

# KOSOVO



## Vibrant Information Barometer

2 0 2 1



Highly Vibrant

Somewhat Vibrant

Slightly Vibrant

Not Vibrant

OVERALL  
SCORE

24

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most significant news stories in Kosovo, political drama attracted most of the media's attention. In the course of 2020, Kosovo had three prime ministers. When former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned from his post and snap elections were called, it was Albin Kurti who formed the new government on February 3, 2020. However, by March 25, Kurti's government was ousted from the parliament in a no-confidence vote. Kurti called the move against him a coup, citing pressure from U.S. Special Envoy Richard Grenell to sign an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia.

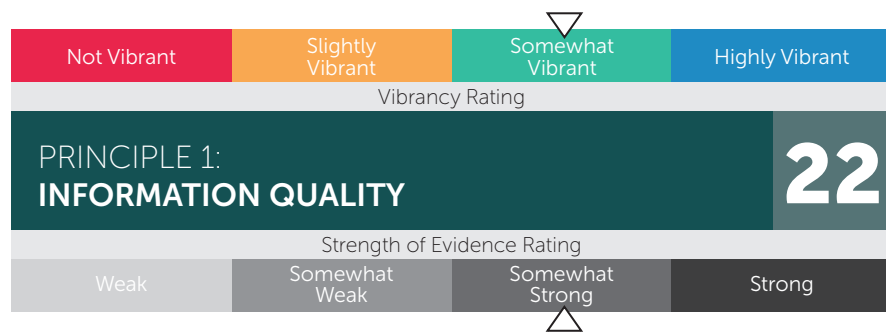
In September 2020, the economic normalization agreement was signed by Kurti's successor, Avdullah Hoti, and Serbian President Aleksandr Vučić at the White House in Washington, D.C. This agreement established, among other things, the basis for more unrestricted travel between the two countries, work with the U.S. Export-Import Bank and the International Development Finance Corporation, and joining the Mini Schengen Zone. Kosovo's president, Hashim Thaçi, however, did not participate in the ceremony, as he had resigned due to war-crime accusations by the UN International Court of Justice. Kadri Veseli, leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, and other prominent figures of the former Kosovo Liberation Army, have been accused of similar charges.

Kosovo's media significantly fueled both the pandemic and political crises. Panel participants said that the media sector has seen an increase in harmful content, including misinformation and fake news related to the spread of

coronavirus in particular, spread through all sorts of media channels.

Kosovo's overall country score of 24 shows that it falls close to the mid-range of VIBE scores when measuring information openness, factuality, professionalism, and economic sustainability. A further analysis of Kosovo's scores indicates that Principles 1 (information quality) and 3 (information consumption and engagement) received the lowest scores, underlining that the media and information sectors have not managed to adhere fully to international standards for information quality.

Despite their criticism on how information is produced, panelists gave higher scores to Principle 2 (how information flows) and Principle 4 (transformative action). These results suggest that consumers have experienced no restrictions, political or otherwise, with creating, sharing, or consuming information. Moreover, online media have increased rapidly, spurring a diversity of information channels. These information flows, however, do not mean that most citizens of Kosovo have the skills and tools necessary for media literacy. Panelists pointed out that such shortcomings leave consumers susceptible to fake news.



Panelists agreed that Kosovan media offer quality information on a variety of topics and that the mainstream outlets produce information based on facts. However, the panelists also expressed the belief that mal-information and hate speech are quite present among media organizations. The lowest score of all 20 indicators was given to the VIBE indicator on resources for content production, suggesting that media produce a large amount of news without sufficient resourcing. This trend is especially present in emerging online media that produce single-source news.

Kosovo has built an adequate infrastructure to deliver varied content (including print, broadcast, and digital media), and the country has journalism schools and training programs available. Still, producers are inadequately versed on creating ethical, evidence-based, and coherent content, and major violations of ethical standards abound at media organizations. Media members face no professional ramifications for producing content that does not meet these standards, apart from warnings and occasional fines issued by the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

Reporters do not adhere to basic professional standards. Their coverage is based on preliminary facts surrounding an issue, so the construction of articles remains problematic. One panelist noted that online media tend to favor the short and fast approach. Reports are not driven by facts but rather by politicians or institutions making single statements or declarations. This practice results in articles lacking adequate sources, contextualization, or explanation of the issues at hand.

Although most media faced financial crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, new online and broadcast media continue to emerge in Kosovo. The number of private televisions increased when K10 and ATV entered the market. These outlets have diversified broadcast and digital media in particular. However, the quality of information remains just as low.

Kosovo has an increasing number of fact-checking organizations; however, only Krypometri is certified by the International Fact-Checking Network.

Education institutions provide a number of training opportunities that target young journalists and focus more on an overview of journalistic production. Programs tailored to contemporary digital needs are lacking or insufficient. Panelists said that the dearth of good journalistic education prevents journalists from investigating harder topics or having larger impacts in their respective fields. Universities offer journalism programs, but only in Albanian.

Kosovan media cover a variety of topics, including political and social issues and local, national, regional, and international news. Panelists agreed that the reporting quality in the media has decreased. Traditional media, such as daily newspapers and terrestrial broadcast channels, have higher levels of editorial safeguards than newly established online media with little financial means. Online media mainly employ young and inexperienced journalists. One panelist pointed out a new-media habit: publish first and fact-check later.

The media landscape is inclusive of all communities and represents the ethnic composition of the Kosovan population. In addition to Albanian media, Kosovo has Serbian, Turkish, Bosnian, and Roma outlets. Specific groups, such as religious communities, have their own radio and television channels. However, minority media lack proper infrastructure and signal coverage. Hardly any Serbian-language TV stations fully cover Kosovo’s territory. For example, the Serbian cable channel RTK2 is not offered in northern Kosovo, which is mostly populated by Serbs, because no cable provider wants to carry it. Another local TV station in Serbian, RTV Mir from Leposavić, has been completely taken off program lists of



private cable companies and cannot be viewed.

Most Serbian-language media are registered as nonprofit organizations, with international and local donors providing their operational funds. Some also have a business registration, but due to the limited advertising market, these media organizations cannot function fully on profits. Their operations are impaired by constantly having to fundraise and by implementing activities not necessarily related to daily reporting. Some Albanian publications, such as the daily *Koha Ditore*, are employing alternative means of profit making, such as subscriptions for online editions. However, media currently do not practice this widely.

Many online content producers will produce misleading titles with little information reported the article. Panelists observed the tendency of media to produce more and more provocative content, rather than content in the public interest. Nearly every day, online media report stories with improper source citations or completely without citations. Only some online media hyperlink original sources for information or photos.

Ethical standards protecting the privacy of ordinary citizens are often violated. *Gazeta Sinjali* committed one of the most serious ethical violations at the beginning of 2020, when it published the names and birth dates of approximately 200 COVID-19 patients who were ordered to be quarantined in North Mitrovica and Zvecan. The paper's decision prompted reactions from local and international media associations.

The Kosovo Press Council, a self-regulatory body for print and online media, and IMC, a public body that licenses and oversees broadcast media, have addressed numerous violations of reporting standards. IMC has also issued warnings to its licensed broadcasters for violating different aspects of its code. IMC is monitored by its own board of directors, with the parliament appointing board members. However, some panelists expressed the belief that appointments are highly politicized, serving only the interest of parties in power.

Panelists agreed that elderly people are more susceptible to fake news because they are less able to distinguish it from factual media. In 2020, most of the false published information was related to COVID-19's causes

and treatment. The public broadcaster RTK reported from an anonymous source that patient zero in Kosovo was a Russian UN employee working in northern Kosovo. The UN mission in Kosovo denied the claim. Another issue is that the government failed to offer information in each local language on its anti-COVID-19 measures. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Ministry of Health and the Institute for Public Health did not provide timely information in non-Albanian languages, even though the former Minister of Health Arben Vitia sometimes addressed the Serb audience in the Serbian language directly.

There is a worrying trend involving foreign governments creating and disseminating information in Kosovo that is intended to upset the ethnic and religious balances in the country. Additionally, both professional and non-professional content producers put out (intentionally or unintentionally) dis-information and hate speech. There are no serious consequences for doing it. However, there is no evidence that media outlets work together with non-governmental groups to create or disseminate information intended to harm.

In terms of social diversity, the mainstream media are not inclusive

#### Information Quality Indicators

- There is quality information on a variety of topics available.
- The norm for information is that it is based on facts. Misinformation is minimal.
- The norm for information is that it is not intended to harm. Mal-information and hate speech are minimal.
- The body of content overall is inclusive and diverse.
- Content production is sufficiently resourced.

in their coverage, particularly pertaining to ethnic or LGBTQI groups; however, marginalized groups have some alternative platforms to express their views. Although women own some of the largest media organizations, the mainstream media are male-dominated and male-led institutions, and this is reflected in perspectives and approaches to coverage. Nonprofessional producers—particularly social media users and bloggers—have more women present. Regarding the issue of diversity in news topics, most professional and semiprofessional media

organizations report on political issues, devoting little attention to stories related to health, culture, education, local news, or community development.

Some media outlets publish or broadcast information that is inadequately sourced or that does not fairly cover the position on all sides. Media have grown accustomed to quoting widespread social media posts, often from public officials or political figures, in a push to publish time-sensitive or exclusive information. These posts are often unreliable or are used in a different context. For example, if a politician attacks an opponent in a Facebook post, media with close ties to this politician will publish the comments without asking the person under attack for a response.

Panelists also pointed to problems with the rule of law. Defamation lawsuits languish in the courts for many years, and according to the panelists, most judges feel that they might become targets of media attacks and are afraid to rule against the media. Panelists have spoken of the immunity against defamation that political elites enjoy, even though the same people are often the sources of mal-information.

The Kosovan government does not intentionally publish harmful information, but the media commonly lodge complaints over the government's restricting access to public documents. Some media even exercise the right to report to the Ombudsperson Institution of Kosovo (OIK) or directly sue the institutions. Resolving cases of defamation via the justice system is problematic. According to OIK, a court case in Kosovo requires an average of eight years to be resolved.

As a multiethnic society, Kosovo has challenges with providing information in several languages. The print media are divided linguistically between those that publish in Albanian and those that publish in Serbian. This rift is reflected in the topics they cover and the space they provide for members of the other community to express opinions. The news stories produced in Albanian rarely feature Serb

citizens as interviewees; likewise, stories produced in the Serbian language rarely include Albanian voices.

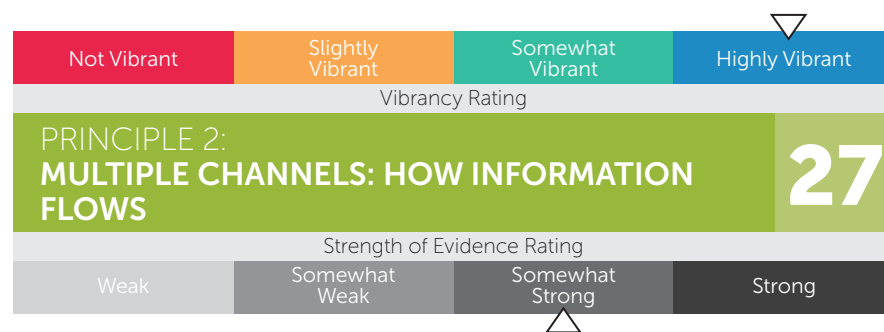
The media sector has a shortage of female analysts and commentators on everyday issues, including those of the LGBTQI community. Panelists pointed out that IMC is doing more to advance licensing media outlets launched by women. The government does not disseminate media grants; however, it uses profitable public companies such as the postal service and telecommunication facilities to finance pro-government media. Most companies that advertise in the media benefit from public contracts, in effect penalizing critical media outlets due to the financiers' favoring.

**Panelists observed the tendency of media to produce more and more provocative content, rather than content in the public interest.**

Panelists expressed the view that professional content producers do not have sufficient financial sources to output high-quality information. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which advertisers cancelled contracts. Due to COVID, newspapers have ceased their print editions, although they are still publishing online; additionally, some broadcast media restructured to introduce major operational shifts, such as integrating print, online, and television newsrooms into one, leading to staff layoffs. Budgetary diversification would allow professional content producers to be more resilient amid economic strains. Local advertising revenue does not necessarily stay in the local market. Instead, advertisers funnel their spending into national media and international social media companies, such as Facebook. Local content producers are not heavily engaged in identifying alternative sources of income, other than international donors supporting media development through international NGOs which has increased.

While salaries in the majority of media companies tend to remain average, journalists have no financial security, as they are employed through short-term contracts. A 2016 study showed that more than 85 percent of journalists in Kosovo were temporary contractors, preventing them from getting loans and credit cards. According to the panelists, journalists feel that they are easily replaceable, particularly

with new entrants to the market. Journalists do not necessarily have the opportunity to earn extra income, as many media managers disallow their journalists from producing for other publications. Journalists' welfare also deteriorated during the pandemic crisis, when many companies canceled their advertising contracts. However, the government offered a little financial help to the media community through the Emergency Fiscal Package, which funded direct subsidies to private-media employees.



Generally, the legal infrastructure provides good protection for sources and whistleblowers—one of the reasons why this principle was rated the highest. The constitution firmly guarantees freedom of information, and the parliament has adopted laws to protect freedom of press, such as the Law on Access to Public Documents, the Law on Protection of Journalism Sources, and the Law on Protection of Whistleblowers. However, one panelist stated that journalists have a very poor understanding of legal frameworks.

The government does not censor media, but some media self-censor, fearing that they will lose advertising from public companies and private businesses aligned with the government. Journalists are aware of the editorial stance they need to pursue—that is, the media company's political position. Self-censorship is more or less agreed upon and applied from the moment a journalist joins a media outlet that has certain political leanings.

Channels of communication are diverse. While traditional media such as television remain the most trusted, online media are catching up as

primary news and information sources. The government uses its own communication channels, including mainstream public outlets and the prime minister's Facebook and Twitter accounts. However, panelists said that the state needs to increase availability of government information in all local languages, especially with news related to COVID-19.

Panelists agreed that citizens have the right to create, share, and consume information. In addition to its constitution, Kosovo has a number of laws that aim to protect freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Officials enforce most provisions equally across a diverse citizenry.

Panelists acknowledged that law content is sufficiently updated, but they pointed out that some laws are not implemented properly. The Law on Access to Official Documents is one example. The government and municipal institutions in general are reluctant to provide information on issues related to budget spending, even though that information is public under the law. Access to public documents and information was particularly fragile in 2020, in the context of the pandemic and the political turmoil that saw a government fall amid heightened political tensions. All of these upheavals have created an environment where government and other institutional representatives have found it easier to not respond to requests for information, nor straightforward requests for interviews or comments.

Although some panelists said that the environment for journalists is safe, incidents continue to be reported. The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AGK) is quick to issue public statements condemning incidents in which journalists, reporters, or camera operators face verbal or physical attacks. Some of the journalists that were physically assaulted

#### Multiple Channels Indicators

- People have rights to create, share, and consume information.
- People have adequate access to channels of information.
- There are appropriate channels for government information.
- There are diverse channels for information flow.
- Information channels are independent.

during 2020 included Valon Sylja, Diamant Bajra, Nebi Maxhuni, Arsim Rexhepi, and Nenad Milenkovic. Other incidents include journalist Shkumbin Kajtazi's car almost being set on fire, and police detaining journalist Tatjana Llazareviq for violating curfew even though she showed them her press identification. AGK has reported that a number of prominent journalists have received threats.

Kosovo's laws protecting whistleblowers and the confidentiality of sources are very good on paper, but the problem is their implementation—lawsuits on defamation and incitement of hate take many years to be resolved. Kosovo has no criminal libel laws that could be used to indict citizens or journalists for openly expressing opinions or for their news coverage. Yet a new form of intimidation is taking place: Private companies are using strategic lawsuits to quell public participation by suing human rights activists and demanding large sums of money.

Information and communication technology have improved greatly over the years, evolving to meet the needs of people with disabilities, people who are illiterate, and people who speak ethnic languages. Most of Kosovo's territory is now covered by an internet and cable infrastructure, extending to all urban and rural geographic areas. Internet penetration is above 92 percent, and cable providers have reached almost all corners of the country. The majority of people throughout Kosovo have the economic means to access most information channels, including digital and social media.

Kosovo has no social, ethnic, or religious norms that preclude any community from accessing information. Internet governance provides open and equal access to users and content producers. However, not all information is available in the languages of Kosovo's multiple ethnic communities. Consumers have a variety of channels for accessing government information. Public media provide live coverage of parliamentary sessions and of key government information presentations.

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Kosovo's laws conform to international standards and norms and guarantee the right to information. However, panelists expressed the belief that these laws are not implemented in timely or comprehensive ways. The state offers tools for public access to governmental policy and decision-making information, including online mechanisms. However, ordinary citizens rarely use these tools—not out of fear of seeking out information, but because many are reluctant to ask for it due to lack of knowledge about what public information is as well as lack of trust in the transparency of public institutions. Often, media organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) are the entities seeking to access public information.

Government officials have spokespersons or information offices, but these liaisons rarely give information or take questions from the press. Immediate and crucial matters that demand a public response are usually addressed by public officials, such as the president or prime minister. Panelists have also expressed concerns about government spokespersons reliably telling the truth to the press and the public. Parliament members refuse to appear on TV to repeat what they declared in the parliament. The political discourse in parliament among opposing political parties is quite contentious and produces many media headlines.

Transparency in media ownership transparency is low, despite laws that require it. Information for media ownership is available but is hard to find for the average citizen. Media distribution channels are not strictly monopolized, but a small number of conglomerates do dominate the market.

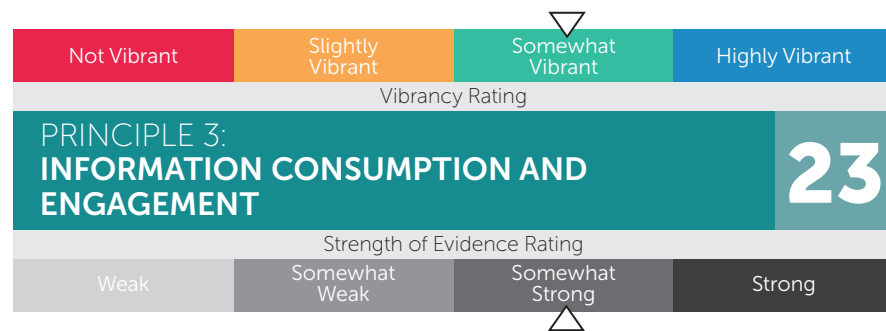
By law, the freedom to establish media is guaranteed, and the process for spectrum allocation is fair and transparent. License holders usually renew every few years, with IMC managing licensing procedures. In practice, however, governmental regulatory bodies overseeing frequency allocations, licenses, and telecommunications services are political. Even the members of regulatory bodies with oversight of media or



information and communication technology structures are politically appointed.

Public service media produce informative and educational news to some degree, but they do not provide fair coverage to all political parties, as the Law on Public Broadcasting requires. The public broadcaster is financed directly from the state budget, therefore jeopardizing its editorial and institutional independence. In one positive, public television provided online learning materials prepared by the Ministry of Education during the pandemic crisis when schools were closed.

Internet service providers are nonpartisan and do not discriminate based on users or content. The same cannot be said for cable providers; they decide which channels to include and leave out. Funding sources—including advertising revenue and owners’ investments in media outlets—dictate editorial stance to a high degree. Government subsidies or advertising contracts also influence editorial independence. Further, panelists said that they see no clear distinction between newsroom operations and business operations for professional content producers. It is common to see the general director of a television company appear as an analyst on live news editions or talk shows.



In a broader societal scope, Kosovans have little information on digital security and poor understanding of its importance. Media members have not had formal training or informal experience in digital security. While younger populations are aware of how algorithms drive social media content, older groups are more prone to fall prey to fake news and misinformation. Overall, panelists agreed that Kosovans do not

have sufficient media literacy skills, and panelists gave this indicator the lowest of all scores in this survey.

One panelist argued that educational organizations offer some good initiatives on media information education and media literacy, but the focus is on the wrong participants. Most training targets journalists that actually produce the news, but it should target educators and teachers instead, the panelist said.

Schools across different levels have not embraced media literacy courses as part of mandatory curricula. While there are media literacy courses in Kosovo, they mainly target young people and students, with very few media literacy efforts directed toward adults. Few Kosovans show initiative in working with educational groups and learning to be more discerning with media. Still, organizations continue to assist citizens in increasing critical knowledge in the ways that texts and media messaging establish or promote certain value systems.

Kosovo’s legal protections for data privacy and digital security are enforced in a way that does not impinge on personal freedoms. However, media outlets and other professional content producers have failed to engage enough with digital security training and tools. Media companies’ digital hygiene practices are insufficient as a result, leaving their websites vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Individual consumers can freely access technology-based tools that help protect their privacy and security. But panelists said that they have not seen much evidence that the population has basic digital and data literacy skills, such as the workings of digital technology

### Information Consumption and Engagement Indicators

- People can safely use the internet due to privacy protections and security tools.
- People have the necessary skills and tools to be media literate.
- People engage productively with the information that is available to them.
- Media and information producers engage with their audience’s needs.
- Community media provides information relevant for community engagement.



and digital security. Further, panelists said that they are not convinced that the population is aware of the algorithms driving social media, the mechanics of advertisement targeting, and other ways in which personal information is enlisted to target digital users.

Although awareness is growing on internet danger—particularly spreading disinformation and endangering individuals’ privacy—Kosovans have little knowledge of how to protect themselves. Attacks on media websites are common, and some website owners contract out cybersecurity services. Another problem is that Kosovo does not possess a country-level domain, so all government addresses are .com or .org and therefore more easily targeted by hackers. According to the panelists, people are highly concerned with their personal banking information when they apply to withdraw their private pension savings. Due to the pandemic-related financial crisis, the government passed a law that allowed citizens to withdraw 10 percent of their own savings from the Kosovo Pension Saving Fund. When the system was open for application, cybersecurity experts warned that the personal data may be under attack.

Kosovo has freedom of speech, but public discussion of more sensitive issues remains problematic. In 2020, Shkelzen Gashi—a human rights activist who briefly served as an adviser to former Prime Minister Kurti—was sacked from his advisory position. The removal stemmed from the enormous negative public reaction following Gashi’s statement that individual Kosovo Liberation Army fighters committed crimes during and after the war. In addition, Gashi remains a target of online assaults, including personal threats. His case has led to CSOs widely reacting in support for his free speech, although as the panelists pointed out, Kosovo’s fragile public sphere still can organize attacks when certain opinions are considered to be against “established truths.”

Kosovans enjoy a variety of quality public debates and discussions due to an active civil society. Multiple online public debates persisted during the COVID-19 lockdown and government responses. However, these debates were not organized by the government. Citizens also have

platforms such as town halls for public debate. These meetings tend to be more popular in bigger cities, where more citizens participate. In smaller towns, fewer people take part.

The media sector does not conduct credible market research, nor do individual media outlets. As such, they have little to no information regarding the audience’s needs or interests, or what topics the audience considers to be of public interest.

Media staff have little communication or feedback with their audiences. Any communication is generally limited to comments on social media, and these platforms do not always serve to engage discussion between the public and editorial teams. Therefore, open digital communications are generally characterized by unhealthy debates, misinformation, mal-information, and hate speech. Panelists noted an increasing tendency for people to report such content to the police, and they say that OIK

addresses the complaints it receives in a fair and balanced way. Only certain media—especially those that are funded from international donors—take steps to build audience trust, such as transparency in authorship and reporting methods and in publishing corrections.

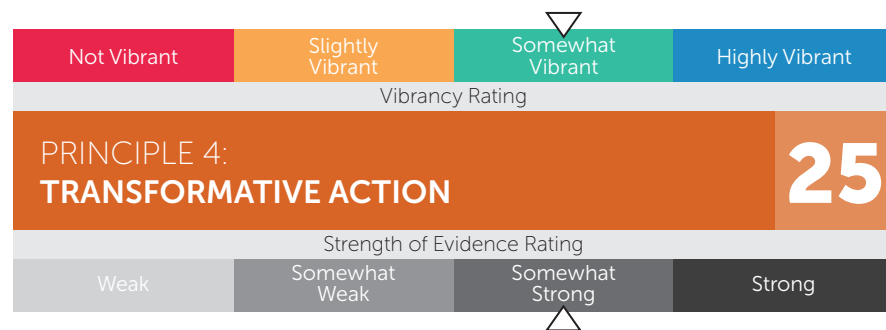
Journalistic media and CSOs regularly collaborate for productive information sharing, while accepting and considering feedback from one another. The cooperation between CSOs and media is adequate, and CSOs invest in communication strategies as well as personal relations with media representatives. Media-CSO partnerships in research projects are also common.

Online media provide space for readers’ reactions, and comment sections are widely available, either directly on the website or via social media platforms.

Community media are not recognized as such in Kosovo, although some outlets—mostly youth initiatives—could be described as community resources. These include sites created by CSO activists for debates or blogs and portals led by journalism students. Recently, Kosovo

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has seen a positive increase of a variety of smaller media outlets that serve as community media, including Perspektiva of Foundation 17, dylberzimi, QIKA, and Gazeta. They are a combination of journalistic and new-media platforms and they target and respond to the needs of specific societal groups. These outlets include feminist, youth-oriented, or LGBTQI platforms. Their initiatives are filling in a gap in mainstream media, which rarely delve into marginalized communities or their issues.



The Kosovan media sphere has nonpartisan and quality news sources; however, they remain more the exception than the norm. While people engage in debate on social media platforms through exchange of comments, much of it is antagonistic debate. Meanwhile, TV debates seem to have particular influence over setting the public dialogue agenda. By and large, these debates are heavily opinionated or partisan discussions rather than fact-based analysis or commentary. Yet panelists scored this principle as the second highest; they gave high scores to Indicator 16 (information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines) and to Indicator 18 (civil society uses quality information to improve communities). Moreover, panelists agreed that distribution channels enable and encourage information sharing, and this in turn supports good governance and democratic rights. However, the panelists also noted that the government does not rely enough on quality of information to make public policy decisions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed just how susceptible citizens of Kosovo are to conspiracy theories. According to a survey by the

Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group and Ipsos, around 80 percent of citizens believe a variety of falsehoods with regard to COVID-19: that it was created by the Chinese government, that it came from a lab in Wuhan, that it is a biological weapon of the United States, and so on. Among many factors for believing in such theories is the lack of public trust in government and public institutions. This absence of trust has driven broad disregard for following fact-based health and safety recommendations throughout Kosovo. Through their own actions, public institutions--especially the national government and the parliament--have undermined their appeals to people to respect social distancing and other public health measures. At various points, the president convened meetings with political party leaders to discuss changes in the government cabinet, and political parties organized street assemblies that disregarded public health recommendations. Taken together, this has further decreased citizens' trust in government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

Still, the diversity of media and information outlets allows consumers to read or view multiple types of media with varied ideological leanings. People engage with others with whom they disagree through in-person forums, such as town hall meetings; or through digital forums, such as social media platforms or comment sections. The Albanian community has a more developed culture of debate, but those discussions are mostly built around assumptions, rather than data and evidence. Panelists said that any fact-based or well-evidenced discussions are usually led by CSO representatives.

Some people's views on political and social issues are shaped primarily by quality information, and citizens rely on these sources more when electing political parties. Although it is hard to prove, panelists said that the misinformation circulated during election campaigns has an influence on people's views.

CSOs produce high-quality, reliable, and credible work, and CSOs and the media have a cooperative relationship. The media report on the work of CSOs; in turn, the media use the work and findings of CSOs to initiate more substantial journalistic investigations. Panelists said that CSOs do a good job in monitoring government and institutions,

### Transformative Action Indicators

- Information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines.
- Individuals use quality information to inform their actions.
- Civil society uses quality information to improve communities.
- Government uses quality information to make public policy decisions.
- Information supports good governance and democratic rights.

in providing feedback and analysis to legislative changes, and in advocating for such changes. CSOs reference high-quality investigative reports conducted within Kosovo when they call for policy changes or corporate reforms, and they integrate quality news and facts in explaining their mission and objectives. These organizations also share quality information with the public as part of their missions and do not disseminate misinformation or mal-information. However, CSOs have limited capacities to fight the spread of these ailments.

Media outlets actively engage with civil society to cover socially important issues. However,

citizen participation in key decisions (such as policy formation and legislative change) is not very evident, the panelists reported.

According to public polls, citizens consider most CSOs valuable and reliable sources of information. Panelists also held the view that CSOs in Prishtina are more credible and have stronger research capacities. Outside the capital city, CSOs are dependent on municipal funds; as a result, they often become instruments of the daily politics in their respective municipalities.

Many legislative initiatives are spearheaded by CSOs, but government officials and members of parliament rarely acknowledge this. Rather, elected officials tend to participate in conferences organized by CSOs. One panelist pointed out a new practice: At times, government officials leak information to media outlets allied with them and then leverage this same information to attack a political opponent through the media.

In cases when information sources reveal corruption, the government does not always respond swiftly. The panelists expressed a shared belief that quality information can have a cooling effect on government corruption. A prevalence of factual information can prevent or lower the incidence and severity of corruption among state and local officials, but the justice system is still slow to act. When information sources report on human rights violations, the government does respond appropriately, usually by issuing a press release or a Facebook post. When information sources identify civil liberty violations, the government faces pressure to remedy the violations.

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**LIST OF PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

**Abit Hoxha**, media researcher/consultant, Prishtina

**Ardita Zejnullahu**, Executive Director, Association of Kosovo Private Electronic Media, Prishtina

**Albert Spahiu**, journalist, Telegrafi.com, Prishtina

**Besa Luci**, Kosovo 2.0 Chief Editor, Prishtina

**Dren Gerguri**, lecturer, University of Prishtina, Prishtina

**Flutura Kusari**, media lawyer, Prishtina

**Gazmend Abrashi**, lecturer, AAB College, Fushe Kosove

**Goran Avramović**, Editor in Chief, RTV Kim, Čaglavica

**Kreshnik Gashi**, Managing Editor, Kallxo.com, Prishtina

**Milica Andrić**, Journalist, New Social Initiative, Zubin Potok

**AUTHOR**

**Jeton Mehmeti**, Research Director, GAP Institute, Prishtina

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