

## **Safety of journalists, best international recommendations and new Ukrainian regulations**

### *Webinar on COVID-19 pandemic for media in Ukraine*

How does COVID-19 quarantine impact work of the media? What are the existing international recommendations on safe operation of media (including measures to ensure personal safety and health of journalists covering the events) these days? What are the most widespread violations of freedom of expression and threats to safety of journalists during the pandemic? What new Ukrainian regulations on quarantine envisage for media and journalists? These questions were discussed during a webinar organised by the Joint Project “EU and Council of Europe working together to support freedom of media in Ukraine” (JP-Media) on 9 April and engaged about 25 participants from all over Ukraine, editors and journalists of regional media outlets.

Representative of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ – partner of the CoE Platform on safety of journalists), an independent non-governmental organization advocating press freedom and protecting journalists’ rights, David Oades, Advisor on the issue of safety of journalists, made lively presentation on CPJ recommendations on safe operation of media and measures to ensure health and safety of journalists covering the COVID-19 pandemic and answered a number of participants’ practical questions.

Among the tips is to keep a distance of at least 2 meters, wash hands properly, use of masks, gloves and disinfection tools. Particular caution measures should be taken in a high-risk areas, such as in health care facilities, quarantine areas, homes of infected people, when interviewing anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or those who have contacts with infected persons, such as doctors. If possible, these people should be interviewed by phone or online, i.e. without personal “live” contact. If journalists feels unwell, he/she should seek medical advice immediately.

Special attention by the expert was paid to the tips on safe operation of the equipment and its disinfection. The following is important:

- use a hand-held microphone “crane” to maintain a safe distance;
- wash the surface of the microphone with high-temperature water with a detergent at the end of each task;
- use inexpensive headphones when possible as disposable ones. Clean and disinfect them each time before and after use;
- use special lenses in shooting equipment to maintain a safe distance;
- use mobile equipment, not cables;
- do not leave any device lying on the floor;
- wrap equipment with plastic;
- carry extra fully charged batteries;

- avoid charging the equipment on site;
- always disinfect all equipment with high-speed antimicrobial wipes, and then carry out thorough disinfection;
- all equipment must be cleaned and disinfected again after returning to base.

Gulnoza Said, Ph.D., Coordinator of programs in Europe and Central Asia, said the coronavirus pandemic has created global challenges for press freedom, especially in countries with fragile democracy. Often, journalists cannot work because of a ban on quarantine or restricted access to public institutions. In addition, there were financial issues, including small local media that stopped receiving funds from advertisers. In addition, there were financial issues, including small local media that stopped receiving funds from advertisers. Because of this, some newspapers, for example, do not print. Ms Said also stressed that the Committee on the Protection of Journalists can provide and pay legal assistance to journalists if they have violated their rights. She called on media workers to inform them of any cases of obstruction of journalistic activity.

Then Council of Europe consultant, Ukrainian media lawyer from the Human Rights Platform NGO, Liudmyla Opryshko, presented the situation in “Ukrainian context” – what Ukrainian regulations on quarantine envisage for media and journalists. She noted that there are currently two regimes in Ukraine: emergency and quarantine. In March, two new laws were adopted in Ukraine concerning measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, under new legislation, plenary sessions of local councils may be held in videoconferencing, but journalists must be properly informed and accessible.

The Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine has introduced additional accreditation for journalists, and the admission of the press to the administrative buildings, structures and offices of the Parliament is generally limited.

The expert also stressed that journalists have the right to move freely through the territory of Ukraine and perform their professional duties, even where an emergency is declared.

Watch webinar in full at the **Council of Europe Media Project Facebook page** ([https://www.facebook.com/CoEUPSIS/videos/334547594171206/?epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/CoEUPSIS/videos/334547594171206/?epa=SEARCH_BOX)).

On 10 April the JP-Media organised another webinar “What can be enhanced during quarantine: ideas for teleworking. Special projects”, where trainer, a newspaper published in a Kharkiv region, Kostantin Grigorenko, presented participants with fresh ideas concerning how to improve work of media in the period of quarantine.

Watch this webinar in full at the **Council of Europe Media Project Facebook page** ([https://www.facebook.com/Orysya.fedorchuk/videos/10158064371765011/UzpfSTU5Mzk4Nzk4NzYyM2ODkzNzoyNDQyNDgwMTUyNTE5Njk2/?epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/Orysya.fedorchuk/videos/10158064371765011/UzpfSTU5Mzk4Nzk4NzYyM2ODkzNzoyNDQyNDgwMTUyNTE5Njk2/?epa=SEARCH_BOX)).