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TOOLKIT

FOR REPORTING CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Developed within the project "With Digitalisation Versus Corruption" (Erasmus+)

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INTRODUCTION

About the project

DigitalVScorrupt is an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the Field of Youth project focused on strengthening anti-corruption awareness, digital literacy, and civic engagement in the European Union and the Western Balkans. Its main objective is to fight corruption through digital tools, cross-sectoral learning, and the empowerment of young people, youth workers, civil society actors, and community leaders.

Corruption is a complex social, political, and economic phenomenon that weakens democratic institutions, distorts public decision-making, reduces trust in authorities, and undermines social cohesion. In the public sector, corruption directly affects the quality of services, equal access to rights, and the fair use of public resources. It can appear in procurement, licensing, inspections, recruitment, budgeting, public investment, and many other administrative processes.

The project therefore supports non-formal learning activities, practical training, awareness raising, and the development of user-friendly tools that help people identify, prevent, and report corruption in a responsible and secure way.

Training areas addressed by the project include:

- understanding corruption, integrity, and accountability in public institutions;
- national and international legal frameworks related to anti-corruption and whistleblower protection;
- identification of corruption risks and preventive measures in daily institutional practice;
- use of digital tools, reporting mechanisms, and secure communication channels;
- interactive methods such as workshops, simulations, role-plays, and case-based learning.

INTRODUCTION

About the Toolkit

This Toolkit provides practical guidance for recognizing and reporting corruption in the public sector. It is designed for youth, youth workers, civil society organizations, public officials, educators, and other stakeholders who wish to strengthen transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct in public life.

Its purpose is to explain what corruption in the public sector can look like, where it commonly appears, how it affects institutions and communities, and what steps individuals can take to report it safely and effectively. The Toolkit combines accessible explanations, structured reporting steps, examples of official channels, and practical tables that can also be used in training settings.

The Toolkit can be used as:

- a practical guide for understanding and reporting corruption in public institutions;
- a training and facilitation resource for workshops, study sessions, and awareness events;
- a reference document for organizations and institutions seeking to improve integrity culture and reporting practices.

UNDERSTANDING CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Corruption in the public sector refers to the misuse of public office, authority, resources, or procedures for private benefit. It may involve money, gifts, favors, political influence, family ties, or other advantages that interfere with fair and lawful decision-making. It can occur at national, regional, or local level and may involve elected officials, civil servants, public institutions, state-owned enterprises, or external actors seeking improper influence.

Because public institutions manage shared resources and provide essential services, corruption in this sector has especially serious consequences. It not only harms budgets and institutional credibility, but also affects citizens' trust, equality before the law, and access to services such as healthcare, education, social support, permits, infrastructure, and justice.

1. Types of Corruption

Type of Corruption	Description	Example
Bribery	Offering, giving, or receiving money, gifts, or favors to influence an official act or decision.	A citizen pays an official to speed up a permit.
Abuse of Office	Using public authority or discretion for personal, political, or financial gain.	An official directs municipal resources to benefit a private contact.
Conflict of Interest	A personal, family, or political interest interferes with impartial public duty.	A decision-maker awards a contract to a company owned by a relative.
Nepotism and Favoritism	Preferential treatment based on personal connections rather than merit or rules.	A public institution hires a friend without a fair recruitment process.
Embezzlement or Misuse of Public Funds	Stealing, diverting, or improperly using public money, assets, or equipment.	Budget lines are manipulated to cover private expenses.
Procurement Manipulation / Collusion	Manipulating public tenders, specifications, or evaluation criteria to favor a bidder.	A tender is designed so that only one preferred supplier qualifies.

The table below links common forms of corruption to key risks and preventive approaches:

Type of Corruption	Description	Typical Risk	Preventive Measures
Bribery	Improper benefits influence official decisions	Unequal treatment	Gift rules, supervision, reporting channels
Abuse of Office	Authority used for personal gain	Distorted decisions	Clear mandates, audits, oversight
Conflict of Interest	Personal interest affects duty	Biased outcomes	Disclosure rules, recusal procedures
Nepotism / Favoritism	Connections override merit	Unfair recruitment	Transparent hiring, external observers
Misuse of Funds	Public money diverted or hidden	Financial loss	Budget controls, procurement checks
Tender Manipulation	Competition is restricted	Poor value for public money	Open tenders, documentation, review

2. Key Risk Areas

Corruption risks often emerge where officials exercise discretion, where procedures are complex or poorly monitored, or where transparency is weak. Public institutions can reduce these risks through clear rules, documentation, accountability mechanisms, digitalization, and a strong integrity culture.

- Public procurement and tendering, especially where specifications, evaluation criteria, or contract changes are poorly justified;
- Licensing, permits, and inspections, where fast-tracking or favorable treatment may be exchanged for improper benefits;
- Recruitment, promotion, and public appointments, where merit can be replaced by political or personal loyalty;
- Budgeting, grants, subsidies, and public spending, where resources may be diverted or allocated without transparent criteria;
- Public service delivery, including social services, healthcare, housing, and education, where unequal access may result from informal influence;
- Urban planning, land use, and infrastructure decisions, where corruption can affect large investments and long-term public interest.

3. Impact of Corruption in the Public Sector

Corruption in public institutions affects not only those directly involved, but the wider public, who depend on fair rules, reliable institutions, and equal access to services. When integrity is weakened, public trust declines and social inequality tends to increase.

- Wasted public funds and reduced value for money;
- Lower quality of public services and delayed access for citizens;
- Erosion of trust in institutions, democracy, and the rule of law;
- Discouragement of honest staff and reduced morale within institutions;
- Greater inequality, exclusion, and vulnerability among citizens and communities.

REPORTING CORRUPTION: PRINCIPLES AND FRAMEWORKS

Reporting corruption is one of the most effective ways to support transparency, accountability, and integrity in the public sector. Clear reporting mechanisms allow institutions to detect wrongdoing, protect the public interest, and improve trust in public administration. Effective reporting also depends on legal safeguards, good institutional practice, and public awareness of available channels.

1. Core Principles of Reporting

- Confidentiality: the identity of the reporter and the information provided should be protected throughout the process;
- Accuracy and good faith: reports should rely on factual, honest, and verifiable information;
- Responsibility: reporting corruption is both an ethical and civic contribution to the public good;
- Timeliness: concerns should be raised as early as possible, before harm grows or evidence disappears;
- Protection from retaliation: no one should face intimidation, discrimination, or punishment for reporting in good faith.

2. International Frameworks

Anti-corruption reporting in the public sector is supported by international and regional frameworks that promote integrity, accountability, and whistleblower protection. The most relevant reference points include:

- United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which provides a global framework for prevention, criminalization, cooperation, and asset recovery;
- Council of Europe standards, including guidance on corruption prevention, ethics, and public integrity;
- OECD work on public integrity, transparency, and responsible public governance;
- European Union anti-corruption and whistleblower-protection standards, which encourage secure reporting and stronger institutional safeguards;
- Transparency International and Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) resources, which support practical tools, public awareness, and cooperation in the Western Balkans.

3. National Context and Legal Frameworks

Each country has its own legal and institutional arrangements for receiving and processing reports of corruption in the public sector. These may include anti-corruption agencies, prosecution services, police units, ombudsman institutions, internal integrity offices, inspectorates, and audit bodies. Procedures differ from country to country, but most systems include three common elements: a competent authority, a reporting procedure, and some form of protection for reporters acting in good faith.

Users of this Toolkit should always consult the latest national legislation, guidance documents, and official online platforms in their country to confirm where and how a report should be submitted.

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HOW TO REPORT CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Reporting corruption requires careful preparation, accurate information, and responsible action. The process should be guided by confidentiality, respect for legal procedures, and a focus on factual information rather than assumptions.

Step	Action	Key Tip
1	Identify suspicious activity	Write down facts, dates, and context
2	Collect and secure information	Keep copies safely and in order
3	Choose the right reporting channel	Verify the official mandate
4	Submit the report	Be clear, objective, and concise
5	Follow up and keep records	Store reference numbers and replies

1. Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Identify suspicious activity

Recognize warning signs such as irregular procurement decisions, unexplained urgency, missing documentation, repeated favoritism, pressure to bypass procedures, conflicts of interest, or unusual financial movements. Make sure your observations are based on specific facts and not only on rumors.

Tip: If you are unsure, record what happened, when it happened, and who was involved. Even brief notes can help identify a pattern.

Step 2: Collect and document information

Gather relevant information such as dates, names, positions, departments, decisions, correspondence, invoices, procurement records, or screenshots. Store the information securely and do not alter original documents.

Tip: Organized, well-dated information makes a report more credible and easier to review.

Step 3: Identify the appropriate reporting channel

Determine which authority or mechanism is responsible. This may be an anti-corruption agency, internal ethics office, ombudsman, inspectorate, prosecutor, police unit, or another competent body. If internal reporting may expose you to risk, consider an external secure channel where available.

Tip: Before submitting, confirm that the channel is official, secure, and competent to receive your report.

Step 4: Submit the report clearly and accurately

Use official forms or platforms whenever possible. Present the facts in chronological order, explain why the conduct appears improper, and attach or describe supporting material. Avoid emotional language, personal attacks, or unsupported conclusions.

Tip: A clear and objective report is easier to process and more likely to be taken seriously.

Step 5: Follow up and maintain records

After submission, keep confirmation receipts, case numbers, dates, and any communication you receive. If no response is provided within a reasonable time, use official follow-up channels and document your efforts.

Tip: A simple log of messages and responses helps you track the case and protect your own position.

2. Tips for Secure and Responsible Reporting

- Use official and verified channels, websites, and contacts;
- Avoid public discussion of the case or sharing sensitive information on social media;
- Prefer secure devices and internet connections when handling documents or submitting reports;
- Do not edit or manipulate evidence; preserve original files and messages whenever possible;
- Seek support from a legal expert, CSO, union representative, or trusted integrity body if the case is sensitive or you fear retaliation.

OFFICIAL CHANNELS AND DIGITAL TOOLS FOR REPORTING

Accessible, transparent, and secure reporting channels are essential for effective anti-corruption work. While institutional arrangements vary across countries, the main logic is similar: reports should be submitted to the body that has the legal mandate to receive, assess, investigate, or refer the case.

1. Official Reporting Channels

Channel	Advantages	Limitations	Anonymous Option
Anti-corruption agency / commission	Specialized mandate and expertise	Processing may be slower	Often yes
Police / Prosecutor	Strong investigative powers	Higher visibility for criminal cases	Rare or limited
Internal integrity / ethics office	Fast internal response and corrective action	Possible conflict of interest	Depends on institution
Ombudsman / inspectorate / audit body	Useful for maladministration and systemic issues	May not handle all criminal elements	Sometimes
CSOs or legal support organizations	Guidance, support, and referral	No direct enforcement power	Often yes

Main types of official channels include:

- National anti-corruption agencies or commissions, which often receive reports through online forms, hotlines, or direct submission;
- Public prosecutor's offices and police authorities, especially when bribery, fraud, embezzlement, or other criminal conduct is involved;
- Internal institutional mechanisms such as ethics officers, integrity units, disciplinary bodies, or internal audit departments;
- Ombudsman institutions, inspectorates, and supreme audit institutions, especially for maladministration, misuse of public authority, or systemic irregularities;
- Civil society organizations that provide advice, legal orientation, documentation support, and referral to the proper authority.

2. Digital Reporting Tools

Digitalization can make corruption reporting faster, safer, and more accessible. Online and mobile tools reduce geographic barriers, support documentation, and can strengthen traceability when institutions use them properly.

- Official online reporting portals managed by anti-corruption agencies or public institutions;
- Mobile applications or secure web forms used by reporting bodies or trusted CSOs;
- Email hotlines and contact forms available on institutional websites;
- E-procurement and open-data systems that allow irregularities to be flagged and monitored;
- Secure encrypted or tamper-resistant systems that protect submitted evidence and access logs.

3. How to Use Digital Tools Safely

- Verify that the platform is official and uses secure connections (for example, HTTPS and recognizable institutional domains);
- Avoid public Wi-Fi when sending sensitive documents;
- Keep confirmation receipts, timestamps, and reference numbers;
- Do not publish screenshots, names, or confidential details online;
- Read the privacy notice to understand how your information will be processed and protected.

4. Case Study: Reporting Corruption in a Public Institution

A municipal employee noticed irregularities in a small public procurement procedure for office equipment. One bidder repeatedly received favorable treatment even though the documentation was incomplete and the price was significantly higher than other offers. The employee also observed last-minute changes to the tender documentation and informal pressure not to question the process.

After collecting copies of the call documentation, evaluation notes, and relevant emails, the employee submitted a report through the institution's internal integrity channel and later shared the same information with the national anti-corruption authority.

Outcome: The review confirmed procurement manipulation and a conflict of interest involving a manager and the preferred bidder. Corrective disciplinary measures were introduced, the tender was annulled, and the institution revised its procurement and documentation procedures.

Key lessons learned:

- Early documentation of warning signs is essential;
- Secure internal channels can reduce immediate risk for staff;
- External oversight becomes crucial when internal impartiality is uncertain;
- Good record-keeping strengthens both prevention and accountability.

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Preventing and reporting corruption in the public sector requires cooperation between institutions, civil society, communities, and other stakeholders. Transparency is strongest where formal accountability mechanisms are combined with active public engagement and independent monitoring.

1. The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- raising awareness about the social cost of corruption and the importance of integrity;
- supporting citizens, youth, and workers who wish to report corruption or understand their rights;
- monitoring public spending, procurement, and institutional performance;
- facilitating dialogue between communities and institutions;
- developing educational and digital tools that make reporting easier and safer.

2. The Role of Public Institutions

- establishing clear ethics rules, conflict-of-interest standards, and reporting procedures;
- ensuring that staff understand how to identify, prevent, and report corruption risks;
- processing reports promptly, impartially, and in accordance with the law;
- protecting reporters from retaliation and communicating available safeguards;
- using audits, open data, digital tools, and public communication to strengthen accountability.

3. Multi-stakeholder Cooperation

Sustainable anti-corruption efforts depend on cooperation between public institutions, CSOs, educational actors, journalists, oversight bodies, and the wider community. This cooperation can include awareness campaigns, open-data initiatives, training activities, joint integrity standards, and local or regional partnerships for transparency.

CONCLUSION

Reporting corruption is not only an act of accountability; it is also a meaningful contribution to fair, transparent, and trustworthy public institutions. By recognizing risks, documenting concerns carefully, and using secure reporting channels, individuals and organizations can help protect public resources, strengthen democratic governance, and promote equal treatment.
Combating corruption in the public sector requires more than rules alone. It requires awareness, integrity, institutional responsiveness, and a shared commitment to the public interest. Digital tools and accessible reporting mechanisms can support this process, but their value depends on responsible use, legal safeguards, and cooperation across sectors.
This Toolkit is therefore both a practical guide and a call to action: to identify wrongdoing, to report it responsibly, and to contribute to a culture in which public service is grounded in honesty, fairness, and accountability.

ANNEX

TEMPLATE FOR REPORTING CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

This Annex provides a simple template that can be adapted to national context and organizational needs, except where a legally prescribed reporting form already exists. It may be used by citizens, public employees, CSOs, or other stakeholders to report suspected corruption in a structured and consistent manner.

Section	Details to be Provided
1. Date and place of the incident	When and where did the suspected act occur?
1. Public institution or body involved	Specify the institution, office, department, or authority concerned, if known.
1. Description of the suspected corruption act	Provide a clear and factual summary of what happened.
1. Individuals or departments concerned	List names, functions, positions, or departments, if possible.
1. Available evidence	Attach or describe documents, screenshots, messages, photos, financial records, or other supporting material.
1. Impact or potential damage	Describe the possible financial, ethical, social, or institutional consequences.
1. Has this been reported before?	Yes / No. If yes, specify when, where, and with what outcome.
1. Information about the reporter (optional)	Name, organization, contact details, and preferred contact method. Anonymous reporting may be possible depending on national law and platform.
1. Receiving institution or authority	Name of the anti-corruption body, institution, CSO, or other authority receiving the report.
1. Date of submission / Reference number	To be completed by the receiving authority or generated by the platform.

Introduction of participating organizations and their representatives in the project

Name and function	Organisation	Role/tasks
Zoran Dabetic	EPEKA Montenegro	Coordinator
Nermina Simoncic	EPEKA Slovenia	Coordinator
Stefan Simoncic	EPEKA Slovenia	Coordinator
Matej Tisaj	EPEKA RS	Coordinator
Milica Nedeljkovic	EPEKA RS	Assistant coordinator
Belma Muratovic	EPEKA Montenegro	Assistant coordinator
Jerica Lorenci	EPEKA Slovenia	Assistant coordinator
Atli Thor Fanndal	TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL Iceland	Assistant coordinator

PARTNERS

EPEKA Montenegro (Lead organisation)
Scientific Research Association for Art, Cultural, Educational Programs and Technology EPEKA (Montenegro) operates in Berane, a rural area with high youth unemployment and limited access to non- formal education. Within DigitalVSCorrupt it coordinates overall delivery, management and monitoring, and leads national CB workshops focused on ICT supported transparency and community awareness in Montenegro.

EPEKA Slovenia
A non governmental social enterprise active in EU citizenship, youth work and inclusion. EPEKA Slovenia co-hosts the partner kick-off, supports management, and co-develops ICT based transparency modules inspired by the ERAR model; it also hosts the final conference and supports EU-level dissemination.

EPEKA Serbia
Youth - focused NGO from Niš with strong experience in mobility and inclusion (including Roma and migrant youth). In the project, EPEKA Serbia co-leads trainings, supports Kosovo–Serbia youth dialogue through joint activities with CET Prizren, and pilots local campaigns on integrity in public services.

EPEKA Germany
Member of the EPEKA network supporting intercultural learning and communication. Contributes to cross border dissemination, workshop design on civic engagement and media, and documentation of good practices across partners.

CET Prizren (Kosovo)
Center for Education and Training Prizren promotes democratic values and youth participation. In DigitalVSCorrupt it co-designs youth friendly training content, co-hosts CB workshops in Kosovo and collaborates with EPEKA Serbia to strengthen trust, dialogue and anticorruption literacy among youth.

Phiren Amenca (Belgium)
International Roma youth network with strong outreach and advocacy capacity. Leads EU level dissemination, supports inclusion measures across all activities, and mentors youth campaign teams to reach diverse audiences with inclusive narratives.

Transparency International Iceland
Brings global anticorruption know how, practical tools for risk mapping and reporting, and co-authors the youth work manual sections on corruption in public institutions and accountability pathways.

Institute for Applied Research (North Macedonia)
Supports the 'Corruption in Business' strand with sessions on procurement risks, conflicts of interest, and SME integrity pledges. Co-hosts national workshops with chambers/entrepreneurs.

QENDRA (Albania)
A youth oriented civil society centre engaging communities in non-formal education and civic action. Leads CB workshops in Albania and contributes case studies on local service integrity.

Europe for You (Czech Republic)
European civic organisation experienced in communication and youth mobilisation. Codesigns the campaign lab, supports creative dissemination formats and visual storytelling.

FEIO (Poland)
Education/outreach foundation contributing to research based activity design, quick polls and pre/post evaluation tools adaptable to youth settings.

AKUSTIKUM (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Cultural organisation leveraging creative media and audio-visual methods. Co-leads the three 'video simulation' outputs (public sector, business, whistleblowing) including storyboarding and youth co-creation.

LIDSK (Turkey)
Youth development organisation focusing on civic skills and dialogue. Hosts CB workshops in Türkiye and contributes facilitation methods for diverse groups.

Arcigay (Italy)
National civil society organisation with expertise in rights based education and safe space facilitation. Contributes inclusion strategies, ethics protocols and campaign messaging on equality and integrity.

All partners collaborate via monthly coordination calls, shared templates and joint monitoring visits.

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