



JOURNALISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON SERBIA - KOSOVO RELATIONS

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS REPORT

April, 2025.
Birn Serbia
Internews Kosova

Authors: Tijana Uzelac, Kreshnik Gashi

Editor: Tanja Maksić

Publisher: BIRN Serbia

April 2025

All terms used in the report in the masculine gender include the masculine and feminine genders of the persons they refer to.

Resume

The focus group discussions organized with Serbian and Kosovo journalists in April 2025, by BIRN Serbia and Internews Kosova highlighted a deepening crisis of media freedom, characterized by political pressure, financial instability, and deteriorating safety conditions.

While journalists in Serbia face a polarized and captured media environment, in Kosovo, although some institutional openness exists, journalists report political labeling and physical attacks. Serbia in particular exhibits declining scores in international press freedom indexes, with economic dependency on foreign donors creating additional uncertainty, especially following the withdrawal of U.S. media support.

Two focus group discussions were organized with 20 journalists from Kosovo and Serbia to discuss issues and perspectives of media freedoms, quality of information and its impact on mutual relations.

This report underscores the poor quality and high polarization of reporting on Kosovo-Serbia relations. Media coverage is dominated by political rhetoric and sensationalism, lacking depth, nuance, and human-interest perspectives. Positive stories of interethnic cooperation are scarce and often perceived as risky to publish. Journalists from both sides confirm the prevalence of biased narratives, particularly in pro-government outlets. Limited mobility, lack of cross-border correspondents, and minimal collaboration between Serbian and Albanian-language media further exacerbate the issue. Disinformation thrives in this environment, fueling mistrust and obstructing reconciliation. The absence of knowledgeable and impartial analysts further hampers objective reporting, leaving both societies misinformed and disconnected from each other's realities.

The report offers several recommendations aimed at improving media practices and fostering reconciliation between Serbian and Albanian communities. Journalists emphasized the need to promote multi-perspective journalism that includes diverse voices and human stories to counteract stereotypes. They also believe that strengthening collaboration between media outlets, supporting joint reporting initiatives, and creating multiethnic journalist networks would improve their ability to report on Kosovo-Serbia relations. The report also calls for institutional transparency, consistent enforcement of media laws, and increased accountability for political and media actors. Long-term funding and journalist exchange programs were identified as critical to enabling fieldwork, building trust, and producing empathetic, high-quality reporting across the region.

Political context and overall environment for media development

Media freedom is a key aspect of a democratic society, ensuring freedom of expression and access to diverse information essential for the public. However, over the past several years, researchers around the globe map the worrying trend of the decline in media freedom and independence, manifested through political pressures, financial dependence, and censorship, which restricts the space for free and impartial reporting. Kosovo and Serbia are no exceptions to these trends, as this report will show.

In recent years, both countries have witnessed slow progress in normalization processes or even backsliding in democratization and media freedoms (especially well documented in Serbia).

According to the Freedom House 2025 report, [Serbia](#) is classified as a “partially free” country. The report states that Serbia’s ruling party undermines political rights and civil liberties, exerting pressure on independent media, political opposition, and civil society organizations. The same report also noted that the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and President Aleksandar Vučić have solidified their grip on power by increasing control over state institutions and the media, directly contributing to democratic backsliding.

However, since late 2024, especially after the collapse of railway station canopy, which claimed 16 lives, the ruling party has faced heightened public discontent. This is evident in student blockades and protests demanding institutional responses to corruption and organized crime in the country. Serbian students and citizens are now entering into the sixth month of mass protests and road blockages.

On the other hand, Kosovo continues to build democratic pillars, including regular elections and a pluralistic political environment. The most recent elections were held in February 2025, with the ruling Self-Determination Movement (Vetëvendosje), led by Albin Kurti, claiming victory. According to the Freedom House 2024 report, [Kosovo](#) has maintained its ranking under this organization’s methodology, remaining in 60th place. This classification means that Kosovo is considered a transitional or hybrid regime, a partially free state where concerns persist regarding the rule of law, corruption, and institutional functionality.

Albin Kurti [resigned from his position as Prime Minister of Kosovo](#) to facilitate the formation of the country’s new Assembly on April 15, 2025. In order to be sworn in as a member of the ninth legislature of the Kosovo Assembly, following the elections of February 9, 2025, both the Prime Minister and the government cabinet must resign.

According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which previously highlighted ongoing corruption issues in [Kosovo’s](#) public sector in 2023, the 2024 report recorded a lower level of corruption, indicating some progress.

Trends in media development

In Kosovo, media freedom is threatened by political influence on independent bodies, SLAPP lawsuits, insufficient access to information, and an increase in physical attacks against journalists. Media independence is compromised by poor regulation and dependence on partisan distribution of public funds. During 2024, Kosovo saw a decline in the independence of its public television as the previous Director of Kosovo Public Television (RTK) resigned from his position, citing political pressure as the cause. The leadership of the television station is now under Rilind Gërvalla, who has openly stated that he financially supported as a donor Lëvizja Vetëvendosje, the ruling party in Kosovo.

The Serbian media market, despite having over 2,100 registered media outlets according to the Business Registers Agency, is highly polarized and often described as “captured” by the ruling party. Serbian independent journalists operate in a highly fragmented political environment, where they are regularly exposed to various pressures and attacks in their professional lives, especially during periods of political crisis and turmoil. Members of the ruling party frequently attack journalists, both during press conferences and through pro-regime media, accusing them of bias or spreading false information, thereby fostering an atmosphere of fear.

Above mentioned negative trends are well recorded by the international watchdog mechanisms.

According to the Reporters Without Borders report, [Serbia](#) has fallen on the list of countries guaranteeing journalist safety. In 2024, Serbia ranked 98th, compared to 91st in 2023, and 79th in 2022. [Kosovo](#) has also recorded a decline in this area, dropping from 56th place in 2023 to 70th place in 2024.

According to the European Union's 2024 annual country reports, both Kosovo and Serbia should make extra efforts in order to make progress towards EU integration. EU recommendations for [Serbia](#) include full implementation of existing media laws, strengthening the mechanisms for protection of journalists, and refraining from targeting or verbally attacking journalists. It is also recommended that Serbia ensure transparent and fair co-financing of media content that serves the public interest, as well as full transparency in media ownership and advertising. Recommendations for Kosovo include improving the capacity of prosecutorial, judicial, and police authorities to handle cases related to freedom of expression. It should also develop protocols and training on journalist protection and safety, including early warning and rapid response mechanisms, and improve working conditions for journalists and media workers while strengthening professional reporting. [Kosovo](#) should also implement the new Law on the Independent Media Commission, ensuring full alignment with EU regulations and standards, and review the Law on Radio Television of Kosovo to ensure sustainable financing while preserving its independence. On April 23, 2025, the Constitutional Court of Kosovo ruled to annul the new Law on the Independent Media Commission, which had been challenged in court by several members of the Democratic League of Kosovo and the Democratic Party of Kosovo. The Court determined that certain provisions of the law violated constitutional principles. Media markets of both Kosovo and Serbia are still highly dependent on state money, despite some positive trends in regards to the transparency of media ownership. For example, since 2023, the Kosovo Independent Media Commission (IMC) has required that any changes in media ownership be approved by the Commission. A further step toward transparency was the launch of a public database of audiovisual media owners by the IMC in 2024, as the [Media Ownership Monitoring 2023 report](#) shows. On the other hand, the same report shows that funding sources for media in Kosovo are often inaccessible to the public, as both the state and media outlets conceal sources of funding. The same report indicates that the Serbian media landscape is dominated by commercial companies whose owners are closely linked to the government and the ruling party.

Information quality is highly different between two media systems. According to IREX's 2024 Vibrant Information Barometer, [Serbia's](#) final score is lower compared to the previous year. In terms of information quality, diversity of sources, media literacy, information consumption, and the use of information in government decision-making, Serbia has achieved a lower overall score compared to the previous period. On the other hand, [Kosovo](#) has improved information quality and source diversity, while criteria related to media literacy and information consumption and the use of information in government decision-making remained at the same level as the previous year.

As Picasa AI data show, Kosovo media report on Belgrade - Pristina dialogue more intensively than their Serbian counterparts. In the sampled period of one year, 155 online media outlets in Serbia produced in total 60.756 articles, while 111 Kosovo online media produced almost three times more - 167.275 articles, as shown in table 1.

	SERBIA	KOSOVO
Number of outlets	155	111
Number of articles	60.756	167.275
Social media posts	1.619	9.697
Facebook engagement	1.146.066	2.581.938

Table 1. *Media articles and social media statistics September 2023-September 2024, Picasa AI*

Focus groups discussions: the methodology

Two focus groups with journalists reporting in Serbian and in Albanian were held in February 2025 and included 20 journalists, with an idea to gather in-depth insights and perspectives from journalists regarding the state of media freedom, quality of reporting, and the influence of political context on journalistic practices in both Serbia and Kosovo, particularly in light of the ongoing tensions and media polarization. Focus groups were organised within the project “Fostering a media inter-cultural exchange as a milestone towards a reconciliation process between Kosovo and Serbia”, implemented by a consortium of CSOs from Serbia and Kosovo¹.

The focus group discussions were used as a main research method as it provides qualitative insights into participants’ attitudes, perceptions, and experiences on a specific topic. Focus group was organized in two small groups, composed of 10 journalists coming from different media in Serbia and 10 in Kosovo. Journalists are seen as important actors that can drive changes and improve quality of reporting, so their perspectives are chosen as the most valid by this research. Participants were selected on the basis of having previous experience in reporting on Kosovo - Serbia relations, have a deep understanding of media systems and work in credible, ethical media. Both focus groups were held online and were moderated by BIRN/Internews Kosova staff. Focus groups were moderated by the same methodology, which included the questions such as an assessment of general level of media freedoms in Serbia/Kosovo; the role of media reporting in building mutual relations and shaping the image of the “other”, whether media reporting supports cooperation or not; whether there are topics that are actively ignored by mainstream media; assessment of openness of institutions and access to information, plurality and availability of sources; resilience to disinformation; the main challenges media face in reporting on mutual relations; ways forward and recommendations for improvement of journalistic practices etc.

The overall tone of this research and the focus groups discussion was largely shaped by the events that occurred prior to the meeting. Most notably, the suspension of U.S. assistance to the media sector, which had a dramatic impact on media outlets in both Kosovo and Serbia. Many of the participants we spoke with described this moment as a “turning point” - one that brings a heightened sense of caution and significant uncertainty.

“Almost all the media I work with in Kosovo and Serbia are to some extent dependent on that funding. And when I talk about that, I’m primarily referring to small and local media,” noted one of the participants.

¹ The consortium consists of four organisations: leading Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN Serbia), Internews Kosova, Center for Community Development (KoSSev) and The Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina (IJAV).

The sense of uncertainty is further exacerbated by ongoing student protests in Serbia, which at the time of writing this report have entered their sixth month. These protests have provoked the authorities into taking various undemocratic actions, such as [raiding the offices of NGOs](#), conducting [illegal surveillance](#), and launching public smear campaigns against protest participants. In northern Kosovo, all Serbian institutions have been shut down over the past year, putting Serbian-language media outlets in a difficult position.

To accompany focus groups discussion findings, the research team additionally included data and information acquired from the company Picasa AI to supplement qualitative data with the quantitative ones. These data included the treatment of topic of Kosovo-Serbia dialogue in online and social media in Serbia and Kosovo, including number and frequency of articles, number of social media posts and its reach and audience engagement, as well top 10 media in Kosovo and Serbia that reported most on Belgrade, Pristina dialogue and whose posts were most engaging in the period of September 1, 2023 and September 30, 2024.

On top of that, desktop research was conducted, mostly to summarize the contextual part of the report and provide secondary review of available policy reports, laws, data from the field etc.

This methodology, as any other, has its restrictions, but it provides rare and valuable insights which are not often publicly available. These restrictions include a relatively small sample of journalists that are directly consulted; the absence of perspective of other media professionals, such as editors, owners, etc.; the fact that online discussions have its limitations in comparison to face-to-face talks; perspective of the tabloid media was not considered even though they have a vast audience etc.

PART I: The State of Media Freedom

A Shrinking Space for Independent Journalism

Media freedom is in decline – especially over the past two years, as concluded by the journalists working in Serbian media or in newsrooms reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo. Journalists in Kosovo work in a better overall media system, but they, however, share concerns regarding safety, inter-community relations, work-related interference, and discreditation. Within the framework of the project, the team also conducted an analysis of media content produced by media in Serbia and Kosovo, which is presented in greater detail in the Case Study and the Report published in [Serbian](#), [Albanian](#) and [English](#).

As noted, authorities in both Kosovo and Serbia tend to exert pressure on independent media, obstructing access to information, and amplifying narratives that deepen ethnic divisions. The media landscape is not conducive for dialogue and the objective dissemination of information to citizens.

“When it comes to media freedom in Kosovo, especially among us in Serbian-language media – of which there are far too many for such a small area, around 40 outlets – it actually feels like, in theory, we have all the freedom in the world. But the real issue here is that our influence is extremely limited.”

Participant 9, journalist and editor of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

Smear Campaigns, Economic Pressure, and Legal Harassment

Ruling governments in both Kosovo and Serbia increasingly rely on indirect tactics – smear campaigns, economic pressure, and selective application of the law – to suppress critical voices and investigative reporting. Independent journalists are thus under constant psychological and professional strain.

“We’re dealing with regimes that don’t restrict your ability to speak or report directly, but instead do it through targeted intimidation. You’ll go to the doctor, for example, and they’ll say, ‘Oh, you’re that journalist from the opposition.’”

Participant 5, journalist of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

“From both the Serbian and Kosovo sides, you can easily be labeled either as a spy, someone working for Belgrade, or as ‘Kurti’s Serb.’ That makes it incredibly difficult to do your job and maintain any sense of professional distance.”

Participant 4, journalist of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

Deep polarization and division between media that report in favour of the Government and those critical of its action is highly visible, and confirmed by all journalists in Serbian speaking newsrooms. Labeling independent media as “enemies of state”, “traitors” and “mercenaries” is a long-standing tactic of Serbian authorities to minimize their influence. As one of the participants at the focus group noted, with political tensions rising – whether related to Kosovo or other sensitive political topics – polarization is only increasing.

“There’s also this constant insistence on foreign influence...this endless narrative about traitors, which is completely unrealistic, downright absurd and laughable... but for some people, it definitely has an impact. They’re always looking for that external enemy, claiming money is coming from Croatia, Ukraine, Albania – you name it.”

Participant 3, freelance journalist

“Opposition media, ‘Šolak’s media,’ ‘tycoon media’ – these labels are repeated over and over. That’s one side of the story. The other side is that the outlets that are genuinely trying to function as proper media are becoming closer to forms of social activism, because the situation has become so polarized.”

Participant 10, journalist in Serbian weekly

Journalists working in Kosovo also report politically motivated pressure. Statements made by Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti against certain media outlets are seen as a key trigger for attacks. One journalist explained that members of her outlet were labeled by government representatives as “Serbian journalists, paid by Serbia.” As a result, government bodies have refused to respond to their questions.

“The attacks – including those made by Prime Minister Albin Kurti against certain outlets labeled as ‘Serbian media’ – and the complete shutdown toward journalists, seem to point to a broader intent to assert full control over the media landscape.”

Participant 11, Journalist at Kosovo outlet

At the time of focus group discussions, there were over 20 active SLAPP lawsuits (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) targeting media outlets in Serbia, which is considered to be yet another form of pressure against the independent media, particularly on the rise in the last two years. These lawsuits are primarily initiated by individuals, corporations or members of the ruling political establishment, with the aim of silencing independent journalism and exhausting media organizations financially.

Participants in the Serbian focus group drew attention to the recent case involving Bratislav Gašić, former head of Serbia’s intelligence agency BIA, who filed a lawsuit against the investigative outlet KRIK. In the case, judges stated that journalists should have shown “more tolerance” toward Gašić due to his public office and that “journalists are only allowed to convey information, but not to explain to readers what is actually happening.”

Journalists in Kosovo are also frequently targeted by SLAPP lawsuits, while the inefficiency of courts in handling these lawsuits is foreseen as a major issue for media freedom. However, the situation on the ground has begun to change as the High Council of Justice, KJK, has taken steps to address defamation cases in the courts. According to recent data, over [50% of these have now been resolved](#) in the courts, which is a positive sign for improving the situation.

Media in Kosovo, on the other hand, report issues with physical safety, for example, being physically attacked on election day:

“I was in Istog during the elections. Klan Kosova had visible press identification, and we were attacked solely because we were part of that media outlet.”

Participant 12, Journalist in Kosovo TV

According to the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK), several incidents of violence against journalists occurred on election day, most of them carried out by supporters of the ruling Lëvizja Vetëvendosje party.

Endangered safety is not only an election incident. From January 1, 2024, to March 1, 2025, a total of 77 cases of attacks and threats against journalists have been reported in Kosovo. These attacks have primarily involved hate messages and pressure on journalists while they are performing their professional duties.

During the focus group held in Kosovo journalists highlighted that the presence of the Kosovo Police in northern Kosovo has improved the situation compared to 2023, when journalists faced significant attacks. In 2024, journalists reported fewer security incidents in these areas and felt safer. However, they pointed out that violence against journalists was more prevalent in the southern part of Kosovo.

Safety issues are raised when journalists from Kosovo, for example, visit Serbia.

“I would say that, from my personal point of view, starting with my one experience during the trip to Serbia, it was my first time there, and my entire family immediately told me, ‘You shouldn’t go.’ This was because of the general information they had, which suggested it was dangerous for Kosovars to visit. I believe that, aside from the lingering effects of the war, this fear is also a result of the kind of information ordinary citizens receive from the media. This information creates fear, whether intentionally or unintentionally, especially for those who don’t know if it’s true or not.”

Participant 11, Journalist at Kosovo outlet

The Fragility of Financial Independence

Economic uncertainty further amplifies the sense of diminished freedoms. Independent outlets typically lack access to public funding, which is reserved for pro-government media. Their survival depends heavily on foreign donors, mainly from the United States, EU and other foreign aid programs, but those projects are often short-term and cannot guarantee long-term sustainability.

“One of the ways the current regime in Serbia controls the media is through project-based co-financing via ministries and local municipalities. The foreign funds are, quite literally, a lifeline for the survival of independent media.”

Participant 2, journalists from daily in Serbia

“Even journalists, along with media owners, have somewhat degraded the profession. Some believe that because they financially support a particular outlet, they should have influence over what appears in the main news. However, news agendas should be determined by the editorial policy of the outlet, remaining independent of any financial influence. No one, regardless of their funding, should dictate or sway what is covered in the news.”

Participant 13, Kosovar journalist in international media

Financial independence comes as one of the crucial issues of focus group discussions, especially at the moment when USAID and US-based funds are stopped, hitting Kosovo and Serbian media hard.

“A key question is how the overall treatment of the media, especially the model of foreign donor-based funding – which, notably, comes largely from the United States – will shape the media landscape, and how Europe will respond to all of this.”

Participant 6, journalist at TV station in Serbia

Journalists participating at the Serbian language focus group pointed out another development that has potential to dramatically change the media landscape. Namely, in the time of focus group discussions, SBB, a publisher of TV N1, daily Danas and weekly magazine Radar was sold to Yettel group.

“SBB essentially accounts for 90% of non-government-aligned media reporting in Serbia. Corporate structure of media means shifting business interests, and I think we’re all now aware that, at any moment, with the flip of a switch, that reporting can disappear if it is no longer aligned with corporate priorities.”

Participant 3, freelance journalist

Restricted Access to Information and Political Interference

Authorities in both Kosovo and Serbia tend to deny independent media access to key information. This lack of transparency, including selective responses to journalists, misuse of secrecy laws, and restrictions on accessing public documents, obstructs accountability and impairs the public’s right to objective information.

“As someone reporting from Belgrade for international media, I’ve noticed how incredibly difficult it is to obtain any kind of information or official statement – unless it’s something already distributed through selected, government-friendly outlets.”

Participant 6, journalist at TV station in Serbia

“I’ve made countless attempts to reach representatives of the Serb List ahead of the elections – to ask questions that weren’t even particularly sensitive, many of them were purely procedural – but it was simply impossible to get through to them. They just completely ignore you.”

Participant 1, journalist at international media

Institutions in Serbia remain particularly weak and are heavily influenced by political power.

“What’s been happening over the past ten days is particularly telling. Whenever the government has an interest in pushing a topic, like now this anti-corruption campaign, I suddenly get flooded with messages and calls. Not ones I’ve initiated, but from representatives of the Prosecutor’s Office, literally informing me about every single step they’ve taken or are about to take.”

Participant 1, journalist at international media

“I have to say something that always struck me as somewhat bizarre: I usually find it easier to get information from institutions in Kosovo than from those in Serbia – and that’s true in both English and Serbian.”

Participant 2, journalists from daily in Serbia

PART II: Quality of Reporting

Lack of Depth and Human Perspective

The quality of reporting on inter-community relations between Serbs and Albanians is widely viewed as unsatisfactory. Most notably, there is a complete absence of stories that reflect the daily lives of people on either side, as well as a lack of reporting on examples of interethnic cooperation. Coverage in mainstream media is predominantly framed through the lens of political tension, often driven by sensationalism.

This lack of information contributes to low public interest and a limited understanding of the realities on the ground. In Serbia, the media rarely report on developments in Kosovo at all.

“We’re talking about two societies that barely know each other at all, on so many levels. There are so many ingrained prejudices that they often lead to deep misunderstandings.”

Participant 3, freelance journalist

SERBIA		KOSOVO	
Danas	3.962	Kosovo Online	8.151
B92	3.040	Bota Sot	8.118
Informer	2.920	Gazeta Express	6.749
N1	2.886	Balkani info	6.502
Politika	2.745	Demokracia	6.361

Table 2. Top 5 online media in Serbia and Kosovo with most articles for topic dialogue Kosovo-Serbia September 2023-September 2024, Picasa AI

Polarizing Narratives and Media Bias

Pro-government media in Serbia most frequently report on Kosovo in a negative light, portraying Albanians as a hostile group. Positive or balanced stories are virtually nonexistent, as concluded by journalists reporting in Serbian language. This kind of reporting further hinders reconciliation efforts and deepens long-standing ethnic tensions that are already deeply rooted.

“Tabloid and pro-government media in Serbia often promote a narrative that portrays Kosovo Serbs as victims – using exaggerated language and inappropriate terminology – while simultaneously creating the image of an external enemy in the form of Albanians. On the other hand, we also see misinformation in Albanian-language media when it comes to reporting on the Serbian community.”

Participant 4, journalist of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

“There is a complete dehumanization on both sides, which makes quality reporting incredibly difficult. In Belgrade-based media, particularly in pro-government outlets, it’s rare to see Albanians appear as sources or interviewees.”

Participant 6, journalist at TV station in Serbia

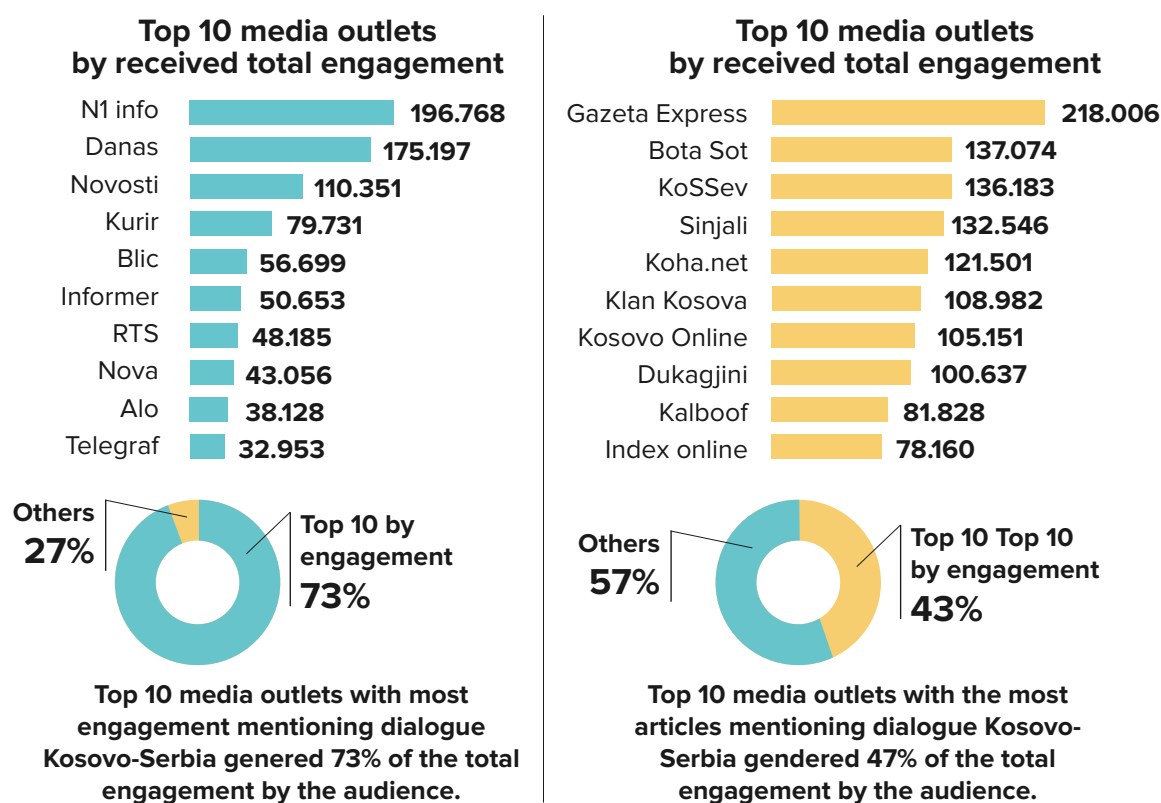


Table 3. Media articles and social media statistics, Picasa AI

Stories of Cooperation Are Rare and Risky

Stories about cooperation between the Serbian and Albanian communities rarely appear in the media, which makes it harder to build trust and dismantle long-held prejudices.

“Probably we’d need to spend more time on the ground to build real trust – but that requires logistical and technical support. You might succeed in producing a story, but there’s always the question of how much interest it will generate. Human interest stories do have the potential to spark engagement, but honestly, it often feels like a lottery.”

Participant 10, journalist in Serbian weekly

“One example of a positive experience is with Albanian colleagues from the north – we’ve developed very good cooperation when it comes to sharing contacts and information.”

Participant 4, journalist of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

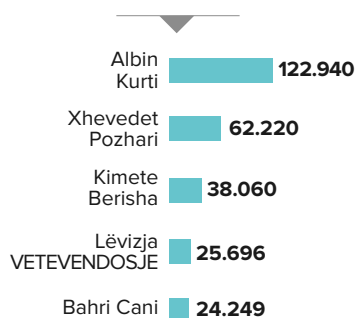
Journalists in the focus group also identified a major challenge in the tendency to report only one side’s statements – either Serbia’s or Kosovo’s – without the opportunity to provide context or a counterpoint from the other side.

“We often see situations where both leaders speak before the UN Security Council, and the media will only broadcast Vučić’s speech, or only Kurti’s speech. It shows a media environment where only one perspective is presented”

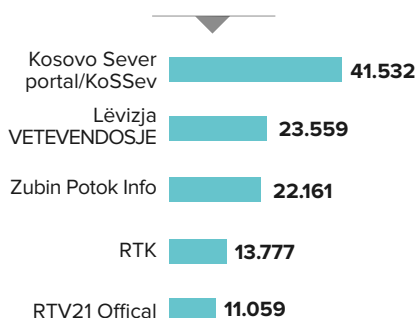
Participant 13, Kosovar journalist in international media

This finding is additionally supported by Picasa AI data, showing that Serbian President Vučić and Kosovo PM Kurti are the most mentioned figures in media reporting, in the selected sample. Vučić is mentioned 26.299 times in top 5 Serbian media, almost the same as Kurti with 26.997 times in top 5 Kosovo media. Other Kosovo and Serbian politicians have significantly less appearances, as much as 20 times less.

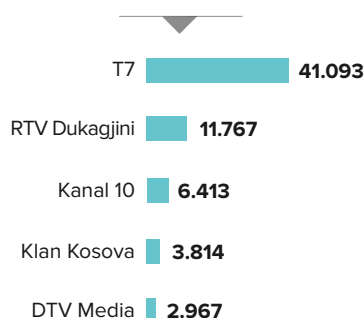
Top 5 Facebook fan pages by received total engagement



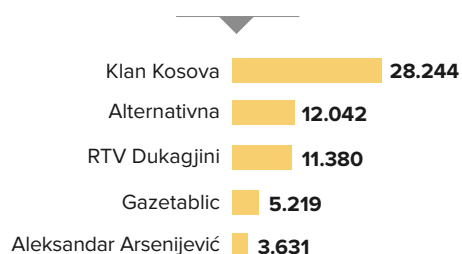
Top 5 Instagram profiles by received total engagement



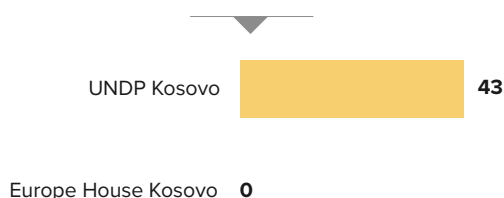
Top 5 Youtube channels by total engagement



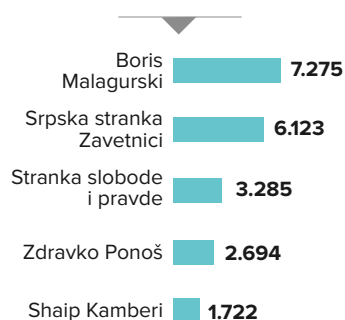
Top 5 TikTok fan pages by received total engagement



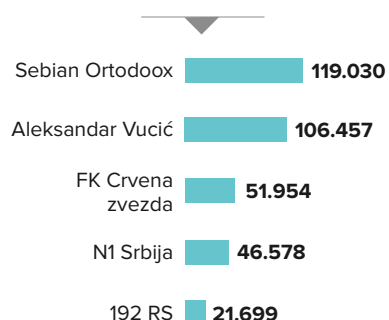
Top 5 LinkedIn profiles by received total engagement



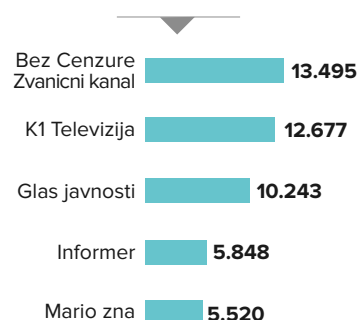
Top 5 Facebook fan pages by received total engagement



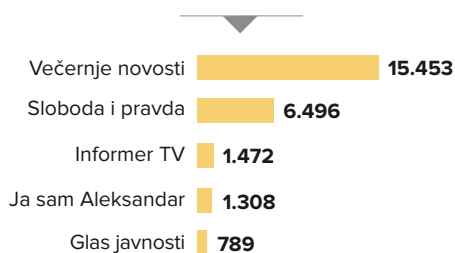
Top 5 Instagram profiles by received total engagement



Top 5 Youtube channels by total engagement



Top 5 TikTok fan pages by received total engagement



Top 5 LinkedIn profiles by received total engagement

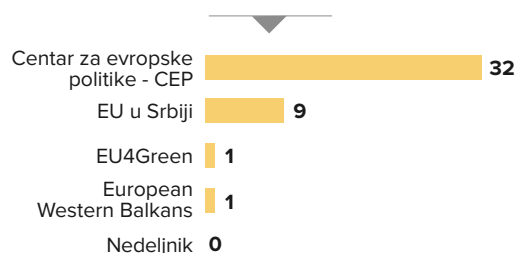


Table 4. Media articles and social media statistics, Picasa AI

Another critical issue for Kosovo journalists is the general lack of understanding about how governance functions in Serbia. Journalists pointed out that very few reporters in Kosovo have a solid grasp of Serbian political structures, including institutions such as the presidency, the prime minister's office, or the parliament.

“For example, at Klan Kosova, there’s Besnik Tahiri – he’s the only journalist who really knows Serbian politicians by name and by role. But now, maybe there are two or three others with a deep understanding of Serbian politics. Even they, however, aren’t covering those matters in a diplomatic or professionally journalistic way.”

Participant 14, journalist at Kosovo TV

This lack of understanding also has consequences at the local level. Albanian journalists acknowledged that they struggle to conduct interviews with local Serb citizens – whether about events in their communities or the everyday challenges they face.

“Recently, I came across a news story about someone who had just started doing business with Serbia. There were a lot of negative comments, and some media outlets took a clearly critical stance against that person. I found it a bit strange – why approach this so negatively? Doing business with Serbia isn’t inherently bad. Personally, I viewed the report in a positive light – an Albanian being given the opportunity to engage in cross-border business shouldn’t be seen as a problem at all”

Participant 15, Journalist in Kosovo TV

The focus group with Kosovo journalists also discussed the quality of reporting on regions in Serbia inhabited by the Albanian community. Journalists observed that coverage of Preševo, Bujanovac, and Medveđa is often limited to narratives of discrimination, with little to no focus on other local issues or the actions of local politicians.

There is a tendency, they noted, to avoid holding local leaders accountable for their performance, as their behavior is often excused by pointing to broader discrimination.

Media Operating in Isolation

Media outlets in both Kosovo and Serbia largely operate in isolation, with minimal exchange of information between them. This results in one-sided, and often inaccurate, reporting. Improving cooperation between newsrooms and sharing content could significantly raise the quality of information available to the public.

“This affects both Albanian-language and Serbian-language journalists. It often feels like we’re working between two fires.”

Participant 4, journalist of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

“Official institutions typically send press releases only in Albanian. When it comes to the Kosovo Police, particularly in the northern region, we’ve managed to convince them to start sending statements in Serbian as well. However, those come with delays, and the translations are often grammatically incorrect or poorly written. We simply cannot guarantee the accuracy of what’s being translated.”

Participant 8, journalist of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

“I almost always find it easier to get information from Kosovo institutions, in both English and Serbian, though mostly in English. On the other hand, Serbian authorities tend to ignore inquiries from certain journalists. There’s a sense that if you’re not reporting in their favor, they simply won’t respond.”

Participant 2, journalists from daily in Serbia

Limited Mobility and Resource Constraints

The majority of journalists in both focus group discussions stated that their only visits to Kosovo or Serbia had been through study trips funded by international donors. They noted that the outlets they work for lack the financial resources to support regular travel or to maintain correspondents in other regions.

Most journalists said they were unable to attend negotiations in Brussels due to high costs. Instead, they rely on statements made by political leaders after the meetings, usually published on social media. As a result, many important political developments are covered exclusively through official posts, without independent reporting or analysis.

Focus group participants confirmed that their editorial teams do not invest in alternative topics, with most resources and attention directed toward covering crises and political messaging.

Limited Influence of Independent Media and the Role of Local Outlets

Independent media have limited influence in shaping public opinion. However, local media outlets in both Kosovo and Serbia provide space for more in-depth and accurate reporting on real, everyday issues. Supporting independent and local journalism could significantly improve the quality of reporting and contribute to a more objective portrayal of the situation on the ground.

“The average citizen in Serbia, if they follow national broadcasters or read the most widely circulated newspapers, knows absolutely nothing about Kosovo. Sensationalism is their priority.”

Participant 9, journalist and editor of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

Traditionally, Serbian media do not report on the lives of Albanians in Kosovo. This creates an information vacuum that reinforces stereotypes and deepens divides.

“If people relied exclusively on Serbian media for information, they would know absolutely nothing about life in Kosovo, especially when it comes to the Albanian community. It would be a complete blind spot. People don’t even know basic things, like what Resolution 1244 actually means. They wouldn’t be able to explain it in a sentence.”

Participant 1, journalist at international media

Limited Access to Expert and Unbiased Commentary

Objective reporting is significantly hindered by the limited availability of knowledgeable and impartial sources. Media outlets often struggle to find analysts or researchers who can provide balanced and expert insights into the issues being covered. There is a strong need for the media to rely more on such voices to improve the depth and neutrality of their reporting.

“I think that in Kosovo, in general, Albanian media have only one correspondent in Belgrade, and in most cases, it’s just Idro [Idro Seferi, a Kosovar journalist based in Serbia], or they have no one at all. That alone shows we have no real insight into what’s happening in Serbia,”

Participant 11, journalist at Kosovo outlet

In the absence of correspondents, the information that does come from Serbia is often considered unreliable. Journalists expressed that they are unfamiliar with which independent Serbian media can be trusted. As a result, information from Serbia is usually presented vaguely, often described simply as “reports from Serbian media”, without proper sourcing or verification.

The Spread of Disinformation and Its Destabilizing Impact

Disinformation is widespread and thrives in an environment of deep social polarization. The damage caused by these falsehoods often surpasses even the baseline level of distrust between communities, further destabilizing already fragile interethnic relations.

“The greater the polarization, the more powerful the disinformation becomes and that’s something we should be especially mindful of. The disinformation coming from both sides is sometimes an even bigger issue than the lack of trust in politicians themselves. These narratives often go under the radar, especially regarding the Serbian community in Kosovo, yet they have the potential to seriously damage ethnic relations.”

Participant 4, journalist of local media reporting in Serbian language in Kosovo

Fact-checking platforms confirm the scale of the problem. According to data from certified fact-checkers, media outlets are the source of disinformation in dozens of documented cases, and the overall quality of reporting remains poor. In January alone – during the electoral campaign – more than 200 false or misleading pieces of content were identified in online media by the two Kosovo-based platforms certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).

PART III: Potential Solutions

The quality of reporting on Serbia-Kosovo relations is marked by a lack of depth, mutual misunderstanding and a near absence of human-centered narratives or stories of cooperation. Leading media in both contexts reinforce ethnic divisions and disinformation, often reducing complex realities to one-sided political narratives. Journalists expressed concern over limited mobility, weak editorial investments in cross-community reporting, and a lack of informed, bilingual correspondents.

In considering potential solutions to the numerous challenges identified throughout this report, the starting point was a shared understanding: the media play a vital role in de-escalating tensions and fostering empathy between communities.

Participants in the focus groups put forward several concrete and actionable recommendations aimed at improving the current media environment and promoting reconciliation:

■ **Promote multi-perspective journalism**

Encourage reporting that includes diverse viewpoints from all relevant communities, highlights personal stories, and captures the everyday lives of people across ethnic lines. Such journalism can humanize “the other” and help dismantle entrenched stereotypes.

■ **Foster media collaboration and shared projects**

Journalists and media outlets should be encouraged to build long-term partnerships, engage in joint reporting initiatives, and share resources, contacts, and expertise. Establishing mutual support among newsrooms, particularly across ethnic divides, should become standard practice rather than the exception.

■ **Create opportunities for cross-community engagement**

Dedicated spaces should be developed for journalists from different backgrounds to meet, exchange ideas, and build professional trust. One proposed idea is the formation of a multiethnic journalists’ association to facilitate cooperation and representation across the media landscape.

■ **Advocate for rule of law and professional accountability**

There is a pressing need to advocate publicly for the consistent application of media laws, ethical guidelines, and professional standards. Institutions, media regulators, self-regulatory bodies, and media organizations themselves must be held accountable for breaches.

■ **Ensure institutional transparency and responsiveness**

Public advocacy efforts should focus on increasing institutional openness, emphasizing the duty of authorities to cooperate with journalists, respond to media inquiries, and provide timely access to public information.

■ **Strengthen long-term funding and exchange programs**

There is a critical need for financial support directed at sustainable, long-term projects that allow for in-depth field reporting and cross-border journalist exchange. Increased mobility, time spent in the field, and joint editorial initiatives are essential for building trust and producing more accurate, empathetic reporting.

APRIL 2025.



This Focus Group Report is part of the activities of the project “Fostering a media intercultural exchange as a milestone towards a reconciliation process between Kosovo and Serbia”. It is produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of BIRN Serbia and Internews Kosova and may in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.