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NEW MEDIA-OLD PROBLEMS 2021



Report about the state in
Montenegrin online portals
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	4
Introduction	6
Digital media in Montenegro during 2021	7
Information portals in the era of the digital economy	10
Experiences of freelance journalists in Montenegro	14
School of Digital Unionism	17
Conclusions and recommendations	21
Bibliography	22



SUMMARY

The report “**New Media-Old Problems 2021**” is the fourth survey on the position of digital media in Montenegro. These are the findings of research on the impact of the digital economy and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of online portals and employees in these media in Montenegro. The report provides an overview of the situation over four years and offers an overview of some of the new challenges that this part of the media scene is facing.

The report in front of you is a continuation of the work of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro on improving the position of digital media by strengthening the position of employees. The research is part of the project “Union to Union - Recruitment and Organizing campaign in CEE 2021”, which is traditionally conducted by the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro with the support of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Union to Union and the Union of Journalists of Sweden. The main goal of the project is to strengthen unions in the fight for better working conditions in digital media and to discover the impact that changes and the digital economy have on these media.

The research was conducted for the needs of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (SMCG) by **Bojana Laković-Konatar**, using:

- Analysis of Qualitative Documents Analysis (QDA), i.e. analysis of published studies in this field made by other organizations, academies, NGOs, individual researchers, but also analysis of laws and bylaws made by public institutions, as well as media publication;
- Qualitative interviews - five of them with representatives of trade unions, media, civil society and journalists;
- Official statistics - collected from available websites or other available sources.

A special part of the research, prepared by **Dragana Zaric**, refers to the first School of Digital Trade Unionism in Montenegro, which was conducted by the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro in 2021.

This year’s survey, unfortunately, did not show any positive developments when it comes to the online sector of the media community. The process of regulating and recording online media portals is still left to chance, so the existing register contains websites that cannot be considered media in the true sense of the word. Employees in these media continue to work in equally poor conditions, precarious work is still present, wages are still below average, pressures are obvious, and

overtime and unpaid work are almost constant. Digital media in Montenegro also gather the largest number of freelancers, who are forced to work for more than one media in order to provide themselves with a decent income. The freelance journalistic community in Montenegro is currently strong, with a large number of mostly young people gaining experience in the media in this way. However, the legal regulations are still not favorable to them and are mentioned in only one law. Insufficient regulation leads freelancers, but also other employees in digital media, to an even worse position, leaving employers a large space for free interpretation of rights and obligations towards employees. The research of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro showed that it is not possible to obtain precise data on the financial operations of all registered portals, but that the available data show that some of these media ended 2020 positively.

INTRODUCTION

Digital media in Montenegro has experienced the biggest expansion in the year ahead. As many as 60 new portals have been established in the last four years, and there are currently almost 200¹ registered media operating in the small Montenegrin market, with a significant number of media (mostly portals) still unregistered. The establishment of digital media was accompanied by three important events in Montenegro that largely reflected on the work of the media: the Covid-19 virus pandemic, parliamentary elections and the heated atmosphere in society, as well as mass protests and gatherings. All this has affected the narrowing of media freedom, precarious working conditions and fears for the personal safety of media employees.

Even almost two decades since the establishment of the first news portal in Montenegro, it has not been enough for media and state owners to establish a minimum framework for their functioning. Employees in these media continue to work in very poor conditions, with wages below average, overtime, precarious work or without a contract, and under pressure. Portals are generally understood as “additional media”, which are connected to the already existing printed or electronic media

from which they draw content. On the other hand, although the Law on Media was adopted in 2020, it still does not provide minimum standards for the functioning of digital media, especially with regard to penalties for those media that do not register.

The digital economy has influenced the media scene around the world, the changes are obvious both in the business models and in the content that the media place. These changes are probably most obvious in digital media, which, given that they are the youngest, also suffer the biggest changes. The digital economy has influenced the media to fight to stay in the market, while at the same time creating innovative content that will attract readers. At the same time, it led employees to work in changed circumstances, often fearing for their jobs.

The research “New Media - Old Problems 2021” is the fourth research of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, which tries to give an overview of the situation in the digital media community in our country. It consists of statistics, interviews with experts and representatives of the media community, as well as employees and freelancers from digital media.

¹ Data from the Agency for Electronic Media show that in November 2021, 103 electronic media operated in Montenegro. From the print media, four daily newspapers and one weekly are published on the territory of Montenegro. According to the data from March this year, 104 portals have been entered in the register of the Ministry of Public Administration, digital society and media.

DIGITAL MEDIA IN MONTENEGRO DURING 2021

The media scene in Montenegro has undergone major changes in recent years. However, the biggest changes were in the sphere of digital/electronic/internet publications or portals. In addition to the names of these media, their number is also changing, so from 2016 to 2021 there was a huge increase in the number of portals. In just four years since we conducted this research, the number of portals in Montenegro, registered with the competent authorities, has increased from 40 to 104. The biggest changes have been recorded in the last two years. Portals make up 50% of the total number of media in Montenegro, which gives us perspective about the impact they have on informing and creating public opinion. However, one gets the impression that the opportunity to regulate this area was missed. Especially having in mind the fact that a huge number of registered portals do not deal with information, but are different sites of non-governmental and other organizations.

The area of online publications or portals is regulated by the Law on Media of Montenegro, which, even after two years of work on changes, still does not regulate this area in the right way. The latest changes, adopted just before the 2020 elections, have led to some formal changes, so the Ministry of Public Administration, Digital Society and Media is now in charge of this area. The cu-

rrent law defines what online publications are and stipulates the obligation to register these media.

„An online publication is a medium whose content is disseminated via the Internet, and which cannot be considered an audiovisual media service under the law governing the field of audiovisual media services.“²

In addition to the entry in the records of the media, which is kept by the Ministry, special attention of the legislator was paid to publishing the Impressum of these media, as well as regulating comments on internet portals. However, the main novelty brought by the Law is the possibility of online publications to apply for part of the money from the Fund for Encouraging Pluralism and Diversity of the Media. Namely, the state has committed to allocate the amount of at least 0.09% of the current budget to the Fund.

“The distribution of funds referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article shall be performed by:

- 1) Board of Regulators for Audiovisual Media Services, 60% of funds, which are directed to the sub-fund for commercial and non-profit media; and**
- 2) An independent commission formed by**

² Law on media, Article 26

the Ministry, 40% of the funds, which are directed to the sub-fund for daily and weekly print media and online publications.”³

The problems we have registered in almost every research so far are still not regulated by law. This applies in particular to the registration of the portals, since in the Law on Media there are no penalties for the founders of the portal if they do not register them. The Ministry's records still contain a large number of online publications that cannot be considered media in the true sense of the word, given that they deal with culture, “fact checking” of media products or are simply websites of certain non-governmental organizations or companies. Although harmless at first glance, this problem may have some consequences for the work of the media, given that these publications can also apply for money from the Fund. But that is not the only problem. From a union point of view, portals are probably one of the most insecure places for media workers to work. A large number of employees in these media work illegally, given that they do not have employment contracts and are not insured. Also, the working day of employees in portals lasts longer on average, employees work on weekends, the pressure on them is higher (especially due to the speed of publishing information), while salaries are at a very low level and below average.

For many years, the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro has been trying to obtain as comprehensive data on the media scene as possible, especially in the field of digital media, in order to influence changes and improve the position of employees. Precisely for this reason, this year an analysis of the media business in Montenegro was conducted, which showed major problems

in the functioning of these media. According to the Vice President of the SMCG and the author of the analysis of the financial operations of the media, Radomir Krackovic, it is impossible to accurately calculate the value of the digital media sector or portal in Montenegro. As he explained, some of the most influential portals operate within dailies such as Vijesti, Pobjeda, Dan and Dnevne novine. Also, within the national public service, there is a portal of Radio Television of Montenegro, and the largest private information radio station, Antena M, and well as several others radio stations, have the portals. Thus, data on the operations of these portals can be found in the financial reports of the media under whose auspices they were created. In addition, of the other 73 portals that existed during 2020, data are available for 49 of them.

“Data are not available for the remaining 24 media, for several reasons. Namely, some portals were founded by companies engaged in other activities (eg. computer programming as the founders of the Mondo and Onogošt portals or winter tourism as the founder of the Aktuelno portal), which generate most of the revenue, so the media come as an additional activity. Many portals have been established by NGOs that do not have an explicit legal obligation to report financial statements to the Revenue and Customs Administration.”⁴

According to Krackovic, some portals were founded by natural persons, so no data can be found on the financial operations of the news portal of the Revenue and Customs Administration because they reported their unique identification numbers as a tax identification number.

3 Law on media, Article 18

4 Interview, Radomir Krackovic, November 2021, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic-Konatar

„ Taking all this into account, it is impossible to accurately calculate the financial value of the digital media sector or portals in Montenegro, and the closest possible data show that 48 out of 73 portals in 2020 had a total profit of just over 45 thousand euros, with total revenues of one million and 479 thousand euros and expenses of close to one million and 434 thousand and 71 employees were registered in them. Almost half of the portals or even 24 did not report full-time employees or stated that there were zero of them, which indicates that there is undeclared work in this sector.”⁵

All these problems led the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro to propose changes to legal solutions, as well as to participate in the work of working groups that will change the existing legal solutions and write the first media strategy in Montenegro.

Krackovic adds that out of 49 portals, for which there is data, only 14 operated positively, but nine were also at zero, while 25 operated with a minus. “Nearly half or 23 are in the positive or at positive zero, and a little over half or 25 had a loss.”⁶

The data obtained by Krackovic indicate that the largest profit among Montenegrin portals in 2020 was made by the CDM portal, more than 84 thousand euros and that 10 people worked in that portal. Portal Analitika had the most registered employees, 14, and recorded a profit of five and a half thousand euros. The biggest loss was in the FOS media portal, which also has 16 portals registered in different cities. These 17 portals ended the year in a deficit of close to 86 thousand euros. According to Krackovic, no full-time employees were reported in the financial report for all these 17 media. The IN4S portal also operated with a loss of over 26 thousand euros, and one full-time employee was registered in it.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

INFORMATION PORTALS IN THE ERA OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Changes related to jobs and working conditions in the media have been almost constant over the last decades. The introduction of the Internet has contributed to the improvement of the work of the media, brought the media closer to the citizens, and in many cases made it easier for journalists to access information. However, the most significant changes have been occurring since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The previous way of working of the media, which referred to work in newsrooms, daily and weekly meetings of journalists and editors, meetings with sources of information, was replaced by the online sphere. Employers, on the one hand, had to find sustainable ways to work, which would enable the media to work smoothly, while journalists, on the other hand, were forced to cope with the changed circumstances while doing the same job. Our research during 2020 showed that both were unprepared for all the innovations brought by the pandemic and changed working conditions, but it seems that over time the situation has changed in favor of employers.

When it comes to the media business, traditional business models based solely on advertising are almost completely outdated. This primarily happened with the introduction of the digital economy, which implies the availability of content via social networks and the ability to follow the media "on-demand". Also, according to media representatives in Montenegro, the Covid 19 pandemic

affected the marketing cake by 30%⁷. The coronavirus has led to a paradoxical situation, data from the European Federation of Journalists show.

„Consumption of news has increased but a number of conclusions since March 2020 have caused a dramatic decline in sales and advertising revenue, across Europe, especially in the print media. In these conditions, not only journalism be constantly improved, but it must also be financially sustainable.“⁸

The digital economy and digital jobs are, to a certain extent, a novelty for all countries of the world and representatives of all professions. The ability to work from home, at any time, using virtually any available technical aid (telephone, computer, laptop) made it easier for employees to work. Journalists who do not have standard working hours anyway, in principle, can better organize their working day, organize online conversations and meetings with interlocutors in the comfort of

7 Jankovic, Srdjan, *Oglašivači se povlače, crnogorski mediji pred recesijom, (Advertisers are retreating, Montenegrin media facing recession)*, *SlobodnaEvropa.org*, April 2020, URL: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/mediji-crna-gora-pandemija-korona-virus-kriza/30568307/html>, Accessed November 2021.

8 *European Federation of Journalists, Sustainable innovative journalism and new business models*, page 5, URL: https://europeanjournalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/EFJ-INNO-VAT2021-WEB_pages.pdf, Accessed November 2021.

home, present their ideas... However, the question of private life, unlimited availability of journalists and other media workers is also raised, and last but not least, the question is who bears the costs of all those additional working hours and resources spent.

The coronavirus appeared at the beginning of 2020, and already in March, Montenegro was "closed", so employers also enabled employees to work from home. Such a decision was based on the need to fight the virus, and it meant a complete change in the current way of working and functioning of the media community. Although triggered by a pandemic, this change is just one of the novelties brought by the digital economy. According to journalist and fintech analyst **Ana Nives Radovic**, we need to understand that „any working principles that apply now may not apply in the very near future.“⁹

„Many industries will be built that will be completely new for us and in which we will have to cope additionally. Many of us, during school, or while we were planning to start our own business, believed that the sphere of our studies was the one that gave us enough knowledge. But everything was changing at a rapid pace. As soon as you think you understand something, you realize that algorithms have changed, that there are innovations, that there has been a turnaround ... When you think you have noticed a rule on the Internet, you realize next year that it has changed.“¹⁰

A study conducted by the Cisco System¹¹ long before the Covid-19 pandemic (2010) found that 64% of employees would agree to lower wages if they were allowed to work outside the office. The research also showed that employees who deal with information prefer newer communication tools, especially instant correspondence, as opposed to e-mail¹². All these "benefits" once seemed like an unattainable dream. However, their introduction seems to have put employees in an even worse position, and led unions to face these challenges and try to find a solution for them.

According to the Deputy Secretary General of the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro (USSCG) **Ivana Mihajlovic**, apart from the health system, the epidemic caused by the spread of coronavirus, caused the biggest shocks and changes in the labor market. She points out that there is almost no employee, nor activity/sector, who has not faced changes in the way they work and their working conditions. In addition to the uncertainty that marked the labor market, employees, she adds, faced a change in working hours; reduction of earnings due to the ban on work in certain activities; non-renewal of a fixed-term contract; lack of protective equipment (masks, disinfectants, protective suits, gloves); inability to provide physical distance; the overburdening of those who remain to work and take on the burden of employees who are absent from work due to illness; stress due to overwork, uncertainty from possible job loss and/or earnings, fear of illness... Changes in the manner and conditions of work have drawn attention to the increasingly common form of work such as work outside the employer's premises, which, according to Montenegrin legislation, includes work remote

9 Ana Nives Radovic, lecture in the School of Digital Unionism, October 2021.

10 *Ibid.*

11 CISCO, *The Cisco Connected World Report, (2010)*, URL: https://newsroom.cisco.com/dlls/2010/ekits/ccwr_final.pdf, Accessed November 2021.

12 *Ibid.*

and work from home. Although this type of work has certainly contributed to preventing the spread of the virus, protecting the lives and health of employees, the longevity of the pandemic, and the fact that working from home has become the rule rather than the exception, have opened many questions and dilemmas for many workers.

„The fact that in most cases employers have not concluded an annex to the contract amending the basic provisions of the employment contract related to the place of work and working conditions, inevitably problematized some of the following issues: obligations of the employer to reimburse the employee for all costs related to work from home (electricity, servicing of means of work, provision of electronic devices necessary for performing jobs and work tasks,...); obligations of the employer to provide the employee with healthy and safe working conditions, ie to take care of the aspect of protection and health at work; non-compliance with working hours, ie the inability of employees to disconnect, due to which most employees lost the border between working and private time. There are many examples of employees with a lack of adequate housing who have encountered problems with uninterrupted work because they were surrounded by family members at the same time.“¹³

According to Mihajlovic, the negative consequences of the epidemic affected most employees with precarious employment contracts, i.e. temporary employees, employees in temporary and occasional jobs and agency workers. Unemployment has risen, but she believes that timely

and comprehensive measures to support the economy and citizens, implemented by both the previous and new governments, have resulted in the preservation of most jobs in Montenegro, and that there have been no collective layoffs caused by the coronavirus. However, the current unemployment rate of 23.81% is very worrying, especially bearing in mind that in the month when the epidemic was declared, it was 15.31%.

„Globalization and digitalization are indeed changing the world, but at the moment it is not clear enough in which direction. There are many positive but also negative examples, many examples pro et contra, many advantages and disadvantages that are manifested in practice when it comes to the digital economy. Trade unions around the world, and therefore the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro, focus on the social aspects of this work.“¹⁴

Mihajlovic points out that unions need to find ways to protect the new forms of work that digitalization and globalization bring with them. She says that many questions have been opened: “Do you have the right to disconnect, when you can disconnect, do you lose the border between working and family time? In case of injury while working from home, the question is whether it is a workplace injury. Can the labor inspection come to determine the circumstances of the violation if we know that the Constitution guarantees the inviolability of the apartment and privacy? Do you alienate yourself from colleagues? Will the employer offer advancement and training to those working from the office sooner? Can you lose some income while at home, e.g. transportation fee? Will the employer cover the costs of internet, electricity bills? Countless questions and few answers. The legislation has no solution,

¹³ Interview, Ivana Mihajlovic, November 2021, Interviewed by Bojana Laković-Konatar

¹⁴ Ibid.

at least for now.”¹⁵

The digital economy and the novelties it brings to the media are topics that the NGO 35 mm also deals with. The project coordinator in that NGO, **Snezana Nikcevic**, points out that it is important to repeat that the digital aspect should not be seen as something special, but as an integral part of today.

“The digital economy as such in Montenegro is still developing, and it is important that the media see themselves as a business in this context, except as guardians of democracy, because the principles according to which they will be able to provide space for creating professional journalistic content depend on people, who are not the ones bringing the stories.”¹⁶

Since the beginning of 2020, the NGO 35 mm has started implementing the regional project “Increasing civic engagement in the field of Digital Agenda - ICEDA”. The Digital Agenda is an initiative of the European Union that has been expanded and adopted in six countries of the Western Balkans. It aims to ensure that the citizens of the region take full advantage of the digital transformation. Its goal is to enable a larger number of Government services online, and citizens will not have to worry about the privacy of their data. In addition, digitalization will speed up bureaucratic procedures, strengthen trust between citizens and institutions, and improve the climate necessary for socio-economic development through digital literacy.

Nikcevic points out that the changes in terms of employment brought by the Digital Agenda are already certain, especially because the very nature of work is conditioned by technology. However, she

believes that everyone will have to leave their comfort zone in a larger extent than they might want to.

“Routine is something that will no longer last for 20 or 30 years, but we will constantly have to make some new routines. However, we will have the opportunity to save time and resources - and that is a fact, at least for one segment. In addition, it is necessary to invest in employee development, which is something that, according to research from previous years¹⁷, employers in the private sector do not have the practice to work.”¹⁸

The Digital Agenda will also facilitate access to information, as various tools (such as free access to information, open data, e-participation mechanisms) will allow journalists a greater number of sources and opportunities to deconstruct some phenomena and objectively report on some topics.

“Most often, I see that tweets, announcements, posts from other social networks or similar posts are published on portals, in which you rarely have a direct and live comment from the people mentioned in the text. However, I think it is also important that future journalists keep in mind that they have to adapt and nurture the whole set of skills needed for the work on the portal. On the other hand, editors and editorial policy makers need to keep in mind that a balance needs to be struck between professional journalism and sustainability.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interview, Snezana Nikcevic, November 2021, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic-Konatar

¹⁷ Nikcevic, Snezana, Accelerated digital advancement and its impact on job-skills demand in the Western Balkans, LinkedIn.com, URL: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/accelerated-digital-advancement-its-impact-job-skills-nik%C4%8Devi%C4%87/>, accessed November 2021.

¹⁸ Interview, Snezana Nikcevic, November 2021, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic-Konatar

¹⁹ Ibid.

EXPERIENCES OF FREELANCE JOURNALISTS IN MONTENEGRO

Although the legislation does not sufficiently recognize and protect them, the Montenegrin media scene boasts a good network of freelance journalists. There are no official statistics on their number, but the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro has formed a special network of members who are freelance journalists and is trying to determine with them what the biggest problems are and possible ways to solve them.

“Bearing in mind that freelancers are recognized as a growing community in journalism, the TUMM Main Board has formed an informal network of freelancers and adopted a plan of further steps in order to improve their position. Our plan is for the network to be active and for members to meet regularly and inform us about all possible problems.”²⁰

The focus group with new members - freelance journalists pointed out five main problems, which, as Krackovic says, will be the focus of the work of the Trade Union. Their problems are, among other things, that neither labor nor media legislation recognizes them, as they do not have employment contracts, mostly work “illegally” - without health and pension insurance, do not have editorial support, and are not recognized by the Central Register of Business Entities, so they do not have

access to state funds.

According to the Deputy Secretary General of the Union of Free Trade Unions, Ivana Mihajlovic, for the first time since the middle of last year, the definition of freelancers was introduced in Montenegrin regulations, because the Law on Incentives for Research and Innovation Development defined them as “domestic or foreign natural persons in Montenegro who independently performs innovative activities providing intellectual services for the needs of domestic and foreign legal and natural persons”²¹. Although this solution offers certain benefits for the registration and taxation of freelancers, the disadvantage is that these benefits apply only to freelancers who work for foreign individuals and legal entities. However, Mihajlovic emphasizes that there is no legal solution that guarantees social protection and labor rights for freelancers (sick leave, maternity, parental leave, vacation, guaranteed salary, the right to receive a loan, the right to establish a union...).

“The association of freelancers in a special type of professional trade union or a formal association that would act as an interest organization within the trade union is a precondition for a more efficient and fruitful fight for their rights. Experiences from certain European countries indicate that the

²⁰ Interview, Radomir Krackovic, November 2021, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic-Konatar

²¹ Law on Incentives for Research and Innovation Development, Article 5

associating of freelancers has contributed to amending the legislative framework and improving their position.”²²

Journalist **Marja Pesic** points out that the position of young freelance journalists is not enviable in Montenegro. She believes that the public most often does not understand that being a freelance journalist is, in fact, a choice. Freelance journalists, she says, are often seen as not good enough to be a permanent part of a newsroom “which is far from the truth”. She sees the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro as a partner who can help them improve legislation, which does not recognize the freelancers.

“Freelance journalists are not able to register as employees, therefore they do not have health and pension insurance, although some have been working so for years. Legal regulation of the position of freelance journalists is especially important, because, unlike other professions, they are exposed to various risks, such as pressure, inconvenience, attacks, threats, and do not have a newsroom that would ‘stand behind them’, so it is important to have a law that will do it.”²³

Pesic believes that increasing the number of digital media will certainly increase the number of jobs, but the question must be asked - at what price? She believes that in the sea of what is considered a media business, it will be easier to recognize real journalism, to stand out as a media and a journalist who works in the public interest.

“The hyper-production of the portals will bring with it a hyper-production of

‘copy-paste’ journalism, a transcription habit that is going to be passed on to young and inexperienced journalists, all with the aim of the championship, more reviews, advertisements, and earnings. In this way, the digital economy not only negatively affects the professional standards of journalism but also almost uproots them because future bearers of the media scene are taught just that.”²⁴

Journalist **Andrea Jelic** also agrees with her. Jelic estimates that young freelance journalists, if they work for several media outlets, day and night, can earn decent money, but that all other benefits (such as contributions, work experience, insurance...) are missing.

“Freelance journalists live from today to tomorrow, in constant uncertainty when it comes to earnings, so for them, any planning of serious life moves is almost impossible. Therefore, it would be important for media legal solutions in Montenegro to finally recognize freelancers as a category, and it would be good if our union could react in that direction.”²⁵

Jelic points out that new spheres in journalism are flourishing in the world, such as “solution journalism-SoJo”, which attracts an increasing number of younger journalists, because it is innovative, interesting, different and because it requires special skills.

“If we are talking about a journalist who truly understands the meaning and purpose of his profession, then nothing can violate his integrity, not even the last word of the digital economy. Standards are standards,

22 Interview, Ivana Mihajlovic, November 2021, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic-Konatar

23 Interview, Marja Pesic, November 2021, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic-Konatar

24 Ibid.

25 Interview, Andrea Jelic, November 2021, interviewed by Bojana Lakovic-Konatar

in whatever time or space. If this is not the case, then it is a problem of another kind, which is a fact, quite pronounced in Montenegro.”²⁶

When it comes to the challenges faced by freelancers in Montenegro, Jelic believes that the biggest of them is to earn enough for a dignified life and stay sober and healthy. The engagement of freelance journalists, he adds, varies from month to month, which has multiple consequences: financial, professional and psychological. Jelic points out that it is difficult to find interlocutors and at the same time take care that they are not repeated, that the same person does not talk about several different topics, which is even more difficult when you are forced to do it alone, without the help of colleagues from the editorial office or editor.

“The saddest thing is that, over time, when enthusiasm declines and reality ‘kills the concept’, most young journalists give up and enter other professions, most often PR or marketing, which has many consequences for society as a whole.”²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

SCHOOL OF DIGITAL UNIONISM

As part of the “Support for the Recruitment Campaign” project of which this research is a part, the Trade Union of Media organized the first School of Digital Unionism. The School was conducted from September to November 2021, and 23 participants applied. Certificates of completion of the School were awarded to 14 participants.

Eight thematic lectures in the field of trade unionism and digital media were held within the School. The first lecture on the topic “Fundamentals of Trade Unionism” was given by the Deputy Secretary General of the Union of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro, **Ivana Mihajlovic**. The second lecture was about changes in the journalistic profession (the relationship between ‘old’ and ‘new’ journalism), and **Dragana Zaric** spoke on this topic. The third lecture was given by the TUMM expert associate, **Kristina Pasic**, who spoke to the participants about digital skills. Assistant Professor at the University of Montenegro, dr. **Vuk Vukovic**, gave a lecture on “Podcast - a new chance for action.” The fifth lecture was given by financial analyst **Ana Nives Radovic** on the topic “Digital Economy and Youth Employment”. Lawyer **Mirko Boskovic** spoke about copyright on the Internet, and the TUMM expert associates, **Bojana Lakovic Konatar** and **Drazen Djuraskovic**, presented the working conditions in digital media, with a focus on “Covid crisis” and teleworking (work from home). The last lecture was given by photo reporter **Boris Pejovic**, who spoke about the working

conditions of photo reporters in the digital age.

Participants of the School of Digital Unionism were given the opportunity to participate in a competition aiming to arouse young people’s interest in trade union topics. Nine papers (infographics, articles, comments, videos and photos) arrived on the given topic “Youth, trade unionism and...”. The jury consisting of TUMM President **Marijana Camovic Velickovic**, TUMM Vice President and editor of Vijesti Television **Radomir Krackovic**, and researcher **Bojana Lakovic Konatar**, awarded three participants of the School: **Andjela Asanin**, **Tanja Ceklic** and **Andrea Cvorovic**.

Asanin conducted a survey on youth and the union and presented the results on an excellent infographic. The data she obtained will also be used by the Trade Union of Media in its future activities. Ceklic wrote an article about freelancers, noticing the challenges the unions will be facing within the process of digitalization of jobs. Cvorovic created an interesting video, the focus of which is the extinction of the print media.

The call for the School of Digital Unionism is addressed to all young people who are interested in working in the media. As expected, social science students dominated among them.

In the applications, the participants marked the topics “Digital Skills” and “Relationship between

Student of journalism	Student of social sciences	Student of other sciences	Journalists	Total registered participants
34.8 %	43.5 %	4.3 %	17.4 %	23 100%

Table 1: Structure of registered students by field of study/occupation

traditional and ‘new’ journalism” as the areas of most interest to them.

Digital skills	30 %
The relationship between traditional and “new” journalism	30 %
Digital economy	15 %
Copyright on the Internet	15 %
Fundamentals of trade unionism	10 %

Table 2: Topics that interested participants the most

When asked: “How close are the topics of the School to you”, more than 13 percent of the participants said that they were not familiar with trade unionism and digital media at all, which was a special challenge for the TUMM.

Not at all	Partly	Mostly	I know the topics
13.6 %	50 %	4.5 %	31.8 %

Table 3: Pre-knowledge of participants on the School’s topics

In the application process, we asked participants to write their motives for participation and give a brief overview of digital media. Below are some of the most interesting answers:

- “As someone who recently graduated journalism at the Faculty of Political Sciences with an interest in digital media, I want to expand my

knowledge and advance in that field. I am also interested in the topic of trade unionism and I have not had the opportunity to learn about it before.”

- “Since I have recently been involved in media work, I think this School can give me a broader picture of the media scene and working conditions in digital media.”
- “The media are an indispensable part of everyday political discourse and as a student of political science, topics dealing with journalism will always be close to me. In addition, the work of trade unions will always have my attention, especially in today’s time of neoliberalism. Expanding the knowledge as well as the tasks I would get are the main motives for applying. I believe that this school would provide me with the experience and knowledge I am looking for and help me better understand the world around me, but also my narrower specialization.”
- “Given the fact that we live in the 21st century, the era of technology and digitalization, I believe that digital media is one of the main links in society. Precisely because of so much importance, I think it is very important that as many young people as possible are educated in this field to create a good team for the future, which will do the job in the right way. I have always recognized journalists as a group that was in an unenviable position, especially because of their work in crisis situations.”

- “Digitization requires certain degrees of adaptability in almost all industries, and I think that’s especially important for journalism.”

According to the above observations, young people already recognize that constant improvement is needed in the digital media field of work.

It is obvious that these young people are active ones, interested in social action. Confirmation of the position that young people should be addressed through those communication channels that are most receptive to them is confirmed by the fact that most of the participants have heard about the School on the Internet.

On the social networks	On the website of the University of Montenegro	From a colleague
35.7 %	42.9 %	21.4 %

Table 4: Channels through which participants learned about the School of Digital Unionism

Most of the participants of the School wrote in the final message (exit survey) that such training, exercises and lectures are very necessary for young people and that they should be continued.

When asked - which topic was the most inspiring for them, the majority of participants answered that it was copyright (28.5%). Other answers were: “old” and “new” journalism, digital economy, trade unionism and photojournalism.

When asked to rate the knowledge acquired at the School of Digital Unionism on a scale of 1 to 5, 75 percent of students gave a “five” and 25 percent a “four.” The overwhelming majority claim that the School has fully met its expectations.

Within the School, 14 participants wrote a “media diary”, by which we wanted to examine some of the habits of young people interested in journalism and the media, which relate to the use of social networks. Participants filled out the diary for five days in a row.

Some results are quite expected, having in mind data from larger, global researches. Young people spend the most time on Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. Our participants stayed on these platforms for up to four hours a day.

It is indicative, however, that young people, despite noticing anomalies, injustices or hate speech in digital media, do not react to these phenomena.

Completely met expectations	Most of the expectations were met	A small part of the expectations were met	Expectations were not met
87.5 %	12.5 %	/	/

Table 5: Fulfillment of participants’ expectations

How much time do they spend on social networks (average, daily)

Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok
37 minutes	95 minutes	6 minutes	109 minutes	11 minutes

What content they follow

Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok
Posts of friends; Follower comments on favorite pages; Daily politics; University groups	Photos of friends; Influencer an- nouncements; Recipes; Tourism	Mimes and debates	Music; Shows; Courses and tutorials	Entertainment and fun

How useful these platforms are to them

Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok
Mostly	A little	Partly	Useful	Not at all

Do they notice injustices, hate speech, anomalies

Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok
Mostly yes				

Do they react

Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok
Mostly not				

Tabela 6: The most important results from the media diaries of the participants

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the research on the situation in digital media in Montenegro, "New media-old problems" has been conducted since 2018, there seems to be no progress. The economic and social position of employees continues to reflect low wages, overtime work, working weekends and holidays that are not paid, pressures, precarious work and the growing need for employees to work as freelancers. Interviews with experts, researchers, theorists, but also journalists, freelancers in Montenegro, showed us that there are still many areas in which employers and the state could do much to improve the position of employees and strengthen this part of the media community.

The Trade Union of Media of Montenegro has once again prepared a series of recommendations in order to improve the position of employees in digital media, which rely on research from previous and conclusions from this year.

- The state must improve the legislative framework by which informative internet publications, i.e. portals, will be recognized to the extent and in a manner appropriate to their influence in society.
- The state must adopt by-laws that would more closely regulate the process of registration of the portals, in order to avoid the current possibility of registering the websites of non-governmental organizations or companies as media.
- The state must recognize and legally protect freelancers in Montenegro, the number of whom will be increased in the coming years.
- The Media Strategy 2021-2025 should be dedicated to the issues of regulation and functioning of online media, i.e. portals.
- The media strategy must recognize and present in the right way the challenges facing the community of freelance journalists in Montenegro.
- The owners and managers of the portals must do everything to enable dignified work for employees in online media.
- The state, media owners and employees in the portals must recognize and react in time to the challenges posed by the digitalization of jobs and the digital economy and thus enable the stable operation of these media.
- Employees in digital media portals should unite in order to work together to solve their problems. In doing so, they should follow the results and activities of the informal network of freelancers who are part of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro.
- The Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, together with other unions, shall monitor changes in the media scene in the region and the world, strengthen its internal capacities to be able to respond to the challenges of job digitization and provide adequate assistance to its membership.
- The Trade Union of Media of Montenegro should continue with the School of Digital Unionism, which has proven to be an excellent endeavor that, on the one hand, allows students to get acquainted with labor market challenges, while, on the other hand, provides an opportunity for the Union to get acquainted with the challenges young people face with during employment.

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