

**OBSERVATORY ON JOURNALISM, 3<sup>RD</sup> EDITION**  
**"JOURNALISM AT THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY"**  
**PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

Based on the results of the third edition of the [Observatory on Journalism](#), AGCOM - the Italian Communications Authority - by means of a public consultation, is searching for comments, observations, information and documentation regarding the actual conditions in which the main media players work on a daily basis, with a view to jointly launching a round table, the outcomes of which will be submitted to the Italian Government and the Italian Parliament.

Therefore, AGCOM is inviting interested parties to submit their own briefs on the main issues concerning the current condition of journalists and newspapers, the training of professionals and freelancers, and the future of journalism, with a view to outlining a strategy for the protection and support of the news supply chain through the identification of appropriate forms of regulatory intervention and/or sector policy proposals.

To this end, all interested parties are invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation involving the following topics in particular:

- 1) The data of the third edition of the Observatory on Journalism confirms the deep and structural differences in terms of income between freelance and employed journalists (cf. figure 2.1), and therefore an 'insider-outsider' labour market condition (see paragraph 2.1). Moreover, on the one hand, these structural differences are found in the age-based analysis of the distribution of active journalists within the various income brackets (cf. figure 2.3); on the other hand, the precariousness of the working condition is evident especially in online-only news outlets, which gather most of the young professionals and are characterised by an organisational model based on so-called flexible newsrooms (cf. paragraph 2.5).

**QUESTIONS QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation on access to the profession, remuneration and contractual relations, outlining possible regulatory and policy solutions.

- 2) The progressive "emptying" of newsrooms, which worsened during the lockdown period, now risks becoming structural, with a consequent loss of professionalism that is inevitably reflected in the production of news content. At the same time, the training of new journalists in newsrooms and freelancers, who are increasingly relied upon, often seems inadequate and requires additional training, which access to the profession does not always ensure.

**QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation on the actual working conditions in newsrooms and proposals on how 'old apprenticeships' can be replaced with more suitable training, outlining possible regulatory and policy solutions.

- 3) The data of the third edition of the Observatory on Journalism shows a low propensity on the part of journalists to carry out innovative web journalism activities (cf. figure 2.17) and an average level of digital competence that is not particularly high, especially with reference to the use of digital tools (cf. figures 2.8 and 2.9). Moreover, information professionals lack a level of specialised knowledge (especially in terms of academic training) adequate to cover economic, financial, scientific and technological facts and events, which indeed receive less coverage in terms of information content production (cf. figure 4.8).

**QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation on aspects relating to the (lifelong) training of journalists, outlining possible regulatory and policy solutions.

- 4) The timing and methods whereby news is produced have changed radically in the span of a few years, just as the channels through which news is disseminated have multiplied, thereby weakening the ability to check non-institutional sources. In this sense, there are obvious risks to the sustainability of a number of news outlets, which could undermine the pluralism of information, at a time when on-line news outlets are multiplying and their working conditions are difficult to know.

**QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation on aspects relating to greater need to protect pluralism of information, outlining possible regulatory and policy solutions.

- 5) The survey on journalism conducted during the COVID-19 emergency showed that journalists are not fully prepared to take on the role of certifiers of quality news, since activities entailing the debunking and scientific analysis of fake news were less substantial than those entailing the verification of misleading content (see Figure 5.9). On the other hand, fact-checking sites and open and scientific sources were not among the most frequently used sources for journalistic purposes (cf. section 2.4), even during the COVID-19 emergency (cf. section 5.3).

**QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation on aspects relating to the fight against disinformation and the promotion of quality news content (e.g., through the use of fact-checking), outlining possible regulatory and policy solutions.

- 6) The geographical distribution of journalists, also when compared to the number of journalists per news outlets in each Region (cf. figure 1.7), shows a great lack of

professionals in a number of local news outlets, which can have negative effects on the quality and pluralism of information at a regional and local level. Moreover, the extensive use of institutional sources (cf. paragraph 2.4) and, in the case of the COVID-19 emergency, of individual personalities from the scientific world (cf. paragraph 5.3), testifies to a lack of representation of numerous emerging actors and subjects in society (social pluralism).

**QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation on the training and production shortcomings of local news outlets in particular, outlining possible regulatory and policy solutions.

- 7) The protection of copyright in order to safeguard the pluralism of information and ensure recognition for those who invest and produce news content is still at the core of a dispute between publishers and 'press reviewers', which has also had legal implications.

**QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, observations, information and documentation on copyright and to outline possible regulatory and policy solutions.

- 8) Further critical aspects that will be analysed by AGCOM in subsequent and specific in-depth studies concern threats to sector professionals (through, for example, intimidation, threats also via web, specious complaints), as well as gender issues related to the profession and to information production.

**QUESTIONS:**

Participants in the public consultation are therefore invited to submit comments, remarks, information and documentation on aspects relating to threats to the profession as well as issues related to gender representation in the media, outlining possible regulatory and policy solutions.

Interested parties may send their comments and any other written documentation by e-mail to [osservatoriogiornalismo@agcom.it](mailto:osservatoriogiornalismo@agcom.it) within 60 days of the date of publication of this document. It will also be possible to request, following the submission of written documentation, a virtual hearing with the competent offices of AGCOM.

AGCOM will therefore initiate meetings with stakeholders to collect proposals and engage in a debate on the main problems of the industry, also with a view to developing useful indications for legislators and making proposals to the Government with the aim of protecting and renovating journalism in Italy.

Any request for information or explanations concerning the procedure and the contents of the public consultation, which is carried out by the Department of Economics and Statistics, can be addressed to [segreteria.ses@agcom.it](mailto:segreteria.ses@agcom.it).