

Information landscape for key target groups in Republic of 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 Republic of Cyprus?

KISA, Action for Equality, Support and Antiracism: "In theory, we have access to some data, at least we have the right to access it. On the other hand concerning certain topics that are regarded as 'sensitive', while these are the topics that have a real effect on us, we do not know them. I think the authorities should provide absolute access to all the data they gather."

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "Yes."

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "I don't know if we have that legal right and even if we do, I don't know if we really have the access to this information. But yes, I guess we should have the right to access information regarding our organization by other businesses or public authorities. Maybe there is something negative or offensive but you never know. As an NGO we have a different status. But I agree that we should have the right to access. To be honest, I am not so keen on legislations. Besides we don't really know our legal right even though we should."

Peace Centre: "I don't think I have this legal right. I know the law concerning personal data. That means that as an organization I don't have the right to keep records for everyone, unless that someone is aware of it. I don't know, I have no idea if I have this legal right, to ask to be told what information they have for my organization."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "Yes, I think I have that right and I want to have that right."

ALERT: "That I do not know. Depends on for which public body you are talking about. If you are e.g. on their lists, in their publications, then yes, definitely you must be informed. You become exposed. Whether they are keeping archives and for what reasons that I do not know. It never seemed that such right exists. Since we are talking about public bodies there should be transparency, therefore, there certainly should be transparency on this issue as well."

Cyprus Youth Council: "I am not really aware of my legal rights concerning this issue and I think that not only should I have that right but I should have the specific information as well. I have to be aware and I think the state has an obligation to make people aware."

Skoogle: "You should definitely do both by public authorities and by business. I think it's not that easy by businesses. As far as I know, I have this right at least by the state but I am not sure about the private businesses."

Culture in Action: "Of course I do believe that my organization should have that right and actually the right to have information is fundamental and it can help a lot for our organization, to organize other social activities we arrange to and to get organized in general."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "It is a little hard to simply 'lift up' the phone's handset and immediately get the information you need. I imagine, according to the Law, I have the right as a citizen of accessing information; not all, but some. I was actually discussing this issue with individuals belonging to other NGOs; we were asking regarding the issue of asylum seekers, from the immigration department (the Planning Bureau redirected the NGO to the Immigration Department), we needed some statistical data. It was not the first

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time we were discussing on how hard it is to get the information we need. In my section, we found out that the most difficult part is to find the right person responsible to give to us the information we need. Sometimes we may call on the phone for days and nobody answers the phone. Sometimes, we may be lucky and find that person immediately. E.g.: the Commissioner for Private data employee gave us the info we asked immediately - but this is an exception. Do I have the right to have access to the information held by a public authority regarding my organization? I don't know - I suppose yes. I think I should have, because I would need to verify that the information they have for my organization is correct, either whether that information is held by a public entity, or by a private organization. This should be done, in order to make sure that the information is held about my organization is correct and that is not to be misused."

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?

KISA: "Not always. Some information is published retrospectively and some information such as financial information that NGOs cannot get involved with or those that concern cooperation with large organisations we cannot access to. However in order to utilize it one needs to have the information on the right moment and needs to see the whole picture."

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "If I want to know about a law regarding a matter concerning my activities, if I go to parliament, they would provide it to me. We know if we can ask for money / finance, but usually we do not use funding."

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "One of the public institutions that we are mostly aware is the Ministry of Education and some others, like the P.I.O. (Press and Information Office). But the research is done mostly on the internet, but we can't find budgets, programmes, plans. I think everything is on the web pages. If we really need something more than what they have in the web site, I guess we should get some licence or authorization. But wherever we needed in table structure and functions of the public institutions like the Ministry of Education there is sufficient information on the webpage."

Peace Centre: "I think I don't. If I try to exercise it... but I think they will tell me that it is none of my business. I think I don't have this right in Cyprus yet."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: Yes. I never tried to have it. I don't know if I have access to their budgets."

ALERT: "Yes, the right is there. Normally, any body established, even non-governmental, should have statutes, transparency to information, members and budgets. Legally there is this parameter. The (right of) access to budgets exists, but there is no one that knows to look for it. We assume that we can do that, so we do not seek. Each body has an obligation to present its budgets. E.g. a government department that wants to hold an event is bound to call for tenders, find the cheapest, etc. So this information automatically becomes available for the public. I personally experienced this in the EU as well, where an official in charge in the European Parliament had shown me the links to access such information in order to see them. Back then, in this example, it was the issue was whether some Media in Cyprus had been funded by EU institutions. That information was available in these lists that were online and we just had to find them; we simply lack the knowledge. The essence of the matter is, as a

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citizen, to recognize this right. We already have the accessibility. Neither had I known about that right until the time I researched about it."

Cyprus Youth Council: "I think we do have the right to information about the structure and functions of the public institutions. I think for programmes it is easier, but it is not always really accessible however it is not easy to gain access to their budgets, plans."

Skoogle: "I don't know where I could get information about all these. In my opinion there should be an institution where you could be informed about all your legal rights concerning everyday matters. If you are a lawyer then all the doors are open for you, otherwise you have to pay a lawyer to get the relevant information. I wouldn't dream of having access to the budgets apart from those that are published. The plans vary. For instance, those regarding the city planning, the land registry office etc if I would buy plot of land I wouldn't know if it would be expropriated in the near future, unless I asked a private organization."

Culture in Action: "For the first section, if it's a public institution, I am obligated to have access to their information about the structure and functions of them. For the second it is not that easy to have access to their budgets, plans and programmes. Of course nowadays with internet is easier than five or six years ago. And the EU tries a lot."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "Yes. If the information is available on their website, then I can say I have access. Otherwise, I will be needing to find the responsible person in the correct department, then this person must be aware that I have the right to ask for that information, and then I would ask, and then this person should not deny to me my right. Some government officials don't have an idea that they must GIVE the information. There is the phenomenon of "responsibility phobia" in the government; they are afraid "to get in trouble", or they state "I am not sure if I should give this data to you". This applies for most of them (the civil servants)."

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

KISA: "I do not know. We have never needed such information."

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "Not to all."

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "I don't know about this. Because we are an NGO we are not so much involved. My personal, not my organization's, view is that we do have access to this information but what happens is that in general the information is kept among the small circle of people that they know and it is circulated to the wider public, but I think this is happening only just for the keeping procedure. They may be taking into account the other tenders of contracts."

Peace Centre: "No. If I am not directly involved in this specific call for tenders, I can't go as a citizen or as an organization to ask them [the authorities] to give me the information. They will tell me that it is private. I don't believe I have access. If I ask for any information I will not get it."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "Yes."

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ALERT: "Yes, because that information is always published in the official gazette of the Republic. Those associated with the government and the state, yes."

Cyprus Youth Council: "I think they (the authorities) are obliged to publicly give information about tenders and awarded contracts. I think there is a law forcing the authorities to publicise them."

Skoogle: "I believe I do, because I happen to know that they are published in the Gazette. Nevertheless it's hard to look for it all the time. I used to be a subscriber but they couldn't send it to you regularly or when there was an extra issue they wouldn't send it to me. Even though it can be found online, it's not easy to focus on what interests you. The information is not adequate from the Gazette. You are informed about the "sales of supermarkets" not about significant matters such as vacancies. The state (TV/Radio) channels shouldn't charge public organizations for any advertisements. The European website for tenders is much more efficient than ours, which sometimes announces too late for anyone to apply. Moreover, I don't know how the selection of the European procurement is done. There are many more that concern all the European citizens which are not published. There's a lot of unimportant information, about dismissals and promotions."

Culture in Action: "We do have access to information if we hear about it. There is not an official body, an official organization, or an official website that always gathers information we need in order to plan our activities, or application forms about our activities, interesting contacts about our political ideas or anything else. We should have an organization or a body in a formal website maybe, that this information is gathered and publicised."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "I am not dealing with these issues, I never asked for this matter, so I don't know. I suppose I should have the right, and that there should be transparency, for all citizens, and ALSO transparency in the procedures."

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

KISA: "For me, the issue of (access to) information is an endless subject and it depends on how you look at it, that you indeed "have access". There is a law on protection of personal data, some things were done based on the instructions of the European Union. It required the state to inform civil society and consult with it (either superficially, or in essence). There are a number of other laws to ensure that you can have access to information in the financial sector. Concerning these one can access all the information needed but the volume of information is so big that nobody can comprehend in order to adopt (eg. a decision, a law etc). It is important that every government body should be obliged to provide such information that can help the public with the difficulties they face, to inform about the risks, opportunities, legal rights, etc".

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "I do not know the laws but I do know that whatever information you ask from the authorities they are obliged to give it to you within a month, if they can. As Teachers' Platform we have never asked for anything".

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Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "I am not actually aware of any domestic laws. I am sure that I know some but I know that we do have the right to obtain information without some kind of authorization either from the police or from the institution that you want to get the information from. But anyway I think if we search about "impersonal" information, for example if we wanted to come to the law of personal data: We are looking for people that lived in mixed villages and there were cases that we faced problems - because of personal data they [the authorities] wouldn't give us the information like that. Or, when it comes to teachers, when we browse on the ministry's website, you can find there are procedures and the location where each of the teachers is placed, but on the other hand we can't have the personal data if you want to contact them."

Peace Centre: "I am not aware of any domestic laws. Except what is made available voluntarily by the state. That is, the Gazette and whatever it is announced. "

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "Sometimes people need to do something and they don't know what to do. They don't have any information about how things are going on. By the law, you know that you have the right to act, to be aware of what is going on in the society, to know how to behave."

ALERT: "Surely there are, but I don't know about them."

Cyprus Youth Council: "I have to say that I am not really aware of any domestic laws concerning this subject."

Skoogle: "Personally I am aware of what is kept in my life at work. This concerns my sick-leaves, whether I am a conscientious and efficient teacher and so on. I also know that there is a secret life and obviously I have no access to it. There is also personal data which is obtained while you are in the army or even at school about your character, psychological state, political beliefs etc. You are likely to be rejected for a governmental job because of information held years before."

Culture in Action: "Actually I am not aware of any domestic law. Maybe in the context of the EU, I am sure that there are laws that give people the right to obtain information but on the other hand my personal opinion is that it is an essential right for every European citizen to have this access to any public body or any public authority."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "I have no idea."

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

KISA: "Type of information that we need are planning, programming, statistical data, economic data related to the fields we work upon immigration, discrimination, racism, the trafficking of persons, asylum. The essence is to have information when a planning phase begins, as an organization to represent your own interests but also to intervene for the interests of society."

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Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "We need information from the European Commission on projects on education."

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "The information that we need most of the time is personal data, addresses of people, locating and finding these people, for example, where and how many Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots lived in mixed villages. But mostly these are personal data, so we can access that data directly by those people, so we include them in our research. Also we need information from the Ministry of Education such as people that are in the Educational Committee, but all those data they have available. We access it either by internet or through getting authorization from the Ministry of Education."

Peace Centre: "I need to have access to any public authority and government contracts. Because I am a member of an organization which is working for a better society, this kind of information will be helpful to me. I want to know anything that has to do with good governance, within the spirit of absolute transparency."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "First of all I want to have access to the regulation and the law, in practice in Cyprus. And this information you get it by the House of Parliament. I also want to have information about the rights of immigrants and refugees living in Cyprus. What they are entitled of and what their obligations are. And this information can be obtained by the House of Parliament and the Immigration Office. How one can access it depends on the people you find there. Some people can give you the information some others pay no attention to you. I would also like to know who are permitted to stay and for how long immigrants are allowed to stay here. Another thing I want to know is when we can get the Cypriot citizenship. How many years should immigrants stay in Cyprus to acquire citizenship? I would also like to access to information which helps immigrants to know what is forbidden to the immigrants to do, what can help immigrants not to become illegal and how the immigrants can behave, what they can do to help them to the participation in the society."

ALERT: "For me it is primarily for cultural issues, specifically sponsorships, the legal framework and structures that exist in the cultural sector... The Ministry of Education and all relevant agencies (governmental and non-governmental), semi-governmental organizations, the Cyprus Theater Organisation (ΘΟΚ), the Youth Council etc. When I am dealing with issues regarding social injustice and justice for immigrants, violence, etc. I apply at the appropriate ministry and agencies, the Police, in which the access we have is limited. We never asked the police to give us documents, statements (testimonies) etc. but it is certainly a process that needs a specific procedure in order to be carried out. On cultural issues you do get the information you need - but it depends if it is accurate. One officer tells you something and the other other tells you something different, they confuse the data they have, there is no intercommunication between them. This is a problem. They give you the info because they have an obligation but it leads to errors. For example a recent case, we have been sponsored by them for a show/event and the amount needed confirmation from the accountant. The Ministry of Education said that they did not need a confirmation, so we prepared all the documents and then, when we submitted the documents to them, they asked for confirmation, which means extra work and delay of funding because we will receive it half a year later. This is because the two officers told us two different things and did not communicate with the accounting department. We do various actions to have access to the information we need. We make some publications, announcements, we meet with them, etc."

Cyprus Youth Council: "As far as we are concerned, I would say that all types of information are needed, therefore we should have access to all authorities. We can access information - mostly based on our personal contacts because when you try to pick the official way it not

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always easy and it is time-consuming to access information.. so we usually use our own contacts with people. This is how we get the information."

Skoogle: "Since I am interested in everything that's going on in my country, I would like this information written in a language understood by all the citizens that have attended Gymnasium (note: 3-year school after 6-year elementary school). In case I needed to be informed about the law, the constitution, or about something written in the press, I want to be able to understand and find it easily."

Culture in Action: "As an organization that cultivates and is active with culture, we have to have access to information that considers cultural life and in general about social problems that we could intervene. Who holds that information, I think is the government, E.U. and some other independent authorities such as U.N.D.P., U.N. and other programmes. I think that the usual way and the fastest way is the internet."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "Too many different kinds of information we need all the time. For example from Makarios Hospital: What contraception methods are provided in the hospital. I obtained that information, from the manager of the gynecological department. General Hospital, Dermatological Department: what kind of tests for Sexual Transmitted Diseases are provide for free to Cypriots and Immigrants. General information from the Statistical Service of the Republic. Ministry of Education and Culture. Ministry of Health. Ministry of Labour: for some projects, for exapmle, for unemployed. Those people were very good, they gave answers straight away. We need the information for reports, mainly. Sometimes we may need to call for days and nobody answers, or, sends you to someone else. It is a matter of luck if you can find a person that is conscious to his/her duty and is not bored to serve you. It depends on the departments and the people. Because we are established since many years now, we have relationships, so we know where to ask. Commission for Demographic and Family Policy (Ministry of Labour). CFPA is member. Once I needed information whether there is a text available about that Commission in English. They were lost, I did my job otherwise: I had to ask a person I knew personally and he helped me immediately."

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?

KISA: "Sometimes we use our imagination to be able to engage in this process. Sometimes we operate only correctively e.g. after a decision / action is taken (by the state) we are trying to diagnose whether it was right or wrong. In Cyprus, usually in the House of Representatives, everything is already pre-agreed among the political parties so there are not many possibilities there. To differentiate something you should start from the point the [parties / House] are just starting to decide what they want to regulate, how and why. In practice, there is a "Committee of Experts" for integration issues in which the only representative is a civil servant, so no one else involved in addition to the Ombudsman, neither the NGOs, the academics, representatives of immigrants. The "Commission on Trafficking Persons" has been created, we are not inside!"

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "No, I am not involved into such procedures. We go there in order to demonstrate - not to ask to participate."

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Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "None of the NGOs are taken seriously by the public institutions. It is firstly an issue that they (the authorities) are taking the decisions, they are making up the plans and then they inform us about that. And by that time, we can only try to have a say to what is happenings in a friendly and more indirect ways (not direct involvement in the decision taking procedure itself). I think there is an issue of how mature is our society to take into account the work produced by the NGOs in general. I mean, regarding our research work, we produced lots of important data especially from our research about how teachers present and how they see history and how they receive history and what they mean by that. And what we are hoping is that we would be able through all this scientific research to come and say "hey, you listen to us and include us in your decision making because, yes, you are taking this decision but we have some data that could help you, or could improve your decision". But in the moment, I don't think that NGOs in general actively participate in the decision making procedure. No, I think we are just recipients for the moment of the decisions taken by institutions like the Ministry of Education."

Peace Centre: "Not at all."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "Actually in my NGO we are doing efforts to access to this information. It is not easy, as I told you. It depends on the people you find. Sometimes they are people who are willing to give you the relevant information while other times they refuse."

ALERT: "It's difficult. Basically, it depends on how the person that holds the information perceives your role. If that person does not take you seriously and if you are not a pressure group (that will press to get the information), the information that comes near you is fragmented, isolated. It has to do with who you know, how much effort you put, the pressure you put, whether you have the knowledge where the information is in order to go and get it."

Cyprus Youth Council: "Once more, our NGO has access to information with the help of the people we know. If we know people in specific places then it's easy to have access to information to get involved, but, again, if we do not really know people involved in such places, then it is much more difficult. So I wouldn't say that this works efficiently."

Skoogle: "No, I have no such access. I very vividly remember a student of mine who once said 'I am scared of decisions that will be taken for me without being asked (me)' and still feel that fear."

Culture in Action: "If you mean about procedures on making decisions about procedures think that is not that usual. I think the decision making procedures are maybe in higher organizations and as an NGO maybe we do have the right to participate to such procedures but we don't usually. We just follow some funding or programmes. Maybe if we decide to have a programme we will find the right organization to propose it. We have done such things like proposing programmes and we were involved in a minor degree in such procedures but I think that we are the main providers. If you want a recent example, since now I am a facilitator for cultural programmes, maybe we should have the right to participate more in such procedures and in decision making procedures. In my opinion it doesn't work efficiently. It needs to be more open."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "I don't have access to the minutes of the sessions of the House of Parliament (note: an example are the minutes of the sessions of the Parliament special committees). If there's a report regarding an issue discussed by the parliamentary committees, it is accessible; but the minutes are not. For exapmle, there were three sessions

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of the related parliamentary committee that took place regarding the issue of abortion. I would personally want to have the minutes (as any other citizen should have the right) because that would help me "pull the strings" i.e.: by using the official minutes I would use them for persuasion, to build my arguments. But I do not have access. I have to do research from the Press (e.g.: statements of politicians, ministers). The House of Parliament puts obstacles to me. I did not research much about the whole issue (of the question); up to a point I do have access. I have too much of a workload, so I do not have the time to research for that issue, unless there's something urgent."

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

KISA: "We have not exhausted the possibilities for access to information. We learn about these issues fragmentary, because we are dealing with human rights. I believe there is no good awareness / provision of information about what mechanisms are there, what kind of data and how can they be accessed. I think neither the society, nor the NGOs are aware."

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "Yes we should, we must be aware - there must be ways. I cannot tell you now about a specific law, but I am aware that we can learn many things. Even the [national] archives are not exactly open. It is a series of archives that I know that researchers find it difficult to access them. I do not know whether with (the Cyprus accession to) the European Union, things became easier."

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "And again I am not actually aware of any international legislation but I know that through the international legislation, the rights of access to information, transparency and accountability are secured. But there is a gap between what the legislation exists "in theory" and what actually happens in practice. But again, this is my opinion: maybe a campaign informing people and NGOs in general about our rights could help; I mean through this question I realise there is a gap in our awareness of the international or national legislation regarding this right. And maybe a campaign should be appropriate by informing people about this right. Maybe it would facilitate us in our work in the future. In fact, even if you do have access to information, if you don't know that this is your right, then someone (the authorities) may tell you "no you cannot have this information"; and if this bureaucracy is making your life difficult, next time you won't even bother asking. I think it's a nice idea to inform us about all these rights, either on what is happening regarding international legislation, or national legislation. So it would be like an guide: helping us knowing that it's our right and it's the authorities' obligation too."

Peace Centre: "No."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "No."

ALERT: "Yes"

Cyprus Youth Council: I think that it is established by the Human Rights; declared that public information should be transparent and known to the public. To be honest I am more aware of the children legislation which is mostly led by the UN Convention on the Rights of

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Children and I know that children have the right to access of information, therefore I assume that all human beings have the right of access to information.

Skoogle: "At a seminar I have attended recently, I happened to be informed about international agreements which have not been signed by Cyprus yet. I think we will be asked to do so this year. I don't know who decides, the government, or the European representatives, although I believe that the government should sign this Agreement so that everyone can have access to it and to any records held by the government; I am not sure that this applies to Cyprus. What I know is that they are obliged to give you an answer within a month but from my experience they hardly ever do. Probably taking them to court would be a way to make something out of it."

Culture in Action: "In E.U. there must be such legislation. E.U. and other international bodies should make a campaign or something that will inform us. So I think there is a problem here. This kind of information is not very open to some NGOs in the periphery of Europe not only in Cyprus."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "No."

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

KISA: "We cooperate with organizations in the north on issues of our interest. The problem is there, is the difficulty to utilize in one process the information that exists in two different situations. e.g. we may need some other things beyond the legislation to the issue of trafficking of persons, namely the implementation of this legislation, training, procedures in order different mechanisms to operate properly etc. But it is very difficult to come up with a single unified strategy because e.g. in the North there is no such legislation / practice. We (in the South) strive to implement this legislation and they (in the North) for its creation. In this case two completely different mechanisms are being used. It is very important the (dissemination of) information to exist; it must be often, not filtered, neither superficial. The language issue is very important and one of the biggest problems is that information for both sides is going through a third language [English]; this is not immediate communication. Usually what we have is a very small fraction of information, so it is difficult to evaluate properly."

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "We are a bi-communal organization, so if something happens or we want something in the north, our members are active. So we have access from our members."

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "The same as in the south. We need information, mostly what's in the newspapers for both sides. Because we are an NGO we do have the support of teachers unions, from both sides, but again a more personal contact makes our work much easier. Personal contacts are more appreciated by the association and the association seeks information directly from them. But again, I think the problems are the same, even though, because of the small population and because of the people's mentality, it is easier for people from both sides to have a direct contact with teachers and to get information like personal data and stuff like that."

Peace Centre: "I would certainly love to, but it is utterly impossible, for the time being."

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I wouldn't dare to ask, but in the future if there was a democratic system then I would definitely want to know what's going on in the north."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "Yes, I need information from the south. About the same things. I want to have information on how the official authorities help people to participate in the decisions taken in the society."

ALERT: "Yes, sometimes certain information is needed e.g. for antifascist organizations. We have always been cooperating with Turkish Cypriots; mainly with individuals. Regarding cultural matter, we get in touch privately with people, via emails and with people we know. Regarding getting in touch with public authorities in the North, so far we didn't need to do so. If I'd ever need to do so, I'd ask a Turkish Cypriot friend to tell me where to go to get the information I need. I am not afraid to go, as long as I know where should I go."

Cyprus Youth Council: "As changes have taken place in both communities, Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, I mean that quite often we need to access many types of information in the north, because, as I told you before, we deal with many subjects. So yes, information from the north is much needed but is cannot be easily accessed - at all."

Skoogle: "Yes, I need to have access to information in the north, regarding my NGO and for business purposes. I would be interested in matters such as properties, business, the law and about any NGO. For example if with these documents I have in the north I could be provided with the topographical maps so that if I applied for compensation at the proper committee I would have some proof for it. I don't know whether I could have access to it or not. I am thinking of going ahead with what I could be given by our authorities."

Culture in Action: "Of course we need access to information in the North because we consider that our work as "Culture in Action" is concerns the whole of Cyprus. We don't usually divide Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots. It's more difficult to us to have access to the North because of the political problem and the procedures that we need to follow in order to obtain this information, or the way we will find the information."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: I guess not. I would like to have access to information (in the North). If I'd need to have information from the North, I would ask from my contacts (NGOs in the north) and then I would have the information. But I would not contact the public authorities in the north, because I think they wouldn't give the information to me. From my personal experience from a seminar about HIV/AIDS, the colleagues in the North said that it is difficult to have information related to this issue and also that information cannot be trusted (the validity).

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?

KISA: "We live in a difficult world. E.g. a drug dealer shouldn't know that the police is suspecting on him, or being made public when the next raid of the police is going to take place. Certainly there must be a mechanism in place to exclude the abuse of power. Because

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the problem is that under the guise of necessity certain information is retained but this serves other purposes. Surely it is impossible that all information is accessible to everyone, but if information is retained, then there really should be a good excuse e.g. to protect society in general, or specific persons by restricting access of information e.g. for the protection of crime victims. For medical issues or for protection of personal data, eg why the parents of children in a kindergarten should not know that another child has AIDS- it is doubtful whether the parents will use that information in order to protect their children, or they will use this information in order to isolate the child that has AIDS. On the other hand, we know that many other children may be carriers, or have something, but we do not know because they haven't been under a medical examination. Therefore there is sensitive information and in order to protect those people should not be accessible. Surely the state should not withhold information in order to deprive people the ability to assert their rights and address violations of their rights."

Platform of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot Teachers: "Yes. Purpose has to be protective."

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research: "I think I would. Otherwise the laws would be a bit tricky. You can have access to the information but in a way you do not hurt or expose someone else, as a person or as an institution. "Yes" to access information, yes to dignity, yes to transparency and accountability but on the other hand this information shouldn't be able to hurt someone. Not in order to disguise or to hide something, but there has to be a limit. I mean we must respect some limits, otherwise anyone could access your information, my information, bank accounts, whatever. We need to have some limits, you can't let all the information open to everybody. For example, like our problem, information regarding missing persons, yes, I think there should be but again if this information could be hurtful to the family or to the public in general, maybe we should be careful on how we filter such information. Because it's not about the quality of such information, it's about the quantity of such information and information that contradicts other information that e.g. could be used in multiple ways to do good, or bad. I think it shouldn't be everything out in the open, but have some limits, have some respect to the personal data."

Peace Centre: "I would put exceptions on personal information, individuals (health, habits, finances). I wouldn't like my personal information to be known since I don't think it is right to have access to other people's private lives. I would establish limitations in cases I'd feel that those limitations would benefit the whole society. The state, or public institutions should not waste valuable time. (For example, a civil servant would probably need to look for hours to find the information asked). Consequently, I would give information only to those who I believe can make good use of it."

Association of Refugees Recognized in Cyprus: "If I were the only legislator in Cyprus, I wouldn't stop people from getting information, I would make it possible for them to get as much information as possible, because this helps the people to be aware of what is going on in the country in order to be able to help when needed."

ALERT: "For a state to function properly, it does not need to hide anything. In some cases e.g. regarding issues with underage people, this needs special treatment and such info should not be known by everyone. I reckon this should be the correct thing, as long as it is contained only for that matters. (Regarding access to Information) there should be an easy process. If it'd work the way it is now, I wouldn't change it. The important thing (for this phenomenon of lack of Access to Information) is not to spread this mentality."

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Cyprus Youth Council: "I think the only exception should be to protect the right of privacy and personal data. If this right of the citizens is not breached, then I think the citizens should have the right to access any information as long as we don't hurt or damage anyone by accessing specific information."

Skoogle: "I believe I would give them all the rights to access information because I like transparency and I am ready to establish it for my NGO, regarding records held for teachers, students etc. There shouldn't be any secrets. A country whose main concern is peace and safety, transparency is fundamental. With this exception of weapons, I can see no other need for secrecy. As for the private life of certain people I believe it should be published. If the citizens of a Democracy are considered active members by voting. Is an incontrovertible fact that they should have the right to access information, just like the shareholders of a company whose if anything is concealed it is considered a scandal."

Culture in Action: "No limitations to the right of citizens to access information. We live in a democratic country so everyone should have any kind of information from public sectors of the Cyprus Government. Of course there is a danger having information about army and other (sensitive issues). We should have some limitations there for our national safety and security. On the other hand we should have information. Once again, we should protect the personal data of each citizen. But if you mean information for the structure and for the way public sector domains, organizations and government work, we should have that information."

Cyprus Family Planning Association: "I would impose limitations to information that would breach, or jeopardize the legal rights of citizens - information that someone (with bad intentions) could use on the expense of other citizens; Private data, classified medical information (Medical Confidentiality); I would make laws -always having transparency in mind- in a way they can actually work; availability of statistical data is important."