MENA-OECD Working Group on Civil Service and Integrity

Preventing Corruption: What role for citizens?

25 November 2021, online

Summary note

Background and objectives of the meeting

Engaging citizens in public life is especially important in the MENA region, where more than 70% of citizens reported in spring 2021 that they did not have trust in their governments, and where more than half of citizens declared that their governments were not taking effective action to tackle corruption.[1] However, even though the fight against corruption is primarily a task for governments, citizens also have a major role to support these efforts.

In this context, many MENA governments are committed to establishing mechanisms and tools to engage with citizens. Promoting dialogue and cooperation with citizens contributes to ensuring that citizens' needs are taken into account, and that citizens have the means to keep their public service providers accountable. By relaying concerns and effectively monitoring public action, citizens can contribute to promoting values of integrity and accountability of public action and to preventing corruption.
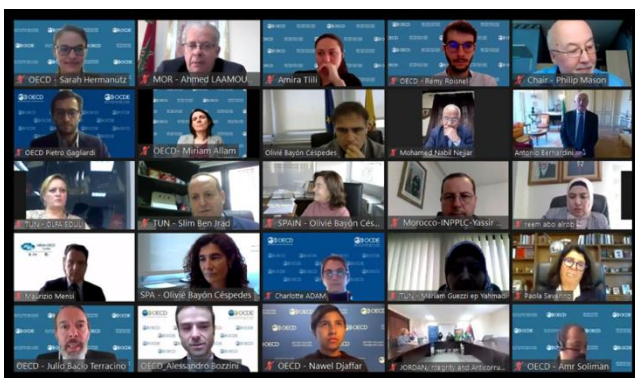
The Working Group meeting "Preventing Corruption: What Role for Citizens", organised by the MENA-OECD Governance Programme and the MENA-OECD Training Centre in Caserta, brought

[1] Arab Barometer, Wave 6, Phase 3 (March-April 2021), https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/

together more than 80 government officials, policy makers, experts and members of civil society from 13 MENA and OECD countries to share relevant experiences in strengthening the role of citizens in holding their governments to account. The seminar was opened by H.E. Ambassador Antonio BERNARDINI, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OECD and Co-Chair of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme, as well as by the two Co-Chairs of the Working Group on Public Service and Integrity, Mr. Ahmed LAAMOUMRI, Secretary General of the Ministry of Digital Transition and Administrative Reform of Morocco, and Mr. Olivié BAYÓN CÉSPEDES, Director General of Public Governance in Spain. Inaugural remarks were complemented by a keynote speech by Professor Paola SEVERINO, Director of the National School of Administration of Italy, who stressed that corruption should not be solely fought through repressive measures or preventive laws, but also by the promotion of a culture of legality to promote citizens' engagement to fight corruption. In that sense, promoting civic awareness, especially among youth, is of crucial importance to ensure that citizens take hold of their role in supporting governments in preventing corruption.

Summary of the presentations

Involving citizens in monitoring anticorruption strategies

- Engaging citizens in preventing corruption starts with legal measures to encourage their participation. The new 2020 – 2025 Jordanian anticorruption strategy highlights the key role played by citizens in fighting corruption. The Jordanian Anti-Corruption Commission (JIACC) has established partnerships with civil society

organisations to conduct field studies to assess citizen's concerns and raise awareness on the risks induced by corrupt practices and the importance to promote a culture of integrity.

Citizen charters

- The Tunisian government implemented citizen charters as part of its efforts to integrate citizens' feedback in public service design. This mechanism invites citizens and civil society organisations to express their concerns and feedback on certain public services, which are then translated into public commitments in the citizen charters. In addition to improving the quality of public services, citizen charters can provide citizens with the means to monitor implementation and voice their concerns to demand greater accountability.

Strengthening citizens' role in monitoring lobbying activities, governmental action and elections

- In France, the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life took action to improve transparency in lobbying activities by creating a platform that provides citizens with easily accessible data on actors involved in lobbying activities, as well as their goals and budgets.
- In Jordan, civil society actors are engaged in promoting integrity and preventing corruption by monitoring elections and the implementation of government's commitments in the context of the Open Government Partnership.

Promoting citizens' engagement in law-making and budgeting

- In the Palestinian Authority, the Bureau for Legal Opinion and Legislation ("Diwan")

maintains an online database with all legislations and regulations up to date, and is currently directing efforts towards making legal information more easily accessible for citizens in order to enable citizens to monitor public action.
- To enhance the accessibility of information on anticorruption actions, the Palestinian State Audit and Anti-Corruption Bureau publishes reports with different levels of complexity to meet the diversity of citizens' needs and profiles.
- In Morocco, the municipality of Chefchaouen engages with citizens to develop participatory budgets, as part of its annual budget plan. As part of this mechanism, citizens have the possibility to suggest and select projects that will be financed by the municipality, and the municipalities actively engages with citizens in the implementation of the selected projects.

For more information

The MENA-OECD Working Group on Civil Service and Integrity

The policy brief "*Public Integrity for an Effective COVID-19 Response and Recovery in the MENA region*"

OECD work on Citizen Charters in Tunisia

OECD database on stakeholder engagement practices

OECD work on anti-corruption and integrity in the public sector

OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity

OECD Recommendation on Open Government