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YOUTH WORK MANUAL ON WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION & ICT AGAINST CORRUPTION

PRACTICAL MANUAL FOR YOUTH WORKERS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS

Developed within the project "With Digitalisation Versus Corruption" (Erasmus+)

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table of contents

04 INTRODUCTION

05 WHO THIS MANUAL IS FOR AND HOW TO USE IT

06 FACILITATION PRINCIPLES FOR SENSITIVE ANTI-CORRUPTION WORK

07 MODULE 1: UNDERSTANDING WHISTLEBLOWING AND LEGAL PROTECTION

09 MODULE 2: DIGITAL TOOLS, SECURITY AND SAFE REPORTING

11 MODULE 3: ETHICS, CIVIC COURAGE AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK

13 MODULE 4: DESIGNING YOUTH ANTI-CORRUPTION ACTIVITIES

15 MODULE 5: SAFEGUARDING, REFERRALS AND ORGANISATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

17 SUGGESTED TRAINING FORMATS

18 PRACTICAL HANDOUTS AND TRAINER TOOLS

19 CASE STUDIESFOR WORKSHOPS

20 GLOSSARY AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

21 CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

INTRODUCTION

Corruption harms trust, reduces fairness and weakens democratic life. Young people feel its consequences in education, employment, access to services, local government and opportunities for participation. At the same time, many young people are unsure what wrongdoing looks like in practice, how to report it safely, and where to seek support.

Whistleblowers play an important role in protecting the public interest by speaking up about fraud, abuse of power, conflicts of interest, misuse of funds, threats to health and safety, or other serious wrongdoing. Yet reporting wrongdoing can also expose people to retaliation, isolation, digital risk and emotional pressure. For that reason, whistleblower protection is not only a legal issue; it is also a youth work, ethics, safeguarding and digital literacy issue.

This expanded manual was prepared to help youth workers, civil society organisations, facilitators and community educators approach the topic responsibly. It builds on the original Youth Work Manual and adds practical structure, clearer learning outcomes, facilitation notes, risk management guidance, workshop ideas and tools that can be adapted to different countries and organisational contexts.

Main aim

To help youth workers and practitioners create safe, informed and action-oriented learning spaces in which young people can understand corruption, recognise the value of whistleblowing, learn how to protect themselves digitally and ethically, and identify trustworthy support pathways.

WHO THIS MANUAL IS FOR AND HOW TO USE IT

This manual is intended for:

- youth workers and youth organisations that want to integrate integrity and anti-corruption themes into non-formal education;
- civil society organisations that support community accountability, transparency, inclusion and human rights;
- educators, trainers and facilitators running workshops, exchanges, campaigns or peer-learning sessions;
- community practitioners who may be the first trusted contact for a young person who has witnessed wrongdoing.

You can use the manual in several ways:

- as a full 1–3 day training course covering all modules;
- as a shorter thematic workshop focused on one issue, such as digital safety or ethical dilemmas;
- as a preparation resource for trainers before running anti-corruption activities;
- as an internal organisational reference for referral, safeguarding and safer communication.

Important practice note

This manual does not replace legal advice, psychological counselling or formal reporting mechanisms. It is a practical guide for education and support. When real cases arise, facilitators should know their boundaries, avoid giving risky promises, and refer participants to qualified services when needed.

FACILITATION PRINCIPLES FOR SENSITIVE ANTI-CORRUPTION WORK

Because whistleblowing can involve fear, risk, shame, anger or trauma, facilitation should always be careful and participant-centred. The following principles are recommended:

- Create a safe and voluntary learning environment. No participant should be pressured to disclose personal experiences or sensitive details.
- Use examples and case studies before discussing real situations. This gives participants distance and reduces risk.
- Be transparent about your role. A trainer is not an investigator, lawyer or journalist unless they are explicitly acting in that capacity.
- Separate education from formal reporting. Training spaces can explain options, but they should not become improvised reporting channels unless appropriate procedures are in place.
- Think about inclusion. Young people with fewer opportunities, minority groups, LGBTQI+ youth, migrant youth or young people in precarious employment may face additional risks when speaking up.
- End sessions with grounding and support information, especially after emotionally heavy discussion.

MODULE 1: UNDERSTANDING WHISTLEBLOWING AND LEGAL PROTECTION

Module purpose

This module introduces the basic concept of whistleblowing, explains why it matters for democratic societies and youth participation, and provides an accessible overview of legal protection principles.

Learning outcomes

- define whistleblowing in plain language and distinguish it from rumours, personal disputes or bad-faith accusations;
- dentify common forms of wrongdoing that may justify reporting;
- understand the purpose of legal protection frameworks, including confidentiality, reporting channels and anti-retaliation safeguards;
- reflect on why protection mechanisms matter for public trust and accountability.

Core concepts

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information about wrongdoing that affects the public interest. This may include corruption, fraud, abuse of office, procurement irregularities, nepotism, falsified documents, serious ethical breaches, environmental harm, unsafe practices or misuse of public or donor funds. A whistleblower may report internally within an organisation, externally to a competent authority, or in some contexts publicly when other channels fail or are unsafe.

A good introductory distinction for participants is the difference between suspicion, concern and evidence. People do not always need perfect proof before raising a concern, but they should understand the importance of good-faith reporting, factual accuracy, documentation and avoiding reckless sharing. Youth workers can help participants think through what they know, what they assume and what still needs verification.

At European level, Directive (EU) 2019/1937 established minimum standards for the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law. Trainers may also refer to Council of Europe standards and relevant national laws. In practice, participants usually need the principles explained more than the legal detail: confidentiality, accessible reporting channels, prohibition of retaliation, follow-up obligations and access to support.

Trainer note

Avoid presenting whistleblowing as a heroic act only. It is helpful to acknowledge courage, but also to normalise responsible reporting as part of healthy institutional culture, ethical citizenship and community care.

Suggested activity: perception mapping

Ask participants to write the first three words they associate with the term "whistleblower". Collect responses on a flipchart or digital board, then group them into themes such as fear, courage, betrayal, justice, risk and responsibility. Use the patterns to discuss local attitudes and stigma.

Discussion prompts

- What kinds of wrongdoing do young people most often encounter in everyday life?
- Why do many people stay silent even when they believe something is wrong?
- What protections should any fair reporting system guarantee?

Quick handout content

Concept	Plain-language explanation	Examples
Whistleblowing	Reporting wrongdoing in the public interest	Fraud, bribery, procurement abuse, unsafe practices
Retaliation	Negative consequences for speaking up	Threats, isolation, dismissal, pressure, smear campaigns
Confidentiality	Protection of the reporter's identity	Restricted access to identity, secure handling of information

MODULE 2:
DIGITAL TOOLS, SECURITY AND SAFE REPORTING

Module purpose

This module helps participants understand how digital tools can support safe reporting and transparency, while also highlighting the risks of surveillance, insecure communication and poor digital hygiene.

Learning outcomes

- recognise the role of encrypted communication, anonymous reporting systems and secure file sharing;
- identify common digital risks such as phishing, metadata exposure, insecure Wi-Fi, weak passwords and device sharing;
- apply basic digital hygiene steps before, during and after a report;
- compare tools not only by convenience, but also by privacy, accessibility and suitability.

Core content

Digital tools can make reporting safer and more efficient, but only when users understand their limits. Youth participants often assume that common apps are automatically safe. This module therefore focuses on everyday decision-making: which tool to use, what not to share, how to reduce traceability, and how to avoid exposing other people unintentionally.

Examples trainers may introduce include encrypted messaging applications, privacy-respecting email services, secure reporting platforms, anonymous browsing tools and simple file-sharing options with strong access controls. The educational point is not to overwhelm participants with technical detail, but to help them make safer choices and recognise when specialist support is needed.

Basic digital hygiene checklist

Use strong unique passwords; activate two-factor authentication where possible; separate personal and sensitive communications; think about metadata in files, photos and screenshots; avoid sending sensitive information over insecure networks; and document what was sent, when and through which channel.

Suggested activity: tool comparison

In small groups, ask participants to compare two tools used for communication or reporting. They should consider encryption, identity protection, ease of use, data retention, access on shared devices and what risks remain even when a tool is technically secure.

Category	Example tools	Strengths	Watch-outs
Messaging	Signal or other encrypted messengers	Fast communication; strong encryption	Phone number exposure; backups; device access by others
Email	Privacy-focused email services	Useful for longer records and attachments	Metadata remains relevant; inbox security still matters
Reporting platforms	GlobaLeaks / SecureDrop-style systems	Structured intake, anonymity features, evidence upload	Requires organisational capacity and clear follow-up
Browsing and access	Tor Browser or privacy-aware browsing	Can reduce traceability and support anonymous access	Learning curve; misuse can create false confidence

Reflection prompts

- What makes a tool feel safe, and what actually makes it safer?
- How can convenience become a security risk?
- What should a youth worker say when they are unsure whether a participant's digital plan is safe enough?

MODULE 3:
ETHICS, CIVIC COURAGE AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK

Module purpose

This module explores the moral side of speaking up: values, trust, solidarity, dilemmas and the supportive role youth workers can play without taking over decision-making from participants.

Learning outcomes

- reflect on ethical tensions such as loyalty versus integrity, silence versus responsibility, and caution versus courage;
- understand the supportive role of youth workers as trusted adults, mentors and referral points;
- practice non-judgmental communication when a young person raises a concern;
- develop a values-based approach to integrity work with diverse youth groups.

Core content

Whistleblowing is often discussed through legal procedures, yet many real decisions happen before formal procedures begin. People ask themselves whether speaking up is worth it, whether anyone will believe them, whether they will hurt colleagues, or whether staying silent makes them complicit. These are ethical questions as much as legal ones.

Youth workers are not expected to solve every case. Their role is often to listen, help structure the situation, reduce panic, avoid harm, support informed decision-making and connect the young person with more specialised help. A good youth work response combines empathy, confidentiality, honest boundaries and practical orientation.

Good practice for youth workers

Listen without interrogation. Clarify immediate safety concerns. Avoid making promises you cannot keep. Encourage factual thinking rather than speculation. Explain options and limits. Record only what is necessary and protect the information you hold.

Role-play exercise

Scenario: a young volunteer tells a youth worker that a local organisation may be misusing

project money. Participants role-play four positions: the young person, the youth worker, the organisation representative and a peer. Debrief by focusing on emotion, power, fear, evidence and safe next steps.

Values discussion

- When does loyalty to a group become harmful silence?
- What support does a person need before they can act with civic courage?
- How can youth work build integrity without moralising or shaming?

MODULE 4: DESIGNING YOUTH ANTI-CORRUPTION ACTIVITIES

Module purpose

This module turns knowledge into practice by helping participants design workshops, campaigns and peer-learning actions that are realistic, engaging and safe.

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Learning outcomes

- translate complex anti-corruption topics into accessible youth-friendly formats;
- design a small awareness activity or campaign with a clear objective and audience;
- include risk, ethics and support pathways in communication design;
- evaluate whether an activity promotes empowerment rather than fear or sensationalism.

Core content

Young people are more likely to engage with the topic when activities feel concrete and relevant. Rather than speaking only about institutions, facilitators can begin with everyday experiences: unfair selection processes, missing transparency around budgets, favouritism in school or local clubs, or unsafe ways people are pressured to stay silent.

Creative formats are especially useful in youth work: short video, podcast, peer discussion, comic strips, debate, social media storytelling, community mapping and simulation exercises. The strongest activities combine three elements: recognition of the problem, practical knowledge for safer action and a realistic support pathway.

Mini campaign planner

Element	Guiding question	Examples	Notes
Objective	What should change after the activity?	Raise awareness; build reporting confidence; map support services	Keep objectives realistic
Audience	Who is it for?	Secondary students; youth leaders; volunteers; local community	Adapt language and format

Message	What is the core message?	Speaking up safely matters; integrity protects everyone	Avoid fear-only messaging
Safety	What could go wrong and how will you reduce risk?	Anonymous participation; moderation rules; referral contacts	Plan before publishing

Suggested group task

Ask each group to design a four-week youth action plan on integrity or safe reporting. Each plan should include a goal, target group, key message, one online activity, one offline activity, a risk assessment and a follow-up method.

Debrief questions

- Does the activity inform, empower and protect?
- Have you included support contacts or only awareness messaging?
- Could your activity accidentally expose participants or encourage unsafe disclosure?

MODULE 5: SAFEGUARDING, REFERRALS AND ORGANISATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

Why this module matters

Many manuals stop at awareness and reporting, but youth organisations also need a preparedness layer. If a participant raises a serious concern, the organisation should know how to respond safely, ethically and proportionately.

Learning outcomes

- identify safeguarding and duty-of-care issues linked to whistleblowing-related discussions;
- distinguish between educational support, emotional support and formal case handling;
- develop a simple internal referral pathway for trainers and youth workers;
- understand the importance of documentation, confidentiality and secure storage.

Core guidance

Organisations benefit from a simple internal protocol: who can be approached, how confidential information is stored, when management is informed, when external referral is needed, and what not to do. Even a small NGO can prepare a basic response pathway. This reduces panic and lowers the chance of accidental harm.

Referral mapping is especially important. Trainers should know which organisations or institutions in their context can provide legal advice, psychosocial support, digital security assistance, labour rights information or anti-corruption reporting routes. A good manual therefore encourages preparation before a workshop begins, not only reaction afterwards.

Minimum organisational readiness

Nominate a responsible contact person; agree on boundaries of confidentiality; prepare a short referral list; define safe storage practices; and brief facilitators on how to respond calmly when a participant shares a real concern.

Simple referral pathway

Situation	Immediate response	Possible referral	Notes for facilitator
Participant asks a general question	Provide educational information	No formal referral needed	Stay within trainer role
Participant describes a past concern without current risk	Listen and clarify support needs	CSO, legal clinic, hotline, trusted institution	Do not push them to report
Participant fears retaliation or digital exposure	Prioritise safety planning	Digital security support, legal advice	Avoid insecure follow-up
Immediate danger or severe abuse	Follow emergency and safeguarding procedures	Competent authority / emergency support	Act according to duty of care

SUGGESTED TRAINING FORMATS

The manual can support different delivery formats depending on time, participant experience and organisational goals.

Format	Suggested duration	Best use	Recommended modules
Intro workshop	90–120 minutes	*Awareness raising for new groups*	Module 1 + selected parts of Module 2
One-day training	5–6 hours	*Balanced practical training*	Modules 1–4 + short safeguarding segment
Two-day training	10–12 hours	*Deeper skill building and project design*	All modules + case studies + campaign planning
Internal staff capacity session	2–3 hours	Organisational preparedness and referral planning	Modules 2, 3 and 5

Sample one-day agenda

1. Opening, expectations and group agreement
2. Module 1: understanding whistleblowing and legal protection
3. Break
4. Module 2: digital tools and safe reporting
5. Lunch
6. Module 3: ethics, role-play and youth worker response
7. Module 4: campaign or activity design
8. Closing reflection, referrals and evaluation

PRACTICAL HANDOUTS AND TRAINER TOOLS

The following materials can be copied into handouts, workshop worksheets or slide-based exercises.

A. Safe reporting checklist

- Clarify what happened, what you know directly, and what still needs verification.
- Keep evidence in a secure place and avoid over-sharing copies.
- Consider risks to yourself and to others who may be affected.
- Use a safer communication channel if you are seeking advice.
- Contact a trusted organisation, adviser or institution when needed.
- Document retaliation or pressure if it occurs after reporting.

B. Youth worker response checklist

- Stay calm and thank the person for their trust.
- Do not interrogate or demand proof immediately.
- Clarify whether there is any urgent safety concern.
- Explain your role and the limits of confidentiality.
- Offer information, options and referrals rather than instructions.
- Store any written notes securely and minimally.

C. Pre-session reflection questions

- What do participants already believe about corruption and speaking up?
- Could this topic trigger anxiety or real-life concerns in the group?
- What local referral contacts do you need before the session starts?
- What digital tools will you use during the workshop, and are they appropriate?

CASE STUDIES FOR WORKSHOPS

Case 1 – Misuse of youth project funds

A volunteer notices invoices for equipment that was never purchased. The organisation relies heavily on public funding and staff fear reputational damage if the issue becomes public.

- What are the main risks in this situation?
- What support would a young person need first?
- What would be a safer next step?

Case 2 – Scholarship favouritism

Students suspect that scholarships are being awarded based on connections rather than transparent criteria. No one is sure where to report and many fear being labelled as trouble-makers.

- What are the main risks in this situation?
- What support would a young person need first?
- What would be a safer next step?

Case 3 – Environmental harm in the community

Young activists document repeated illegal dumping near a local settlement. They want to raise the issue publicly but worry about digital harassment and backlash.

- What are the main risks in this situation?
- What support would a young person need first?
- What would be a safer next step?

1.1. Case 4 – Workplace retaliation against a trainee

A trainee raises concerns about unsafe practice and is suddenly excluded from meetings and future opportunities. They are unsure whether this counts as retaliation.

- What are the main risks in this situation?
- What support would a young person need first?
- What would be a safer next step?

GLOSSARY AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Term	Practical meaning
Whistleblower	A person who reports wrongdoing affecting the public interest.
Corruption	Abuse of entrusted power for private gain or unfair advantage.
Retaliation	Punishment or pressure because somebody raised a concern.
Confidentiality	Protecting identity and limiting access to sensitive information.
Integrity	Acting in line with ethical principles, fairness and accountability.
Open data	Publicly available information that can support transparency and oversight.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This manual is designed to be used, adapted and localised. Youth work on corruption and whistleblower protection is strongest when it connects values, knowledge, practical skills, digital awareness and realistic support systems. Trainers are encouraged to adapt examples to local realities, translate handouts where needed, and update referral contacts and legal references regularly.

Most importantly, the manual should help create a culture in which young people understand that integrity is not abstract. It is lived through everyday decisions, fair systems, solidarity with those at risk, and the confidence to seek safer pathways when something is wrong.

Introduction of participating organizations and their representatives in the project

Name and function	Organisation	Role/tasks
Zoran Dabetic	EPEKA Montenegro	Coordinator
Vedran Savić	UDRUZENJE AKUSTIKUM	Coordinator
Nermina Simoncic	EPEKA Slovenia	Coordinator
Stefan Simoncic	EPEKA Slovenia	Coordinator
Matej Tisaj	EPEKA RS	Coordinator
Milica Nedeljkovic	EPEKA RS	Assistant coordinator
Belma Muratovic	EPEKA Montenegro	Assistant coordinator
Jerica Lorenci	EPEKA Slovenia	Assistant coordinator
Atli Thor Fanndal	TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL Iceland	Assistant coordinator

PARTNERS

EPEKA Montenegro (Lead organisation)
Scientific Research Association for Art, Cultural, Educational Programs and Technology EPEKA (Montenegro) operates in Berane, a rural area with high youth unemployment and limited access to non- formal education. Within DigitalVSCorrupt it coordinates overall delivery, management and monitoring, and leads national CB workshops focused on ICT supported transparency and community awareness in Montenegro.

EPEKA Slovenia
A non governmental social enterprise active in EU citizenship, youth work and inclusion. EPEKA Slovenia co-hosts the partner kick-off, supports management, and co-develops ICT based transparency modules inspired by the ERAR model; it also hosts the final conference and supports EU-level dissemination.

EPEKA Serbia
Youth - focused NGO from Niš with strong experience in mobility and inclusion (including Roma and migrant youth). In the project, EPEKA Serbia co-leads trainings, supports Kosovo–Serbia youth dialogue through joint activities with CET Prizren, and pilots local campaigns on integrity in public services.

EPEKA Germany
Member of the EPEKA network supporting intercultural learning and communication. Contributes to cross border dissemination, workshop design on civic engagement and media, and documentation of good practices across partners.

CET Prizren (Kosovo)
Center for Education and Training Prizren promotes democratic values and youth participation. In DigitalVSCorrupt it co-designs youth friendly training content, co-hosts CB workshops in Kosovo and collaborates with EPEKA Serbia to strengthen trust, dialogue and anticorruption literacy among youth.

Phiren Amenca (Belgium)
International Roma youth network with strong outreach and advocacy capacity. Leads EU level dissemination, supports inclusion measures across all activities, and mentors youth campaign teams to reach diverse audiences with inclusive narratives.

Transparency International Iceland
Brings global anticorruption know how, practical tools for risk mapping and reporting, and co-authors the youth work manual sections on corruption in public institutions and accountability pathways.

Institute for Applied Research (North Macedonia)
Supports the 'Corruption in Business' strand with sessions on procurement risks, conflicts of interest, and SME integrity pledges. Co-hosts national workshops with chambers/entrepreneurs.

QENDRA (Albania)
A youth oriented civil society centre engaging communities in non-formal education and civic action. Leads CB workshops in Albania and contributes case studies on local service integrity.

Europe for You (Czech Republic)
European civic organisation experienced in communication and youth mobilisation. Codesigns the campaign lab, supports creative dissemination formats and visual storytelling.

FEIO (Poland)
Education/outreach foundation contributing to research based activity design, quick polls and pre/post evaluation tools adaptable to youth settings.

AKUSTIKUM (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Cultural organisation leveraging creative media and audio-visual methods. Co-leads the three 'video simulation' outputs (public sector, business, whistleblowing) including storyboarding and youth co-creation.

LIDSK (Turkey)
Youth development organisation focusing on civic skills and dialogue. Hosts CB workshops in Türkiye and contributes facilitation methods for diverse groups.

Arcigay (Italy)
National civil society organisation with expertise in rights based education and safe space facilitation. Contributes inclusion strategies, ethics protocols and campaign messaging on equality and integrity.

All partners collaborate via monthly coordination calls, shared templates and joint monitoring visits.

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