

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

People in the EU concerned about government corruption, ties between business and politics, survey reveals

Lucinda Pearson · Tuesday, June 15th, 2021

Over half of people in the EU think their government is run by a few private interests

Berlin/Brussels 15 June 2021 – The Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) – European Union released by Transparency International today reveals that almost two thirds of people in the EU think that government corruption is a problem in their country. The GCB, which surveyed more than 40,000 people in the bloc, asked about people’s views and experiences of corruption. The results highlight some worrying trends across the region.

[Explore the findings](#)

Almost three in ten EU residents reported directly experiencing corruption, as they paid a bribe or used a personal connection to access public services. This is equivalent to more than 106 million people.

The survey reveals that health care, in particular, has been a corruption hotspot as governments struggled to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Although just six per cent of people paid a bribe for health care, 29 per cent of EU residents relied on personal connections to get medical care. Furthermore, most people don’t think that their government has handled the pandemic in a transparent manner.

“The EU is often seen as a bastion of integrity, but these findings show that countries across the region remain vulnerable to the insidious effects of corruption,” said Delia Ferreira Rubio, Chair of Transparency International. “During a health crisis, using personal connections to access public services can be as damaging as paying bribes. Lives can be lost when connected people get a COVID-19 vaccine or medical treatment before those with more urgent needs. It’s crucial that governments across the EU redouble their efforts to ensure a fair and equitable recovery from the ongoing pandemic.”

The survey explored other areas related to corruption, such as the ties between business and politics, with over half of respondents thinking their government is run by a few private interests. Bankers and business executives are perceived as more corrupt than any public sector institution in half of the EU. Overall, more than five in 10 people believe that big companies often avoid paying taxes, and that bribes or connections are commonly used by businesses to secure contracts.

Almost a third of people think corruption is getting worse in their country, while almost half of them say their government is doing a bad job at tackling corruption. In addition, only 21 per cent of

people think that corrupt officials face appropriate repercussions.

Sentiments that governments are not doing enough to combat corruption and the perception that corrupt officials are able to act with impunity negatively affect trust levels in both national governments and EU institutions. Less than half of people in the EU trust their national government. While the EU institutions fared better (at 56 per cent), the rate of trust remains relatively low.

“These results should be a wake-up call for both national governments and the EU institutions. Corruption is undermining public trust and policy makers need to listen to the concerns of the public,” said Michiel van Hulten, Director of Transparency International EU. “There are many immediate actions that can be taken to remedy these problems, such as increasing lobbying transparency both at the EU and national levels and tackling tax avoidance. And EU policies to protect whistleblowers and fight money laundering must be effectively and swiftly transposed into national law.”

Notes to editors

The GCB is one of the largest, most detailed surveys of people’s views on corruption and experiences of bribery in the 27 EU countries. The GCB surveyed over 40,000 people in the EU from October to December 2020. For details on the survey approach, please see the methodology note in [the report](#).

Detailed recommendations are available in the report, as is a [country-by-country breakdown](#) of the findings from each EU Member State.

The findings of the Global Corruption Barometer – European Union will be discussed in an online event taking place on Tuesday, 15 June 2021 at 15:00 CEST. Please click [here](#) to register.

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