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TRAINING MATERIAL ON WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION & ICT AGAINST CORRUPTION

A SET OF TARINING MODULS DEVELOPED FOR FOR YOUTH WORKERS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS

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

For practical learning, safe reporting and community integrity

December 2025

ERASMUS-YOUTH-2023-CB
Project name: "With Digitalisation Versus Corruption" within the programme Erasmus Youth 2023 - Capacity building in the field of Youth - Western Balkans.

Project number: 101131572
The Project "With Digitalisation Versus Corruption" is co-funded by the European Union.
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table of contents

04 INTRODUCTION

05 HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

06 TRAINING DESIGN PRINCIPLES

07 MODULE 1: UNDERSTANDING WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

09 MODULE 2: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, REPORTING CHANNELS AND PROTECTIONS

11 MODULE 3: ICT TOOLS, DIGITAL SECURITY AND SAFE EVIDENCE HANDLING

13 MODULE 4: ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORKERS

15 MODULE 5: TEACHING METHODS AND AWARENESS-RAISING

17 SAMPLE ONE-DAY AGENDA

18 ANNEXES

INTRODUCTION

About the project

DigitalVScorrupt is an Erasmus+ CBY and WB project with the main objective to fight corruption in the EU and the Western Balkans (WB) through digital tools and empowerment of young people and people in the EU and the Western Balkans (WB).

Corruption weakens democratic institutions, reduces trust in public systems and limits opportunities for young people. It affects education, employment, healthcare, public procurement, community services and the everyday quality of life of citizens. When wrongdoing goes unreported, abuse becomes normalised and people begin to believe that fairness is impossible.
Whistleblowers play an essential role in challenging this culture. They are people who, in the public interest, report corruption, fraud, abuse of power, misuse of funds, threats to health or safety, environmental harm or other serious wrongdoing. Their actions can help institutions correct misconduct, protect communities and improve accountability.
At the same time, whistleblowing is rarely simple. Individuals who speak up often fear retaliation, job loss, exclusion, stigma, online harassment or pressure from colleagues and superiors. For this reason, whistleblower protection is not only a legal matter; it is also an educational, ethical and social issue. Young people and the adults who support them need clear information, practical tools and safe pathways for action.
This expanded training material was developed within the Erasmus+ project "With Digitalisation Versus Corruption". It builds on discussions and learning from the international training in Tuzla (23–27 July 2025) and translates them into a structured resource that can be used in future workshops, local actions, internal staff training and community-based education.

What this material adds

Compared with a brief slide deck or workshop outline, this version offers more detailed explanations, facilitation notes, sample exercises, debrief questions, trainer tips and ready-to-use templates.
It is written so that facilitators can both learn from it and directly adapt it into workshop handouts, session plans or awareness activities.

HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

This document is intentionally modular. You can deliver it as a complete training course, select only those modules that match your participants' needs, or combine it with local case studies and national legal information. It is suitable for youth centres, schools, NGOs, municipalities, volunteer programmes, project teams and informal education settings.

Facilitators are encouraged to adapt terminology, examples and reporting pathways to the legal and institutional context of their country. The goal is not to turn participants into legal experts, but to make them more informed, more confident and more careful when dealing with corruption-related concerns.

Delivery format	How it can be used
Format option	Suggested use
1–3 day training	For in-depth learning, group work, practice exercises and local adaptation.
Standalone workshop	Use one module for a 60–120 minute session on a specific topic.
Internal organisational training	Build staff awareness of safe reporting, confidentiality, digital hygiene and ethical response.
Youth awareness session	Focus on practical rights, risks, safe behaviour and where to seek support.

TRAINING DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Whistleblowing can be a sensitive topic. Some participants may have already witnessed or experienced abuse, corruption, discrimination or retaliation. Good facilitation therefore requires more than strong content knowledge: it also requires trust, careful pacing and a clear sense of boundaries.

Create a safe and respectful learning space from the beginning.

Never pressure participants to disclose personal experiences.

Clarify that the training offers educational guidance, not formal legal advice.

Encourage participants to think critically about both opportunities and risks.

Balance empowerment with caution: speaking up can be important, but preparation matters.

Use real-life examples only in ways that protect privacy and dignity.

Include referral information where possible: ombuds institutions, anti-corruption bodies, NGOs, legal aid providers or psychosocial support services.

Facilitator reminder

When a participant shares a real case, do not immediately push them to report. First help them clarify the situation, assess immediate risks, consider confidentiality, and identify appropriate support.

Training should strengthen responsible action, not create pressure for unsafe action.

MODULE 1: UNDERSTANDING WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

Recommended duration
60–90 minutes

Main focus
Core concepts, public interest and why whistleblowing matters

Suggested output
Participant handout, discussion notes, or a short action plan

Learning objectives

- Understand who can be considered a whistleblower.
- Differentiate whistleblowing from gossip, personal conflict or unsupported accusations.
- Recognise the public-interest dimension of reporting wrongdoing.
- Explain why whistleblowing matters for democracy, accountability and youth participation.

Core content

A whistleblower is a person who reports or discloses information about wrongdoing that they became aware of in a work-related, organisational, educational or institutional context. The wrongdoing can involve corruption, fraud, theft of public resources, abuse of authority, discrimination, environmental harm, threats to public health or safety, or other violations of law and ethics.

A useful starting point in training is to emphasise that whistleblowing is not simply "telling on someone". The defining element is the public interest. The report is made because the issue affects fairness, legality, safety, transparency or the rights of others. The concern is not primarily personal revenge or private conflict.

Participants should also understand that people may report internally, externally or, in some circumstances, publicly. Internal reporting usually means informing a supervisor, ethics officer or internal reporting channel. External reporting refers to a competent public body, inspectorate, ombuds institution or specialised authority. Public disclosure is more sensitive and should only be discussed together with legal protections, risks and context.

Concept	Meaning in practice
Whistleblowing	Reporting serious wrongdoing in the public interest, ideally with factual grounds and through appropriate channels.
Personal grievance	A complaint focused mainly on an individual employment or interpersonal issue, which may still be important but is not necessarily whistleblowing.
Rumour or gossip	Unverified information shared without evidence, structure or regard for consequences.
Ethical concern	A broader concern about conduct, culture or values that may or may not amount to a legal violation.

Suggested activity

Association mapping: ask participants what words they connect with the term "whistleblower". Write both positive and negative responses on a flipchart. Then discuss why society often admires whistleblowers in theory but hesitates to protect them in practice.

Debrief questions

Why are people often afraid to report wrongdoing?
What makes a report more credible and responsible?
What is the difference between courage and recklessness in this context?

Trainer note

This module works best when examples come from settings familiar to participants: schools, youth projects, local government, sports clubs, social assistance, recruitment or public procurement.
For younger participants, avoid legal jargon at the start. Begin with fairness, safety and trust.

MODULE 2: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, REPORTING CHANNELS AND PROTECTIONS

Recommended duration
75–105 minutes

Main focus
Minimum standards, retaliation and institutional responsibilities

Suggested output
Participant handout, discussion notes, or a short action plan

Learning objectives

- Become familiar with key protection principles related to whistleblowing.
- Understand the purpose of internal and external reporting channels.
- Recognise what retaliation may look like in practice.
- Identify what information trainers should localise to national context.

Core content

At European level, the EU Whistleblower Protection Directive (2019/1937) established minimum standards for the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law. Even where countries are outside the EU, the Directive and related European standards provide a useful benchmark for good practice in reporting systems and protective measures.

Participants should understand several core principles: confidentiality of the reporter's identity; safe and accessible reporting channels; protection against retaliation; timely follow-up; and access to information, advice or support. In practice, these standards are only meaningful if institutions know how to implement them and if potential reporters trust the process.

Retaliation should be discussed broadly. It can include dismissal, demotion, reassignment, threats, exclusion from meetings, reputational attacks, online harassment, bullying, pressure to resign, denial of opportunities, intimidation or subtle forms of isolation. Many participants only recognise retaliation when it becomes extreme, so trainers should help them notice early warning signs.

Area	Good practice elements
What good reporting systems include	Confidential intake, clear procedures, acknowledgement of receipt, impartial assessment, secure storage of information and communication on follow-up.
What protection should address	Employment-related retaliation, physical safety, privacy, legal support, psychosocial strain and reputational harm.
What trainers should localise	National laws, relevant institutions, deadlines, complaint procedures, labour protections and available support services.

Mini exercise

Ask participants to identify one institution, ombuds body, anti-corruption agency, inspectorate or trusted NGO in their country that could receive or support a corruption-related report. The exercise helps move the topic from theory to local reality.

Case discussion

A municipal employee reports suspicious public procurement practices. Soon afterward, they are excluded from meetings, given less meaningful tasks and warned that they are "damaging the institution's reputation". Ask participants to identify which actions may count as retaliation, what documentation the employee should keep and which channels of support may be relevant.

Important limitation

This training material is educational. It does not replace national legal advice. When a real case arises, facilitators should encourage participants to verify current procedures and seek competent guidance from an authorised body or qualified legal professional.

MODULE 3:
ICT TOOLS, DIGITAL SECURITY AND SAFE EVIDENCE HANDLING

Recommended duration
90–120 minutes

Main focus
Digital risk awareness, secure tools and practical protective habits

Suggested output
Participant handout, discussion notes, or a short action plan

Learning objectives

- Recognise common digital risks linked to corruption reporting.
- Compare basic security features of selected communication tools.
- Understand why metadata, devices and storage practices matter.
- Learn practical steps for safer documentation and communication.

Core content

Digital tools can make reporting easier, faster and more accessible, but they can also expose the identity, location, network and behaviour of the person reporting. Many people focus on the message itself and forget about surrounding traces: metadata in documents and photos, weak passwords, cloud backups, shared devices, email forwarding, browser history or location services.

For training purposes, it is useful to introduce a basic threat-awareness approach. Before choosing a tool, participants should ask: What am I trying to protect? From whom? How serious are the consequences if information is exposed? What level of anonymity or confidentiality do I realistically need? This helps avoid both carelessness and false confidence.

No tool is perfect. Secure practice usually comes from combining tools with good habits: strong passwords, two-factor authentication, careful handling of evidence, limited sharing, updated devices, cautious use of public Wi-Fi and awareness of phishing or social engineering.

Tool category	Training message
Secure messaging	Signal is often used as an example of end-to-end encrypted messaging with stronger privacy features than mainstream platforms used primarily for social communication.
Email	Encrypted email services may provide stronger privacy than standard webmail, but email always requires careful handling of recipients, attachments and subject lines.
Anonymous browsing	Tools such as Tor Browser may reduce traceability, but should be introduced with practical caution and clear explanation.
Secure file sharing	Solutions such as OnionShare or protected file-transfer methods can reduce unnecessary exposure when sharing sensitive files.
Reporting platforms	Dedicated systems such as GlobaLeaks can structure reports more safely than ad hoc forms or personal email.

Safe evidence handling

Collect only what is necessary and lawful.
Keep original files unchanged whenever possible.
Store copies in a secure location with limited access.
Remove metadata from documents or images when needed.
Avoid discussing sensitive evidence in large group chats or on mainstream social media.
Do not leave devices unattended or unlocked.

Practical comparison exercise

Participants compare two communication tools, for example Signal and WhatsApp, or ProtonMail and Gmail. They review encryption, identity protection, ease of use, trust assumptions and possible risks when sharing sensitive information.

Do and do not

Do: document carefully, verify sources, protect accounts and think before you transmit.
Do not: assume that deleting a message removes all traces, forward sensitive files without reflection, or rely on convenience alone when risk is high.

MODULE 4:
ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORKERS

Recommended duration
60–90 minutes

Main focus
Supportive practice, ethical dilemmas and safe boundaries

Suggested output
Participant handout, discussion notes, or a short action plan

Learning objectives

- Reflect on the ethical dimensions of whistleblowing and support.
- Clarify the role and limits of youth workers and facilitators.
- Practice non-judgmental communication and referral skills.
- Strengthen integrity-based approaches in youth education.

Core content

Youth wrkers are rarely formal investigators, but they are often trusted adults, mentors or first points of contact. Their role can include listening, helping a young person organise facts, discussing risks, signposting support and creating educational opportunities around integrity and civic responsibility.

Confidentiality is important, but so are boundaries. Facilitators should not promise secrecy they cannot legally or ethically maintain. When a disclosure involves a serious risk of harm, a vulnerable minor or mandatory reporting obligations, participants must be informed clearly and calmly about what can and cannot remain confidential.

Ethical reflection is central here. Speaking up can be an act of courage, solidarity and responsibility, yet it can also carry consequences. A good training does not romanticise whistleblowing. Instead, it helps participants think about timing, evidence, proportionality, care for self and others, and the support structures needed for action.

Dimension	Good practice
Role of the youth worker	Listen carefully, ask clarifying questions, avoid panic, support reflection, encourage documentation and refer onward when needed.
What to avoid	Making promises you cannot keep, giving legal guarantees, pressuring a person to disclose more than they want, or taking control of the case.
Ethical values to emphasise	Integrity, fairness, responsibility, courage, solidarity, empathy and respect for due process.

Role-play activity

Scenario: a young participant says that money allocated for a youth project is being used for private expenses, but they are afraid that reporting it will affect future opportunities. In pairs or small groups, participants practise a supportive first response. Debrief what language helped create safety and what language increased pressure.

Useful first-response questions

What exactly have you seen or heard?
Do you have any documents, messages or other evidence?
Who already knows about this?
What is your biggest concern right now?
What support would help you think more clearly about next steps?

MODULE 5: TEACHING METHODS AND AWARENESS-RAISING

Recommended duration
75–105 minutes

Main focus
Workshop design, participant engagement and community outreach

Suggested output
Participant handout, discussion notes, or a short action plan

Learning objectives

- Plan engaging and realistic learning activities on whistleblowing.
- Choose methods that suit different groups and timeframes.
- Design simple awareness actions with practical value.
- Link anti-corruption education with youth participation and civic agency.

Core content

Awareness-raising is most effective when people do not only hear information, but also apply it. Interactive methods such as scenario work, structured discussion, corruption mapping, digital-tool comparison, campaign design and role-play make abstract concepts more concrete. For short workshops, focus on clarity and practical takeaways. For longer training formats, create a learning arc: begin with definitions and trust-building, continue with legal and digital literacy, and end with ethical reflection and action planning. Trainers should combine information, dialogue and application instead of relying on long lectures.

Youth-oriented outreach can use podcasts, short videos, community discussions, visual posters, school sessions, peer education, social media explainers or integrity-themed campaigns. The strongest activities usually combine emotion, local relevance and practical guidance.

Method	Why it works
Discussion circle	Good for opening beliefs, fears and expectations around speaking up.
Case study	Useful for analysing risks, protection and decision-making without exposing real personal cases.
Corruption mapping	Helps participants identify where corruption appears in everyday life and who is affected.
Campaign design	Builds communication skills and turns learning into outreach.
Reflection journal	Supports quieter participants and deeper personal processing.

Campaign design task

Groups create a simple awareness action that includes a title, target audience, main message, one safe call to action and two communication channels. Encourage them to avoid sensationalism and to include practical advice such as where to seek guidance.

A strong message usually does three things

It names the issue clearly.
It reduces fear by showing that support and safer channels exist.
It invites responsible action instead of blame or panic.

SAMPLE ONE-DAY AGENDA

The following schedule can be adapted for local workshops. It balances information, practice and reflection.

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Welcome, introductions, expectations and group agreements
09:30–10:30	Module 1: Understanding whistleblower protection
10:30–10:45	Break
10:45–12:00	Module 2: Legal frameworks, channels and protections
12:00–13:00	Lunch break
13:00–14:30	Module 3: ICT tools, digital safety and evidence handling
14:30–14:45	Break
14:45–15:45	Module 4: Ethics, integrity and the role of youth workers
15:45–16:30	Module 5: Awareness-raising and campaign design
16:30–17:00	Evaluation, action points and closing reflection

ANNEXES

READY-TO-USE TOOLS

These tools can be copied into handouts, printed separately or adapted for local workshops.

1. Pre-training questionnaire

- What does the term "whistleblower" mean to you?
- Have you ever witnessed corruption or unethical behaviour in your environment?
- Do you know any organisation where corruption can be reported safely?
- How safe would you feel reporting corruption in your workplace or community?
- What do you think are the biggest risks for whistleblowers?
- Do you know whether your country has laws protecting whistleblowers?
- Self-assessment scale (1–5): I understand whistleblowing; I know how corruption can be reported more safely; I believe whistleblowers should be protected by law.

2. Post-training evaluation

Rate from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent): content clarity, trainer performance, usefulness of the topic, practical value of exercises, overall satisfaction.

Open questions: What did you learn? Which part was most useful? What should be improved in future workshops?

3. Whistleblower reporting template

Field	Information
Date of report	
Name (optional)	
Organisation or institution involved	
Description of the issue	
Location of the incident	
People involved (if known)	
Evidence available	
Has this already been reported elsewhere?	Yes / No
Preferred contact method (optional)	
16:30–17:00	Evaluation, action points and closing reflection

4. Safe reporting checklist

- Verify facts and collect evidence carefully.
- Protect your digital identity and accounts.
- Use secure communication tools where appropriate.
- Seek advice from a trusted NGO, legal adviser or competent institution.
- Keep copies of relevant documents.
- Limit unnecessary sharing of sensitive information.
- Document any retaliation or unusual pressure.
- Protect your privacy and mental wellbeing after reporting.

5. Trainer checklist before running a session

- Have I adapted legal and institutional references to the country context?
- Do I know where I would refer a participant who brings a real case?
- Have I prepared a safe-space introduction and confidentiality boundaries?
- Are my examples realistic but not unnecessarily identifying?
- Do I have a balanced message that includes both rights and risks?

ANNEXES

RESOURCES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Useful reference points for further work include the EU Whistleblower Protection Directive, Council of Europe standards, whistleblowing and anti-corruption resources developed by civil society organisations, digital security materials from trusted digital-rights actors and national reporting mechanisms relevant to each country.

Whistleblowing is not only a legal procedure. It is also a question of culture: whether institutions reward silence or support accountability; whether communities dismiss concerns or respond responsibly; and whether young people grow up believing that integrity matters in practice, not only in theory.

This training material aims to support facilitators in building that culture step by step. By combining legal literacy, ethical reflection, digital safety and participatory education, youth workers and civil society actors can help create environments where speaking up is better understood, more carefully supported and more effectively connected to public trust and democratic life.

ANNEXES

PROJECT NOTE

This material was developed within the project “With Digitalisation Versus Corruption” under Erasmus+ Youth 2023 – Capacity building in the field of Youth – Western Balkans. The project is co-funded by the European Union.
Lead organisation: EPEKA Montenegro. Contributing partner network includes organisations from Slovenia, Belgium, North Macedonia, Iceland, Albania, Germany, Czechia, Kosovo, Serbia, Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Türkiye and Italy.

ANNEXES

LOCAL ADAPTATION WORKSHEET

Before delivering the material in a specific country or community, facilitators can complete the short checklist below.

- Which institutions or organisations in our local context can receive a protected report or provide guidance?
- Which examples of corruption or misuse of power are most relevant to our participants?
- What digital tools are commonly used by our group, and which risks should we explain in simple language?
- What referral options exist if a participant needs legal, psychosocial or organisational support?
- Which parts of this material should be simplified for younger participants or expanded for professionals?

ANNEXES

FINAL REFLECTION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Useful closing questions for the end of a workshop:

- What is one idea from today that changed how you think about whistleblowing?
- What is one practical step you would take to protect yourself or someone else in a reporting situation?
- What should institutions do differently so that speaking up becomes safer and more credible?

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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