



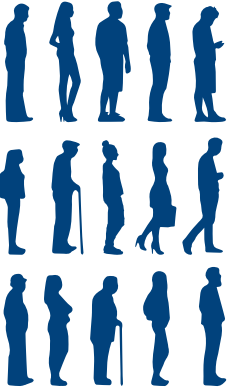
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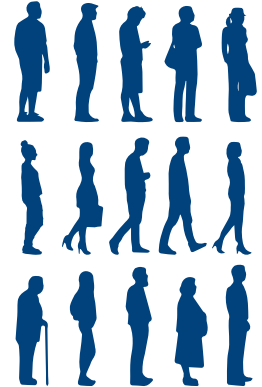


Institute for Democracy
Societas Civilis - Skopje



Perceptions of corruption and motivation to engage in the fight against corruption

Conclusions from focus group discussions



IMPRESSUM

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KEY FINDINGS

- The main association of corruption for the participants is a high-level corruption, although their direct experience is in the area of petty corruption. There is a consensus that corruption is a major social problem; and that its ubiquity and impunity has a destructive impact on society.
- Impeded access to services and to quality services, on the one hand, as well as the low income and the existing corrupt relations seen as "normal way of doing things", on the other hand, were indicated as main factors for the persistence of corruption. The more important the sector is for the well-being of the citizens, the greater the corruptive pressure. This, according to the participants, undermines the functionality of the institutions, reinforces mistrust, affects the reduction of the quality of life of the citizens and is a factor for emigration of those who refuse to come to terms with this reality.
- Most participants in the focus groups believe that reporting corruption is useless, because they do not expect that cases of corruption will be properly investigated and sanctioned. They are afraid of repercussions or have faced repercussions when reporting corruption. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), civil sector organizations, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption, the Public Revenue Office, the Ombudsman, as well as the inspectorates and the Judicial Council are all considered to be the key institutions in the fight against the corruption. However, there is low trust in the capacities of these institutions to successfully combat corruption.
- A small number of the focus group participants are engaged in voluntary organizations outside home or work, and there is no motivation to participate in actions (individual or mass-scale) to fight against corruption. The main motivating factors for participating in protests are the relevance of the problem for which the protest is organized, dissatisfaction with the current situation, as well as the need to "act morally". They are disappointed by the lack of effect of these actions in the past, which demotivates them from engaging in similar actions in the future.
- Recommendations for designing initiatives for greater involvement of the citizens in the active fight against corruption:
 - According to the participants, personal change cannot have a wider social impact if it is not *en-masse*. In this regard, it is necessary to organize actions/initiatives/communication products that aim to raise the collective solidarity and call for a fight for the common interest, emphasizing *en-masse* as a factor for change. The involvement of local grassroots organizations, which enjoy trust by the citizens, in the mobilization of the civil resistance to corruption, can contribute to greater civic involvement.

- The perception that there is a positive change (solved corruption cases, change of normative framework) is a motivating factor; informing about and highlighting achieved results in the fight against corruption would influence the increase of trust and motivation of citizens to participate in anti-corruption actions.
- A significant motivating factor for the participants is the feeling of security – that they are safe from repercussions if they publicly express an attitude/opinion. Continuous raising of awareness about channels available for anonymous reporting of corruption, as well as information about positive outcomes of reported corruption, would influence the increase of the citizens' trust in the systemic solutions aimed at fighting corruption.
- According to the discussions within the focus groups, there is a need for continuous education about what are the services the citizens are entitled to, as well as education about their rights in certain situations, especially in areas where petty corruption is common (health, obtaining personal documents and permits and similar). At the same time, showing the ways in which corruption adversely affects the availability of rights and services for everyone can contribute to reducing the tolerance towards corrupt behavior.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the qualitative research is to obtain information about citizens' perceptions of corruption, as well as more knowledge about the motivations and obstacles for their active participation in the fight against corruption. The qualitative research is carried out within the framework of the program "Citizens against corruption", financed by the American Agency for International Development in the Republic of North Macedonia (USAID), led by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation in partnership with the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje (IDSCS), the Center for Civic Communications (CCC), the Chamber of Commerce of North Macedonia (CCNM), 360 Stepeni, the Investigative Reporting Laboratory (IRL) and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Macedonia (BIRN). The conclusions of the analysis will be used to design, plan and organize initiatives for greater involvement of the citizens in the active fight against corruption.

For the purposes of the analysis, eight focus groups were conducted with a total of 80 citizens from all regions of the country, with one focus group in each region. During the formation of the groups, an effort was made to ensure equal gender representation among the participants. The focus groups were conducted between August 10 and 25, 2023. The participants discussed several topics related to corruption - what corruption is for them, how corruption affects society, which are the key institutions affected by the problem of corruption, and what are their views on the role of the citizens and various stakeholders in resolving this issue.

1. CORRUPTION IN THE EYES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants from all regions were ready and open to share their views on what constitutes corruption. Common definitions of corruption in discussions present it as a relationship involving the giving of a bribe (money or favor) in order to obtain a requested service, or to obtain a required service in a shorter time frame or with better quality.

It was concluded from the discussions that the participants understand corruption as obtaining an illicit advantage in order to benefit from a certain service and that this relationship includes violation of the legal norms and the abuse of official position. When describing corruption, the participants often relate this relationship with the absence of moral values among the persons who engage in corruption. In addition, the majority of the participants have an opinion that corruption is something that is widespread and normalized as a social phenomenon. The participants shared that, although they are aware of what corruption is and consider that it has an extremely bad effect on society, it is often really difficult to escape the pressure to get involved in corruption, because corruption has grown into a way of life in many areas. When describing corruption, many of the participants emphasize the vicious circle of corruption, that is, once a service is received in a non-standard way, then there is the "debt" of the counter service.

“It’s like asking a smoker – all smokers will agree that cigarettes are bad and harmful but they still smoke”.

(man, unemployed, Northeast region)

Throughout the discussions, one can notice the tendency of the participants to make a moral distinction in their attitude towards different forms of corruption - petty and high-level corruption, as well as to point out dilemmas - whether nepotism constitutes corruption, the cases when no immediate bribe or favor is given in order to benefit from a privileged treatment (but is reciprocated if and when the other party requests that). In making a distinction which behavior is corruption and which is not, the participants were often dismissing the acts of the so-called petty corruption as behavior that should not be reduced to the term corruption. Such was, for example, the view of certain participants that political party employment does not constitute an act of corruption because (according to them) it does not include immediate compensation for the service rendered.

Other dilemmas in terms of which relationship is corrupt are related to the practice of giving gifts for a service performed, especially when they were not directly requested by the party that performed the service. Participants make a distinction between giving small gifts (coffee, candy box) and expensive gifts (jewelry, luxury alcoholic beverages, etc.). An additional distinction is made by some participants regarding gift giving and money giving. Considering that almost all participants offered and accepted the definition of corruption as a violation of the norms in order to receive privileged treatment for the sake of a certain compensation,

the interpretation that is imposed is that some of them "amnesty" this form of corruption, presenting it as a "normalized" way of things work, such as looking for connections when it comes to obtaining documents, or giving a gift. In a certain way, one gets the impression that one's own responsibility (within the involvement in petty corruption) is minimized at the expense of a high-level corruption, which in the perceptions of the majority of participants is omnipresent and is also a factor for the survival of petty corruption.

“Everyday events, everyday conversations with people, everyday everywhere, corruption is no longer hidden in our country – whether it is your friend, or a relative, or you yourself know about it, for example, how much you need, if you want a better doctor or if you want to get your work done faster, you know how it could end in court, you know how it could end in the police, we’ve already come to a phase where even in a store, if you need to get something, there will be also corruption”.

(woman, private sector, Northeast Region)

Even in situations where the participants admit that small forms of bribery represent corruption, they relate the "inevitability" of these relationships with the "Balkan mentality", to types of relationships that are passed down from generation to generation. The same or similar arguments are used to explain the ubiquity of corruption, that it is a type of behavior that "is very difficult or impossible to refuse" because it is part of relationships that have existed throughout history in our society. The consequence of this is a system in which it is almost impossible to access services (of services with adequate quality) in a regular, legal way – a "vicious" circle that "pushes" citizens into accepting and taking alternative ways (often illegal and corrupt) to access services. One of the key factors for the widespread prevalence of corruption, according to the participants, is the fact that the institutions charged with fighting corruption are themselves susceptible to corruption, with the susceptibility to corruption being directly proportional to the amount of power an institution/position has or holds.

1.1 Associations/examples of corruption

Citing examples of corruption, participants often first refer to cases of high-level corruption or mention that corruption is primarily linked to the highest authorities. In terms of high-level corruption, the case of the construction contract for Corridor 8 highways between the Government and the Bechtel-Enka company was mentioned by the participants from several focus groups. The first association for corruption in some of the focus groups were cases from the health sector - from scheduling health examinations to interventions for life-threatening conditions. There were also frequent examples of corruption in administrative procedures, such as obtaining personal documents (ID and similar) and obtaining permits. The cited examples also included corruption at the local level, within the judiciary, public procurement, employment, construction, border crossing, corruption in education. The participants cited examples when they were indirectly or directly requested a bribe, independent of situations where they themselves offered a bribe.

Personal examples of involvement in corruption were passing a driving test, jumping the queue, requesting health services through acquaintances, requesting to intervene in school grades. Examples of favor for favor or using connections with friends and acquaintances to get faster or better service are common in petty

corruption. Those who are involved in corruption often use the absence of financial compensation for the corrupt act to deny that the illegal granting of privileges is corruption.

1.2 Being informed of corruption

The main sources of information about corruption for the participants are the media (very often Internet portals), but also personal experience and the experience of relatives and friends ("we are involved in them"). Some of the participants stated that they receive information about corruption through the media coverage of the work of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC).

1.3 Causes of corruption

Participants discussed the various reasons why different parties in a corrupt relationship would have a motive to be involved. On the side of those offering or accepting bribes, one of the main factors was the lack of access to services, especially timely and quality services as a reason for corruption (increases the pressure of corruption). Persons who request or accept to receive bribes mention the debt in return of such favor and the lack of finances as reasons for corruption.

Enabling factor for corruption, according to the participants in several focus groups, are the ambiguities and different interpretations of the legal norms.

“When the law doesn’t work, where there is a semicolon or dot in the law that 10 people interpret differently, whether, I don’t know exist in the Western countries”.

(man, freelancer, Pelagonia region)

In addition, the discussions in several focus groups highlighted the low level of awareness among the citizens regarding rights and obligations they enjoy/have, as well as the high level of apathy among citizens as factors that encourage and enable corruption.

“Why do I think that corruption will not be solved? First of all, corruption requires two people – one who will demand and one who will offer a bribe. We have that here. Every third Macedonian would say, "Yes, I would give money". The second thing is that we are very poor in knowledge. Hardly anyone knows which institution is in charge of what, which law gives you which right, where you can complain, how you can obtain that. That is very rare. It is mainly about "You won’t be able to do anything, there’s no point in trying". For 20 years we have been drunk with that song: "Don’t bother because you won’t be able to achieve anything anyway". It is already part of our genetic trait. Before it was the attitude of "The bowed head shall not be cut by the sword" and now it’s "There’s nothing you can do anyway". And that’s why we do nothing”.

(woman, unemployed, Pelagonia region)

The more important the sector is for the well-being of the citizens, the greater the corruptive pressure, according to the participants. In all focus groups, experiences from healthcare were mentioned, where for minor to life-threatening services/interventions, the participants were asked for a bribe. Healthcare was often cited as the first association for corruption and was often highlighted as the area in which corruption is most prevalent.

1.4 Who is susceptible to corruption?

As part of the discussion about examples of corruption, the participants had already singled out the sectors/institutions they consider the most susceptible to corruption – healthcare, police, courts. In addition to these, the participants in some focus groups mentioned the Government, customs and the Public Revenue Office (PRO), as well as the national media service - Macedonian Radio Television (MRTV). The judiciary stands out as an area entrusted with the defense against and sanction of corruption and is recognized as a key in fighting corruption.

In discussions about whether corruption prevails among a certain demographic category, a large number of participants do not consider corrupt behavior to be a characteristic of young people (up to 30 years old) and believe that older people are more inclined to ask for or offer bribes for favors. This perception can be due either to the understanding of corruption as an inherited practice from the past (so the older people have already accepted it and are in line with the model of corrupt relations) or it is a function of power, where the older/more experienced people who are in a position of power abuse that power through corruption.

In general, there were no opinions that gender was a factor in corrupt behavior. There was agreement among the participants that regardless of gender, corruption is more linked to the position of the person. In some of the focus groups, distinct opinions were expressed that members of other ethnic groups (always expressed as an ethnic group other than the group they belong to) are more prone to corruption and that they contribute to the worsening of the corruption problem.

1.5 What is the impact of corruption?

There is agreement among the participants that corruption is a major social problem; that its ubiquity and impunity have a destructive impact on society and the quality of life of citizens. On the other hand, corruption is perceived as a normalized phenomenon, it becomes a solution for various aspects of way daily life works.

During the discussions, the participants emphasized that corruption causes "financial suffering" of citizens and increases social dissatisfaction. With corruption, hard-to-reach services become even more inaccessible to citizens who cannot pay bribes; when it comes to services on which the health and life of citizens depend, their difficult availability can make the difference between life and death. This, the participants pointed out, undermines the functionality of institutions (poor access to services, low-quality services, absence of rule of law, negative impact on the environment), strengthens mistrust, affects the quality of life of citizens and is a factor in emigration for to those who refuse to live with this reality.

“Most of the time you know how. With people, they are "caught" on their emotions. When they have the most problems, when they most need to get the job done for x, x reasons. The person doesn't think about reporting, he/ she only thinks about how to get the job done. Another thing is that corruption has entered into our culture of behavior. Somehow, we think it's normal to give something in order get a job done. And that is why we do not dare to report. If we report and if they catch some of those people will not be there any more to get the job done and that is already a problem of the society. [...] The employees in the institutions are prone to corruption, mostly because the salaries are low. Because with those wages, they simply cannot live normally. So, they, unfortunately, dare to enter in the lives of the people. People who make ends meet but will give 100 euros to get the job done and spend the entire month on bread and salt, as we say. Just to get the job done. Here, as people and as living beings, I think we are not fair. Those who are prone to corruption in the institutions are not fair, but unfortunately that is the system. The system is difficult to change, especially in countries like ours, which is in transition. And another thing is that first we need to have some kind of mechanism at the local level, then at national level, how to somehow suppress corruption at, of course, there should be more and more education and all of that is called educating the population against corruption. But I think it would take a long, long time to finish this job without giving something”.

(male, public administration employee, Southwest Region)

In addition, the participants believe that corruption, in the form of nepotism and party employment, as well as the emigration of a young and educated population, makes the problem of the lack of qualified and competent staff in the institutions worse, indirectly increasing the corruptive pressure. Corruption, according to them, impacts the loss of foreign investments as well as relations with foreign partners in the business sector. Finally, the cumulative effect of all these consequences has an impact on the deterioration of the mental health of citizens, who face regular pressures to remain silent or engage in corrupt behavior in order to be able to function.

1.6 Experiences and reasons for (not) reporting corruption

Most participants in the focus groups from all regions believe that reporting corruption is useless, because they do not expect that cases of corruption will be properly investigated and sanctioned. In the majority of cases of the few participants that have reported corruption would report corruption, they faced repercussions (such as loss of job, negative impact on career, etc.). Some of them reacted by writing petitions, reporting to relevant institutions, but the lack of reaction from the competent authorities demoralizes them. It can be concluded that there is no perception among the participants of their agency, the capacity of citizens to be active actors in the suppression of corruption.

“And in the end, you can come out guilty, and the one you wanted to report will not bear any consequences. And that is why the common person steps aside. Lives alongside it”.

(woman, professor, Polog region)

In addition to lack of trust in institutions, participants in several focus groups stated that they did not report corruption due to fear of repercussions. Participants often emphasized that they feel helpless and powerless when they have to report corruption, because "corruption is protected, everyone is corrupt in the chain and you can't get justice."

Faced with repercussions when reporting corruption, there is a belief among the participants that there is no mechanism that protects citizens and their rights when reporting anonymously, both in terms of protecting the identity of the whistleblower and in terms of the outcome of the report/case.

“Fear that if you report, you will be the one who will get burned and not the individual you wanted to report. And it can backfire on you and they could imprison you”.

(male, worker in the private sector, Vardar region)

“It is difficult to report corruption because everyone is connected. And you will end up guilty. And you will be fired at the end, depending on where you work. One person cannot fight against a monster, against crime. Crime is a monster. And you as an individual cannot fight it. You can't. You will keep quiet or look for your own alternative ways to get some justice and finally if you can obtain compensation. Therefore, we are all on our own. Everyone manages in their own way”.

(woman, unemployed, Polog region)

1.7 Institutions in the fight against corruption

The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) is recognized among most of the focus group participants as an institution vested with anti-corruption mandate. However, apart from the basic recognition of the existence of the institution, the majority of the participants did not share more information about the mandate or results of the Commission. Some participants think that the Commission is an authority for sanctioning corruption, and several participants expressed uncertainty about the status of the State Commission (is it a governmental or non-governmental organization). Some of the participants are aware of the possibility to report corruption by phone, and a smaller part also know that corruption can be reported in the institutions (where they were asked for a bribe). Some, especially younger participants, indicated organizations from the civil society sector (Helsinki Committee, NGO Glasen Textilec) as organizations that are involved in the fight against corruption.

Some other institutions indicated as important in the fight against corruption were the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption, the Public Revenue Office, the Ombudsman, as well as the inspectorates and the Judicial Council. Heads of state institutions were also mentioned as positions that have access to information, including on corruption, and that have the power to take appropriate actions to prevent and sanction it. Participants indicated low confidence in the capacity of these institutions to successfully fight corruption. They believe that the judicial authorities do not act on the well-founded suspicions of corruption and that the cases that have been initiated do not receive adequate resolution.

When it comes to media outlets, the participants, apart from considering them as a source of information about possible cases of corruption, most refer to the contribution of the media outlets in the fight against corruption with great skepticism. The discussions highlight the view of some of the participants that most media outlets are biased and serve the interests of a particular political structure and selectively expose cases related to their political opponents, which can also create confusion among citizens. In the discussions about the possibility of the media outlets to contribute to the fight against corruption, it was said that, although compared to the past there is now greater freedom to report and comment, the media outlets are generally not considered a force that could contribute to change for the better.

2. MOTIVATION AND IMPEDIMENT TO INVOLVEMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Overall, very few focus group participants are involved in voluntary organizations outside of home or work. Some of the participants who work in the public sector, stated that they avoid getting involved in protests for fear of being the target of harassment at the workplace. In addition, participants from rural areas emphasize that they have fewer opportunities for community participation in the areas in which they live.

In the discussions, a generational gap in the attitudes of the participants was also noticed - older participants believe that young people are apathetic and respond to corruption and other social problems by leaving the country. The younger ones, on the other hand, think that they are much more active than their older fellow citizens, but they do not see support from them.

A small part of the participants a duty to protest or otherwise get involved in the fight against corruption. They state the desire for justice and a better quality of life as a motivating factor. Asked about the factors that would motivate them to go to protests, the participants mainly stated the relevance of the problem for which the protest is being organized, the dissatisfaction with the current situation, as well as the pressure to "act morally".

A small number of participants (mostly women) stated that they had participated in protests in the past about various social problems, including protests about cases related to corruption. They are disappointed by the lack of effect of these actions, which demotivates them from engaging in similar actions in the future. When it comes to their capacity to act as citizens, proposals have been raised that call for civic self-organization (for example, the establishment of a civic center for reporting corruption) that would encourage them to be proactive in the fight against corruption.

Additional ways to fight corruption that were discussed also referred to withdrawing from one's own involvement in corrupt activities, reporting corrupt activities, as well as boycotting election processes. The participants consider the *en-masse* engagement in the fight against corruption as a motivating factor and seek a broader anti-corruption consensus in society.

They emphasize that greater availability of certain services will help citizens to look less for alternative (corrupt) ways to reach these services. Litigations for corruption cases that have been resolved are also considered a motivating factor for citizens to be more active in reporting corruption.

For the majority of participants, education is not a factor that significantly contributes to the fight against corruption, and there is dominant view that the education system is corrupt and of low-quality. Several

participants in the discussions believe that the educational system does not teach young people critical thinking, but supports learning through repetition and promotes submissiveness. However, there is an awareness among the participants of the important role the education has, and in that context, the role in the fight against corruption. Although they believe that education has the power to raise the awareness of the issue of corruption, the education system currently does not fulfill this role because it cannot distance itself from a system that is extremely prone to corruption. Asked about the possibility of reducing the corrupt pressure on education, some of the participants cited standardized testing and entrance exams for higher education as a possibility.

The participants also had the opportunity to share knowledge about successes in the fight against corruption. Most of the statements include other countries (Singapore, Belgium, France), without sharing details regarding the strategies that have been taken in the fight against corruption. In most cases, no details are given about the examples, and the statements convey the idea that a single legal solution is sufficient to solve the problem of systemic corruption. In terms of en-masse activism, the example of France is cited, where public dissatisfaction with various problems (including corruption) is expressed through mass protests.

“As I have researched, I know that Singapore was considered one of the most corrupt political systems, especially the healthcare. By adopting a Law, the entire country was reorganized in a unique manner. Just by adopting laws and by proving the origin of property, assets, everywhere where a small percentage of corruption was discovered and the people were unable to prove the origin of the assets, acquired property, etc. All of them ended up on the street and a new system was established and now Singapore is one of the richest and most orderly countries in the world“.

(woman, student, Southeast region)

The knowledge that an action had a result or that changes for the better are beginning to be felt in a certain sector is a strong motivating factor for the participants to be more vocal against corruption.

“If only I knew that I would achieve something with it. If I think from the very start that I won’t achieve anything, then what”.

(woman, government sector, Northeast region)

A significant motivating factor for the participants is the feeling of security that they are safe from repercussions and retaliation if they publicly express an attitude/opinion. Some of the participants stated that they refrained from participating in public events against corruption for fear of facing repercussions at the workplace (public administration). It is the idea that their actual involvement (individually or in a group) is stigmatizing them politically and can have an impact on their career and general well-being.

“And social pressure. Before I came here I was talking to my wife that I am going to attend a focus group on corruption. You know what my wife told me... Be careful what you say“.

(man, employee in the state sector, Skopje region)

Polarization (political and ethnic) is seen as an obstacle to *en-masse* response to corruption. Some of the participants shared that their enthusiasm and faith in change was broken after the Colorful Revolution, in their view, did not produce the expected results in the suppression of corruption. In addition, a small part of the participants also mentioned the Ohrid Framework Agreement as a factor of ethno-political mobilization that does not allow a more massive unification in the fight against corruption.

2.1 Recommendations from citizens

The participants agree that there is a need for professionalization and strengthening of the capacities of all institutions involved in the fight against corruption. Additionally, there is a high degree of agreement that it is necessary to ensure compliance with laws and equal access to rights and services for all citizens. In several focus groups, it was especially emphasized that those at the top of the hierarchy should set an example by complying with laws, so that there can be a cascading effect downwards. In several instances, the participants called for greater monitoring by the international community and external expertise for dealing with corruption.

The participants mentioned that the removal of the political party influences in the society would help citizens to be more motivated to get involved in the fight against corruption. The *en-masse* reactions against corruption (protests, for example) acts as a motivating factor. With massiveness, the fear of repercussions decreases.

In terms of anti-corruption campaigns, many participants do not find them useful (they consider them to be "empty words"). It is important for them to see greater sanctioning as well as responsibility of the institutions. A significant part of the participants said that the society needs a strong leadership figure, as well as rigorous punishments that would have a demotivating effect on future corruption. Some of the participants believe that the inclusion of religious institutions can help, with the moral and educational role of these institutions. Promotion of core values, which are not different between religions, can help fight corruption.

Finally, most of the participants believe that personal change, personal example, cannot have a social impact, if it does not have an *en-masse* character.

Consistent with the belief that the judicial system is a key factor in the prevalence and profound presence of corruption in society, the participants call for reforms in the judiciary that will enable the independence of the judiciary. There were discussions about the fact that previous office holders, against which judicial procedures for potential abuse of official position due to corruption relations have been in the pipeline for years, still "walk freely", without any outcome of the proceedings. For some of the participants, passing a law on the origin of property is one of the ways to exercise greater control over corruption.

Finally, the participants recommend that greater transparency of the institutions, not only in the judiciary, but in all areas, would have a positive impact in terms of reducing the corrupt pressure on the institutions. When citizens know that their case is in the process, how far it has progressed, there would be less motive for offering bribes. In this context, education about what services the citizens are entitled to, as well as education

about their rights in certain situations, can also be a useful part of a campaign. Emphasizing the bad impact of the petty corruption that citizens often engage into (if you jump the queue, others suffer consequences) should also be used to raise awareness in a campaign.

“Well, I think that the procedures should be made a little more transparent, for example, when I enter the institutions, it is a literal black hole – and I have to wait for something to show up. It would be good to know the progress at any moment”.

(male, employee in the government sector, Skopje region)

In addition to the above, the participants believe that the establishment of accountability among people in power should be linked to corruption; that is, that governments should bear responsibility for unfavorable climate for corruption.

“Let’s encourage those in the Government to do that, to prevent corruption by threatening their seats. To enact a law that will say – if, on an annual level, we are in the top 5 countries with the greatest corruption, that group of politicians cannot run in the next elections. And if there are better results, then run again in the elections and we will vote for you. On the other hand, if we are among the worst examples of corruption, the same set of politicians should not have right to run in elections”.

(male, student, Vardar region)

Some of the participants from the Vardar region recommend the involvement of non-political party experts who would participate in the mobilization of the civil resistance to corruption. This would be followed by involvement of local organizations that would have the trust of the citizens, and this would show results.

SUMMARY

From the insights gained from the participants' thoughts in focus groups on various issues, it can be concluded that the mass awareness of anti-corruption efforts significantly motivates individuals to actively engage in or support these initiatives. The awareness that identified and sanctioned cases of corruption positively influences the motivation to report or support activities aimed at combating corruption. A significant motivational factor for participants is the sense of security that they are safe from repercussions if they publicly express their opinions; according to this finding, regularly informing citizens about available channels for anonymous reporting of corruption and sharing information about resolved corruption cases would contribute to increasing citizens' trust in systemic solutions for combating corruption.

