

Expert Seminar on the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights in anti-corruption efforts in the context of recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

Concept note

Date and venue: Monday, 18 November 2024, 10:00-13:00 CEST, Room III, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Objectives: The panel aims to:

- Enhance the understanding of the nexus between corruption and human rights,
- Share good practices, achievements, challenges and lessons learned in the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights in anti-corruption efforts in the context of recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic,
- Identify opportunities for linking anti-corruption measures with the promotion and protection of human rights,
- Identify opportunities for policy coherence among the intergovernmental processes,
- Consider ideas for further steps and actions that might usefully be taken by the UN-system, including the Human Rights Council, to help States adopt a rights-based approach to preventing and fighting corruption.

Outcome: A summary report of the discussion will be prepared by OHCHR and submitted to the Council at its fifty-eight session (February 2025).

Mandate: The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 53/17 of 13 July 2023, requested OHCHR to organize before its fifty-seventh session, a half-day expert seminar to share good practices, achievements, challenges and lessons learned in the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights in anti-corruption efforts in the context of recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Background: Corruption and associated illicit financial flows divert scarce public revenue and drain public budgets for essential services such as healthcare, housing, education. Corruption gives rise and deepens inequalities and has a destructive effect on the capacity of States to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, particularly of those persons and groups in situations of vulnerability and marginalisation. It impacts disproportionately people and communities experiencing discrimination based on economic status, including persons with disabilities, migrants, children, youth, older persons, Indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities, and has its impact is often exacerbated along gender and race lines.

Give its hidden and illicit nature and the fact that it takes different forms across countries and sectors, measuring corruption is technically complex. Independent research has estimated that US\$500 billion in public health

spending is lost globally to corruption every year, undermining health services. A 2011 study found that corruption increases child mortality rates.

Despite the measurement challenges, what is clear is that corruption undermines States' ability to meet their pre-existing human rights obligations to maximise all available resources to progressively realise Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCRs). Fighting corruption is hence central both to the realisation of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social, cultural, the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and the right to development as well as for the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The pandemic created an unprecedented and unforeseen situation, which posed major challenges to good governance, public service delivery and the realization of human rights. It led to sharp decline in economic activities, reducing revenues and constraining fiscal space. In response to the pandemic, governments unleashed some of the biggest public spending in health (procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE), treatments, vaccines, other supplies), social protection and stimulus packages. Most governments also resorted to the use of emergency measure including, direct awards/procurement. Thus, the risks of corruption heightened, including irregular procurement, due to weakened oversight and reduced accountability due to emergency measures in place.

Pandemics and other health emergencies increase the risks of corruption. Corruption affects the recovery efforts of States and endanger the fulfilment of human rights. The loss of vital resources due to corruption impact States socioeconomic outcomes, governance structures and undermine public trust. It is thus essential for all Member States to strengthen efforts to prevent and counter corruption and put in place measures to support better recovery.

Background documents:

- Human Rights Council [resolution 53/17](#) on the negative impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights, of 13 July 2023
- Report on the panel discussion on good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights during and after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic ([A/HRC/52/43](#))
- Final report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the issue of the negative impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights ([A/HRC/28/73](#))
- Challenges faced and best practices applied by States in integrating human rights into their national strategies and policies to fight against corruption, including those addressing non-State actors, such as the private sector, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([A/HRC/44/27](#))
- Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises on connecting the business and human rights and the anti-corruption agendas ([A/HRC/44/43](#) and [report web page](#))
- [Joint statement on corruption and human rights](#), by several United Nations Treaty Bodies

- Our common commitment to effectively addressing challenges and implementing measures to prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation, [General Assembly resolution S-32/1](#) of 2 June 2021
- [Corruption and COVID-19: Challenges in Crisis Response and Recovery](#), UNODC
- [COVID-19 Vaccines and Corruption Risks: Preventing Corruption in the Manufacture, Allocation and Distribution of Vaccines](#), UNODC
- [Good Practices Compendium](#) on Combating Corruption in the Response to COVID-19, UNODC
- [Accountability and the prevention of corruption in the allocation and distribution of emergency economic rescue packages in the context and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic](#), UNODC
- [COVID-19 Fiscal Response and the Prevention of Corruption](#), UNODC