

White Paper on Freelance Journalism in Europe

**Challenges, opportunities, and the path
toward sustainability**

Coordinator: Ruth de Frutos



Taktak



Co-funded by
the European Union

Executive Summary

Freelance journalism is essential to media vitality and the defense of democracy, yet it faces growing invisibility and structural challenges that threaten both its sustainability and the quality of information. This white paper, the result of European-level research on the journalistic profession conducted by Taktak in collaboration with Display Europe and supported by the European Union, seeks to shed light on the working conditions, challenges, and aspirations of those engaged in journalism. It also proposes new monetization mechanisms through payment or donation-based platforms.

A fragmented and precarious labor landscape

Journalism has historically been associated with precarity and job insecurity, a trend that has intensified with the dismantling of traditional newsrooms. For freelancers, the profession is characterized by irregular income, unstable employment, and the constant need to seek additional sources of revenue, often outside the journalistic field. Economic instability is not only the result of market dynamics but also of a business culture that shifts risk onto self-employed journalists.

According to Taktak's research, the main sources of income for those working independently in journalism are salaries from media organizations (47.2%) and freelance payments (46.4%). Other income streams include grants and subsidies (29.4%), audience donations (10.6%), advertising (10%), sponsored content (9.4%), and paid subscriptions (8.1%).

This coexistence of roles, where the freelance figure overlaps with more structured contractual arrangements, can lead to situations of so-called "false self-employment," a concern frequently raised by labor unions. Job dissatisfaction is notably higher among those who rely primarily on freelance rates and experience inconsistent earnings.

Professional burnout

Self-employment, while offering a degree of freedom, entails a significant emotional and physical burden that can lead to burnout, or professional exhaustion. Recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), burnout manifests as exhaustion, cynicism toward one's work, and reduced professional efficacy. This phenomenon represents a structural reality that directly affects journalists, particularly those working independently.

Burnout is triggered by multiple factors. Economic precarity, income instability, lack of job security, unpredictable schedules, and excessive workloads are key contributors. In addition, journalists face increasing pressure to ensure that their articles perform well online.

This often means writing with algorithmic visibility in mind, prioritizing how platforms such as Google or social media networks rank content, rather than focusing on the stories they truly wish to tell. The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence has further shifted the dynamics of the profession, intensifying competition. Altogether, these pressures make the work more stressful and significantly increase the risk of professional burnout.

Women and freelancers: the double precarity

An increasing number of women journalists in Europe are choosing self-employment, often at younger ages. This shift has made it possible to address historically overlooked topics such as gender issues and

human rights. However, this professional independence does not shield them from job insecurity, income instability, or the challenges of balancing professional and family life. Women journalists are more likely to take on freelance or part-time roles to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, a choice that frequently results in inconsistent pay, lack of benefits, and reduced job security. The absence of clear contracts and the infringement of authorship rights further exacerbate these structural inequalities.

Monetization and the path toward sustainability

In response to persistent precarity, a growing number of self-employed journalists are actively seeking alternative sources of funding. Direct monetization through payment and donation platforms is emerging as a promising avenue for securing direct financial support from audiences. More than half of European journalists (56.8%) who participated in Taktak's study expressed willingness to use such platforms. This trend aims to diversify income streams, reduce dependence on major media outlets, and enhance editorial freedom, thereby facilitating niche and investigative journalism.

Projects such as Taktak are helping to establish a new system of audience-driven donations that directly support practicing journalists. Notably, 55.9% of respondents to the Europe-wide macro-survey¹ indicated interest in actively contributing to the development of Taktak, whether through beta testing or interviews. This finding highlights the profession's strong desire to be part of building sustainable solutions for the future of journalism.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this white paper are directed toward three key actors essential to transforming the journalistic landscape in Europe: freelance journalists, media organizations, and public administrations.

This division is justified by the complexity of the challenges faced by self-employed journalists, including precarity, burnout, gender inequality, and difficulties in monetization, which demand a multifaceted approach and coordinated engagement from all stakeholders within the media ecosystem. Freelance journalists require tools and knowledge to self-manage their careers and defend their rights. Media organizations bear the responsibility of ensuring fair working conditions and fostering an environment that values journalistic quality.

Finally, public administrations must establish regulatory frameworks and supportive policies that guarantee sustainability and equity within the sector, recognizing freelance journalism as a fundamental pillar of democracy and informational diversity.

In conclusion, this *White paper on freelance journalism in Europe: challenges, opportunities, and the path toward sustainability* underscores the urgency of acknowledging and addressing the structural challenges faced by journalism professionals. Only through a concerted and collaborative effort among journalists, media organizations, and public authorities can a sustainable future for this essential profession be secured, one that ensures informational plurality and, consequently, strengthens democracy itself.

¹ In this white paper, we use the term *macro-survey* to refer to the methodological tool employed within the framework of this Taktak project, given its broad scope, European-level focus, and specific orientation toward journalism professionals, with particular attention to the freelance community. We consider this terminology appropriate not only because of the scale of the study but also because, to the best of our knowledge, it represents the most extensive survey conducted on this subject in Europe since 2015.

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Chapter 1 | Introduction

Importance of highlighting the freelance reality in contemporary European journalism

Journalism is essential for the vitality and pluralism of the European media ecosystem and for the defense of democracy. Despite its growing relevance, the reality of self-employed journalists often remains invisible, characterized by a series of structural challenges that threaten both their sustainability and, consequently, the quality of journalism.

[Taktak](#)², a European Union (EU)-funded project aimed at creating a new reader donation system to directly support information professionals, present this white paper. It emerges from the need to shed light on the working conditions, challenges, and aspirations of self-employed journalists in Europe. Beyond the superficial perception of a traditionally precarious figure, there is a need to examine the professional profile of those working independently, considering the economic, legal, and personal challenges they face.

According to the [Declaration of Journalists to the European Commission](#), published by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) in January 2025, the role of self-employed journalists is indispensable for informing the public, defending democracy, and maintaining editorial independence. The EFJ called for measures to address precarity in the profession, highlighting strategies to “ensure fair working conditions, equal treatment, and adequate livelihoods for self-employed journalists across Europe.”

At this point, monetization through platforms emerges as a central part of the solution. While emerging strategies such as crowdfunding and direct donations exist, their implementation through dedicated technological platforms can provide a response to economic instability. As Jeff Israely, co-founder of Worldcrunch and leader of the Taktak project, notes:

The search for new sources of income remains crucial. But over the past decade, we have learned that ensuring the quality of journalism is the only sustainable way to achieve this. And that requires people who can fully dedicate themselves to this work³ (Israely, 2025).

This white paper aims not only to serve as a tool for reflection but also for action. It diagnoses the current situation, identifies challenges, and highlights the effort and passion of freelance journalists, laying the groundwork for constructive debate and the formulation of recommendations for journalists themselves, media organizations, and public authorities to improve working conditions.

1. Context and objectives of the white paper

Self-employed journalism in Europe operates in an environment marked by profound precarity, with low wages and weak or non-existent social security schemes, according to the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (Blagojev et al., 2025). The report also highlights the lack of detailed data and monitoring on the specific conditions of freelancers, which hinders a comprehensive assessment and the development of adequate policies.

In this context, the main objective of this white paper is to provide a complete and up-to-date overview of the situation of freelance journalism in Europe, with particular emphasis on how a monetization

² The Taktak platform, currently under development by the Taktak Consortium, is a pioneering solution designed to empower media outlets and individual journalists through an innovative donation and revenue-sharing system.

³ <https://www.lamarea.com/2025/03/27/periodistas-freelance-necesitan-otro-trabajo/>

solution via a dedicated platform can mitigate income and stability challenges. To achieve this, the following four secondary objectives are proposed:

- O1. To make the socioeconomic reality of freelance journalism in Europe visible, by profiling journalists, their sources of income, contract types, and their level of satisfaction with working conditions.
- O2. To identify the key challenges faced by journalists. This includes examining the barriers self-employed journalists encounter, from financial instability and the absence of benefits to difficulties accessing professional development opportunities and exposure to occupational risks without proper protection.
- O3. To explore strategies for direct monetization of journalistic content and their impact, with a focus on crowdfunding platforms for journalists.
- O4. To formulate concrete recommendations for journalists, media organizations, and public administrations within the European Union. Based on the analysis of data and experiences, the white paper aims to propose solutions and courses of action to improve working conditions and strengthen the sustainability of freelance journalism in Europe.

This white paper aspires to contribute to the debate on the future of journalism in Europe, promoting a fairer and more equitable environment for self-employed professionals, whose work is indispensable for the democratic health of the region. Monetization through a dedicated platform emerges not as an optional strategy but as an urgent necessity to reverse precarity and ensure the long-term viability of freelance journalism.

2. Methodology

The development of this white paper has been based on a methodology combining data collection through an online survey, conducted between July and November 2024, and a comprehensive review of academic and professional literature carried out between April and July 2025.

2.1. Online survey

First, an online survey was conducted, answered by 436 journalists residing in 33 countries (21 EU member states, 13 other European countries, and 8 non-European countries), representing the first study on freelance journalists in Europe since the 2015 report by the European Federation of Journalists (La Marea, 2025).

Data collection was carried out using a non-probabilistic snowball sampling method, a strategy particularly suitable for accessing specific professional profiles such as freelance journalism. This technique provided crucial primary data on the labor and economic situation and perceptions of respondents, with particular emphasis on content monetization and the impact of new technologies.

The survey was distributed in two phases. In the first wave, it was primarily disseminated via consortium organizations' email contact lists, newsletters, websites, and social media channels. In the second phase, [Display Europe](#), a new European multilingual platform for media and content distribution led by independent and community media, collaborated on distribution through its own channels, while consortium partners conducted an additional dissemination effort within their networks. This mixed strategy increased the survey's reach and enabled the capture of a diverse sample within the target group.

The online questionnaire⁴ available in 13 languages (English, Spanish, German, Catalan, Galician, Greek, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, French, Italian, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, and Romanian), was structured into six thematic sections:

1. Demographic and professional data: questions included origin, residence, country of work, age, gender, and years of experience as a journalist, enabling segmentation of responses and profiling of participants.
2. Contractual and economic situation: questions addressed contract type, level of satisfaction with it, percentage of income from journalism, and monetization of work.
3. Challenges and adaptations: explored issues such as supplementary income, income consistency, strategies for balancing earnings during low-activity months, and the publication of unpaid work. It also covered content adaptation for traffic and productivity measurement.
4. Wellbeing and future perspectives: included questions on overall wellbeing, challenges faced, experiences with burnout, and concerns about the impact of artificial intelligence. Participants were also asked about the likelihood of continuing in the profession long-term.
5. Interest in monetization platforms: focused on the use of and expectations for emerging tools to receive payments or donations for journalistic work, addressing desired functionalities, revenue distribution, payment methods, customization, and compatibility with other tools.
6. Open-ended questions: At the end of each thematic section, participants could provide additional input (e.g., “Could you elaborate on your contract type?”, “Please tell us more about your experience with direct content monetization”, “Is there anything else you would like to share?”), allowing respondents to freely express themselves and provide valuable information that closed questions could not capture.

The anonymous survey employed a strategic combination of question types to collect diverse information. Single-choice multiple-choice questions were used for demographic data and satisfaction levels (e.g., “Where are you from?”), while multiple-selection questions captured several relevant responses (e.g., “Where do you work?” or “What types of media do you currently work with?”).

Additionally, Likert-scale questions were introduced to measure degrees of satisfaction or concern (e.g., “How satisfied are you with your current income...?” or “To what extent are you concerned about the potential impact of artificial intelligence?”). Finally, open-ended text questions allowed the collection of detailed qualitative information and personal perspectives, such as in “Could you elaborate on your response regarding your contract type?”

Although some preliminary data from this survey were previously published in the report *Results of the survey for journalists* in March 2025 (Taktak & Display Europe, 2025) as part of the European project’s early findings, this white paper presents a much deeper and comprehensive analysis. Cross-tabulations were conducted using contingency tables to explore relationships between responses and to observe patterns among different subgroups within the surveyed population. To facilitate understanding of the findings, results are visually represented using graphs, maps, and custom tables created with Python.

However, several important limitations should be noted. For certain questions, particularly the more specific or open-ended ones, some categories recorded a low number of responses, limiting the generalizability and interpretation of those results. Additionally, although the survey was widely

⁴ See <https://form.typeform.com/to/p5kyFXLc>

disseminated and translated into 13 languages, digital access and distribution networks may have influenced the profile of participants, which does not represent all European countries uniformly. Nevertheless, the overall dataset provides an unprecedented and solid basis for better understanding the situation of freelance journalism in Europe and for guiding concrete proposals to improve it.

2.2. Literature review

To contextualize and enrich the data extracted from the survey, an exhaustive literature review was carried out between April and July 2025.

1. Reports and publications from European professional organizations, consulting documents from associations, unions, and/or journalist federations such as those of UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists, the International Federation of Journalists, the European Federation of Journalists, Reporters Without Borders, the Centre for Regulation of the Creative Economy, or the National Council for the Training of Journalists in the United Kingdom, *Lo Spioncino Dei Freelance* in Italy, the Madrid Press Association or the *Unió de Periodistes Valencians* in Spain, and the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University in the United States.
2. Academic studies, incorporating findings from relevant scholarly research on the working conditions of self-employed journalists in Europe, business models in journalism, and the impact of the economy on the media sector.
3. Analysis of public policies and legal frameworks. This reviews existing initiatives and regulations at both European and national levels that affect self-employed workers and, specifically, journalists.
4. Media and sectoral publications, consulting specialized media outlets and professional journals to obtain an updated perspective on relevant trends and debates.

In addition, the review incorporates best practice case studies, such as the Italian projects *#ComeTiSenti* and *Lo Spioncino dei Freelance*, the European Federation of Journalists' initiative Stand Up for Journalism!, and the study on fees and grants proposed by the Belgian Association of Journalists. Two conceptual frameworks are also included, addressing the survivor bias in self-employed journalism and the impact of the creator economy for professionals who use payment and donation platforms.

The combination of diverse sources and methodological approaches has made it possible to build a white paper grounded in empirical data and a deep understanding of the complexities that define the reality of freelance journalism in Europe, underscoring the urgent need for innovative and centralized monetization solutions through digital platforms.

Chapter 2

An overview of freelance journalism in Europe

The freelance journalist has always existed, but today the term has become synonymous with precarity and job insecurity taken to their extreme (UPV, 2018).

In the dynamic European media landscape, the figure of the journalist who works on assignment or per piece has gained undeniable prominence, albeit not without complexity. They are known by various names in different countries, from “*pigistes*” in France to “*journalistas a la pieza*” or “*colaboradores*” in Spain. These are professionals who carry out their work without full-time schedules or daily presence in a newsroom, though always under the editorial guidelines of the media outlet (Estevez, Morga Manzanares & Gómez, 2007). However, beyond the appearance of autonomy, this work model has long been associated with a reality of instability and precarity.

This phenomenon is not new, but its intensity is. The report *Freelance: del precariorismo al periodismo* [Freelance: from precarious journalism to dignified journalism] (freelancers, piecework journalists, collaborators, newsroomless journalists), authored by Manuel Mediavilla for the Federation of Journalist Unions (Mediavilla, 2018), coined the term *precariorismo* to describe this growing trend. It refers to the alarming increase in the number of journalists who collaborate with media outlets as self-employed workers without the necessary labor conditions to be considered dignified. This figure has risen across Europe, inversely proportional to the progressive dismantling of traditional newsrooms. This structural transformation of the sector not only redefines working conditions but also raises important questions about the future of journalism and the well-being of those who practice it.

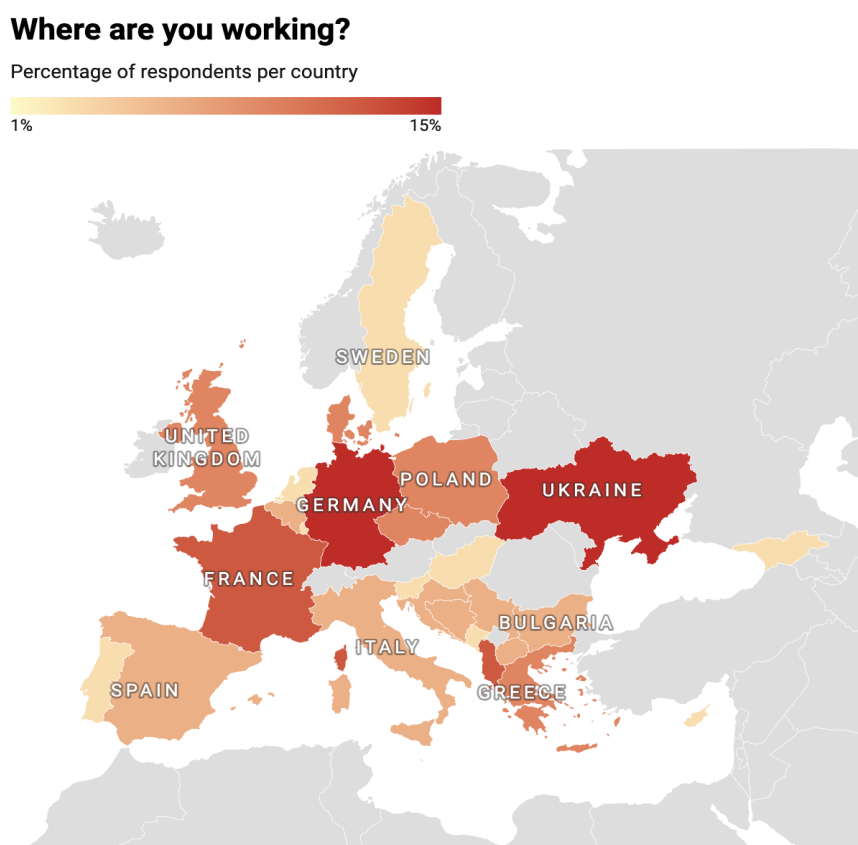
1. Socio-demographic data and basic characteristics

European data on the media sector (Hess & Lory, 2025) reveal a fragmented landscape. While the number of journalists in the EU has decreased by 2.5% since 2022, the number of publishing companies has grown by 9%. Portugal registered the highest expansion, with a 7.3% increase, followed by Malta (7.1%), France (6.5%), and Bulgaria (3.6%). France remains by far the country with the largest number of publishing companies (around 24,000) and has lost approximately 13% of its media professionals. The picture is clear: if the number of companies grows while the number of salaried employees declines, there is a corresponding increase in self-employed journalists.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2025a), this situation directly impacts press freedom and working conditions for journalists, with differences arising from specific national contexts. For instance, in Eastern Europe, freelance journalists face a particularly challenging scenario, where economic difficulties, notably the decline of U.S. funding, combine with geopolitical tensions. Countries such as Ukraine and Belarus have seen a reduction in international financial support, particularly from the United States. In the Balkans, public media outlets are undergoing a deep crisis, marked by budget cuts and political pressure.

Across Europe, freelance journalism has a woman's face. In the macro-survey, 61.9% of respondents identified as women, 35.8% as men, and 1.1% identified as another gender or preferred not to answer. For example, the Annual Report on the Journalism Profession published by the Madrid Press Association (APM) indicates that 25% of those working in Spain's information sector are self-employed, while 24% work in communication. This research shows both a year-on-year progression and an increase in the percentage of women, particularly in the communications sector. This trend is not exclusive to journalism but reflects a broader shift across Spain's cultural and creative industries.

Figure1. Geographical distribution of freelance journalism in Europe



Source: Own elaboration.

Labor mobility among freelance journalists in Europe is not particularly high. The majority of those working as freelancers live (85.8%) and work (92.7%) in the same country in which they were born. However, there are notable exceptions linked to political or conflict-related circumstances, such as in Ukraine, Belarus, and several Balkan countries. In fact, the locations where journalists work often coincide with preferred information zones, shaped by ongoing wars or proximity to financial and institutional hubs, such as Ukraine (15.6%), Germany, Albania, and France (12.5%), as well as the Czech Republic, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Greece, and Poland (9.4%). It is paradoxical to note that freelance journalism coexists in the same informational spaces as traditional journalism, hegemonic media, and institutional communication, a dynamic that reinforces the notion of structural substitution within the sector.

Age diversity is another defining feature of journalism in Europe. The professionals who participated in Taktak's study represent all age cohorts, ranging from the youngest group (19.5% between 18 and 29 years old) to those nearing retirement, who make up 7.1% of respondents. This pattern reflects both those who have maintained freelance work throughout their careers and those who experience it temporarily while seeking stability. As noted in the *Unió de Periodistes Valencians* report (2018), one of the first effects of the economic crisis in Spain was the dismantling of newsrooms, which occurred in parallel with an increase in precarious hiring to sustain various journalistic products.

Regarding income, journalism is the primary source of revenue for the majority (60.8%), though it often requires supplementary financing. For the remaining 40%, journalistic activity accounts for only one-fifth of their total income. In summary, even under the most favorable circumstances, freelance

journalism rarely constitutes a journalist's sole source of income, reinforcing precarity and limiting full professional dedication.

When analyzing the career trajectories of those working in freelance journalism, nearly half of respondents (49.7%) have been in this work model for more than 15 years. This finding challenges the notion that freelancing is a temporary condition tied to ad hoc coverage of specific events and confirms instead that it represents a consolidated labor trend, closely linked to the rise of digital journalism, with the advent of platforms such as Facebook, for example, around 2004 (Thomas et al., 2024).

Although online media represent the main professional sphere (68%), freelance journalists in Europe often work across multiple sectors simultaneously, including social networks, print newspapers, and magazines. This indicates that the freelance employment model is not exclusive to digital outlets, but rather a structural, complementary, or substitutive model of salaried employment, much like in other industries. The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ, 2025) warns about journalists who are registered as self-employed but integrated into a media organization's structure and subject to the same obligations and schedules as staff journalists, the so-called "false freelancers." In Spain, for example, the APM identified 14% of false freelancers in 2023, compared to 6% in the previous year (APM, 2024: 15).

Regarding the type of employment arrangement, 51.7% work as self-employed collaborators, 39.4% as full-time employees, and 17.8% as entrepreneurs. Most are not formally linked to media companies or organizations, which requires them to register under their national self-employment schemes to practice journalism legally. As the EFJ (2025) highlights, this situation has serious negative implications for social protection rights, from pensions and sick leave to parental benefits, and the challenges are even greater for cross-border workers, whose rights cannot always be guaranteed.

Despite these working conditions, more than half (33.6% satisfied and 18.9% very satisfied) report being content with their situation. The Report on Freelance Journalists in the United Kingdom (Thomas, Battisti & Kretschmer, 2024: 45) attributes this satisfaction to moral rights, grounded in recognition and respect for authorship and integrity, noting that "people are happy to work and to be credited." Similarly, the APM Report (2024: 16) in Spain reaches the same conclusion: between 35% and 39% of journalists and 40% to 45% of communicators identify "being able to organize my own work" as their main advantage, followed by "being able to develop my own ideas." Combined with a strong sense of professional purpose and awareness of their vital democratic role in ensuring the flow of information, many freelancers strive to make the best of a critical situation.

However, only 1.2% hold permanent contracts, and the open-ended responses reveal a polyphony of experiences. Positive statements emphasize the flexibility to work on topics of interest, general autonomy, independence from traditional media, and the ability to produce more personal work, often remotely and in combination with other professional or creative pursuits. Conversely, negative responses focus primarily on low pay, per-piece remuneration (ranging, according to testimonies, between €50 and €100 per article), job insecurity, lack of benefits or healthcare coverage, absence of free time, and the deterioration of mental health. These perceptions vary by region, with Ukraine and Romania explicitly mentioned as contexts where freelance journalism is often the only way to practice journalism, even under discouraging labor conditions.

2. The role of digital journalism and its impact on the labor model

The arrival of digital technologies radically transformed journalistic routines, formats, and content, but their deepest impact was felt in the working conditions of those dedicated to journalism in general, and freelance journalism in particular. Immediacy, the abundance of sources, and the interaction with audiences accelerated these changes. Digital influence even reaches the integrity of journalistic work itself. To what extent is reporting adapted according to the expected traffic? The results of the Taktak survey reveal a significant ethical dilemma.

Table 1. On the possibility of modifying work according to audience interaction based on topic or content choice (n=364)

Question: Have you ever adjusted your work (the choice of topic and/or the content of a story) based on expected traffic (how widely it would be read/viewed)?

Response	Percentage
No, this has never been an issue / I have never faced that decision.	27.19%
Yes, though I struggle with it ethically. Journalistic integrity should not be compromised by the pursuit of clicks and views.	26.09%
No, though I have encountered this decision, I felt that adjusting my work would hinder my integrity as a journalist.	25.82%
Yes, I consider it to be natural for a journalist to take audience engagement into account. It's how we survive in the evolving media landscape.	20.87%

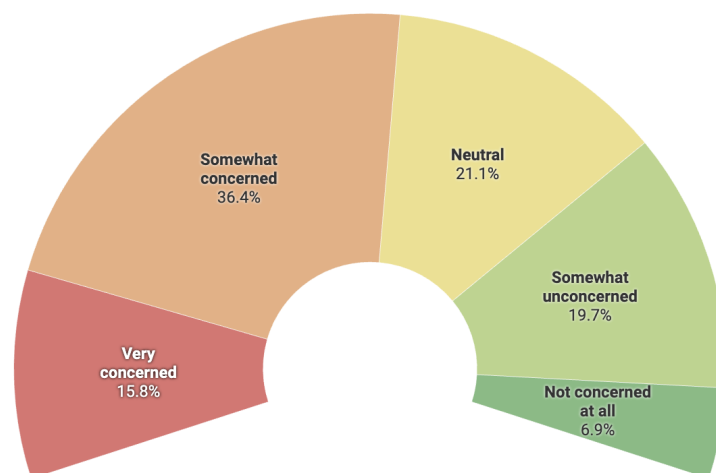
Source: Own elaboration.

The closeness of these percentages reveals the complexity of the issue, as there is a clear divide in opinions regarding journalistic ethics and flexibility in response to the dynamics of the digital market. A total of 27.19% state that they have never been in the position of having to adjust their work based on expected traffic. Very close in percentage, 26.09% admit to having done so on occasion, though with ethical reservations, emphasizing that journalistic integrity should not be sacrificed in the pursuit of clicks. Meanwhile, 25.82% report having faced this decision but chose not to modify their work in order to preserve their professional ethics.

Figure 2. Perception of the impact of AI on the profession

Question: How concerned are you about the potential impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the journalism profession?

How concerned are you about the potential impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the journalism profession?



Source: Own elaboration.

The arrival of artificial intelligence offers unprecedented opportunities while simultaneously intensifying existing challenges. The report *SpinozaAI: Vers un journalisme augmenté et éthique* (RSF, 2025b) reveals that journalists are already using AI for certain tasks, such as translation, transcription, synthesis, or summarization, but remain reluctant to use it for writing or fact-checking, fearing it could pose a risk of replacement. The Taktak survey also shows some concern about this development, though curiosity and uncertainty prevail. This moment may, in fact, represent an opportunity to reaffirm the central role of journalists in producing quality content with ethical commitment.

The analysis of freelance journalism in Europe allows us to understand that, beyond the appearance of autonomy, there exists a complex web of precarity, inequality, and adaptation to a constantly evolving digital environment. The demographic data and working conditions presented in this chapter not only outline the profile of a resilient professional but also compel us to examine how these factors affect their livelihoods and working realities.

Chapter 3

Working conditions: income, precarization, and levels of satisfaction

Journalism in Europe unfolds within a deeply fragmented labor landscape. On one side are salaried professionals employed by media organizations, whose positions are relatively secure, both in terms of duration and financial stability, thanks to full-time contracts and stable salaries. On the other side are freelancers, characterized by irregular income, precarious employment, and the constant need to seek additional sources of revenue, often outside the field of journalism, or to cut expenses when alternatives are scarce.

The first group is marked by higher levels of satisfaction; the second, by greater dissatisfaction on all fronts. However, these are not two isolated or disconnected blocks, they coexist within a professional ecosystem shaped by growing precariousness and the ongoing digital transformation of the sector.

The economic instability experienced by freelancers is not solely the result of market dynamics but also reflects a business culture that tends to transfer risk onto those working independently (Mondon-Navazo et al., 2021). In response to this reality, emerging, though still marginal, strategies are beginning to take shape, aimed at fostering collective support for both journalists and independent media. These include direct donations, crowdfunding, membership models, and micro-patronage platforms.

Moreover, institutional recognition of the role and contribution of freelance journalists is essential. The intervention of public policies and European funds, such as the Creative Europe Programme (European Commission, 2023), is crucial to ensure that independent journalism does not become a privilege accessible only to those who can sustain it through other economic activities.

1. Sources of income and sustainability models

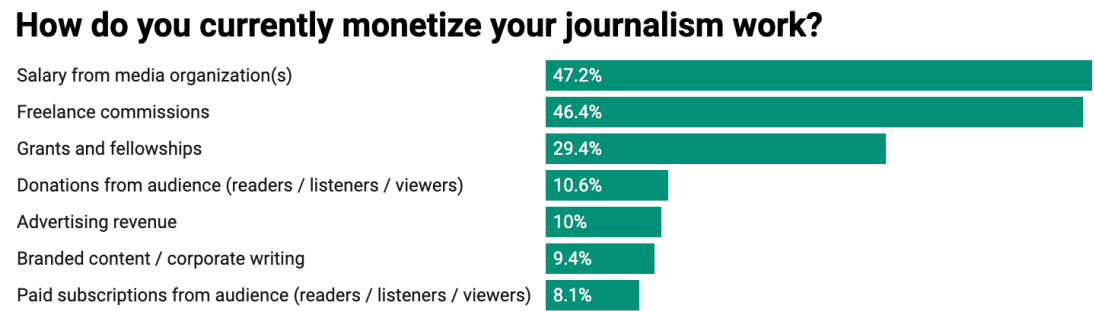
The analysis of income sources among freelance journalists in Europe reveals a heterogeneous and constantly evolving ecosystem. The most common means of monetizing journalistic work remain salaries from media outlets (47.2%) and fees earned through self-employed work (46.2%).

The high proportion of journalists who still receive salaries from a media organization (even part-time or per assignment) suggests that, for many, self-employment coexists with more structured contractual relationships. For instance, in Spain, 54% of freelance journalists are “contributors to several companies,” while 24% are “contributors to a single company,” and 10% are “integrated within a company’s structure,” according to the APM (2024). This reinforces the idea of hybrid contracts.

This phenomenon translates into work arrangements that combine the flexibility of freelance employment with certain guarantees typical of salaried work, such as long-term collaboration contracts, monthly payments for a fixed number of pieces, or even hybrid roles that merge freelance flexibility with a salaried base. This coexistence of roles is a defining feature of contemporary journalism, where outsourcing has become commonplace within the media industry (Deuze & Witschge, 2017).

Union organizations such as the *Federación Española de Sindicatos de Periodistas* (FeSP) warn that these situations foster the figure of the “false self-employed” and call for its elimination, alongside demands to guarantee the independence of public media and the promotion of media literacy in schools (FeSP, 2023).

Figure 3. Current sources of income for freelance journalists in Europe



Source: Own elaboration.

In addition to these traditional income sources, other funding avenues have gained importance. Grants and subsidies (29.72%) allow journalists to pursue complex and public-interest stories that would otherwise be financially unfeasible in the commercial market. Initiatives such as JournalismFund.eu or the European Journalism Centre provide vital funding to ensure the viability of complex journalistic projects, especially in investigative journalism (Lönnendonker et al., 2023; Alfter & Căndea, 2019).

In addition to the above, emerging models include audience donations (10.6%), advertising (10.0%), branded content (9.4%), and subscriptions (8.1%). Though still minority practices, these monetization models are growing significantly.

In this context, forms of direct audience support are gaining ground, particularly among journalists who specialize in very specific niche topics. This model relies on building highly loyal communities and offering high-value-added content. Such forms of direct support foster greater editorial independence and a closer relationship with audiences, though they require considerable investment in personal branding and continuous community engagement (Myllylahti & Meese, 2024). Their growth signals the willingness of certain audiences to pay directly for journalism they value, as reflected in platforms such as Substack or Patreon.

Good practices box from the AJP on scholarships and rates

The *Association des Journalistes Professionnels* (AJP) in Belgium stands out for its support of scholarships and funds for journalistic projects. Through initiatives such as the *Fonds pour le journalisme*, it awards grants and financial aid to journalists conducting investigative or long-term projects. One of its most significant contributions lies in the area of remuneration, where it establishes and promotes recommended minimum rates, often in collaboration with the *Association Générale des Journalistes Professionnels de Belgique* (AGJPB).

Finally, many professionals supplement their income with activities outside journalism, such as part-time work, royalties, conference and workshop fees, or the sale of cultural products and exhibitions. This variety of income sources underscores the need for flexible and adaptive strategies to ensure the economic sustainability of journalistic work.

When asked to describe their experience with direct content monetization, respondents show a clear pattern: although they diversify income streams, direct monetization is not stable enough to constitute a solid financial foundation. Platforms such as Substack allow journalists to generate additional income through donations or audience subscriptions, whether direct (newsletters or paywalls) or indirect (via Buy Me a Coffee).

There is also a clear preference for direct monetization systems, from simple donation buttons integrated into websites (e.g., Donorbox) to local fundraising platforms such as *Darujme.sk* in Slovakia or *l'Aixeta* in Catalonia. These mechanisms offer a more direct relationship with the audience and reduce professional and economic dependence on intermediaries. However, in most cases, the income generated through these means is insufficient to sustain exclusive dedication to them.

Among the main difficulties cited are the need to build and maintain a large and consistent audience, the weak culture of paying for news, or, in the worst cases, explicit prohibitions imposed by the media outlets they work for:

“I have a salary, and they monitor me so that I don't have income from elsewhere, which makes it very difficult to combine” (Journalist 1, man, Spain)

In this context, other creative approaches to monetizing journalistic work also emerge:

“Entrepreneurs donate money to us, and we place advertising banners on the portal as a sign of gratitude” (Journalist 2, woman, Serbia)

These strategies, though still marginal, illustrate the efforts of freelance journalists to find funding models compatible with their autonomy and their commitment to high-quality information.

2. Income and the pursuit of economic stability through supplementary work

As previously detailed, the economic landscape of journalism in Europe is marked by significant instability. Only 38.6% of respondents stated that their income remains constant from month to month. In contrast, more than 60% experience monthly fluctuations in their earnings, whether major (36.9% of the sample) or minor (24.4%).

Table 2. Monthly stability of journalism income

Question. Do your earnings as a journalist remain constant from one month to another?

Value	Frequency (%)
Yes	38.6%
No	36.9%
Somewhat	24.4%

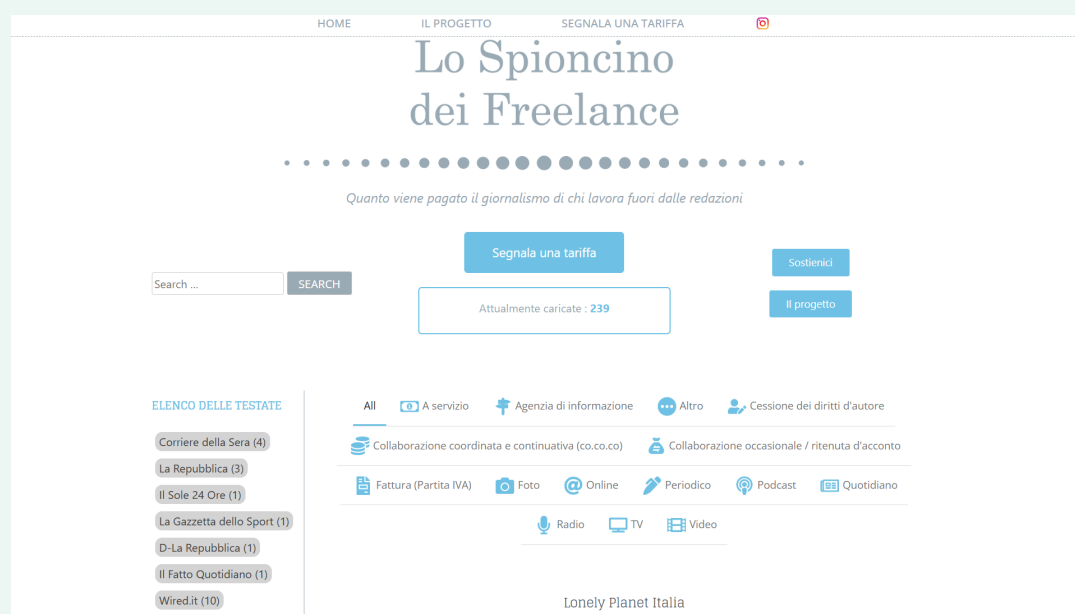
Source: Own elaboration.

These findings are not isolated but reflect a widely documented trend of precarity in the sector. Studies such as *Freelance Journalists: A Survey of Earnings, Contracts and Copyright*, conducted by the Centre for Regulation of the Creative Economy (CREATe) at the University of Glasgow (Thomas et al., 2024) in the United Kingdom, or the *Annual Report on the Journalism Profession* by the Madrid Press Association (APM, 2024) in Spain, point to common structural problems, such as low pay and dependence on multiple assignments. In Spain, the *Unió de Periodistes Valencians* (UPV) has denounced the “drastic decline in rates” over the years in the Valencian Community, citing examples

such as “6 euros per day in a local print newspaper and 10 euros per article for a digital outlet,” or national magazines paying half of what they did five years ago (UPV, 2020).

Good practices box | *Lo Spioncino dei Freelance* (Italy)

In response to this situation, some initiatives seek to make visible the economic conditions of the sector, marked by opacity and a lack of communication among professionals. A notable example is [Lo Spioncino Dei Freelance](#), which provides concrete data on the rates paid to freelance journalists by various publications in Italy.



When job opportunities become scarce, strategies to balance income reflect a high degree of precariousness. The same percentage of people surveyed (43.9%) resort to their savings and work outside the field of journalism and, in the worst-case scenario, 39.4% cut back on expenses. Only a quarter (28.5%) choose to look for new journalistic assignments to compensate for the lack of funding.

Table 3. Strategies to balance income when assignments are scarce

Question: How do you balance your income during months when job opportunities are scarce? (Multiple responses)

Value	Frequency (%)
Take on additional work outside journalism	43.9%
Dip into savings	43.9%
Cut expenses	39.4%
Take on additional work in journalism	28.5%
Have a part-time job	0.5%
Keep a spare account from good months to balance the others	0.5%
Other (husband's help)	0.5%
My partner helps	0.5%
I can readily spread my annual income	0.5%
Social benefits	0.5%

Loan money	0.5%
Renting my house to others	0.5%
I have a job as a teacher in communication and intercultural issues. I also give language and writing courses and work as a consultant	0.5%
Family support *	0.5%
I have good parents *	0.5%
Other: I have a part-time contract as a journalism teacher at the university	0.5%
Other: I work other kind of easy-earning but precarious jobs	0.5%

Source: Own elaboration.

Among the individual responses, situations such as financial support from family members, renting out rooms, or taking out bank loans come to light. In many cases, journalistic activity alone does not allow for an autonomous livelihood and must be supplemented by other sources of income.

Of those surveyed, 61.9% acknowledged having supplemented their income at some point by doing other types of work unrelated to journalism, a figure that rises to 74.2% among freelance journalists and falls to 47.2% among those employed full-time. This once again points to the dual reality described earlier.

Table 4. Supplementary income from non-journalistic work

Question. Have you supplemented your income from journalism by doing other types of work?

Value	Frequency (%)
Yes	61.9%
No	38.1%

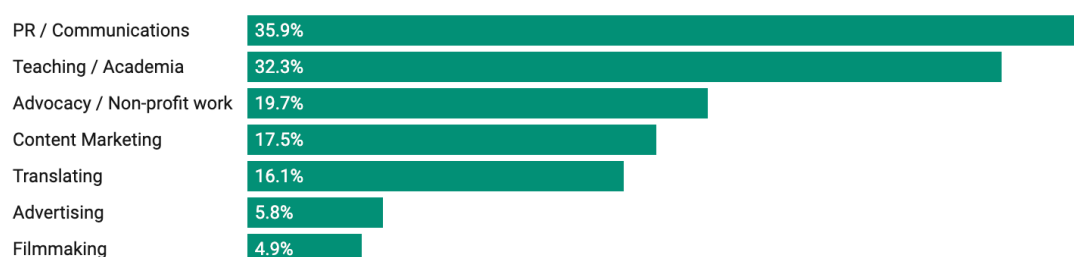
Source: Own elaboration.

Among the most common sectors for these additional jobs are public relations and institutional communication (35.9%), as well as teaching and research (32.3%), generally at the university level. Next come activism or nonprofit work (19.7%), content marketing (17.5%), and translation (16.1%); followed by advertising (5.8%) and filmmaking (4.9%).

Other sectors mentioned range from dance teaching to engineering, as well as agriculture, rent-based income, photography, or childcare. The fact that professionals are compelled to turn to occupations so disconnected from their training, often involving low skill requirements and modest pay, casts a troubling light on the working conditions under which journalists carry out their profession.

Figure 4. Work sectors complementary to journalism

What type of work do you do to supplement your income from journalism?



Source: Own elaboration.

A particularly revealing finding is that 36.7% of respondents have published work without receiving any payment. The main reasons include a desire to support a cause (50.0%) or personal interest in the topic (34.8%). Other motives involve the expectation of generating future assignments (31.1%), gaining visibility (28.0%), or reaching a wider audience (23.5%).

A significant proportion of journalists do so because they believe that publishing for free will strengthen their professional relationships, perhaps making it easier to secure new assignments in the future (31.1%), or allow them to gain exposure (28.0%) or reach larger audiences (23.5%). Additionally, 9.1% of journalists reported having tried, unsuccessfully, to sell their work to a publication and ultimately resorted to publishing it for free.

Table 5. Unpaid publications: frequency and reasons

Question. Why did you publish it without receiving payment? (Select all applicable answers)

Value	Frequency (%)
I wanted to support a cause (advocacy, public interest)	50.0%
I'm passionate about the topic (personal interest)	34.8%
I thought it would lead to future assignments (networking, building relationships)	31.1%
I wanted to build my portfolio (gain more exposure)	28.0%
I wanted to reach wider audience (increase reach)	23.5%
I tried in vain to publish it in a publication that pays (unsuccessful sell)	9.1%
We ran out of money so we had to continue publish our newsletter until we started receiving money from mini-grant we won.	0.8%
Volunteer journalistic work	0.8%
I had an agreement to get paid, but they didn't pay me and I do not have enough time or resources to take legal action	0.8%
I wanted to expand the work chances	0.8%
Scientific research	0.8%
Trade union work	0.8%
I tried in vain to publish it in a publication that pays (unsuccessful sell) I wanted to support a cause (advocacy, public interest)	0.8%
I was deceived	0.8%
I'm passionate about the topic (personal interest)	0.8%
Unpaid internships	0.8%
because they are not charged	0.8%
Registering with the social security administration for that activity would be more expensive and laborious for the amount they charge.	0.8%
I thought it would lead to future assignments (networking, building relationships)	0.8%
Other: I was asked for a favor by a small newspaper.	0.8%
Failed to pay for the work with ten thousand excuses and no valid legislation is available to press for payment	0.8%
They simply published it without paying me	0.8%

Source: Own elaboration.

In addition, several respondents reported negative experiences, such as disputes with media outlets or editors that resulted in deliberate or unfulfilled non-payments. This reflects the vulnerability in which

many freelance journalists often find themselves and underscores the urgent need for labor protection mechanisms.

“I had an agreement to get paid, but they didn't pay me and I do not have enough time or resources to take legal action” (Journalist 3, man, Spain)

“I was deceived” (Journalist 4, man, Spain)

“Failed to pay for the work with ten thousand excuses and no valid legislation is available to press for payment” (Journalist 5, woman, Italy)

“They simply published it without paying me” (Journalist 6, woman, Italian resident in Belgium)

3. Satisfaction with income received

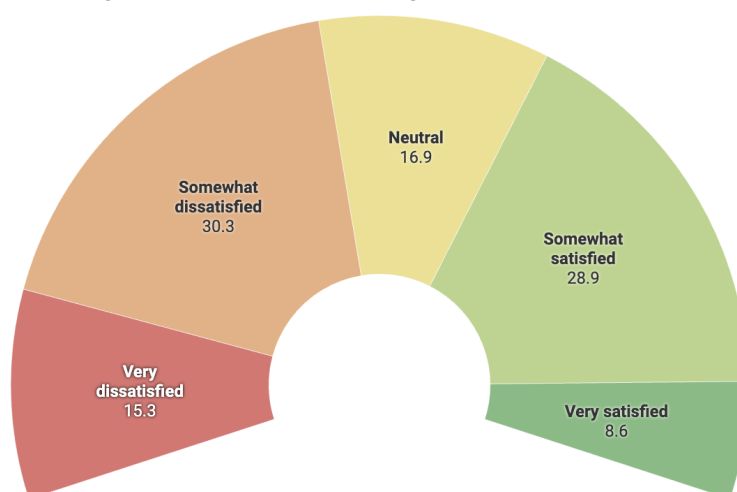
Regarding satisfaction with income derived from journalism, responses are divided into two main groups of journalists: those who feel somewhat satisfied (28.9%) and those who are dissatisfied (30.3%).

Polarization, therefore, is moderate: only 8.6% report being very satisfied, compared to 15.3% who are very dissatisfied, the latter being twice as many in proportion, though still the second smallest group. In any case, there are more respondents who are discontent (45.6%) than those who are satisfied (37.5%). The remaining 16.9% describe themselves as neutral regarding satisfaction.

This level of satisfaction is influenced by several factors. Respondents living in their country of origin report greater satisfaction (40.0%) than those living abroad (22.0%). Significant differences are also observed across age groups: 19.2% of those over 60 are very satisfied, compared to only 5.7% of those under 30. Finally, those who obtain most or all of their income from journalism show higher satisfaction levels overall.

Figure 5. Satisfaction with income derived from journalism

How would you rate your satisfaction with your current income from journalism?

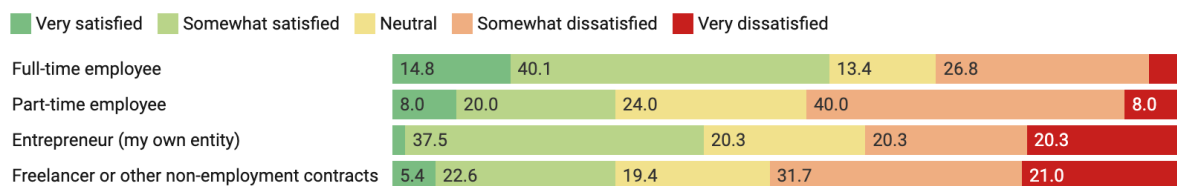


Source: Own elaboration.

Employment status also has a notable influence. 14.8% of those with a full-time contract report being very satisfied, while the percentage drops to only 1.6% among those who identify as entrepreneurs. Levels of dissatisfaction are particularly high among freelancers, exceeding 52.7% when combining those who are somewhat and very dissatisfied. This percentage is almost double that of professionals employed full-time (31.7%).

Figure 6. Job satisfaction in freelance journalism according to type of professional relationship

How would you rate your satisfaction with your current income from journalism?

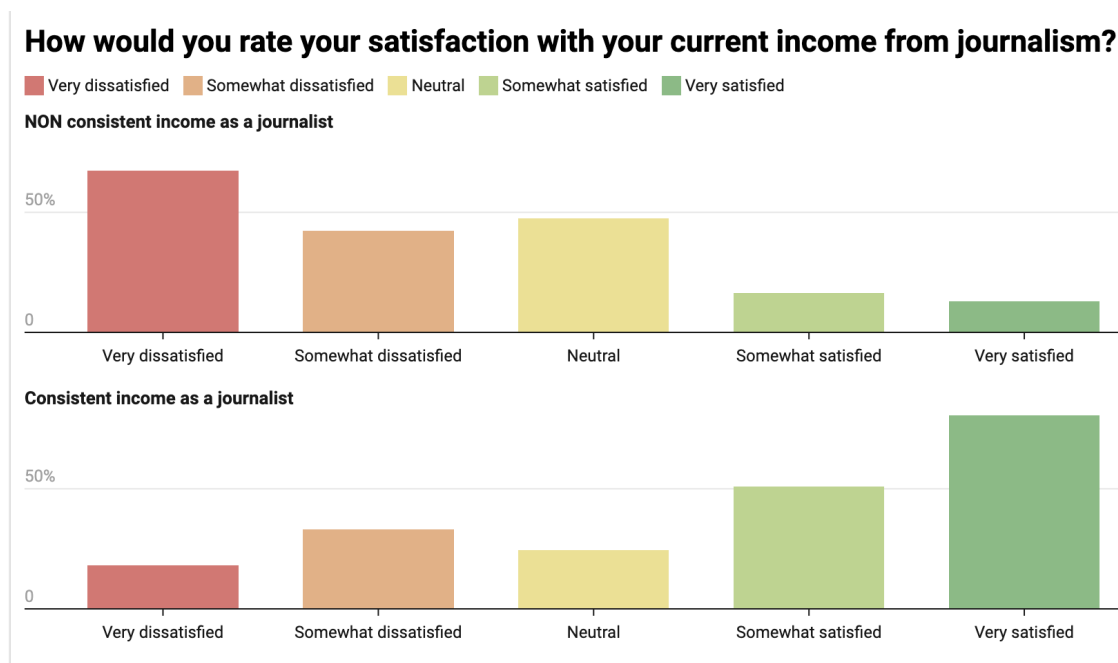


Source: Own elaboration.

Monetization methods also make a difference: those who work for freelance rates show the highest levels of dissatisfaction (56.3%), while those who receive income from advertising or have an employment contract with media outlets exhibit lower rates of discontent (both below 40%).

Satisfaction is also related to the regularity of income: 80.6% of those who report being very satisfied receive the same amount each month, compared to 67.3% of those without a fixed amount who report being very dissatisfied. This gap is especially significant for freelance journalism, where only one in ten respondents reports receiving a fixed monthly income.

Figure 7. Relationship between satisfaction and regularity of income



Source: Own elaboration.

Overall, these data reaffirm the profound inequality among different professional profiles within journalism and highlight how economic instability directly affects the well-being and work perception of those practicing the profession independently in Europe.

Chapter 4

Burnout: triggers of chronic stress in freelance journalism

Freelance work can offer freedom and flexibility, but it also carries an emotional and physical burden that often goes unnoticed. Increasingly, those who work independently face prolonged levels of stress that, over time, can lead to a phenomenon known as burnout or professional exhaustion. Burnout is not classified as a disease, but it is recognized by the WHO⁵ as a work-related phenomenon characterized by three main dimensions: a feeling of exhaustion, a negative or cynical attitude toward one's work, and a decrease in professional efficacy (WHO, 2019).

In journalism, professional well-being has long been a neglected topic. However, this is beginning to change. The Journalist Trauma Support Network (Sachs et al., 2025) shows that new generations of journalists are more willing to speak openly about mental health, trauma, and burnout. This initiative from the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University (United States) makes clear that burnout is a present reality in the profession, not an isolated phenomenon.

In recent years, various studies have focused on the mental health of those who work in journalism. Research by Aoki et al. (2012), O'Brien (2021), Seely (2019), Bustamante-Granda et al. (2021), and Holland (2018) delves into the emotional effects of journalistic work and the need to create more sustainable working environments. For example, De Jong and Kotišová (2024) show that cross-border investigative journalism is particularly exposed to chronic stress and emotional exhaustion.

For their part, Springer and Rick (2025) warn that the job insecurity associated with freelance journalism increases the risk of burnout. Their study found that, although symptoms did not reach extreme levels, a significant portion of respondents already exhibited signs of exhaustion. This is not a new phenomenon: as early as 2011, Reinardy noted that burnout was common in the journalistic environment, manifesting in a general atmosphere of pessimism and professional cynicism among its participants.

For all these reasons, this chapter examines the well-being of those who work autonomously, without clear support structures and under working conditions that favor overload, emphasizing the triggering factors of chronic stress in freelance journalism in Europe.

1. When the model fails: structural causes of burnout in freelance journalism

Research on journalists in Europe shows that six out of ten professionals (60.3%) have experienced burnout at some point in their careers. Only 31.1% report never having experienced it, while 8.6% chose not to answer this question. Reinardy (2011) had already noted a progressive increase in this condition of chronic occupational stress. Likewise, the results confirm the precarious situation in which these professionals find themselves within the field of journalism.

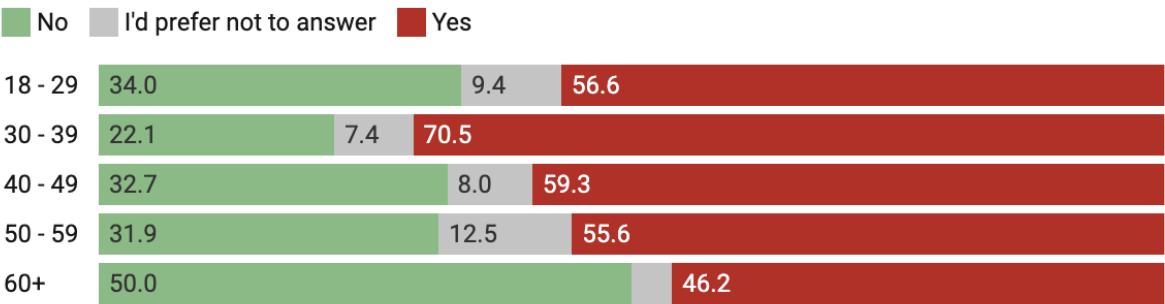
An analysis by age group reveals that chronic exhaustion is more common among young and middle-aged journalists, peaking between the ages of 30 and 39, where 70.5% report having experienced it. In contrast, the incidence decreases with age: among those over 60, half say they have not suffered from burnout.

⁵ The WHO incorporated this phenomenon into the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) in 2019, under the heading "problems associated with employment or unemployment" (WHO, 2019).

One possible explanation, highlighted by the Journalist Trauma Support Network, is that younger generations are more willing to speak openly about mental health, stress, or trauma, while among older professionals there remains a certain stigma or reluctance to discuss these experiences. Another hypothesis is that, having spent less time in the profession, younger journalists may not yet have been as exposed to the factors that trigger this condition.

Figure 8. Relationship between burnout and the age of freelance journalists

How old are you? / Have you ever suffered from burnout in your journalism career?

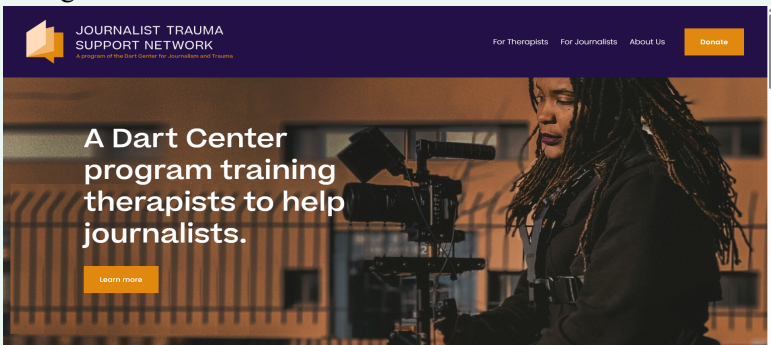


Source: Own elaboration.

At a second level, burnout affects journalists unevenly according to gender. The survey reveals that women freelancers suffer from it to a greater extent than men. While 66.5% of women report having experienced burnout, 52.2% of men say they have not experienced it. This finding underscores the need to analyze burnout through a gender perspective, as women face additional pressures, such as caregiving burdens, workplace discrimination, or economic insecurity, that exacerbate their stress levels.

Good practices box | Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (United States)

In response to the high prevalence of burnout in European freelance journalism, exacerbated by economic precarity, job instability, and digital challenges, some initiatives seek to promote greater awareness and support. A notable example is the [The Journalist Trauma Support Network](#) (Sachs et al., 2025), an initiative of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University (United States). Although not a European initiative, it represents a positive shift within the profession: newer generations of journalists are more open to discussing mental health, trauma, and exhaustion. This openness is essential to destigmatize burnout and foster more sustainable working environments, indirectly benefiting European freelance journalists by encouraging a culture of greater attention to professional well-being.



It is also noteworthy that men show a higher tendency to avoid answering whether they have experienced burnout (10.4%) compared to women (6.4%). This again indicates that younger generations are more open to discussing these issues, and that women, in particular, are more willing to speak about chronic work-related stress.

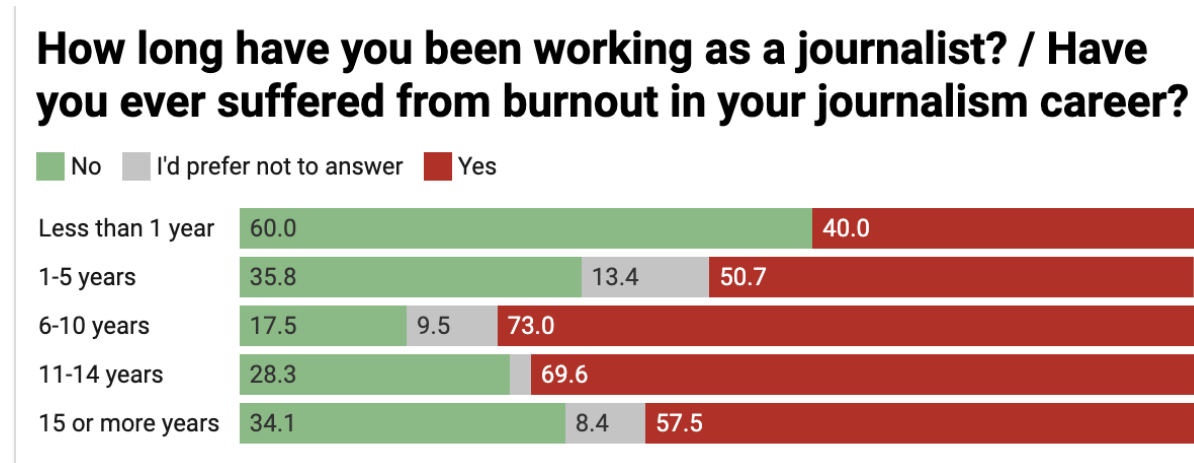
2. Economic, labor, and structural factors of burnout

As previously discussed, burnout is a widespread problem among freelance journalists and is not limited to those with low incomes or precarious contracts. More than half of those working independently in this profession have experienced this type of emotional exhaustion. This phenomenon, already noted by Springer and Rick (2025), does not appear to stem solely from occasional factors, but is instead deeply rooted in the structural dynamics of journalism work.

One of the most relevant findings of the macro-survey is that the risk of burnout increases with economic dependence on journalism. The group that earns between 81% and 100% of its income exclusively from journalistic work reports the highest rate (62.1%), suggesting that living solely from freelance journalism, without other sources of income, can be a significant source of chronic stress.

However, the issue is not just about income. The type of contract also seems to play a major role. Journalists with part-time contracts show the highest levels of burnout (68%), followed closely by those with full-time contracts (66.2%). This indicates that even those with seemingly more stable conditions face intense pressure, pointing to a structural problem in how journalistic work is organized.

Figure 9. Relationship between years of experience in journalism and likelihood of suffering burnout



Source: Own elaboration.

Although burnout levels are high across all ranges of professional experience, this vulnerability also correlates with the amount of time spent working as a journalist. Notably, those with six to ten years of experience report the highest levels of burnout (73%). A possible explanation is that, at this stage, their careers are not yet fully consolidated, and they face significant professional uncertainty.

In contrast, among those who have worked in the profession for more than fifteen years, the incidence drops to 57.5%. This may be because they have learned to better manage stress, or due to survivor bias, meaning that those who could not adapt or cope with exhaustion likely left the profession before reaching that stage. There is also a relatively low incidence (50.7%) among those with less experience.

This trend aligns with previously mentioned data on younger age groups and suggests that, having been less exposed to precarity and accumulated strain, they do not yet exhibit such high levels of burnout.

Survivor bias in the context of burnout among freelance journalists

Survivor bias is a phenomenon that occurs when analysis focuses only on those who have managed to remain in a given situation, ignoring those who have dropped out. In this case, freelance journalists with more than fifteen years of experience may show lower levels of burnout because those who were unable to cope with stress or precarity likely left the profession earlier. Therefore, the data reflect only those who have “survived” the most challenging stages, offering a more positive picture than the full reality. This implies that the lower incidence of burnout among veteran professionals may not be solely the result of better stress management, but also because the most affected individuals are no longer in the sector.

The manner in which freelance journalists monetize their income represents another contributing factor to the rise in burnout. Data indicate that those who rely economically on traditional media outlets exhibit the highest burnout rates (64.1%). This could be attributed to the constant pressure to deliver content under tight deadlines, adapt to shifting editorial lines, or navigate newsrooms in crisis. Following closely are those working on commission (56.9%), selling advertising (55.6%), and/or depending on donations (57.9%) or subscriptions (58.6%). Even those receiving grants or subsidies, who ostensibly have more time and flexibility for research, report high burnout levels (61.3%), likely due to competition, the temporary nature of such funding, and the need to supplement income with other work.

Beyond income sources, certain personal and structural conditions exacerbate burnout. It is more prevalent among journalists who struggle to balance personal and professional life (71.8%), live in contexts of insecurity (67%), or feel their journalistic style is not in demand (66.7%). Additional factors include difficulty covering basic needs with their income (63.2%) and general job instability (62.1%). Even seemingly minor aspects, such as administrative or financial management, have a notable impact (54.4%).

Finally, dissatisfaction with income emerges as a critical factor: among those highly dissatisfied with their earnings, 70.9% have experienced burnout. In contrast, among those highly satisfied, the rate drops to 45.2%. Nevertheless, burnout levels remain elevated even among those who are content or neutral about their income, underscoring that the issue transcends financial considerations. Self-imposed expectations, work overload, constant visibility, and lack of recognition form part of a professional ecosystem that fosters exhaustion.

3. The invisible weight of instability

Instability is a constant feature of the professional lives of European journalists and represents one of the main causes of burnout within this group. This emotional exhaustion affects not only those who rely exclusively on journalism but also those who combine it with other activities.

The data show that both groups exhibit high levels of exhaustion, although burnout is slightly higher among those who depend entirely on journalism (63.5% versus 58.3%). This suggests that the greater

the degree of attachment to the profession, the more likely one is to experience its emotional consequences.

Good practices box | #ComeTiSenti (Italy)

The Italian project #ComeTiSenti, promoted by IrpiMedia and the *Ordine dei Giornalisti della Lombardia*, represents an important effort to raise awareness and address the mental health of freelance journalists in Italy, a group particularly vulnerable to burnout in Europe.

Centered around the book [*Come ti senti?*](#) (2024) by Alice Facchini, this initiative emerged from Italy's first participatory study on the psychological well-being of journalists, based on an anonymous questionnaire that gathered 558 responses between July and October 2023. Its findings are alarming: job insecurity, low pay, constant digital connectivity, and frenetic work rhythms are identified as the main stress factors, with 87% of respondents reporting stress, 73% anxiety, and 42% burnout syndrome, alongside other disorders such as depression and insomnia.

When work becomes scarce, the main strategy journalists adopt is cutting expenses, a measure typically taken by those without financial reserves or alternative income sources. Within this group, 71.3% have experienced burnout, the highest rate recorded. The link between economic need and exhaustion is clear: sustained precarity, which forces even basic consumption to be restricted, acts as a direct risk factor for mental health. Only 21.8% of those forced to cut expenses report never having experienced burnout, highlighting the magnitude of the impact.

Conversely, journalists who are able to rely on savings during periods of lower workload show slightly lower levels of burnout (55.7%). Although still high, this group benefits from a financial buffer that helps reduce anxiety during less active months. Meanwhile, those who seek work outside journalism to compensate for a lack of assignments report a slightly lower burnout rate (57.7%), though it remains considerable. This can be seen as a pragmatic solution to the scarcity of opportunities in the sector, but it may also become an additional source of stress, as it requires adapting to other work environments or different types of jobs.

Thus emerges a scenario of structural precarity, which only intensifies occupational exhaustion among Europe's freelance journalists, which is obviously exacerbated by the unpaid work they sometimes do. The highest burnout rate (66.7%) occurs among those who publish without pay after unsuccessfully trying to sell their work, followed closely by those who publish in the hope of securing future assignments (63.4%). In both cases, the effort invested without tangible return increases emotional exhaustion. Equally concerning levels appear among those who work for free to reach larger audiences (58.1%) or out of commitment to social causes (59.1%). Even more personal motivations, such as passion for the topic (52.2%) or the desire to expand one's portfolio (54.1%), are linked to fatigue. Overall, burnout is closely tied to nearly every professional aspect of journalism, and its causes are deeply structural.

4. The pressure of positioning: the algorithm and the threat of AI

New technologies are also reshaping freelance journalism in Europe. Freelancers now not only have to worry about finding work or getting paid on time, but also about how to make their articles stand out online. The need to adapt to the rules of the digital world, such as search engine optimization or social media visibility, adds an extra layer of pressure that can take its toll in the form of exhaustion or burnout.

The analysis reveals that this practice, even when mediated by ethical or professional considerations, is directly linked to emotional strain. Freelancers who report having altered their topics or approaches to gain visibility at the cost of compromising their journalistic integrity show the highest levels of burnout (71.3%). However, this exhaustion is not limited to those who give in to such pressure: it also affects those who refuse to modify their content for ethical reasons (60.2%) or those who faced this dilemma and ultimately chose to adapt (54.7%).

In all cases, the tension between maintaining journalistic quality and meeting the demands of digital positioning translates into a strong emotional impact. Alongside algorithmic pressures, the rise of artificial intelligence has sparked growing concern among freelance journalists. In this regard, concern about AI is widespread across all groups, although those who have experienced burnout tend to report the highest levels of anxiety about its implications.

Chapter 5

Gender perspective in freelance journalism

In recent years, an increasing number of women journalists in Europe have chosen to work independently, and they are doing so at younger ages. This trend reflects a transformation that affects not only the number of professionals, but also the ways in which journalism is practiced. For example, since the year 2000, self-employment among women journalists in the United Kingdom has grown by 40%, a figure that doubles the growth rate observed among men (Spilsbury, 2016).

This rise in freelance journalism has opened opportunities for many women to work more freely on topics that have historically been outside the mainstream agenda, such as gender issues, human rights, and overlooked social realities. In doing so, these professionals contribute to diversifying and enriching the European media landscape (Domínguez Torres et al., 2019). However, this independence is not without challenges. Job insecurity, unstable income, and difficulties in balancing professional and family responsibilities are recurring obstacles. According to recent data from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ, 2024), the gender pay gap in journalism remains concerning, even within the freelance sector:

Women journalists are more likely to take on freelance or part-time roles in an effort to balance caregiving responsibilities. In these positions, pay is often inconsistent, time and travel expenses related to research and editorial work are not compensated, benefits are scarce, and job security is limited, not to mention issues of digital safety and the lack of support mechanisms from media employers (IFJ, 2024).

To this must be added issues such as the absence of clear contracts and violations of authorship rights, as highlighted by the *Decálogo de Quebec*⁶ (n.d.), which further exacerbate gender inequalities in the field. A study on women freelancers' working conditions also underscores the paradox that, while flexibility in managing time and workspace can facilitate a better work-life balance, it does not guarantee higher satisfaction or financial security (Peters et al., 2020). Many journalists must sacrifice part of their autonomy to achieve economic stability, while maintaining control over their work does not always ensure a steady income.

This chapter explores these tensions to show how a gender perspective is essential for understanding the reality of women freelance journalists in Europe. It examines how the labor precarity inherent in this model intersects with gender-specific inequalities, generating both challenges and opportunities that deserve special attention in policies and support mechanisms for women in freelance journalism.

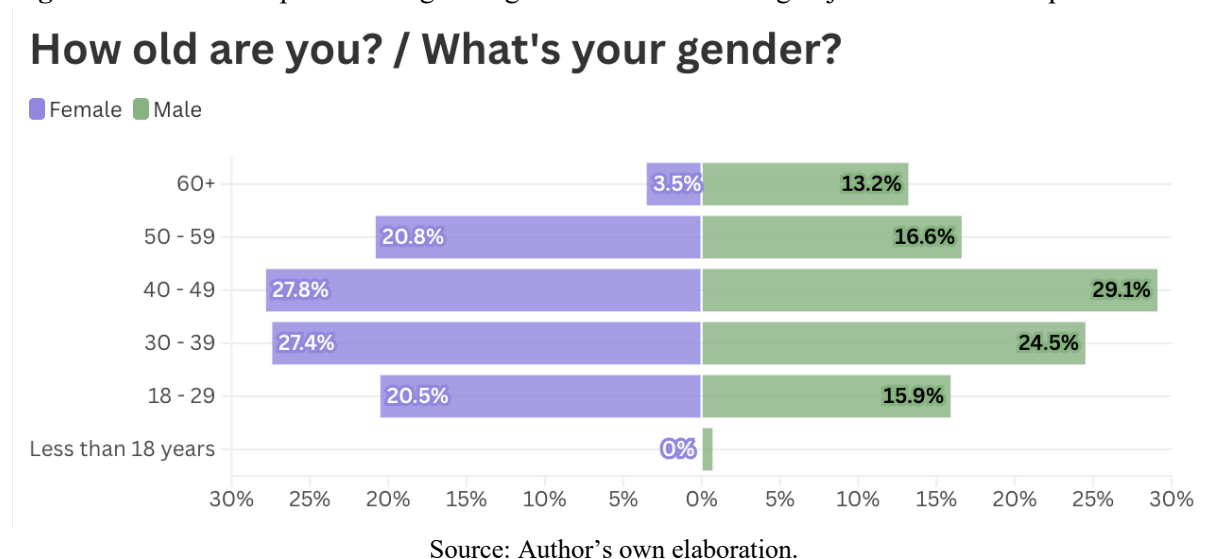
1. Women freelance journalists: between consolidation and generational change

Data show that female and male freelancers work across very similar types of media. Most operate through online news platforms (29.9% of women versus 28.7% of men), and 11.8% in both groups

⁶ For more information, see “*Situation des journalistes pigistes au Québec: un constat navrant*”, which reported that the situation of freelance journalists in Quebec was alarming. Ten years after a similar survey, the findings revealed that their income levels had not improved (with an average annual income of only 31,336 Canadian dollars, CAD), and that nearly one-third were working for minimum wage or less, despite most holding university degrees. Job insecurity was widespread: 70% experienced delayed payments, 66% were dissatisfied with rates (an average of 109 CAD for 250 words), and half lacked financial stability. In addition, many had to cover their own production costs and combine journalism with other professional activities (CNS, 2022).

publish primarily via social media. However, there are slight differences in other formats: women are somewhat less represented in print media (10.7% compared with 12.9% of men) and in magazines (10.5% versus 11.8%).

Figure 10. Relationship between age and gender of those working in journalism in Europe



In terms of age, the survey highlights the significant entry of a new generation of female professionals into self-employment. Women journalists are mainly concentrated in intermediate age groups: 26.7% are between 30 and 39 years old, and 28.5% between 40 and 49. The presence of young women is also noteworthy: 21.5% are between 18 and 29 years old, compared with 16% of men in the same range.

Almost half of the women surveyed (47.7%) have extensive professional experience, having worked in the sector for more than fifteen years. Many did not start their careers as freelancers but instead chose, or were pushed into, this path after years of work in traditional media.

This challenges the idea that independent journalism is mainly for recent graduates or younger professionals. On the contrary, for many experienced women, freelance work represents a way to continue practicing journalism with greater autonomy and flexibility, or as a response to the growing precarization of the industry. This accumulated experience adds value, contributing to higher-quality reporting, better access to sources, and a more critical and nuanced perspective on the issues they cover. As one veteran journalist explained:

“I enjoy the freedom it allows me, as well as the diversity of topics I can cover. In the 30 years of my career, 18 of which were as a freelancer, it was during my freelance work that I experienced the most fulfilling moments. However, in the last decade, the disappearance of various media outlets, the decrease in the amounts paid per page and/or article, and the lack of timely or delayed payments make it nearly impossible to make a living from journalism” (Journalist 7, woman, Portugal)

A revealing figure about today's independent journalism landscape is that, among those who have been working for a short time (between one and five years), women outnumber men: 20.2% versus 15.7%. This reflects a significant trend: more and more young women are beginning their professional careers in journalism through the freelance model.

This phenomenon aligns with Eurostat data (2025), which show a marked reduction in the gender gap within cultural employment in the European Union over the past decade. In fact, 2024 recorded the lowest level ever observed. Although female and male representation in the cultural sector is now nearly equal, with variations between countries, the Eurostat report still points to a persistent gap in income. The voices of women journalists help to better understand this reality. Among the open responses collected in the survey, several stand out:

“I like the freedom and the diversity of themes. I don't like the insecurity” (Journalist 8, woman, Portugal)

“What I like the most of working as freelance is freedom. The hardest part is the economic situation” (Journalist 9, woman, Polish living in Spain)

The growing participation of young women in freelance journalism can be seen as a positive sign, indicating that more women are entering the profession at an early age. At the same time, it may also reflect the lack of stable opportunities in traditional media, leading many to choose independent work as a way to enter the field.

2. Vocation versus obstacles. Journalists' perceptions of their work

Most women freelance journalists maintain their vocation and commitment to the profession, but they also express dissatisfaction and exhaustion due to the conditions under which they must practice it. Only 3.2% of women say they are fully satisfied and would not change anything about their current work situation, compared to 11.2% of men. This difference reveals a gender gap in professional satisfaction: men seem to experience their careers with greater fulfillment or, at least, fewer difficulties.

Meanwhile, 46.8% of women journalists state that they are doing well but that their situation could be better or easier, and 30.7% acknowledge that working as a freelance journalist is difficult, although they wish to continue. These figures reflect a complex reality: many journalists remain committed to this form of employment, but they do so despite the structural barriers that directly affect their well-being and professional development.

Among the main challenges mentioned are the imbalance between personal and professional life (especially due to irregular schedules and night work), cited by 20.6% of women compared to 17.5% of men. Financial strain is also more frequent among women: 23.1% report that their income does not adequately cover their personal or family needs, versus 21.5% of their male counterparts.

This accumulation of pressures has a clear impact on mental health: 66.5% of women report having experienced burnout (professional exhaustion), a significantly higher proportion than men (52.2%). One respondent summarized it as follows:

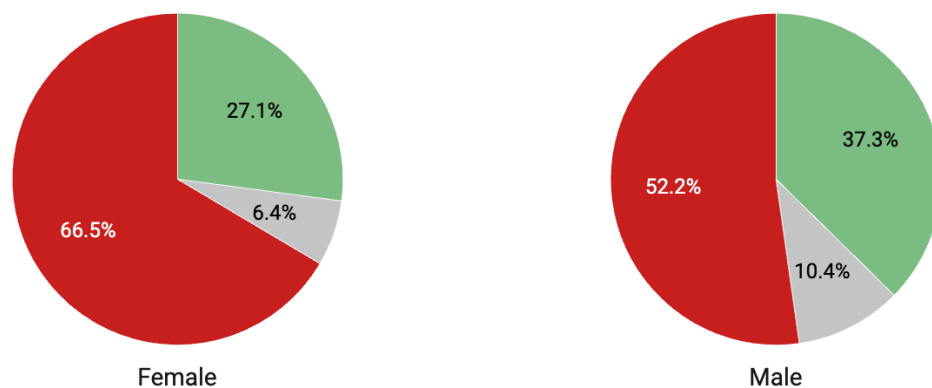
“Being self-employed has not been a choice, but the only possible option. Now I have to pay an advisor, my own social security and basic labor rights (such as sick leave, paid vacations or days of personal affairs) seem like a utopia. Mentally it's exhausting and I don't perform well” (Journalist 10, woman, Spain)

Perceptions of future career prospects also show a notable gender difference. When asked whether they see themselves working in journalism five years from now, 35.8% of women responded with complete certainty, compared to 40.3% of men. Although the gap is not wide, it is significant, as it suggests that women freelance journalists feel less confident or secure about their medium-term professional future.

Figure 11. Burnout experienced throughout career by gender

What's your gender? / Have you ever suffered from burnout in your journalism career?

■ No ■ I'd prefer not to answer ■ Yes



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Various studies also concur that women journalists face greater vulnerability in the exercise of their profession. They are more frequently exposed to precarious working conditions and to different forms of violence, particularly in digital environments, and they often lack institutional support networks to mitigate these challenges. All of this increases the risk of leaving the profession and limits their opportunities for professional growth.

Recent reports such as *Online Violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts* (UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists, 2021) and the *Liberties Media Freedom Report 2025* warn of this situation. The latter includes a specific section on gender-based violence, emphasizing that although all journalists can become targets of attacks, women are disproportionately affected. In many cases, harassment carries a sexualized component. The report documents threats and attacks against women journalists in 2024 in countries such as Bulgaria, Italy, Slovakia, and Sweden (Day et al., 2025).

In conclusion, freelance journalism is a vocational choice for many women, but not always a secure option. The lack of stable conditions and the hostile environment in which they often have to work can undermine their confidence and make it difficult to continue their careers in the medium and long term.

3. Unpaid work and supplementary jobs: the precarious reality of women freelance journalists

More than half of women freelancers depend almost entirely on journalism for their livelihood. In fact, for 60.1% of them, between 81% and 100% of their annual income comes from their freelance

journalistic activity. However, this economic stability is far from guaranteed, as 35.8% report that their monthly income is irregular or inconsistent.

Good practice box | “Stand Up for Journalism” (SUJ) by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

In response to the structural challenges affecting journalists across Europe, including freelancers and their problems of precarity and lack of representation, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) launched the [Stand Up for Journalism](#) (SUJ) project in April 2024. This initiative stands out as a key good practice, as it focuses on strengthening the capacity of national journalist unions and associations to tackle the sector’s challenges.

The main objective of SUJ is to enhance these organizations’ ability in crucial areas such as collective bargaining, worker representation, and participation in social dialogue with editors, media owners, digital platforms, and policymakers. By empowering unions, the initiative aims to establish stronger mechanisms to protect labor rights and improve contractual conditions, issues that are directly relevant to the financial stability and security of freelance journalists and have a significant gender dimension.

To cope with instability, many women have had to seek a second job outside journalism. A total of 65.6% of respondents reported supplementing their income through additional work, compared with 56.7% of men. When journalistic opportunities are scarce, 31% of women resort to this type of additional employment, compared with 22.4% of men. These secondary jobs are often related to adjacent fields such as public relations (23%) or teaching (17%), in line with national reports such as those published by the APM (2025) in Spain.

Another way to gain visibility and experience is by publishing unpaid content. A total of 64.2% of women freelancers published at least one unpaid piece in the past year, a slightly higher percentage than among men (61.2%). The motivations for doing so vary: women tend to publish unpaid work to expand their portfolios (16.3% versus 12.5% of men) or to support social causes (27.9% versus 24.0%), while men more often do so to secure future commissions (18.8% versus 15.0%) or out of personal interest in the topics (21.9% versus 15.6%). These data reflect a structural reality of freelance journalism linked to precarity and the normalization of unpaid work, particularly among women, who seek to build their reputation, gain experience, or contribute to meaningful causes. Men, by contrast, tend to prioritize more business-oriented or personal objectives.

Starting one’s own company could represent an alternative path toward greater stability. However, women entrepreneurs are fewer than men: only 13.8% have created their own business, compared with 16.9% of men. Furthermore, nearly half of women freelancers (47.3%) report having no experience with digital monetization platforms or tools such as PayPal, Patreon, Stripe, Substack, or Ko-Fi, while among men this percentage is much lower (22.4%). These figures highlight the need to promote training and ensure equal access to digital monetization tools for women journalists, in order to reduce the gap and strengthen their participation in the digital journalism economy.

Chapter 6

Monetization of freelance journalism: a new horizon for sustainability

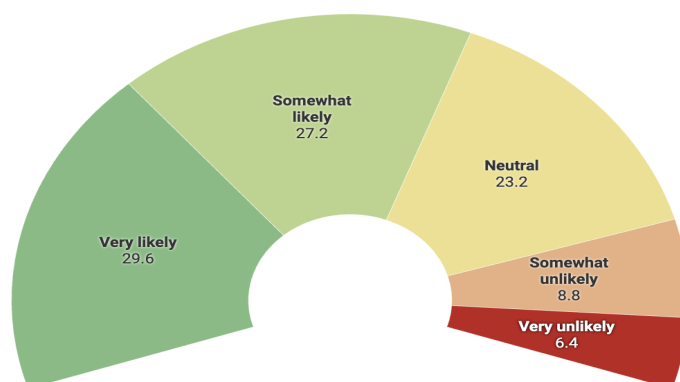
An increasing number of journalists across Europe are actively seeking alternative ways to finance their work. In this context, direct monetization through payment platforms and donations is emerging as a promising path to receive direct financial support from audiences. This strategy not only responds to the precarious conditions repeatedly denounced by organizations such as the European Federation of Journalists (2025), but also addresses the urgent need to diversify income sources, since freelance journalism rarely guarantees a decent economic foundation on its own, as underlined by the *Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute* (Newman et al., 2025).

1. Interest in payment and donation platforms

Although journalism still lacks stable funding mechanisms, research reveals a growing interest in exploring forms of direct monetization. More than half of freelance journalists view positively the possibility of using platforms to receive payments or donations as a means of achieving economic sustainability. Almost 30% state that they are very likely to use such tools, and 27.2% say they are somewhat likely to do so. On the opposite side, 15.2% report a low likelihood of relying on these platforms for funding, 23.2% remain neutral, and 4.8% either do not know or prefer not to answer.

Figure 12. Willingness to use platforms to receive payments or donations

How likely are you to use a platform to receive payments / donations for your journalism work?



Source: Author's own elaboration.

This trend reflects a growing awareness of the need to diversify income streams and strengthen autonomy within European freelance journalism, which can be understood through three key dimensions. First, by monetizing their work directly, journalists can reduce their dependence on large media organizations, gaining greater editorial freedom and the capacity to investigate issues of public interest. In this way, the tool becomes a form of disintermediation that places journalists at the center of their own economic model, as explained by Konieczna (2024), who analyzes how grants and subsidies impact journalists' ability to pursue investigative reporting.

Second, it facilitates niche and investigative journalism, where subscription- and donation-based platforms tend to thrive thanks to loyal audiences. A good example of this practice is the emergence of specialized newsletters hosted on platforms such as Substack, where professionals focused on specific fields build communities willing to pay for in-depth analysis and unique perspectives.

Third and finally, this openness demonstrates the profession's ability to adapt to the digital economy. To capitalize on it, it is crucial to promote sound practices in financial and community management, building loyal audiences while ensuring transparency and the consistent delivery of high-quality content. In this regard, the experience of small independent projects across Europe that have achieved sustainability through memberships and donations (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022) offers inspiration and a model for freelance journalists. The responses collected in the survey reveal a wide range of perspectives on the use of such platforms. A significant proportion see them as a useful way to diversify income, strengthen autonomy, or connect with their audience, valuing the possibility of receiving occasional support and having transparent methods.

“Any additional, transparent way to collect money from readers is a plus” (Journalist 11, woman, Romania)

“I think it's essential for journalists to find direct payment methods outside of the media, which tend to pay late and poorly. If you have an idea that can pay journalists straight away, welcome” (Journalist 12, man, Spain)

Others do not reject the idea but need more information before committing. The most frequent concerns relate to technical operations, management workload, or the overall economic feasibility:

“It sounds okay in principle, but I would have to know more details about the way the platform works before I could answer” (Journalist 13, man, Romania)

There are also deeper critiques of the direct funding model. From a theoretical standpoint, several studies have highlighted its complexities. Hunter (2018), for instance, notes that for many journalists, crowdfunding feels “like a second full-time job,” adding a significant burden of management and self-promotion to their journalistic responsibilities. This reality underscores the need for platforms to provide tools that simplify these processes as much as possible, as many respondents emphasize simplicity and speed as key factors. From this perspective, the challenge is not merely technical but structural: transferring the responsibility of financing journalism to audiences may reinforce precarious, individualistic, or market-driven dynamics. As one journalist put it:

“Because it is not my duty to monetize my work. I am a journalist, not a marketing technician. Who should pay me fairly is the media that uses my services. I'm tired of advertising myself, it's not my thing” (Journalist 14, woman, Spanish living in Greece)

Finally, some voices highlight limitations related to their professional or geographical context, such as the prevailing payment culture in their country or the difficulty of reaching a sufficiently broad audience. These responses show that the implementation of such alternatives must be flexible and sensitive to the specific conditions of the freelance ecosystem. A clear example of this is the vulnerable situation of Ukrainian journalists, for whom managing a funding platform would add another burden to the already challenging task of reporting in a war context.

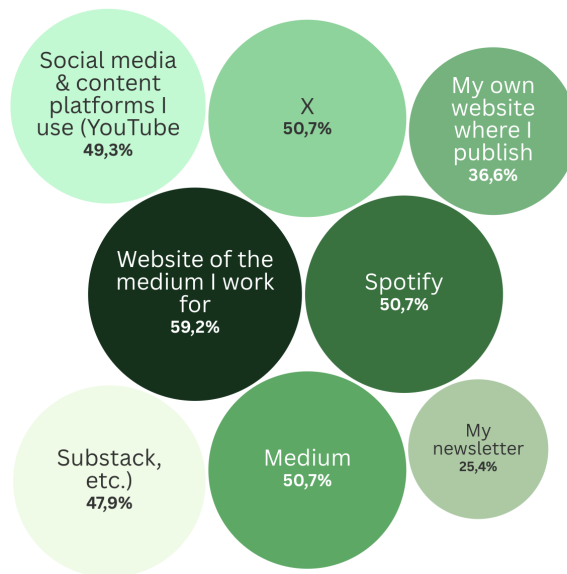
2. Platform design and functionalities

For a direct monetization platform to be truly effective, its design and the functionalities it offers must be aligned with the specific needs and expectations of freelance journalists in their respective settings.

In this sense, the placement of the payment or donation button becomes a critical component of the overall strategy.

Figure 13. Preferred placement of the payment or donation button

Where would you like to place the payment / donation button?



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Most freelance journalists prefer to place the payment or donation button in spaces where they already engage with their audiences, particularly on established platforms or media outlets with which they collaborate. More than half of respondents (59.2%) favor this option, linked to the media outlet or publication in which they publish, suggesting a perceived need for institutional support.

After this, respondents show a strong preference for locating payment buttons on general platforms such as Spotify, Medium, or X (Twitter), which receive 50.7% of mentions, highlighting the influence of social media and mainstream platforms. YouTube (49.3%) and Substack (47.9%) also stand out as preferred spaces. However, it is important to consider that each country has its own digital culture: while TikTok may dominate in some contexts, others favor Facebook or alternative social networks.

Creator economy for freelance journalists in Europe

In recent years, a new model has emerged that is transforming how many people work in the digital sphere: the creator economy. Within it, professionals such as freelance journalists can generate income directly from their audiences through platforms like newsletters, podcasts, social networks, blogs, or video channels. Rather than depending solely on traditional media, they are building their own communities and monetizing their work through tools such as subscriptions, donations, or pay-per-content models. This trend provides greater autonomy but also introduces new challenges: journalists must cultivate a personal brand, learn to use digital tools, and devote time to tasks that were not traditionally part of their profession, such as managing payments or promoting their work.

This diversity illustrates how the “creator economy” adapts to different contexts, transforming journalists into brands capable of generating direct income from their audiences. Finally, more independent options, such as a personal website (36.6%) or a self-managed newsletter (25.4%), receive less support, likely due to the additional effort required to maintain an individual brand identity autonomously.

The desired functionalities expressed by freelance journalists in Europe reveal a clear need for tools that enable easy management and transparent income tracking. More than half (53.2%) consider it important to have an analytics and donation-tracking system for each piece published. Around 46% would like the platform to include invoicing tools, and 37.9% believe it should offer the option to generate tax documentation in countries where the taxation system is a major challenge for freelance journalism due to its heterogeneity and bureaucratization.

Other relevant features include integration with content management systems (24.2%) and options for sharing income with collaborators (16.9%), reflecting the growing complexity of collaborative journalism. Finally, some respondents stress more specific or critical aspects, such as a preference for fast, simple payment methods (e.g. credit card, Bizum), or concerns about not turning journalistic work into a form of personal exhibition, underscoring sensitivities around how the relationship with audiences and funding should be managed. When it comes to revenue-sharing models, freelance journalists in Europe express a clear preference for options that recognize teamwork and the social causes featured in their reporting.

Table 6. Journalists’ preferences regarding revenue sharing and donations

Question: What type of revenue / donation sharing would you like to see in a new platform?

Value	Frequency (%)
Revenue sharing with my contributors e.g. other journalists, editor, photographer, translator, etc.	45.6%
Revenue sharing with media outlets where my story is published	42.4%
Revenue sharing with a cause profiled in the story	32.8%
Revenue sharing with my favorite charitable organizations	20.0%
ONGs, etc.	20.0%
No revenue sharing makes sense to me	14.4%
Revenue sharing with my contributors e.g. other journalists, editor, photographer, translator, etc..	5.6%
ONGs, etcetera	4.0%
Revenue sharing with a cause profiled in the story,	1.6%

Source: Own elaboration.

The most popular option (45.6%) is to share revenue with direct collaborators, such as fellow journalists, editors, photographers, or translators. Another 42.4% believe that part of the income should go to the media outlet that publishes the story. There is also considerable interest in donating part of the earnings to causes covered in the reports (32.8%) or to favorite charities (20%), including NGOs (20%). However, 14.4% believe that revenue sharing does not make sense, reflecting a more individualistic approach to income management.

3. Key aspects for implementation and experience

Freelance journalists believe that any donation platform must necessarily include widely used and accessible payment methods. Mastercard (80.6%) and Visa (79%) are the most in-demand options, reflecting their global popularity and ease of use across almost all European countries.

More than half (57.3%) consider it important to integrate PayPal, a platform well known for its security and speed, followed closely by Google Pay (52.4%) and Apple Pay (50%), which provide increasingly popular mobile and digital payment solutions among audiences. Other, less frequently mentioned methods include more local or specific systems such as Wise (14.5%), and national solutions such as Bizum, Mbway, or MobilePay, which, though less common overall, can be particularly relevant depending on the country and target audience.

Table 7. Preferred payment methods for donation or payment platforms

Question: Which payment methods do you think should be available to donors from your country on the platform we are designing?

Value	Frequency (%)
Mastercard	80.6%
Credit / debit card (VISA)	79.0%
PayPal	57.3%
Google Pay	52.4%
Apple Pay	50.0%
Wise	14.5%

Source: Own elaboration.

To ensure a positive user experience and broad adoption, respondents believe that the platform should prioritize email registration (75.2%), complemented by quick-access options such as Google login (42.4%), while other alternatives, like Facebook or mobile registration, are seen as secondary.

Table 8. Registration preferences for new monetization platforms

Question: How would you like to onboard / register on the platform?

Value	Frequency (%)
Standard email registration	75.2%
Google log-in	42.4%
Facebook log-in	12.8%
Mobile phone	1.6%
Other: Personal data and user	0.8%

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The current landscape of monetization for freelance journalists in Europe is mixed. Almost half of respondents (48.8%) have never used a platform to receive payments or donations, indicating significant potential for growth. Among those with experience, PayPal (39.2%) is by far the most popular tool. Other platforms with lower penetration but still relevant include Patreon (13.6%), Stripe (12.8%), and Substack (10.4%).

The diversity of formats and channels used highlights the need for an adaptable and compatible platform. The vast majority (71.5%) consider it essential that any new platform be compatible with WordPress, while 62.6% emphasize compatibility with YouTube as a key feature.

Although these tools provide viable paths to monetization, Karlsson's (2024) research on creative work platforms reveals significant challenges. For instance, some platforms retain up to 20% of earnings, and prices are often set very low. This has led many freelancers to attempt to move clients off-platform to avoid commissions, despite explicit prohibitions against doing so. Moreover, reliance on such atypical income sources introduces volatility. Studies of crowdfunding platforms such as Patreon show that success is heavily concentrated: the top 1% of creators may earn at least USD 2,500 per month, while the majority make only marginal income. Maintaining a community and producing exclusive content also demands a considerable amount of time, which often fails to yield significant financial returns (Regner 2021).

These challenges underscore the need for any new platform, such as Taktak, to not only ensure fair payment and commission structures, but also to include tools that reduce administrative burdens and unpaid tasks, thereby promoting genuinely sustainable monetization for journalists.

Table 9. Journalists' experience with existing monetization platforms

Question: Do you have experience with any of these existing solutions?

Value	Frequency (%)
I don't have experience with any other solutions	48.8%
Paypal	39.2%
Patreon	13.6%
Stripe	12.8%
Substack	10.4%
Ko-fi	4.0%
Steady	1.6%
Piano	1.6%
Poool	0.8%
I don't have experience with any other solutions, no	0.8%
Veem	0.8%
Buy me a coffee	0.8%

Source: Own elaboration.

The diversity of formats and channels used reveals the need for a flexible and adaptable platform that allows freelance journalists to make the most of their digital spaces. To a lesser extent, 22% of respondents value compatibility with Substack, a tool that has become especially popular among those who monetize their work through newsletters and subscription models.

Less frequently mentioned, but still relevant, are platforms such as Ghost, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as the need for the new tool to be flexible enough to integrate with various custom systems or audio platforms such as Spotify.

When it comes to platform fees, the group shows high sensitivity to associated costs: a significant 58.4% believe that a fair commission should range between 0% and 5%. Several journalists emphasize the importance of ensuring that the platform provides real financial support and greater visibility for their work, while also being as user-friendly as possible.

Table 10. Desired compatibility with existing platforms and tools

Question: Which platforms and tools do you think a new platform needs to be compatible with?

Value	Frequency (%)
WordPress	71.5%
YouTube	62.6%
Substack	22.0%
Ghost	4.1%

Source: Own elaboration.

Although some participants expressed concern about the potential for further precarization, innovative ideas also emerged, such as introducing micropayments for audiences in middle- and low-income countries, along with a motivational component to encourage sustained audience engagement.

Figure 14. Perception of a fair commission for payment or donation platforms

What percentage cut do you think would be fair for a platform to take from donations as platform fees?



Source: Own elaboration.

For self-employed journalists, every cent counts. That is why sensitivity to associated costs and the maximization of net income are crucial.

“I think that it would be important to financially support freelance journalists in some way so that they can carry out their work” (Journalist 19, man, Spain)

But it’s not all about money. Freelance journalists also value platforms that not only facilitate funding but add value to their professional work. In this regard, the visibility of journalistic work is highly appreciated:

“It would be great if the same platform gave visibility to the work of journalists” (Journalist 20, woman, Spain).

In addition, simplicity and speed for the end user are essential. The donation process should be as quick and straightforward as possible for readers, without barriers that might discourage their support. However, not all opinions are positive. Some expressed criticism and concern about the potential precarization that this model could entail.

“I don't like at all the initiative and I think that only makes the profession and the journalist more precarious. Media must pay fairly and must pay their collaborators properly” (Journalist 23, woman, Spanish resident in Greece)

Finally, among the most innovative proposals, ideas emerged such as the inclusion of micropayments for audiences in middle- and low-income countries.

“Micropayments will be crucial particularly servicing audience from low- and middle-income countries” (Journalist 24, woman, Indian resident in Switzerland)

Several journalists emphasized the need for the platform to offer genuine financial support to freelancers, enabling them to continue their work with greater stability. In addition, respondents valued that the platform should not only facilitate funding but also provide visibility to journalistic work.

Table 11. Importance of platform customization for brand identity

Question: How important is it for a payment/donation platform to be customizable to match your brand identity?

Value	Frequency (%)
Very important	31.2%
Extremely important	30.4%
Moderately important	24.8%
Slightly important	9.6%
Not important at all	4.0%

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, most respondents consider it crucial that a payment and donation platform can be customized to match their brand identity. A notable 61.6% rated this feature as “very important” or “extremely important,” highlighting the need for visual consistency and the strengthening of audience relationships.

4. Taktak: The strategic ally for freelance journalism

The development of innovative solutions like Taktak fundamentally depends on its connection with the target audience. In this sense, the level of interest shown by freelance journalists in participating in its future development is a key indicator of potential adoption and success.

Survey data are encouraging: a significant majority (56.45%) expressed a clear interest in actively contributing to the shaping of Taktak, whether through beta testing or user interviews. This willingness to collaborate underscores the desire of freelancers to participate in an emerging solution, bringing their direct needs and perspectives to ensure the platform effectively addresses their challenges. Such engagement is crucial, as co-creation with the audience is a fundamental pillar for developing tools that are not only functional but truly enhance the income of journalists and journalistic projects alike.

Lastly, the interest of nearly half of survey participants in subscribing to Taktak’s newsletter confirms both anticipation and a willingness to stay informed about project developments, paving the way for its implementation and expansion within the European journalism ecosystem.

Chapter 7

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for freelance journalists

- 1) Actively defend labor and authorship rights
 - a. Require clear, signed contracts before starting any assignment, specifying payment terms, rights transfers, and delivery deadlines.
 - b. Refuse retroactive transfers of supplementary rights and limit unauthorized uses of journalistic work.
 - c. Identify cases of “false self-employment” and understand indicators of dependency that may allow for legal claims in each country.
 - d. Consult labor or union specialists whenever there is doubt about the professional relationship.
- 2) Strategically diversify income sources if necessary
 - a. Complement assignments for media outlets with direct monetization options, such as donations, subscriptions, newsletters, or exclusive content.
 - b. Include cancellation clauses for exclusivity, allowing content to be reused elsewhere.
 - c. Claim remuneration for every reuse of journalistic work, and remember that the investigative material belongs to the journalist.
- 3) Strengthen support networks and transparency with the audience
 - a. Communicate honestly about the cost of producing journalistic work to raise audience awareness of its value.
 - b. Foster direct and loyal relationships with the audience through newsletters, social media, or private groups to reinforce engagement.
- 4) Professionalize financial and legal management
 - a. Use digital tools for invoicing, payment tracking, contracts, insurance, and legal protection.
 - b. Share experiences about non-payments and solutions in networks or collaborative groups to reduce vulnerability.
 - c. Prioritize platforms that automate or simplify payment management and content adaptation, recognizing that direct monetization and multiplatform strategies can create additional administrative burdens that would otherwise reduce time for core journalistic work.
 - d. Promote training in three key areas to strengthen professional autonomy, especially for women journalists.
 - i. Financial and tax management, including fundraising.
 - ii. Digital monetization tools (e.g., [Taktak](#), PayPal, Patreon, Stripe, Substack, Buy Me a Coffee, Ko-Fi).
 - iii. Intellectual property, labor rights, and digital security as a means of self-protection against abuse, non-payment, or online harassment.
- 5) Create and strengthen collaborative structures

- a. Promote cooperatives or collectives that share resources, negotiate rates, and improve job stability.
 - b. Encourage membership in unions and professional networks and associations to counter isolation and gain bargaining power, with particular attention to women journalists.
- 6) Prioritize work-life balance and care with a gender perspective
 - a. Recognize the double burden faced by women journalists due to family and care responsibilities.
 - b. Organize work and rest periods to prevent burnout, prioritizing the health of women journalists.
 - c. Set clear boundaries for availability outside working hours.
 - d. Promote peer support strategies among journalists to share experiences and approaches to work-life balance.

2. Recommendations for media outlets

- 1) Establish clear and fair minimum rates
 - a. Propose openly publishing rates for collaborative pieces.
 - b. Respect market standards, avoiding symbolic payments or unpaid collaborations
 - c. Remunerate all journalistic production at a decent rate, considering the work involved and the skills required.
 - d. Reimburse journalists for expenses (travel, communication, or others) as soon as receipts are submitted, without linking reimbursement to the publication or dissemination of the work.
- 2) Expand equitable and reliable payment policies
 - a. Urge the implementation of internal mechanisms to ensure payments within reasonable deadlines, for example, a maximum of 30 days.
 - b. Avoid payment delays and require efficient electronic invoicing.
 - c. Raise awareness among media about the importance of fair and timely payment, recognizing the value of freelance work and its impact on journalism quality.
 - d. Pay in full for all work executed and delivered according to assignment terms and editorial standards, whether published or not.
 - e. If a publication refuses a piece, the journalist is freed from any exclusivity obligations with the editor.
- 3) Foster long-term editorial relationships with freelancers
 - a. Prioritize stable collaboration with recurring freelancers to build quality and trust.
 - b. Offer project-based contracts or annual agreements that provide predictability.
 - c. Remember that, according to the law, all contracts are terminable.
- 4) Strengthen ethical commitment, editorial transparency, and financial clarity
 - a. Include freelancers in editorial decision-making when possible.
 - b. Share traffic and engagement data generated by their content to facilitate direct monetization by journalists.

- 5) Promote an inclusive and safe environment for freelance journalists
 - a. Recognize and address the specific challenges faced by women freelancers, including economic and gender-based violence, especially online.
 - b. Implement protocols against gender-based violence affecting women freelance journalists.
 - c. Offer institutional support and professional networks for women freelancers.
- 6) Promote social dialogue, the representation of women workers, and labor rights

3. Recommendations for public administrations

- 1) Legally recognize the professional status of freelance journalism
 - a. Promote the legal recognition of freelance journalists as a distinct professional category, with specific rights in labor, taxation, and intellectual property.
 - b. Encourage European directives and national regulatory frameworks that include freelance journalists in collective bargaining and sector agreements, ensuring equal representation in advisory bodies.
 - c. Establish protective mechanisms against non-payment and labor abuses.
 - d. Facilitate access for independent journalists to training programs, legal advice, and union representation, especially in contexts of vulnerability or structural discrimination.
 - e. Guarantee access to social protection (unemployment, health, retirement) under conditions equivalent to those of salaried workers.
- 2) Establish direct, transparent, and unmediated financing mechanisms
 - a. Create direct aid programs for freelance journalists, particularly on topics of public interest, with regular calls, clear criteria, and independent monitoring.
 - b. Support scholarships, residencies, awards, and competitive funding for individual projects.
 - c. Develop emergency funds for self-employed professionals during crises or periods of low activity, managed by public entities or independent consortia.
- 3) Support the creation of ethical digital monetization platforms
 - a. Fund digital infrastructures that allow independent journalists to receive payments, issue invoices, and protect their copyright securely, with low fees and full transparency.
 - b. Promote models that address the income volatility and inequality observed on existing payment and donation platforms, where success is concentrated among a small percentage of creators, ensuring that direct monetization is equitable and viable for a broad range of journalists.
 - c. Facilitate access to digital production, editing, and distribution tools, particularly for low-income journalists or those in rural or peripheral areas.
- 4) Encourage media literacy and the value of journalism
 - a. Launch institutional campaigns highlighting the importance of paying for quality content.
 - b. Promote the fundamental role of freelance journalism in democracy, especially in rural areas, peripheries, and marginalized communities.
 - c. Include content on labor rights for freelancers in public education and communication training programs.
- 5) Design and implement public policies with a gender perspective

- a. Develop programs that recognize and mitigate the double precarity faced by women freelance journalists.
- b. Fund training initiatives in digital skills and monetization for self-employed women journalists.
- c. Support the creation and strengthening of networks and collectives for women journalists.

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About the authors

Ruth de Frutos (coordinator) is a journalist and Senior Lecturer at the University of Málaga (UMA). She has worked as an international consultant for UNESCO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Article 19 and coordinated the UNESCO Chair in Communication in Málaga (2016-2020). Her work focuses on human rights, gender, and journalism.

Antonio Cuartero is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Journalism at UMA. He has participated in various research projects on mental health, a topic he has explored in depth as vice president of the young researchers' network YECREA, part of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

Manuel García Borrego is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Journalism at UMA. His research line focuses on the working conditions of journalism, with special attention to the early stages of professional careers. He has conducted studies on precarity and professional practices in media outlets.

Natalia Meléndez Malavé is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Journalism at UMA. Part of her academic career has been devoted to research on gender and communication.

Teresa Vera Balanza is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Journalism at UMA and holds accreditation as a full professor. Since 2020, she has coordinated the Spanish section of the *Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP), an initiative promoted by UNESCO to advance gender equality in the media.

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