

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS



RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION OF SOCIO- ECONOMIC POSITION OF JOURNALISTS

AND MEDIA WORKERS
IN VOJVODINA



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Executive Summary

Basic information about the research

The project “Research and Analysis of Perception of Socio-Economic Position of Journalists and Media Workers in Vojvodina” was implemented by the Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. Paying particular attention to the goals of the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia (2020-2025), the research was conducted in order to better understand socio-economic position and working status of journalists and media workers, with special focus on position of female journalists, journalists working in minority language media, as well as freelancers and other journalists with fixed term contracts

The research was completely conducted online by means of qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (survey) methods. Three focus groups were implemented in October and November 2020 and were attended by 15 journalists selected so as to represent different experiences in terms of the types of media outlets they work in and their ownership, length of service, and language in which they report.

The survey was conducted from 4 to 25 December 2020. A non-probability sample was formed, which consisted of 144 journalists and media workers in Vojvodina.

Of the 144 respondents, 51% were female journalists and 49% male journalists. The average age of the respondents was 40, the youngest was 20, and the oldest was 66 years old. The largest number of respondents work on television (33%) and in online media outlets (29%). Among the respondents are 36.1% of journalists and media workers engaged in the public broadcasting service (Radio-Television of Vojvodina), 34% engaged in private media outlets, 20.1% in civil society media outlets and 3.5% in the media outlets founded by national councils.

Journalists and media workers in Vojvodina

Just over half of the surveyed media professionals are permanently employed (58.5%). 9.5% of respondents have a fixed-term contract, 7.5% have a service contract and 4.8% have a part-time or temporary service contract. 6.8% of respondents are in unemployed status, while 4.1% percent are volunteers. Among the respondents are 5.4% of self-employed journalists and media workers.

Most respondents (21.8%) have an average monthly income ranging from 51,000 to 60,000 RSD. 38.7% of journalists and media workers have incomes of less than 50,000 RSD, and 4.9% of media professionals have not had income in the last three months. One third of the journalists (34.5%) have incomes higher than 60,000, and 13.4 percent of them earn more than 80,000 RSD.

80.4% of respondents can always count on regular monthly income, while 10.5% of media professionals have regular monthly income sometimes, 5.6% rarely, and 3.5% never.

Most journalists work on average from 41 to 50 working hours (30.6%) and from 31 to

40 hours (31.3%). A certain percentage of journalists (15.3%) work more than 50 hours, and slightly less journalists and media workers work less than 20 hours per week (9.7%).

Media professionals often work for more than one media outlet at a time (47.9%). Among them, most worked for two (23.6%) or three (12.5%) different media outlets in the previous three months.

One in five journalists does not have or does not know whether he/she has covered pension, social and health insurance.

27.5% of respondents do not have paid travel expenses. 27% of them are not entitled to paid annual leave, while 27.5% of journalists and media workers are not entitled to sick leave. 12.3% of respondents are not entitled to a leave for visiting a doctor, 13.6% are not entitled to days off, 49% are never entitled to an increase for overtime work, while 24.5% of surveyed media professionals are rarely entitled to it.

More than two thirds of journalists and media workers (69%) do not know whether they are entitled to severance pay in the event of termination of employment. As many as 49% of respondents claim that they never have an increase in salary for overtime work, and 24.5% claim that they rarely have an increase.

Media professionals are poorly informed about the internal procedures of the media outlets they are engaged in. Almost half (49.3%) of respondents do not know whether there is an internal procedure for sexual harassment in the media in which they work, while 40.3% do not know whether there is an internal procedure in the case of mobbing. Also, 40.3% of journalists do not know whether there is a procedure for hiring people with disabilities. More than half of the respondents (56.3%) answered that the media outlet in which they work has internal procedures for attaining gender equality.

A large number of journalists and media workers (78.5%) have never attended training on how to exercise and protect their labour and professional rights.

Among the surveyed journalists and media workers 43.1% are members of the trade union, while 51.4% work in the media outlets where the trade unions exist. Slightly more than a third of respondents (37.1%) have a signed collective agreement, while less than a third (29.9%) believe that signing a collective agreement would improve their status.

The research showed that journalists believe that their economic status will improve when employers start paying journalists more (4.49). The factors that have a greater impact on improving the economic status are: more active engagement of journalists in the fight for their labour rights (4.43), cessation of the practice of allocating state funds to compliant media outlets (4.29) and more pronounced articulation of demands by trade unions (4.27).

Journalists' views on the situation in the media and in the media market show that journalists are generally dissatisfied. Journalists are the least satisfied with the state's attitude towards the media (1.25) and the attitude of political parties towards journalists (1.31), but also with the freedom of the media in the state (1.36). Journalists are also dissatisfied with the attitude of employers towards journalists and media workers (1.92) and the attitude of advertisers towards journalists (1.93).

Female journalists

The results of the research show that female journalists and media workers are more formally educated than their male colleagues, because there are more women among university graduates, while men are more numerous among those who have finished high school. On the other hand, when it comes to the position in the editorial office, there are more women performing journalistic work, while there are slightly more men in the editorial offices, as well as in the position of editor-in-chief.

Journalists believe that women in journalism are more often exposed to insults, misogyny and hate speech, both in the virtual and real environment, and they deem it a consequence of patriarchal views that are still present in the society.

The results of the survey that refer to the problem of gender inequality, sexual harassment and safety are alarming, because they show that these topics are not recognized, both in media organizations and by journalists. Less than a third of media professionals state that there are internal procedures for sexual harassment cases in the media outlets in which they work (29.2%). It is similar with the procedures for attaining gender equality, which exist in the media outlets where 22.2% of respondents work.

Journalists in the media outlets in the languages of national minorities

Journalists and media workers who report in the languages of national minorities believe that they are in a worse economic position compared to journalists who report in the Serbian language. This is supported by the obtained data which show that journalists who report in the Serbian language usually earn between 51,000 and 60,000 RSD on average, while journalists who report in minority languages usually earn between 41,000 and 50,000 RSD on average. Journalists and media workers who report in the languages of national minorities mostly are permanently employed, but beside their permanent employer they also work for other media outlets.

Journalists and media workers who report in the languages of national minorities put the professional status of journalists in the forefront, which is followed by the economic status. They are extremely dissatisfied with the freedom of the media in Serbia and the attitude of political parties towards journalists, but the situation is not better when it comes to the autonomy of their work or the attitude of employers towards journalists.

Solutions for improving the position of journalists reporting in the languages of national minorities are seen in the adoption of internal codes that should regulate issues of autonomy in performing their work, and respect for ethical rules of the profession.

Freelancers and non-standard employment of journalists

Journalists and media workers in non-standard employment are equally men and women, and their educational structure is almost identical to the educational structure of permanently employed journalists and media workers. Most of the freelancers (37.5%) are those who are at the very beginning of their career, i.e. have been working in the media outlets for less than five years.

Compared to the permanent employees, freelancers predominantly work for online media, mainly private media outlets and civil society media outlets.

Every tenth freelancer has not earned income in the last three months, and 43% of them had income lower than 40,000 RSD. Slightly more than half of journalists and media workers in non-standard employment have regular incomes.

Less than half of the journalists and media workers in non-standard employment have paid contributions. 42.86% of them do not have regularly paid pension insurance, and 8.93% do not know whether it has been paid. It is similar when it comes to the health insurance contributions: 37.5% of journalists and media workers in non-standard employment do not have regular health insurance coverage, and 7.14% do not know whether their employers paid for it.

Freelance journalists highly value independence and autonomy in performing professional tasks, as well as the effects that their stories have in the community. Professional fulfilment contrasts with the inability of freelancers to reconcile business and private obligations, as income that meets basic living needs can only be earned at the expense of the quality of personal life.

1. INTRODUCTION

Objective of the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025 (Media Strategy) and the accompanying Action Plan is the improved public information system through a harmonized positive legal framework that guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of the media, security of journalists, media pluralism, a developed media market, strengthened journalistic profession, educated citizens and institutions capable of enforcing regulations.

The first measure envisaged by the Strategy and elaborated by the Action Plan is defined as “improved safety, socio-economic and professional conditions for the work of journalists and media workers” (p. 46). The mentioned measure resulted from the results of the analysis of the current situation in the field of public information, which show the unfavourable socio-economic, professional position and safety of journalists and media workers.

The Media Strategy states that journalists and media workers in the Republic of Serbia work in difficult conditions, often without an adequate employment contract: “The general trend is to reduce the number of employees and the share of employees for an indefinite period of time, while, on the other hand, engagement on the basis of temporary and occasional work contracts, copyright agreements and work contracts is growing” (p. 8-9).

Previous research shows that the salaries of journalists are low, even below the national average, payments are often irregular, while a large number of journalists work overtime: “All this affects the degradation of the profession, and puts journalists and media workers in a precarious position, which is why a large number of them want to leave the profession” (Mihailović, 2015, p. 67).

As stated in the Strategy, “a mixture of low late pay, insufficient job security, work without a contract or with an easily termination contract is a form of pressure that encourages the spread of self-censorship, hinders independence, quality journalism and favours “tabloidization” (p. 9). It is added that the solution could be to establish social dialogue and sign a branch collective agreement, but that this is impossible in the current circumstances, because unions are weak, employers’ organizations have not been formed, and an additional problem is the lack of a database on journalists and media workers.

When it comes to the position of local media, the Media Strategy states that, in addition to being extremely fragmented, the local media market is extremely economically unsustainable. “Local media have been in an extremely difficult financial situation for years, operating in small, limited, extremely poor local / regional economic markets, earning very little from advertising and sales, and the transition to digital terrestrial television broadcasting has imposed new costs on television, which was not accompanied by an increase in income” (p. 21).

The change of traditional models of creation and distribution of media content, conditioned by technological development, has set new requirements and challenges for the journalistic profession. The advanced model of economic sustainability is no longer fully effective, and new types of content billing are still, for the most part, in the experimental phase.

The problem of incomplete financial and institutional independence of public media services, and adequate realization of public interest, was also stated in the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System.

Establishing a transparent and sustainable model of financing public media services, in the form of revitalization of tax collection and distance from the state budget, should ensure their independence, improve professionalism and enable the realization of program functions in the public interest and public accountability.

According to the data stated in the Media Strategy, the revenues of the Republic Public Service (*Radio Television of Serbia*) are below 90 million Euro per year, of which almost half (49%) is from tax collection, about 28% from the budget and about 23% from commercial sources. Unlike European practice, where about 63-64% comes from tax collection or subscription, only 14-15% from the state budget, and approximately 10% of revenue is generated through advertising. The Law on Public Media Services stipulates that the provincial public service (*Radio-Television of Vojvodina*) receives 70% of the fee collected on the territory of AP Vojvodina (p. 30).

Due to the bad financial situation caused by the reduction of funds from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, according to the management of *Radio Television of Vojvodina*, in September 2020 about 200 journalists and media professionals of the provincial public service were fired, many of whom work in newsrooms community. These are media workers who are hired through employment agencies, which makes their employment status even more uncertain (Kolundžija, 2020).

The professional status of journalists and media workers in Vojvodina who report in the languages of national minorities is additionally influenced by national councils, which largely control the sphere of information. Due to frequent misunderstandings between the media and publishers founded by national councils of national minorities, journalists suffer great professional pressure.

All the above points to the need for a comprehensive study of the socio-economic and professional position of journalists in AP Vojvodina, in order to get a clearer picture of the number of permanently employed journalists, freelancers, journalists engaged in other ways, their salaries, working hours, pressures on their professional status and which force them to stop practising journalism and switch to other professions. Collecting data related to the social and economic status of journalists is the main goal of this project.

Following the guidelines from the strategic document, the research is focused on three groups of journalists who face specific problems. The first group consists of journalists, the second group of media workers in newsrooms in the languages of national minorities and the third group of freelancers. What they have in common is a bad socio-economic situation that arises from the structure of the media market and the characteristics of the economic and working position. However, as we will show in separate sections of the study, the specifics of the difficulties they face in economic and professional terms are different.

The study, which is presented to the readers, places the obtained data in the broader context of previous analyses and initiates a discussion on methodological issues related to the research of journalism and journalists. It also offers a systematic overview of the characteristics of the most common types of work of journalists in Serbia. Finally, all the above data lead us to the recommendations and steps that various actors need to take in order to improve the socio-economic position of journalists and media workers.



Research methodology



2.1. Journalism as a moving target of research

There are two main topics that are opened at the beginning of every research in Serbia that deals with journalists or journalism. The first is not strictly limited to Serbia and is the topic of theoretical papers and public policies: who are the journalists? The second topic has already been tackled by the Strategy for the Development of the Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025: How many journalists and media workers are there in Serbia? These two topics will inevitably intertwine, and as a template for future activities we will offer several insights.

The question of who journalists are can be asked within two contexts, one is the theoretical and research context, and the other is the context of public policies. In the context of public policies, the main question is who are the beneficiaries of certain activities and measures. For example, if we need to increase the security of journalists or improve their socio-economic position, how exactly to determine who is being protected and whose position is being improved. The decision to license journalists, provided for in the first, rejected, draft of the Media Strategy, conflicts with international documents and practice, and in existing socio-political constellations has raised fears among the journalistic community that licensing or any form of registration could be a means of restricting journalistic work. The main line of thought of international organizations is reflected in "Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on a new notion of media" (Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7). This document calls for the adoption of a broader definition that will include "all actors involved in the production and dissemination of content", and then for an "assessment of regulatory needs for all actors" (Art. 7). Similarly, "Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors" emphasizes that the definition of journalists has expanded as a result of digitalisation to include all those "performing journalistic roles or fulfilling public watchdog functions" (para. 4). Similar to the security issues, the issue of defining the recipients of measures in the field of labour protection of journalists should be equally sensitive to the existence of different actors, situations, work routines and relationships that jointly constitute what we might call journalism.

In the theoretical and research sense, the definition of journalist is equally subject to redefining and precedes public policies. Journalism refers to a wide variety of practices, and it is not surprising that a group of authors launched a study with the aim of mapping all the epithets linked to journalism (Loosen et al., 2020). As the authors find, we can talk about different "journalisms" in the context of dissemination channels (TV journalism, press journalism), thematic focus (e.g. sports journalism), style and motive of reporting (investigative journalism, solution-oriented journalism) or technology (data-based journalism, drone journalism). One of the criteria is the relationship between the audience and the journalist, and in this domain the authors map as many as 24 terms: civic, public, participatory, interactive, hyper-local journalism, etc. (Loosen et al., 2020, p. 8). As can be seen from these terms, the basic challenge in the new definitions of journalism arises due to technology-enabled citizen participation in informing the public.

Reducing the costs of disseminating news and other media content has led to the emergence of new and the transformation of traditional actors in public information. The thesis that every citizen will become a media did not stand the test of time, but it did allow some individuals to reach the audience. In addition to individual amateurs in the role of journalists,

who sporadically publish information of public importance on social networks, there are also professional amateurs (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004) who publish regularly and are sensitive to audience needs and attract advertisers (to the detriment of traditional media). Their work has sometimes been formalized in different types of entrepreneurship, but these business models are not identical to traditional media organizations. On the other hand, behind the contents, blogs, YouTube channels and similar professional-amateur content can be individuals or groups without formalized status, who still participate in informing and attracting advertisers in the market.

Along with amateurs who professionalize their work, there is a process that goes in another direction. Research on freelance journalists shows that some of them have started their own blogs or podcasts, moving from the editorial office to the digital environment (Spilsbury, 2016). The frequency of this transition - whether it is driven by lay-offs or the search for media freedom and autonomy - is recorded worldwide. That is why the famous theorist of journalism Mark Deuze concluded that editorial offices are not necessary for the survival of journalism today (Deuze, 2019). The same author claims that what he will call “professional ideology” is crucial for defining journalism: values and beliefs about what it means to serve the public and public interest, what constitutes objective, neutral and credible journalism, autonomy in performing journalistic work, a sense of relevance, timeliness and awareness of the ethical foundations of the profession from which it derives its legitimacy (Deuze, 2005, p. 447).

Although this definition of journalism helps to locate it in places where it did not exist before, the definition based on norms and values creates certain difficulties when looking at the media themselves. The values of public interest and objective journalism are anyway understood differently, in the contexts of nationally specific journalism cultures. Today, growing political and social polarization has contributed to the culture of biased journalism spreading to countries that until recently served as an example. Together with the already initiated process of news commercialization, this leads to the collapse of the basic postulates of journalistic ethics. In other words, professional values and norms cease to be a necessary element of journalism practised in traditional editorial offices.

None of these insights from journalism studies that talk about technological, political, and economic change, as well as changes in the relationship between journalists and audiences, help to draw firm borderlines around the field of journalism. On the contrary, by supporting media policies, scientific knowledge suggests the complexity and fluidity of the journalistic landscape and speaks of the “hybridization of journalistic cultures” (Mellado et al., 2017). For research, as well as for public policies, this is an obstacle that needs to be overcome by carefully shading the needs of diverse actors, keeping in mind all the “x-variants” of different practices and journalists as their bearers.

When it comes to panoramic research dealing with journalists, we can offer several definitions. For example, the Council of Europe’s research on pressures on journalists starts from the definition that journalists are “persons who regularly collect and disseminate information to the public, for journalistic purposes (exercise of public interest)” (Clark & Grech, 2017, p. 11). One of the largest global research “Worlds of Journalism”, covering 67 countries, deals with professional journalists, defining them as persons who have editorial responsibility for their articles, i.e. “participate in creating or editing journalistic content or have a position of editorial supervision and coordination” (Lauerer & Hanitzsch, 2019, p. 55). It is stated that the

photo reporters met these criteria, but the cameramen did not necessarily meet them if they were doing a job that involved following the producer’s instructions. There is a threshold set for someone to be a professional journalist, and it is that 50% of their income should be earned by working for the information media. Although it is stated that freelancers are included in the research, this project starts from (mostly traditional) media and, based on them, maps representative editorial offices whose journalists will be interviewed.

In the researches performed in Serbia, we can see three approaches. The first starts from the media, seeks to make the sample representative of the media (not necessarily of journalists) and as the main criterion for inclusion in the research takes affiliation with the editorial office, regardless of the type of engagement (Milivojević, 2011; Seizova & Rupar, 2016). The second approach starts from membership in journalists’ associations and trade unions, most often using their communication channels to reach respondents (Association of Journalists of Serbia [AJS], 2014). The third approach is based on self-identification, which means that the research includes all those who recognize themselves as “journalists and media workers” (Mihailović, 2015; 2017), regardless of membership in professional associations or connections with editorial offices and media.

All three approaches face the question of how many journalists and media workers there are in Serbia. Previous researches cited in the table rely on different data sources, always noting that they are not comprehensive (Table 1). Precisely due to the lack of accurate data on the total population, the researches most often use appropriate samples. Media researches stratify samples against data available on different types of media organizations, primarily in the context of the division into press, radio, television and the Internet, or national and local media outlets. The problem is, however, that the exact number of media outlets is not known precisely, as stated by the Strategy for the Development of Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025.

Table 1: Overview of research on the socio-economic status of journalists in Serbia

	Sample type	Number of respondents	Estimate of the number of journalists and media workers
Profesija na raskršću (Profession at the crossroads, Milivojević, 2011)	Convenient and accessible, stratified quota	260 journalists and editors 51 owner and manager	4,000 registered in the novinari.rs database
Research on the economic and professional status of journalists (UNS (AJS), 2014)	Random sample	585	7,000 active and passive members of the JAS
Od novinara do nadničara: prekarni rad i život (From journalists to wage earners: Hard work and life Mihailović, 2015)	Convenient sample	1,110	-
Worlds of Journalism (Seizova & Rupar, 2016)	Non-probability quota sample for the media and non-probability convenient sample for journalists	407	8,000
Indicators on the level of media freedom and journalists’ safety (Vukasović, 2016)	Intentional quota sample	111	-
Pasivni aktivizam novinara (Passive activism of journalists, Mihailović, 2017)	Convenient sample	303	-

	Sample type	Number of respondents	Estimate of the number of journalists and media workers
Kontrola i sloboda medija: svedočenja novinara (Media control and freedom: testimonies of journalists, Matić, 2018)	Non-probability convenient sample	177	-

Research “Journalists and media workers: What is our real number (JAS, 2019) shows that 70% of the 2,149 media outlets registered in the BRA database in 2018, are active. The survey responded by 724 media outlets shows that they employ 5,294 journalists and media workers, of which 2,809 under employment contracts and 2,485 on a part-time basis (JAS, 2019, p. 9). As it is stated, 1,174 people are employed in the position of journalists, while 1,606 of them work as part-time associates (possibly for several media outlets at the same time, so it should be noted that this number is probably lower). For other publishers, the number of employees was obtained from BRA and these data show that there are 8,354 of them, noting that these are not necessarily journalists and media workers, since media publishers are also engaged in other activities (JAS, 2019, p. 10). Updating the BRA database is one of the goals set by the Media Strategy and Action Plan, and only after the end of that process can we get a clearer picture of the media and through them about the journalists working in them. However, this list will not be final due to the overlap of part-time associates who work for several media outlets, but also because it will not include freelancers, journalists and media workers whose media did not register as media or those hired through employment agencies.

Another source of important data on journalists is the Republic Statistical Office (RSO). The main shortcoming of the existing databases is that the RSO statistics provide aggregate data for the “information and communication” activity, which too broadly includes marketing agencies, certain IT activities and the like. Therefore, for example, the Labour Force Survey for 2019 shows that 78,400 people work in this sector, which is significantly more than all estimates of the number of journalists and media workers. It is expected that the new National Standard Classification of Occupations, which has only recently begun to be applied, will improve the data collected (Matović, Misita and Ćirković, 2020). There are 21 occupations in the category of journalists and editors, which basically correspond to the structure of media employees, and this should enable the relatively non-transparent category of “journalists and media workers” to be better broken down.

Table 2: Section of the National Standard Classification of Occupations

2642	Journalists and editors
2642.01	Mass media analyst
2642.02	Editor in chief
2642.03	Enigmatist
2642.04	Publisher
2642.05	Commentator
2642.06	Desk Coordinator
2642.07	Music editor
2642.08	Journalist
2642.09	Journalist correspondent
2642.10	Journalist reporter
2642.11	News producer (radio / television)

2642	Journalists and editors
2642.12	Proofreader
2642.13	Sports journalist
2642.14	Editor of literary editions
2642.15	Editor of social media communications
2642.16	Newspaper editor
2642.17	Newsroom Editor
2642.18	Column Editor
2642.19	TV program Editor
2642.20	Editor in publishing
2642.21	Website Editor

These new codebooks should be used for the formation of the database of the Central Register of Mandatory Social Insurance (CROSO), as well as salary statistics based on individual tax returns on calculated taxes and contributions (PPP-PD). Based on the old codebooks, previous data in the CROSO database showed that 8,565 employees work in the media, of which 6,790 are employed on the basis of a permanent employment contract (Zajíc, 2017, p. 107). However, it should be borne in mind that both groups of statistical data, CROSO and PPP-PD, record data on a contract basis, which means that part of the journalistic work remains outside this record.

In addition to research and official statistics, the third group of sources of data on journalists are those held by journalists' associations and trade unions. According to the research "Passive activism of journalists", there are about forty associations in Serbia (Jakobi, 2017, p. 134), and the three largest ones, IJAS, JAS and IJAV together have about 10,200 members (p. 138). However, as further stated, there is a gap between the number of those who have filled in the application form and those who pay the membership fee (p. 138) which calls into question the accuracy of the databases of the associations. However, the data from the associations are important because they include journalists outside the employment status and better than other indicators point to the professional status of journalists and media workers, which theory considers an important segment of defining journalists.

Finally, there is a fourth potential source of data, and that is those that come from the educational sphere. It is obvious that a diploma from an appropriate faculty is not required for journalistic work, although previous research shows that the share of journalists who enter the profession with a degree in journalism is growing (Milivojević, 2011; UNS, 2014). Over 200 students enrol annually at three state faculties that educate journalists. The exact number of graduate journalists does not exist, but it can be obtained from higher education institutions or from the Republic Statistics Office. Monitoring students' career paths would provide information on volunteer and trainee journalists, their status and reasons for remaining or leaving the profession.

2.2. About this research

The research we present in this report was performed by a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, through focus groups and survey research. Both components of the study were conducted online due to the coronavirus epidemic, and this probably influenced the response of the participants, the quality and the contextual conditionality of the findings.

Three focus groups were implemented in October and November 2020 through the Zoom platform. The aim was to determine the self-perception of the socio-economic position of three specific journalistic groups: 1) journalists, 2) journalists engaged in media in the languages of national minorities and 3) freelancers and other journalists without permanent employment. Focus group interviews were attended by 15 journalists selected so as to represent different experiences in terms of the types of media outlets they work in and their ownership, length of service, and language in which they report. More detailed data on the participants are given in the following parts of the study, in which we deal separately with topics of importance for these three groups of journalists. Focus group interviews were anonymized and in presenting the findings we used general labels that are important for understanding individual experiences (e.g. type of engagement, type of media).

Analysis of previous research and focus group discussions contributed to the formulation of the questionnaire. The strong support that our research found in previous studies was aimed at enabling at least partial monitoring of trends in the socio-economic position of journalists and media workers. This was only partially possible for two reasons. First, all previous research, as well as ours, is unrepresentative, so the conclusions cannot be “translated” from one study to the another. The second reason is that we conducted the research in the midst of a pandemic that has brought many changes in the lives of all citizens. With these two limitations, we hope that the comparisons we present in the conclusion can at least partially contribute to the understanding of changes in the socio-economic position of journalists.

A non-probabilistic sample was used in the survey, which does not provide representativeness of the findings for the entire population of journalists and media workers in Vojvodina. The questionnaire was posted online as a Google template and could be completed from 4 to 25 December 2020. In order to reach as many journalists and media workers as possible, the call to fill in the questionnaire was forwarded to all members of the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina and partner journalistic and media organizations. The United Branch Trade Union *Nezavisnost* also joined in the dissemination of the call. The call was also forwarded by the OSCE Mission to Serbia. In order to avoid the bias of IJAV towards its own membership, the research team sent calls to all media outlets in Vojvodina whose data are available in the BRA or the Media Service Providers Register maintained by REM. In total, the call to participate in the survey reached about 1,000 addresses of media workers and the media outlets. This way of forming the sample meant that the respondents identified themselves as the addressees of the call, i.e. they are self-identified as journalists and media workers.

144 journalists and media workers filled out the on-line questionnaire. Given that on-line surveys are characterised by lower responsiveness than other survey techniques, the research team is generally satisfied with such participation. In this assessment, we have in mind that a large part of various jobs was moved on-line during the coronavirus epidemic, so at the end of the year it could be expected that journalists and media workers, as well as all citizens, already had enough of on-line activities. Also, the survey was complicated by the fact that at the same time the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia conducted its on-line survey, on very related topics, which is why some respondents concluded that it was the same research. Despite these limitations, the research roughly corresponds to the previous one, bearing in mind that a group of journalists and media workers from the area of Vojvodina were included.

The questionnaire consisted of several groups of questions in which questions about the

economic position and labour rights of journalists prevailed, compared to questions about professional status. The first part consisted of questions aimed at mapping the structure of respondents (gender, age, place, education, type of media, media ownership, position in the editorial office, etc.). The second part consisted of questions about the economic position and labour rights - employment status, income, regularity of wages, working hours, benefits, internal procedures in the field of labour law, etc. The third group of questions was dedicated to trade union organization, trade union membership and the perception of respondents. The last part consisted of questions about the evaluation of the profession, the connection between employment status and professionalism, as well as questions about the possibilities of improving the economic position of journalists. Several questions also referred to the changes brought about by the corona virus epidemic.

The results obtained by the on-line survey were entered into the statistical program SPSS and processed by the methods of descriptive statistics.

3

Characteristics of the most common types of employment of journalists in Vojvodina



In accordance with the positive legislation, journalists in the Republic of Serbia can be engaged in many different ways. Almost all types of employment are regulated by the Labour Law, as the umbrella law that regulates this area, but labour relations can be also regulated by various special laws, such as the Law on Agency Employment. Journalists in Vojvodina are most often employed under permanent or fixed-term employment contracts, under service employment contracts, but also through employment agencies. Agency employment is also widely used by the largest employer in the territory of AP Vojvodina, the Public Broadcasting Service of Vojvodina.

Table 3: Types of employment of journalists in Vojvodina

Types of employment of journalists in Vojvodina		
	Number	Percentage
Permanently employed	86	58,5
Employed under fixed-term contract	14	9,5
Employed under a service contract	11	7,5
Employed under a temporary or periodical contract	7	4,8
Self-employed (freelance/entrepreneur)	8	5,4
Volunteer	6	4,1
Retired	2	1,4
Unemployed	10	6,8

Permanent employment contract

Employed journalists and media workers who have concluded an employment contract with an employer, the duration of which is not determined in advance, have the most favourable status and the widest range of employment rights.

The employment contract is concluded before the employee starts working, thus preventing the so-called “unregistered work”. This is of particular interest to an employed journalist or media worker, as he or she can exercise all employment rights guaranteed by law since entering employment. The employer is obliged to register him/her and pay the contributions for mandatory pension, health and social insurance.

When hiring, the employer is obliged to acquaint the employee with the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the employment relationship, as well as with the conditions and organization of work. All this is in the employment contract, which is always in writing and signed by the employer and the employee. In the event of any dispute, the employment contract serves as proof of the agreed working conditions.

Permanent employment practically means that the employee’s employment will last until some of the legally prescribed conditions for termination of employment are met (the employee violates work discipline or does not achieve the required performance results) or until the employee reaches the age of service. The employment contract, among other things, must contain the name and job description which further determines the employee’s job. The employer cannot ask the employee to perform tasks that are not provided for in the employment

contract, and if the employer requests something like that, and the employee refuses, such action will not be a reason for termination of the employment contract by the employer.

An important element of the employment contract is the working hours. The employee and the employer determine whether the employee will work full-time, shortened or part-time. If the employer, in accordance with the law, asks the employee to work beyond the time specified in the employment contract, the employee must be paid for such a thing, and if the legally prescribed conditions for overtime work are not met, the employee may refuse such request. The employment contract also defines the amount of salary, i.e. the elements determining the salary, as well as the deadlines for payment of salary.

The employment contract may also specify elements of the employee's disciplinary responsibility. They represent cases of breaches of work obligations or work discipline due to which the employer may terminate the employment contract.

If the employer has more than 10 employees, it is obliged to adopt the Rules of procedure prescribing in more detail the rights, obligations and responsibilities from the employment relationship. The employment contract, in that case, must be in accordance with the Rules of procedure. Also, the employer can conclude a collective agreement. The collective agreement is adopted as a result of a pre-agreement between the employer or the employers' association and the representative trade unions. If there is a collective agreement, the Rules of procedure must be in accordance with the collective agreement, and the employment contract must be in accordance with both the Rules of procedure and the collective agreement.

It is important to note that the Labour Law prescribes the lowest level of employees' rights, while the employment contract, Rules of procedure or collective agreement allow for a higher level of labour rights than those prescribed by law to be agreed between the employee and employer. For example, although the legal minimum for annual leave is 20 working days, the employer and the employee may agree that the annual leave be longer than 20 working days.

Fixed-term employment contract

An employee who concludes a fixed-term employment contract with the employer has all the rights from the labour relationship as the employee who has a permanent employment contract, but the duration of the labour relationship is determined in advance by the employment contract between the employer and employees. An employer may conclude one or several fixed-term employment contracts with the same employee, providing for the labour relationship with the same employee for a period which, with or without interruptions, may not exceed 24 months. If the same employee works for the same employer for more than 24 months, the fixed-term labour relationship grows into a permanent labour relationship. In practice, employers often resort to various abuses to avoid concluding a permanent employment contract with an employee who works for a fixed period of more than 24 months. That is why it happens that employers formally conclude employment contracts with employees for different jobs, while employees in reality perform the same jobs all the time.

Service contract (outsourcing contract)

Journalists who are hired under a service contract (outsourcing contract) are not

employed, but perform their work outside the employment relationship. In accordance with the Labour Law, a service contract may be concluded for the performance of certain tasks outside the purview of the employer. Contracts that media publishers conclude with journalists are therefore not in accordance with the provisions of the labour law, because journalistic activities can in no way be outside the purview of media publishers. An outsourcing contract is only one type of service contract. Under this contract, the media publisher and the journalist agree on the copyright work that the journalist should deliver to the publisher, the deadline for submitting the copyright work, the journalist's fee for the delivered copyright work and the deadlines for payment of the fee. In addition to these elements, the outsourcing contract may contain other elements that may relate to the quality and quantity of the delivered copyright work, provisions that further regulate the copyrights in the work in question and the like. In addition to the fee for the copyright work, the media publisher is obliged to pay the journalist a tax for the copyright work, as well as contributions for pension and health insurance.

Temporary or periodical employment contract

This type of contract can be concluded by the employer with the employee only in the case of jobs that, by their nature, do not last longer than 120 working days in a calendar year. Although this type of contract is characteristic of the so-called "seasonal jobs", more and more journalists and other media workers are engaged under this type of contract. This form of employment is not considered an employment relationship, so employees do not have all the rights guaranteed to employees by the Labour Law. The contract is most often concluded due to the alleged increased volume of work with the employer, although the real motives for concluding these contracts are hidden in the fact that they are very easy to terminate. Therefore, employees hired under these contracts are in a much worse position compared to the fixed-term or permanent employees. After the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) of Vojvodina lost a significant part of its budget funds in 2020, a large number of employees, who were employed by the employment agencies but actually worked in the Public Broadcasting Service of Vojvodina, lost their jobs in employment agencies, to be engaged by the Public Broadcasting Service of Vojvodina on the basis of temporary or periodical contracts.

Self-employed (entrepreneurs / freelancers)

It is also possible to perform journalistic tasks as an entrepreneur or freelancer. Entrepreneurs are entities without an employment contract with the employer because they are not employed, but perform work in their own name and for their own account. They do not have employment rights because in practice they do not even need them. Entrepreneurs can regulate their own way of doing business, working hours, vacation, salary... In this way, journalists can work for several media outlets without any legal obstacles, and for their services they usually issue invoices to those media outlets. The media outlet they work for is not obliged to pay contributions for pension, social and health insurance, but the entrepreneur pays all taxes and contributions individually. Taxes and contributions are paid in the same amount every month, regardless of the amount of the entrepreneur's income in that month. This fact can be both an advantage and a disadvantage of self-employment. If an entrepreneur can earn enough on a monthly basis to pay taxes and contributions, self-employment will be an advantage. The disadvantage of self-employment is manifested in those months when the entrepreneur does not earn or makes a minimum income, but nevertheless will be obliged to pay taxes and contributions in the prescribed amount. Also, in the case of maternity leave, female entrepreneurs will not earn any money. The same situation is in the case of incapacity for work due to illness when the entrepreneur will not receive any compensation.

4

Most important research **results**



4.1. Demographic and professional characteristics of journalists

Of the 144 respondents, 51 percent are female journalists and 49 percent are male journalists. The average age of the respondents was 40, the youngest was 20, and the oldest was 66 years old.

Graph 1: Gender of respondents

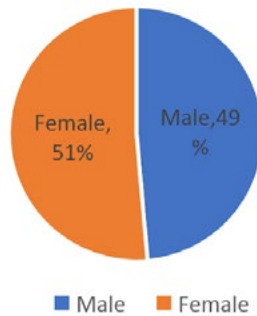
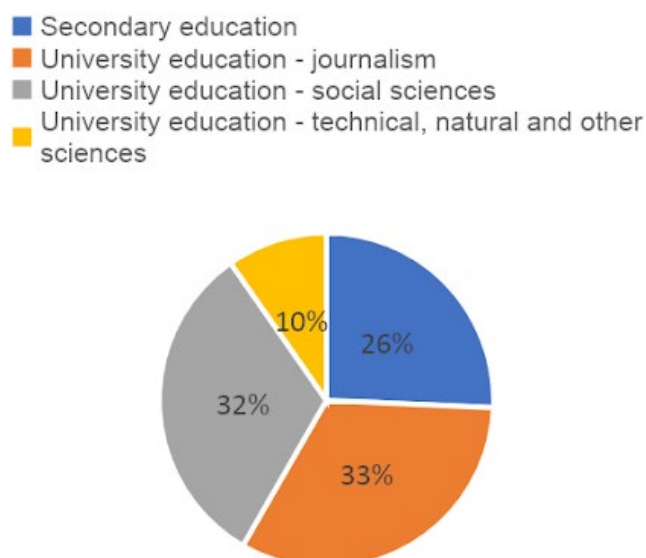


Table 4: Age of respondents

Minimum	Maximum	Average
20	66	40

Regarding the formal education of journalists in the sample, the largest percentage are journalists with a university degree in journalism (32 percent) and social sciences (32 percent), and a smaller percentage in technical, natural and other sciences (10 percent). Formal education is mostly university level (74 percent), and a small number (10 percent) of respondents has secondary education.

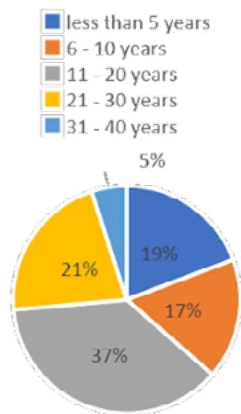
Graph 2: Degree and type of education



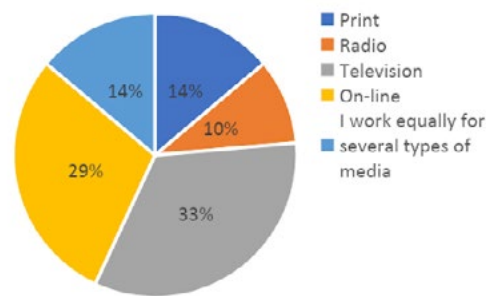
According to the years of employment, the largest number of journalists belongs to the group with 11 to 20 years of professional work experience (37 percent), followed by the group with 21 to 30 years of professional work experience (22 percent). Thus, more than half of the surveyed journalists have worked in journalism for 11 to 30 years.

The largest number of respondents work in television (33 percent) and on-line media outlets (29 percent). The sample includes journalists who work for several types of media at the same time (14 percent) and those who work for the print media (14 percent), while the lowest number of them work on radio (10 percent).

Graph 3: Years of employment of journalists



Graph 4: Type of media



A survey of the type of media ownership that journalists predominantly work for showed that those are mainly public broadcasting services, in this case RTV (36.1 percent) and private media (34 percent), followed by civil society media (20.1 percent), media founded by national councils (3.5 percent), mixed ownership media (3.5 percent) and state media (0.7 percent). Two percent of the respondents stated that they do not know who owns the media they work for.

Respondents mostly report in Serbian (85 percent), and the languages of national minorities they report in (15 percent).

Graph 5: The language in which journalists report

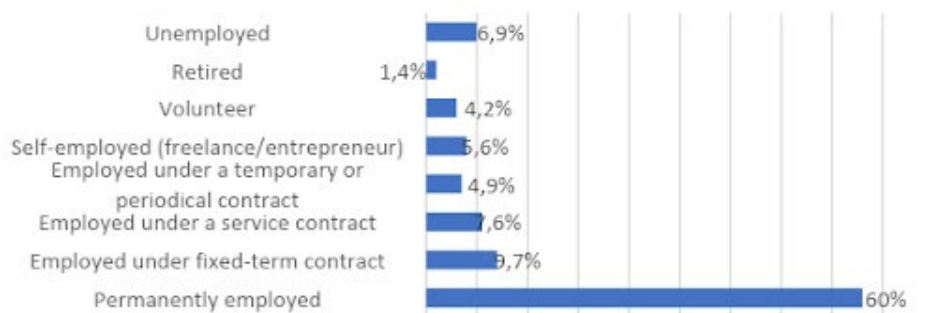


According to the position in the editorial office, the surveyed media workers mostly work as journalists (41.7 percent) or have editorial positions (15.3 percent work as editors, and 14.6 percent as editor-in-chief, which makes 30 percent of the corpus) in the editorial office. Correspondents make up 6.9 percent of the corpus, and cameramen 5.6 percent.

4.2. Economic status of journalists

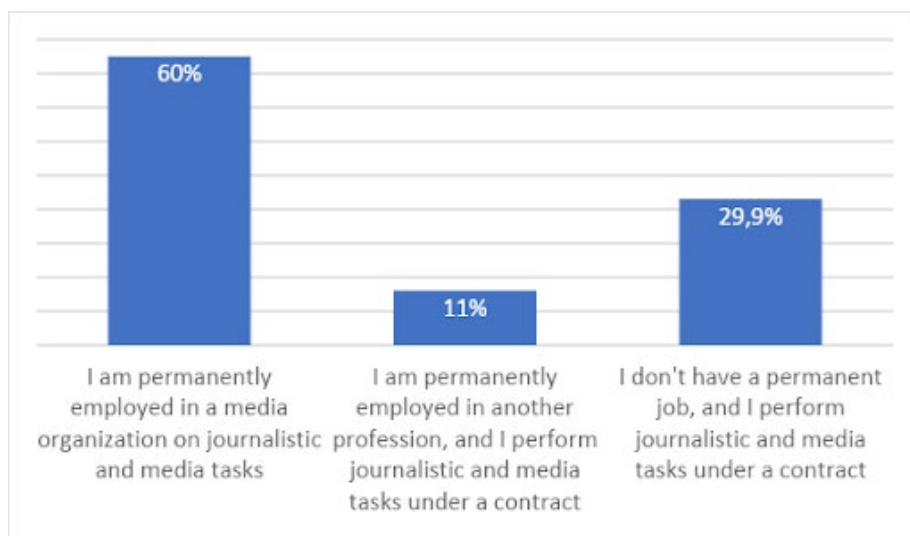
According to the type of employment, almost 60 percent of the respondents are in permanent employment, i.e. employed for an indefinite period of time. Other types of labour relationship are represented in smaller percentages: fixed-term 9.7 percent, under service contract 7.6 percent. The lowest percentage of the sample consists of volunteers (4.2 percent) and retirees (1.4 percent).

Graph 6: Type of labour relationship



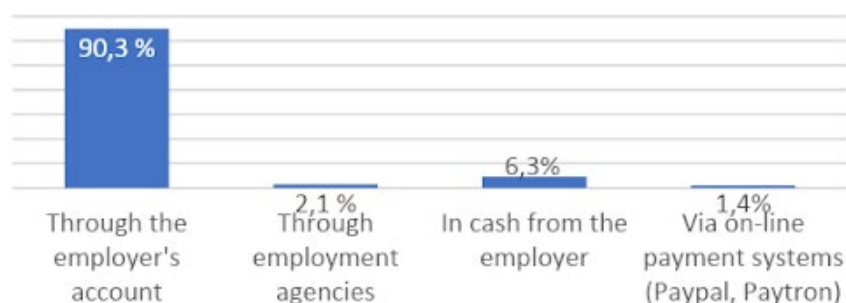
The results of the research show that in addition to 60 percent of those who are permanently employed in the media organization, there are those who are permanently employed in other professions, and perform journalistic and media work under contracts (11.1 percent). However, most of those who are not permanently employed in journalism are not permanently employed in another profession, so they perform journalistic and media work exclusively through other types of contracts (29.9 percent).

Graph 7: Which description best suits your current situation



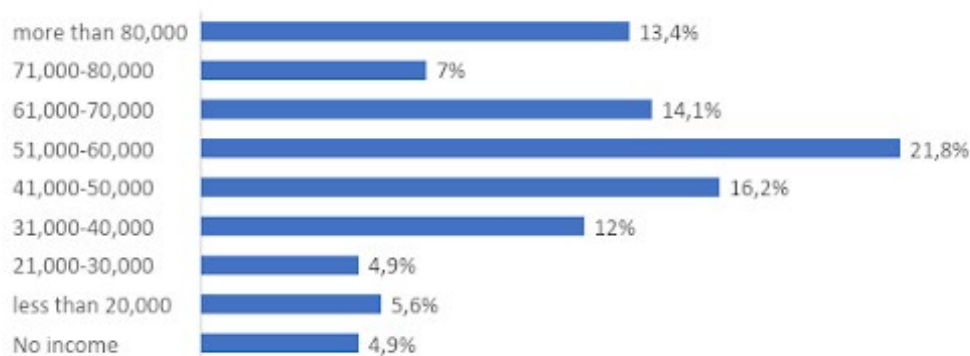
Most respondents - more than 90 percent - receive their salary through an employer's account, and a small percentage receive money in cash (6.3 percent), through employment agencies (2.1 percent) or via on-line systems such as Paypal or Paytron (1.4 percent).

Graph 8: How do you receive your salary?



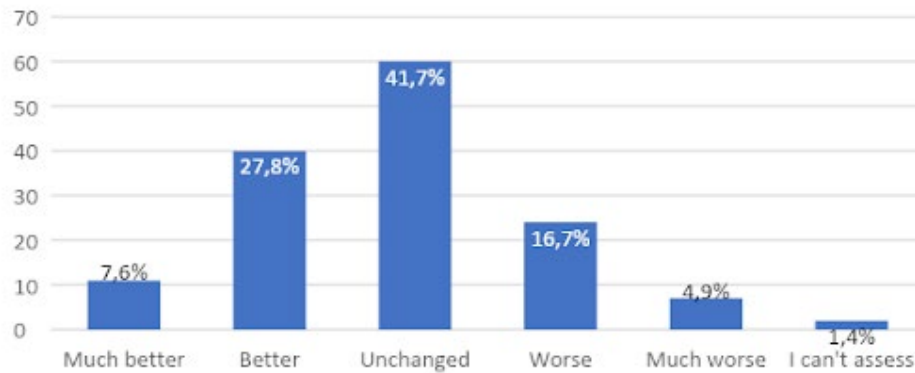
Regarding the average monthly salary for the previous three months, the highest percentage of respondents (21.8 percent) states that it is a salary in the range of 51,000 to 60,000 RSD. There are slightly fewer of those who state the amount of 41,000 to 50,000 RSD (16.2 percent) and those who state that the average salary is 61,000 to 70,000 RSD (14.1 percent). Thus, half of the respondents (52.1) earn an average of 41,000 to 70,000 RSD per month. Those who earn more than 80,000 RSD make up 13.4 percent, and those who earn less than 41,000 RSD make up 27.4 percent of the sample.

Graph 9: Average net income in the previous three months



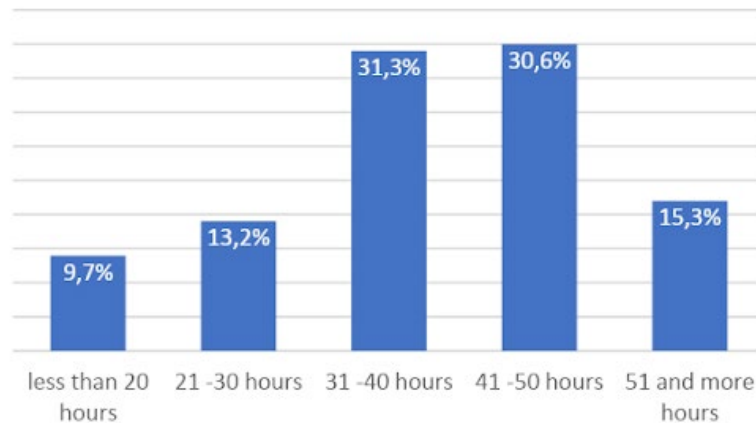
The financial situation of the majority of respondents remained unchanged compared to the previous year (41.7 percent), and several respondents said that their financial situation had improved (27.8 percent) and was much better (7.6 percent), compared to those who say it is worse (16.7 percent) or much worse (4.9 percent).

Graph 10: Material status of the respondents compared to the last year



By reviewing the economic situation, we also tried to establish the average number of working hours during one typical working week. Most journalists work on average from 41 to 50 working hours (30.6 percent) and from 31 to 40 hours (31.3 percent). A certain percentage of journalists (15.3 percent) work even 51 hours or more, and a small part of the sample stated that they work less than 20 hours a week (9.7 percent).

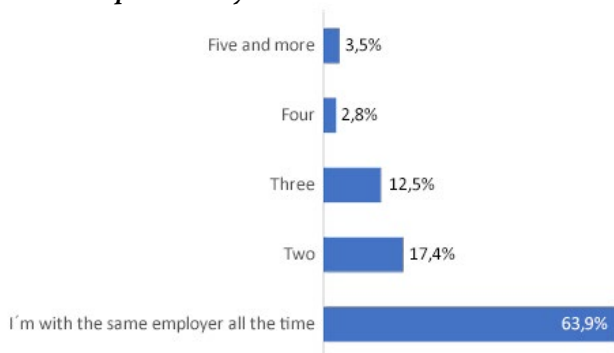
Graph 11: Average weekly working hours of respondents



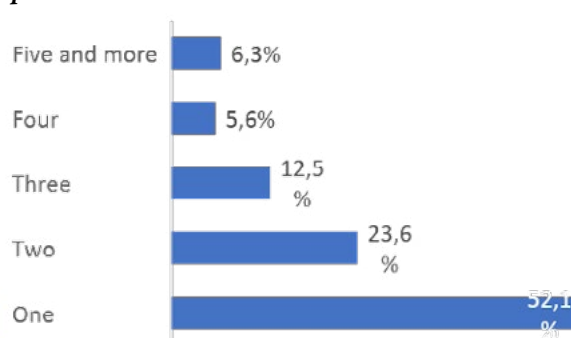
The results show that there is no significant tendency of frequent change of employers in the journalistic profession. More than 60 percent of journalists (63.9 percent) have not changed their employer in the past five years, and a smaller percentage has changed employer once (17.4 percent).

As for the number of media outlets for which a journalist works, it is mostly one media outlet (52.1 percent), but it is noticed that media professionals often work for more than one media outlet at the same time (47.9 percent). Among them, most worked for two (23.6 percent) or three (12.5 percent) different media outlets in the previous three months.

Graph 12: Number of employers in the previous 5 years

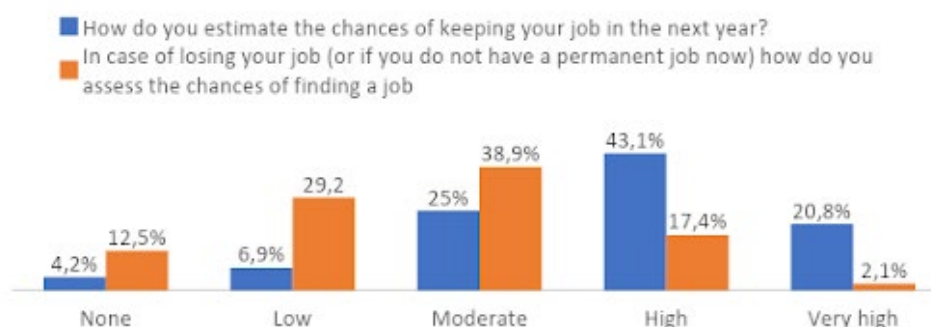


Graph 13: Number of employers in the previous 3 months



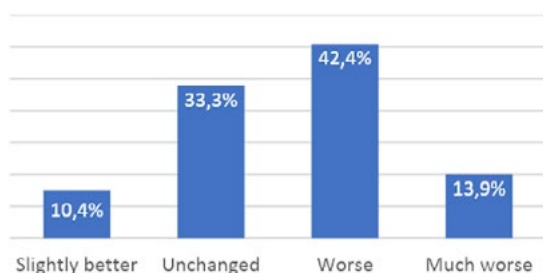
When asked how they assess the chances of keeping their jobs in the next year, media professionals believe that the chances are mostly *moderate* (25 percent), *high* (43.1 percent) or *very high* (20.8 percent). However, respondents believe that in the event of job loss, their chances of finding a new job are mostly *moderate* (38.9 percent) or *low* (29.2 percent).

Graph 14: Chances to keep an existing or find a new job in the next year

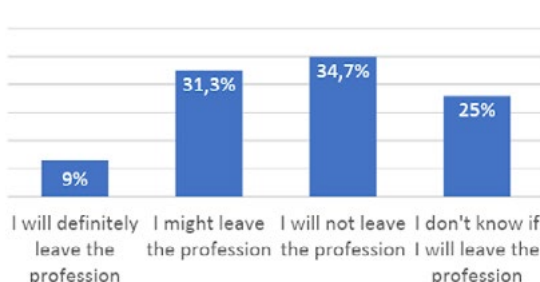


The research shows that media workers believe that the economic position of journalists has remained *unchanged* in the previous five years (33.3 percent). A certain percentage of respondents think that the situation is *worse* (42.4 percent) and *significantly worse* (13.9 percent), while a small percentage thinks that the economic situation has become a *little better* (10.4 percent). Regardless of the opinion that the economic position of journalists is worse than before, the majority of respondents are of the opinion that if the situation does not improve, *they will not leave the profession* (34.7 percent). Next in terms of representation is the opinion that they *may leave the profession* (31.3 percent), then that *they do not know if they would leave the profession* (25 percent), and there are the least are those who are of the opinion that they will *definitely leave the profession* (9.0 percent), if the economic situation of media workers does not improve.

Graph 15: Economic position of journalists in relation to the situation 5 years ago



Graph 16: Attitude towards leaving the profession if the situation does not improve

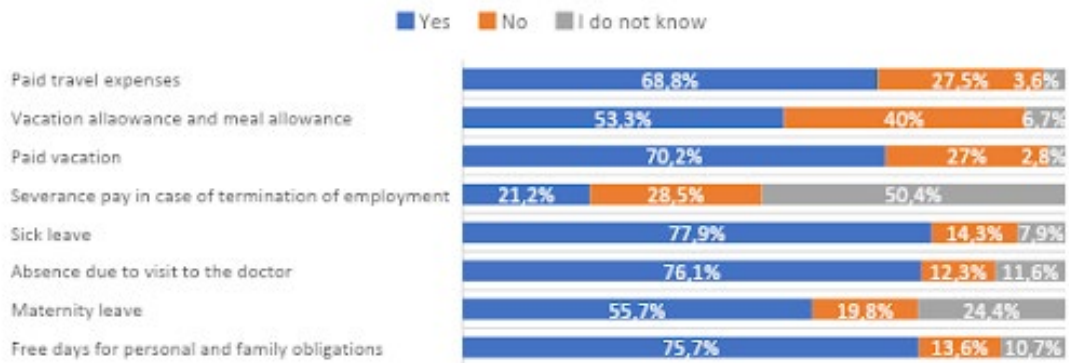


4.3. Employment rights and obligations

As for the exercise of employment rights, 3.5 percent of journalists and media workers have never had a regular monthly income, and 5.6 percent rarely do. 27.5 percent of respondents do not have paid travel expenses. 27 percent of them are not entitled to paid annual leave, and 27.5 percent of journalists and media workers are not entitled to sick leave. 12.3 percent of respondents are not entitled to a leave for visiting the doctor, 13.6 percent are not entitled to days off, while 49 percent are never entitled to an increase for overtime work, and 24.5 percent rarely.

It should be noted that 69 percent of media workers do not know whether they are entitled to severance pay in the event of termination of employment. Also, 40 percent of journalists claim that they are not entitled to vacation allowance and meal allowance, and 28.5 percent claim that they are not entitled to severance pay in case of termination of employment. 10 percent of the sample, i.e. 7 journalists, claim that they do not have the right to maternity leave, and 14.4%, i.e. 10 journalists claim that they do not know whether they have that right.

Graph 17: Employment rights



As for the obligation to work at the request of the employer outside working hours, 16.9 percent of journalists claim that they always have that obligation, 40.1 percent of journalists claim that they have it sometimes, and 28.2 percent that they rarely have it. As for the obligation to work on weekends, 27.5 percent of journalists claim that they always have that obligation, and 45.8 percent that they have it sometimes.

As many as 49 percent of respondents claim that they never have an increase in salary for overtime work, and 24.5 percent claim that they rarely have an increase. Only 11.2 percent of journalists answered that they always have an increase when they work overtime.

When it comes to workflow planning, the answers are relatively evenly distributed - 33.6 percent of media workers say they always have a work plan, and 32.1 percent say they sometimes do. 16.4 percent never plan a week in advance, and 17.9 percent do it rarely.

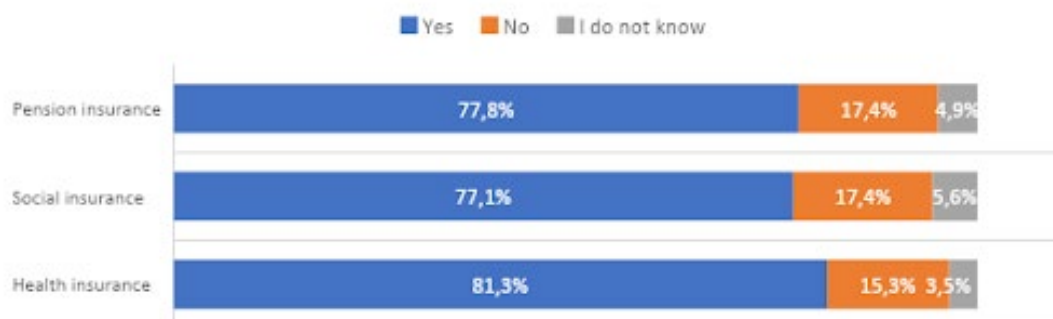
80.4 percent of respondents have a regular monthly income; 10.5 percent have regular income sometimes; 5.6 percent rarely; 3.5 percent never have a regular salary.

Graph 18: Employment rights and obligations



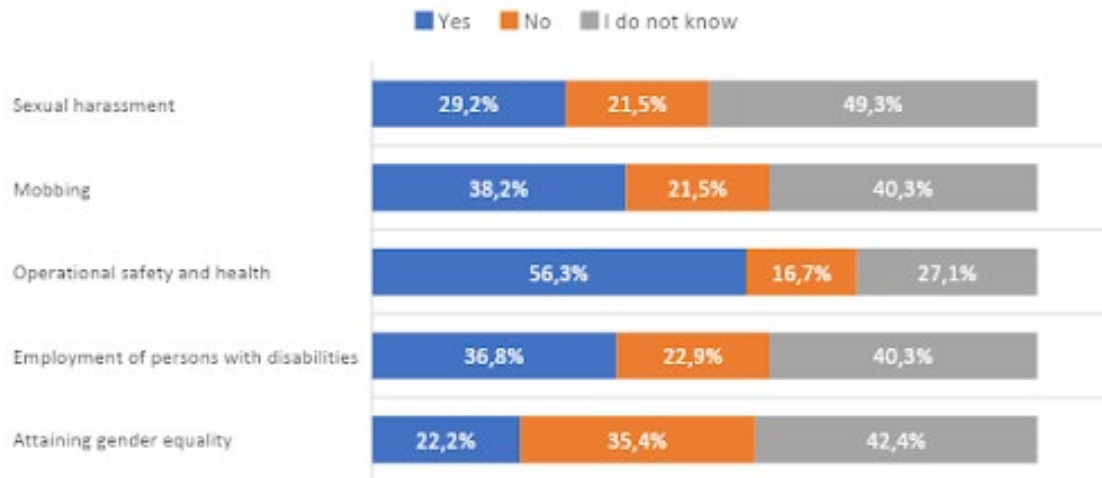
When looking at the rights related to pension, social and health insurance, the answers are similar - 77.8 percent of journalists and media workers have a paid pension insurance, and 17.4 percent do not; 77.1 respondents have social security and 17.4 do not; 81.2 percent of respondents have health insurance, while 15.3 percent do not. A small percentage of journalists do not know whether they have regularly paid pension, social and health insurance.

Graph 19: Pension, health and social insurance



Journalists are less informed about the internal procedures of the media they are employed in than about their rights and business obligations. Namely, 49.3 percent of journalists and media workers do not know whether there is an internal procedure in case of sexual harassment in the media outlet in which they work (and 29.2 percent know that there is), 40.3 percent do not know whether there is one in case of mobbing (and 38.2 percent know that it exists), 40.3 percent of journalists do not know whether there is a procedure for employment of persons with disabilities (36.8 percent know that it exists), and 42.4 percent of respondents do not know whether there is an internal procedure for attaining gender equality. Further regarding gender equality, 35.4 percent of respondents answered that there is no procedure for attaining it. A positive answer stood out in the case of internal procedures for maintaining operational safety and health - more than half of the respondents (56.3 percent) answered that there is one in the media outlet in which they work.

Graph 20: Internal procedures



4.4. Attitude towards trade unions and trade union organization

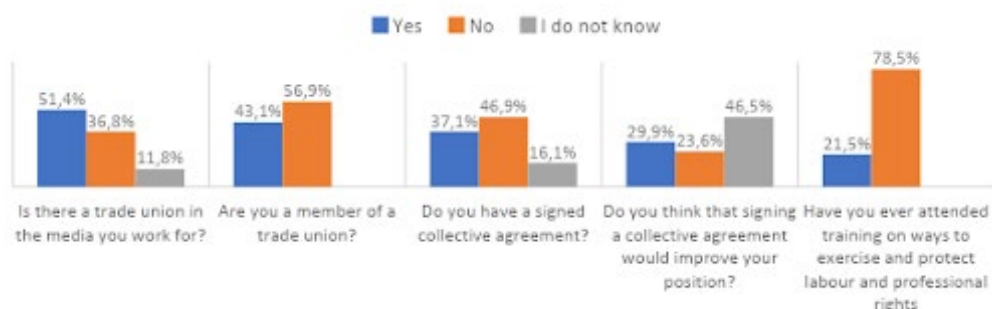
When it comes to trade union organization, 51.4 percent of journalists answered that there is a trade union of employees in the media in which they work, and 36.8 percent said that there is no union. The results of the research show that journalists more often choose not to be union members - 82 negative answers were marked, compared to 62 positive ones.

When asked “Do you have a signed collective agreement?”, almost half of the respondents replied negatively (46.9 percent). 37.1 percent of respondents stated that they had signed a collective agreement, and a smaller percentage of respondents said “I don’t know” (16.1 percent).

Through the research, we tried to examine whether journalists believe that signing such an agreement would improve their socio-economic position. The majority of respondents answered that they did not know (46.5 percent), and more of them think that the situation would improve (29.9 percent) compared to those who think that the situation would not improve (23.6 percent).

The results of the research show that a large number of journalists have never attended trainings on ways to exercise and protect labour and professional rights. Thus, 78.5 percent of the respondents answered that they had never attended this type of training, while 21.5 percent said that they had attended it.

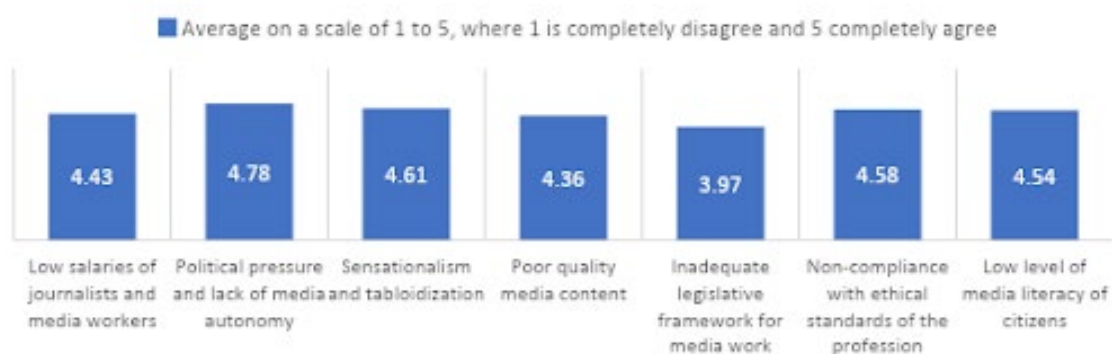
Graph 21: Trade union organisation



4.5. Assessing the profession and marking the biggest problems in journalism

Through the research, we tried to look at the perception of journalists and media workers about the biggest problems in the journalistic profession and examine which of them they consider the most important. Political pressures and the lack of media autonomy were highlighted as the biggest problem (4.87/5). In addition, the results of the research show a relative uniformity of responses about which problem is currently the biggest in journalism and media - sensationalism and tabloidization (4.61), disrespect of ethical standards of the profession (4.58/5), low level of media literacy of citizens (4.54/5). Only after the mentioned problems, the respondents recognized the problems of low salaries of journalists and media workers (4.43/5) and poor quality of media content (4.36/5). The inadequate legislative framework concerning the media was perceived as the smallest problem of all (3.97/5).

Graph 22: The biggest problems in journalism and media today



The research showed that journalists believe that their economic status will improve when “employers start paying journalists more“ (4.49). The factors of significant impact on improving the economic status are: more active engagement of journalists in the fight for their labour rights (4.43), cessation of the practice of allocating state funds to compliant media outlets (4.29) and more pronounced articulation of demands by trade unions (4.27).

The degree of agreement is somewhat lower with the following offered solutions:

- when journalists’ associations start dealing with the working and economic position of journalists (4.17)
- when the purchasing power of citizens becomes higher (4.13)
- when the state prescribes the minimum wage (3.97)
- when advertisers start allocating more funds to the media (3.97).

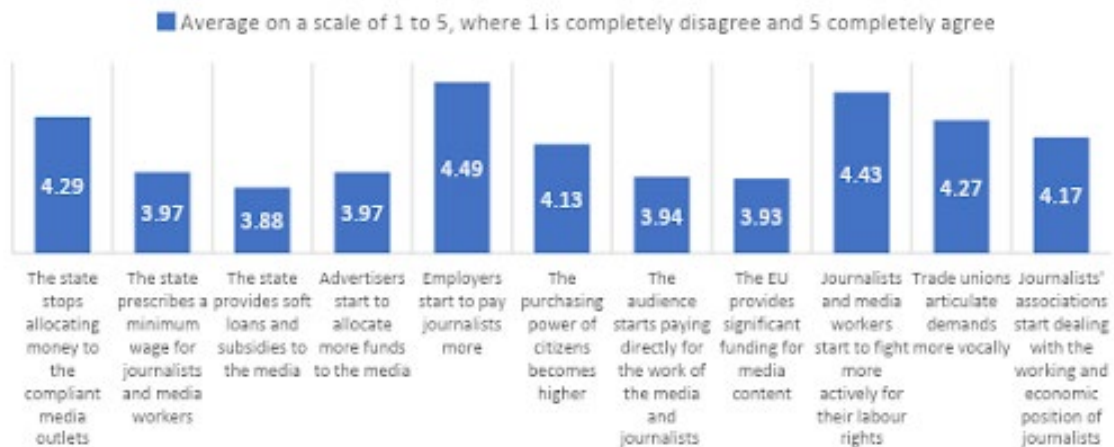
The least significant are:

- the influence of the audience, which would directly pay for the work of the media and journalists (3.94),

- the European Union, which could provide significant funding for media content (3.93)
- and the state, in terms of providing soft loans and subsidies to the media (3.88).

This implies that media workers hold employers accountable first, then journalists themselves, then the state, and finally unions.

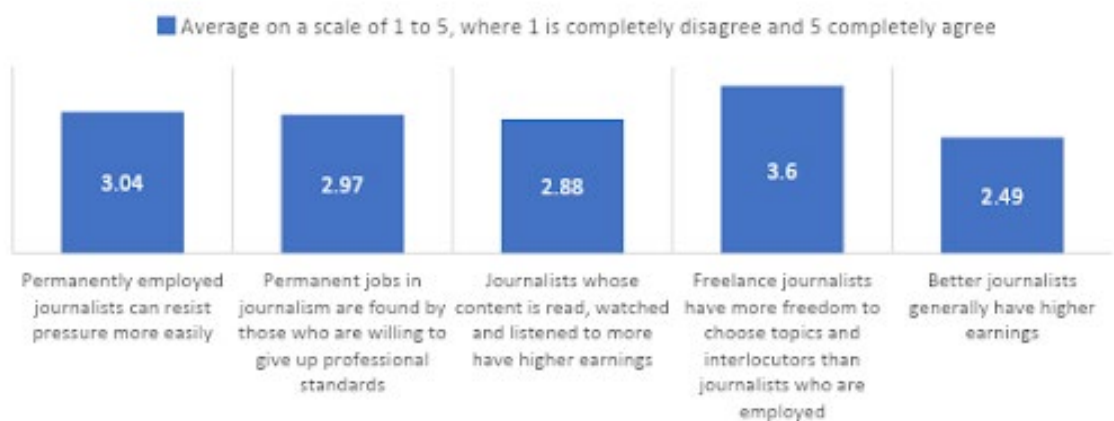
Graph 23: The economic situation of journalists and media workers will improve when:



The research tried to examine the attitudes of journalists about the relationship between financial status and employment status on the one hand and professional autonomy on the other. Surveyed journalists and media workers believe that freelance journalists have more freedom to choose topics and interlocutors than those who are employed (the degree of agreement is 3.6) and that journalists with permanent employment have less difficulty resisting pressure (the degree of agreement is 3.04).

According to the respondents, the correlation between permanent employment and non-compliance with professional standards is low. The degree of agreement with the statement that permanent jobs in journalism are found by those who are willing to give up professional standards is 2.97. Journalists have a similar degree of agreement with the claim that journalists whose content has a larger audience also have higher earnings. Journalists generally disagree with the statement that “better journalists generally have higher earnings” (the degree of agreement is 2.49).

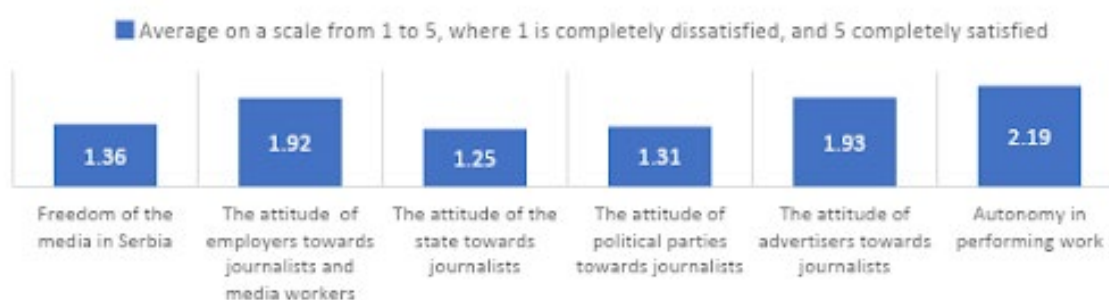
Graph 24: To what extent do journalists and media workers agree with the following statements



4.6. Satisfaction with the status of the profession and the work performed

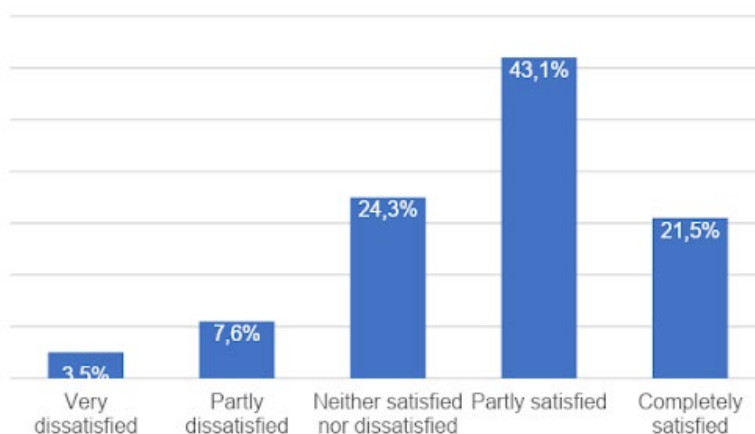
Journalists' views about the overall **situation in the media and in the media market** show that journalists are generally dissatisfied - the average degree of agreement with the claims does not exceed 2.19. Journalists are the least satisfied with the state's attitude towards the media (1.25) and the attitude of political parties towards journalists (1.31), but also with the freedom of the media in the state (1.36). Journalists are also dissatisfied with the attitude of employers towards journalists and media workers (1.92) and the attitude of advertisers towards journalists (1.93). The least dissatisfaction is reflected in the answers regarding autonomy in performing their work (2.19), but even here the answers show that journalists are generally dissatisfied with the autonomy granted to them.

Graph 25: Views of journalists about the media and the media market



As for the **work they do**, the research shows that the largest number of respondents are *partially satisfied* (43.1 percent) and *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (23.3 percent). 21.5 percent of the surveyed journalists and media workers are completely satisfied with the work they do, and 3.5 percent are completely dissatisfied.

Graph 26: Job satisfaction



The connection between **job satisfaction** and the **type of labour relationship** was noticed, because the most satisfied are those who are employed under a service contract (4.2) and those employed under a temporary or periodical contract (4.1), and only then those permanently employed (3.8) and self-employed (3.7). The lowest level of job satisfaction was expressed by those who are employed under a fixed-term contract (3.5), volunteers (3) and the unemployed (2.6).

Regarding the relationship between **job satisfaction and the amount of income**, journalists and media workers with a monthly income above 80,000 RSD show the highest level of job satisfaction (4.2), but the same level of satisfaction is shown by the respondents with the income in the range of 21,000 to 30,000 RSD (4.1). The lowest level of satisfaction with the profession is shown by those without income (2.4) and with income of less than 20,000 RSD (3.1). When we talk about the **timeliness of income**, those who *always* and *sometimes* receive a salary on time, show greater satisfaction (3,7 and 4), and those who *rarely* or *never* receive a salary on time show a lower level of satisfaction (3,1 and 2,8). The level of satisfaction is high, and ranges approximately between 3.7 and 3.9, for those who have either not changed employers or have changed up to three employers in the previous five years, but the level of satisfaction drops dramatically in cases where respondents changed more than three employers in the previous five years (2.5). It has been noticed that regularly paid health, social and pension insurance does not play a significant role in relation to job satisfaction. Even those who are most satisfied with their work, mostly answer that they do not know whether their health and pension insurance is covered.

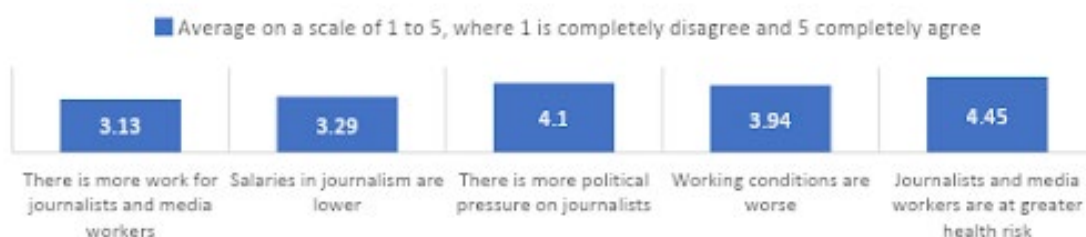
When we compare job satisfaction and labour rights that are guaranteed by employment, the obligation to work on call has proven to be a category on which the satisfaction of journalists may depend. Namely, journalists who *always* have the obligation to work on call show the lowest level of satisfaction (3.4), and it gradually increases with the categories *sometimes* (3.6), *rarely* (3.7), *never* (4). A smaller difference was noticed concerning the entitlement to a leave for visiting the doctor, where those who have that entitlement are slightly more satisfied (3.8) than those who do not have that entitlement (3.5). The difference in satisfaction was also noticed between those who are entitled to severance pay in case of job loss (3.9) and those who are not (3.5).

4.7. Impact of the pandemic on the profession and journalists

When asked if they have a paid full sick leave in case of coronavirus infection, as many as 43.3 percent of respondents answered that they do not know. In this case, in addition, slightly more respondents claim that they have 100 percent paid sick leave (29.1 percent), than those who claim that they do not (27.7 percent).

Journalists generally agree with the statement that they have been at greater health risk since the beginning of the pandemic (4.45) and that since the beginning of the pandemic there has been even greater political pressure on journalists than before (4.1). Also, journalists agree with the statement that working conditions are worse (3.94), and in a slightly lower percentage that salaries in journalism are lower (3.29). As for the claim that there has been more work for journalists since the beginning of the pandemic, the degree of agreement is moderate (3.13).

Graph27: Impact of the pandemic on the profession and journalists



Socio-economic and professional status of **female journalists** in AP Vojvodina



In the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, media invisibility and discriminatory media coverage of vulnerable social groups are noted.

According to research, the media sphere does not ensure full and consistent compliance with the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, the Law on Gender Equality, laws regulating the media, REM guidelines and ethical standards of journalism regarding gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices against women (Filipović, Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2012). “Women are continuously underrepresented in the informative content and are most often stereotyped. The achievements and creativity of women are neglected, and members of vulnerable groups of women are also invisible in the media” (Dokmanović, 2016).

Since there are no data on the number of media that have internal measures and procedures for achieving gender equality, nor are mechanisms established for gender sensitive collection and analysis of data on women’s representation in journalism, the Action Plan for Implementing the Strategy for Development of Public Information System for the period 2020-2022 provides for measures that should contribute to creating conditions for greater representation of women among editors and in decision-making positions, as well as conditions that enable the harmonization of business obligations with private ones. During the fourth quarter of 2022, the adoption of internal measures and procedures related to policies for achieving gender equality in public broadcasting services should be finalized, while ensuring the participation of women in designing and implementing effective gender-sensitive policies and programs.

In recent years, especially with the emergence of the #MeToo movement, more and more attention has been paid globally to gender-based violence against women in the public sphere, including female journalists.

Violence against women, as defined in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threat, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of freedom, whether occurring in public or private life.

The Report on Violence against Women Journalists of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (2020) states that both male and female journalists are exposed to violence and security threats in their work, however, gender-based violence and sexual harassment are disproportionately targeted at female journalists, both in the workplace and on the Internet. It is added that journalists are expected to fit into stereotypical roles and sexualized images of women and to operate within unequal power relationships between men and women in the media world.

Journalists are more exposed to attacks on the Internet, misogyny, sexualization, persecution and harassment because of their professional work, but also because they openly express their views. Recent cases of verbal violence and hate messages to journalists in Serbia, including Tamara Skrozza, Jovana Gligorijević, Snežana Čongradin, Sanja Kljajić, Vanja Đurić, Ana Lalić and Žaklina Tatalović, indicate that the virtual age provides new ways to intimidate, such as “doxing” or “trolling” while sexual blackmail and the distribution of intimate content without consent are present on a global scale, in order to belittle women in the public sphere.

According to a survey by the International Women's Media Foundation in which nearly 600 journalists took part in 2018, almost 30 percent of women who experienced threats and attacks thought about leaving the profession, while almost 40 percent admitted that they avoided reporting on certain topics. (Ferrier, 2018).

The Report on Violence against Women Journalists of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (2020) states that, in addition to the overt harassment faced by women journalists and media workers, outside factors are present in some countries, including inflexible working hours, partial or no access to reasonably priced and quality childcare, inadequate parental leave policies and negative social attitudes.

5.1. Female journalists in Vojvodina: Research results

In December 2020, 144 journalists and media workers from Vojvodina filled in the questionnaire on the socio-economic situation, 74 women and 70 men.

When it comes to the type of labour relationship, no drastic differences in relation to gender have been noticed. There are slightly more women among the permanently employed (45 women and 41 men), but there is also a larger number of women who are unemployed (seven women and three men).

Among the respondents, most are women who have been in journalism for 11 to 20 years (30) as well as those who have been in the profession for less than five years (17), while men are twice as numerous among those who have been in the profession for more than 20 years.

The focus group was organized on-line, via the Zoom application, on 3 November 2020. Five women journalists participated - two from Novi Sad and one from Kikinda, Zrenjanin and Subotica. The interlocutor from Pančevo, although she confirmed her participation, due to editorial obligations, failed to join. When selecting the research participants, care was taken to represent women of different ages, length of journalistic experience, professional status, experience and types of media in which they are or were engaged.

At the beginning of the conversation, four women journalists **said that they did not personally feel discriminated against in the profession because they are women, but during the discussion one stated that she believes that the threats she was exposed to were made because she is a woman, and others agreed that they notice different positions of female and male journalists in the distribution of work and positions within editorial offices.** However, the women participants in the research believe that the social and economic position of women journalists is the same as the position of other women, for example doctors, educators, and that, according to one interviewee, they are *simply sharing the overall position of women in this society.*

5.2. Economic status of female journalists

When asked how they assess the economic situation of journalists, the interlocutors agreed that it is very bad and that the situation, regardless of the type of engagement or contract, is unstable in the sense that there is no security in solving some important life issues, such as raising a housing loan and sometimes it is even a problem to pay regular monthly dues.

The woman journalist who works at the public broadcasting service states that thereby she has some kind of economic security, *so we still feel a little protected, like polar bears, in that economic sense. However, she also states that the very fact that the public broadcasting service is a special type of media institution makes it much harder to fight for all the professional principles of journalism.*

On the other hand, a woman journalist and editor who has been working for 20 years in private media outlets of large foreign companies, does not complain about her economic status, however she considers the situation varies depending on the position within the company and the proximity of central editorial office, *correspondents are generally paid less than the journalists who work in the headquarters, in the newsroom, without any justification, they mostly even do more work because they cover more cities and therefore they are fewer than journalists in the newsrooms.* She also states that, according to her editorial experience, women find it harder to fight for better positions, and that men are more willing to change jobs and look for a safer job.

A woman freelancer from Subotica states that she does not have working hours and that she earns as much as she works and according to the opportunities, i.e. that she has to fight for money every month and engage herself. *I live from project to project and from offer to offer. That way, I've been surviving since March until today, and that's it. I wonder how it will be going forward, but now it is as it is.*

A woman journalist from Kikinda, currently unemployed, believes that journalists working in the local media outlets are in a more difficult economic position because they are more dependent on the will of the local authorities. *I remember many months and years when the salary was lower than the minimum or when there was no salary at all, and we were a municipal newspaper. Sometimes it was in the mood to give us salaries for the rank of clerk at the counter of the Municipality, and sometimes it was in the mood to give us even lower salaries, so we had even less.*

The woman interlocutor from Zrenjanin, who is at the beginning of her career, says that according to the assessments of older journalists and editors, salaries in journalism have never been lower. *When I look at other media outlets in the city, it is obvious that the situation has never been worse. Incomes are quite low, but also they are increasingly uncertain and function on a project-by-project basis, and there are no stable or secure sources of funding for journalists.*

In the socio-economic survey, most women journalists and media workers state that the average net salary they received in the last three months is between 51,000 and 60,000 RSD (18), although when viewed collectively 37 women receive a salary below 50,000, while five women are without income.

Focus group women journalists who are permanently employed have health, social and pension insurance covered, however, they testify that some colleagues also work “illegally”.

I have a permanent contract and in general in our company it is all covered. So, the one who has a temporary or periodical employment contract has also paid contributions. But as far as I know from colleagues from the portal, they do not have contracts, they are not signed under their articles and they work illegally, in essence.

A female journalist with thirty years of service is currently out of work. *Now at the age of 59 I haven't had any contract for five years. As far as health insurance is concerned, I have a health card that I received as an unemployed person, and I try to visit the doctor as rarely as possible.*

On the other hand, the woman interlocutor who has been in journalism for more than two decades believes that she is in a satisfactory position because she was *rude enough* to set the conditions under which she will work, but she is aware that she can afford that comfort when choosing a job and making risky economic decisions *thanks to a hard-working husband*.

5.3. Position of women in journalism

Although they say they have not personally experienced discrimination because they are women, most focus group participants agree that female journalists are in a more difficult position than male journalists. It was also noted that the government and state institutions discriminate against certain journalists, regardless of gender, in the sense that they provide information only to certain, compliant media outlets.

The interlocutors agree that there are currently more women in the profession, and the woman journalist from Zrenjanin believes that regardless of the number, men find it easier to get the position of editor and media director. *I can say that in my environment, the more female journalists there were in relation to the number of male journalists in the editorial office, the worse the economic situation became.* She adds that earlier there was a more noticeable division by the areas they cover, female journalists covered more health, education and culture, while the economy and politics were covered by male journalists. *And now it is not like that, because only female journalists have remained, and the situation has never been worse.*

The survey on the socio-economic situation shows similar results. Women are the most numerous among journalists (39 women compared to 21 men), while more men (12 men and 10 women) hold editorial positions, as well as the position of editor-in-chief (12 men and nine women). Among the women who are editors-in-chief, three work in the civil society media outlets, one of them does not have a permanent job and works as a journalist under a contract, while two are permanently employed. There are no women among those who stated that they are cameramen. The directors and owners of the media were not among those who filled out the questionnaire.

A woman participant of the focus group from Kikinda remembers that a colleague who had the same experience as his female colleagues was promoted because he *regularly drank brandy with the director*. The management explained the promotion procedure by saying that they know the colleague better. *And he did not know us women, although better educated, with more articles and better style. Because we went home after working hours to take on our other responsibilities. To take care of children, parents, this or that, and he just met this man and found him to be a great character.*

When it comes to providing travel expenses, the given example is illustrative of how women journalists managed and rode their bicycles to the field in the surrounding villages, while their male colleagues did not want to agree to work if they did not have a secured vehicle and driver.

A woman interlocutor, who has been working for companies based abroad for years, says that these media houses are strict and clear in compliance with European Union law, and that in one corporation where she previously worked gender equality was more pronounced, but primarily because it understood the issue as an obligation. The experience of a colleague who was removed from the position of editor as a mother of two when she became pregnant for the third time, with explanation that she will not be able to fit in her three children with her work obligations, testifies to how the issue of gender equality is actually formal and not essential. "Which is completely unfounded. If they hadn't asked her, they wouldn't have known how many children she has and if she has any children at all. To that extent she did her job professionally and there was never any issue. But there is an a priori assumption that someone with three children cannot be a journalist."

This woman journalist also suspects that male editors have higher salaries than female editors. *I don't have data, it's just my belief and for me it's one of the dumbest sex discrimination, because nothing has shown that they are bigger, better workers than women. I would even add, I say from some editorial experience, women have proven to be more responsible workers, and often more hard working.*

A woman participant of the focus group from Subotica thinks that she is not discriminated against in the profession, but she remembers the beginning of the migrant crisis and the unrest at the border crossing with the Republic of Hungary when the editorial office thought it was wrong for her to go to the field just because she is a woman. *Then our editor asked who wants to go to cover, I answered that I wanted to and then they told me: "Well, you can't as a woman" and then I said that I'm not a woman but a journalist and that I want to go.*

5.4. Adjusting professional obligations and private life

Since there are no defined working hours in journalism, often they need to work on weekends and holidays, the interviewed women journalists agree that they would not be able to reconcile professional and private obligations without the support of a partner or family.

I have to admit, thanks to my husband above all, and his understanding, good will and patience. I chose to be a journalist and I invested a lot in my professional career. There were evenings and evenings when he put the children in bed and gave them dinner and everything that follows, because I cover culture and all cultural events are in the evening, which does not mean that I am free during the day, because I have to go to the radio in the morning as well.

You are a journalist 24 hours a day, and whoever does not agree to that should leave journalism as soon as possible and do some calmer and safer work.

The fact is that journalism is a profession that the whole family suffers from. It doesn't matter how many children there are and whether there are parents, in my case whether there is a dog. As ridiculous as it sounds, I have to count it as an obligation.

I also have the privilege of having a partner who is a journalist and who understands what journalism is and what the job looks like. His situation is a little more comfortable since he works on the RTV. But we are very flexible towards each other and we try to meet halfway, especially he meets me, since I had situations in which I worked 15 hours a day. That is when the kitchen and

everything else are taken care of, but there are also reverse situations.

Female journalists also agree that priority should be given to professional obligations while private life is in the background. *We would rather choose that our spouses, children, pets and friends suffer than allow the newsroom and our business to suffer.*

The results of the questionnaire on the socio-economic position of journalists and media workers in Vojvodina show that 24% (32) of respondents do not know whether the media organization in which they are engaged has regulated maternity leave, more than half (56% or 73) say yes, while about 20% (26 respondents) state that it is not regulated.

5.5. Violence against female journalists

Women focus group participants agree that women in journalism are more often exposed to insults, misogyny and hate speech, both in virtual and real space. They believe that this is a consequence of the patriarchal way of thinking that is still present in the society. *People more easily decide to criticize the work of a female journalist than a male journalist. Obviously, there is still a common opinion that this is not a woman's job, that we have nothing to do there or take pictures of, possibly to cover the weather forecast.*

A woman journalist who was exposed to hate speech says that she was surprised that she received the most brutal messages and threats to her and her family from women. *Everyone wanted to rape me, lynch me, but to rape me again because it's probably easier to threaten a woman with that. What really was a complete phenomenon to me was that some of the most brutal, disgusting messages concerning my family and my child came from women. I received messages that we are fools and that we should get married well and deal with things that do not require the brain, or that we are journalists because we are self-conscious fools, and we think we know everything.*

A woman journalist who has been in journalism for thirty years also says that she personally experienced the most brutal insults from her colleagues. *They talk about me as a traitor and the like, that kind of labelling.*

Women are more often targeted by bullies, both virtual and real-time thugs, but I think the reason is in the mentality and that this society still thinks that women have no place in journalism or politics or in some more serious spheres, which does not include nails, bangs and pedicure.

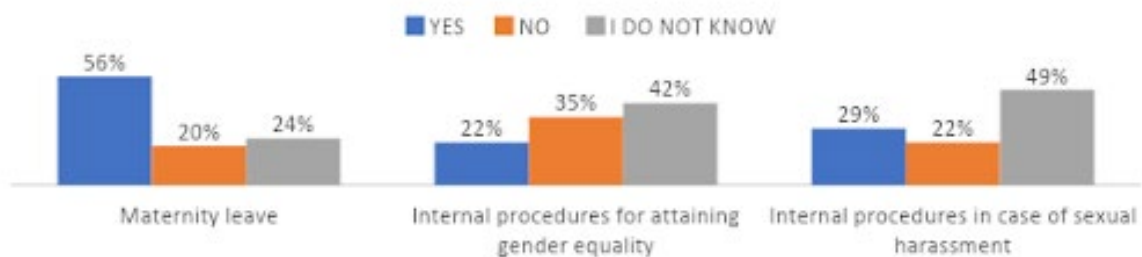
There are also cases of sexual harassment, but it is rare for female journalists to raise their voices while most are silent because they are in a subordinate position. *One of the editors was punished many times for his attitude towards his female colleagues, which ranged from extreme sexist insults to sexist expectations. So he was the editor, they were journalists, their monthly fees depended on him due to certain grading points.*

Well, it makes sense for women to be an easier target. Female journalists are braver than their male colleagues, with some exceptions. They are more ready to reveal the truth, no one likes the truth. We see how this society is developing, how fiercely it is regressing in all aspects, and it is natural and logical that this new patriarchal system will be worse than the previous one.

The results of the implemented survey that refer to the problems of gender inequality, sexual harassment and safety are alarming, because they show that these topics are not recognized, both in media organizations and by journalists. When asked whether there are internal procedures for attaining gender equality in the media they work for, the majority of respondents 42% (61) do not know, 35% (51) say they do not exist and only 22% (32) state that there are procedures for attaining gender equality. It is also worrying that almost half of the respondents 49% (71) do not know whether there are internal procedures in case of sexual harassment, 22% (31) say that they do not exist and 29% (42) state that there are procedures.

When it comes to the problem of safety and health at work, the majority of 56% (81) of those who completed the questionnaire say that there are internal procedures, 17% (24) say that there are no procedures, while 27% (39) do not know if there are procedures for safety and health.

Graph 28: Maternity leave and internal procedures



5.6. Possible solutions for improving the position of journalists

Apart from the woman journalist who has been working in the same position for more than three decades, first in the state media and then in the public broadcasting service, who is pessimistic and believes that journalism as a profession will die out, other women interlocutors see the improvement of professional and socio-economic status primarily in the strength of journalists to fight for their own position, by putting pressure on the government and competent institutions to respect the law, while strengthening solidarity, cooperation, association, respect for professional and ethical principles, enhancing the role of trade unions and their support in journalists' associations (the Independent Journalists Association of Vojvodina was mentioned).

We should adhere to ethics and we should adhere to ourselves and be in contact with journalists who do not violate the code and who function and report in the public interest.

As for the trade unions, I think that they have a bigger role when it comes to the public sector, for example, the RTV and the like, while we, the other journalists, rely more on our journalists' associations such as IJAV.

It is known what journalism is, you don't need to wander around in some grey zones now, it is very clear what a journalist is, what a professional is, what professional and true information is, and what is everything else. When the terrain is cleared, then there will be space left for journalism to return in its full extent.

Journalists reporting in the languages of national minorities



There is no official data on the number of media reporting in the languages of national minorities in Vojvodina, and therefore there is no precise data on the number of journalists reporting in the languages of national minorities. According to Sejdinović (2020), there are a total of 163 media outlets in the Republic of Serbia that also report in the languages of national minorities, of which 82 are on the territory of AP Vojvodina.

The privatization of the media in Serbia has not bypassed the media that report in the languages of national minorities. According to Serenčeš and Sejdinović (2016), out of a total of 73 media outlets that were subject to privatization, as many as 43 media outlets had minority content (20 radio stations, 15 broadcasters, 5 television stations and 3 print media outlets) (p. 41). The Law on Public Information and Media introduced the obligation that in the next 5 years, from the day of privatization, the media buyer must keep the media content as it was in the previous 12 months before the day of purchase. Failure to comply with this obligation is a reason to terminate the contract. REM monitors compliance with the obligations of privatized media outlets. Sejdinović (2020) states that, in addition to that, one third of the media outlets (14) was shut down, while some media outlets, meanwhile, abolished the program in minority languages (p. 5).

Minority media outlets have negligible marketing revenues. Newspapers in minority languages, whose founders are the national councils of national minorities, on the territory of AP Vojvodina, receive direct subsidies from the Government of AP Vojvodina. According to the Radio-Television of Vojvodina (2016), 264 million RSD were set aside to finance nine publishers and 22 papers in the languages of national minorities in 2016. On the other hand, there is no such type of funding for minority language media outside the territory of AP Vojvodina. The problem is that the public is not aware of the criteria on the basis of which this money is distributed.

Another way of financing the media in minority languages is competitive co-financing implemented by the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities and local self-governments. In some places, special competitions are announced for co-financing projects in the languages of national minorities, while elsewhere general competitions are announced, indicating that these competitions also apply to media content in the languages of national minorities. The problem is that this practice is not uniform, as well as the fact that decision making is not supported by any explanations from the commissions, based on which it could be determined why certain projects were awarded certain funds, and why some other projects were not awarded with any funds. Simply scoring of projects is not enough to establish these important facts.

National councils of national minorities have a significant role in deciding on projects that will be awarded funds for competitive co-financing. Namely, national councils make a proposal for the distribution of funds for projects, which are submitted to a public competition announced by a public authority. The legal form of the proposal is not binding and could be considered as a kind of assistance to the independent expert commission to evaluate certain project proposals, having in mind the broader context and needs of a certain community. Given that the proposals of national councils are generally respected, and that a large number of media in the languages of national minorities generate most of their income through project co-financing, national councils as highly politicized bodies are granted with a significant mechanism to control the media and media content regarded as unsuitable for the current

convocation of national councils, which is not good from the aspect of pluralism and freedom of expression.

When it comes to reporting in minority languages on public broadcasting services, according to Kuntić research (2017), it was found that:

The second television channel of the Provincial Public Broadcasting Service broadcasts daily or on weekdays the news programs, which includes the prime time news in Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Ruthenian and Croatian, while programs in other languages are broadcast once a week. In addition, weekly news programs are broadcast in the languages of larger or traditional minorities. Old minorities, especially the Hungarian national minority, have shows covering social issues, agriculture, sports, etc. Thanks to the existence of numerous slots, the programs on Radio Novi Sad have a similar program schedule, but a more diverse one. For the time being, the Republic Public Broadcasting Service RTS has only a radio show in the Romani language (p. 56).

Sejdinović (2020), states that the influence of national councils of national minorities on the editorial policy of minority editorial offices, which mainly function as separate entities within RTV, is evident (p. 9).

In accordance with the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, national councils may establish institutions and companies in the field of information. In practice, there is a mutual misunderstanding between national councils, as the founders of media outlets in the languages of national minorities, and employees of those media outlets about who is the one who decides on the personnel and editorial policy of those media outlets. On the one hand, national councils believe that they should have absolute control over the personnel and editorial policy of the media outlets of which they are the founders. On the other hand, editorial offices of the media outlets founded by national councils require them to be depoliticized and independent from the founder in their editorial and personnel policy.

6.1. Research results

Of the 144 respondents who participated in this survey, 84.7% reported in Serbian while 15.3% reported in minority languages.

Most journalists who report in the languages of national minorities, among the respondents, are permanently employed (68.18%), while 18.18% of journalists have fixed-term contract.

Among the surveyed journalists who report in the languages of national minorities, most are those with 11 to 20 years of service (36%), while 27% have been employed from 6 to 10 years, or 21 to 30 years.

6.2. Economic position of journalists reporting in the languages of national minorities

Focus group participants believe that they are at a disadvantage compared to journalists who report only in Serbian. This unfavourable position is reflected in lower wages, unresolved employment status and general distrust of them. One of the participants in the focus group

believes that *journalists are not even middle class, they earn below average, certainly below all those statistical averages given by the Government, and that their social status is currently outsider status*. Such attitudes are somewhat reflected in the results of the survey, which found that the largest number of journalists reporting in national minority languages have incomes between 41,000 and 50,000 RSD, while journalists reporting in Serbian have incomes between 51,000 and 60,000 RSD. Also, over 15% of journalists who report in Serbian earn over 80,000 RSD, while no journalists who report in the languages of national minorities earn that much.

One woman interlocutor states: *I have always had the feeling that media workers in minority journalism have always been seen as less valuable workers, journalists, maybe even people*.

Another interlocutor adds: *As far as I know, the coefficients differ between editors in Serbian and editors in minority languages, and no one is pushing that story. I do not know why*.

The interlocutors agree that the budget financing of media whose publishers were founded by national councils is just an illusion of security for journalists working in those media, because it can always happen that the state reduces funding, which will certainly lead to lay offs in those media. They see the solution in “playing on several fronts” and participating in various projects in order to obtain funds in several ways.

All interlocutors must do several jobs to ensure financial security. One of the interlocutors states: *Of course, I worked on several fronts, because I expect that tomorrow someone will replace me and say: Enough is enough. What next? What about retirement? I know journalists who don't have a health card*.

Another woman interlocutor is also engaged in several projects, but states that the economic moment is not crucial: *Even while I had a stable job I was always additionally engaged from time to time, but it was always about journalism or language in terms of translation. When I am presented with an opportunity for additional engagement in some other projects I almost always jump in and it is not always about financial gain, but the feeling that I am doing a good thing. So for me, that economic moment is not always important*.

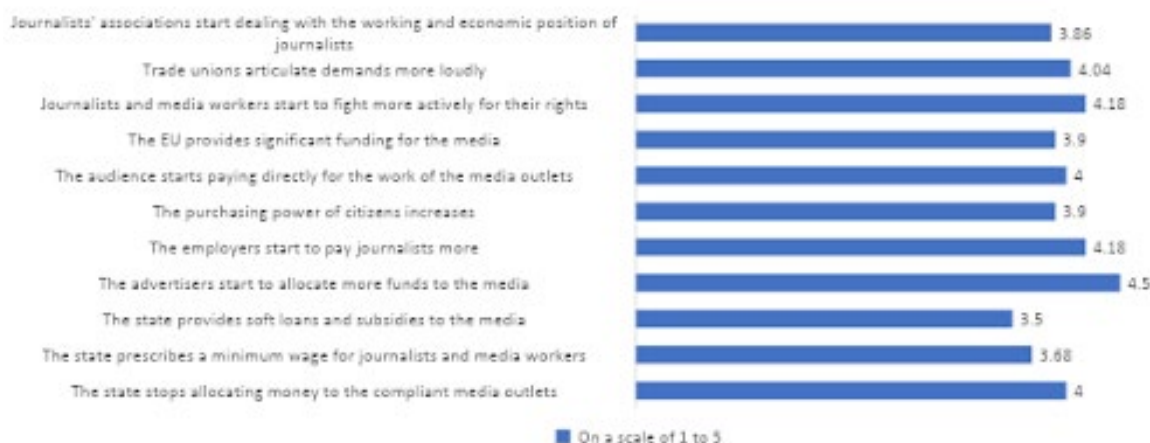
A third interlocutor is also doing several jobs because he believes that the future is very uncertain in a professional sense: *I don't have to, but I'm working because I don't know how long it will last. I was always saved by the fact that I always had a place to escape. Now I'm not sure I have a place to escape, but I hope that situation doesn't happen. If it comes I hope to come up with something again*.

One woman interlocutor states: *My socio-economic position is good, why? Because I work on multiple fronts*.

Such attitudes are confirmed by the results obtained from the questionnaire. Only 36.4% of respondents in the previous three months worked for only one media outlet, while 63.6% of respondents worked for two or several media outlets. In addition to the fact that journalists who report in the languages of national minorities work for several media, their working hours often exceed 8 hours a day, so 31.8% of respondents work 41-50 hours a week, while 18.2% of respondents who report in the languages of national minorities work 51 or more hours a week.

As possible solutions to the problems of journalists and media workers reporting in the languages of national minorities respondents see higher salaries for journalists (4.18), more active fight of journalists for their rights (4.18), but also increase in advertising revenues (4, 5)

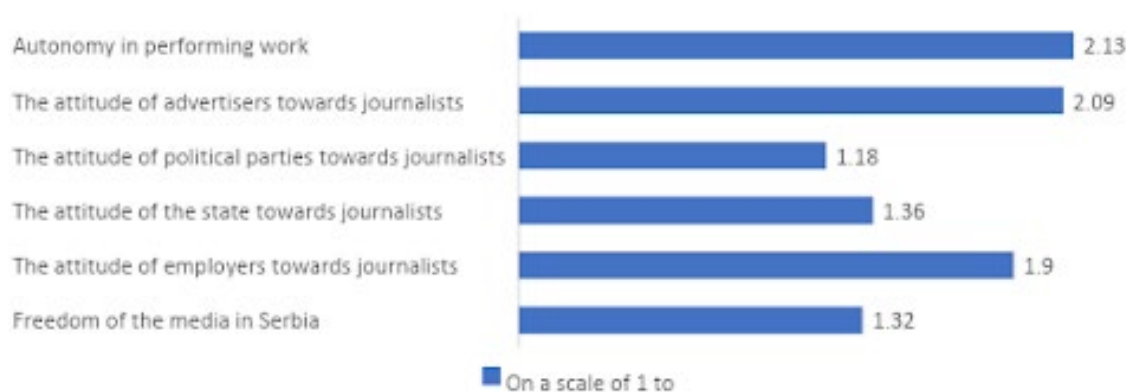
Graph 29: The position of journalists and media workers will improve when:



6.3. Professional status

Respondents reporting in the languages of national minorities are completely dissatisfied with the freedom of the media in Serbia (1.32), the attitude of employers towards journalists (1.90), the attitude of the state towards journalists (1.36), the attitude of political parties towards journalists (1.18), while they are partially dissatisfied with the attitude of advertisers towards journalists (2.09) and their autonomy in performing their work (2.13).

Graph 30: Satisfaction with certain aspects influencing the professional position of journalists and media workers



Focus group participants believe that journalists themselves have contributed to the current position the profession finds itself in. Immediately after the journalists themselves, they indicate political pressure on journalists and the media as the culprits for such a position of the journalistic profession. They see the solution to this problem in uniting journalists, expanding the model of integrity and reducing the control over the media by national councils of national minorities. The results of the survey follow the views of focus group participants. Thus surveyed journalists who report in the languages of national minorities largely believe that political pressures, sensationalism, and disrespect for ethical standards have contributed

the most to the poor state of the profession.

Focus group participants prioritize professional position, which is even more important to them than economic one.

One woman interlocutor states: *Journalistic integrity is very important to me in my journalistic career and we journalists are journalists all the time and our whole life. Our social engagement, whether private or public, is very important, so I consider that part to be part of the socio-economic position of journalists.*

Despite the fact that the social status is important, they believe that it is not the best at the moment. They state: *The status in this society, socio-economic, is not good and that is why journalists are looking for different engagements, not just engagement in a particular media outlet where they may be employed. I have a feeling that we journalists are just some balls that people throw at each other. Sometimes we are black when we are not good, and sometimes we are red and white when we do something good.*

The woman interlocutor notes that journalists do not contribute sufficiently to changes in society, although they should do so: *Since I entered journalism, which is about 15 years ago, I have been a professional journalist, but every two or three years I have the urge to leave journalism as I just have the feeling that I simply do not contribute to the development of the society, and in my opinion journalists are the ones to contribute to change.* Participants in the survey part of the research also believe that they may leave the profession if the position of journalists does not improve. Thus, 9.1% of respondents state that they will definitely leave the profession, while 45.5% of respondents state that they may leave the profession, while 27.3% are undecided. Only 18.2% of respondents state that they will not leave the profession in spite of everything.

The interlocutors believe that journalists and media workers are mostly to blame for the current situation: *I think those are journalists themselves, again they are not journalists, they are media workers who have contributed to the mistrust, they are just being photographed and do not know how to ask a question. People don't feel that these people are fighting for progress, for the truth, for some social progress, or whatever.*

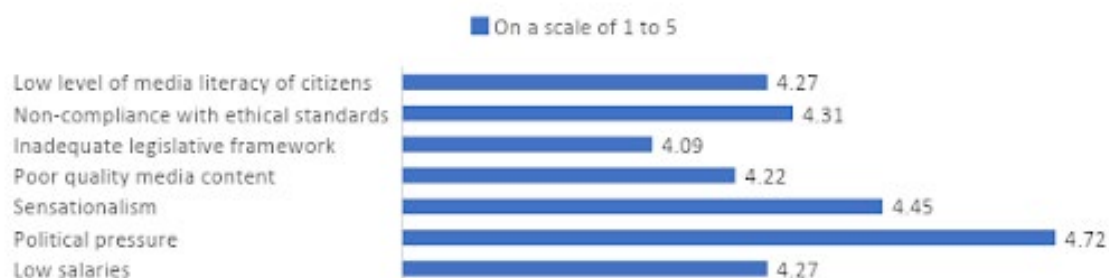
The interlocutor adds: *Each and every one of us believed in October 5th and in the authorities after October 5th and we tolerated these people a lot, and in the end it all led to one disappointment. And we ruined that profession.*

A third interlocutor agrees that journalists are mostly to blame for their current position: *it's not our viewers' fault that our media are bad. The media are to blame for the fact that they are bad, the viewers did not ask for that. Viewers have not changed, I don't know how they would have changed since the seventies, when the same viewers watched exceptional educational shows or any other program on Belgrade television. Then they watched it because they were offered it. Now they are watching lowest quality and manipulation of lies, propaganda, garbage in the media, because they are being served that.*

One interlocutor believes that there are several "culprits" for the status of the journalistic profession: *On the one hand, it is certainly the state leadership, there are various political parties there. Not only the ruling one, there are other interested groups close to the political or state*

leadership. So these are some of the culprits and we, the journalists, are also to blame, because at one point we, or some of us, got scared and started self-censoring. Another interlocutor thinks that the authorities, not only this one, the previous ones as well, have developed mechanisms for stigmatizing a journalist who is disobedient. This is seen in investigative journalism. These are people who are the target of the powerful, they are endangered, not only their status, but their lives in general.

Graph 31: The biggest problems in journalism and media today



And when it comes to professional status, journalists who report in minority languages consider themselves to be at a disadvantage compared to journalists who report in Serbian.

A woman interlocutor cites an example from her practice: *They are always given the primacy, I think that this has still not changed on television. It often happened to me that someone from the Serbian editorial office came to expel me from the editing unit because the Serbian program has priority.*

Another interlocutor adds: *It is known on last name basis who belongs where and who should go where. And I think that further undermines the self-confidence of journalists of national minorities. My personal policy was that it was better to be a traitor around October 5, it was easier to be a foreign mercenary, a domestic traitor, you did better than a minority journalist. And that's the formula, believe me, that's the formula.*

All interlocutors believe that professional interests should be above all other interests: *There is no national or supra-interest that is above the Journalistic Code for journalists, because otherwise a journalist cannot be called a journalist. Of course, those who have power are not interested in making this come to life, but their interest is to make nationally aware media, nationally responsible media, responsible towards the community.*

6.4. Possible Solutions

It is interesting that the interlocutors see the solution for improving the socio-economic status of journalists in better organizing of the journalists themselves: *It is really enough for me to hear that we journalists are just whining, and very few of us stand in defence of the journalistic profession. Let's be louder and more united, we are real journalists. In that sense, I am not naive that we can change our status, but I think that with the help of some institutions and organizations in Serbia, or some international organizations, we might be able to create enough pressure to solve some of our journalistic problems faster.*

The interlocutors saw the solution to political pressures and a better professional status in

signing internal codes of ethics in the media that report in the languages of national minorities. One woman interlocutor states: *One solution is to sign that code between national councils and the media. That is part of the solution for a part of the minority media outlets.*

Another interlocutor adds: *I think that a model of integrity document or self-regulation or minority code should really be offered to other minority communities. Because it is that branch of civil society, depoliticization and appeasement of that minority nationalism. It is dangerous, I hear it in my mother tongue, because it is much scarier than the Balkan local ones, except that they do not have tanks and weapons.*

Freelance journalists and non-standard forms of work



An increasing number of journalists and media workers are under non-standard forms of employment, and the reasons for this can be found in changes in the media market, in technological changes, as well as in changes in the profession itself. Flexibility and individualization of work have introduced different forms of employment, ranging from journalists-entrepreneurs (i.e. self-employed journalists) to journalists hired under temporary or periodical contracts or those working through employment agencies. Non-standard forms of work also include volunteer contracts under which young journalists usually start their careers, then work under the outsourcing or service contracts, as well as work without a contract. Freelancers or independent journalists are those who are self-employed, while all these other modalities represent other non-standard forms of employment, which is also characterized by uncertainty and insecurity in terms of income, working hours, working conditions, status, health, etc.

Significant changes in the engagement structures of journalists and media workers have occurred in the last decades of the last century. A 2003 report by the International Federation of Journalists notes an increase in the number of journalists without permanent employment and indicates that in 19 European countries they make up more than a quarter of journalists (Nies & Pedersini, 2003). At the global level, this organization states that one third of journalists are under non-standard form of employment, with 71% being self-employed journalists, freelancers. In Great Britain, a country where self-employment is already on the rise, journalism is most pronounced: the number of self-employed journalists increased from 10,000 in 2000 to 25,000 in 2015 (Spilsbury, 2016). A representative survey of journalists in Sweden shows that the number of freelancers almost doubled between 1989 and 2005 (Edstrom & Ladendorf, 2012, p. 714). Among the 15,000 journalists in the Netherlands, there are 5,600 freelancers (Charhon & Murphy, 2016, p. 22). Research shows that the self-employed are equally men and women, mostly younger journalists working for television and on-line media (Deuze & Fortunati, 2011, p. 111). However, somewhat recent data for the UK show that there are more men among freelancers, and that the number of freelancers over the age of 50 is on the rise (Spilsbury, 2016, p. 15).

Previous international research suggest that journalists and media workers opt for freelance work because they have an entrepreneurial spirit and believe that it is better to be “a boss to oneself”. To that extent, they belong to the culture of “entrepreneurial journalism” (Vos & Singer, 2016, p. 151) for which digital technologies are the main flywheel. Another important element is working time flexibility (Mathisen, 2016), for example, research from the US and Sweden shows that freelancers value the flexibility they have because they can organize work and family affairs (Massey & Elmore, 2011; Mathisen, 2016). Another reason is the autonomy in choosing the topics and employers, and greater control over media content. It is believed that without a firm commitment to one media outlet, freelancers can avoid the economic or political pressures that editorial offices usually find themselves under (Das, 2007).

A part of the research shows that freelancers have a strong orientation towards public service and professional foundations of journalism (Das, 2007; Mathisen, 2016, 2018). However, for some authors, the appearance of an increasing number of atypically engaged journalists indicates a trend of de-professionalization of journalism, which is confirmed by the findings that freelancers often accept other, even PR jobs (Mathisen, 2018). Also, it is considered that individual journalistic work is equally, if not more, exposed to the market because freelancers work under pressure to meet the demand for media content. The data that show that freelance

work is not necessarily a choice of journalists, but arises as a consequence of lay-offs in the media sector, contribute to this view. The media outlets continue to cooperate with the fired workers, but since the power of individual negotiation is less than the power of collective bargaining, it lowers the costs of the media organizations.

Regardless of whether they chose this type of work or were forced to do so, freelancers earn less than their permanently employed colleagues and do not have the security that arises from permanent employment - pension and health insurance, paid sick leave, severance pay and the like. Media products that freelancers work on are mostly charged “per piece” and only after the work is done, which contributes to uncertainty (Christin, 2020). In addition to the part-time work, these qualities make freelancer a precarious workforce. That is why the annual report of the group of organizations that are partners of the “Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists” of the Council of Europe emphasizes the vulnerability of freelancers: lawsuits, travel bans, defamation campaigns, and denials of accreditation are cited as the most common forms of threats (Council of Europe, 2019).

Although collective agreements in many countries of the Western world include special collective agreements for freelancers, they mostly contain basic contractual obligations and provide limited protection to freelancers (Salamon, 2019). It is an increasingly common practice for freelancers to form trade unions and professional associations to protect their professional status, negotiate price lists and copyrights. Also, many journalist associations and trade unions establish special sections for freelancers. For example, the European Federation of Journalists has an Expert Group on Freelancers. Freelancers are also associated with the so-called alternative trade union organization, which most often relies on digital technologies as resources for informing and mobilizing citizens.

Non-standard forms of employment of journalists and media workers in Serbia should be considered in the broader economic and political context of the functioning of the media. The media market in Serbia is characterized by an extremely large number of media outlets in relation to the economic power of advertisers and citizens. The privatization of state-owned media has not had the expected effect - withdrawing the state from the media market - as the new owners maintain their businesses relying on project co-financing of content and largely non-transparent contracts with state institutions and public enterprises. Preventing this type of impact is one of the main goals of the Strategy for the Development of Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, which seeks to establish a functioning, sustainable and fair media market protected from political influence (p. 46).

The effects of privatization on the employment status and income of journalists have not been fully considered, and determining the exact number of journalists who lost their jobs in the process of ownership transformation is causing controversy. The fear for their socio-economic position was loudly articulated by the local media outlets, which expected the stability of employment and wages from state ownership or transformation into public services (Drašković and Gruhonjić, 2015). The possibility of pre-emptive purchases offered to employees was used by a small number of editorial offices, and the opportunity to transform local media into civil sector media was not sufficiently popular and was rejected as uncertain among media workers (Drašković and Kleut, 2016). Analyses of local media show that they are struggling to survive, and that they pay employees a minimum wage or a salary below the national average (Vujović, Pavlović and Obradović, 2019, p. 45).

Research “From journalists to wage earners: Hard work and life”, which includes employed and unemployed media workers, shows that journalism is a precarious profession: “We find three-fifths of the surveyed journalists (61%) to be characterized by worrying insecurity, i.e. significant precarious work and life. Journalists are most worried about legal uncertainty, insecurity of working hours, workplace and working conditions “(Mihailović, 2015, p. 75). The same research points to the “stretching of journalists between their own precariousness and their professional integrity” (Mihailović, 2015, p. 82), i.e. that some journalists strive to preserve the integrity of the profession by paying a high price for their precarious employment status.

Data from the Centre for the Development of Trade Unions, obtained on the basis of individual tax returns in the CROSO database, show that about 80% of media employees are engaged on a permanent basis, while 20% are under fixed-term contracts, temporary or periodical contracts, outsourcing and service contracts (Zajić, 2017, p. 107). The survey of this organization, which included 303 journalists and media workers, indicates that 20% of respondents are freelance, and that 11% work as unregistered, without a written contract (Zajić, 2017, p. 110). As it is further stated, men are more often than women in a flexible labour relationship, as are employees in internet media and the youngest media workers (p. 11, 12). For Vojvodina, this research finds above-average employment in a stable labour relationship (59%), but also the largest number of freelancers (23%). Self-declaration of media workers as freelancers was perceived as an issue to be considered. According to Zajić (2017, p. 108): “It can be concluded that the status of ‘freelancer’ is perceived differently depending on the context. If the relationship with the media is more pronounced and, probably, the level of identification is higher, the media worker feels less like a freelancer.”

The analysis of the Journalists’ Association of Serbia from 2019 shows that 724 surveyed media outlets employ 1,174 journalists under contract, while 1,606 are part-time associates, noting that this is not the total number of “part-time employees” because one person can work for several media (Journalists’ Association of Serbia, 2019, p. 9). The same research shows that there are more administrative workers, cameramen, sound engineers and video editors among employees under contract, while there are more journalists among part-time associates (61% of part-time associates compared to 39% of employees under employment contract).

To these data should be added the employment of journalists through agencies, which on several occasions brought the Radio-Television of Vojvodina to the public’s attention. Back in 2016, when “leasing” employment was not regulated by law, RTV hired a group of companies that “delivered” workers to the provincial public broadcasting service (VOICE, 2016a), at the same time terminating employment contracts with 111 employees (VOICE, 2016b). The following year, 200 workers hired through the employment agency lost their jobs because their one-year contracts were not extended (Sovilj, 2017). A similar situation repeated in 2020, in the midst of the corona virus epidemic, when supplementary budget left the RTV without the planned 201 million dinars. In August, RTV decided not to extend contracts with agencies through which it employed 257 journalists and media workers (Kolundzija, 2020). This has had particularly detrimental effects on editorial offices preparing programs in the languages of national communities, as it was found that most of their associates were engaged in this way. On that occasion, the trade union Nezavisnost protested, and editorial offices in Slovak, Romanian and Ruthenian, which are broadcasting the program on the Third Radio Program of the Radio-Television of Vojvodina (Radio 021, 2020), also raised their voices. The epilogue

of the case is that RTV hired 50 employees, and the remaining media workers were left without engagement.

Last year, another topic that is important for freelance journalists and media workers was revealed, and that is digital work in the so-called “e-lens” economy. It all started in mid-October 2020 with a call from the Tax Administration for individuals to pay taxes and contributions for funds received from abroad in recent years. According to the statement, a “high rate of non-compliance” has been established, especially for software development services, translation, foreign language classes, marketing, graphic design, as well as for revenues generated on social networks (Tax Administration of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). This community has risen against the self-taxation of freelancers and influencers, noticing as major problems inaccurate instructions for tax calculation, outdated fiscal laws, and the general misunderstanding of the state when it comes to the gig economy sector. A petition against retroactive taxation was soon launched, and the Association of Online Workers was formed. It also organized the first digital protest by sending mass emails and phone calls to the Ministry of Finance, the Tax Administration of Serbia and the cabinet of Prime Minister Ana Brnabić. As the main shortcomings of the existing system, the Association of Online Workers (2020), among other things, cites the invisibility of Internet work in the Labour Law, lack of social protection, job insecurity, and the inability to form a union.

According to the analysis of the Public Policy Research Centre, the share of the temporary employed is growing in Serbia, “in 2011 the share was 12.4%, while in 2018 it was 22.9%, which is an increase of temporary employees in total employment of approximately 10 % in the indicated seven-year period” (Kovač, Anđelković and Jakobi, 2020, p. 6). A similar increase is recorded when it comes to persons who are in part-time employment, while among the employed in 2018, every fourth citizen belonged to the group of self-employed (Kovač et al., 2020, p. 7). In the first domestic survey of digital workers, the Public Policy Research Centre states that in various indices, Serbia is ranked among the leading countries in terms of the number of citizens participating in the gig economy (Andjelković, Šapić and Skočajić, 2020, p. 3). A typical digital worker, as this research shows, is a young person (25–29 years old) from an urban environment; female workers earn slightly less money and are engaged in writing and translation, while male workers contribute the most to the household with their earnings and are engaged in software and technology development (p. 6). 22% of internet workers work in the creative and multimedia industry (p. 6)

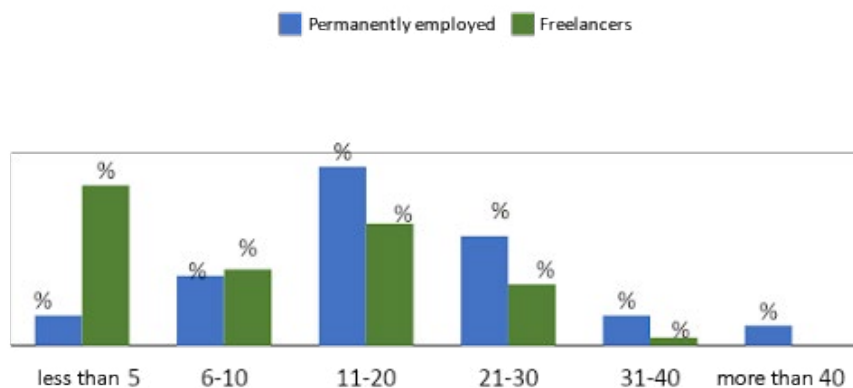
7.1. Freelancers in Vojvodina: Research results

The results we present in this section are based on focus group interviews and surveys. Seven journalists who are not permanently employed in the media participated in the group interview on 27 October 2020. Among them were four men and three women, six participants from Novi Sad, and one participant from Bečej. One part of the journalists has a long “freelance” experience with sporadic permanent employment, while a part of the journalists has been in the profession for less than five years, exclusively engaged on a part-time basis. In terms of formal employment status, journalists who have their own agencies and belong to the group of the self-employed are included, as well as journalists hired under service and outsourcing contracts. Some of them are registered as unemployed and part of their income comes through online payment platforms.

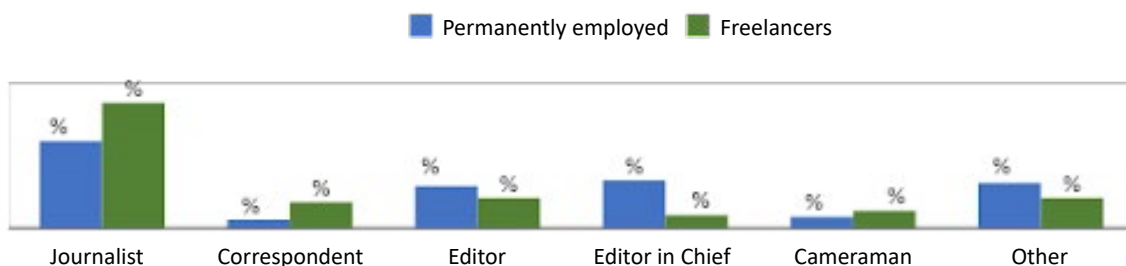
144 respondents took part in the survey, of which 56 were journalists and media workers who do not have a typical form of employment, i.e. they are employed under fixed-term contract, under a service contract, under a contract on temporary or periodical employment, self-employed, as volunteers or are unemployed. Among these 56 respondents, there are nine who are permanently employed in other professions, and perform journalistic and media jobs part-time. In the form of a methodological note, it should be said that the sample was created organically without additional engagement to find a certain number of journalists and media workers without permanent employment. Hence, the fact that more than a third of the respondents are people who are not in a standard labour relationship in the media may be indicative of their overall representation in the journalistic and media community.

Journalists and media workers in non-standard employment in Vojvodina are equally men and women, and their educational structure is almost identical to the educational structure of permanently employed journalists and media workers. Most of the freelancers (37.5%) are those who are at the very beginning of their career, i.e. have been working in the media outlets for less than five years. In the group of media workers without permanent employment, journalists make more than half of it, although some of the respondents also perform editorial work.

Graph 32: Years of service of permanent employees and freelancers in Vojvodina

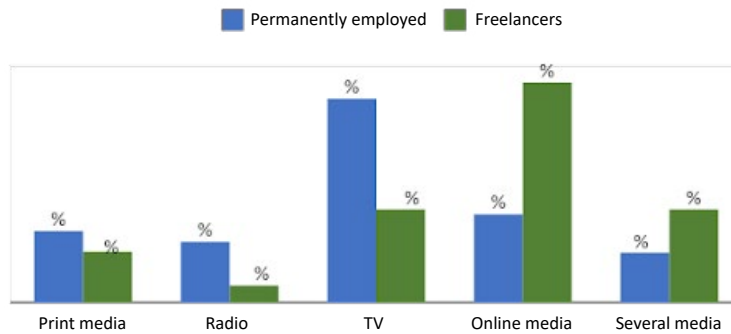


Graph 33: Type of jobs that permanent employees and freelancers are engaged in

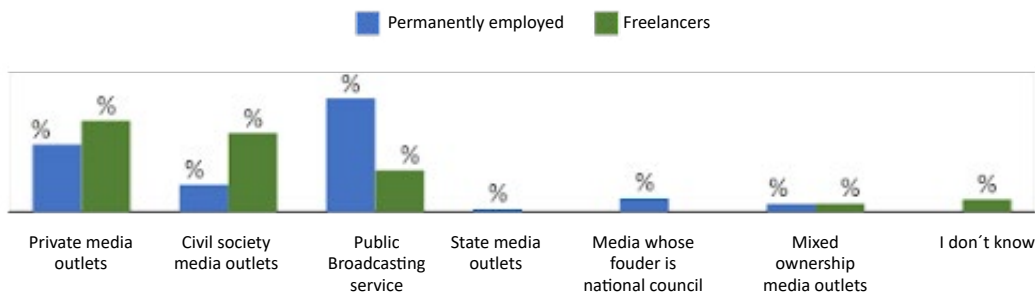


Compared to permanent employees, freelancers predominantly work for online media, followed by television or several different types of media. When we look at the ownership structure of media that hire freelancers, we see that it is mostly private media and civil sector media.

Graph 34: Type of media for which permanent employees and freelancers work in Vojvodina

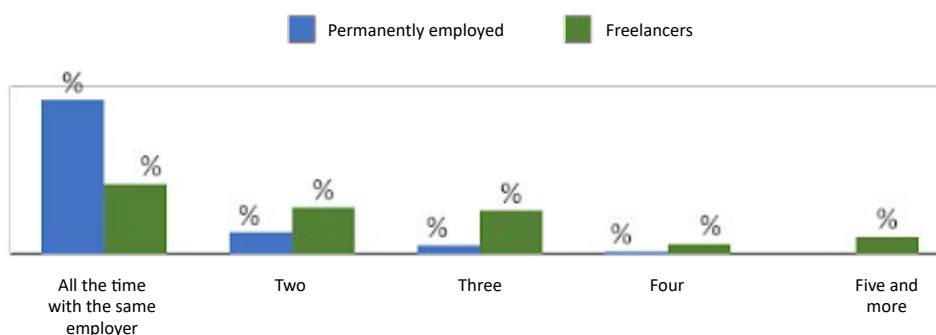


Graph 35: Type of media for which permanent employees and freelancers work in Vojvodina, according to the type of ownership

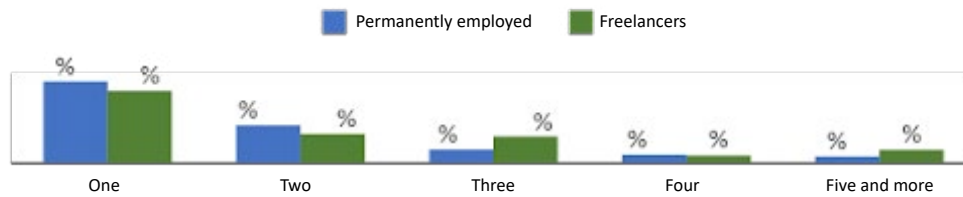


Slightly more than a third (37.5%) of freelancers have been employed by the same employer in the last five years, while the same number have worked for three or more employers. In the last three months, half of the media workers with permanent engagement as well as those in non-standard form of employment worked for one media, while the other half worked for two or more employers. This indicates that during the corona virus pandemic, a large number of permanent employees were forced to do additional work.

Graph 36: Change of employer of permanent employees and freelancers in Vojvodina



Graph 37: Number of media for which permanent employees and freelancers worked in Vojvodina



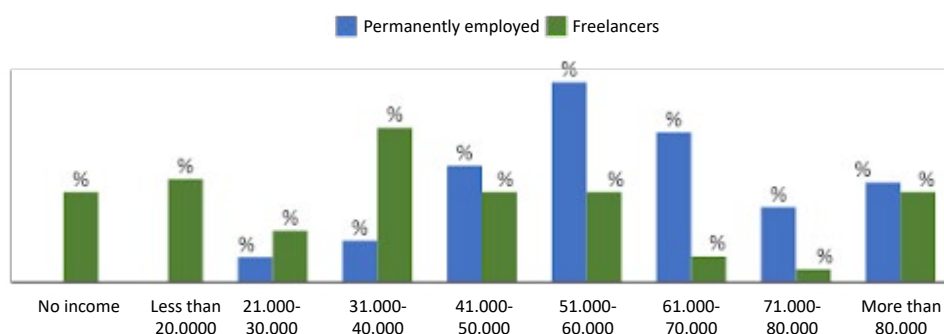
7.2 Income and working hours of freelancers in Vojvodina

The main topic in the focus group interview with freelance journalists was the search for jobs and sources of income. They, as one junior woman journalist says, *live from project to project to make ends meet*. A journalist with many years of experience adds that *I haven't met a person from our milieu who refuses side jobs, which speaks volumes about that*. The jobs they work on are numerous, sometimes they have some common ground with journalism, but sometimes they don't. Or, as one junior journalist says: *I immersed myself in all other possible related professions, meaning geographic information systems, data processing and data entry, and even in the last few days I was at some trainings for call centres and technical support*.

According to the survey research, only four respondents in non-standard employment do not engage in any additional work. Journalists and media workers often mention several jobs they do, and among them the most common are project writing, marketing and training.

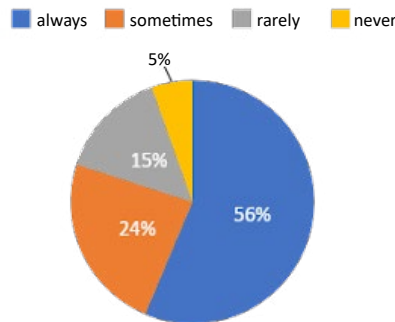
The salaries of journalists and media workers in non-standard form of employment are lower than those of permanent employees. Every tenth freelancer has not earned income in the last three months, and 43% of them had income lower than 40,000 RSD. Since just over half of the journalists and media workers in non-standard employment always have regular incomes, the burning issue is the timeliness of earnings. As one self-employed journalist with a long career points out in the focus group: *In recent years, it no longer matters how much those side jobs were paid for, it is important that they are paid, that it is regular. To write without anyone paying you, if the fee is even 300 Euro it is useless if you don't get it*. The experience of a younger freelancer is similar: *The dynamics are such that sometimes 100 Euro is my daily wage, and it happens that I don't get 100 Euro for three months. And that is completely uncertain, completely precarious, completely ... Before the coronavirus, before the New Year I was able to know more or less what awaits me in the next period, a month, two, three, four. After the New Year and after the pandemic started, I don't know what awaits me, I don't know what will happen next week, next month*.

Graph 38: Average salary of permanent employees and freelancers in the last three months



Almost all focus group participants testify to the large amount of work that freelancers have to do in order for one month to be “good”. For a young freelancer, a good month is an exception: *It’s been a good month for me when I worked hard in the previous month, so I got paid for what I did in the previous month. At least one article has been published, another one is due for payment. I had, say, some fixing days when I was absolutely at the disposal of a foreign team. At least one training session took place that month, for several days. And now when all is added up, that’s the amount that will be some 700-800-900 Euro that month, but that means that the previous month was not even half of it, and that next month will not be even half of that.*

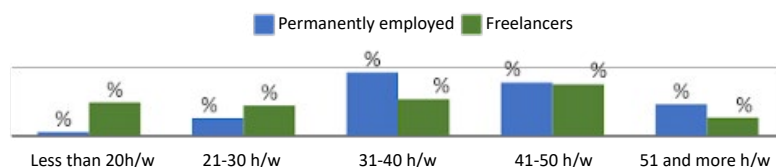
Graph 39: Regular income of freelancers in Vojvodina



Therefore, one of the key dilemmas is the one formulated by one of the focus group participants: *Man, do you find enough side jobs to survive, and even if you find them how to find time for anything else?* In the answers to this question, the interlocutors describe a day that never ends and the lack of time for family and friends. For a television correspondent: *A good month in the material sense is necessarily inversely proportional to everything that should make life. For example, when I work well and earn well in one month, I know that I was not free for a single day, that I did not have a coffee or dinner with a friend, nor did I have time to go out of Novi Sad once.* A woman correspondent of another television briefly describes: *I know it’s a good month if I don’t remember half of the events. I don’t remember my friends specifically, even if I saw them along the way, but for example I won’t have that stomach cramp when the first of the month comes, the second, when the rent arrives, the bills and I don’t know what, because I know I made money. And for birthdays, weddings and baptisms, you will somehow pay your dues, but it is important that you do not have that stomach-ache when you owe someone something.*

A self-employed journalist who works for several online media says that he has not had working hours in the last three years. This is partly *up to him* because he had a *sick habit of working on vacations as well*, but he notices that the lack of working hours *is exhausting him more and more*. He believes that the freedom of freelancers to organize their own working hours, which others see from the side, actually means that there are no working hours. Agreeing with this statement, a young woman journalist says: *I can’t organize myself well, I don’t know when I work, when I don’t work, when I’m free, when it’s my working time, when it’s not and it starts to create psychological pressure on me.*

Graph 40: Weekly engagement of full-time employees and freelancers



However, in the part of the interview about the advantages of non-standard engagement, the respondents actually point out that they do not have working hours. A synonym of permanent employment for freelancers is idleness in the newsroom, time spent sitting in the newsroom in the presence of superiors. Those with this experience say: *he is obliged to sit there for five and a half, six hours of his working hours. To be in the facilities of his office. We don't have to do that, I can work from a café, I can work from a car, I can work from a toilet. That's the advantage, and now I never - though never say never - but I really wouldn't like to put myself in the position of having to sit in an office again for eight hours, to watch my superiors come along, to not know how to behave. There is some freedom that really has no price.*

For a woman television correspondent, the advantage is 50-50: *As a freelancer, you can set the pace yourself, more or less my editors don't check much. If I say that I can't do something, if I feel like not working today, or I just want to avoid a story that I don't want to do, I will say that I just didn't manage to do it and they won't check it. I can rest that day for example, but then I have to work day and night to be able to make up for it. In that sense, I think it's 50-50.* However, with the exception of one woman interlocutor who is at the beginning of her career and did not have experience of permanent employment in the newsroom, all respondents say that they would refuse the offer to get a permanent job.

Compared to permanent employees who have paid pension and health insurance, less than half of journalists and media workers in non-standard employment have these contributions paid. 42.86% of them do not have regularly paid pension insurance, and 8.93% do not know whether it has been covered by contracts and engagements. It is similar when it comes to the health insurance contributions: 37.5% of journalists and media workers in non-standard employment do not have regular health insurance coverage, and 7.14% do not know whether their employers paid for it. The conversation in the focus group shows that freelancers do not expect to have pensions, *they do not believe in them* or think that *they will not live to enjoy them*. Those who are self-employed pay all benefits regularly, but are sceptical about being able to cover their retirement days with the pension they can expect, of 15,000 RSD. They are thinking about private pension funds, but for now they seem as an additional expense on otherwise unstable salaries. For those at the beginning of their careers, contributions are a distant topic. One interlocutor, for example, is registered as unemployed and thus have access to health care, and on other contributions he says: *In general, employers sometimes pay taxes and contributions, the rest I try to evade as much as I can, I try to go through payment platforms that are harder to track so that the net amount is as high as possible or that the burden of gross amount falls on the employer if it is willing to pay, if not I take the money in my hands in the grey or black zone.*

7.3. Professional status of freelancers

Despite the poor economic situation and working hours that separate them from family and friends, the freelancers we spoke to have a strongly developed professional identity. As we have seen in the discussion on working hours, they strongly value the autonomy they have in choosing topics. According to one focus group female participant: *After half a decade of working in this business, I am still in love with my job. Well, now it may sound like a cliché, but it is somehow compensated by the fact that even today, as a correspondent, I have the freedom to suggest stories that I will do, I choose how I will work, I choose what I will not do, so to say that compensates somehow.* Or in the words of another interlocutor who adds: *That freelance*

way is the only one possible for me and in that sense its value is priceless and all these financial problems that seem almost unsolvable are negligible in essence, because after all, at the end of the day, we have one kind of freedom, and freedom, what is freedom really? Freedom is one taking responsibility for oneself, and then those closest to oneself, so I would not change, but whether I wanted to improve my position - yes, I would.

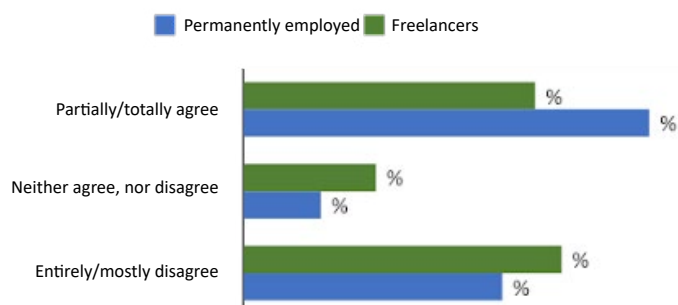
According to some of the interlocutors, financial incentives can be compensated by the effects that the news will have. According to a woman television correspondent: *I think I did my best stories, solely in the interest of the people, when I was hungriest.* The other interlocutor agrees with this: *I think this is Stockholm Syndrome what we do, there is no better description of it, we are here we work with what we have, we are attached to the profession, our drive is that one small concrete change that we will make in the life of that one person, or that one small community and their relatives. It's in the term of service, it is my most commonly uttered sentence when I respond to people when they thank me for presenting their story.*

This commitment to quality journalism is one of the reasons for financial problems for some of the interlocutors. A young woman journalist who collaborates with an investigative portal describes the difficulties as follows: *If you want to work in journalism and if you work on topics that are really journalistic, like I try, you have to work on them for two months, because you are waiting for this answer, you are waiting for that answer, you are writing a thousand requests for free access to information of public importance. And until you get all those answers, the time simply goes by, if you really want to ask questions you don't know if you'll be able to finish the story you started within a month. You may have started three stories at once, but the question is whether you will be able to finish them within a month. It can happen to me that I don't earn anything in a month, because I am waiting for those answers. And without some answers you don't have a story and then you tap in one place and it's really, really, really, really hard.*

Adding, another young freelancer points out that weak and uncertain earnings deter freelancers from investigative stories: *As for the connection between the socio-economic position and the quality of journalism, I and all of us who are prone to these topics, we all know that without two months there is no investigative story. Sometimes it takes four months, sometimes it takes six months. If I get 4,000 dinars for an investigative story on which I spent five months of active work, for a story that appeared on the front page, I can't finance anything with that. As a result, my investigative journalism stops or is reduced to a minimum and I move on to what provides me with enough money to make a living.*

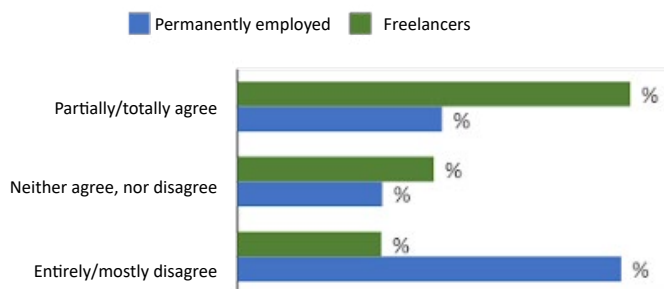
This gap between independence and autonomy, on the one hand, and the poor socio-economic situation, on the other hand, is reflected in the results of the survey. The answers to several questions that served for testing the perception of freelance work versus permanent employment show the complexity of this question.

Grafikon 41: Novinari sa stalnim zaposlenjem lakše mogu da se odupru pritiscima



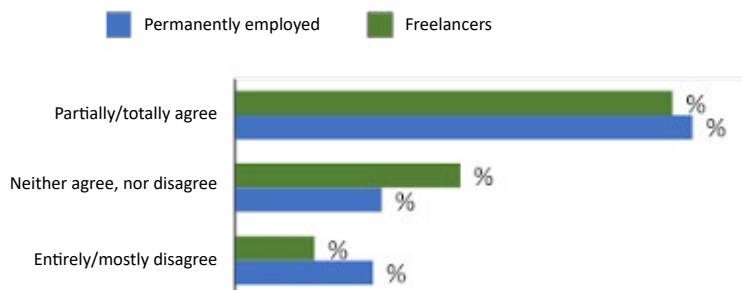
Sasvim očekivano novinari koji imaju ugovore na neodređeno smatraju da im ova pozicija omogućava da se lakše odupru pritiscima i smatraju da ugovore za stalno nisu dobili zato što su bili spremni da se odreknu profesionalnih standarda. Novinari u netipičnim formama radnog angažovanja nešto su skeptičniji prema ovim tvrdnjama. Međutim, kako i grafikoni pokazuju mišljenja jesu podeljena.

Graph 42: Permanent jobs in journalism are found by those who are willing to give up professional standards



On the other hand, when asked to assess the freedom that freelance journalists have in choosing topics and interlocutors, respondents - regardless of their employment status - generally agree with this statement. Almost a third of journalists in non-standard employment are not entirely sure about this claim, which may indicate that under the form of “freelance” or non-standard employment lies a variety of practices and relationships of journalists with employers.

Graph 43: Freelance journalists have more freedom to choose topics and interlocutors



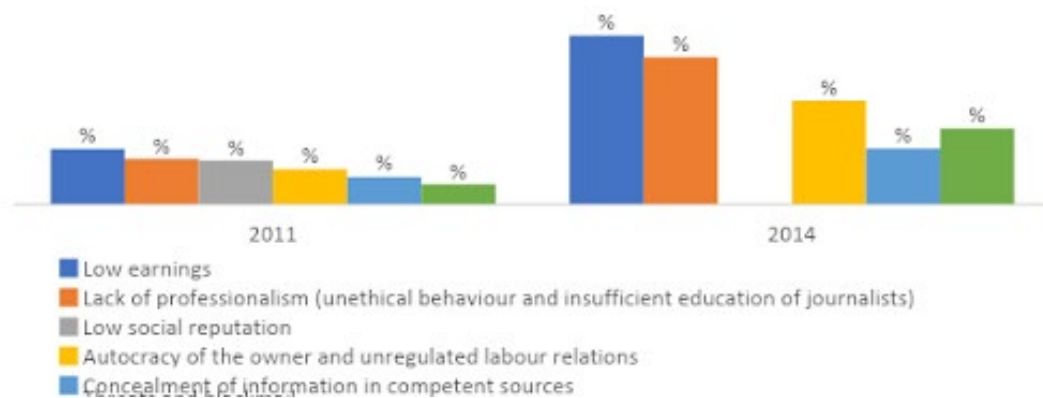
The main backbone of the distinction between these practices, as previous research shows, lies in question whether non-standard engagement is a choice made by journalists and media workers themselves or it is forced upon them. As the focus group interview with journalists shows, one part of them opened their own agencies and, despite the uncertainty of earnings and job instability, would not return to the newsrooms. These are mostly accomplished journalists whose networks of social and media contacts still provide some kind of security that there will be some work (and some earnings). The other group, mostly younger journalists, does not have such networks, which makes jobs and money more uncertain. Some of them fail to find permanent employment, wanting experience in the newsroom before deciding on further career path, while others are assessing the current and future situation in order to decide on a job - not necessarily in journalism - that will bring better earnings.



**Instead of
conclusion: are
there **trends** in the
socio-economic and
professional status
of journalists and
media workers**

In the last ten years, several significant and extensive researches in Serbia have offered a current status assessment of the journalistic profession and pointed out the poor socio-economic position of journalists and media workers. One conducted in 2011 by a team of researchers from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade allowed us to capture the changes within the double transformation - technological changes caused by digitalization, and transitional changes due to the restructuring of Serbia's media system (Milivojević, 2011). As the biggest problems of the journalistic profession, the journalists surveyed in this research recognized: "poor salaries (20.36%), low level of professionalism, and above all insufficient respect for journalistic ethics (16.78%), low social reputation and status of the profession (16.09%), technically obsolete work equipment (3.16%), lack of preparedness for journalistic work on digital platforms (1.79%)" (Milivojević, 2012, p. 30). The Journalists' Association of Serbia came to similar results in 2014. The research of this association shows that for journalists and media workers the biggest problems are low wages (62.22%), lack of professionalism and inadequate education of journalists (54.36%), autocracy of owners and unregulated labour relations (38.29%), followed by threats and blackmail (27.86%), media ownership structure (27.52%), and unavailability of information (20.51%) (Journalists' Association of Serbia [JAS], 2014, p. 9).

Graph 44: The biggest problems of the journalistic profession in the research in 2011 and 2014



Compared to the previous one, our research among journalists and media workers in Vojvodina shows that low salaries are no longer the primary problem of media professionals. Political pressure and the absence of media autonomy, sensationalism and tabloidization, disrespect for the ethical standards of the profession, and even the low level of media literacy of citizens - all these are problems that burdening the journalistic community more. This finding is difficult to interpret otherwise than in the context of the collapse of media freedoms in recent years.

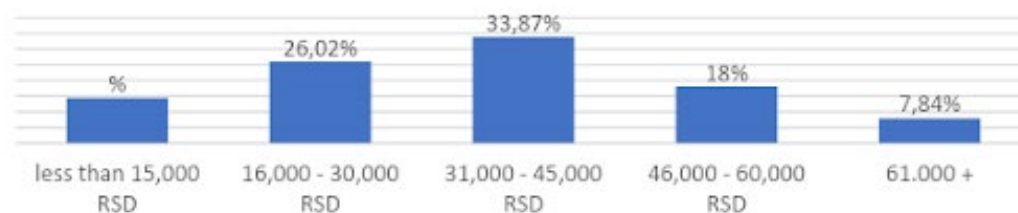
According to previous research, more than a third of journalists live on very modest incomes. The research from 2011 shows that 37% of the surveyed journalists had incomes below 30,000 dinars, and a quarter over 50,000 (Milivojević, 2011, p. 27).

Graph 45: Earnings of journalists according to the research in 2011 (Milivojević, 2011)



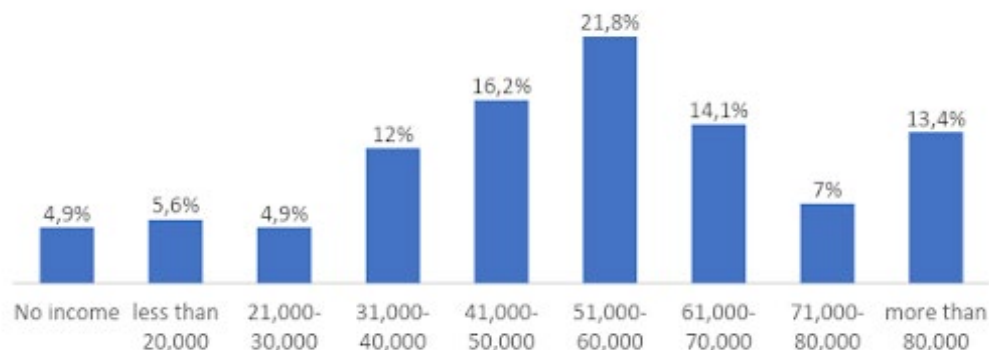
According to data from 2014, 40% of respondents had incomes below 30,000, while only 7.84% of journalists and media workers had incomes over 60,000 dinars (UNS, 2014, p. 6). The research conducted by IJAS in 2016 shows a slight improvement, with 18.92% of surveyed journalists reporting incomes below 30,000 dinars and 14.41% of those whose incomes are higher than 60,000 (Vukasović, 2016, p. 35). Asked to assess working conditions today and five years ago, respondents in the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation survey from 2018 believe that salaries, working conditions and labour rights of journalists are worse than five years ago (Matić, 2018, p. 13).

Graph 46: Earnings of journalists according to the 2014 survey (JAS, 2014)



In the context of this review, it seems that the salaries of journalists and media workers have increased, or that the situation in Vojvodina is somewhat better than in other parts of Serbia. However, there is no reason to rejoice, since only a third of journalists and media workers earn more than the average net salary.

Graph 47: The average salary of journalists in Vojvodina in the previous three months



Previous research has shown that about half of journalists work up to eight hours a day (Milivojević, 2011; UNS, 2014), and the other even more, with a tendency to increase (Vukasović, 2016). Our research shows that 45.9% of journalists and media workers work more than eight hours a day, which leads to the conclusion that the working hours of journalists have not changed much in recent years.

In previous years, about 70% of journalists were regularly paid for their work, while about a third received salary late (Milivojević, 2011; UNS, 2014). In AP Vojvodina, 80% of respondents received regular salary in 2020, and others had regular salary sometimes (10.5%), rarely (5.6%) or never (3.5%). The results of previous research, which show that more than half of journalists perform additional work (UNS, 2014, p. 8), are confirmed by our findings.

It may seem that the number of permanently employed journalists is growing: from 60% in 2011 (Milivojević, 2011, p. 28), 75% in 2014 (UNS, 2014, p. 6) up to 80% registered by

official statistics in 2016 (Zajić, 2017, p. 107). However, survey research show that half of media workers have a stable employment, while the group of those with flexible employment status consists mostly of freelancers (40%) and non-contract workers (25%) (Zajić, 2017, p. 110). We came to very similar findings in our research among media professionals in Vojvodina: over half of the surveyed are permanently employed (58.5%).

All this points to the precariousness of the journalistic profession in Serbia, which was most thoroughly researched and presented in 2015, in the publication “From journalists to wage earners - precarious work and life”. As this research showed, if they were in a position to choose, two-fifths of journalists would choose to do another job that has nothing to do with journalism, two-fifths would choose to work in a free media, and would agree to be paid less, while one fifth of journalists opted for a safe job, although this would imply mandatory self-censorship and censorship (Mihailović, 2015, p. 67). Asked whether they would stay in journalism if the socio-economic and professional position of journalists did not improve, our respondents said that they would surely (8.8%) or perhaps (30.6%) leave the profession. A quarter of journalists and media workers (24.5%) do not know, and a third (34%) say they will not leave the profession. Thoughts about leaving the profession can be put in the context of the self-assessment of journalists in Vojvodina, that in case of job loss they have no (12.2%), small (28.6), and moderate (38.1) chances to find another job. This means that in addition to the security risks that are often emphasized, journalists and media workers work at a significant existential risk.

The attitudes of journalists towards trade unions in the Republic of Serbia were surveyed in 2011, 2016 and 2017, and a comparison of the results shows that the attitude towards trade unions has not changed significantly over 6 years, although there is a slight decline in union members. Namely, in 2011, 65% of respondents stated that they were not union members (Milivojević, 2011, p. 28), and in 2016 the same was confirmed by 78% (Vukasović, 2016). Although most felt free to become members, they were not interested because the unions were “weak”. The following year, 83% of the surveyed journalists estimated that the influence of media unions on the improvement of their financial position was small or non-existent (Mihailović, 2017, p. 226). Among the surveyed journalists and media workers in Vojvodina, 57% of respondents are not union members, and the unfavourable image of the union and distrust of the scope of collective agreements, together with obstacles set by media organizations for union organizing, are the main reasons for these findings.

In the context of a sense of responsibility for problems in journalism, a research on the activism of journalists in improving their own position and status of the profession in society showed that 56% of journalists believe they are passive in solving media problems, while 19% say they are active (Mihailovic, 2017, p. 226). The reasons for passivity are the fear of possible negative consequences of activism and distrust in people with whom one entered into activism (p. 232). A year later, as many as 69% of respondents thought that journalists were responsible for the unfavourable status of media freedoms in Serbia (48% of them thought they were partially responsible, and 21% that they were most responsible), and 4% were of the opinion that journalists were not responsible (Matić, 2018, p. 14). We come to similar results with the research in Vojvodina, in which journalists first indicate employers as solutions to their bad economic position, and immediately afterwards the community of journalists and media workers.

9. Recommendations

Government, line ministries in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, local self-governments

- Ensure a more equal market competition in which all media and journalists will be able to compete under equal conditions for funds allocated by project co-financing of content of public interest, and other types of budget payment for media services.
- Improve the working conditions of journalists by providing access to information of public importance under equal conditions to all media.
- Organize labour inspections and supervision over the obligations of media organizations towards journalists, according to the principles of equal and fair treatment of all media.
- Include in the Rulebook, for the evaluation of projects submitted for project co-financing of public interest content, additional scoring of media that have established internal procedures for achieving gender equality, employment of persons with disabilities, and for cases of sexual harassment and abuse at work.
- Introduce as an obligation to enter in the media register accurate data on the number of hired journalists and other media workers.
- Amend the Labour Law to regulate the position of freelancers and provide them with labour and legal protection.
- Amend the Law on Public Information in the Media to provide stable sources of funding for all media in the languages of national minorities, regardless of who their founder is.

Journalists' and media associations

- Promote solidarity among journalists and media workers in the fight for better protection of labour rights and overall improvement of the socio-economic situation.
- Coordinate the work of relevant media associations on the formulation of a common platform for improving the socio-economic position of journalists and media workers.
- Work on improving the position of the most socially endangered groups of journalists by monitoring the socio-economic position of the membership and forming special sections.
- Strengthen existing funds or establish new funds for assistance to socially disadvantaged journalists.
- Organize training in Labour Law.
- Prepare manuals in the field of Labour Law.
- Constant education of editors and journalists on the topic of gender sensitive approach in journalism.
- Establish recognitions and awards for journalists who contribute to the development of gender equality

Trade Unions

- Work on establishing a relationship of trust with journalists and media workers by improving internal procedures, transparency and more pronounced articulation of requests.
- Work on establishing trade unions in media organizations.
- Advocate for the introduction of a collective agreement for journalists and media workers.
- Create modalities for union protection of journalists and media workers who are not employed.



<p>Media outlets and their founders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide everyone who is engaged, regardless of the type of contract, with basic working conditions (e.g. paid travel expenses). • Provide all employed journalists with a paid annual leave, the right to sick leave, the right to a leave for visiting a doctor, the right to days off, the right to severance pay in case of termination of employment, increased salaries for overtime work. • Pay regular contributions for pension, social and health insurance to all journalists who are employed. • Provide mechanisms to protect journalists from retaliation for engagement in the trade union. • Establish internal procedures in case of sexual harassment and abuse at work. • Establish procedures for the employment of persons with disabilities. • Establish and implement internal procedures for attaining gender equality • Ensure transparency in payments and fees, with engagement agreements in writing. • National councils that are the founders of media publishers in the languages of national minorities to enable a greater degree of autonomy in the editorial offices by adopting internal codes of ethics.
<p>Journalists</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote journalistic solidarity in cases of security breaches or socio-economic vulnerability of journalists. • Sensitizing media employees to recognize and address sexual harassment and gender-based violence.
<p>Educational institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce teaching content related to the socio-economic position and labour rights of journalists. • Introduce entrepreneurship courses. • Creating alumni clubs and following the career paths of graduate journalists.
<p>Cross-cutting measures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All actors involved in the public information process should actively work on the components of media literacy related to recognizing the professional work of journalists. • Promote a model where the public pays directly to the media and journalists, which guarantees greater autonomy in relation to advertisers and the state. • Encourage the professionalism of journalists and media workers.

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