



# Communication and Information

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## First Legal Leaks training in Pristina empowers journalists to use access to information laws



Participants of the Legal Leaks Seminar in Pristina, June 2014. © UNESCO

**How is taxpayers' money being spent in a city? What are the plans for constructing a public hospital or a new school? Who received public contracts for building a new road or public infrastructure? Answers to those questions can be as interesting for readers, listeners and viewers as any story about political intrigue or international affairs. By using access to information laws, journalists can lead to strong everyday stories of high public interest.**

To help media professionals get information held by public bodies for their stories, a **Legal Leaks training** seminar was organized by UNESCO in cooperation with **Access Info Europe**, the **South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM)** and the **Press Council of Kosovo**. Around 30 participants joined the event, which took place on 2 and 3 June 2014 in Pristina, Kosovo (as defined under UN Security Resolution 1244).

The right to freedom of information is a fundamental human right. Behind it lays the idea that public bodies are elected by the people and sustained by taxpayers' funds. The public should therefore have a right to know how the power is being used and how that money is being spent. More generally, using access to information laws can invigorate and strengthen journalism, thereby contributing to improving the quality of public debates, increased public participation in decision-making, and thus more open and democratic societies.

During the seminar, journalists received a toolkit designed for journalists working in newspapers, radio and television, as well as bloggers, to access information held by public bodies and appeal refusals. The Legal Leaks Toolkit has been tailored to the local legislation and language by legal experts from **BIRN Kosovo** (The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network). Helen Darbshire, a trainer from Access Info Europe, emphasized that "journalists might need to change the culture in the newsroom and persuade editors that submitting an access to information request is not a waste of time but is actually a useful part of your journalistic activity."

On the second day, journalists were given a lecture by Ibrahim Berisha, Board Director of the Press Council of Kosovo, about the essentials of journalistic ethics. Participants were also trained to protect the confidentiality of their sources and discussed ethical dilemmas related to whistleblowing and leaking of information. A session was led by Access Info Europe with practical exercises on how to ensure the security of data and how to check the credibility of a whistleblower.

The event took place in the framework of the EU-UNESCO project "**Promoting Media Accountability in South East Europe and Turkey**", which started in January 2013. The training was the first in a series of local events that will take place in each of the project's target countries.

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