

# Precariousness, an obstacle to journalistic quality: a case study

## *La precariedad, obstáculo para la calidad periodística: estudio de caso*



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**Abstract:**

This paper focuses on the collaborators of the Biscayan press' employment and professional situation, journalists who work exclusively or almost exclusively for a single media as freelance workers. This paper shows how precariousness is an obstacle to achieving the necessary journalistic quality that the media should offer. These professionals are at a disadvantage compared to hired journalists who are covered by the corresponding collective agreement. The collaborators' precarious working conditions affect their professional routines and, ultimately, the quality of the daily texts published in the newspapers. We use quantitative data from a survey and a qualitative analysis through in-depth interviews with collaborators and former collaborators to address this problem and show the working and professional situation of the journalists who make up this group.

**Keywords:**

Journalism; precariousness; quality; journalistic routines; freelance journalist.

**Resumen:**

*Este trabajo se detiene en la situación laboral y profesional de los colaboradores de la prensa vizcaína, periodistas que trabajan en exclusiva, o casi en exclusiva, para un único medio como trabajadores autónomos. El propósito del mismo es mostrar cómo la precariedad constituye un obstáculo para alcanzar la necesaria calidad periodística que deben ofrecer los medios de comunicación. Estos profesionales se encuentran en una situación de desventaja respecto a los periodistas contratados que están amparados por el correspondiente convenio colectivo. Las precarias condiciones laborales de los colaboradores afectan a sus rutinas profesionales y, en último término, a la calidad de los textos que se publican cada día en los periódicos. Para abordar esta problemática y mostrar la situación laboral y profesional en la que los periodistas que conforman ese colectivo ejercen el oficio se recurre a datos cuantitativos, procedentes de una encuesta, y, especialmente, a un análisis cualitativo, por medio de entrevistas en profundidad a colaboradores y ex colaboradores.*

**Palabras clave:**

*Periodismo; precariedad; calidad; rutinas periodísticas; periodista autónomo.*

## 1. Introduction

The subsequent precariousness of working conditions of communication professionals, denounced by trade unions and academics, which was brought about by the 2008 economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, was not reported in the news. Although both crises have contributed to the deterioration of employment in the sector, journalists' precarious working and professional conditions have been constant in the journalistic panorama for decades (Gutiérrez, Ruiz and Cantalapiedra, 2016) and are now a common feature of Spanish journalism.

Trade unions have repeatedly denounced the worsening of newsroom workers' and journalists' working and professional conditions, who are not part of media staff because they do not have employment contracts and work as freelancers, through the Federation of Journalists' Unions (FeSP). On International Workers Day and World Press Freedom Day, May 1 and 3, respectively, the FeSP called on the Spanish government to urgently adopt measures to tackle the precariousness that had worsened due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (FeSP, 2021). This request did not differ much from the same entity's made a year earlier, during the first onslaught of the pandemic, when it asked the government for urgent measures to guarantee decent working conditions for journalists, especially freelancers and working journalists (FeSP, 2020).

The precariousness pervading Spanish journalism is a problem that goes beyond journalists' particular situation since it affects professional routines, as has been stated in different academic works, and ultimately affects the quality of the information that the media communicates to society. However, this precariousness is nuanced depending on the particular collective. Thus,

those professionals who do not have an employment contract with the media for which they work, such as freelance journalists and contributors, have more precarious working and professional conditions than media's directly employed journalists and therefore do not have the optimal conditions necessary for quality work.

This precariousness has been consolidated and has become a systemic element in journalism (Varela, 2017), leading to a deterioration in the quality of information that the media provides to society. Professionals' poor working situations condition the information, negatively impacting the final quality of the news product and journalists' ethics (Suárez, Romero and Almansa, 2009). Journalists have noted a gradual worsening of the sector's professional, working, and economic conditions, closely linked. A change in one of them affects the rest and, therefore, the quality of the information (Soengas, Rodríguez, and Abuín, 2014).

The profession has suffered from poor remuneration for journalistic work, unemployment, and precariousness since the profound 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic that has been dragging on since 2020 (APM, 2020); it has also been impacted by the inequality between men and women (Cáceres and Parratt, 2021).

The financial crisis (Túñez and Martínez, 2014) or the unfavourable economic period for the media (Viota and Parratt, 2021) have been reflected in the quality of news because issues such as journalists' long working hours, salaries, and working conditions, together with the speed with which news needs to be published in the online version of newspapers, "cause a lower respect for ethics and professional deontology" and mean that there is not always enough time to reflect on what is published (Maciá-Barber and Herrera-Damas, 2010: 97). Fariás and Gómez (2011) agree, highlighting the reduction in staff journalists and the lack of time for checking and verifying information.

The lack of adequate working and professional conditions affects journalists' work, as working in a context of precariousness, both for professionals and journalism as a whole, makes it challenging to write quality news and results in a lack of neutrality and banality in the process of searching, selecting and preparing news, leading to "poor, trivial and sensationalist" journalism (Ufarte, 2012: 4). This precariousness transforms the journalist into an obedient professional (Figueras-Maz, Mauri-Ríos, Alsius-Lavera, and Salgado-De-Dios, 2012), more concerned about working conditions and, fundamentally, salaries than producing a rigorous, ethical, independent, quality work that should be demanded of journalism in a democratic society. The professionals themselves are aware that precariousness affects the quality of their work and acknowledge that the models of news quality have deteriorated (Gómez-Mompart, Gutiérrez-Lozano, and Palau-Sampio, 2015).

However, journalists' concern about precariousness in the sector and its repercussions on news quality differs as they become less concerned as their salaries increase. Freelance journalists are among the professionals who value this issue most (Figueras-Maz et al., 2012).

This study focuses on the Biscayan press contributors, who are among this group of freelance journalists most concerned about precariousness. They are professionals who work under the Special Regime for Self-employed Workers (RETA) for a single media outlet; most work remotely daily and follow orders or instructions from their newspaper's editor.

The contributors are part of the growing unconventional press work. Their employment status does not conform to the traditional employment relationship between an employer and an employee as they are economically dependent freelancers or false self-employed (ILO, 2016). Although they are not strictly speaking freelance journalists, they face the same difficulties

since their work is characterised by low income, instability, and the uncertainty of work and employment status (Marín-Sanchiz, Carvajal, and González-Esteban, 2021).

In recent years, the number of journalists who make up the atypical media workforce has grown in Europe (Edstrom and Ladendorf, 2012; Mathisen, 2017; Hayes and Silke, 2018) and Spain. The number of professionals who work in the journalistic field as freelancers without an employment contract and, therefore, without the protection of a collective bargaining agreement accounts for almost a third of the total (APM, 2020). Thus, the increase in atypical media work (Gollmitzer, 2014) means that more journalists do not have regulated working hours, income, rest periods, or the social and welfare benefits included in collective bargaining agreements.

Moreover, the tension between the freedom and autonomy to tackle the work and the vulnerability and precariousness in which it is performed in the case of freelance journalists (Mathisen, 2017) does not exist in the case of contributors. These professionals are subordinated to the newspaper's demands, which establishes the fees for their work- by news item or a fixed monthly fee- and tells them how much to write and what about. Contributors do not have the freedom and autonomy that freelancers have. Instead, they work in vulnerable and precarious conditions.

## 2. Objective and methodology

This research aims to examine the relationship between journalists' working and professional conditions and the journalistic quality of their work. We have taken the contributors of the Biscayan press as our subjects of study to achieve this objective based on two hypotheses. On the one hand, contributors have working and professional conditions inferior to media's directly employed journalists, protected by a collective bargaining agreement (H1). On the other hand, according to the freelancers themselves, the precariousness they withstand influences their work routines and ultimately the journalistic quality of the information they produce for the media that contracts their services (H2). We maintain that precariousness is an obstacle to achieving the necessary journalistic quality. In this case, the contributors from the newspapers published in Bizkaia are the professionals who best illustrate this relationship between working under precarious conditions and difficulty in achieving optimum quality work. Moreover, it can be seen that similar phenomena occurring in other contexts are taking place in Biscayan newspapers.

We opted to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies as both allow us to obtain more significant and more profound knowledge of the phenomena. In this case, we examined the impact of employees' professional and employment insecurity on the quality of the information. This is because the measurable data obtained through quantitative techniques are included, thanks to qualitative research "interpretative richness, contextualisation of the environment or surroundings, details and unique experiences" (Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista, 2006: 28). Furthermore, qualitative methodology implies an "openness to the approach of the researched" to achieve the "understanding of the other" (Canales, 2006: 19-20) and "allows for basic understanding and knowledge in the area of social sciences" (Taylor and Bogdam, 1987: 285).

The quantitative analysis has been carried out using the data from work carried out by the Bitaretz Research Group from the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) within the framework of the project CSO2014-56196-R for the design of a corporate communication tool for systematising different entities' flow of information. Working journalists were surveyed

in 2020 in the Basque Country in this project; this data is included in a yet-to-be-published report on *Journalists' profiles and professional routines in the Basque Country*. The population that made up the study universe comprised Basque Country media journalists. Two hundred twenty-four active professionals were interviewed using stratified sampling with proportional quotas, enabling us to establish the Basque journalist collectives' training, work, and personal profile. The data from this study put the contributors' and former contributors' testimonies into context and includes a qualitative analysis of the professionals' degree of satisfaction by considering two main issues regarding working conditions: remuneration and working hours.

This qualitative element of the research results comes from the in-depth interviews with professionals who work or have worked as freelancers for Biscayan newspapers (Gutiérrez, 2021). The contributors analysed in this study are not professionals who work set hours for a particular medium. The Biscayan press contributors are journalists who work exclusively or almost exclusively for one media, forcing them to register as freelancers working from home daily and not part of the media's direct employees.

The interviews were carried out in person between the end of 2019 and 2020, hampered by the difficulties of the lockdown brought about by the decreed state of alarm for COVID-19. Nine contributors and former contributors were interviewed from the two general information newspapers published in Bizkaia *El Correo* and *Deia* using a script designed through participant observation –“the main ingredient for qualitative methodology” (Taylor and Bogdam, 1987: 31)– by one of this study's authors, who has had over two decades of journalistic experience as a freelancer in which he has maintained professional contact with contributors from both media.

We decided to conclude this research phase when the so-called “saturation point” was reached, at which point the interviewees did not provide new information. The nine interviews were enough to obtain relevant data since, in qualitative studies, “the size of the sample is not important from a probabilistic perspective” because “what is sought in qualitative research is depth” (Hernández et al., 2006: 394).

The two Biscayan newspapers for which the professionals interviewed work or have worked belong to media groups with head offices in other provinces. Thus, *Deia* forms part of Grupo Noticias, with Gipuzkoa, Álava, and Navarra newspapers, while *El Correo* is one of Vocento's regional newspapers. This group has general information newspapers in several autonomous regions. Circumscribing the study to the area of Bizkaia allows us to work with a more manageable sample. Still, it does not limit the results since the two publishing groups replicate the news model followed in Bizkaia in Gipuzkoa and Álava. Moreover, as mentioned above, the Vocento group has other regional newspapers.

Information was obtained from professionals with different profiles in the interviews, which enriched the research. We opted not to provide the interviewees' details to keep them anonymous (name, age, sex, and medium for which they worked). This was all explained to the participants before agreeing to the interviews. In this way, we sought to obtain more participation, more frank answers and protect professionals from having problems with the media outlet they worked for because of what they might say in the interviews. The journalists were asked the following questions:

- Q1.** Staff journalists started working in the media as a contributor, where they worked for seven years.
- Q2.** Staff journalist became a contributor after an internship in the media and worked as a freelancer for five years before signing an employment contract.
- Q3.** Contributor for more than a decade in the same media.
- Q4.** Recent contributor who had previously worked under contract in other media and left the profession temporarily to return to it as a freelancer.
- Q5.** Worked for more than a decade in the media in which they interned before moving to this position.
- Q6.** Contributor for more than a decade who left the profession to work on a contract basis for a company in a non-journalism-related sector.
- Q7.** Contributor for over a decade with previous experience in different media, some with a work contract and others as a freelancer.
- Q8.** Staff journalist who, after completing a traineeship, was a contributor for more than a decade before signing an employment contract.
- Q9.** A contributor who left journalism to work in communications in the public administration.

The interviews covered the full range of career possibilities. They have all worked as freelancers at some point in their professional careers. Some worked in such circumstances during the interviews, some for more than a decade, and some have become contributors after working on a contract. Some journalists ended up forming part of the media's staff where they had worked as freelancers, and some left the newspaper, either to stay in journalism or to leave the profession. This has made it possible to obtain significant data, allowing us to approach the objectives set out in the present work.

### **3. Results**

The 2008 crisis caused the media to cut salaries by laying off veteran and more expensive journalists from the newsrooms, replacing them with lower-paid young people. It was cheaper to hire these young journalists as contributors than as staff. The professionals who enter this world do so without the workers' rights that organisational media's direct journalists have. Freelancers have precarious contracts and take on the burden of paying the monthly freelance fee and all the expenses resulting from their professional activities. In this way, journalistic work is outsourced. Still, it fosters precariousness, which is transferred from the newsroom to freelancers.

The contributors have stated that these freelance journalists do not have stipulated working hours. They do not enjoy the rights in the corresponding collective bargaining agreement, such as paid holidays and extra pay. They may have fixed wages if they agree with the medium or pay per news item. Consequently, their final monthly income depends on the number of texts they publish since payment is established per line or page. According to the professionals' testimonials, each line is paid 65 euro cents in *El Correo*. According to the professionals' testimonials, a full page in Deia, where texts and photos are included, is paid 60 euros. The professional has not chosen this precarious working situation as a freelancer. Instead, it is imposed by the media.

None of the contributors and former contributors interviewed began working in this situation of their own free will. Some signed a commercial or collaboration contract; others only have a verbal agreement.

I never had a commercial contract. I started as a contributor, paid by news item and I started out billing 500 euros, 600 euros by the fifth month; I was already working every day in the editorial office without a contract. When I started billing 1000 euros a month, I registered as a freelancer, and I am still a freelancer without any commercial contract (Q1).

A few days after starting, I already had the commercial contract ready. I went to the newspaper and signed it, kept a copy, and that was it. In the contract, it says that I recognise myself as a freelancer. (Q7).

When I worked as a freelancer, I was paid a fixed monthly amount, a fixed amount that the company changed depending on the month, but the agreement was that the amount had to be X over the year. It was the result of a commercial contract. (Q2).

In 201X, I signed an agreement. Until that time, I had not done so. They explained the working conditions to me, all verbally, but I did not sign any papers. After working for ten years, I signed a dependent freelance contract (TRADE). It came from them. (Q3).

The daily press contributors face a more volatile work situation than the newspaper's direct employees, covered by the corresponding collective bargaining agreement. This work volatility causes insecurity that ends up affecting these professionals' daily work, routines, and ultimately the quality of the information. The contributors have reported being afraid that the newspaper may fire them, either to replace them with another professional or because the newspaper's management decides to get rid of their position. "I don't think, knock on wood, that they will do without me, but it is as simple as saying, 'well kid, don't send us anything else,'" says one of the interviewees (Q5).

Precariousness is caused by this work volatility, as freelancers have unstable and lower incomes than they would if they had an employment contract and defined working hours. However, these conditions have repercussions on the contributors' work. Contributors who do not have a fixed monthly salary and whose income depends on the number of lines or information they publish face more pronounced economic uncertainty.

I charge per line, not per hour. That's the way it is. You indeed compensate. You compensate an hour for another, but I do not pick up the telephone for less than 30 lines. And for less than 25, unless I am very bored, I do not leave my house. I see a press conference scheduled for tomorrow, and I am fully aware it is going to be 15 lines, so I don't go, at the risk of missing out on other issues that may come up in the press conference. (Q4).

This contributor clarifies that their precarious work situation directly influences their way of working. They do not attend press conferences where they do not expect to obtain well-paid work, even if that means running the risk of missing out on information that comes up in the press conference. This professional's precarious situation has repercussions on their journalistic routines as they are worried about their income from their work and optimising their time.

The need to accumulate lines or fill pages to increase their income at the end of the month forces these professionals to give up their days off to continue writing and publishing. Consequently, they sometimes face marathon working days.

I don't have a fixed timetable. You depend on the calls on a day-to-day basis. For example, because there was a protest the other day, I finished work around midnight, and I had started at 8:00. It depends. The day-to-day makes its mark on you. (Q3).

I work seven days a week. There is no other way. Percentage-wise what works best for you is weekend work because that is the period in which you are practically guaranteed to publish a full-page a day. (Q7).

The quest to accumulate published texts to receive an adequate monthly income may lead to the employee falling ill. Contributors avoid taking sick leave because it means taking time off work and lowering income.

I was in bed with a 39-degree fever and a nasty infection, and working and working from bed, but working. If I had a fixed salary, I would either fall ill more often or I would be less able to cope with a fever, and so on. The best antibiotic is to be freelance. Maybe they do it for our own good. There has only been one day in ten years when I have said, "I can't work." (Q5).

The same applies to rest periods included in collective bargaining agreements, particularly holidays. Employees do not receive paid holidays. They receive a rough fixed monthly remuneration for the twelve months of the year, while the medium's direct journalists receive twelve months' pay plus the extra pay stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement. On the other hand, freelancers cannot have a month's rest because it means giving up their income.

I have to earn in eleven months what I would in twelve. Well, in fourteen months in this case. Eleven months worked, plus a month of holidays plus two months pay. I have to invoice in eleven months what others receive in fourteen. Plain and simple. The month I don't sign, like in August, I don't get paid. (Q7).

In this way, journalists are under pressure to write a certain number of lines or publish enough articles to earn an adequate income. This pressure impacts professional routines, and the way information is treated as it must be "sold," in contributors' jargon, to the person in charge of the section for which they work. Once the day's topics have been gathered, in press conferences or through the communications sent by institutions and cultural, social, or sporting entities, or by developing their own issues, the contributors report them to a section manager who will provide a space for each of them. Income depends on the number of lines written. Therefore a good sale will give more space and more income. The contributors interviewed speak of "stretching out" and "overstretching" the news to try to sell it and gain more space and, therefore, more money. "I try to force them to take up more space" (Q6), says one of them. Another contributor clarifies the need to sell their news and the fierce competition for space in the newspaper.

You work with the concern that no matter how good your topics are... I fight directly with the contributors from other municipalities. And when it comes to selling it, if a journalist does not know how to sell their stories, they are screwed. You have to sell them. (Q7).

I knew that I had to make it nice. You have to embellish it and give it twenty twists and turns to make it look nice because if not, they wouldn't buy it. In the end, you had to sell it to them. There was a bit of a line between the ethics of "let's see, I'm not going to go twenty times too far" and "I have to sell it." You tried to strike a balance because you had to charge lines." (Q6).

I always set the bar for myself halfway through the month. My goal was 2000 lines, and when I exceeded 1000 lines halfway through the month, I would relax a little; I would say, "well, things are going well." If I didn't reach 1000 by the middle of the month, I was capable of looking under a rock to reach my goal (Q8).

If they had agreed on a fixed monthly fee with the media outlet, there would be less pressure, and you no longer work as you would if you were a freelance journalist. This is highlighted by a contributor who has signed an agreement as an economically



dependent freelancer after years of their income, depending on how much they wrote. A fixed amount of money is paid per month. This professional no longer has to stretch information to earn a few more lines as they admitted to doing before having a fixed monthly salary.

Before the contract [to charge a monthly fee] for sure, because we were paid by the news item and then you had the pressure and maybe topics that could have waited... Now perhaps I can be more patient with the issues and even more comfortable at times and leave some issues so as not to be so overwhelmed. Before, I had the stress of not having a topic, and I had to look for something. This affects you in that you exaggerate a news item because you try to have an opening to something that is not so important; you look for a twist so that it can be more newsworthy. (Q3)

Sometimes, a photograph must accompany the text. It is not unusual for the contributing journalists who write the text to send the newspaper an image illustrating the story.

The price of the page includes taking photos. Therefore, you were taking the work away from the photographers. (Q9)

Therefore, the contributor does work that cannot have the same quality standards that a photojournalist offers and takes away the photographer's work, who are also freelancers, and used to take photos at all types of events with better photographic equipment than the contributor. However, the contributor can take photos with their mobile phone that will be published in the newspaper the next day or digital.

The quantitative data corroborate the precariousness described by the interviewed and former contributors. The interview carried out by the Bitaretz Research Group included a section in which journalists were asked to rate their satisfaction with a set of aspects on a scale from zero to ten, in which zero was "not at all satisfied," and ten was "totally satisfied." The two main elements of working conditions, such as remuneration and working hours, receive lower scores from freelance journalists. While all the journalists interviewed by the Bitaretz Group scored 6.87 for their working conditions and 6.87 for their financial conditions, freelance journalists, 3.6% of the 224 surveyed; gave a score of 5.85 5.42, respectively. A pass grade.

People [staff members] write about a topic a day. It is a one-off when I write about three or four topics a day [...]; I think I do [quality work], although you need to ask others. You try to pay attention, devote attention to the things you do. You try. To be honest, there are times that it's just another *churro* because you don't have much time to dedicate to it. (Q5).

When you have more work and the same hours in the day, the quality of your work will pay the price, for sure, because it is common practice not to revise your work, to make fewer calls, which means talking to fewer sources and less fact-checking. That is undeniable. (Q3).

When you have all of those symptoms of precariousness, no rest, I don't know what, I don't know how many, I think there is a decline. Being more relaxed, having time off, and being rested, allows you to work better. (Q1).

This "relaxation" is achieved when the long-awaited employment contract arrives; although it does not automatically mean gaining better quality information, it lays its foundations. Having an employment contract and ceasing to be a freelancer is the best way to overcome the obstacles to achieving the desired journalistic quality, which comes with working without a set schedule, low pay, without enough rest, and the job insecurity of being fired at any moment. Freelancers are also disconnected

from the newsroom since the contributors mainly work from home. The contributors themselves acknowledge that they would do better work with an employment contract.

I would work with less stress. Yes. I could afford to concentrate only on one topic at times (Q5).

Yes, because I wouldn't be paid per line. I would have an established working timetable, and if, for whatever reason, I had to work eight hours a day on a topic that would later be 50 lines, I could do so. (Q4).

I think so. I would have been more relaxed. Yes, I do; it worked with more interest, just the same. Without pressure, working without pressure always leads to higher quality. I would avoid the pressure of knowing that you can be fired without having any rights at any moment. That is tough. (Q6).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

Instability, insecurity, precariousness. These three terms appeared in the interviews with the contributors and marked their professional routines. Instability is caused by not having an employment contract and being a freelance worker whose only connection with the medium is a commercial or TRADE contract or simply a verbal agreement. Insecurity comes about by not having a guaranteed income depending on the number of lines written or the amount of page space filled with text and photographs. Precariousness comes about when fundamental issues such as salary, working hours, and rest days are not regulated. All of this instability, insecurity, and precariousness influence the contributors' work routines, as reported in the interviews.

Although this work limits its study to a particular segment of journalists, the results obtained, apart from confirming the findings of studies that focus on other professionals in the journalistic field, could be extrapolated to other professions in which workers face the same instability and insecurity as contributors, a fact that although intuited, must be proven.

The data collected is in line with what is reflected in national surveys (APM, 2018, 2019, and 2020) and ratifies what has been pointed out in previous academic works (Figueras-Maz, Mauri-Ríos, Alsius-Lavera and Salgado-De-Dios, 2012; Farias and Gómez, 2011; and Maciá-Barber and Herrera-Damas, 2010) regarding the existing difficulties in achieving quality texts in a precarious situation. Furthermore, the information gathered in the interviews allows us to confirm the validity of the initial hypothesis since the press contributors from Bizkaia have worse working and professional conditions than the contracted journalists who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement, and this greater degree of precariousness impacts the work routines, therefore impacting journalistic quality.

The contributors themselves recognise that they work in precarious conditions, with a particular impact on essential elements of working conditions such as income, working hours, and rest periods, affecting their professional routines. If these routines are altered, the journalistic work is not carried out with the necessary dedication for achieving optimum quality standards, either due to a lack of time for dealing with the information rigorously or because the professional is more concerned with ensuring, they gain an adequate income than with gauging the importance of the issues they deal with daily.

It is necessary to point out that the contributors try to overcome all the inconveniences that they come across daily and consider that, on most occasions, they provide quality work, but we should ask ourselves how much better the quality of the information published by the Biscayan newspapers would be if all journalists, including the contributors, had decent working and professional conditions that allowed them to carry out their job to report without the fear of not making ends meet or of being out of work at any time.

These journalists' effort and experience, some have worked continuously for more than a decade for the same media, make up for the shortcomings resulting from the precariousness they face. However, the media's overall quality should not rest on the professional's actions. It is up to the companies to eliminate the elements that contribute to increasing or maintaining job insecurity, consequently facilitating these professionals' work. Some issues remain, such as the opinion of those in charge of the media regarding the journalists' working conditions for future research, as it is not the aim of this study. Moreover, the quality of the contributors' texts could be analysed and compared to the medium's contracted journalists.

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## 6. Specific contributions from each author

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Concept and design of the work	Juan José Gutiérrez Cuesta, Naiara Vink Larruskain and María José Cantalapiedra
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Data collection and analysis	Juan José Gutiérrez Cuesta and María José Cantalapiedra
Discussion and conclusions	Juan José Gutiérrez Cuesta, Naiara Vink Larruskain and María José Cantalapiedra
Writing, formatting, revision and approval of versions	Juan José Gutiérrez Cuesta, Naiara Vink Larruskain and María José Cantalapiedra

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