



# REPORT SUPPORT PROTECT

## A platform for whistleblowers

The Coalition members have continued their work to encourage the reporting of illegal cases and irregularities within institutions. They have set up tools to facilitate access for whistleblowers to report cases, engage with the media through capacity building and investigative reporting, and engage youth activists and journalists to write about whistleblowing. Through online platforms, experts, and legal advisers, the Coalition members aim at building an effective system of protection by providing information on and strengthening current protection mechanisms.

# I SUPPORT WHISTLEBLOWERS



Under the Coalition-funded project, “Whistleblowing.gr: Stronger protections and enhanced public awareness of whistleblowing in Greece,” **Transparency International (TI) Greece** launched the website [www.whistleblowing.gr](http://www.whistleblowing.gr). The platform offers a self-sign up service through a guaranteed, anonymous and secure mechanism provided by GlobalLeaks. TI Greece adopted the GlobalLeaks software in Greek and assisted beneficiary organizations in both public and private sector in working with



this software and the mechanisms for setting up internal online whistleblowing channels to securely receive and confidentially manage reports by whistleblowers.

Step by step instructions, frequently asked questions and promotional guidelines are included on the website. Moreover, a forum with the purpose to connect the competent compliance officers aiming to exchange practical information and best practice is in place. The service is fully operational. However, the reports are managed internally by the beneficiaries, thus, TI Greece has no direct access to them. Access to the reports is restricted to a very limited number of (1 or 2) senior management and experts. The website suggests whistleblowers to

use ToR browser to submit their reports. As soon as a report is submitted, the whistleblower receives a unique 16 digit code in order to log in and follow the next steps (receive an initial response, initiate a two-way dialogue via an anonymous chat facility, submit new evidence).

The website also includes:

- information on the Greek law, the EU Directive on whistleblowing, and international best practices
- the ethics of whistleblowing for safeguarding the public interest
- news and updates on whistleblower protection with a focus on national and international policies
- TI-Greece's work on whistleblowing

**TI-Greece will make all the texts available in English, as well as share the website source code, documentation, and visual materials in a GitHub repository to benefit NGOs that consider developing something similar.**

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To further increase the potential impact of this initiative, TI-Greece will provide the English translation of all the texts, the website's source code and documentation as well as visual materials in a GitHub repository to benefit NGOs that consider developing something similar.

Similarly, **Transparency International (TI) Macedonia** set up an online platform for the protection of whistleblowers (<https://www.ukazuvac.mk/>; <https://whistleblower.mk/>) within the framework of the project

“Empowering Whistleblowers in Macedonia”. The main objective of this project is to raise public awareness regarding the law on whistleblowing and reporting channels, explain the existing mechanisms for protection, and provide relevant information for safe reporting and whistleblower legal protection. As such, the website has been promoted on social media, as well as through printed leaflets along with pocket publications containing information of the Law on Whistleblowers.

**20 cases of corruption and violations of labor rights**

**6 cases of unlawful unemployment**

The website has been available and active since March 2019. In addition to the reporting channels, the website also contains a link with the contact details of the appointed officials in North Macedonia’s public institutions that are in charge of receiving reports from whistleblowers.

## How it works?

The reports can be registered online either anonymously or including contact details. In both cases, the reports are automatically sent to a special e-mail address. In case contact details are registered, whistleblowers are contacted by legal advisors who may ask for more information and assess to what extent they are able to assist whistleblowers.



## Reported cases

So far, 20 reports from potential whistleblowers were received from TI Macedonia that were analyzed by the legal team. The reported cases revolve mainly around corruption. However, given the pandemic, the TI - Macedonia team gave a particular attention to cases encompassing violations of labor rights and cases pointing out a lack of transparency regarding the financial assistance packages from the government concerning businesses and employees’ salaries. One report in particular was filed by a restaurant owner to whom financial assistance from the government package was refused. The case raised concerns over lack of transparency and politicization in the whole process of the financial distribution to the enterprises and businesses, in the sense that companies

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related and affiliated to the government were the ones to be awarded financial assistance. Additionally, there were six cases received from people who have reported being unlawfully left unemployed. In the context of COVID-19, there were also reports from whistleblowers being asked for a bribe by medical personnel to provide negative test results.

TI - Macedonia continues to closely monitor the government decrees that have being adopted and constantly updated during the emergency situation in the country and assess any risk of corruption or violation of human rights. With these activities, TI-Macedonia continues to be committed to the mission of becoming a focal point for whistleblowing practice.

## Investigative Reporting

Members of the Coalition organized several activities to raise awareness of and enhance whistleblowers' rights. A particular target in their activities during this reporting period were journalists and investigative media in general.

In Albania, the **Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance (CSDG)** completed the project on "Improving the reporting on whistleblowing by enhancing skills of investigative journalists in whistleblowing and protection of whistleblowers". The CSDG published in April 2020 a report on "Whistleblowing in the media". The study finds that there is a lack of information concerning the practice of whistleblowing and holds that part of the problem is not only lack of awareness in the society but also the organization of the media which often discourages journalists to engage in issues related to whistleblowing. In this regard, the CSDG has made efforts to promote the practice of whistleblowing as well as the legal protection of whistleblowers but also to encourage journalists to engage more in this area.

Specifically, the CSDG has produced an English version of the Guide on Whistleblowing in Albania which contains information on the Albanian legal framework on whistleblowing and provides answers to the most frequent questions that whistleblowers and practitioners in charge of its implementation might have.

Furthermore, the CSDG produced a promotional video on whistleblowing, especially in the private sector, in which there is a lack of reporting according to the results from monitoring whistleblowing in Albania. With materials and contribution from the Coalition staff, the CSDG produced an additional

### The CSDG:

- **identified information gaps among the Albanian community of journalists**
- **launched a competition engaging young journalists to write whistleblowing-related stories**
- **produced the English version of the Guide on Whistleblowing in Albania, as a didactic instrument to better understand the Albanian legal framework on whistleblowing**
- **found a lack of reporting in the private sector and produced a promotional video on whistleblowing in this regard**
- **an assessment report was produced titled "Albanian Media Reporting on Whistleblowing" which was translated to English as well.**

promotional video on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the SEE Coalition on Whistleblower Protection.

Regarding the second objective, concerning the encouragement of journalists to write on whistleblowing related stories, CSDG launched a competition by building on the identified gaps

among the Albanian community of journalists. The best articles were selected by a jury of experienced journalists and experts on the practice of whistleblowing. Each article unfolds a particular perspective on the role of whistleblowing as an anti-corruption instrument that can contribute to the improvement of a specific aspect of society. The first article to be selected was "Whistleblowing in electoral processes as a good sign for the improvement of democracy in Albania" written by Klea Xhaferi and published on the CSDG's website. This article elaborated on whistleblowing as a tool to strengthen the integrity of the electoral processes. The two other best articles revolved around the topic of whistleblowing in the media and whistleblowing in the field of sports. They raise the challenging aspects of the cooperation between journalists and whistleblowers, and the problem of recognizing and reporting corruptive cases in the field of sports. The second prize was, thus, awarded to Erisa Kryeziu for her article "Whistleblowers of corruption to be acknowledged by journalists" whereas the third prize was received by Ermal Spahiu for his article "Whistleblowing, a tool to strengthen the integrity of and fight corruption in sports".



Part of the CSDG video guide on whistleblowing in Albania

### How to work with whistleblowers?

### How to treat whistleblowers as sources of information?

### How to verify the received reports?

The Bulgarian Coalition member **Media Development Center (MDC)** implemented activities that targeted mid-career journalists from small regional media and students in journalism. The first workshop took place on October 19, 2019 with 10 participants and the second one was held on February 1, 2020 at the American University of Bulgaria with the participation of 40 students from more than five different countries. The workshops covered topics on how to work with whistleblowers, how to treat whistleblowers as sources of information, and how to verify the received reports.

The participants were trained by Alexenia Dimitrova, a prominent, award-winning Bulgarian investigative journalist, who is also a licensed trainer and media expert, as well as founding member of the SEE Coalition on Whistleblower Protection and

member of the Commission on media policy of South East European Network for Professionalization of Media. She pointed out that whistleblowers can be an excellent source of information but, as such, need to be treated with high responsibility by the journalists.

The workshops addressed the main challenging aspects of investigative journalism with regard to whistleblowing, such as the lack of trust in journalists and the society in general but also the fact that whistleblowers very often do not seem to understand that

reporting comes with a high responsibility. Thus, the main profit was to raise awareness among young people and future journalists about whistleblowing and its importance to the society, which was followed by ideas and techniques on how to build trust in journalists and how the media can communicate to whistleblowers more effectively.

However, the media has to not only provide protection to whistleblowers but also to verify the information received from them. The trainer outlined that the Perudja Principles on whistleblowers do not contradict the usual media strategies on access and verification of information. Thus, the trainer pointed out the need to also train whistleblowers to support their allegations, for instance by using Freedom of Information acts and Open Source Intelligence. As a result, the activities can be expanded in the future, specifically in the field of "citizen journalism", which is a relatively new and less popular branch of modern journalism. Media Development Center is taking into consideration the idea to contribute to this branch by offering its already well-established expertise.

The presenter answered numerous questions from the participants both in an informal chat before the event and during the event in a discussion with the entire group. Dimitrova encouraged participants to start observing and exploring the techniques and principles shared during the workshop and invited them to stay connected and exchange advise or updates on the raised questions and concerns.



Illustrative picture taken from MDC site