

\$2.50 for AFP's reputation? Fact-checking success built on precarity

Fact-checking has become a major activity for AFP and management regularly points to it as a success story. Revenue has grown quickly from €750,000 six years ago before it was for the first time explicitly made part of our public interest mission in the 2019-2023 Aims and Means Contract (COM) to €11.6 million last year. CEO Fabrice Fries made it one of three strategic priorities in his plan for 2023-2028, and according to management, fact-checking is a profitable activity. But the 2023 and 2024 global Teams Q&A sessions revealed discontent within the ranks of our fact-checkers over them being stuck on precarious short-term contracts.

SUD-AFP decided to speak with fact-checkers in different parts of the world. What we found is that working conditions vary greatly, with those working on our contract with TikTok in the most precarious situation. Many had working conditions closer to stringers than CDDs. Most we spoke with still had minimum monthly revenue guarantees but said these deals were being phased out, and some complained they had little possibility to take days off to attend to their personal affairs.

We also found that the TikTok fact-checks are quite different from what we publish on our public website (<https://factcheck.afp.com/>) and on client websites. They are just a brief summary of the assertion made in a TikTok video and whether or not it is misinformation, followed by several links to information backing up the conclusion. These are not published but submitted directly to TikTok, making this activity more akin to content moderation than journalism.

The pay varies considerably between countries with the lowest rate we found being \$2.50 per fact-check. Most said the pay is reasonable for the time spent on the fact-checks. But that is where the problem is. They are under pressure – both managerial and financial – to spend no more than 10 minutes on each fact-check. This piece-work system is reminiscent of a sweatshop and is antithetical to AFP's commitment to quality. Management insists that these TikTok fact-checks meet our editorial standards yet we found that in the Asia-Pacific region they are being submitted to TikTok by stringers without review by editors, despite this operation being run from AFP. This lack of editorial control is not only a breach of standards but it creates reputational risks – TikTok had us fact-check assertions it funnels user information to Beijing. This is not only a financial conflict of interest but one that puts us smack in the middle of a political minefield with a commercial client on one side and Western governments on the other, including our financial sponsor France. This situation is insupportable and SUD-AFP has requested the Higher Council order our TikTok fact-checks be transferred to our subsidiary, which already does content moderation for Meta.

We welcome Global News Director Phil Chetwynd's promise during the last Teams town hall to increase training opportunities for fact-checkers so they can take on text or video roles. But this is not enough. Information provided to trade unions made clear that permanent contracts are only for those who already have proven

text or video skills. This is unacceptable for a profitable activity that is a strategic priority. AFP has to take on the risks of paying severance benefits in the case it loses a fact-checking contract otherwise we are profiting from precarity.

If you want to learn more about the working conditions of TikTok fact-checkers, you can read our full report [here](#).

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SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

