Beat: News

2020 CPI reveals widespread corruption is weakening COVID-19 response

threatening global recovery

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USPA NEWS - The 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released today by Transparency International reveals that persistent corruption is undermining health care systems and contributing to democratic backsliding amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries that perform well on the index invest more in health care, are better able to provide universal health coverage and are less likely to violate democratic norms and institutions or the rule of law.

“COVID-19 is not just a health and economic crisis. It is a corruption crisis.“ And one that we are currently“ failing to manage,“ Delia Ferreira Rubio, Chair of Transparency International said. “The past year has tested governments like no other in memory, and those with higher levels of corruption have been less able to meet the challenge. But even those at the top of the CPI must urgently address their role in perpetuating corruption at home and abroad.“

Global highlights

The 2020 edition of the CPI ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, drawing on 13 expert assessments and surveys of business executives. It uses a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Denmark and New Zealand top the index, with 88 points. Syria, Somalia and South Sudan come last, with 14, 12 and 12 points, respectively.

Significant changes

Since 2012, the earliest point of comparison in the current CPI methodology, 26 countries significantly improved their CPI scores, including Ecuador (39), Greece (50), Guyana (41), Myanmar (28) and South Korea (61).

Twenty-two countries significantly decreased their scores, including Bosnia & Herzegovina (35), Guatemala (25), Lebanon (25), Malawi (30), Malta (53) and Poland (56).

Nearly half of countries have been stagnant on the index for almost a decade, indicating stalled government efforts to tackle the root causes of corruption. More than two-thirds score below 50.

COVID-19

Corruption poses a critical threat to citizens´ lives and livelihoods, especially when combined with a public health emergency. Clean public sectors correlate with greater investment in health care. Uruguay, for example,“ has the highest CPI score in Latin America (71), invests heavily in health care and has a“ robust“ epidemiological surveillance“ system, which“ has aided its response to COVID-19“ and“ other infectious diseases,“ like“ yellow fever“ and“ Zika.“

In contrast, Bangladesh scores just 26 and invests little in health care while corruption flourishes during COVID-19, ranging from bribery in“ health“ clinics to misappropriated aid. Corruption is also pervasive in the procurement“ of medical“ supplies. Countries with higher corruption levels also tend to be the worst violators of rule of law and democratic institutions during the COVID-19 crisis.“ These include Philippines (34), where the response to“ COVID-19“ has been characterised by major“ attacks on human rights and media“ freedom.

Continuing a downward trend, the United States achieves its worst score since 2012, with 67 points. In addition to alleged conflicts of interest and abuse of office at the highest level, in 2020 weak oversight of the US$1 trillion COVID-19 relief package raised serious concerns and marked a retreat from longstanding democratic norms promoting accountable government.

Recommendations

The past year highlighted integrity challenges among even the highest-scoring countries, proving that no country is free of corruption. To reduce corruption and better respond to future crises, Transparency International recommends that all governments:

Strengthen oversight institutions“¯to ensure resources reach those most in need. Anti-corruption authorities and oversight institutions must“¯have sufficient funds, resources“¯and“¯independence“¯to perform their duties.

Ensure open and transparent contracting to combat“¯wrongdoing, identify conflicts of interest and ensure“¯fair pricing.

Defend democracy and“¯promote“¯civic space“¯to create the enabling conditions to hold governments accountable.

Publish relevant data and guarantee access“¯to information to ensure the public receives easy, accessible, timely and meaningful information.

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