

Information landscape for key target groups in northern Cyprus

Do you have the legal right to know what information is held on your organisation by businesses or public authorities? Should you have that right in northern Cyprus?

Business Woman Association: "I do not know for sure. I do not think there is a legally recognised right to know, but I should have that right."

TCHRF, Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation: "Up to a certain point, I have that right. However, there should be more information. If I cannot reach the information, then I need to go to court and present a request for information as the subject matter of a case. I believe that apart from the right not to be subjected to torture and inhuman treatment, all the other rights can be limited one way or another."

KAYAD, Women's Organization for Community Development: "I have never personally tried to access information. But I suppose I have such a legal right. How difficult access might be probably depends on the institution holding the required information. For example it might be harder to get information from the Ministry of Interior or the Police, but one must be able to get information about oneself from the Tax Office."

YENİ ÇAĞ, on-line Turkish newspaper: "Apart from some basic information, the right to access information is not given in practice. This is due to the fact that even though this right is provided on paper, there is no legal regulation on what would happen if access is hindered. Bureaucrats sale whatever information they want to whomever they want."

Youth Camps Project, Mediation Association: "Yes. Even though I am not involved as much in managing organizations as I am involved in managing projects, it could be useful. It would also be interesting to see what information the secret police is holding on us. I have never tried to reach information so I am not sure whether I would have access. I do not know where to look for it. But I should have the right to access."

KGP, Cyprus Youth Platform: "We should [have that right] and we do. But I am doubtful whether or not we would succeed if we were to request information."

KTGB, Turkish Cypriot Journalists Association: "Under TRNC constitution and other legislation, we should and actually we have such a right. But there are bureaucratic barriers for the effective operation of this system. Personal contacts are generally the only effective way in accessing information."

FEMA, Feminist Atoliye: "As far as I know, the Management Centre is the only CSO keeping information on NGOs. Even if they [the government] do, this would constitute their own information bank. I do not believe there is any legislation regulating this. However, the very legislation regulating CSOs is of such an oppressive character, [that] it seems you will be required the permission of the Prime Minister to open any type of association. On the other hand, the right to access information regarding business organisations, whose sole purpose is to make profit, and the right to access information of public organisations [i.e. CSOs], that have as their purpose the public good, should be distinguished."

Yesil Baris Hareketi, Green Action Group: "How can [personal] information be regulated by law? If I need information relating to myself, I apply to myself."

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TDP, Turkish Cypriot Social Democratic Party: "There is not such a right. Even if it existed, the state bureaucracy would not implement it. Generally, they [public officials] enquire about the aim [of the request for information], or postpone it or just do not deal with it. There should be such a legal right."

Management Centre of the Mediterranean: "I do not know whether there is [such a] legislation. I believe it is nearly impossible. The Ministry of External Relations have prepared a report on us, but we only heard about it from a civil servant working in the Ministry. When we inquired about it, we were not given any information whatsoever."

CMIRS, Centre for Migration, Identity and Rights Studies: "They [the government] say that they do provide information. However, when you ask for any information, you get many problems, especially bureaucratic ones. I believe we should have such right."

KOBI Centre: "Because our organization is not registered here, naturally there is no information held about it. I do not know what would have happened if there was any. I believe we should have as a member of an organization on which the information is being held. Otherwise, I do not believe that individuals outside this organization or other organizations should have the right to access to such information."

Kıbrıs Türk Ticaret Odası (KTTO), Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce: "Now we have 3000 members. We have problems accessing them to share information. Also we face problems trying to get information from our members, information about them for statistical purposes. The underlying reason for this is the lack of trust in the state in the case this information goes to the hands of public officials. For example, if they truly state the correct amount of their earnings, this may go to the hands of the tax authorities which may tax them more. We have the problem of 'undocumented economy' whose primary features include tax evasion and employment of workers without registering that they are employed."

Do you have the right to access information about the structure and functions of public institutions? Do you have access to budgets, plans and programmes?

Business Woman Association: "We only have access to such information through personal contacts."

TCHRF: "Yes we do, but only to the extent they make this information publicly available."

KAYAD: "I assume I have."

YENİ ÇAĞ: "First of all, information needs to be there [i.e. available] for one to be able to access it. From my own experience, the budgets, plans, structures are provided on paper but they are not [adequately] implemented. Therefore, even though one might have access to [these kinds of information], they lack accuracy. The process is influenced depending on various interests and gains. Even when these types of information might be accessible, they are not updated or consistent."

Mediation Association: "Since I am involved with a CSO, it would be very helpful if there would be open tenders of public funding for CSO. Public authorities hardly co-operate and it is not clear who would you need to call or contact. I find it difficult to reach information about the

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structure and functions of [public] authorities. You would need to make at least three phone calls to just reach the official in charge!”.

KGP: “Yes, but [only] through personal contacts.”

KTGB: “Partly due to the political structure of the country, there is no transparency relating to budgets, plans and programmes.”

FEMA: “The state has a duty to disclose such information in the Official Gazette. Since accessibility is hard, this produces unawareness in the general public. These factors inhibit the exercise of this right. When we suggested to the State Planning Authority (*Devret Planlama Örgütü*) that it fulfilled their obligation to analyse information from a gender perspective, our demand was simply not taken into account. Later, they said the information we tried to access was not in their hands.”

Yesil Baris Hareketi: “This information must exist. I asked for it, but unsuccessfully. Although we made our demands accordingly, we were expressly excluded. We made our suggestions on the basis of budgets published in newspapers. There are no funds for environmental organisations.”

TDP: “If it is a public body I wish to be a member of or carry out activities [within its structure], then the relevant information is normally provided. However, public bodies refuse to give other types of information.”

MC-Med: “It is easy to reach the budgets because these are published in the Official Gazette. The main problem in the public sector is that the information is not consistent. There are neither consultation practices nor accuracy in the information. We even know there are secret councils of Ministers that are not published in the Official Gazette. All the decisions of the Council are secret. These decisions might concern important and delicate matters. Public bodies might provide information they already have, but they do not undertake any research. Even in matters where official assistance is available for the general public (information about the programme of the Development Bank or scholarships to students), are spread out only from mouth to mouth or through personal contacts of these people. Legally speaking, I do not think that publishing information in the Official Gazette is sufficient. Important should be disseminated through newspapers, press releases, etc. I would like to add that the information provided by the State Planning Authority is not reliable and wrong in methodology.”

CMIRS: “I believe we should have a right to access that information. Although this right is theoretically granted, in practise its [fulfilment] depends on the discretion and personal connections of the public officials involved. For instance, I required some information about night clubs. My request was blocked in the Ministry of Internal Affairs so I could never access the information. One cannot find a [public] employee having specific duties. Many [public officials] have no idea about where the information is or who has it. And often, they just do not bother in locating it.”

KOBI Centre: “No. I have tried to access that kind of information in previous project at UNDP. I try to obtain information from municipalities and the city planning authority. I only get access when we used our personal contacts within these authorities, and not when we applied for it through the official ways provided.”

KTTO: “No.”

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Do you have access to information on the public tenders and awarded contracts by public bodies?

Business Woman Association: "I do not know. We have never needed such information."

TCHRF: No response.

KAYAD: "I do not think I have access to financial matters. I do not know, to be honest. This might be due to the fact that civil society in our country does not press the authorities on this kind of matters. So our criticisms on this topic are grounded in the information that is available through the press, but not so much on what we find ourselves through research."

YENİ ÇAĞ: "No. Public tenders are based on mutual understanding between the public [and] private parties involved."

Mediation Association: "I feel very limited on this regard because of the language barrier. I cannot read or understand what is published in the local newspapers [in Turkish]. And there is no such kind of information available in [local] publications in English."

KGP: "Yes. But if the authorities do not want to publish parts of that financial information, they just do not."

KTGB: "Recently, the Central Public Tender Commission (*Merkezi İhale Komisyonu*) has made the process more transparent. Now we can watch the process online. However, a while ago a public tender involving a paved road began later than planned, during wintertime when the market price of building materials went down; this was contrary to procurement rules since the tender was conceded for a specific timeline. Public officials of the Ministry concerned just overlooked this fact. We have made public this issue, but we were unable to access the relevant documentation of the Commission. Therefore, although there is some kind of transparency during the public procurement stage, political favouritism can be observed in subsequent stages."

FEMA: "As far as I know public bodies have the legal duty to publish such information in the official gazette. Information can also be obtained from the *Devlet Basım Evi*. But this information is only accessed by companies or individuals for whom [public procurement contracts] are of direct interest. I do not believe any other person would do so."

Yesil Baris Hareketi: "We need information concerning the strategic planning of the country. So eventually we demanded a CSO consultative committee on this [strategic planning]. There were three or four CSOs there but the committee did not hold any power and was not effective. For important projects, it was not even consulted. Its report was not published. When we talked to other public authorities, they had no idea about this committee."

TDP: "Access to such information is not normally provided. Public procurement contracts are sometimes announced in the Official Gazette, but I think that the winner is usually predetermined."

MC-Med: "There is a Public Procurement Commission. We have never need information on this matter. The Commission is of an open character and the information they hold is accessible."

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CMIRS: "As far as I know this information is not provided, but I do not have a direct experience. However, the private sector requires a lot of [financial] information, especially concerning employment and clearance certificates."

KOBI Centre: "Personally, I have never tried. However, from what I read in the press and what I hear from others, this process is neither open, nor transparent, nor just. I must also add that this may only be a prejudice. Also, when these public tenders were awarded as part of the previous project I was involved with, we could actually monitor the process. But I had a feeling that other public tenders were not carried out in the same transparent manner. Additionally, when I was working for the Ministry of Health in a project concerning the establishment of a bi-communal care house for the elderly, I observed that during the employment process the criteria taken into account was not the personal qualifications and abilities required, but political party memberships. Out of 8 persons employed, 3 of them had criminal record. We complained on this ground and corrected the mistake."

KTTO: "We can access them through internet, they are transparent."

What domestic laws are you aware of, if any, that give people rights to obtain information from public authorities?

President of Business Woman Association: "I am not aware of such domestic legislation."

TCHRF: "There is a law on the right to access information. However, there are problems with its implementation. One should also have the right to reach information as a matter of general rule of law."

KAYAD: "I guess there is one because I know that there is a domestic law on this topic in Turkey. And given that we are implementing current Turkish legislation, I assume we should have adopted such a law as well."

YENİ ÇAĞ: "The right is provided in the Constitution where an obligation is put on public bodies to answer within 30 days. But, in cases where this [right] is violated, nothing is provided by law to regulate such situation. I am not aware of any other legislation."

Mediation Association: "I am not aware of any local legislation of that kind."

KGP: "None."

KTGB: "There is nothing specific. But I know this right is inherent to [other] laws regulating the [administrative] procedure. However, as journalists we generally access the information we need through personal contacts. This illustrates the untransparent feature of the system."

FEMA: "I am aware of a law granting the right to access information. However, we have been unable to effectively exercise this right because of problems with the legal definition of 'domestic violence' in the criminal code and other domestic statutes. The Gender Platform that was promoted with the previous government aimed at processing government-held statistical data from a gender perspective. The project was stopped as soon as the political power shifted."

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Yesil Baris Hareketi: "We do not know much about the domestic law on access to information. Besides, it does not make sense to have access to given information if you cannot disseminate it. Our legislation is not successful [because] right now it is part of the public agenda and it is not even implemented in practice. We access the information secretly, under the counter. No one is listening to the Ombudsman because it does not have sanctioning power."

TDP: "No, I am not."

MC-Med: "None."

CMIRS: "No that I am aware of. We once requested information on public property. A reply was never given. We used this as evidence for a court [case]. In another case we were not able to obtain information from Doctors' Union. We usually have problem to access information held by police and evidences held by the Public Prosecution Office. In Turkey, for example, the lawyers are allowed to be with their clients during interrogation. Here the lawyers still argue in Court whether or not testimonies were given voluntarily."

KOBI Centre: "I am not aware of such laws but I believe there should be in place."

KTTO: "No, there is not."

What classes of information would you need to access? Do you know which authority holds that information? How can you access it?

Business Woman Association: "We need access to information regarding economical and financial matters such as the cost of living, average annual income, etc. We tend to access such information using private researchers as we do not trust the accuracy [of] official information. We access public officers through personal contacts."

TCHRF: "We need information from the police concerning refugees. Things like [judicial] decision numbers or details about detained refugees at the airport. These figures are not even given out to lawyers."

KAYAD: "Our organization requires information on domestic violence, police and hospitals. We tried to access information held by hospitals, but there is a problem in the way this kind of information is kept in hospital records: domestic violence is not recorded separately from other types of physical violence. The reason is that domestic violence is not [presently] defined as a distinct form of crime in the criminal code nor in any other domestic legislation. In the Gender Platform we were discussing that we should have access to information concerning relevant cases once their legal process would have started. As far as statistical information about complaints made to the police, it turned out that no one has ever request that kind of information. Since everyone has the prejudice that this kind of information would not be provided at all, then no one has ever tried.""

YENİ ÇAĞ: "As a journalist I need many classes of information from various bodies. For example, how much are [political] candidates spending on campaigning? We cannot access this information neither through public authorities nor in the newspapers. Or, how many copies

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does each newspaper sell? In most instances, I do not know which specific body holds the information I would like to access."

Mediation Association: "Because the project [I am working in] is about youth, I require access concerning [information] about the young people residing on the island. Since it is bi-communal project, it might be information and statistics about both migrant young people and the local youth: information about members of youth groups, number of young people that are disabled, that are involved in sports, misusing drugs or alcohol, etcetera. This information should be in hands of social welfare services and the Ministry of Education and Youth. But there is another issue. I do not trust the reliability of the information these authorities might provide us. Our efforts to obtain all this information have not gone beyond our efforts trying to make an appointment with the relevant officials. And even to make those appointments we have to resort to our personal contacts [because] written requests just take too long."

Cyprus Youth Platform: "I would like to know the percentage of budget spent for student and related matters such as scholarship rules. I would access this information through personal contacts and correspondence with the corresponding authorities, but the quality of the information provided is also questionable."

Turkish Cypriot Journalists Association: "If we were to require any information, we would obtain it through our [KTGB] members that are in high positions in the various public bodies relating to media (for example, the *Türk Ajansı Kıbrıs* or the *Bayrak Radyo Televizyon*)."

FEMA: "[We need access to] all kinds of information relating to gender issues: employment and unemployment rates according to gender; [productive] sectors where women are mostly employed; any information relating to violence against women, geographical distribution of cases, educational background of victims and perpetrators; information about domestic violence against children or LGBTT members as well; (...); the sex ratio of people employed at involved in NGOs, trade unions or in higher positions at the public services and decision-making bodies; the salaries of men and women in the private sector to test 'equal pay for equal work'; statistical data concerning pregnancy and unemployment rates. And more. Yet, there is not a public body providing the information we need for our work. We demand gender equality mechanism to be established as soon as possible. Until then, the State Planning Authority (DPÖ) possesses the means to provide all that information. Even the updating of [government] websites has stopped. Also, not only the information but the methodology used in order to obtain the information should be published as well.

As a point of case, I would tell that we have been trying to change the article in the criminal code that prosecutes "unnatural sexual conduct". We heard from a journalist that the General Attorney's Office had written a [recommendation] stating that the current criminal code lacked any gender perspective. We were completely unable to access such paper. But after numerous letters to [high] officials, the journalist succeeded in getting a copy of it.

I just believe such information should be readily available to all. Me, for example, that my job is directly related to that information, I cannot access it. So, how could a person on the street be informed [about gender issues]?

Yesil Baris Hareketi: "We were able to obtain information from municipalities, the Ministries of Health, Environment, and Trade as well as statistical information from primary and [secondary] schools. The information we obtained was introduced in a documentary produced in partnership with the Cancer Research Foundation.

Now we are looking for funds to produce a documentary on agro-chemicals that are adversely changing the ecological balance. Concerning this, the Ministry of Agriculture has provided some

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information when requested. Information about the chemicals can only be obtained through personal connections, though."

TDP: "[We need information from the] Public Prosecution Office, Police, Business Registration Office and Land Registry. There is not a [single] mechanism for effective research. The Land Registry has not passed to an IT [digital] format. Moreover, even if one gets access, the information is not accurate in 40-50% of the cases.

MC-Med: "If we need information from the State Planning Authority, we try in their publications. We also need information concerning the Green Line Regulation [and] the relevant information is being kept by the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce. However we can only access the information through the Edge Project, where work on Tourism. As I used to be a Vice-Secretary, I can personally access to relevant information rather easily. However, I do not think the same applies to the man on the street. Actually, I do not have the same easy access to other Ministries. [Accessing information] requires strive and endeavour, it is hard and tiring. The websites of public institutions, that should provide easy access to information, are either not functioning or do not contain information. Accessing information held by each DG of the EU or held by Turkey's [government] is much easier than accessing information held by authorities in northern Cyprus."

CMIRS: "I am not aware. The government do not even provide statistical information. For example, they have no idea about the number of students studying in the UK."

KOBI Centre: "We need socio-economical statistics, information on the ability of firms to compete, on exports and imports. Such information, unfortunately, is not readily available. There is lack of methodology and consistency, details, accuracy, punctuality (the socio-economical statistical information of 2008 was published on January 2010 which caused us problems) as well as proper organisational structure in the public bodies collecting and disseminating information. Also, I have seen from my personal experience that as an individual you cannot access it, only if you have a legitimate organisation."

KTTO: "We need information concerning taxes payments. The information kept by the public authorities is published in the Official Gazette. However, we cannot access it in any other way if we wanted to."

Does your civil organisation have access to information that will help it to actively participate in decision-making procedures? Have you been directly involved in such procedures? Do these procedures work out efficiently?

President of Business Woman Association: "No. We are not permitted to get involved. We attempt to participate in the past, after finding out in the media about a draft legislation that was of interest for our NGO. [We] were not taken into account. Procedures do not work efficiently."

TCHRF: "No."

KAYAD: "This [i.e. participatory decision-making] is not done in a systematic way. We are trying to exert some influence through the Gender Platform. But the procedure does not work efficiently. Furthermore, when we lobby through the platform we always try to keep the 'E.U.'"

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name apart because it rises prejudices up. Also, our co-operation with the gender equality body established under the [former] presidency is minimal, as it cannot be considered an independent body."

YENİ ÇAĞ: "No. It does not work efficiently because if an opposite view is expressed, then the procedure is halted."

Mediation Association: "I know that my organization, Mediation Association, was involved in some discussions on the practice of mediation and on the [relevant] laws in accordance with EU legislation, and that they were preparing a document, but I am not sure whether or not any other measures was taken later on. I remember that Mr. Talat, the ex-president, made a call for a NGO Council, but I am not sure whether its role went any further than just a consultation one. I am sure that, concerning the youth projects we are running, no one has ever approached to us for consultation. There is no Youth Council operating here like in the southern part but even there [in the south] its structure is pretty much politicized. I am not sure if I would be happy to have in the northern part [something like] what is established in the southern part. Would I like to get involved [in decision-making processes], then contacting head of the bodies is what I would do."

KGP: "We were once involved in a workshop related to rules for graduate student scholarships. Our say on the criteria for an average diploma was taken into account and the rules were drafted accordingly, but this does not happen in all instances."

KTGB: "We do get involved through our members in high positions in government bodies. But they are not effective and our opinions are not taken into account much."

FEMA: "Participation is possible if invited by the Council of Ministers as a relevant third party. Otherwise this [participation] is limited to simple observation at the Parliament. One can prepare a draft bill and present it to the head of the Parliament in order to be discussed at the Council of Ministers and technical committees. But this is not regulated by any legislation."

Yesil Baris Hareketi: "The relevant drafts for us do not even come to our attention. We try to follow the Council of Ministers [meetings] but too often the process is nearly over when things come to our attention. For instance, we cannot act as a consultative party in drafting the act on National Parks. [We are] just observing in the Parliament. We want to be in the Committees. Although [our organization] follow them, we are never invited. We deliver our written opinion but it is never taken into account. We believe there is a possibility to make a [difference] if we could explain [our position] to decision-makers. The Committee on Environment [is supposed] to meet regularly but it does not. The method changes depending on who is forming the government. For instance, we were able to have some positive influence concerning environmental damage in the Bafra area. However, the committee did not continue to operate. We even made written and oral recommendations. They [politicians] think they have the freedom to do whatever they want through populism."

TDP: "As a member of political party in the parliament, we do have access through party representatives. But [decision-making] does not work efficiently. A draft bill might be ratified overnight."

MC-Med: "The EU DG Trade [in Cyprus] has an CSOs platform that works for obtaining the views of NGOs. This is the first officially established body of its kind. Some organisations are members and consultations happen. [Our organization] is a member as well and we are often invited to join meetings or present our opinions. The travel expenses are covered by them."

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There are [on-line] consultation sessions [about] trade policy after Lisbon [Treaty]. We receive reports on this process.

[Although] it is not perfect, I wish we have a similar system here in Cyprus. By contrary, here there are no consultations at all, no public body takes [CSOs] seriously. So, the existing mechanisms are not participatory."

CMIRS: "There is information [on participatory processes], and it is accessible. There still is the problem of unproductiveness. There cases where laws are passed overnight without taking into account [CSOs' views]. For example, on one hand they do not pass the bill on organic agriculture [to do more consultations], while on the other hand they make constitutional changes overnight."

KOBI Centre: "No. But I also need to note that we are standing at a different position concerning the facts because we are an organisation operating with foreign funding and not registered in northern Cyprus. We are liked by some officials and not by others, that depends on who is in power".

KTTO: "Yes. When drafting of a bill, as well as during the parliamentary committees, on topics that may concern our organisation, our opinion is always asked and we actually take active part. An example of this was the legislative procedure for the recent competition bill. Sometimes these procedures are effective, sometimes not. "

Are you aware of any international legislation regarding the right to access information, transparency and accountability of the public institutions?

President of Business Woman Association: "No, I am not aware. I believe there should be."

TCHRF: "No, I am not. I guess there should be."

KAYAD: "I am only aware of such legislation at the EU level."

YENİ ÇAĞ: "There is European Union legislation. An example of this was displayed at the election process in Germany."

Mediation Association: No response.

KGP: "I have heard of such international laws but I am not aware of the specifics."

KTGB: "Yes."

FEMA: "Nothing comes to my mind right now. If states do not share their sovereignty, as it has been done within the EU, and [thus] allow non-national actors to have a say in such an internal issues [i.e. transparency and accountability], there is no chance for that kind of international legislation."

Yesil Baris Hareketi: "I am not aware of any international legislation. I am aware of the EU legislation on transparency."

TDP: "No. But I am sure something better than what we have to exist."

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MC-Med: "There is not. For example, during the period of the former government, we prepared a draft bill together with the Ministry of Interior. [When it was finished] we were not even given an appointment. The wife of the former prime minister, current president, imposed a reactionary legislation instead. When we made an inquiry about it, the relevant minister denied its existence [of a draft bill]. We were told that we would be informed but never were given information again. We know they are working on it but they do not let us to get involved. We were never invited to a parliamentary committee."

CMIRS: "Yes, such as the law on transparency and information."

KOBI Centre: "I am aware of such legislation in the United States. There, anyone, either as an individual or as an organisation, can even reach information of private businesses through business bureaus. YAGA in Cyprus tries to operate similarly, but we have experienced that they, themselves even limit access to information kept by them. For example we requested the list of entrepreneurs involved with YAGA to deliver a report on competition. But they stated that that was private information and they would deliver the reports to the entrepreneurs themselves. I can understand this but only up to a point. For example they decided no longer to publish the names of those that are prohibited to use check-books. I am not comfortable with this new rule."

KTTO: "There are laws regulating transparency in the EU. But I do not know how effectively it works."

Would you need access to information held by public bodies in the southern part of the island? What classes of information would you need?

Business Woman Association: "No."

TCHRF: "We need access to information concerning education received by the Turkish Cypriot minority children in the Limassol district."

KAYAD: "Yes. This year we are developing a timeline of women throughout in the history of Cyprus. For this project we need some figures in relation to population numbers in the 1960s."

YENİ ÇAĞ: "Yes. [But] the process is similar as it is in the north... bureaucrats providing whatever information they wish to whomever they want. However, journalists are more respected [in the south]. The classes of information I require depends on the topic I [am] working on, generally socio-economical information. Access is hard and limited. [A] mental block has arisen because of [Republic of] Cyprus view towards Turkish Cypriots."

Mediation Association: "Most of the time the information we require [from the south] is supplied by our Greek Cypriot partners. Personally, I am sure that NGOs in the northern part really need information of institutions from the south. NGOs should at least be provided with some mechanisms that direct them to the places where they could ask for the information."

KGP: "Yes, [information] on political matters that we care about, such as decisions relating to the Cyprus issue. Also, information related to certificates that might be useful for students abroad such as the EU Health Card, etc."

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KTGB: "No."

FEMA: "I need access to the same classes of information both in the north and in the south. But I do not know how [to access it] apart from [what is] published on internet sites."

Yesil Baris Hareketi: "For example we need more information on waste [in the south]. We try to get it from CSOs but have never attempted to deal with the [public] officials."

TDP: "I need access in order to learn about and demand my rights granted in the 1960's Republic. Also, information about inheritance issues, employment, case law, etc."

MC-Med: "When we need to get information from the southern part we use our partners. We do not have direct contact with public authorities in the south. There are problems. For instance, when a NGO network was established in Cyprus, partners [in our project] were supposed to join together [in a single platform] to become a member of the EU CONCORD-TRIALOG. But the Greek Cypriot Ministry of External Relations interfered. They said that the Turkish Cypriot CSOs needed to be register in the southern part. Although CONCORD supported us, the Turkish Cypriot organisations did not want to register in the south. [Just] a memorandum of understanding was signed between two platforms because we [northern CSOs] cannot establish official relations with public authorities in the south."

CMIRS: "We need information on human rights, immigration in order to do comparative research. But we have not tried yet."

KOBI Centre: "Yes, we need access to import and export figures. The information is easily accessible through the internet, is up-to-date and detailed."

KTTO: "We have difficulties to access the laws and regulations concerning the Green Line. An additional problem is that these regulations and laws are only in Greek."

Imagine that you are the only legislator in Cyprus: would you set any limitations or exceptions to the right of citizens to access information held by public institutions? If so, on what basis?

Business Woman Association: "No, I would not. I do not think neither health, financial nor other personal information should be restricted. For matters relating to national security I cannot comment as I do not know much about that topic."

TCHRF: "I would set exceptions for reasons of public security and data protection. For example, the details of victims of human trafficking should not be public. Some military information and some personal information (such as mobile numbers) should also be included as exceptions. However, exceptions to access should not be determined by the sole discretion of a few public officers. Any regime of exceptions should be complemented with an independent supervisory mechanism to be appealed within a specified time limit. In cases of succeeding at the appeal mechanism, then compensation should be granted depending on the harm caused."

KAYAD: "I would enable access to public information but I would put some restrictions regarding personal information."

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YENİ ÇAĞ: "I would put restrictions on information about national security, but I would define the limitation narrowly and subject it to supervision. I would also impose harsh penalties when the rule on narrowness and effective supervision is breached. For instance, it is absolutely unacceptable the notion of '*ortulu odenek*', namely non-transparent or 'under-the-counter' payment that still happens in Turkey and other areas, where money is given directly to the authorities but what they do with it is never supervised."

Mediation Association: "Information that might endanger public safety should not be issued to the general public. Some classes of information should also be classified [such as] strategically important military information or evidences kept by the police related to an on-going investigation. But these criteria seem open to manipulation. [Classes of] information should be clearly defined when their access is restricted. Everything else should be available, especially information concerning businesses and institutions. This [would] promote public trust on the decisions that are made at the state level. I am not sure whether or not this is what government seeks, but it would bring long-term benefits for sure."

KGP: "To prevent misuse, [I would set] limitations on [access to] information related to personal data; also on military information such the whereabouts of military bases for reasons of public security. Some things are better left unsaid, like military budget, not to cause public tension."

KTGB: "Yes, [I would set] restrictions on financial matters and issues concerning international relations and security."

FEMA: "I would not put any."

Yesil Baris Hareketi: "I would not put any limitations or exceptions. If laws are for people, they have a right to know. Even the military information should be accessible."

TDP: I would limit the right as it concerns access to personal information. But institutions should be transparent. So, distinguishing between public area and private area seems very important. For example, the names of those who are prohibited to use cheque books should not be openly published but provided when asked, instead. I think that without pre-determined and well defined standards, access to all kinds of information might be dangerous. For example, only after repeated cheque book bans or two negative health inspections should names [of persons or business] be published. The reason being that we live in a small community and small businesses might go bankrupt or individuals might lose their chance to fix past mistakes.

MC-Med: "This might be taken as an extreme but I believe that anything public must be open. There should not be anything hidden. The general public is the owner of the state, and it is run in the name of the general public. So, all [public] information should be ready for access. The only exception must be incomplete information for this is the only class of information that might be dangerous if published. Security issues are often raised. I do not believe in that except for war conditions. The same applies for organisations because [access to] most information [held] by NGOs and businesses is very restricted. We, as MC-Med, share the information we hold... sharing information empowers you and everyone else."

CMIRS: "I would set very limited exceptions concerning military issues and national security. Concerning the police, only secret service information should be exempted. The rest, as narcotics, etc., I would not. I would also be careful with issues that might have an adverse effect on trade, but any other information must be transparent."

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KOBI Centre: "I would open the information relating to public institutions such as organisational structure or financial info. I would set some exceptions on personal data in order to not to breach privacy rights. However, some classes of information are provided at a price. They can be easily accessible but conditional on payment. I think that, for example, EU standards or information on legal requisites to importing goods, should be provided for free. On the other hand, information kept by standard institutes, given that the collection of that information entails financial costs, could be supplied in return of money. This will also ensure that access is granted to those that will use the information in a correct way. Information that may endanger national security, such as how many soldiers or military equipment a country has or their location should not be open. This does not include information such as number of civil servants or socio-economical information. By contrary, the availability of such information makes a country stronger."

KTTO: "I would only set exceptions concerning personal data and trade secrets."

Thank you and your organization for participating in this research. Would you like to add something?

KAYAD: "I believe there is a kind of cultural resistance concerning access to information. I am sure that several CSOs would [oppose] to any freedom [i.e. right] in relation to access to their [own] financial information on the funding received from foreign institutions such as the European Union. This might happen due to the fact that CSOs are often politicized [along party lines]."

Mediation Association: "As an individual living in Cyprus, I also require information concerning residency permission, etc. But [residency permits] rules are not clear and it seems that these rules ultimately depend on who are the individuals concerned. For instance, I applied for a permanent residence permit in June 2009 and I was told that it would take 2-3 months to process it. I am still waiting for an official answer [as in May 2010]! That is why people often resort to personal contacts within the political parties to which public officials belong to. So, I got an unofficial answer that a new bill [on residence permits] is pending and that my case will be resolved afterwards. This personal experience shows that immigration rules and procedures produce lots of headaches. I am sure that many [of us] who live in the northern side would like to sort out [our residence permits] in the southern part as well, so we could cross the border without any problems."

KGP: "We do not question [that] much and readily accept the present situation. The reason for our problems lies in the fact that our society is a very small one. So we have got used to find out what we need to know through personal contacts."

KTGB: "I observe that the right to access information is better implemented in the southern part of Cyprus. Except for certain international treaties, the [northern] state authorities unfortunately do not take international law on board. But I think that states cannot act so recklessly. However, I have never heard of an individual in northern Cyprus that has opened a court case to claim our rights against the state."

FEMA: "Our problem in Cyprus concerning inaccessibility of information is rooted in a basic demand-supply analysis. Since no one bothers to demand information, then no one is out there to supply it. There is a perception that public information does not have a direct effect on

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the daily life of people. There is also a deficit of networking [in civil society] that arises from the consumerist and isolating features of our society.

For example, at some point we wanted to know the number of rape cases and details about those. The only way we could obtain information was by using our personal contacts and through the lawyers of the victims. [We were told that] we might be infringing data protection rights of both the victim and the suspect. But I believe this kind of information should be disclosed by the bar association itself. For instance, there is a Women Office in the İstanbul Bar Association that keeps statistical information about these cases. It advocates for gender perspective in the legislation as well. We have suggested that a similar office should be established here in Cyprus too. It would provide legal service to victims through volunteers in a dedicated office. This idea was rejected on the grounds that this office would decrease the price of legal services in the market. Furthermore, reports with advice and information for victims should also be kept at the Police Headquarters (*Polis Genel Müdürlüğü*) and in the Attorney General Office. Nowadays, these good-practices are not implementing at all. We know that many women that are victims of domestic violence, but try to file a complaint in the Police Station are just asked to go back to their husbands by the police itself."

TDP: "In northern Cyprus one needs to be persistent in order to access information. There is a strong resistance"

MC-Med: "Many in our country think that holding information makes one more powerful. So people do not share information because they are afraid of being judged or being subject to questioning. Holding information is a power control mechanism method. However it is a very outdated one. The general understanding is that those in power do whatever they want to do. But if you object [to that], then nobody takes you into account. Sometimes, concessions may be made. However, unless there is a big social campaign, nothing will improve. But nobody believes in it anymore. For instance, we [as a CSO] got actively involved during the decision-making process concerning the electricity connection for the Karpaz area. Although civil society was mobilised for this issue, nothing finally changed.

For example, we [have] only participated twice in CSOs meetings organised by [the former] Ministry of Education. In the last one, civil society [representatives] posed questions and these were answered by the President. Yet, neither minutes [of the meeting] were taken nor the conversations were recorded. But we never objected to these things to be published in the Official Gazette.

CMIRS: "Another example, the government has taken the right to go to referendum away from us but not even the media is talking about it."

KOBI Centre: "The reason that we cannot easily access information is that we are not a civilised contemporary society. As a civilisation develops, transparency increases. In our culture, holding information is power... if you keep the information to yourself, this makes you stronger. I think that this behaviour is rooted in our political culture. For example, a civil servant in the statistical office is told not to disclose information, so not releasing it amounts to do the 'right thing'. As I have said, holding information means power so if you share it you lose power. On the contrary, if information was to be shared this would make everyone more efficient and productive. Another reason is that public officials are afraid of sharing information. For example, population figures in Cyprus –everyone is simply guessing, because official figures numbers are not published. Another example is how much the public sector costs. Being scared of disclosing that information is useless. Public sector may cost a lot but this does not necessarily mean that it is inefficient. If you educate the people on what to do with information, how to analyse it, information is always useful. Due to the lack of awareness in this respect, most information is still kept secret, the public sector is normally perceived as if there was something bad behind it."