

## Call for tender

**“Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) Fast Track Program”  
for news organizations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo,  
Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia.**

### **Background**

Reporters Without Borders - known as Reporters sans frontières (RSF) - is an independent NGO working globally to promote the freedom, pluralism and independence of journalism. Fighting against censorship and providing support to journalists and media outlets persecuted because of their activities, RSF defends an essential pillar of democracy.

With consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), RSF is an independent organisation based in Paris. Strong with 6 sections abroad, bureaux in 7 cities, 4 representatives and network of correspondents in 130 countries, RSF has a strong potential to mobilise, alert on issues related to the freedom of the press and the protection of journalists and media professionals.

### **Context of the call for tender**

The rise of Big Tech, opaque algorithms, disinformation and countless external factors erode news consumption rates, revenue streams, audience shares, due prominence online, overall trust and more fundamentals of professional news organizations. Taking the issue from an economic perspective, we put news organizations in the context of a free market in which they severely lack competitive advantages and in which there is a structural lack of incentives.

This is why RSF organized the creation of the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), an [industry benchmark with 18 criteria](#) that helps professional publishers distinguish themselves and provide official assurance of their professionalism and commitment to ethical standards – by showing who they are, how they work and their commitment to high ethical standards – through ISO certification. The JTI puts forth a way to remedy not just these symptoms but the root causes of disinformation and the declining state of the news publishing industry. RSF initiated its development in 2018 with 130 media experts from around the world, under the aegis of the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) which published the standard as CEN Workshop Agreement [CWA 17493](#) in December 2019.

From a public policy perspective, ISO standards are used as self-regulatory references wherever there is a regulatory void. They are also used to better existing regulations and to shape upcoming legislation. RSF advocated and successfully inserted a specific [reference to the JTI in the European Union's upcoming Media Freedom Act](#) (the so-called EMFA).

From a business perspective, ISO standards are a sort of common denominator between all actors of one same market. In this case, tech platforms ([like Microsoft](#)), brands and

marketers, news aggregators, distributors, funders, philanthropies, media development organizations and so many others have a growing interest in making sure that the news organizations they work with can demonstrate their best effort to implement the 18 criteria of the JTI.

For the JTI to be successful, an industry-wide adoption is mandatory. RSF puts at the disposal of news organizations a free online tool on [www.jti-app.com](http://www.jti-app.com) for them to start an internal assessment of their processes until they are ready for an external audit and, if positive, receive an official certification. In May 2025, JTI tracked over 2 000 media outlets that registered on this platform to start the process. A great majority of them need support and mentorship to build capacity, save time and maximize their chances to achieve the JTI certification.

The JTI Fast Track Program aims to address their challenges and to increase the JTI's global footprint.

### **Purpose of the call for tender**

The purpose of this Call for Tender is to identify a Service Provider who have expertise in the specific media landscape, in training and capacity building programs for journalists and media. The Service Provider of the JTI Fast Track Program will play a crucial role in connecting RSF to participating media outlets and in facilitating actionable data, insights and opportunities to push for an effective adoption of the JTI.

The JTI Fast Track Program was first launched [in Ukraine in partnership with NewsGuard](#) and has been replicated [in Argentina with SembraMedia](#), in Nigeria and Benin with MDI and more countries.

This Call for Tender does not constitute a promise of award of the future contract to any applicant company. The Contract between RSF and the chosen service provider(s) will be a service contract governed by French laws.

### **Estimated services of the contract**

As part of this call for tenders, two distinct lots are proposed:

- **Lot 1:** Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo

Description of the services:

- Nominate from 5 to 15 media outlets to then be recommended by local and international partners such as NGOs, media development organizations, press or publishers associations, academics and any other trusted intermediary. The final list will be vetted and agreed upon by both RSF and the Service Provider;
- Outreach selected media outlets to promote the program and confirm their interest in participating in it;

- Working closely with the selected media outlets to collect the necessary data to assess the media outlet with the 18 criteria of the JTI, all done for each media outlet via a questionnaire online on [www.jti-app.com](http://www.jti-app.com);
  - Support the media outlet with the necessary tools, documents and trainings or mentorings for them to be able to implement any of the missing criteria;
  - Assist media outlets throughout the process until they publish, themselves, the JTI Transparency Report that results from the internal assessment phase;
  - Internal communication: RSF and the Service Provider will communicate on a recurrent basis on the progress, pain points, successes and any topic for a flawless implementation of the program;
  - External communication: the Service Provider will organize group sessions (ideally in person or online) with all participating media outlets, a representative of RSF and any stakeholder that has vested interests in the overall goals of the JTI; RSF and the Service Provider will promote the JTI Fast Track Program to their respective audiences, in their respective languages, via press releases, posts on social networks or any of their communication platforms.
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- **Lot 2:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro

Description of the services:

1. Nominate from 5 to 15 media outlets to then be recommended by local and international partners such as NGOs, media development organizations, press or publishers associations, academics and any other trusted intermediary. The final list will be vetted and agreed upon by both RSF and the Service Provider;
2. Outreach selected media outlets to promote the program and confirm their interest in participating in it;
3. Working closely with the selected media outlets to collect the necessary data to assess the media outlet with the 18 criteria of the JTI, all done for each media outlet via a questionnaire online on [www.jti-app.com](http://www.jti-app.com);
4. Support media outlet with the necessary tools, documents and trainings or mentorings for them to be able to implement any of the missing criteria;
5. Assist media outlets throughout the process until they publish, themselves, the JTI Transparency Report that results from the internal assessment phase;
6. Internal communication: RSF and the Service Provider will communicate on a recurrent basis on the progress, pain points, successes and any topic for a flawless implementation of the program;
7. External communication: the Service Provider will organize group sessions (ideally in person or online) with all participating media outlets, a representative of RSF and any stakeholder that has vested interests in the overall goals of the JTI; RSF and the Service Provider will promote the JTI Fast Track Program to their respective audiences, in their respective languages, via press releases, posts on social networks or any of their communication platforms.

Estimated term: 2 months non-renewable, unless an exception is made by written agreement between the various parties of the contract.

Applicants may choose to apply for one or both lots.

For each lot, the proposal may cover all countries included in the lot, or add a specific focus. In the latter case, the choice of focus must be clearly justified in the technical proposal, based on the applicant's expertise, capacities, or strategic approach.

Regardless of whether one or two service providers are awarded the contracts, a minimum of 15 transparency reports must be collected from media outlets across both lots combined. The target of 15 reports is a cumulative requirement and does not apply separately to each lot. If a single provider is awarded both lots, they are responsible for collecting a total of 15 reports. If two different providers are selected (one per lot), they will share the responsibility of reaching the combined target of 15 reports. Depending on the offers received, RSF will arbitrate on the final number of transparency reports each service provider will be responsible for.

### **Estimated deliverables and due dates**

- Deliverable 1
  - Pre-selection of media outlets and recommendation by partners
  - Due date: No later than 2 weeks before the start date of the JTI Fast Track Program.
- Deliverable 2
  - Schedule and agenda for the dedicated support and mentoring program, including:
    - introductory sessions to present the main goals and milestones of the JTI Fast Track program;
    - ongoing support sessions for RSF to interact with media outlets and vice versa;
    - training and mentoring sessions to cater to specific needs expressed by media outlets or identified by the Service Provider;
    - any other session deemed necessary by the Service Provider, with the presence or not of RSF.
  - Due date: No later than 2 weeks before the start date of the JTI Fast Track Program.
- Deliverable 3
  - Any material deemed necessary throughout the whole duration of the JTI Fast Track Program, such as:
    - educational materials on key journalistic principles (e.g.: accuracy and fact-based communication; independence from political, corporate or other centers of power; due impartiality in a systematic approach to reporting and editing; fairness, respect and consideration of the impact of journalism on the lives of others; transparency to facilitate accountability and responsibility to the public)
    - model materials such as, and not limited to, editorial guidelines, privacy policies, staff or freelancer handbook, etc.
    - Any other material.

- Due date: No later than 1 week after RSF's request. The Service Provider is encouraged to produce them at any time throughout the program.
- Deliverable 4
  - Activity report, which consists of:
    - the JTI Transparency Report of each participating media outlet;
    - a brief qualitative report by the Service Provider on the collaboration with each media outlet and on their readiness for the external audit for the JTI certification.
  - Due date: No later than 2 weeks after the publication of the last JTI Transparency Report.

### Estimated Deliverables and Indicative Due Dates

Deliverable	Description	Deadline
Deliverable 1	Pre-selection of media outlets and recommendation by partners	Beginning of June
Deliverable 2	Schedule and agenda for the support and mentoring program	Beginning of June
Deliverable 3	Production of supporting materials	Within 1 week of RSF's request, and proactively from June 1 to July 31, 2025
Deliverable 4	Final Activity Report	By July 31

### **Total estimated value**

The maximum amount allocated per media outlet is set at 1 050 euros, and the maximum amount of the contract(s) shall not exceed 15 750 euros for both lots combined, tax included.

### **Location of the mission**

There is no specific requirement regarding the location of the service provider. However, participating media outlets who benefit from this project shall be based preferably in the targeted countries listed.

### **Application**

Applications can be written in English/French and must include:

- A technical proposal (max 2 A4 pages) clearly stating for which lot the application is referring to as well as the countries targeted by the proposal, with the estimated total amount of participating media outlets, the methodology and with examples of training and mentoring sessions from the Service Provider's experience;
- The résumés of each person that will work on the JTI Fast Track Program;
- A quotation detailing the unit price (price per participating media outlet) and the total price, tax included.

Please send the application to [jti@rsf.org](mailto:jti@rsf.org) by the 30/05/2025 EOB at the latest. Applications will be reviewed and considered on a rolling basis until this call of tender is closed, though early applications are strongly encouraged. Incomplete application will not be studied.

**Selection of proposals**

- Criteria 1 – Technical value (80%), evenly split between:
  - Technical proposal
  - Methodology and processes
  - Relevant professional experience
  - Existing network of news organizations
- Criteria 2 – Pecuniary value (20%)