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SURVEY WITH JOURNALISTS

ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION REGARDING COVID -19

SARAJEVO

17 June 2020

SURVEY OF BHJA

More than 83% of journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina believe that the crisis staffs did not provide objective and comprehensive information to citizens about the coronavirus, according to a survey of BH Journalists Association (BHJA), conducted on a sample of 102 journalists from across the country on access to public information regarding COVID -19 and within the system of press conferences with a limited presence of journalists or completely without them.

Since the beginning of the declaration of the state of emergency in Bosnia and Herzegovina caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives of the media, but also state institutions at all levels of government, have had to adapt their way of working to specific circumstances. This meant, among other things, the introduction of a new system of holding press conferences, which implies a limited presence of media crews or no presence of journalists at all. Journalists who could not attend the press conferences had the opportunity to send questions to the authorities via e-mail. However, although it is commendable that the institutions have implemented protective measures in this way, the BH Journalists Association has received numerous complaints from journalists that some crisis headquarters, as well as other relevant institutions, are using this situation to limit access to public information and introduce a kind of media censorship.

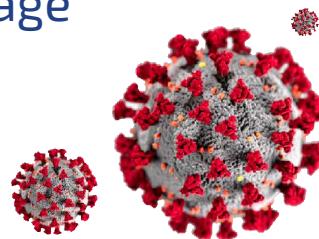
In the period from mid-March to the end of May 2020, BH Journalists Association published a series of appeals and requests to the competent institutions and politicians in order to enable journalists who report daily on the COVID-19 pandemic unhindered work and access to information of public importance.

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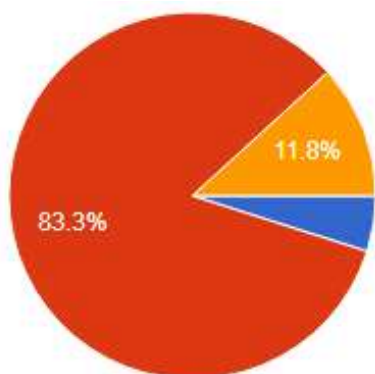
LINKS PRESS RELEASES BHJA

- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/03/21/bh-journalists-public-protest-to-fahrudin-radoncic/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/03/24/bh-journalists-public-protest-to-fadil-novalic-the-prime-minister-of-the-federation-of-bih/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/03/31/bh-journalists-public-invitation-to-crisis-staffs-of-the-federation-of-bih-and-sarajevo-canton/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/04/03/bh-journalists-public-protest-to-dr-sebija-izetbegovic-the-director-of-kcus/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/04/07/bh-journalists-stop-censorship-on-information-about-covid-19-and-institutional-repression-of-freedom-of-expression/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/04/22/bh-journalists-protest-to-crisis-staff-of-herzegovina-neretva-canton-for-violation-of-right-to-freedom-of-expression/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/04/30/bh-journalists-public-protest-to-fahrudin-solak-director-of-the-federal-civil-protection-directorate/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/05/01/regional-platform-stop-pressures-on-bih-media/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/05/06/bh-journalists-public-protest-to-the-director-of-the-ucc-rs-vlado-djajic-and-his-deputy-nenad-stevandic/>
- <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/05/21/bh-journalists-authorities-must-stop-denying-access-to-information-and-events-of-public-importance/>

SURVEY OF BHJA

The BHJA survey showed that media professionals in Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka had the most problems with access to public information about the pandemic, while in other cities communication with public officials and members of crisis staffs was organized in a much more efficient and simple way. Also, **a significant number of questions, which the journalists considered to be extremely important for the public, were left without a credible answer from the members of the crisis staffs.** These were issues related to public procurement and general spending of budget money during the pandemic, causes of death of patients and failure to perform autopsies of the deceased, number of coronavirus tested and protection measures, effectiveness and duration of tests, occurrence of virus in hospitals and clinical centers, patient path...

To the question **"Do you think that the current way of informing from press conferences without journalists enables professional reporting in the interest of citizens?"**, as many as 83.3 percent of respondents answered negatively, is that the information they received were general and without all of the data they need. Only 4.9% of respondents were completely satisfied with this way of informing at press conferences, while 11.8% could not answer whether they were satisfied or not.



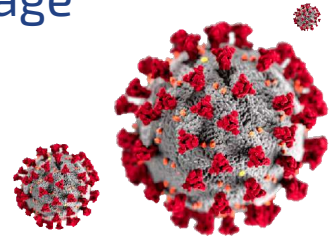
- Yes, completely
- No, the information is generalized and does not contain all the data we need in our work
- Cannot estimate

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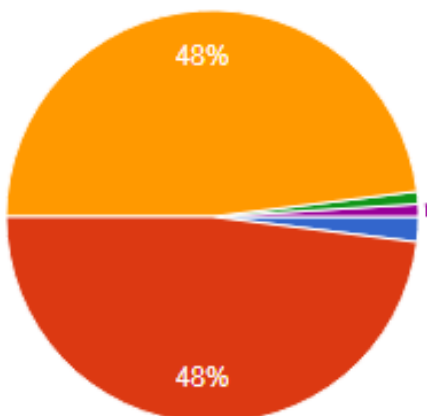
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SURVEY OF BHJA

In order to provide timely, accurate and objective information in the public interest, it is necessary to return to regular press conferences organized in accordance with protective measures, according to 48% of surveyed journalists. The same percentage of respondents (48%) were of the opinion that regular press conferences with the presence of journalists on the spot should be returned, but also with online participation with the possibility of asking questions. About 2% of respondents answered that the existing form should be kept in the future (press conferences without the presence of journalists, with the possibility of asking questions by e-mail), and 1 percent of respondents said that press conferences should be completely abolished and that crisis headquarters should inform citizens through press releases and official web site.



- Keep the existing form, / Press conferences without journalists / with the possibility ...
- Return regular press conferences organized in accordance with safety measures ...
- Return regular conferences with the presence of journalists on the spot, but ...
- Abolish press conferences, and the Crisis Staff can inform citizens ...
- Other

When asked "how journalists should react in order to protect their profession and objectively inform citizens about the introduced practice of holding press conferences without the presence of journalists", the largest number of respondents - 42.2% - answered that they are not sure what to do in this situation.

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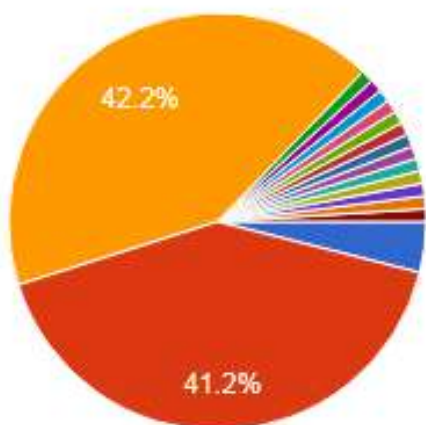
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As many as 41.2% of the surveyed journalists stated that press conferences should be boycotted, and information should be transmitted only from the official website of the institutions / crisis headquarters. About 3.9 percent of respondents stated that there is no need for any reaction and that this way of placing information is quite sufficient.



- There is no need for any reaction ...
- Press conferences should be boycotted ...
- I'm not sure what to do in this situation ...
- We should require the competent diff...
- Protest against such a practice ...
- Ask to organize a press conference ...
- Monitor the existing conference, but cert...
- Other

A smaller percentage of respondents (1 percent each) answered that the authorities should be required to organize different kind of communication with the public because the public has that right, to protest against such practices through statements by journalists' associations, to ask for press conferences with protective measures, to follow existing conferences but criticize the work of institutions that give shallow answers on a daily basis, and to react with professional, impartial and investigative journalism.

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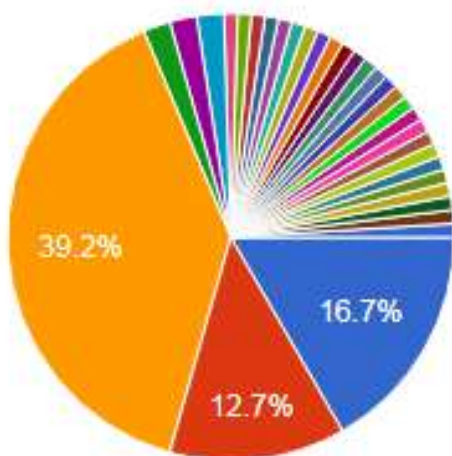
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More than 39% of respondents stated that, after changing the format of press conferences during the pandemic, they received only partial information on the questions they referred to the authorities. Only 16.7% of journalists state that the received answer contained the key requested information, and 12.7% that the answers of the authorities did not contain the requested information.



- Yes
- No
- In part
- The question was completely reformulated
- N/A
- I do not know
- I didn't have a chance
- Other

Out of the total number of surveyed journalists (102), 76.5% are in permanent employment, 17.6% are freelancers, while the rest work part-time, voluntarily or under different employment contracts.

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