

**Joint appeal by IFJ (International Federation of Journalists)
and UNI G&P (UNI Graphical & Packaging)**

Rescue and future survival package for the print media industry

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rapid acceleration of the disturbing trends that the daily newspaper and magazine industry has been facing for the past 20 years, namely: a drop in readership, the slow but gradual decline of print media in favour of digital media, and a fall in advertising revenues.

The drop in readership is particularly true of young people, who are increasingly deserting traditional media outlets for social media. In spite of the significant growth of digital products in the sector, many publishers took the view that their paper and online products were complementary and responded to differing information needs on the part of their readers. The fall in advertising revenues has essentially been due to the increasing power of the tech giants GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft) to attract such revenues.

During the COVID-19 health crisis, we have seen a sharp decline in readership, especially of paper versions of print media, owing partly to disrupted distribution channels, including the closure of many retail outlets and postal delays. The printing industry for the written press has also been hit by a reduction in the number of pages of newspapers and magazines as certain sections, such as sports, culture and entertainment, have been cut.

Some press titles have managed to partially offset falling sales of printed versions with a substantial increase in online subscriptions. This shift towards digital products, accelerated by the health crisis, could become irreversible. Even though many countries are gradually emerging from lockdown, it is unlikely that, without targeted, government support, demand for print journalism will return to pre-crisis levels.

Regarding advertising revenues, many advertisers have cancelled or postponed their campaigns. Some simply have nothing left to sell, for instance in the case of travel agents, airlines, cultural industries, etc. Others have decided to postpone their campaigns so as not to be associated with the perceived anxiety of the health crisis. This spectacular fall in advertising revenues has left a great many companies in the print media industry in a perilous financial state. Many have been forced to close down, which has led to millions of job losses. Today, the surviving companies are issuing an appeal for help. They employ millions of workers, many of them highly skilled, whose jobs are under threat. These jobs must be protected in order to save the print media industry.

During the COVID-19 health crisis, many countries have recognized the print media as an essential industry. It is indeed crucial for a democracy, particularly in times of crisis, to ensure that people have access to reliable sources of information, written by journalists with respect for the legal and ethical standards of their profession.

However, while the print media industry suffers a major existential crisis, isn't enough to declare it a vital industry, without providing it with the means to continue to play its educational and informative role.

Even without mentioning the numerous countries that fail to respect press freedoms, it is a matter of concern that an increasing amount of disinformation is being spread within democratic societies, particularly over the Internet, designed to undermine or destabilize legitimate governments, or to disseminate messages of hatred of minorities, foreigners, women, etc. ...

The spread of such disinformation has already shown it can provide a fertile breeding ground for rising selfishness, intolerance, racism, and extreme right-wing parties. In view of the severe economic crisis that lies ahead, which threatens to make a bleak situation even worse, national governments urgently need to take action to safeguard a print media industry that stands for quality, ethics, solidarity, labour rights and fundamental freedoms.

National governments are urged to see print journalism as a common good and to demonstrate their support for the industry, as the backbone of our democracies.

In order to ensure that the print media industry is able to survive not only the consequences of the current health crisis, but also the structural challenges that lie ahead, the IFJ has set out a series of measures in its Global Platform for Quality Journalism, fully supported by UNI G&P (https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Platform_EN.pdf). In addition, UNI G&P and IFJ call upon national governments to take the following, urgent measures:

- National governments should adopt emergency rescue packages for the print media industry as a whole (journalism, publishing, printing and distribution) in order to avoid bankruptcies and job losses caused by the severe financial impact of the COVID-19 health crisis.
- All national governments and the European Union should make available the necessary budgets, including through the introduction of a tax on digital services¹ to support the whole print media industry. Representatives of companies in the sector and trade unions representing workers in the print media sector should be strongly involved in the administration of the funds raised. Depending on practices at national level, this involvement could take the form of joint company-union management of funds or consultation regarding general principles of eligibility for funds.
- Support for print media should take into account the digital divide within countries, as well as readers' media preferences. Print media guarantee access to in-depth, up-to-date information to parts of the population lacking in either digital literacy skills or Internet access. Therefore, they help to eliminate discrimination in terms of access to information on grounds of age, income, or geographical location.
- Given that everyone in a democratic society is entitled to enjoy access to quality information, governments should not use support packages to give precedence to any particular information medium. They should ensure that paper-based print media are accessible all over the country at an affordable price.
- Financial support should only be provided to print media companies under the following conditions:

¹ Often referred to as the Gafam Tax (an acronym for the Big Five Internet companies: Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft), it would provide a fairer level of taxation for large companies in the digital economy.

- social dialogue and trade union rights are respected, in accordance with ILO Conventions;
 - compliance with collective agreements;
 - dismissals are prohibited wherever companies make a profit;
 - annual accounts are public and transparent;
 - diversity and gender equality requirements are met, and
 - companies receiving support are prevented, for a period of five years, from engaging in mergers, acquisitions, or leveraged buyouts that would result in job cuts or wage reductions.
- National governments should remain strictly neutral regarding the format of print media used in literacy promotion campaigns for young people, families, and school children.
 - National governments are urged to consult a European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) report entitled “Evolution of reading in the age of digitisation” for further information on the pros and cons of reading digital and print media, and to follow the recommendations contained in the Intergraf – UNI Europa joint statement “Print is vital for the future of reading” (<https://www.uni-europa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/201907-future-of-reading-long.pdf>).
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UNI G&P, **UNI Graphical & Packaging**, represents over 800,000 members. These members work in diverse range of sectors including newspapers, general printing, security printing, publishing, tissue, and packaging. UNI Graphical & Packaging is part of UNI Global Union. UNI Global Union is the global voice of its 20 million members working in services sectors from over 150 different countries in the fastest growing sectors in the world. More information here: <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/>

The IFJ, **International Federation of Journalists**, the world's largest organisation of journalists, represents 600,000 media professionals from 187 trade unions and associations in more than 140 countries. The IFJ supports journalists and their unions whenever they are fighting for their industrial and professional rights and has established an International Safety Fund to provide humanitarian aid for journalists in need. More information here: <https://www.ifj.org/>