52nd EPRA Meeting

Working group 1: Regulators and Citizens in times of health crisis

Case study on Covid-19 related measures: an overview of best practices

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Further to a consultation, EPRA members selected the topic of "Regulators and Citizens" to feature in EPRA´s Work Programme for 2020 as an ad hoc Working Group convening on the occasion of the spring meeting of the platform. A Working Group in Vienna in 2017 on "the changing relationships between regulators and citizens" had delivered promising potential for further discussion and it was suggested to build on its outcomes and "*look into how regulators engage with citizens through consultations, developing new communication tools and information campaigns as well as other strategies to enhance the involvement of citizens in decision-making regulation, and to learn from each other's best practices*".

The Coronavirus pandemic has shifted the focus and structure of this Working Group, which initially was planned as a one-off meeting in the spring in Antwerp. The 51st EPRA meeting was unfortunately cancelled, and instead of a webinar on the subject, it was decided to prepare a **case study on how regulators engage with citizens with regard to the Covid-19 crisis** as the output of the group. The topic of the interaction between regulators and citizens is crucial in times of crisis. For that reason, we plan to extend the scope of this Working Group and organise a follow-up meeting in October 2020 where we would round up the discussion and the analysis of the responses of the regulators to the Covid-19 crisis.

For that purpose, EPRA members were invited to share information with the Secretariat on how their respective authority engages with citizens and stakeholders in relation to the Covid-19 crisis. The following 19 EPRA members from 17 countries reported on their activities: CTR (AM), CRA (BA), CSA (FR), CNMC (ES), CAA (ES), CAC (ES), Ofcom (GB), CEM (HR), BAI (IE), Agcom (IT), NEPLP (LV), AAAMS (MK), BAM (MT), NMA (NO), MPRT (SE), AKOS (SI), CBR (SK) RTÜK (TR), NCRTV (UA). In parallel, the Secretariat conducted some desk research by visiting the websites of EPRA members and exchanging with other organisations collecting information on Covid-19 related measures such as ERGA[1] and the European Audiovisual Observatory[2].

This paper[3] presents an overview of the wide range of initiatives taken by audiovisual media regulators with the **direct or indirect aim to support citizens throughout the health crisis by acting as facilitator between public and health authorities, media services providers and the public**. The document does not aim to produce an exhaustive list of all initiatives taken by NRAs (economic measures are not a focus here) but highlights best practices as an inspiration for EPRA members. In addition, two separate annexes to the document list the relevant initiatives per country and regulatory authority with links to individual measures (annex 1) and detail media literacy initiatives taken by NRAs as well as other relevant players (annex 2).

I. Preliminary remarks on engaging with citizens in times of crisis

1.1 Regulators and citizens

Examining the relationships between regulators and citizens requires to cover a wide range of issues such as public awareness, transparency and visibility as well as methodology aspects.

[1] ERGA SG2 Overview of measures on disinformation and media literacy: http://erga-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-ERGA-SG2-MEASURES-DISINFO-MiL-21.4.2020-public.xlsx (ver. 21 Apr 2020)

[2] Tracker of COVID-19 related measures taken in the film & audiovisual sectors in the European Audiovisual Observatory member states https://rm.coe.int/covid-final-tracker/16809e17d4

[3] **Disclaimer:** This background document has been produced by EPRA, an informal network of 54 regulatory authorities in the field of audiovisual media services. It is not a fully comprehensive overview of the issues, nor it represents the views nor the official position of EPRA or of any member within the EPRA network.

The question of the relationship between regulators and citizens has already been raised on the occasion of several past EPRA meetings. Ensuring transparency and accountability was the focus of a session in Tallinn in 2009. Best practices on how to handle complaints were shared in Barcelona in 2010. The session on compliance and enforcement policies that took place in Barcelona in 2016 took stock of the various communication policy tools used to reach the citizens. In Vienna in 2018, an ad hoc working group on the changing relationships between regulators and citizens looked at policies and tools at the disposal of EPRA members and collected best practices with regard to direct interaction through social networks, permanent reporting, standardisation and systematisation of consultations, awareness raising actions and anti-fake news campaigns and fact-checking guidelines.

1.2 From informing viewers to actively engaging with/empowering citizens

Recent and ongoing discussions within the EPRA network have revealed that it is now widely held among regulators that statutory regulation alone will not be enough to ensure adequate protection of audiences in a converged audiovisual environment. The promotion of media literacy is becoming increasingly vital in ensuring that citizens are equipped with adequate tools and skills both to take advantage of the greater choice and control that this environment provides, and to protect themselves and their children from harmful content. Media literacy is about the nature of citizenship, and the understanding and influence that people have on the media.

As a result of the increasing awareness by regulators of the importance of media literacy and their greater involvement in the subject, the relationship of many media regulators with citizens has been gradually evolving from a top-down approach based on the requirement to inform the viewers, protect the vulnerable audience and be transparent and accountable towards viewers to an expectation also to actively engage with or empower citizens to turn them into partners of regulation.

As was highlighted during the Working Group in Vienna in 2018, this changing relationship also involves acknowledging that audiences are composed of individuals with different interests and that any communication from the regulator should take into account whether it is aimed at children, teenagers, parents or semi-professionals such as YouTubers. In addition, owing to the development of communication technology, the line between viewer and content creator can be increasingly blurred.

1.3 Communication in times of crisis

While communicating and engaging with citizens is crucial for both media and public authorities in times of crisis, it can be fraught with specific challenges. Some of these challenges have been highlighted during the discussions held in the EPRA Working Group on “Media in times of crisis” in 2016 that dealt with the strategies, responses, regulation and co-regulation of issues linked to incitement to crime, terrorism and reporting on crisis situations and how to deal with bias, false and deceptive materials from the perspective of service providers and regulators[4].

[4] https://www.epra.org/attachments/yerevan-wg-i-media-in-times-of-crisis-the-role-of-regulatory-authorities-comparative-background-document

The Covid-19 health crisis has been described as fulfilling all the characteristics of the so-called VUCA environment[5]: i.e. Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. Such a VUCA environment is typically a breeding ground for misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. As early as on 8 February 2020, the Director of the World Health Organisation[6] emphasised that people must have access to accurate information to protect themselves and others and that WHO had not only to battle the virus but also to fight the 'infodemic' that "causes confusion and spreads fear to the general public".

However, experience has shown that strategies to engage citizens can prove complex and may require awareness of existing cognitive bias[7] to be efficient. Trust is a key factor that varies widely across jurisdictions[8]. Indeed, in order to achieve a high level of compliance and co-operation of the population, you need "people (…) to trust science, to trust public authorities and to trust the media[9]".

1.4 Covid-19 and audiovisual regulation: key features

The pandemic has emphasised the crucial role played by audiovisual media in society. There was a greater need than ever for citizens to rely on them to go through their disrupted daily life: to be informed, to be entertained, to remain connected with each other. Accordingly, an EBU Media Intelligence Service report of April 2020 shows a significant increase of TV, video streaming and social media consumption in five European countries (*around 58% of the respondents have declared watching more news during the crisis[10], 42% for broadcast TV, 36% for VOD and 32% for social media*), with a clear immediate effect of lockdown measures, even though digital consumption tended to decrease a bit over time[11].

Inevitably, the increased importance of audiovisual media in our daily lives during such times and the emotional wave generated by a worldwide health crisis were likely to boost risks such as excessive daily media consumption[12], panic spreading, exposure of minors to harmful content and information disorders[13]. The challenges of yesterday suddenly became the priorities of today: accessibility of content, accuracy of news, protection of children, etc. The number of complaints appeared to have significantly increased due to Covid-19 related content in several countries (ES, FR, GR, HU, LV, SK, UK)[14] and surveys undertaken by some regulators show that almost half of the citizens have encountered false information during the crisis (ES-CAC[15],

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[5] The notion of VUCA was introduced by the U.S. Army War College to describe the more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, multilateral world which resulted from the end of the Cold War (Kinsinger & Walch, 2012)

[6] https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/director-general-s-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-2019-novel-coronavirus---8-february-2020

[7] https://theconversation.com/Covid-19-comment-les-biais-cognitifs-ont-diminue-lefficacite-de-la-communication-officielle-132818

[8] See for instance the EBU-MIS Trust in Media 2020 report: https://www.ebu.ch/news/2020/04/new-report-shows-broadcast-media-is-most-trusted#:~:text=The%20EBU's%20new%20Trust%20in,trusted%20in%2085%25%20of%20countries.&text=High%20trust%20in%20news%20provided,fake%20news%20as%20a%20problem.

[9] Yuval Noah Harari: the world after coronavirus: https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75

[10] EBU-MIS report, Covid-19: impact on digital media consumption (UK, DE, FR, IT, ES),

[11] EBU-MIS report (see footnote 10), and Ofcom weekly report on consumption and attitudes during the crisis

[12] News from the Catalan regulator (ES-CAC): https://www.cac.cat/actualitat/consum-televisio-durant-confinament-augmenta-mes-duna-hora-arribar-les-4-hores-i-28

[13] Observatory of online disinformation special coronavirus by Agcom (IT): https://www.agcom.it/visualizza-documento/0d954b13-72c8-4894-8ea3-fa9327f4e140

[14] See annex 1 for details.

[15] See footnote 3

NO[16] and UK[17]). Citizens had to deal with a huge volume of information – sometimes contradictory – making it more difficult to properly assess and handle the situation. In the UK, an Ofcom study reveals that more than a third of respondents say they 'find hard to know what it is true and what is false about Coronavirus'[18].

The majority of regulatory authority members of EPRA (over 60%) has had to adapt their services and close their offices to the public and stakeholders. To keep in touch with citizens, 60% of EPRA members used social networks to convey messages and information related to the crisis while 30% attempted to compensate the negative impact on citizens by issuing public recommendations, tips or media literacy campaigns for instance. More than 50% of member authorities issued guidance to broadcasters with the aim to ensure an accurate, appropriate and responsible coverage of the crisis and adapted their regulatory mission in a flexible way to take into account the hardship created by the context for media providers.

II. Supporting citizens in times of crisis: audiovisual regulators and Covid-19

As mentioned above, citizens can be overwhelmed with the sheer volume of information from many diverse sources in times of crisis, resulting in the risks of confusion, misunderstandings, fear or lack of well-being. Interacting with citizens can help to provide them with key support and tools to work their way through this difficult time. Owing to their regulatory missions, the NRAs can act as facilitators between the public and health authorities, the audiovisual media providers and the citizens.

Engaging with citizens as a regulator implies to be attentive to the needs and expectations of the public towards audiovisual media and audiovisual regulation. In this regard, engaging with citizens necessarily requires engaging with stakeholders. The following sections highlight some measures taken by EPRA members to facilitate a functioning and responsible audiovisual landscape as well as initiatives aimed directly at citizens.

2.1 Supporting citizens by facilitating a functioning and responsible audiovisual landscape

2.1.1. Prevention and information: sharing Covid-19 related news and announcements

- *Accessibility to all*

Guaranteeing the accessibility of news to all citizens is crucial in times of crisis, especially when it requires a call for action (to stay at home or to comply with health and safety measures). Persons with aural or visual impairments should be included in the communication to the public through the use of audio description, subtitling or captions or sign language. Previous EPRA research has shown that the level of obligations concerning the accessibility of audiovisual media services varies widely across jurisdictions in Europe[19]. In relation with the crisis, several regulators have called on broadcasters to ensure that content - and especially news and public announcements – are accessible to deaf and hearing-impaired persons (BA, CY, CZ, HU, LV,

[16]NMA-NO survey: https://medietilsynet.no/om/aktuelt/nar-halvparten-av-befolkningen-har-sett-falske-nyheter-om-koronautbruddet/

[17] Ofcom weekly report on consumption and attitudes during the crisis: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/news-media/coronavirus-news-consumption-attitudes-behaviour

[18] See footnote 11

[19] For example, see background document EPRA/2019/12 on accessibility prepared for the EPRA meeting in Athens in October 2019: https://www.epra.org/attachments/athens-wgiii-accessibility-background-document

MD, MT, PT, UA). Some regulators have also been made aware that the use of masks by journalists had created new barriers to access news, making people unable to read on the lips[20].

Best practice example: accessibility

- In *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, the CRA called upon all television stations to broadcast information in a format accessible to persons with hearing impairment by providing sign language interpretation (https://www.rak.ba/en/news/1652), and to read out all important numbers displayed on the screen, thus making such information accessible to blind and visually impaired persons. Public service broadcasters were also recommended to make all information concerning Covid-19 accessible to persons with hearing impairment, i.e. to provide interpretation into sign language. The CRA also sent a recommendation to all Civil Protection crisis management headquarters to make additional efforts to ensure that relevant information they provide to the public daily through press conferences is accessible to persons with disabilities through sign language interpretation and reading out all written announcements to ensure timely information to all citizens.

➢ *Dissemination of public service content*

In the same vein, it is vital that audiovisual content aimed at informing and raising awareness about the health conditions and the restrictions that may apply in the country are given sufficient dissemination among the population. For that purpose, in several countries, the regulators have taken some measures to facilitate the dissemination of major public service broadcasters' news.

Best practice examples: Facilitating the dissemination of public service content

- In *Norway*, the NMA has eased the licence conditions and allowed local radio broadcasts that still broadcast on FM in the big cities to relay the Norwegian government-owned radio and television public broadcasting company's news broadcasts and productions from national press conferences.
- In *Latvia*, the NEPLP authorized the free of charge broadcast of public electronic mass media news and informational content by other electronic mass media.
- In *Croatia*, the AEM has provided free access for local and regional broadcasters to radio and TV spots produced by the main public and private broadcasters in Croatia and relaying important messages and tips on how to behave at the time of the epidemic.

➢ *Call on broadcasters to promote official campaign messages*

By means of press releases or through direct exchanges with broadcasters, a number of regulatory authorities strongly encouraged audiovisual media providers to broadcast the campaign messages produced by official national authorities (AL/AM/BA/CY/FR/HR/IT/MK/PL/PT/RO/RS/TR).

[20] CBR-SK received a significant number of complaints from citizens on this particular issue.

Best practice examples: Encouraging the dissemination of official campaigns

- *Advertising minutage calculation*: at the request of several NRAs, TV and radio official campaign spots were not considered as advertising and thus not deducted from the advertising allocation times (in Poland and Turkey) nor subject to taxation (in Armenia).
- *Official campaign optimisation:* CSA-FR requested TV and radio broadcasters to broadcast the government awareness campaign following a clear schedule: twice in the morning, twice during lunch time and twice in the evening at the time allowing for the biggest possible audience share.

➢ *Sustainability of content production and broadcasting activity*

In many jurisdictions, the Covid-19 crisis has seriously impacted the sustainability of content production and broadcasting activity in general as was discussed during the EPRA webinar 'Understanding key market trends in Covid-19 times'[21]. The situation is particularly difficult for vulnerable smaller players and local and regional media outlets[22]. Several NRAs have taken measures, often in coordination with public authorities, with the aim to provide emergency help to specific media outlets or to support the safety of journalists.

Best practice examples: supporting the broadcasting activity

- In *North Macedonia*, to counter the negative impact of the crisis on the audiovisual sector, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services granted financial help to TV and radios stations (ca. 1.675.000 € - partly to commercial and non-profit broadcasters and partly to public service broadcasters) aimed at providing protective equipment for their staff, financing the production of content or acquisition of broadcasting rights and maintaining their activity.
- Other examples of support include advanced grant payment (*Norway*), re-allocation of special funds (in *the UK* and *Ireland*), subsidies from the state budget (*Latvia* and *Sweden*). In *the UK*, a third of community radio broadcasters have applied for emergency cash funding (through the Community Radio Fund Panel) to help them providing a reassuring local voice to millions of people through the pandemic. In Ireland, BAI launched a special funding round of €2.5 million to support the independent commercial radio sector in its provision of public awareness and understanding of Covid-19, including the risks and public health measures being implemented to reduce the spread of the disease.

Best practice examples: Safety of journalists:

- *Latvia*: upon the request of the NEPLP, the Ministry of Health gave to journalists the possibility to get a free-of-charge Covid-19 test.
- *Montenegro*: the Council of the Agency for Electronic Media allocated € 30,000 of its own funds for the purchase of respirators or other medical equipment necessary for the prevention of the spread of infection or treatment of COVID-19 patients, highlighting the daily exposure risks taken by a large number of journalists to keep informing the citizens.

[21] https://www.epra.org/events/webinar-nr-1-understanding-key-market-trends-in-times-of-Covid-19

[22] European Commission communication Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right, JOIN 2020 (8) final

Best practice example: Assisting journalists in the crisis' coverage:

- *Iceland*: At the request of the IMC, journalists have been added to the Civil Defence Department's list of "front-line staff" giving them priority to get access to nursing homes and schools for their children.

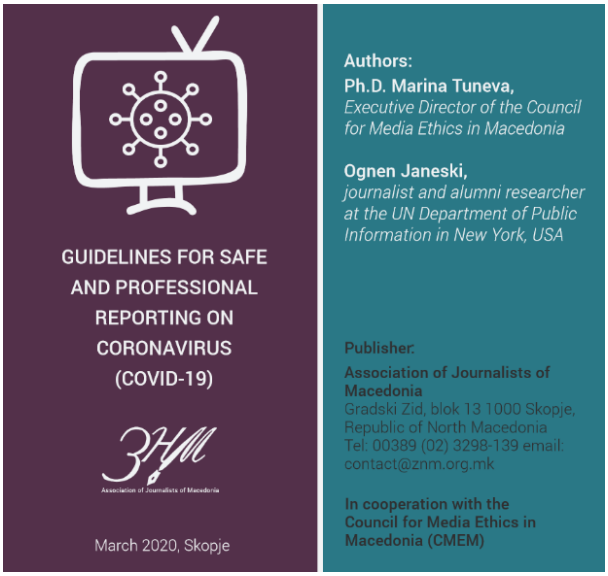
2.1.2. Fighting information disorder: how to promote factual, accurate and reliable content

➢ *Call for professional reporting, accurate and objective news*

The majority of EPRA members strongly called on broadcasters to ensure accurate and responsible crisis coverage (BA / BG / FR / GB / GE / HR / HU / IT / LV / MD / ME / MT / PT / RS / SK / TR / XK), by providing general or specific guidance[23] and reminding them of the rules to comply with when reporting on the situation. NRAs also reflected the importance of this objective by making it a priority in their monitoring missions (see below 2.2). Some regulators also encouraged stakeholders to learn from the experience of major audiovisual media providers in Europe.

Best practice examples: Providing guidance to audiovisual service broadcasters:

- In *Moldova,* the CA relayed to broadcasters the 'Communication Guide for the Media in Public Health Emergencies', submitted to the authority by the British Embassy. This guide, developed by BBC Media Action (*the international development charity of the British public broadcaster)* and available in Romanian and Russian, provides guidance on how to communicate with people in times of humanitarian crisis to help save lives and reduce suffering.
- In *North Macedonia*, the AAAMS has recommended broadcasters to abide with the Guidelines for Safe and Professional Reporting on the Coronavirus (Covid-19) [EN], produced by the Association of Journalists (ZNM) and the Council on Media Ethics of Macedonia (SEMM) and giving very practical instructions on how to report professionally and on to ensure protection and safety of the journalists.



[23] Some recommendations addressed specific issues, such as the CAA [ES] asking the media providers to adopt a responsible and rigorous approach when reporting on alleged shortages in supermarkets to avoid panic.

Best practice examples: Supporting informative content

- In *Latvia*, taking into account the important role of high quality and reliability of local media to inform the public and following the government's decision on the allocation of funds for media support, the NEPLP launched a tender aimed at providing funds to broadcasters (two TV programmes and three radio programmes) for the production of news and programmes related to Covid-19 which will be disseminated to a wider audience. The informative content will be available in Latvian and in minority languages to reach a wider range of audiences.
- In *Croatia*, AEM launched a special Fund (130.000 € + addressed to journalists) to encourage quality and investigative journalism on Internet portals and publish topics of public interest.

➢ *Strengthening dialogue and exchange with digital platforms and social networks*

As mentioned by the European Commission´s communication on the fight against COVID-19 disinformation cooperation with social media platforms is a key element in developing both a comprehensive assessment of the challenge and an effective response to the 'infodemic'.

Best practice examples: dialogue and exchange with digital platforms and social networks

- In *Italy*, Agcom organised technical roundtables with broadcasters and digital platforms to address the accuracy of information and online information disorder. They aim to establish a link between media actors, discuss the needs of the sector and share the initiatives undertaken by players. The discussions with platforms focused on the measures to prevent online disinformation related to Covid-19.
- In *Slovakia*, the CBR has organised roundtables with several institutions and the digital platforms on Covid-19 disinformation. In collaboration with MEMO 98, a non-profit specialist media monitoring organization, CBR held a webinar with stakeholders on Covid-19 and disinformation on 14 April 2020.
- In *France,* the CSA has set up different meetings with Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Wikipedia and Google to discuss the measures taken by the platforms to respond to the health crisis.

2.2 Engaging with citizens by providing resources and support

2.2.1. Understanding citizens by conducting research

Successfully engaging with citizens requires regulatory authorities to be in the position to understand how the media consumption of the audience evolves as well as the changing expectations towards regulation. Recent EPRA meetings have highlighted the added-value for regulators to conduct and/or commission robust qualitative and quantitative research. Research findings are particularly valuable to inform the activities of a regulatory authority during a crisis and be able to follow how the impact may evolve over time.

Best practice examples: conducting research

- *News consumption*: In the UK, Ofcom has commissioned a weekly online survey of around 2,000 people over three months, and also provided key findings from other datasets such as BARB and comScore. This work furthers Ofcom´s understanding around the access, consumption and critical engagement with news over time, recognising that habits may intensify or change given the nature of the crisis. Ofcom has also adapted its regular Children's Media Lives study to provide a specific analysis of children use of media during the lockdown.
- *Disinformation:* In Germany, DLM has adapted its annual representative Forsa-population-survey on disinformation with two aspects of the pandemic (perception of the frequency of disinformation related to the crisis + how people react to disinformation). The Media Authorities have also published a Kandar study on the information behaviour of citizens during the corona pandemic. In addition, DLM is also conducting a data analysis on, first, the platforms' disinformation measures (Google, Facebook and Twitter) and the effectiveness of these measures and secondly, on the identification of news sites spreading false information on Covid-19. In Ireland, BAI is engaging with academic researchers and the Irish news organisations to monitor and understand the prevalence and nature of disinformation on Covid-19. On 28 April, BAI also released a report on assessing the Implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation in Ireland in 2019 (CodeCheck 2020) and used this as an opportunity to highlight concerns about disinformation relating to Covid-19.
- *Gender Diversity:* Both CSA-FR and CAC-ES have published a report on the representation of women in the media during the crisis (CSA report – CAC report).

2.2.2. Fighting information disorder though media literacy

A pandemic situation creates a breeding ground for information disorders and social isolation. As revealed in Ofcom's weekly survey, the majority of citizens 'find hard to know what it is true and what is false about Coronavirus'[24]. An Ipsos MORI survey published in April also revealed that more than 20% of the respondents in the UK are concerned about isolation and mental illness during the lockdown[25]. In such a context, providing skills to detect false or harmful information and support and assistance to the most vulnerable is paramount. Indeed, the Covid-19 crisis has shown that disinformation may have extremely serious consequences for instance on the health of citizens (quackery products) or on public infrastructures (damaging of 5G masts). For more detailed information, annex 2 of this document lists media and information literacy initiatives that media regulators as well as other stakeholders have undertaken.

[24] See footnote. 11

[25] Covid-19 and mental health – Ipos Mori: https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/Covid-19-and-mental-wellbeing

- *Launch of MIL campaigns or tools*

Several regulators have responded to the information disorder challenge by promoting and updating existing awareness campaigns or tools, such as Agcom in Italy, AKOS in Slovenia with the specific media literacy website www.mipi.si and BAI in Ireland.

Best practice example: repurposing MIL campaigns

- *Ireland*: In 2019, Media Literacy Ireland launched a successful campaign ('Be Media Smart') with a large range of resources (TV ad, radio ads, social media asset and print ads). To fight the spread of online disinformation on Covid-19 and support the efforts of the health services, Media Literacy Ireland encouraged its members to use the campaign resources. They direct Irish people to the www.bemediasmart.ie website which was updated with information pertinent to Covid-19, and pointing people to trusted resources, as well as giving people practical tools to check information (e.g. using Google to see where the information comes from and directing them to fact checking websites). Media Literacy Ireland chose not to launch a campaign not to compete with official information and messaging. Rather, the aim of running the ads and the various assets was to offer some support to the official information and messaging. Broadcasters and social media platforms (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) have used the assets again. No additional costs were involved as the assets were already in existence.

Other regulators have seized this opportunity to launch new MIL campaigns, such as NMA in Norway, AEM in Croatia or the Catalan CAC, and to strengthen collaboration with external institutions or organisations. In collaboration with the Digital Security Authority, the CRTA in Cyprus has contacted all TV stations asking them to broadcast, on a regular basis and in the form of scrolling text or capshot, two messages aimed towards the public asking them not to trust information from unknown websites and to check the authenticity of news[26].

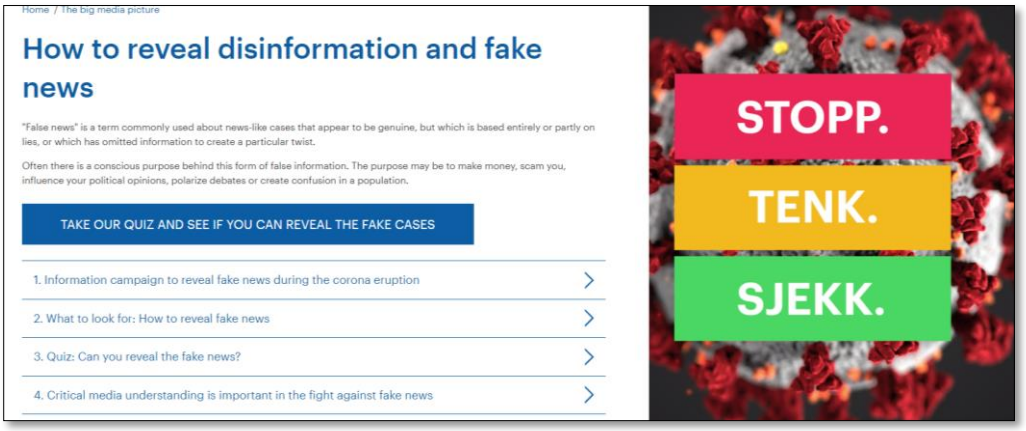
Best practice example: Developing Media Literacy resources

- In *the UK*, Ofcom has created a webpage 'Cutting Through the Covid-19 Confusion' with useful tools to navigate news and information, including links to sites that debunk common misconceptions, dedicated fact-checking services, and resources with tips on how to seek out reliable content. It includes a section for families, to help parents support their children's critical understanding.
- In *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, in collaboration with other institutions and organizations in the field of MIL, the CRA has created a Facebook page providing various information on how to strengthen media literacy skills and citizens understanding of COVID-19 crisis.
- In *Sweden,* in order to increase knowledge about misinformation during the pandemic and how to act source-critically in the infodemic, the Swedish Media Council shared resources from its MIL network actors providing tips and advice to sharpen knowledge of misinformation, find reliable knowledge, and get tips, trainings in fact-checking and specific resources for 6-9 year-old children.

[26] Source: ERGA Survey

Best practice examples: Media Literacy Campaigns

- In *Norway*, following the success of the previous MIL campaign - presented during the 50th EPRA meeting in Athens[27] - the NMA released the second part of its awareness campaign on disinformation, focusing on tips and recommendations on how to detect fake news about the Covid-19 crisis with video and quiz. The NMA also contributed to a factsheet on how to detect fake news with the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB), published on DSB's webpage.
- In *Croatia*, the AEM, in collaboration with UNICEF, has launched a digital campaign to raise awareness on disinformation and the importance of developing media literacy skills. The campaign aims at enhancing critical thinking and knowledge to help identify fake news and protect against disinformation and manipulation. The campaign was run in cooperation with Facebook, which provides ad space and supports the project, as well as with the most read Croatian web portals.



*Screenshot of Media Literacy Campaign of the Norwegian NMA (Translated only for the purpose of this paper).

[27] https://www.epra.org/attachments/athens-working-group-1-media-literacy-presentation-by-mari-velsand-nma-no

Fake news increase insecurity and fear. Let's take care of each other. Take a break. Check. Share.

Are you able to recognize fake news?

Let's take care of each other also on social media. Take a break, check and then share!

*Screenshot of Media Literacy Campaign of the Croatian AEM

- *Strengthening monitoring activities related to accuracy and objectivity*

Over the last months, about 25 EPRA members have chosen to adapt to the circumstances by essentially focusing their monitoring mission on priority issues such as accuracy and objectivity in programmes, fast-forwarding the investigation of complaints received and giving visibility to their decisions in order to alert citizens about harmful content related to Covid-19. In parallel, they have made announcements to inform stakeholders that they would take the exceptional circumstances into account when looking at the compliance with legal obligations (that were not considered a priority for the period). Many regulators also relaxed deadlines to deliver specific outputs. As an example, the Belgian CSA announced that media service providers could postpone the delivery of their annual report and stated that the regulator would take the impact of the crisis on programme schedules into account when monitoring the compliance for the year 2020.

As highlighted in the recent Communication from the European Commission on Tackling Covid-19 disinformation, the 'infodemic' revealed various forms of false and misleading content – whether illegal or harmful, with an intention to deceive or share unknowingly in good faith:

- *Misleading healthcare information*:

  - In Greece, the NCRT publicly informed citizens about products wrongly presented on TV or radio as supposedly preventing Coronavirus infection. In Spain, the CAC has reported several potentially harmful videos to YouTube, which were removed by the platform.

  - In Spain, the CAC announced that they would cooperate with the Department of Health to combat misinformation on health-related issues, especially on Covid-19, by providing advice and information on products, activities or services related to health and co-drafting recommendations on the treatment of health issues in the audiovisual media.

- *Conspiracy theories around 5G*: Ofcom´s weekly research showed that the most common piece of misinformation respondents came across in the UK was 'theories linking the origins or causes of Covid-19 to 5G technology'. As a consequence of these incorrect claims, mobile phone masts have been

vandalised and engineers from mobile phone companies have been harassed as they carried out their work. Ofcom publicised several sanctions decisions related to TV shows where according to the regulator, 'discussions about unproven claims and theories which could undermine viewers' trust in official public health information' were not 'put fully into context to ensure viewers are protected'[28]. As a convergent regulator, Ofcom also published information to clear up the myths and conspiracy theories around 5G and the spread of Coronavirus. Research has shown that there has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents coming across this conspiracy theory, from 50% in week three when it was first asked, to 30% in week ten[29].

2.2.3 Supporting citizens' well-being how to deal with lockdowns

- *Tips and prevention on the excessive use of screens and digital services*

During lockdown, digital devices consumed a significant proportion of our day - be it for working, exchanging with others, being informed, educated and entertained. However, this increased screen time may also be associated with risks such as potential exposure to online harms for vulnerable audiences or the de facto isolation of citizens with poor digital skills.

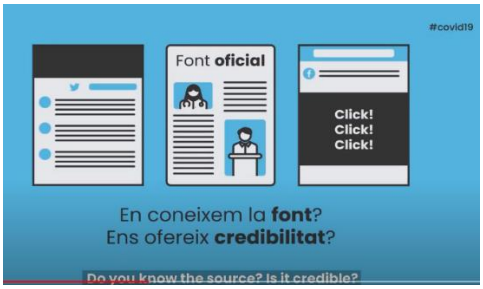
Best practice examples: Tips and prevention on the excessive use of screens and digital services

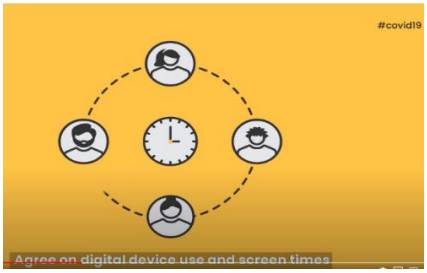
- In *France*, the CSA has participated in the drafting of a guide for parents in lockdown times providing 50 tips and tricks from professionals to address the potential harms of excessive screens' use.
- In *Spain*, the Catalan CAC, has produced material to raise awareness about the risks raised by screen usage, social media and information disorder and provide online teaching tips. A special page was also created on the eduCAC website to promote family activities, incl. suggestions to limit the use of video games, digital security and privacy advice, tips on how to detect fake news, how to turn cinema into more than entertainment, and how to use quality digital resources for children to play and learn. Moreover, as part of the EduCAC programme, the CAC has initiated an analysis with 20 experts on what we have learned from the use of screens during confinement, highlighting that the crisis will modify family coexistence and the way of teaching while more training is needed to face these changes.

The Catalan CAC campaign, released during the lockdown, comprises radio adverts and colour-coded videos (*Blue for 'fake news' risks, Red for social media's use, dark yellow for internet/screen use, and bright Yellow for online teaching tips*). Click on the images below to access some of the videos:

[28] Loveworld Limited decision: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/bulletins/content-sanctions-adjudications/decision-loveworld-limited
Ofcom decisions on programmes featuring David Icke and Eamonn Holmes: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/david-icke-and-eamonn-holmes-decision

[29] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/news-media/coronavirus-news-consumption-attitudes-behaviour



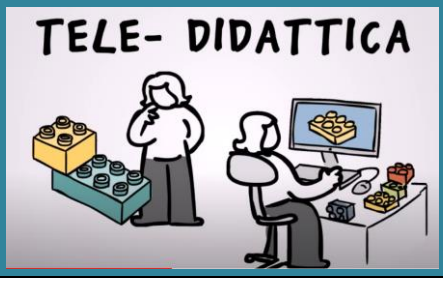


- *Assistance and tips on how to stay connected*

Several converged regulators among the EPRA network provided digital tips and assistance to citizens in order to optimise the Internet connection and use during the lockdown (AT / BA / HU / IT /UK). In Sweden, the Swedish Media Council provided tips and resources to adapt to remote working from home.

Best practice example: Tips to optimise Internet connection

- In *Italy*: Agcom released a video with practical recommendations on how to optimise the Internet connection at home on its website.



- *Educational tips for parents*

Schools being closed, parents had to become teachers and children had to adapt to online education and reinvent their daily life, with the risk of increased potential exposure to online harm and social isolation. Several regulators have produced advice, recommendations and resources directly targeting children and specifically aimed at helping parents handling the situation with material for education and entertainment. The Andalusian Audiovisual Council CAA has updated its recommendations for minors' protection in the digital environment with 10 recommendations aimed at families and parents for the development of digital literacy among children (*how to deal with parental tools, how to teach minors to protect their privacy, how to raise their awareness of online harm…).*

Best practice examples: Educational Resources

- *Reinventing lockdown time*: in France, the CSA has promoted 12 audiovisual resources from media service providers to entertain and educate children.
- *Reinventing school:* in Latvia, the NEPLP has cooperated with the Ministry of Education and Science and the media to create an opportunity for two free-to-air terrestrial broadcasting programmes to

produce educational content for elementary and high school students[30]. In Malta, the MBA encouraged broadcasters to include content targeting minors in their programme.

- *Reinventing MIL training*: due to the suspension of the Magic Valley's operation during the crisis (Hungary's media literacy and education centre offering free media awareness sessions to children from 9 to 16) the NMHH has created a Facebook group to continue to provide support to teachers with MIL training through an interactive platform[31].
- *Supporting children*: in Sweden, the Swedish Media Council has published on its website a list of resources from the members of its network providing lesson packages specially adapted for distance learning and exercises in seeing through false information spread about the Covid-19. Moreover, the SMC has published some key advice for adults to support children well-being during pandemics.

➢ *The fight against social isolation*

Encouraging solidarity: In Turkey, the Supreme Council has recommended the broadcast of the public service announcement "We are at Home" aiming at drawing attention to unity and solidarity and emphasizing that citizens should stay at home. The fight against social isolation was also part of the Guidelines for Media Organizations produced by the RTÜK when broadcasting Coronavirus-related content.

Activities to stay connected: In Portugal, the ERC, through GILM, an informal group on media literacy created by several public entities including the ERC, is collaborating with MILObs, an Observatory on Information, Media and Literacy, to provide a media literacy resources and activities kit promoting and suggesting activities and media content for children and young people. This 'Media at home' initiative aims to help families, schools and other groups in social isolation due to the pandemic.

➢ *Highlighting some relevant content resources*

To help mitigate the psychological effects of lockdown, several regulators took initiatives aimed at highlighting quality content resources to citizens.

Best practice examples: highlighting relevant content resources

- *Sharing content*: in Ukraine, the National Council has put forward the idea of creating a content database that could be used for free by any Ukrainian TV company. The Media Change Ukraine database (http://mediachange.com.ua/) can be joined by any company, including Internet bloggers. Any company can feed the database with their own programmes to be used by other broadcasters.
- *Positive attitude*: the CSA of the French-speaking Community of Belgium launched a dedicated area on its website, 'Think positive', proposing links to positive online initiatives from the cultural and audiovisual sector such as 'fun initiatives from the media sector', sources how to identify and support 'quality journalism', 'cultural offers directly accessible from the living room' and 'special kids' content.

[30] Source: NEPLP's response to EPRA survey

[31] News on the NMHH website: http://english.nmhh.hu/article/210887/Mediaszertar_NMHHs_Facebook_group_to_assist_with_outofclassroom_media_education

- *Religion and lockdown*: some regulators have helped facilitate the offer of religious content. In Germany, regional media regulators enabled a simplified notification procedure for the live streaming of cultural or religious events and educational content during the crisis to maintain social participation. In Ukraine, the National Council has requested national, regional and local broadcasters to provide live broadcasts of church services and religious ceremonies in the largest churches and religious communities. In Latvia, the Cabinet of Ministers has allowed NEPLP to allow the broadcast, free of charge, of the public media services' Easter holiday programme by other media during Easter holiday.
- *Fostering 'drive-in culture'*: to increase the cultural offer and to allow people to come together while respecting social distancing, temporary licences for radio have been granted to permit drive-in-movies (Norway/the UK/Israel) and to cover church service events (UK).

➢ *Using lockdown as an opportunity to strengthen the interaction with citizens*

Media has never been so much at the heart of people's interest than during this crisis. What if this time was the opportunity to catch citizens' attention to increase their awareness about the media situation in the country and to engage with them to prepare the audiovisual landscape of tomorrow?

Best practice examples: using lockdown to strengthen interaction with citizens

- The *Belgian CSA* contributed to build on the relationship between broadcasters and their audience by regularly posting, on its Twitter page, interviews with media service providers to share their views on how they handle the current crisis and to provide the audience with a 'behind-the-scene' experience.
- In *the UK*, as part of its assessment of the future of the public media service, Ofcom has seized the opportunity of the lockdown to promote its website Small screen Big debate, aimed at collecting the citizens' views on the future of the PSM. During the lockdown, a new competition was launched, aimed at encouraging young people aged 16 to 18 to share their views on '*What must traditional broadcasters and streaming services do to make sure they appeal to the audiences of tomorrow?*' through a video or a blog post which will be submitted to a jury. The most original, convincing or innovative contribution was rewarded and shared publicly by Ofcom and the Financial Times.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 crisis is unprecedented. As such, it has raised vital challenges for citizens and the media sector. The crisis has demonstrated the crucial role of free and independent media as an essential service, providing citizens with reliable, fact-checked information, contributing to saving lives. Against this background, media regulatory authorities have a special role to play owing to their particular position as an intermediary between media service providers, public and health authorities and citizens.

This paper presents an overview of the wide-ranging activities and measures that NRAs have put in place within a few months to support citizens, either directly through awareness raising actions, or indirectly through enabling a functioning and responsible media environment - and highlights best practice examples. The bulk of these initiatives consists in emergency short-term measures to respond to the crisis especially during the lockdown period.

However, experts warn that the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on the media market and on the citizens could be long-lasting. Early research findings reveal that the crisis appears to have acted as a catalyser of trends already existing in the European audiovisual markets, for instance by amplifying the move of advertising revenue to online or accelerating the take up of SVOD services. With regard to citizens, the crisis has shown that issues of trust are vital – be it trust towards public institutions, including health authorities or trust towards media providers. Comparative research also highlights than the level of trust in the media varies a lot across Europe between East and West and North and South. How can the regulator help foster people's trust in media? This is certainly a major challenge for the years to come.

In any event, the EPRA webinar on "Regulators and Citizens", which will take place on 21 October 2020, will be a welcome opportunity to reflect more how to strengthen the relationship with citizens to make them informed actors of the future regulation in the digital area.