Concept note

XV Edition of the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC)

Conference host:

The Office of the Information and Data Protection Commissioner of Albania

Dates:

3 – 5 June 2024

Main theme:

"Empowering Individuals through Access to Information: Ensuring Transparency and Inclusivity in an Interconnected World"

The XV Edition of the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC) will focus its endeavors around the empowerment of individuals through access to information. This conference aims to bring together information commissioners, experts and stakeholders from various sectors to explore the critical role of access to information under the principles of transparency, inclusivity and accountability in an interconnected world.

The conference will feature panel sessions, parallel sessions, side events, various meetings and ICIC work updates. Panel discussions will include experts from different sectors, providing diverse perspectives on the conference topics. Side events will offer opportunities for in-depth exploration of specific themes or projects related with the mission, vision and strategic priorities of the ICIC. Various organizations will have the opportunity to introduce their initiatives and projects with the ICIC participants promoting the networking among the membership.

In the context of empowering individuals, the conference will address matters around the access to information guarantees for people in vulnerable situations aiming to enhance their right to obtain public information and the exercise of other human rights. These groups encounter various challenges and barriers when speaking about matters such as access to information. The work of information regulators along with relevant public and private stakeholders is essential in finding ways to ensure that these groups exercise their right equally to other individuals. Conference discussants will delve into the aspects preventing, or imposing barriers to people in vulnerable situations for their access to information rights and explore

potential solutions and mechanisms that allow them to consult and use information in an agile way, in an increasingly connected digital world.

The role of media and civil society in promoting access to information is crucial for fostering transparency, accountability, and democratic governance within a society. Both entities play distinct yet interconnected roles in ensuring an information ecosystem where useful and quality information is accessible to the public.

Despite their active role, journalist and media representatives often encounter challenges in accessing or obtaining information and a collective approach from information regulators, civil society, the media and independent journalists, should be exploited in order to have a clearer understanding and make progress in overcoming barriers, but also considering practical aspects.

In an era marked by rapid technological developments, geopolitical complexities, and societal transformations, numerous global challenges directly impact the fundamental right of access to information. One significant challenge lies in the digital divide, where disparities in internet access and technological infrastructure hinder equitable information dissemination, limiting the ability of certain populations to exercise their right to access vital information. Additionally, the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation on digital platforms poses a threat to the reliability and credibility of available information, complicating the public's ability to make informed decisions, undermining democratic governance. Geopolitical tensions and restrictive government policies further curtail access to information, as censorship, surveillance, and suppression of dissent inhibit the free flow of knowledge. The delicate balance between privacy rights and the imperative for transparency adds another layer of complexity, as individuals seek to protect personal information while governments aim to ensure public accountability. These interconnected global challenges underscore the pressing need for international collaboration, ethical frameworks, and innovative solutions to safeguard and enhance the right of access to information on a global scale.

Open data initiatives play a pivotal role in advancing access to information by promoting transparency, innovation, and collaboration across various sectors. By making datasets freely available to the public, these initiatives empower individuals, researchers, and organizations to access, analyze, and utilize information for informed decision-making. Open data fosters a culture of accountability, as citizens gain insight into government operations, policies, and public services. Furthermore, it serves as a catalyst for innovation and economic growth, enabling entrepreneurs, developers, and businesses to leverage data for the creation of new applications, products, and services. The collaborative nature of open data initiatives encourages cross-sector partnerships and knowledge-sharing, breaking down traditional silos and fostering a more interconnected global community. As access to information becomes more inclusive and widespread through open data, societies can address complex challenges more effectively, driving social progress and contributing to the overall well-being of communities

worldwide. Ultimately, open data initiatives are indispensable in shaping a future where information is a powerful tool for empowerment, understanding, and positive societal transformation.

As the current ICIC strategic plan 2021 – 2024 is about to be concluded, members and partners of the ICIC Conference will seek to explore ways and set new objectives to make further progress by laying down the foundations for a renewed ICIC strategic direction. To ensure continued success, commissioners should prioritize collaboration, both within their ranks and with relevant stakeholders globally. Establishing a robust framework for knowledge-sharing and best practices will enable commissioners to navigate evolving challenges and develop innovative solutions. Embracing technology is crucial, as it can enhance the efficiency of information processes and help commissioners adapt to the changing landscape of data governance. Moreover, a renewed emphasis on capacity building and training programs would empower Commissioners to navigate emerging issues, such as digital privacy concerns and ethical use of technology. Inclusion and diversity are considered as important aspects in the realm of access to information, which ensures that the perspectives of various communities and demographics are considered in the formulation of policies and guidelines. Strengthening partnerships with civil society organizations, governments, and international bodies will amplify the impact of the conference's initiatives, fostering a global commitment to advancing access to information. By fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and inclusivity, the ICIC can strengthen its role and act as a driving force in shaping the future of democratic, transparent, and accountable governance across the world.

The conference participants will convene in Albania to address challenges and find effective solutions for better and more accountable governments worldwide. This conference will serve as a catalyst for positive change, fostering a collective commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and most importantly, the empowerment of individuals in our interconnected world.