

## CoViD-19 and the media: Devastation or Renaissance?

*News media is considered part of the critical infrastructure. Governments react to the CoViD-19 pandemic with emergency support, but neglect structural transformation. Professional journalism soars in esteem and trust, but the advertising-based business model crumbles. This is the result of a survey by researchers of the Media for Democracy Monitor 2020 research project, conducted under the umbrella of the Euromedia Research Group in countries around the globe in the first half-year 2020. ([www.euromediagroup.org/mdm](http://www.euromediagroup.org/mdm))*

### Embargo 1 September 2020

Two trends characterize the media landscapes in the countries under observation by the Media for Democracy 2020 research project after the CoViD-19 induced lockdown in March 2020:

On the one hand, professional newsroom based media enjoyed increasing reach, and eventually, trust. Public service, as well as private commercial news media experienced booming demand, both offline (television, newspapers, often radio) and online (websites, social media profiles, etc.).

On the other hand, sizeable industries in the trade and services sector suspended promotional activities, leading to the collapse of advertising based media business models. As a rule of thumb, some 30 to 50 per cent of advertising revenue disappeared from the media markets. Subsequently, hundreds of newspaper titles ceased printing altogether or switched to online-only publication. The Director of Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, Daniel Bernhard, expressed his concern: “With few exceptions, we’re talking about the extinction of the entire Canadian media industry.”

CoViD-19 related reporting dominated up to 70 per cent of the entire coverage of the news media. In parallel, misinformation and fake news became prevailing more than ever before on digital platforms.

National governments reacted by supporting media organizations and companies financially, even against traditions of rejecting direct media subsidies. Germany, for example, set up a media support fund of no less than € 200 million. The Finnish government returned to their once abandoned subsidy scheme. The British government decided to spend some £ 35 million (€ 39 million) in the media industry. Other countries piled up their annual support substantially: Austria increased press subsidies by the factor 1.5, Sweden expanded the subsidy scheme by € 70 million and the Netherlands set up a temporary support fund of almost € 10 million, with an option for another € 24 million during September to December 2020.

Subsidies were intended in most cases to rescue news and media operations and to keep journalistic staff in their jobs. This generally worked well for employed journalists, but neglected the large number of free-lance journalists, as reports from Germany and Belgium show.

## Media for Democracy Monitor MDM 2020 Press Release CoViD-19 and the Media

A closer look shows some interesting differences of how the media support is granted. Portugal (€ 15 million) and the UK (€ 39 million) decided to allocate state funds to the media in the form of public advertising campaigns, while most other countries grant their subsidies as non-refundable support.

Very few of the country governments in the MDM 2020 sample developed a strategy to cope with the media crisis beyond the immediate rescue of media companies. In Italy, the regulator AGCOM established four working groups including media representatives, to combat in a structured way negative effects of the pandemic. One task force was (and still is) scrutinizing online disinformation.

Overall, observations of the national media landscapes show that media companies with professional newsrooms and a long tradition of operations have been and are indispensable during the pandemic. They regain trust among their users, and they manage to distance their professional work from noise in digital platforms. People tend to recognize and honour trustworthy information during the pandemic crisis. Governments, on the other hand, have been caught unprepared and their activities so far addressed short-term glitches rather than support for urgently required structural reforms as a response to the evolving digital environment.

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Full report available [HERE](#) (tbd)

*The Media for Democracy Monitor 2020 (MDM) is a longitudinal research project on the performance of the media with regard to democracy. In 2011, communication and political scientists from 10 countries delivered a state-of-the art report, based on relevant indicators, researched by national experts. Results have been published by Nordicom ([free and open access book](#)), and on the [website of the Euromedia Research Group](#).*

*In 2020, experts from 17 countries applied the MDM indicators to their national media landscape, providing insights on the development of the media performance with regard to democracy over the decade of media digitalization (2010 to 2019). Full results will be released early 2021. The [Dutch Journalism Fund](#) support the research project.*

*The Euromedia Research Group is the academic host of the MDM project, which is coordinated and managed by Josef Trappel, Professor for Media Policy and Media Economics, at the University of Salzburg.*

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