



Press Release



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Results of Survey of Civil Servants on Quality of Anti-Corruption Policies and Working Environment in Central Public Authorities

Transparency International–Moldova (TI-Moldova) regularly conducts surveys among civil servants in central public authorities (CPAs) to analyze their views and experiences on the quality of anti-corruption policies in CPAs, to identify possible problems in the implementation of policies, and to make suggestions for improvement. The recent survey covered all ministries and some public institutions with a high risk of corruption under their control¹, with about 600 people interviewed (29% of the central apparatus of the institutions included in the survey). The respondents were randomly selected from the lists of employees according to the state structure provided by the HR service managers. The interview was conducted in February 2024, reference period: year 2023.

The survey was based on a questionnaire that included questions related to civil servants' familiarity with anti-corruption legislation, opinions on the areas with a higher risk of conflict of interest and corruption, perceptions and experiences in applying anti-corruption policies, opinions on the presence of corruption in their institutions, willingness to report cases of corruption and to cooperate in its prevention, and suggestions for improving the working climate.

The results of the survey show that the public authorities monitored are taking steps to implement public anti-corruption policies, but this process leaves much to be desired and needs to be improved.

For example, in terms of civil servants being familiarized with anti-corruption legislation, an average of 58% of respondents in 2023 reported having received such training, which seems encouraging. *However, in MFA, MH, ME, MD, MC, and GPI, reportedly less than 40% of respondents have received such training.*

Although respondents rated their self-assessed knowledge of integrity quite high (on average 7.9 out of 10), *their knowledge of the legal framework is insufficient.* For example, only about half of respondents (53%) correctly understand that a civil servant, like any other person, has personal interests. When asked to give examples of *personal interests*, only some respondents referred to natural interests that a civil servant may have, such as career development, ensuring decent living conditions, supplementing family income, etc. *Most of the examples had a negative connotation, reflecting cases of violations of legislation related to conflicts of interest, restrictions and incompatibilities, etc.* Some interviewees stated they had no personal interests or that they were not aware of such interests.

Nor is the concept of "close person", which is very important for identifying and reporting conflicts of interest, well understood by respondents. Although the majority of respondents correctly identified spouses, parents and children as close persons, a significant proportion did not refer to grandparents, grandchildren, uncles/aunts, cohabiting partners and in-laws.

Respondents do not always recognize the difference between actual, potential and consummated conflicts of interest – concepts defined in the legislation – and do not know what sanctions individuals risk if they fail to comply with the requirements to declare personal assets and interests and to report conflicts of interest.

In this context, the National Integrity Agency (NIA), the National Anti-Corruption Center (NAC) and the CPA management should take measures to improve the process of familiarizing civil servants with the provisions of the anti-corruption legal framework, so that civil servants understand and apply them correctly.

Regarding the filing of declarations of assets and personal interests for 2023, the majority of respondents (on average about 95%) claim to have filed them, *with one in eight respondents mentioning that they had problems completing and filing the declarations.* In this context, respondents cited both technical deficiencies related to the functioning of the electronic system, including overloading during the period of filing of annual declarations, and difficulties in the valuation of movable and immovable assets at market value, in the declaration of transfers by bank cards, loans and credits due in different periods, etc.

¹ Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development (MIRD), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Justice (MJ), Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP), Ministry of Finance (MF), Ministry of Economic Development and Digitization (MEDD), Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI), Ministry of Defense (MD), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Ministry of Education and Research (MER), Ministry of Culture (MC), Ministry of Health (MH), Ministry of Environment (ME), Ministry of Energy (MEn), State Tax Service (STS), Customs Service (CS), General Police Inspectorate (GPI), Border Police (BP).

The respondents called for an upgrade of the electronic filing system, the possibility of automatic completion of declarations with data from state registers, the development by NIA of an explicit guide for completing declarations with practical cases. In this regard, the NIA should take measures to solve the reported problems, ensure the functionality of the electronic system, strengthen its own advisory capacities and expand the training of civil servants, especially beginners, in the completion and filing of declarations of assets and interests.

Although conflicts of interest are relatively common in the work of civil servants, only about 1% of respondents in 2023 reported being in such situations. At the same time, *respondents reported on situations of conflict of interest that may have occurred in their institutions, including: decisions on promotion in military ranks or on secondment to international missions; hiring people on the basis of kinship or party affiliation; hiring relatives and friends of relatives in various projects coordinated by civil servants.* To note that according to the report on monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the NIAS², in 2023, conflicts of interest were reported in several of the entities monitored, including the GPI (7 situations of conflict of interest), MH (3), MD (2), MIRD (1), and BP (1). In this context, the management of public authorities should focus on preventing and resolving the conflicts of interest reported by respondents in a compliant manner and, if necessary, seek the assistance of integrity inspectors from NIA.

A significant part of the respondents signaled possible irregularities in the application of the anti-corruption policy in their institutions in 2023, in particular, in the recruitment and promotion of staff, their evaluation and reward, compliance with ethical rules, use of internal information and public office for personal purposes, etc. On average, 28% of the respondents stated there had been cases of people hired in their institutions based on kinship/friendship/party relations; about 28% - that employees had been promoted or rewarded undeservedly; 34% - that the professionalism of employees was underestimated, as opposed to loyalty to managers; 27% - that the procedure of evaluation and promotion of employees was not objective and transparent; and about one-fourth – that there were cases of violation of the Code of Conduct. Every fourth respondent believes that the institution in which he/she works is politicized, while and every tenth believes that there have been cases of employees being pressured or threatened to make decisions in the interest of certain persons. This should draw the attention of the CPA management to the need for a genuine implementation of the anti-corruption policy, in particular: merit-based promotion of staff; dealing with conflicts of interest; transparency and accountability in the use of public property and public funds; and compliance with ethical rules.

On average, almost one in five respondents believes that corruption is present in their institution, with CS (43% of respondents) and BP (49%) staff most likely to perceive corruption. Respondents identified a number of units in their institutions with increased risks of conflict of interest and corruption, especially those that should be targeted at preventing them (sections/divisions for internal security/integrity, internal audit, institutional management).

In response to the question "Which branch of state power do you consider the most corrupt?", *about 71% of respondents named the Judiciary*, one explanation being their understanding of the need for real reform in the judiciary, and especially that people of true integrity and professionalism should work in this sector.

Most respondents do not see a difference between a question about a salary that would allow a decent living and a salary that would not induce corruption. However, some of the respondents correctly noted that higher salaries do not make civil servants honest: "If the person is willing to take bribes, a higher salary will not change him/her and will not make him/her honest" (MJ), "An honest person will not be tempted to take bribes no matter how high their salary is" (MLSP).

Although civil servants are expected to report corruption and other malpractices to the chief of the public institution or to the relevant authority, *one in five is unwilling to do so, mainly because they do not trust that they will be protected as whistleblowers and that it will only cause them problems.* Consistent measures are needed to ensure the protection of whistleblowers and the integrity of whistleblowers in anti-corruption bodies.

Trust in public authorities depends to a large extent on their level of transparency. Aware of this, the respondents put forward proposals to improve the content of the websites of their institutions, *asking not only for their completeness* ("More transparency in filling vacancies, posting the results of competitions" (MIRD), "Posting institutional performance reports on the website" (MAIA)), *but also for better tailoring the content of the websites to the needs of users* ("Simpler information, understandable for final beneficiaries, not only for lawyers" (MEDD), "Information for people with special needs, e. g. audio search or sound search" (MEEn); "Better and clearer structure for citizens' use, update for Android/iPhone versions" (MEC)).

² National Anti-Corruption Center, Report on Monitoring and Evaluation of Implementation of National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2017-2023 (reporting period: 2023), https://www.cna.md/public/files/Raport_SNIA_anul_2023.pdf

Posting the results of audits conducted by the Court of Auditors and the measures taken by the authorities to implement its recommendations on the websites would improve proactive information and increase confidence in the work of the authorities. An argument in this regard is that, on average, more than 4/5 of the respondents would like to know the results of controls and audits carried out in their institutions.

Virtually all respondents (on average, about 99%) are satisfied with the communication with their colleagues; slightly fewer (96%) are satisfied with their immediate supervisors, and 89% are satisfied with their management. Some of the interviewees draw attention to insufficient communication, lack of professionalism and unethical behavior of some chiefs/leaders of public authorities: "The chief should have an appropriate behavior, without shouting and discrimination... and should be a good leader" (MJ); "Inappropriate way of communication (impertinence, raising voice), favoritism practices" (STS); "The immediate chief is a public official with no work experience, expertise or knowledge in the field he/she manages" (MEC); "People who have nothing to do with the public office are appointed to leading positions, only based on party affiliation criteria" (MEC); "There is always the feeling that you work for the chief and not for the state" (MEDD).

Although some respondents believe that the working climate in their institutions does not pose obstacles to the performance of their duties, most interviewees made a number of suggestions, in particular the need to respect the principle of meritocracy in the recruitment and promotion of staff, to ensure transparency in their evaluation and reward, to improve communication: "Evaluate staff on merit and objective criteria" (MEC); "Promote competent and honest people" (CS); "Eliminate partisan influence" (CS); "Minimize stress and impose sanctions for professional harassment. .." (MEC); "Less nepotism and relatives appointed to public office" (BP).

Considering the importance and topicality of the issues related to the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union (EU), the requests for training were mainly related to the familiarization with the EU legislation in the areas of competence of the ministries, harmonization of the national legal framework with the European standards, exchange of experience in the work of similar authorities in the EU. At the same time, respondents requested training on issues related to integrity in public service, development of communication skills, management of working time, conflicts and stress.

Some of the interviewees made suggestions to the management of their institutions, mentioning in particular the need to strengthen the staff into a united professional team; to increase salaries; to ensure the recruitment and meritorious promotion of staff; to improve working conditions: "I wish that the management of the Ministry would also understand that the employees must work closely together, that cooperation is important to achieve the desired results. People need to see that their work is appreciated..." (MAFI); "Strengthen the team and be a true leader who brings continuous development to the institution" (MAFI); "Dismiss incompetent people and promote chiefs based on friendship/knowledge" (MD); "Get rid of favoritism" (MLSP); "We want decent salaries. We need more qualified staff so that we can work in a humane way and have time for our families" (BP).

The results of the survey of civil servants, including the respondents' suggestions for improving the process of completing and filing declarations of assets and interests, proactive transparency, training needs, improvement of the working climate, will be submitted for decision to the State Chancellery, the Working Group for the Implementation of the National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Program, the National Integrity Agency, as well as to the management of the agencies monitored.

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