commenting rules. Namely, only fifteen registered portals have defined rules for users when it comes to commenting, while some of them offer a link that leads to a blank page.

Picture 2 – Screenshot of the “Commenting Rules” page of one of the registered portals

Ooops... Error 404

Sorry, but the page you are looking for doesn't exist.

You can go to the [HOMEPAGE](#)

While legislators and media professionals do not see the potential and problems in the field of online media, some international organizations go a step further and provide guidance for the implementation of the Code of Ethics for Journalists in these media. Thus, with the assistance of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, in early March 2019, Guidelines for applying section 2.8 of Montenegrin Journalists’ Code of Ethics were presented, which “elaborate rules, ethical standards and guidelines on how to moderate readers’ comments on internet portals”¹¹. The document itself¹² was created

as a product of the work of the Technical Working Group on Self-Regulation, which consisted of representatives of the Media Council for Self-Regulation, as well as Ombudsmen of Dan, Vijesti and Monitor. The section 2.8 of the Code of Ethics recommends to the online media to define internal rules regarding third party commenting.

“These rules should aim to avoid unlawful and unethical content, with full respect for freedom of expression. Commenters must be aware of this policy. Comments on portals are moderated by the administrator, according to the defined rules.”¹³

Bearing in mind this guideline, the question is how many registered portals are able to apply it, since many of them do not have defined rules.

The document specifies that the rules it contains should allow for “coherent, argumentative and entertaining discussion that respects the dignity of all participants and contributes to the discussion on the topic introduced by the text.”¹⁴ The Guidelines, among other things, provide ban on hate speech, abusive speech and cursing and vulgar expressions in the comments. In addition, there should be no violation of privacy or advertising in the comments. The Guidelines also define the types of moderation, but also prescribe procedures for registration, automatic filtering, as well as sanctions for violations of prescribed standards. Although these are non-binding recommendations and guidelines, the document is still one of the first attempts to bring order among electronic publications, especially in the commentary segment, which is often the most problematic part.

¹¹ OSCE, OSCE’s Guidelines to moderating readers’ comments on internet portals presented in Podgorica <https://www.osce.org/me/mission-to-montenegro/413105>, accessed on 15 Oct 2019

¹² Guidelines for applying section 2.8 of Montenegrin journalists’ Code of Ethics, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Podgorica: OSCE, 2019), URL: <https://www.osce.org/me/mission-to-montenegro/413048?download=true>, accessed on 15 Oct 2019

¹³ Montenegrin Journalists’ Code of Ethics of, Section 2.8.

¹⁴ Guidelines for applying section 2.8 of Montenegrin Journalists’ Code of Ethics, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Podgorica: OSCE, 2019), URL: <https://www.osce.org/me/mission-to-montenegro/413048?download=true>, accessed on October 15, 2019, p.5

RESEARCH ON THE SITUATION IN DIGITAL MEDIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYEES

For the second year now, the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro has been conducting a research on the state of affairs in digital media, which aims to discover how portals work and what are the problems specific to those media. Although last year's research provided insight into this issue, this year we went one step further and instead editors and owners, as we did last year, we asked journalists employed by these media outlets to evaluate their position.

Last year's research on the state of the digital media¹⁵ showed that 92 employees worked in 15 portals, most of whom were journalists. Our data showed that actually around 70 journalists worked in the portals in Montenegro, which was the basis for this year's research. Only 31.5% of employees in these "new" media were younger than 35 years. The responses we received last year from editors and media owners indicated that a total of 83 employees, or 90%, had employment contract. When it comes to the type of contract, most of employees had contracts on indefinite period of time (74 employees), while about 10% had fix-term contracts. In addition, around 10%, or 9 part-time associates were hired in about 15 digital media.

The Digital Media Situation Survey 2018 found that average salary at digital media level, from the perspective of owners and editors of those media, amounted to 362 euros. The salaries of the journalists employed by the portals are slightly higher than

the salaries of other employees in these media, so journalists on average earn about 370 euros a month. However, when compared to salaries in other media, as well as to average salaries at the national level (which last year amounted to 510 euros), it is clear that the employees in these media are in a worse economic position. What undoubtedly influenced this data is the fact that a large number of private media refused to participate in the research and provide data on the amount of salary in these media.

Part of last year's research was related to the manner in which these media are regulated, but also to the problems that employees faced. Therefore, our research showed that only six portals had some rules of procedure. Lack of human resources, poor technical capacity and lack of finances, as well as economic pressures, proved to be the biggest problems faced by portals.

¹⁵ *New Media - Old Problems, Report on Digital Media Situation in Montenegro, Bojana Lakovic Konatar (Podgorica: Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, 2018)*

POSITION OF JOURNALISTS EMPLOYED BY PORTALS

Starting from the fact that there are 70 journalists working in digital - online media, this year's research focused on examining their experience of the situation in online media. The survey involved 30 journalists from 16 media outlets, which is almost half of the estimated total number of journalists employed by the portals.

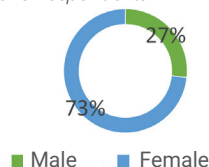
Table 1. Sample

Media outlet	No of respondent
Portal Analitika	1
Portal Antena M	2
Portal CDM	1
Portal Vijesti	1
Portal Fos media	2
Portal LJE Radio Berane	2
Portal LJE RTV Herceg Novi	4
Portal LJE RTV Pljevlja	1
Portal LJE Radio Tivat	3
Portal LJE RTV Rožaje	3
Portal LJE Radio Kotor	2
Portal LJE RTV Budva	1
Portal LJE RTV Ulcinj	1
Portal LJE RTV Cetinje	2
Portal RTCG	3
PV Portal	1

The research was conducted using the survey method, and the survey was conducted in person or electronically. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions, covering several areas: economic and social status, rights and obligations of journalists, as well as their professional position in the newsroom.

73% of women and about 27% of men participated in the TUMM's survey, which actually shows that a greater number of female journalists is employed in these media, as it is the case with other types of media.

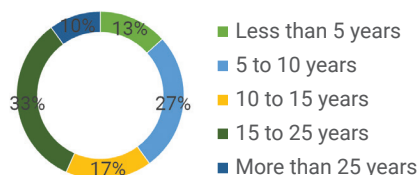
Chart 1. Gender of respondents



The research has shown that mostly journalists with a university degree work in these media - as many as 70% of them have a college degree. An equal number of employed journalists (13%) have completed high school and master's degrees. While a small number of employees graduated from college, there were no respondents who completed doctoral studies.

When it comes to the work experience of employees, the largest number of interviewed journalists work from 15 to 25 years, which also confirms the data from last year's survey saying that a small number of employees in the online media was under 35 years. Employed with 5 to 10 years of experience (27%) occupy the second position. The smallest number of respondents have over 25 years of experience (10%).

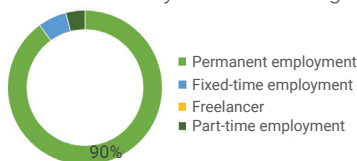
Chart 2. How much work experience do you have?



Regardless of length of service, half of the respondents said that they had worked for 1 to 3 newsrooms so far. The survey also showed that a third of respondents worked for only one newsroom, while only 10% of them worked for more than five media outlets.

This year's survey once again confirmed that the majority of digital media employees are full-time employees, with as many as 90% of them. According to the respondents' answers, there are no freelancers in the digital media, and there are very few part-time journalists. We can understand all this information if we also bear in mind the fact that the largest number of journalists interviewed is employed by local broadcasters who still have more stable positions than their colleagues in the private media.

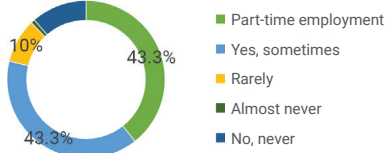
Chart 3. What is your current working status?



The majority of respondents work as journalists in the newsroom (63%), while slightly more than 23% occupies the editor's position. However, the interviewed journalists told us that most of them perform multiple functions (primarily the function of journalists and editors).

Almost all recruited journalists are in charge, sometimes or always, of some additional tasks (e.g. recording, editing, etc). Specifically, 43% of respondents said that they always did these extra jobs, and the same number of them performed these jobs sometimes. Only 10% of their colleagues are fortunate enough to rarely do extra work.

Chart 4. In addition to the primary job, are you in charge of any additional tasks (e.g. photography, recording, editing...)?

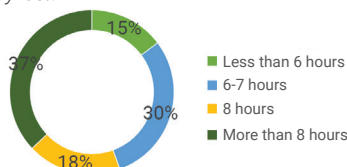


The fact that they are hired additionally does not pose the biggest problem for employed journalists. Namely, as many as 73.3% of them is not paid for this extra work. Only 10% of them are paid for this extra work.

extra work, while 16.7% get paid sometimes.

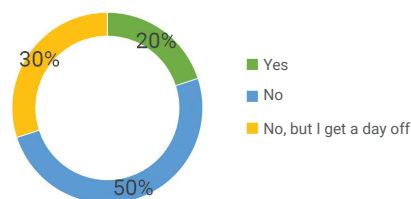
The working day of journalists employed by digital media portals on average lasts eight hours, just as it lasts for employees in other media. This shows once again the misunderstanding of the nature of the job in portals by owners and editors, as well as legislators. The Trade Union of Media of Montenegro tried to improve the position of employees in the portals through negotiations on a new branch collective agreement in the field of media, prescribing that the working hours of employees last up to 6 hours, with more frequent breaks¹⁶, given the nature of work in this type of media. Unfortunately, there was no understanding for these solutions.

Chart 5. On average, how long does your working day last?



We also asked journalists if they were working overtime. As many as 63% of respondents sometimes work overtime, while just over 23% of them work overtime almost daily. Just over 13% of respondents have the luxury of rarely working overtime. However, every second respondent is never compensated for overtime, and every fifth respondent is paid for that work. Instead of money, as required by law, 30% of them get a day off.

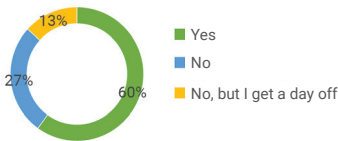
Chart 6. Are you paid for overtime work?



¹⁶ Analysis of the Position of Local Public Broadcasters and Journalists in Media Laws of Montenegro, Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, available at: <http://safejournalists.net/me/resources/page/2/>

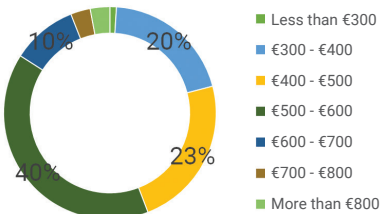
The situation is much more difficult when it comes to working on weekends or during the holidays. Namely, almost 67% of respondents almost always work on weekends and during the holidays. This information is not surprising given the fact that there are a small number of journalists working in this medium and that it is necessary to publish texts almost throughout the day, and of course on weekends. Every third employed journalist works sometimes on weekends and during the holidays, and the number of those who rarely work during those days is negligible. Fortunately, more than half of employees or 60% of them get paid to work on the weekends or during the holidays. Less than 27% of respondents do not get money, and 13% of respondents get a day off instead.

Chart 7. Are you paid for work on the weekends or during the holidays?



We also asked the interviewed journalists about the amount of their salaries. According to the survey data, digital media employees earn salaries at the level of employees in other media. However, the data differs from the data provided to us by editors and media owners last year, which is not surprising given the fact that most local media participated in the survey last year, with salaries much lower than in private media. About 40% of respondents earn from 500 to 600 euros net, while about 23% of their colleagues receive from 400 to 500 euros. Every fifth respondent receives between 300 and 400 euros a month.

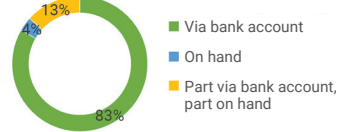
Chart 8. In which of the following categories would you place your net salary?



Half of the respondents reported that their earnings had increased in the last three years, while earnings of 10% of respondents were reduced during that period. As many as 40% of respondents revealed that their earnings had not changed in the last three years. Slightly more than 73% of respondents receive their salaries on a regular basis, and 27% said that the payment is sometimes late.

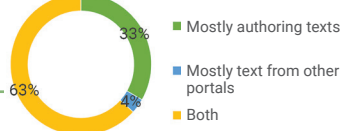
We asked the respondents how they get paid, and according to their answers, they receive most of their earnings via bank account (83%). The number of employed journalists who receive part of their earnings via their accounts and part "on hand" (13%) is not negligible.

Chart 9. How do you get paid?



Digital media journalists mostly work from the office/newsroom (57%). However, they are often forced to work from home as well. As many as 43% of respondents said they worked both from the office and from home. We also asked the interviewees how much texts they published on a daily basis on average, so that we could get an idea of the volume of work. Half of the respondents told us they published up to five texts a day, and that mainly applied to employees of local public service broadcasters, who, apart from that medium, also work for radio and/or television. Around 13% of them publish five to ten texts a day, and even every third one publishes ten, twenty or more texts a day. According to the respondents' answers, online media journalists rarely publish exclusively texts from other portals. Every third respondent said that they published mostly authored texts, while 63% said that they also publish copyrighted texts and texts from other portals.

Chart 10. Do you mainly publish authoring texts or share texts from other portals?



ONLINE MEDIA IN MONTENEGRO AND REGION

Although online media is a relative novelty in Montenegro, there are some common characteristics between them and media from other countries. Teaching Associate at the Faculty of Political Science, **Dragana Zaric** believes that digital media in Montenegro must define its own identity. She explains that one option is to belong to a group that does not take into account professional standards and content quality, and the other is to belong to a smaller group of professionals. The problem, she believes, is that less professional media is much more interesting to advertisers.

"It's a complex cause-effect relationship: if you write more thoroughly (which often means slower, which is interpreted as a disadvantage in the digital media world), with a high level of analytics and balance, chances that fewer people will read/visit you are high. If you are publishing "sensations" or adapting to the beliefs and tastes of a mass audience, then you are more read/visited and make more money. One should not be mistaken that it is possible to cut this knot at once and solve all problems. But we can say that one of the solutions is knowledge. By that, I also mean the knowledge of those who create media content, and the knowledge of those who receive (read, listen, watch) that content."¹⁷

Zaric points out that the employees of portals in their work face daily with the dilemmas arising from technological changes. Knowledge of digital tools is necessary, but not at all easy, as this field is constantly changing. She adds that employees face many different pressures: "you have to keep

up with the technology, you have to work fast, you have to keep up with the competition..."

"I think every good editorial must answer the question - is it worth sacrificing quality and where is the limit? Good editorials will also involve their employees in training - digital skills development, copyright knowledge, handling photo and video content in an ethical manner, checking sources in new media, etc."¹⁸

According to her opinion, the common problem of a large number of portals in Montenegro is the high percentage of pseudo-consciousness as well as downloaded content. In a similar fashion to other media, Zaric points out that portals publish a huge number of press releases daily delivered by PR services of institutions or private public relations agencies, and the percentage of their own content is pretty low. However, she states that journalists are not obliged to publish any announcement they receive via e-mail address, but that they are required to raise issues of public interest.

"The lack of stories is best seen in the morning, when most portals in Montenegro publish texts from the press. The situation is similar on weekends - on-duty journalists or administrators "fill" the space by downloading a large number of agency news, "interestingness" from the world, or, due to the lack of local events they turn to the so-called "easy" topics. This is, among other things, due to economic reasons - editorial boards do not have enough money to send their employees to the field where authentic news stories are created."¹⁹

¹⁷ Interview, Dragana Zaric, interviewed by Bojana Laskovic Konatar, October 20, 2019.

¹⁸ Ibid.
¹⁹ Ibid.

Zaric reminds that in 2020 the Agency for Electronic Media (AEM) plans to amend the Rulebook on the operation of electronic media and to specify what percentage of its own production is a condition for registration of the media, and what is considered to be its own production. She shares the opinion that the Agency has dealt a little with portals (registered as “electronic publications”) so far and more with electronic media. However, she concludes that there should be rules for portals as well, and their monitoring should be done.

According to **Darko Duridanski** from the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers of the North Macedonia (SSNM), the situation in the Macedonian digital media is very difficult, for several reasons. He stated that neither labor rights nor copyrights, nor the Journalist Code and professional standards are respected.

“There are hundreds of online media outlets, but only a small number can be counted as professional media outlets that have their own editorial offices and employed journalists. Many websites do not even have their own production, but they are “copy/paste” sites that download content from others. This is how murmur occurs and readers don’t simply know whom to trust and that is a big problem, which is why professional media is losing the audience.”²⁰

Duridanski points out that, in the North Macedonia, it is rare for an online media to respect employees’ labor rights, so precarity, i.e. precarious jobs, low salaries, overtime unpaid work and non-compliance with the right to break are just some of the problems that employees face. However, the main problem, in his view, is that unionization of digital media employees is at a low level, because it is difficult to motivate them to join a union.

“They do not find it useful. Digital media is usually small, with fewer than 10 employees, and usually made up of a director and editor-in-chief, who themselves have the same problem as employees. The Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers of the North Macedonia faces a great challenge to find creative, new and effective ways to motivate these workers to see their benefits and to organize trade unions”²¹

Colleagues in Serbia have similar problems. According to the president of the Union of Journalists of Serbia (SINOS), **Dragana Cabarkapa**, there are about 600 web portals in Serbia, 530 of which are independent media while others are owned by other media. SINOS data shows that one third of the independent media is not actually active.

“Portals are a black or gray hole when it comes to the media in Serbia. Salaries are the lowest, they go up to 200 euros, which is below the average and below the minimum. Only the owner and two or three other journalists work in the portals. These are very difficult working conditions: the work of people is generally undeclared, they have occasional or temporary employment contracts somewhere, working hours are undefined and are usually longer than those prescribed by law. They work on weekends, as well. In general, the position of journalists employed in Internet media is more difficult than in other media in Serbia.”²²

According to the opinion of Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation of Journalists **Jeremy Dear**, the solution to all these problems is in unionizing employees. Dear points out that the fact that some of the best online journalism work in the world has been created online speaks to the fact

²⁰ Interview, Darko Duridanski, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic Konatar, October 08, 2019.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview, Dragana Cabarkapa, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic Konatar, October 08, 2019.

that these media offer many opportunities. However, they also bring challenges such as precarious working conditions, insecurity and poor contracts. Often, employees are paid very poorly, they have to do a lot more work and have more skills and fewer resources at the same time to do the job.

“The work in digital media should be appreciated. Digital media can be an exciting work environment, but they will not become that if we allow employers to use them for their personal gain only. That is why digital media journalists here and around the world are joining unions and organizing, because they want an exciting work environment as well as fair and just conditions. They want contracts, decent work and being paid fairly for their work, but they also want the opportunity to have a family life and to have a decent life.”²³

Worldwide, from Australia, across the United States to Europe, young digital workers, he says, are organizing and joining the unions. He adds that this is a very positive message, because unions can play a positive role in making digital media a better place to work.

²³ Interview, Jeremy Dear, interviewed by Bojana Laskovic Konatar, October 08, 2019

RECOMMENDATIONS

Two-year intensive monitoring of the situation in digital media in Montenegro has shown that there are some common characteristics of all online media, especially when it comes to respecting labor rights and professional standards. The positive thing is that a large part of the problems could be solved with relatively little effort by both regulators and representatives of the media community.

The Trade Union of Media of Montenegro has, after a two-year analysis, prepared a set of recommendations that could improve the position of employees and the digital media themselves:

- Online media should be registered on the website of the Agency for Electronic Media and regularly update information concerning their media. Although there are no sanctions for non-registering media, the media should recognize their interest in registering, thus providing the monitoring of changes in this relatively new media sphere;
- When registering on the web site of the Agency for Electronic Media, online media should provide correct information but also links to pages concerning the rules of commenting and manner of registering on their web sites. The media should have adopted commentary rules, given that there are specific self-regulatory guidelines that can serve as an example;
- Portals should have internal rules regarding the functioning of these media. This especially refers to the media which consists of several types of media, for example, radio and television and a portal, because their employees are particularly overloaded;
- Online media should publish imprint on their web sites, which will provide information on the editorial structure and journalists employed by those media. Although there is no legal obligation, online media should adopt the practice of print media and thus demonstrate an additional level of transparency and responsibility;
- The Agency for Electronic Media should, in its register, divide news media from other electronic publications, especially from web sites of non-governmental organizations. Although the register currently provides some information on the situation in digital media, having a separate media register would greatly facilitate the monitoring of the situation in this area;
- Online media should respect the laws, especially those governing working hours and work during the holidays, thus providing employees with decent working conditions and adequate working hours;
- Digital media employees should consider, as a way to improve their position, the possibility of organizing and joining trade unions to a greater extent than it is currently the case.

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