

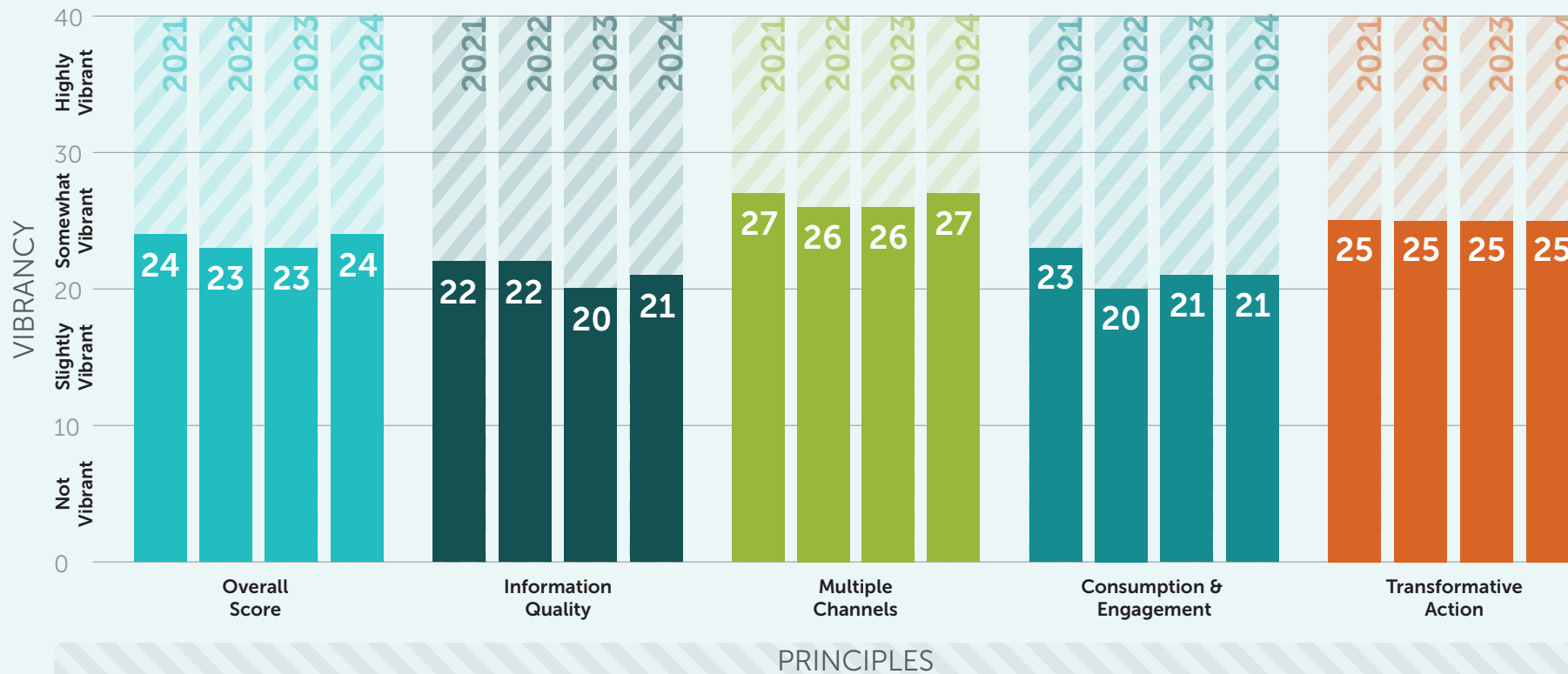
# KOSOVO

# Vibrant Information Barometer

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Photo by: Driton Paqarada



**Not Vibrant (0-10):** Quality information is extremely limited in this country. The vast majority of it is not editorially independent, not based on facts, or it is intended to harm. People do not have the rights, means, or capacity to access a wide range of information; they do not recognize or reject misinformation; and they cannot or do not make choices on what types of information they want to engage with.

**Slightly Vibrant (11-20):** Quality information is available on a few topics or geographies in this country, but not all. While some information is editorially independent, there is still a significant amount of misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech in circulation, and it does influence public discourse. Most people do not recognize or reject misinformation.

**Somewhat Vibrant (21-30):** Quality information is available in this country and most of it is editorially independent, based on facts, and not intended to harm. Most people have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information, although some do not. Most people recognize and reject misinformation, although some do not.

**Highly Vibrant (31-40):** Quality information is widely available in this country. People have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information; they recognize and reject misinformation.

Highly Vibrant

Somewhat Vibrant

Slightly Vibrant

Not Vibrant

OVERALL  
SCORE

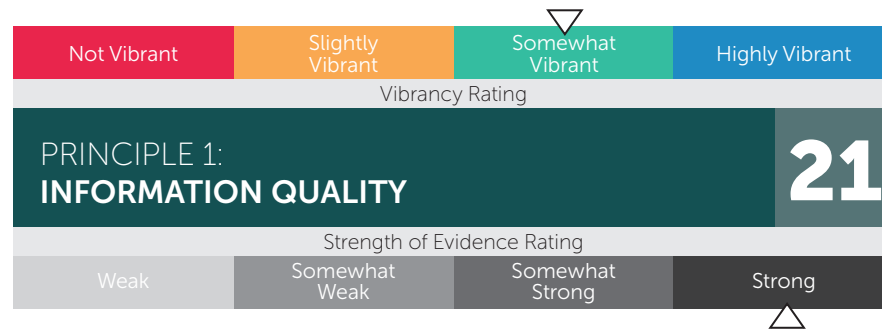
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Kosovo's media is characterized by a legal framework that is largely in line with European standards, demonstrating a commitment to protecting freedom of expression. However, in 2024 Kosovo ranked 75th in Reporters Without Borders' *World Press Freedom Index*, a drop of 19 spots since the 2023 index. In June 2023, the Government of Kosovo suspended the business certificate of one of the main private media broadcasters. This action raised concerns about media freedom and the punitive use of regulatory measures. The courts later reversed the decision, which would have led to the channel terminating operations in Kosovo. Moreover, journalists striving to hold politicians accountable frequently came under attack. Additionally, 2023 saw public broadcaster Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) appoint a television director affiliated with the ruling political party, sparking doubts about RTK independence.

The northern municipalities of Kosovo are predominantly inhabited by the Serb-majority community. Serbs refused to participate in extraordinary local elections in April 2023, resulting in the election of Albanian mayors. As the mayors attempted to take office, citizens mounted protests that escalated into violence, necessitating intervention by Kosovo police and the peacekeeping Kosovo Force (KFOR). This tumultuous period also saw several incidents of attacks on journalists and other media workers. Even with the increase in violence and despite calls for action from the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK), authorities did not establish safety protocols for journalists.

The media sector in Kosovo faces critical issues concerning transparency in ownership and funding, as well as challenges in achieving financial independence. These conditions leave the media prone to political and financial pressures. While RTK benefits from government funding, private media entities largely depend on advertising revenue. Such a monetary structure introduces its own challenges and influences on media content and independence. Furthermore, journalists at Serbian-language outlets have reported experiencing discrimination in accessing public information, pointing to persistent obstacles with media freedom.

In the VIBE 2024 report, Kosovo's overall score slightly increased (from 23 in 2023 to 24 in 2024). The score for Principle 1, regarding the flow of information, has increased to 21 from last year's score, suggesting a slight positive shift due to a better infrastructure for disseminating quality content. Moreover, Principle 2 has also shown an improvement from last year's VIBE publication, due to an upgraded environment for how information flows within the country. The scores for Principles 3 (Information Consumption and Engagement) and 4 (Transformative Action) remained at 21 and 25, respectively, indicating that that freedom of expression and access to information continue to be exercised without any negative consequence, and that civil society members still produce credible information that supports community improvement.



Overall, panelists agreed that Kosovo’s citizens have access to quality media content. However, panelists identified a gap between traditional print and broadcast media and new online media regarding information quality and adherence to ethical and professional standards. In 2024, the panelists’ scoring for Principle 1 increased by one point, compared to the VIBE 2023 study. Out of five key indicators that measure information quality in Kosovo, panelists gave similar scores to three: the indicators on the availability of quality information, on fact-based information, and on inclusivity and diversity. A slightly lower score was given to Indicator 3, which gauges whether the norm for information is not intending harm. Indicator 5, on content production being sufficiently resourced, received the lowest average panel score of this principle.

### **Indicator 1: There is quality information on a variety of topics available.**

Kosovo has diverse content offerings from numerous media outlets, including radio, television, online media, and podcasts. According to Kosovo Agency of Statistics, [98.6% of households](#) in Kosovo had internet access in 2023, a figure that exceeds the [European Union average of 91%](#). However, the television broadcasting infrastructure remains limited to analog since the country’s digital TV transition process is ongoing. The existing infrastructure is also rendered ineffective by unequal competition in the media market, as the cable television sector is becoming monopolized by only two companies. Kosovo has not had any printed newspapers since 2020. There is only one daily newspaper in the

online format, *KOHA Ditore*, which is subscription-based.

Online media, which are widely called “portals,” often do not incorporate ethical reporting on such topics as politics, economy, social issues, etc., and they serve solely as publishing platforms. Treating all online media as portals has resulted in reporting practices with a variety of shortcomings that tend to undermine the integrity, accuracy, and ethical standards of journalism. This approach is primarily driven by the practice of online reporting being short and delivered swiftly.

Media members have many training opportunities available, particularly through civil society organizations (CSOs) and journalist associations such as the AJK and the Press Council of Kosovo (PCK). These entities offer programs aimed at developing and enhancing skills of journalists, albeit with few classes on digital literacy (digital security, safeguarding online resources) and on emerging topics such as mobile journalism. Panelists agreed that a majority of media outlets do not have in-house training departments, so their employees cannot benefit from ongoing professional development.

Although Kosovo has specialized university departments to train journalists, professional producers continue to create misleading content. As video content rises, traditional media often deviate from reporting principles and neglect to meet legal and ethical obligations. The scarcity of professional media outlets commonly results in shortcuts around integrating digital journalism, such as failing to hyperlink cited sources and foregoing illustrative infographics. Information dissemination in fragments further confuses readers, according to the panelists: Most news is reported in pieces without proper analysis or additional context. For example, a news portal will publish up to ten articles about the same issue instead of gathering all the facts and publishing once.

The panelists also voiced concern with the trend of unclear distinction between news content and opinion pieces that are missing factual support, leaving consumers to form mixed and incomplete opinions. Online media, in particular, heavily rely on anonymous sources, undermining journalists’ legitimate and fundamental right to protect the

confidentiality of their sources. This practice appears to be on the rise in Kosovo, potentially eroding public trust in journalism. Additionally, local media undermine their credibility by uncritically distributing information from unverified sources.

Content producers face no serious professional consequences for non-compliance with ethical and legal standards. Although an outlet's credibility can be damaged after flouting ethical and legal standards, visibility and readability remain unaffected. Two key mechanisms, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the PCK, address monitoring and evaluation of complaints about media coverage, respectively. Nevertheless, a new Strategy of the Judicial Council of Kosovo (JCK) prioritizes defamation cases involving vulnerable individuals who face rising criminal offenses perpetrated against them—including journalists, as well as the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities—leading to expedited resolutions.

In the country's current media landscape, political coverage dominates, focusing primarily on government officials and individual figures rather than quality reporting of public policies or in-depth coverage of international events. Moreover, political debates during prime-time television slots seem to increasingly preempt informative and critical journalism. According to the panelists, public discourse is thus dominated with “political rumors” or “political interpretations,” and media present ongoing developments through snipped quotes from politicians and public figures. Online platforms rarely offer comprehensive, qualitative, or contextualized reports on national developments.

## **Indicator 2: The norm for information is that it is based on facts.**

Media content in Kosovo typically relies on facts, albeit not always well sourced. Media outlets regularly produce click-bait stories in hopes of drawing audiences, especially in coverage of crime, politics, and social issues. Panelists agreed that essential reporting is missing in the majority

of online media platforms, which ideally should provide comprehensive clarification and contextualization of developments in the country and beyond. Consequently, the public is often misinformed and misled.

Professional media outlets usually verify information, though oversights in fact verification can occur when journalists feel pressure to be the first to cover a story and thus publish quickly. On the other hand, non-professionals often publish unverified material.

One of the biggest challenges for journalists in Serbian-language newsrooms is limited access to information. Political representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo have been boycotting the work of independent media for years. Meanwhile, Kosovo central-level institutions fail to ensure consistent and timely cooperation. Often these agencies neglect to fulfill even the fundamental legal and technical requirements to facilitate high-quality Serbian language translation.

**“As video content rises, traditional media often deviate from reporting principles and neglect to meet legal and ethical obligations.”**

The government is not involved directly in deliberately creating or distributing false information. However, panelists remained concerned about government officials avoiding accountability and dodging media scrutiny on sensitive topics, such as the education system, visa liberalization, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and international recognition of Kosovo<sup>1</sup>. For example, the Minister of Education recently argued that the assessment results for the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test in December 2023 were due to the pandemic. This was seen as an attempt to downplay low test scores and avoid accountability for Kosovo's low performance.

IMC, Kosovo Press Council, and groups of independent fact-checkers are the primary groups that impose consequences for publishing manipulative information. Social media content falls outside these mechanisms.

<sup>1</sup> International government recognition of Kosovo as a state remains divided since Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia.

Kosovo has two fact-checking platforms, both of which are members of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). [Krypometri operates within kallxo.com](#) and is part of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, and [hybrid.info](#) is a fact-checking platform. Hybrid.info is also part of the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) and it partners with Facebook in reporting types of misleading and manipulative information. This arrangement is unique, as other social platforms (like Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, etc.) do not have local partners in reporting informational irregularities for the Albanian language. Most professional media outlets, at least their editorial staff, continually train on fact-checking and other aspects of professional standards for information. However, they do not have separate fact-checking departments.

### **Indicator 3: The norm for information is that it is not intended to harm.**

The Kosovar public is exposed to controversial content and narratives that are produced or supported by foreign governments and/or their representatives. These stories dominate the Serbian-language media in particular and likely originate from the governments of Serbia and Russia. Manipulated Albanian-language content comes more from the Chinese government. [The governments of these three countries](#) are the main producers of manipulated information about and in Kosovo.

According to University of Prishtina professor Alban Zeneli, within the last year the Serbian government or an affiliated media agency has distributed a large amount of manipulative information of an ethnic nature. The content is aimed at the Serbian population in the north of Kosovo. A [Kosovo 2.0 article](#) about this campaign stated that it is an attempt to create the narrative that Kosovo's Serbs live in unbearable conditions due to Albanian and Kosovar state authorities. The results of this information manipulation

were particularly clear after attacks on police in the North of Kosovo in September 2023.

According to [hybrid.info's research](#), in the first six months of 2023, 20 percent of the manipulated information in Kosovo's media content was related to the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue; 12.3 percent to topics related to the north of Kosovo; 5.2 percent to inflation 2.6 percent to social schemes (such as poverty reduction), 1.9 percent to municipalities with a Serbian majority, and 1.4 percent to the war in Ukraine.

As a general rule, media outlets do not deliberately use terms that would be characterized as hate speech. However, many journalistic practices observed in major media speak to a poor understanding of how political context can influence reactions to information. These shortcomings also show up as insensitive language around gender, ethnicity, or any marginalized group, especially related to sexual orientation or persons with disabilities.

The professional media as well as the government are careful not to spread hate speech. However, such language remains on social networks, mainly in the comments sections. In order to drive more engagement on these platforms, writers often produce inflammatory content and prod for feedback.

**Media reporting and headlines lack a gender-responsive approach, especially in cases of sexual violence, perpetuating sexist and discriminatory discourse against women.**

As for the consequences for professional and non-professional content producers, Kosovo has two primary institutions associated with this issue. Television, radio, and cable are under the purview of the IMC, which exercises its function quite well. Online media are currently self-regulated through the PCK. Both organizations

suffer from a lack of human resources for active monitoring, while PCK operates only on the basis of submitted complaints. These institutions have their own codes of ethics, which are essentially aimed at reporting the truth. Professional consequences, such as an apology or resignation, are not practiced at all in Kosovo. Politicians also rarely face public accountability for misleading citizens.

According to the panelists, media and platforms lack sophisticated mechanisms to reduce manipulative information and hate speech.

**Indicator 4: The body of content overall is inclusive and diverse.**

Most professional media aim to address citizen interests, online portals in particular. The country’s minority communities’ representation in the media is regulated by [Law No. 04/L-046 for the Radio Television of Kosovo](#) (RTK). However, in northern Kosovo, the frequencies of RTK2 are interrupted by Serbian channel frequencies. Pursuant to this law, 30 percent of programming should include content focused on minority groups in Kosovo. Additionally, [30 community radio stations](#) are spread throughout the territory of Kosovo, covering local information needs.

According to Besa Luci, editor-in-chief at Kosovo 2.0, media have little of the coverage that would reflect audiences’ diverse needs, interests, and priorities. Although Kosovo has a plurality of media in terms of quantity, this does not translate to an open plurality of voices.

Political reporting in particular is dominated by male voices, whether as sources or as analysts in studio discussions. Media reporting and headlines lack a gender-responsive approach, especially in cases of sexual violence, perpetuating sexist and discriminatory discourse against women. Such editorial policies marginalize women’s voices and discount their perspectives on issues pertaining to the economy, security, and justice. The underrepresentation of women in televised political debates also reinforces the stereotype that politics is a domain exclusively for men. Furthermore, women and individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community often face repercussions for their media exposure, including negative portrayals, smear campaigns, virtual threats, and cyberbullying.

Serbian-language media demonstrate a comprehensive and diverse content strategy, attributed to the intensive training provided to more experienced journalists and editors in the past decade. This progress is especially evident for television stations. In this sense, media show no discrimination against certain parts of the population. Men hold the majority of positions in management, newsrooms, and decision making,

while journalists and reporters are usually women.

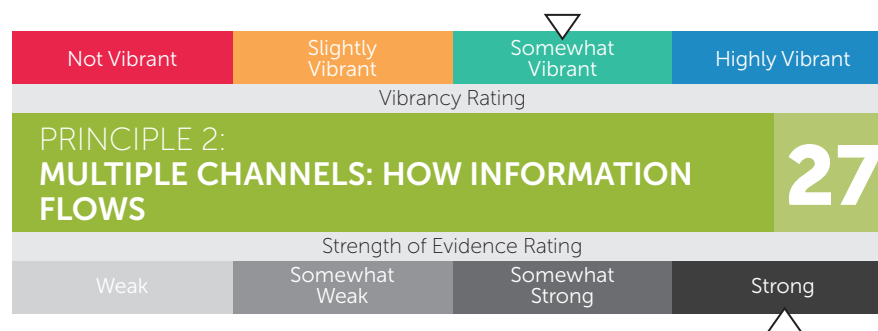
**Indicator 5: Content production is sufficiently resourced.**

The financial dynamics of media competition are uneven, due to the disparities in monetary support. Media outlets backed by business support indirectly do not rely on traditional financing methods, and advertising revenues are declining.

Media outlets (excluding the public broadcaster) have relied on advertising for financing since the post-war period, while those registered as CSOs primarily depend on donor financing. Some media attempted to introduce subscriptions to bring in additional revenue, but they were not successful. Many media outlets have turned to monetizing video content through social media as an alternative revenue stream. However, this raises ethical concerns, especially related to reporting in the public interest. Much of the content requested and viewed at large on social networks is devoted to seeking engagement rather than providing news and information.

Aside from RTK funding, the Government of Kosovo has no budget line to support media outlets through financing instruments such as subsidies.

While editorial-level management within media outlets receive satisfactory compensation, journalists still struggle with low salaries.



Principle 2’s score increased one point since the VIBE 2023 publication, driven in part by Indicator 7 (adequate access to channels of information), which received the highest score in this principle. Diverse

television channels and high-quality internet services cover most of Kosovo. Indicator 10, on the independence of information channels, remains the lowest-scoring one in this principle, as media ownership and editorial content have no clear separation in many media outlets.

Kosovo media align with international norms on paper, but the actual environment for journalists and media outlets remains tense. This reality is especially clear in the government criticism of journalists and the disparities in access to information channels. Panelists lamented the increasing incidents of hate speech against journalists—a trend that poses a significant risk to journalists' safety and public trust in media.

Additionally, the absence of digital broadcasting frequency limits the resilience and diversity of information access channels, pointing to a need for comprehensive regulatory reforms to ensure equitable media access and transparency.

Concerns about media independence, influenced by financial interests and political affiliations, equal a pressing need to preserve media integrity by separating media ownership and editorial content. Despite the challenges faced, IMC has managed to cultivate public trust, under new leadership at the board level.

### **Indicator 6: People have rights to create, share and consume information**

Kosovo's constitution and laws generally align with international standards on freedom of expression, with legal protections in place for the media. In 2023, no reports were made of journalists being arrested or imprisoned for their work. However, panelists described a concerning environment where journalists face harassment, strategic lawsuits aimed at silencing them, and even physical attacks. Such incidents highlight the need for more robust enforcement of existing laws and protections for journalists. The government, while not directly undermining freedom of speech through legal means, has been criticized for its unfavorable

approach towards the media and journalists. Defamation remains a crime.

Panelists cited reports of various government officials using harsh and denigrating language against journalists. The aim has been to cast doubt on journalists' intentions and label them as unreliable or biased. This rhetoric also reinforces a broader narrative that could affect public trust in journalism as a profession.

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Luci argued that rather than engaging in these adversarial tactics, the government could promote media education. Such actions would better serve the public interest and address concerns about information quality. However, the prevailing trend is to discredit media outlets and journalists. This undermining is

furthered by government supporters that rail with hate speech against any critics on social media.

The year 2023 has been marked as particularly unsafe for journalists, [with 74 incidents reported](#) by the AJK, especially during tensions in the northern part of the country.

The government makes no overt attempt at censorship and does not pressure ICT providers to censor journalists or media content. Self-censorship does remain significant, sometimes due to financial ties or editor fears of discussing controversial subjects.

In 2023, the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo failed to make amendments to the Law on Protection of Journalism Sources, the Law on Radio Television of Kosovo, and the Law on Independent Media Commission, despite having them on the legislative agenda. Such amendments would align the IMC law with [the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#) from the European Commission and permit the RTK law to address financing, reporting, and composition, thereby strengthening its editorial independence and direct accountability to the public.



**Indicator 7: People have adequate access to channels of information**

Kosovo has a considerable infrastructure for information dissemination. [The infrastructure serves 19 television stations, 89 licensed radio stations \(22 Serbian, three Bosnian, two Gorani, and one Turkish\), and provides internet access to approximately 96.6 percent of households.](#) Although information is widely available and generally meets the public's needs, panelists identified notable disparities in inclusivity and regulatory oversight. RTK Board Member Albulena Mehmeti said that RTK employs sign language in its news broadcasts, but other media outlets fall short in meeting standards for accessibility—highlighting an area for improvement in ensuring equal access for all communities.

Access is relatively high and stable for internet services as well as for cable and terrestrial television. Consumers across Kosovo, including southern and northern municipalities, have broad access. This reach indicates that most citizens can economically secure various information channels, including radio, television, and digital or social media. Cable companies such as Artmotion and Kujtesa dominate the market, underscoring a critical dependency on these providers for media access.

Kosovo remains unique in Europe for its lack of digital broadcasting, which affects the diversity of information access channels and limits alternatives in the event of terrestrial broadcast disruptions.

The regulatory framework for information channels is urgently in need of reform. Panelists said that cable operators and digital service providers in particular need stronger regulations to ensure competitive fairness, transparency, and wider accessibility.

**Indicator 8: There are appropriate channels for government information.**

The legal framework for the right to public information in Kosovo aligns with international standards. However, the bodies responsible for enforcement, the Agency for Information and Privacy (AIP) and its Commissioner for Information and Privacy, are subject to political

influence. AIP has been criticized for dodging certain cases that would implicate members of ruling parties. Civil society members have spoken out on this selective approach to information disclosure—particularly regarding the government's Security Fund, allocated to the Ministry of Defense for the Kosovo Security Forces (KSF), which officials have deemed confidential.

Flutura Kusari, a media lawyer from Prishtina, stated, “The Commissioner refuses to decide on cases that expose her politically, especially in relation to the politicians in the government who come from Vetëvendosje political party.”

Panelists argued that communication offices within the government are highly politicized. Media advisors, often political appointees, control the flow of information between public institutions, the media, and civil society. Government spokespersons do not regularly engage with the public and consequently are not well-known.

Journalists have voiced complaints about delays in accessing public documents and, in some cases, not receiving them at all. Often responses are incomplete or fail to directly address the questions at hand. AIP has imposed fines for such violations, highlighting the gap between legal guarantees and their practical application. Public institution spokespersons too are noted for being inconsistent in responding to media inquiries promptly or thoroughly.

Zeneli commented on the right to public information. “From a legal point of view, such a right is guaranteed. However, there are still delays in its implementation,” he said.

Government spokespersons generally maintain good relations with the press. However, panelists pointed out the significant problem of officials not providing the necessary content for dissemination, and the subsequent shortfalls in detailed information offered to the press.

The Serbian community faces additional obstacles, including political and institutional barriers to cooperation with independent media as well as challenges in engaging with the Kosovo central institutions.

### Indicator 9: There are diverse channels for information flow.

Kosovo's diversity of information flow presents a mixed picture. While the media have seen some regulatory efforts, such as recent regulations against media ownership concentration, enforcement and transparency remain questionable. IMC recently approved regulations against media ownership concentration. However, these regulations essentially legitimized the status quo, in which owners are frequently connected to other media companies and true diversity is missing.

Media distribution channel monopolization is a concern, as is the opacity behind spectrum allocation and the individuals establishing media outlets. The application of licensing procedures or other regulations also is problematic in terms of fairness and transparency.

Internet service providers appear to treat all communications equally, as internet access in Kosovo is widespread, with no discrimination based on user, content, source, or destination address.

The law guarantees freedom to establish media, but panelists expressed persistent concerns over the monopoly of media distribution channels. Panelists emphasized that an accurate assessment of this issue requires legislation that addresses ownership, transparency, and concentration. In the current absence of such regulatory measures, monopolization and its concealment have become widespread challenges.

### Indicator 10: Information channels are independent.

Panelists lamented the unclear separation between media ownership and editorial content, and they underscored the risk of financial interests influencing media content. Kusari pointed out specific instances such as the RTK appointment of the director of television for Albanian-language channels and his alleged connections with Vetëvendosje (the ruling political party). The appointment prompted reactions from civil

society as well as international stakeholders in Kosovo. The [European Federation of Journalists](#) shared its concerns in a public letter sent to the Prime Minister of Kosovo, arguing that such positions should be filled by professionals with no ties to the government or any political party.

Moreover, the insufficient budget allocated to RTK hampers its independence and hinders its development. The RTK budget in 2024 is planned to be approximately \$9.5 million ([8.9 million euros](#)), marking the third consecutive year of minimal funding from the current government.

Panelists emphasized how media organizations, especially those privately owned, avoid controversial topics which can negatively influence advertising revenue and thus might lead to compromising their editorial independence. However, they acknowledged that some outlets have separated their newsroom operations from business interests. Panelists further noted that government funding affects the neutrality

of public broadcasters. Private media do not receive any subsidies or advertisement revenue from the government. Access to information, including internet access and subscriptions to international news, does not favor any media in particular, and RTK does not receive either any tax breaks.

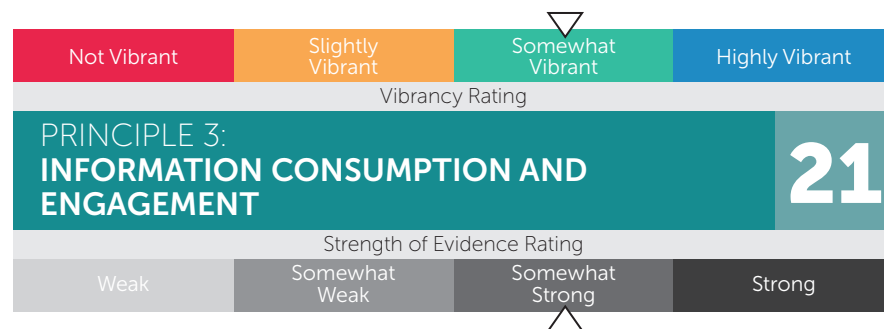
The Kosovo Assembly established the regulatory bodies that oversee frequency allocations, licenses, and telecommunication services. These regulators are legally independent from the government but not entirely free of political influence, as the legislature determines their memberships. The prevailing and persistent practice has been that members are chosen according to political preferences. Despite these challenges, the IMC has gained public trust, particularly under the leadership of its new chair.

Stanko Pevac, program director at RTV Puls, stated that the majority of Serbian-language media in Kosovo maintain independence both in management and editorial practices.

In 2023, the Kosovo government made its first-ever attempt to shut down a private-media broadcaster. The Kosovo Business Registration Agency

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suspended the license of Klan Kosovo, due to suspected irregularities in its registration. The Association of Journalists and civil society activists protested, decrying that decision and its potential impacts on media freedom.



The 2024 score for this principle is the same as it was in the 2023 study. Overall, the panelists agreed that media literacy skills among Kosovo's citizens have not improved, which was reflected in the panel giving the associated indicator its lowest rating out of all indicator-level scores for the country. Furthermore, citizens lack proper information on digital security and have a poor understanding of its importance.

Four out of the remaining five indicators on information consumption and engagement have similar scores to each other. Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the right to information, panelists agreed that journalists and activists have been much more silenced and censored than in the 2023 study, due to intimidation and threats from the ruling party and its supporters against those who criticize the government. High quality audience research is lacking. Moreover, apart from televised debates—which tend to exclude women and other marginalized groups—there are few avenues for public debate, such as town halls.

### Indicator 11: People can safely use the internet due to privacy protections and security tools.

While Kosovo law has a solid basis for the protection of privacy and personal data, effective implementation often proves challenging. The

2019 [Law on the Protection of Personal Data](#), 06/L-082 does not ensure digital security. However, the 2021 [Law on Electronic Communication](#) regulates electronic communications networks, services, and resources, including radio and terminal equipment, and their use. This law also protects personal data, particularly the right to privacy in processing personal data in the electronic communication sector. Although the current laws align with standards for personal data protection, public awareness of the digital environment in general and data security remains especially low.

In 2023, training initiatives in digital security increased in intensity. Participation is low, even though training organizations offer the courses for free. While media and professional content producers have some use of digital security training and tools, training opportunities need to be increased and security measures need to be implemented more widely, according to the panelists. Most media in Kosovo have been prey to cyber attackers, unable to prevent the breaches due to lack of technical expertise. Although some media outlets have taken steps to secure their websites and mitigate distributed-denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, many outlets are still at risk. Media companies have digital tools for preventing DDoS and other attacks, but they are expensive, as the panelists explained.

Panelists observed that the public has a prevailing lack of awareness regarding the role of algorithms in determining what individuals see on social media. This unawareness also extends to privacy and security concerns inherent in digital platforms. Few Kosovo citizens possess the tools or knowledge to adequately safeguard their personal data from unauthorized access or exploitation.

### Indicator 12: People have the necessary skills and tools to be media literate

In general, media literacy in Kosovo is at a very low level. Media literacy training initiatives are conducted on an ad-hoc basis, with short-term training programs organized either for students or teachers, mainly by international organizations operating in Kosovo.

Given students' high level of exposure to the digital world, the limited offerings for this subject are insufficient. Media literacy is not formally integrated into the compulsory curriculum of pre-university education. At the university level, only the Department of Journalism at the public University of Prishtina offers media literacy as an obligatory course. Media literacy remains an elective option at the discretion of teachers with the Municipal Directorates of Education. The subject is included in the core curriculum overseen by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MESTI), although MESTI has not yet approved the Media Education Strategy.

Even in cases where media literacy is part of the curriculum (within another subject or as an elective), it is not comprehensive and has shown minimal positive effect in the workforce. Few qualified professionals are in this field.

The general public lacks the knowledge to verify the veracity of online media, whether or not the editorial, ownership, or contact information is available. CSOs provide media education that is thorough but not enough to reach a wide audience.

Apart from NGO programs, the government does not support initiatives for adults outside of schools to improve their critical thinking about media content.

Few people use fact-checking tools or websites. But according to Ardita Zejnullahu, executive director at the Association of Kosovo Private Electronic Media, Kosovo consumers make good decisions based on qualitative news, especially during the elections and despite poor media education.

Pevac said that media literacy should be strictly distinguished from technical IT literacy. As he explained, "Precisely because media literacy is a condition for understanding civil liberties and human rights, it needs to be legally (re)defined and applied in public discourse, especially when it comes to the education sector and the work of specific professions such

as those employed in education, healthcare, and public administration, but also widely in the civil sector."

### **Indicator 13: People productively engage with the information that is available to them**

Kosovo's constitution guarantees freedom of speech and the right to information. Panelists said that journalists, civil society activists, and the general population clearly exercise their rights to freedom of expression and to information. However, panelists agreed that journalists and activists have been much more silenced and censored in 2023 as compared to 2022. The main reason is the ruling party and its supporters, who intimidate and threaten critics.

Apart from televised debates, there are few other avenues for public debate, such as town halls, and they reach limited audiences. Women and other marginalized

groups are often not part of political debates. According to [research](#) by Democracy for Development, women in the public arena, whether in politics, journalism, or other professions, are unfairly judged. They frequently hear comments on their appearance—hairstyle, attire, weight, and so on—while their abilities, expertise, and professional capacities are often ignored. Critics might resort to disparaging a woman's physical appearance when they have no counterarguments to her expertise. Kusari, for instance, has been criticized for her hairstyle while acting in her professional role as an advocate for media issues.

People report manipulative information, hate speech, or malicious information to the appropriate authorities; however, responsible bodies do not always address complaints in a systematic and professional manner. According to Zejnullahu, reporting to the IMC or the Press Council has increased due to an awareness increase of the general public on the role and responsibilities of regulatory authorities.

Although Kosovo has a formal legal framework, the mechanisms for exercising freedom of speech and human rights are not sufficiently

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developed. Pevac noted that even if some platforms do exist, they are of a “seasonal” character, from project to project, and not systematic and continuous, as is necessary for every community. According to Pevac, the institution of the ombudsperson should be promoted and brought closer to the Serbian community, as should other institutions such as the Office for Communities, the Office of the Commissioner for Languages, etc.

#### **Indicator 14: Media and information producers engage with their audiences needs**

In Kosovo, no audience research is available of any quality to be widely accepted by media professionals. According to the panelists, most research is ad-hoc “orders” from certain media to promote their “viewability” and followership. Media conduct audience research mostly for a specific purpose, such as aiding in decisions about program timing or for presentations to potential advertisers.

Radio and television stations are institutionally regulated and consistently transparent in matters of authorship, publishing corrections in cases of complaints, and hosting community events.

Media meet the needs and interests of the audience by publishing daily current events, but qualitative research is scarce. Media coverage is divided between what audiences are drawn to and more substantive topics that are in the public interest. The media often fail to understand broad audience needs and focus on the more popular content, which is often scandal-driven or related to daily politics. Most media neglect to cover social topics, women’s rights, the LGBTQ+ community, and other interest groups.

Media and civil society cooperate well, although both have unsatisfactory levels of cooperation with government institutions. The government mostly ignores the reactions of the media and civil society to developments in the country.

**“ The biggest challenge for local media outlets is financial sustainability. Both content and staffing are negatively affected by limited advertising budgets.**

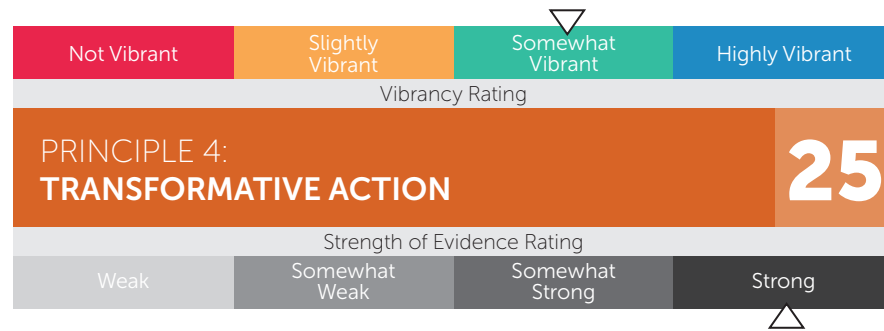
The solidarity and professional cooperation are notable aspects of Serbian-language media in Kosovo. Serbian media are receptive to audience feedback, as most web portals include this feature.

Panelists agreed that Kosovo media need new measurements of television viewership and other quantitative-qualitative research; the last relevant and comprehensive surveys were conducted more than 10 years ago.

#### **Indicator 15: Community media provides information relevant for community engagement**

Although they are few in number, Kosovo does have community media with specific content for marginalized groups. These outlets are media organizations that focus on issues of women’s rights and equal participation in society, which include the Center for Information, Criticism and Action (QIKA) and *Gazeta*. Currently, the show “Qika n’ekran” by QIKA airs on a private national broadcaster, T7 Television, providing latest developments in women’s rights advancement in Kosovo. Additionally, *Dylberism* is dedicated to advocating for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. All of these provide essential information targeted to their groups and elaboration that is otherwise lacking in the mainstream media. Their coverage has also facilitated public pressure to include these topics in debate forums.

Local media outlets, in different regions of Kosovo, provide the local public with information relevant to that area and not provided by national media. The biggest challenge for these media is financial sustainability. Both content and staffing are negatively affected by limited (or, in the case of Serbian media, non-existent) advertising budgets. This absence hinders community media’s overall ability to produce content in the public interest.



The 2024 score for Principle 4 is the same as it was in the 2023 study. As for government use of facts for policy decisions, panelists have seen some evidence of selective fact-sharing and a lack of transparency, which could mislead public perception and debate. In some instances, efforts by media and civil society to expose wrongdoing have led to positive changes. However, significant challenges remain in addressing corruption and ensuring accountability, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. Indicator 18 on civil society's use of quality information received the highest score, though it dropped one point from last year. The lowest-scoring indicator was on government use of quality information.

While Kosovo hosts a variety of media outlets appealing to diverse ideological perspectives, the digital sphere struggles with constructive engagement, and anonymity and hate speech are persistent issues. Despite facing issues with media literacy and manipulative information, people in Kosovo do rely on credible information for significant decisions, such as voting in elections. Civil society's role in using quality information to better the community seems to be positive, focusing on fact-based awareness and combating manipulative information.

“ In Kosovo, challenges related to media literacy and manipulative information present significant obstacles that prevent people from making well-informed decisions.

### Indicator 16: Information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines.

Several impartial information sources in Kosovo have managed to attract large audiences (such as [Radio Free Europe](#), [Kallxo.com](#), and [Telegrafi.com](#)) for their unbiased reporting and more in-depth analysis, thereby helping to strengthen public trust in media. Despite their ideological differences, people read and watch various media types. This diversity in media consumption suggests an openness among the population to gather different viewpoints. Nonpartisan information sources strive to encompass a range of political perspectives within their content. This reflects a foundational effort to provide balanced information, free from bias.

Beyond political debates on television, online debate initiatives and other forums are scarce and often descend into non-constructive exchanges marked by insults or even hate speech. Panelist noted that individuals often hide their identities, driven by self-censorship or fear of repercussions. This tendency indicates a strained environment for open digital discourse.

### Indicator 17: Individuals use quality information to inform their actions.

In Kosovo, challenges related to media literacy and manipulative information present significant obstacles that prevent people from making well-informed decisions. Often the attitudes and actions of the public are influenced by the information they receive, which largely remains unverified, not based in fact, and politically motivated. Despite the low level of media literacy education, people use quality information to choose their public officials. An example is the results of the last national and local elections in 2021, where, contrary to the collective euphoria and biased news, people made their decisions based on

quality information and personal judgements. However, the panelists believed that Serbian state media sometimes engage in information manipulation.

The public responds to government bodies that demonstrate a commitment to fact-based information with a high level of trust and compliance. For instance, citizens diligently followed warnings against the use of contaminated water sources from the National Institute of Public Health and traffic safety appeals from Kosovo police, showcasing the public's readiness to act on credible information. People utilize published information that is in their best interest.

### **Indicator 18: Civil society uses quality information to improve their communities.**

CSOs work towards raising awareness at various societal levels about specific issues, primarily using quality and fact-based information. In addition, CSOs have sought to increase citizen awareness of the forms of manipulative information. The general trend indicates that CSOs have been less active in critiquing the government and public authorities. However, the information they provide is accurate and fact-based. As a general rule, they do not disseminate manipulative information and actively work to reduce its spread.

The media and civil society collaborate effectively to cover various social issues and marginalized groups. Citizen participation in legislative changes is not evident; in fact, it has decreased due to reduced government transparency. Aside from public consultations, which are merely for show, ministries and the government have not made genuine efforts to involve citizens in key decisions.

Pevac commented on the cooperation between CSOs and Serbian media. "Due to political reasons, the work of CSOs within the Serbian community is limited by politics and obstructed by political representatives," he said.

### **Indicator 19: Government uses quality information to make public policy decisions.**

In 2023, the Government of Kosovo did, on several occasions, shape public perception by selectively emphasizing certain facts while downplaying others. Although the government did not engage in outright manipulative information or deceit, it fostered a form of informational disarray.

One example involved the passage of the salary law at the beginning of 2023. The government underwrote substantial salary increases for specific groups, such as police officers, framing the legislation as a path towards fixing disparities across various employment sectors. However, the increase in wages was much lower than what the government claimed, since the government had removed danger pay that recognizes, for example, increased personal safety and security threats in certain

occupations (such as law enforcement). Thus, after the removal of danger pay, the real increase was much different than what the government originally presented--negatively affecting the total amount police will receive from salary and allowances.

**Although the government did not engage in outright misinformation or deceit, it fostered a form of informational disarray.**

Government agencies have been criticized for a lack of transparency, particularly for infrequently holding press conferences. According to Zejnullahu, "In the absence of press conferences, debates in the media often take place, which are more frequently based on unfounded and speculative information rather than evidence and factual data."

Journalists face challenges in holding government leaders accountable, relying on public events for the opportunity to pose questions. As part of their strategy to avoid press conferences, government actors use the social media accounts that they manage. Thus, the provided information is mostly uncritical, and government actors even intentionally use incorrect statistics to shape public opinion about their activities. They refer to media materials primarily when the content is politically advantageous to the government or its officials.

**Indicator 20: Information supports good governance and democratic norms.**

Quality information, disseminated by civil society and media outlets, plays a crucial role in highlighting and preventing violations and corruption. Notably, public pressure fueled by the exposure of such violations can result in reversal of decisions by governmental entities—underscoring the power of informed citizenry in advocating for justice and transparency. One notable incident from 2023 is the [decision](#) of the central government to dissolve a public enterprise (the New Energy Enterprise of Kosovo) after CSOs publicly highlighted that the enterprise was not active due to a [cancelled energy project](#) in 2020, but it was still spending public money. Another example involves the [job vacancy](#) for the position of director of the Health Insurance Fund, which was canceled and reopened based on the [recommendations](#) provided by civil society organizations.

Although Kosovo has seen clear instances where exposés have led to preventive measures and reduced repeat violations, panelists still held significant concerns over the government’s inertia on uncovered corruption and other malpractices. For example, major scandals have not seen adequate governmental response, despite public pressure for accountability. For example, the chief executive of the Kosovo Energy Corporation was arrested on allegations of misuse of official authority, exercise of influence, and conflict of interest; additionally, the Ministry of Trade faces suspicions of regarding delays and absences of ordered goods.

Instances of corruption are still not adequately addressed even after being discovered by the media or CSOs. One example includes the Kosovo’s ambassador to Croatia, who has been at the center of [reports](#) for an alleged financial scandal in Slovenia. Media play a significant role in addressing civil rights and human rights violations. By investigating government officials engaged in corruption or any other irregularity, media in Kosovo are able to share their findings in civil and human rights cases.

On the other hand, findings by Serbian-language media struggle to gain attention or lead to concrete actions in response to the reported issues. This disparity indicates a systemic obstacle to the effective utilization of quality information in governance, particularly in areas with political and ethnic tensions.

Quality information plays a major role in ensuring free and fair elections, at central levels and local levels.



**LIST OF PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

**Flutura Kusari**, media lawyer, Prishtina

**Besa Luci**, editor-in-chief, Kosovo 2.0, Prishtina

**Albulena Mehmeti**, vice chairman of the board, Radio Television of Kosovo, Prishtina

**Stanko Pevac**, Programme director, Local radio and TV in Serbian language (community media), Gjilan

**Brikenda Rexhepi**, editor in chief, Kohavision, Prishtina

**Festim Rizanaj**, researcher, Hibrid, fact-checking site, Prishtina

**Ardita Zejnullahu**, executive director, Association of Kosovo Private Electronic Media, Prishtina

**Alban Zeneli**, professor, University of Prishtina, Prishtina

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