

| Summary note

MENA-OECD Working Group I
on Civil Service and Integrity

Public Sector Integrity in a Time of Crisis



Thursday, 23 July 2020 | 10.45 – 12.15 Paris time, via Zoom



MENA-OECD
Governance Programme Centre



 SNA *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*
Scuola Nazionale dell'Amministrazione



Context and Objectives of the Meeting

The Covid-19 crisis has a massive impact on all countries in areas such as public health, employment, economic growth and social protection. The crisis requires urgent actions by governments, and it can sometimes be difficult to balance timely interventions carefully with accountability, transparency and integrity. Past crises have shown that emergencies and subsequent rapid responses create opportunities for integrity violations, with basic control systems being suspended or bypassed, which can cause increased levels of waste, mismanagement and corruption at a time when government resources are already under pressure.

Early evidence from the current crisis already shows that there are, for example, instances of contracts for personal protective equipment being awarded to dubious companies; price gouging of key medication and healthcare equipment; doctors stockpiling treatments for friends and family; or various types of online fraud, amongst others.

In addition, as governments transition from addressing the immediate crisis to focusing on economic recovery, integrity violations may continue to rise and undermine recovery efforts. It is therefore imperative that fundamental safeguards of public integrity are not weakened or disregarded in the immediate response, as well as the longer-term and during the recovery phase. Both short-and long-term measures are needed to address these risks, focusing on procurement strategies, the resources of internal audit functions, digital tools, access to information and risk management, among others. In this context, the webinar, organised by the MENA-OECD Governance Programme

and the MENA-OECD Training Centre of Caserta, presented the [OECD policy brief on public integrity and COVID-19](#). It was also an opportunity for public officials, policy makers, multilateral agencies, experts and international partners to identify key recommendations and lessons learnt about policy making in time of crisis, with a focus on challenges to public sector integrity. The overarching goal of the webinar was to update the OECD policy brief and enrich it with experiences from the MENA region, to provide strategic guidance for the new mandate of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme for 2021-2025 and to complement the MENA-OECD Governance programme work on public sector integrity, anti-corruption and civil service reform.

The webinar brought together more than 60 participants from 15 MENA and OECD countries and multilateral agencies. After presenting the OECD policy brief on public integrity and COVID-19, the webinar generated a peer-to-peer dialogue about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on public sector integrity and an exchange of lessons learned to stay compliant with the integrity and anti-corruption measures and principles in such times of emergency. The webinar was opened by H.E. Ambassador Antonio BERNARDINI, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OECD and co-chair of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme, and the two Co-Chairs of the Working Group on Civil Service and Integrity, Mr. Ahmed LAAMOUMRI, Secretary General of the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Administrative Modernisation in Morocco, and Ms. María Pía JUNQUERA TEMPRANO, General Director for Public Governance in Spain.

Key Takeaways of the Meeting

Participants highlighted that:

- The COVID-19 crisis has created opportunities for many integrity violations and could intensify fraud and corruption, particularly in public procurement, economic stimulus packages and public organisations.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the emergence of new integrity and ethics risks related, for example, to the restriction of freedom of movement or the abusive requests for unemployment subsidies by employers;



- Both short- and long-term measures are needed to address these risks, focusing on procurement strategies, the resources of internal audit functions, and integrity strategies in public organisations, among others. To tackle the fast evolving impacts of the crisis, the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning are also essential;
- The adoption of specific legislative tools and institutional mechanisms is necessary to adapt to emergencies and make sure that integrity, transparency and compliance with the rule of law within the public sector is maintained;
- Citizens should be empowered to act as watchdogs to keep public service providers and institutions accountable;
- The audit and oversight of emergency public decision-making bodies at all levels of government by independent state institutions is required for an efficient response;
- Both the public and private sectors need to have strong technological and regulatory systems to allow swift adjustment in times of crisis, such as remote working;
- It is relevant to take stock of lessons learned and recent experiences in case of future crisis.

Next Steps

- The meeting discussion will provide strategic guidance to the MENA-OECD Governance Programme, as it will feed into the new mandate of the Programme for 2021-2025 to be able to deliver on countries' respective needs and priorities;
- Experiences and lessons shared during the meeting will be integrated in a MENA version of the OECD policy brief on public integrity and COVID-19.
- Delegates confirmed their commitment to pursue the dialogue on the COVID-19 impact on the public sector integrity and will provide the Working group with data on measures adopted during the crisis.

For more information

- [The OECD Note on Public integrity for an effective COVID-19 response and recovery](#)
- [The MENA-OECD Working Group on Civil Service and Integrity](#)
- [OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity](#)
- [OECD Recommendation on Public Procurement](#)



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