

Governments are doing a poor job at fighting corruption across Europe and Central Asia

New Transparency International report shows people fear speaking out against corruption

Berlin, 16 November 2016 – One in three people living in Europe and Central Asia think corruption is one of the biggest problems facing their country, a Transparency International report said today. This figure rises to two in three in Moldova, Spain and Kosovo, showing that urgent action against the abuse of power and secret deals is needed.

Nearly a third of citizens across the region believe that their government officials and lawmakers are highly corrupt and a majority of people say their governments are not doing enough to stop corruption.

Over half the people in European Union (EU) countries (53 per cent), EU accession candidate countries (53 per cent) and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), mainly former Soviet Union countries, (56 per cent) said their governments had failed to curb corruption. The governments of Ukraine (86 per cent), Moldova (84 per cent), Bosnia and Herzegovina (82 per cent), and Spain (80 per cent) were judged worst by their citizens.

Transparency International spoke to nearly 60,000 citizens in 42 countries in Europe and Central Asia on their experiences with corruption in their daily lives for its new report [People and Corruption: Europe and Central Asia](#), which is part of the Global Corruption Barometer 2016 series.

On average, one in six households paid a bribe when they accessed public services. Although fewer households paid bribes for public services in many EU member states, rates were significantly higher further east; the highest rates were in Tajikistan (50 per cent), Moldova (42 per cent), Azerbaijan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Ukraine (38 per cent), and Russia (34 per cent). Romania had the highest rate for an EU member state at 29 per cent, followed by Lithuania with 24 per cent.

In the richest countries, almost two out of three people (65 per cent) believed the wealthy have too much influence on policy compared to 44 per cent in the EU accession countries and 46 per cent in CIS countries.

In Spain, 88 per cent of people said wealthy individuals had undue influence over government decisions; in Portugal, it was 85 per cent, in France 79 per cent, in Germany and the UK 77 per cent.

“Corruption is a significant problem all across the Europe and Central Asia region. In EU countries many citizens see how the wealthy and those in government distort the system to their advantage,” said José Ugaz, Chair of Transparency International. “Governments are simply not doing enough to tackle corruption because individuals at the top are benefiting. To end this deeply troubling relationship between wealth, power and corruption, governments must require higher levels of transparency, including around who owns and controls companies through public beneficial ownership registries.”

“By their very positions at the top of the power pyramid, corrupt elites and oligarchs are hard to remove. But we have seen that it can be done if people stand together to demand higher standards from their leaders and the judiciary acts independently to hold them to account,” said Ugaz.

Yet one key stumbling block to fighting corruption is the lack of protection for those who speak up against it. 30 per cent of all those questioned across Europe and Central Asia said that the main reason more people don't report cases of corruption is because they fear the consequences. Two out of five who blew the whistle suffered retaliation as a result.

There is also a stigma attached to speaking out. Particularly in CIS countries, only a quarter of people think that reporting corruption was socially acceptable (27 per cent).

Few citizens feel empowered to help stop corruption in their country: Less than half of people (47 per cent) in EU countries feel that they can make a difference in the fight against corruption, and this falls to less than a third (31 per cent) in CIS countries.

Transparency International makes four key recommendations to reduce political corruption and help people speak up without fear of retaliation. Governments across Europe and Central Asia should:

- Have transparent rules on lobbying and a public lobbying register, so that policy decisions can be better scrutinised.
- Ensure the independence of the judiciary, particularly in EU accession and CIS countries, by reducing the influence of the executive over the judiciary and prosecutorial services and including transparent and objective systems for the appointment, transferral and dismissal of judges and prosecutors.
- Adopt and enforce comprehensive legislation to protect whistleblowers.
- Support whistleblowers and reporters of corruption and ensure appropriate follow-up to their disclosures.

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