



KORR-KÉP

**Corruption and Integrity
Through the Eyes of Young
Hungarians**

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*Results from preparatory pre-survey focus group
interviews of a complex research project conducted
among young people*

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Summary

The Integrity Academy is a new organisational unit within the Integrity Authority, offering widely applicable research findings and educational content to strengthen integrity and combat corruption within Hungarian society.

One of the key objectives of the Integrity Academy's research project focusing on young people was to gather well-founded information on experiences and opinions about the use of European Union funds. The data collected in the course of the research is reflected in the Authority's reports and help substantiate its professional recommendations. The goal of the current pre-survey focus group interview phase, part of a complex research project involving several data collections, was to explore topics within the target group, identify the most important areas, as well as to use and integrate the insights thus gained in the next data collection phase – namely the questionnaire.

The research explored the awareness and assessment of integrity and corruption among students or young workers aged 15 to 29 via focus group interviews held in Budapest and rural communities. While few young respondents could define **integrity accurately**, most of them associated the word with concepts such as honesty, compliance and credibility. By contrast, they interpreted **corruption** as a primarily negative phenomenon (theft, fraud, undue advantage), although some considered it neutral or, from an economic perspective, even partially desirable.

The interviews addressed multiple types of institutions, including those in the educational, healthcare, public administration, and financial sectors. The areas frequently affected by and mentioned in relation to corruption were the following:



- **HEALTHCARE:** The subject of gratuities in Hungarian healthcare, often referred to as “gratitude payment”, featured prominently among the responses, and young respondents were sceptical about the abolition of the practice. Respondents believe that by switching from public to private healthcare in a bid to ensure adequate and rapid access to services, getting the necessary medical care still requires paying considerable amounts of money.
- **EDUCATION:** Related phenomena included maintaining good relationships with teachers, making parental “donations”, and offering bribes for better grades and exam results.
- **OFFICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:** Key concerns most often raised included payments made to fast-track administrative procedures, fix appointments, induce the “overlooking” of inspections, or facilitate favorable decisions on benefit applications, as well as the role of personal connections. The lack of digitalisation was also seen as a factor contributing to corruption.
- **POLITICAL CORRUPTION:** This type of corruption was discussed at both national and local level – most particularly in relation to public procurement, where respondents emphasised overpricing and contracts acquired through personal connections. Young people cited the misuse of European Union funds for development as an example of systemic corruption, which they thought had an adverse effect on all citizens.
- **CORPORATE SECTOR:** Young respondents highlighted the construction industry where they believed overpricing, monopoly situation, and contracts acquired through

Young respondents believe they are **better-informed and more open-minded** about corruption-related matters than older generations. Their assessment of corruption was influenced by whether it affected them personally in a positive or negative way. Furthermore, whether corruption could serve the benefit of others or only private gains also proved to be a decisive factor. They associated a sense of moral superiority and satisfaction in not taking part intentionally in any kind of corrupt activities.

Respondents identified **increasing incomes** (as this reduces financial vulnerability and encourages reporting) and **strengthening moral attitudes and social norms** as possible tools in the fight against corruption. They also considered their own role – especially collective action – to be important. In addition, they also emphasised the significance of systemic, state-level intervention at the appropriate points. Filing complaints and reporting were considered less effective because of the involvement of authorities and the lack of protection for whistleblowers.

In addition to preparing for the large-sample questionnaire-based data collection, one of the key research objectives was to examine – already at this stage of the data collection – which opportunities and directions young people consider most effective for their own age group in developing educational activities aimed at recognising and avoiding corruption and promoting integrity and the fight against corruption.

They emphasised that it was essential to elaborate a **complex educational package** starting **from early childhood**, with content tailored to the needs of specific age groups. In addition to personal attendance, they underlined the importance of online accessibility of courses, as well as the need for short and longer audio-visual contents where motivation is maintained through quizzes, point collections, prizes, as well as through the involvement of credible role models and influencers. They considered it important that training courses avoid the general complaining and instead focus on familiarising attendees with their rights and obligations, presenting and discussing practical examples in group settings, and improving critical thinking skills.

1. Research objective

1.1 General objectives of the research

The core activities of the Integrity Authority are regulated by Act XXVII of 2022 on the control of the use of European Union budget funds ("Integrity Authority Act"). The Integrity Academy ("IA"), a newly established organisational unit within the Integrity Authority, offers widely applicable research findings and educational content to various target groups across Hungarian society in the areas of integrity, the identification of corruption, the improvement of integrity, and the fight against corruption.

Through this targeted activity, the unit supports one of the most effective and – in the long term – most cost-efficient forms of fighting corruption: prevention through education, training programmes, and the shaping of social attitudes. Through its educational, awareness-raising, and scientific activities, the IA aims to reach a wide variety of target groups within society. These include the various groups of the young generation, such as elementary school children, high school and higher education students. In the long term, beyond the young generation, the goal is to involve small and medium-sized enterprises and other special target groups in the activities provided by the IA. The elaboration of educational and training materials is always preceded by thorough research which explores the knowledge, ideas, and experiences of a specific group in detail, providing a solid foundation for the content.

Data collection facilitates the precise development of training materials, tailored exactly to the demands and needs, thereby increasing their effectiveness and overall impact. Besides assessing the target group's needs, a future goal is to measure the effectiveness of training programmes that have already been developed. In this data collection, consisting of "pre-survey focus group interviews", the IA studied specifically the group of young Hungarians aged 15 to 29. The study is part of a comprehensive research project that applies a mixed methodology and comprises qualitative and quantitative data collections alternating sequentially. The varying data collection techniques are intended to assess young people's opinions, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences in relation to corruption and integrity. Another objective of this complex research activity is to study the dimensions closely associated with and affecting corruption and integrity, including trust, participation, transparency, clean access, tolerance toward corruption, perceptions and experiences related to corruption, operation in accordance with integrity values, engagement in the fight against corruption, and the collection of educational contents and forms that are considered most effective for the target group.

The duties of the Authority imposed by the Integrity Authority Act include analytical and proposal drafting tasks related to the use of European Union funds, involving integrity risk assessment, preparing annual analytical integrity reports, and formulating related recommendations, as well as other ad hoc recommendations. For this reason, one of the key purposes of this research project on young people was to collect well-founded information within the study target group on their experiences and opinions about the past and current use of European Union funds. In addition to laying the foundation for effective training programmes, the data collected during the research will support the Authority's integrity risk assessments and may also be used in the Authority's various reports and recommendations, underpinning the findings presented therein. A long-term objective is to regularly measure the study group in relation to corruption and integrity, thereby establishing a database with long-term timeseries data which helps to track trends and periodic changes.

1.2 Purpose of pre-survey focus group interviews

The pre-survey focus group data collection is part of a research project that is based on mixed methodology. Given that academic literature on this subject is relatively limited in the Hungarian context (Székely et. al, 2012; Fenyves & Kurgyis, 2014; Bokor, 2018), it was decided during the methodological design and preparation phase of the research that conducting qualitative data collection was essential before the large-sample (quantitative) survey. The purpose of this preliminary data collection was to explore the topics under study within the target group, identify the most important areas, and then fine-tune the quantitative measurement tool in light of this information. In the case of a mixed methodology, this approach involves an exploratory sequential study in which qualitative exploration precedes quantitative, large-sample data collection (Creswell, 2009).

2. Questions and dimensions explored in the research project and pre-survey focus group interviews

The primary purpose of the questions of this complex youth research project, comprising several data collections, is to explore the perceptions and experiences related to corruption and integrity in terms of diverse dimensions such as the relationship of individual and society or various groups of institutions, and to review their opinions on the use of European Union funds and the possibilities of anti-corruption efforts. The pre-survey focus group interviews were intended to collect data that show exactly what members of the young generation think about these subjects, so that the variables and items in the questionnaire of the quantitative survey can be formulated as precisely as possible.

2.1 Questions of the comprehensive research project:

- Are young Hungarians familiar with the concept of integrity? What kind of emotions and meanings do they associate with it, and to what extent is acting in accordance with it a priority in their everyday lives?
- What do young Hungarians think about corruption? Do they have any practical experience related to corruption, and if so, what kind of experience? What sort of prevention and intervention points do they see for reducing corruption? Would they take action against corruption?
- What do they think about efficiency and integrity in the use of European Union funds? What experiences do they have regarding the utilisation of these funds?
- In which areas of integrity and corruption do members of the young generation feel that they can be provided with relevant knowledge on the subject? What forms of awareness-raising campaigns and knowledge-sharing would they primarily be open to?

2.2 Key topics and dimensions in the interview guide for the pre-survey focus group interviews:

Familiarity, interactions and experience with institutions and services
Objective: To examine the types of services members of the target group access in their daily lives, which institutions provide these services, how they can access them, and what factors facilitate or hinder their use based on their experiences.

- **Prevalence, knowledge, and content of the concepts of corruption and integrity**

Objective: To explore the level of familiarity with these two concepts through everyday examples and free association, along with the emotions and contents associated with them.

- **Occurrence of corruption, ideas and experiences**

Objective: To assess their thoughts about where corruption may occur, where and how they have encountered corruption, whether personally or indirectly, via relatives or acquaintances. In what way do they think corruption can occur in specific areas, and where do they hear about these cases? How did or would they react in a situation if or when they encountered such a situation?

- **Engaging in the fight against corruption**

Objective: To assess what they would do in a suspected case of corruption, whether they would report it, and if they would, where/who would they report it to? What sort of interventions do they think are needed to reduce corruption?

- **The potential of education on corruption and integrity**

Objective: To explore the most effective ways of engaging young people through the organisation of training programmes. To explore how this age group can be reached and what forms of education they consider most effective.

3. Methodology and young people involved in data collection

3.1 A brief description of the research project's methodological foundations

The research project employed a mixed methodology, involving sequentially alternating qualitative and quantitative data collections. Mixed-methods research projects attempt to combine the richness and exploratory nature of qualitative approaches with the focus and quantifiability of quantitative techniques (Hesse-Biber, 2010:3).

Using a mixed methodology makes it possible to benefit from the advantages of diverse methodologies, all while eliminating or mitigating their disadvantages. During the data collection, the questionnaire to be used for the large-sample survey will be designed based on the information obtained from the “pre-survey focus group interviews” (the exploratory-sequential type of the mixed methodology) (Creswell, 2009). Later on, the refinement of the results from the large-sample questionnaire-based survey and the further deepening of the uncovered information will be carried out as part of “post-survey focus group interviews”.

The diverse data collections enable a complex research project with a close relationship between the various data collections. This complex methodology is expected to support the collection of reliable and valid data-based results on the sensitive topics of integrity and corruption, studied among young people, and to support the design of an efficient and highly usable training programme based on the collected data.

3.2 People involved in pre-survey focus group interviews

From the point of view of organising and conducting focus group interviews, there is no single “best practice” that is applicable to all research topics and questions, as the topic under study may have a strong influence on such methods. In view of their highly sensitive and often hidden nature, we considered it best to study the processes involved in corruption and anti-corruption efforts in small, homogeneous focus groups whose members were selected randomly, in order to maximise validity. A specific objective in forming the focus groups was to select young people of different ages within the age group of 15 to 29, living in different settlement types and regions of the country, thereby ensuring that data were collected from persons with diverse social and demographic backgrounds. The aim was to conduct interviews in five to seven focus groups, each consisting of at least six or seven – but not exceeding ten – persons. Bearing in mind the various group-dynamics processes within each focus group, the groups were formed to be relatively homogenous in terms of age group, settlement type, and locality, with young participants of approximately similar age, coming from a particular settlement or its surroundings, selected randomly for each group (Krueger, 1994).

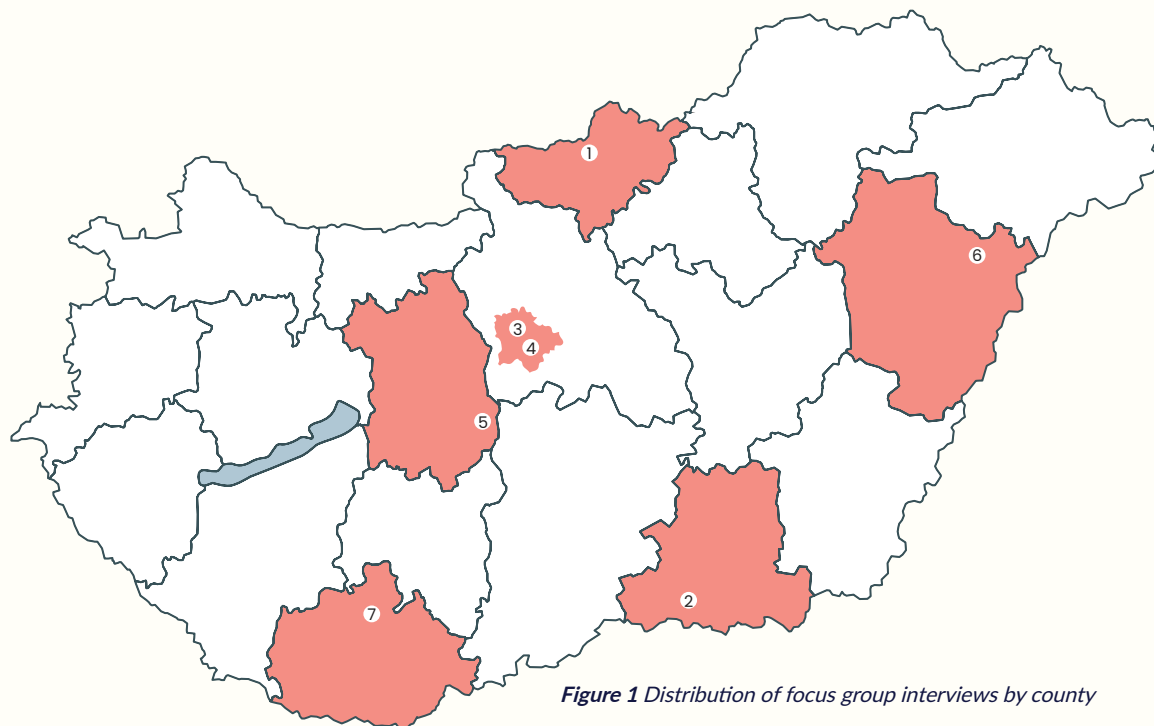
Audio recordings and verbatim transcripts were produced of the focus group interviews. The collected and anonymised data were assessed through thematic analysis, using a framework matrix based on the interview guide.

3.3 Characteristics of individuals and locations included in the focus groups

Five regions and the city of Budapest were involved in the study, with the following distribution: (Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of focus group interviews by settlement type, county, region, and the number and age group of the persons involved

Settlement					People involved	
	name	type	county	region	number (participants)	age group
1.	Varsány	village	Nógrád	Northern Hungary	6 participants	18 to 25
2.	Szeged	county seat	Csongrád-Csanád	Southern Great Plain	7 participants	18 to 29
3.	Budapest 1.	capital	–	Budapest (Central Hungary)	7 participants	18 to 25
4.	Budapest 2.	capital	–	Budapest (Central Hungary)	9 participants	21 to 27
5.	Kisapostag	village	Fejér	Central Transdanubia	6 participants	18 to 25
6.	Debrecen	county seat	Hajdú-Bihar	Northern Great Plain	6 participants	19 to 26
7.	Pécs	county seat	Baranya	Southern Transdanubia	6 participants	16 to 17



The majority of young people involved in the discussions were students¹, while the second largest respondent group – trailing just a few persons behind the largest one – was comprised of young people already active in the labour market.

4. Results from the pre-survey focus group interviews

4.1 Institutional systems, services and access to them

At the beginning of the conversation, focus group participants enumerated the institutions with which they interacted in their daily lives. Here they could name any institution providing either public or private services; at certain data collection sites, even abstract concepts such as family, marriage and workplace were also defined as institutions. The task was intended partly to kick-start the discussions as an ice-breaker and partly to provide important information about the types of institutions participants encounter in their daily lives. These encounters may influence their perception of corruption, as well as areas related to corruption and integrity such as access to services, participation in services provided by institutions, and the transparent operation of individual institutions. In addition to collecting and arranging these institutions into groups, young participants also formulated what these institutions could provide to them, and what they would need most and what they would have to do, if they wished to access those services.

¹ Respondents with active student status, who were either completing an internship or working part-time alongside their studies, were classified as members of the students group. The decision was supported by the assumption that their active student status and the intensive period spent in education might have a greater impact on their opinions and experiences.

4.1.1 Groups of institutions mentioned by young people

Various educational institutions, healthcare institutions, institutions providing civil service administration, and institutions providing financial services were all mentioned across all focus groups. The examples cited by young participants for each institution type showed great variation. Regarding education, day nurseries, kindergartens and schools were brought up at all data collection sites, and a group in Budapest expanded the scope even further with the inclusion of language schools, adult education institutions, and driving schools. In healthcare, interviewees mostly named hospitals and, at several locations, general practitioners' care and pharmacies. In certain areas, some institutions that provide more specialised medical care – such as ambulance service, emergency medical care, and outpatient specialist care – were also mentioned. As regards institutions providing public administration and other administrative assistance, Government Windows and local authorities were mentioned extremely frequently, at almost all of the data collection sites. It is in this institution type that a remarkable difference was found: within the two focus groups in Budapest, supranational organisations, such as the European Union or the European Parliament, were also named, while they were not selected in the other conversations. Among financial institutions, banks were cited frequently as examples.



Figure 2 The types of actors in education, healthcare, public administration and finance mentioned by interviewees, in a word cloud²

In addition to the types of institutions named universally across all locations, respondents also mentioned “law-enforcement, security and judiciary institutions”, “religious institutions”, and various examples of “cultural institutions” (such as museums, libraries, community centres, cinemas, and theatres). In one of the rural towns, a lengthy discussion emerged about the various types of institutions providing social services.

4.1.2 Services and assistance provided by the specified institutions

According to the responses, the various educational institutions help them in several areas to:

- acquire knowledge,
- advance and build later career opportunities,
- prepare them for adult life,
- increase their value on the labour market,

² The size of the names of the institutions in the word cloud indicates the frequency of their occurrence.

- provide oversight,
- provide assistance in talent management,
- encourage skills development and advance self-knowledge,
- potentially serve as a basis for social mobility and help lay the foundation for building social capital, which will be a great resource later on in life.

Respondents also highlighted socialisation for which the various educational institutions may serve as important venues. Besides developing a sense of belonging, dormitories – which are also classified among educational institutions – play an important role in providing accommodation as well.

In case of healthcare institutions, the treatment of existing conditions and injuries, crisis management and prevention were identified as key activities. Furthermore, at one data collection site, respondents also highlighted educational activities and the preservation of mental health as duties of healthcare institutions.

In relation to institutions within public administration and those performing administrative functions, as well as local governments, the Parliament and the European Union, respondents mentioned case administration, the acquisition of documents, and the performance of administrative duties. They also noted that these institutions provide representation, enforce compliance with obligations, and establish rights. It was noted at one of the data collection sites that these institutions know everything about citizens. Respondents maintain that financial institutions, almost exclusively limited to banks, provide assistance mainly through raising financial awareness, disbursing loans and managing savings. Social institutions take weight off people's and families' shoulders, providing care and security.

4.1.3 Conditions for accessing services

Naturally, in order to access the services and assistance that institutions offer, one also must take action. However, the ways and conditions for achieving these goals vary by institution and type of institution. In case of educational institutions, one needs perseverance, physical and mental presence, diligence, talent, and good positioning skills. According to respondents, the choice of school makes a great difference. The presence of money in education appeared in several discussions, but at this point it was mentioned not so much in terms of bribes, but rather because respondents felt that private tutoring and the acquisition of learning-support materials required significant financial resources.

Personal attendance, kindness, and assertiveness with healthcare professionals are indispensable in healthcare institutions. Patience and money – which were brought up mainly in connection with private healthcare – may be important facilitators in this domain as well. The significance of personal connections was also mentioned at several locations, as they were seen as facilitating faster patient care. Luck also plays a role, as the institution a person is assigned to can make a difference, and having a good judgement of character is also essential. One must trust healthcare professionals, but not at any cost. Young respondents also highlighted the necessity of self-assertion.

Besides passive activities, they emphasised that one can also do a lot to stay in good health for as long as possible. In other words, young people think that individuals' own responsibility is also key to reaching and maintaining good health. As far as public administration and other administrative offices and institutions are concerned, respondents mentioned patience, trust and being well-informed as means to help achieve the set goals. In terms of international institutions and national politics, respondents attributed an important role in achieving goals to suffrage, as well as the right to participate in elections, which guarantees freedom of expression and representation.

At this stage of the interviews, respondents did not explicitly mention the financial aspects of corruption, such as the payment of bribes. However, it is important to note that up to this point of the discussion, respondents had not yet been informed that the interview would

involve questions related to corruption and integrity. The two concepts under study were introduced at a later stage of the interview.

4.2 The concepts of corruption and integrity: young people's associations and emotions

Corruption and integrity are fluid concepts, making them difficult to define. Corruption does not have a universally and internationally accepted definition that would be suitable for every data collection and accepted by all professionals. We assumed that significantly fewer people had heard of or were familiar with the concept of integrity compared to corruption. This is also supported by the frequency with which these terms appear in the media and public discourse: it is clear that integrity comes up less often.



One explicit objective of the pre-survey focus group data collection was to explore whether members of the young generation are familiar with the words “integrity” and “corruption”, and to find out what meanings, emotions and sentiments they associate with them.

The study did not attempt to establish definitions for the two concepts. Through the everyday examples introduced to the group during the interviews, we intended to study participants' attitudes and emotions, including the contexts in which the generation aged 15 to 29 think about these concepts, the connotations the two concepts carried, and the meanings that members of this generation associated with them. After getting familiar with the examples and discussing the subjective meanings of the concepts, participants heard two short general definitions for them. The initial definition for integrity was the following: *“Value-driven behaviour. The unity of thought, word and action. Acting in line with professed and declared values. In practice, integrity means that individuals act honestly and ethically at all times, even when they are not being watched.”*

The definition of corruption applied in the study was as follows: *“Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, harming the public interest and typically breaching laws, regulations, and/or integrity standards.”* As far as “integrity” is concerned, participants did not know the exact definition of the word at any of the data collection sites. Nevertheless, at the Budapest location – where older respondents were also present for the young age group – they listed meanings that closely matched the definition, for instance:



„Honesty – somebody says something about themselves, and then acts in accordance with that”

or *“Has something to do with rules, that... something happens in accordance with the rules, that sort of thing”*. Other suggestions included authenticity, appropriateness, uniformity, and when somebody acts in line with their conviction because they know that is the right thing, even if most people look down on them for doing so.

For the most part, respondents associated positive emotions with the word “integrity”, but more neutral sentiments, leaning toward the centre, were also observed in several groups.

Examples related to integrity

1. Example:

When somebody considers themselves to be honest and helpful in their everyday lives, how important do you think it is for them to demonstrate these virtues in their actions and behaviour in their daily activities? For instance, when a person finds a wallet in the street and then returns it to its rightful owner or hand it over to the police, with the money still inside.

2. Example:

What do you think about somebody who considers themselves to be helpful and unselfish, and also professes to be so, but when an old lady living next door falls ill and asks for help in walking her dog or shopping for some groceries, they immediately decline?

Examples related to corruption

1. Example:

What do you think about somebody getting into a well-reputed school by exploiting their personal connections – such as friendships, acquaintances or family ties – when, considering their skills and knowledge, they would not otherwise have been accepted?

2. Example:

What do you think about the executive of a major corporation who pays a bribe to a politician or decision-maker to facilitate the adoption of laws that are favourable for their company?



The concept was often confused with terms such as “fitting in” or “integration” – these were among the first thoughts of participants in several groups.

In relation to the case examples of corruption, concepts like favouritism and injustice, and expressions and words such as “*Hungarian reality*”, “*lost equality*”, “*corruption*” and “*unfair*” came to respondents’ minds at this stage of the discussion. The concept of corruption appeared despite the fact that the interviewer had not introduced or mentioned it specifically. The case examples were sufficient to evoke the concept in participants.

At one location, respondents felt that if someone helps their child get into a better educational institution, they are simply giving the child an advantage, which is not reprehensible. At the same site, another respondent said: “*If I had that kind of opportunity, I would do the same*”, to which another respondent in the same group replied that by doing so, the parent would not only create an opportunity for their own child but would also take away the same opportunity from another student.

After the emotions and associations that followed the case examples, the word “*corruption*” sounded familiar to more respondents. Lively discussions were sparked in several data collection sites, with words and expressions such as theft, fraud, lie, crime, “*undue advantage*”, and “*unfair*” emerging during the interviews. Even within open settings that connect many unfamiliar individuals – such as focus group discussions – many participants indicated that corruption must not be viewed as something exclusively good or bad.

While they primarily associated **negative emotions** with the concept, some argued that the word can be neutral or – even at times – carry positive connotations, and some even considered the phenomenon downright desirable from an economic point of view: “*Honestly,*

hardly anything would work without corruption...Basically, there are many processes driving the economy, as well as events driving other social processes that are often connected to corruption. Without it, these processes would not have taken place at all, or would not have occurred so quickly. Corruption is fundamentally bad in many cases, but... If there was no corruption at all, the world would be deprived of a great deal of progress”.

In addition, several interviews indicated that within a positive interpretation of the word “corruption”, it matters whether corruption serves only private gain or whether it (also) serves other people’s interests. This consideration influences the positive or negative assessment of the concept. R3. *“If they use their connections well. Or if they benefit others too, and not only themselves.”* R5. *“And to use it for good purposes, above all.”* R6. *“Well, it depends on what they use it for.”*

Therefore, when categorising the concept, considering who benefits from corruption and to what extent can be considered a form of value judgement. An extreme example of this was when a respondent made their judgement on corruption conditional upon their personal involvement: *“It’s bad only when somebody else is doing it.”* *Certain corrupt practices (most particularly in relation to the case example) may even be tolerated: “Because I think if someone, let’s say, gets a job through personal connections, it doesn’t matter whether that’s how they got it or not, especially in this day and age.”*

Using personal connections to secure employment or employing acquaintances to fill a position as quickly as possible were brought up at a later stage of the discussions. While several respondents considered the latter situation acceptable, others pointed out that it could deprive more qualified or potentially better applicants of the opportunity, thereby making this practice a form of corruption as well.

In addition, those mentioned also included the simple exploitation of opportunities – which may even be acceptable – as well as holding the system responsible for enabling such practices.



„And it’s about sort of adapting to the environment or taking advantage of opportunities, so if someone has the opportunity, they aren’t wrong for using it; instead, it’s the system that’s flawed.”

It is important to emphasise that the case examples were primarily about low-level corruption, so that they might be as relatable to all respondents as possible.

It may be important at a subsequent quantitative data collection to study the target group’s attitudes toward corrupt practices occurring at different levels as well.



Sextortion – or sexual exploitation – was also brought up as a highly specific form of corrupt conduct.

For the purposes of these data collection efforts, the term specifically refers to instances in which access to an undue advantage is contingent upon tolerating some form of sexual exploitation. Over the past few years the connection between sexual abuse and corruption has appeared more and more frequently in research projects presented in academic literature, despite the fact that the subject is very difficult to study because of its extreme sensitivity (Feigenblatt, 2020; Sundström&Wagnerung, 2021;

Aja-Eke et al., 2025). Similarly to other forms of sex crimes, most victims of sexual abuse (sextortion³), committed as part of corrupt practices, also choose to stay silent; because of societal indifference and even negative attitudes, these incidents are treated as taboo subjects and often go unreported. The abuse of power in order to coerce others into sexual activities, the offering of sexual favours to gain certain advantages, as well as the cover-up or hiding of such acts for personal or organisational benefit, are also considered forms of corruption.

In a focus group discussion conducted in a small community, this form of corruption was brought up by participants without receiving any leading questions. *“R2: Because... at workplaces, too. So, there's quite a lot of things like that, so maybe someone has more experience, but if the other person has good connections... and sure, as we said earlier, that person harms somebody else by accepting a promotion. Or that cliché, you know, that secretary kind of role, that executives always have female secretaries. And in politics, I think... or not necessarily in politics, but you know, bribes and then fame, of course. I should also add that... well, how can I put this nicely? So, sexuality. Q: Do you mean sexual services? R2. Yes, that's it.”* It must be emphasised that only female respondents participated in this particular interview, and that they saw politics and education as the primary areas in which such practices might occur.

They cited personal examples of this type of abuse involving acquaintances – instances in which a teacher or a driving instructor offered certain advantages, benefits, or the avoidance of a penalty in exchange for such services. *“True, such things didn't happen at the XY (university), but there were cases at other universities where the professor insinuated to the young lady that he would give her an “A” if...”*. In the same interview, another example was brought up in relation to a driving school: *“Driving instructors often take girls down to the bank of the Danube, offering them different kinds of benefits, like registering more driving hours or more mileage than what they actually drove, as long as the girls do something for them in return.”*

4.3 Prevalence and forms of corruption in various institutions; direct and indirect experiences with corruption

There were some institutions and areas that were mentioned in all of the discussions as domains potentially affected by corruption: healthcare, education, local authorities / offices. Furthermore, the police were also mentioned several times, as well as the area most often associated with *“high-level corruption”*: namely, politics – which appeared in the discussions in various forms, such as *“politics”, “government”, “voting”/“elections”,* or even *“public procurement”*. In the discussions, participants clearly associated corruption occurring in public procurement with the national and local (local authority or municipal council) political spheres. More specific areas mentioned as potentially affected by corruption were sports, the justice system, the workplace, the construction sector, as well as the aforementioned sexual exploitation (sextortion).

4.3.1 Corruption in healthcare

Participants identified the acceleration of access to healthcare, more thorough treatment, preferential attention, and the circumvention of waiting lists as the main forms of corruption in this domain. Corrupt practices specific to the area, such as *“gratitude payments”* and the use of personal connections, were also brought up.

³ Most studies on sexual abuse related to corruption use the term *“sextortion”*, which does not have a Hungarian equivalent yet. In 2008, the International Association of Woman Judges was the first to use the concept in this context in international academic literature (Eldén et al., 2020). In international academic literature, sextortion refers to a form of corruption and gender-based violence, which occurs when a person uses entrusted power to extort sexual favours in exchange for certain services (Eldén et al., 2020).



Among these, gratitude payments are clearly considered a corrupt practice, while exploiting personal connections lies much more on the borderline of corruption – something that many participants in some focus groups spoke about in a somewhat more permissive tone.

According to the definition⁴ of corruption used in the study, the question is whether a person uses the power bestowed upon them to gain an advantage out of private interests. Do they expect that this favour might bring them benefit in the future? All this is almost impossible to study objectively in each case and previous experiences. Therefore, for the purposes of presenting the results of the pre-survey focus group interviews, gaining an advantage through the use of personal connections is also considered a form of low-level corruption.

Interesting discussions emerged in focus groups about whether smaller gifts – such as a tray of pastries – could be sufficient to achieve the desired goal. Many participants, however, disputed this, feeling that this kind of bribery would produce meagre results, and personal connections and money are clearly more effective these days. Taking this discussion into a broader context, respondents noted that in addition to patients and their relatives engaging in corrupt practices, it is also worth mentioning a higher level of corruption – one that has a detrimental impact in the healthcare system itself, as funds for its development are not spent with due care.

In the latter case, the discussion shifted from micro-level corruption to macro level. It was noted in several locations that low-level corruption in healthcare (gratitude payment) is already severely penalised, and the participants themselves also heard of such cases from the media, yet they remained sceptical. Participants argued that even if this practice is abolished in public healthcare, people will still end up spending the money they would have spent as “gratitude payment”, only somewhere else, under a different name, as adequate medical care is otherwise unavailable. This is why many people feel compelled to use private healthcare services, where they must pay even higher amounts of money for treatment than they used to spend earlier in the form of bribes.

Participants had no consistent answer to the question whether low-level corruption in the healthcare sector was acceptable. Generally speaking, they disapproved of the practice, but if their own health is at stake, their attitude changes:



„Well, if you are sick – with the current state of healthcare – we have unfortunately reached a point where you have to use your personal connections. And now, okay, you may put someone at a disadvantage, but your health is also important. So, you definitely have to use such means.”

Their personal experiences were based primarily on hearsay from relatives and acquaintances, but some also cited suspected cases of corruption that had happened to them personally: *“In healthcare... and when my grandma, she had lung cancer. And she needed to be examined... So we took her to the hospital ward, and this nurse there, she told us she wouldn't give us any information because they weren't allowed to, and also because we could only speak to a doctor. So, we called the doctor, and he told us to come and see him. We went in, and he was pointing at his pocket, saying that he would tell us anything only if we gave him something... even though we were already aware of the situation, anyways, as my grandma wasn't doing very well then.”*

⁴ „Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain which harms the public interest, typically breaching laws, regulations, and/or integrity standards.” (Dobson Phillips et al., 2021).

4.3.2 Potential presence of corruption in education

Education is one of the areas most relevant to the respondents, since, given their age, they are either still part of this system or have just recently left it. In other words, their opinions and experiences are still fresh, which is also proven by the fact that, similarly to healthcare, this field was brought up in all of the discussions.

Participants mostly talked about good relationships with teachers and parental donations to the institution, and, in some cases, about bribes given to secure better grades, more favourable evaluations, or a positive outcome in exams. *“I went to one of the best grammar schools in Debrecen, and was in the best class of the school. And the system was that if your parents donated to the school’s foundation, you could get in. And while the class had initially been announced with 30 students, including myself, we started the year with 36.”*

Participants at several locations raised the issue of classes starting with a greater number of students than initially announced, with some of the reactions in the groups suggesting that such practice is not necessarily reprehensible as long as the extra students do not take places away from others, as opposed to situations where their admission would strip more talented students of a place. Therefore, the value judgement observed in the case examples and during the definition stage reappeared in participants’ personal experiences: their judgement stayed away from consistent condemnation.

4.3.3 Corruption in offices, local authorities, and councils

In the case of public offices, participants primarily mentioned the shortening of waiting lists and the fixing of appointments through money or connections. In addition, participants also mentioned corruption in relation to administrative audits and controls where penalties are waived or significantly reduced in exchange for bribes. An interview conducted in a small community highlighted the exploitation of disadvantaged people, including the taking of bribes to fast-track social benefit applications or to support their positive assessment. The lack of digitalisation or partial digitalisation may also facilitate or sustain bureaucratic corruption, since if a large part of the administration takes place in paper format, or both in paper and digital format, then errors may occur, papers may get lost, or the date of the receipt of documents may change to move an acquaintance or a person/company paying a bribe higher up the waiting list.

Concerning the local, municipal level, participants raised the subject of corruption in local councils, involving the acceleration of investments, helping close acquaintances and relatives to get well-paying jobs, and influencing resolutions and decisions in line with specific interests. *“At the local authority... for obtaining positions that should have been publicly advertised for applications, but where the application process wasn’t real in practice. It wasn’t really published, and the applicants were all people who were already working there or people whom they wanted to employ.”*

4.3.4 Corruption in politics

Political corruption, which appeared in several locations but was described in various ways, was identified at the national level as involving the government, and at the local level as involving the municipal council as the relevant institutions. They could not really share any personal experiences in this regard, since corrupt practices in this domain are rarely seen directly, but a respondent explained in great detail that their effects are strongly felt indirectly:



„And while we're on the negative side... We don't generally perceive corruption directly. Let's say this, we have mentioned XY politician, he/she doesn't harm me or you directly, or in a way that we're aware of, like, say, that I have to pay HUF 10,000 more for a phone, but in an indirect way... We don't right away perceive or experience it personally, but... I was thinking more along the lines of a highway construction project that is built, spending HUF 1 billion more or less. Things like that won't do me either good or bad, only if each kilometre of all highways is built, spending HUF 1 billion more... And if corruption pervades everything, then at the end of the day, I will pay the price indirectly.”

This quote captures extremely well the difficulties inherent in recognising and defining corruption, as well as in the fight against corruption as a whole. It also helps to understand that corrupt practices, especially at a high level, do not take place between parties where it is absolutely clear who benefits and who bears the costs. It is more likely to take place between an individual and a large number of other individuals (even society). It is the fragmentation and distribution of involvement that make corruption very difficult to fight. The quote reflects the recognition that, beyond the individual level, the supra-subjective level – meaning the broader societal dimension that transcends individual experience – may also be an important factor for citizens. Regarding elections, participants mentioned election fraud, citing examples such as the buying of votes and the abuse of influence or power. Closely linked to politics, lively discussions emerged about corruption heard of or perceived in relation to public procurement, such as tailoring tender procedures to predetermined individuals: *“For instance, when a tender procedure is tailored in such a way that only a given tenderer can meet the requirements, ensuring that only that participant will be chosen”*. Overpriced bids were also cited as an example of such corrupt practices: *“Government and local government contracts, where certain companies submit overpriced bids and still win the contract.”*

4.3.5 Corruption observed in relation to the European Union and European Union funds

During the interviews, participants also gave feedback on the European Union, citing practical examples such as the widely publicised case of canopy walkways, or the decision to suspend the Erasmus programme – a move that directly affected them as well. Both of these cases are related to the use of European Union funds. *“But most importantly... it has to do with the Parliament, like we receive some EU funding, and we spend it on some completely stupid project, such as the canopy walkway, which was built from I don't know how many millions or billions of forints. And then they planted the trees around the structure, and then the rest of the money – because they must have asked for much more than necessary – was pocketed, and banks also got their share.”*

Respondents feel that everyone is adversely affected when funds intended to benefit the general public are not spent properly:



„Whenever we look at the state of the country, I think we're always the ones who end up losing out because of how much money gets stolen.”

Among the phenomena that accompany corruption, participants mentioned threats and set-ups. Based on the accounts of the young people involved, the all-encompassing network of connections and their exploitation in these systems are considerably widespread: *“So, everyone can be connected to everyone, and as we climb up on the social ladder, like it's okay that somebody started all this, like a renovation or something, but as you climb higher up the rungs, and take the case of a major project, you only have to go back to the third person, and you realise: Well, well, there are some family ties or a friendship with a politician at play here.”*

4.3.6 Corruption in the private sector

Participants most frequently cited corporations and – more specifically – the construction sector as particularly affected by corruption. Respondents also mentioned tendering companies in public procurement procedures that engage in overpricing or abuse their monopoly power, as well as the practice of securing contracts through personal connections – situations in which contractors are not selected on the basis of their previous performance or expertise. They also spoke in general terms about tax fraud among corrupt practices.

In addition to speaking about the potential occurrences of corruption in specific institutional systems and sharing their experiences, participants listed the different forms corruption can manifest in: besides bribery and leveraging personal connections, they also mentioned the various forms of favours and embezzlement as corruption-related practices.

4.4 Sources of information about corruption

Members of the age group under study essentially felt that they were significantly more well-informed about corruption cases compared to older generations: *“And I think by now we at least have enough perspective on the world that after a while you start to work these things out.”* Despite their broader perspective, they acknowledge that they do not really need to look for these cases, as they come across them easily: *“I think the problem is that corruption has already reached a point where you don’t even need to make an effort to get information about it – it just comes right at you. So, you can’t even miss it because you can just see it in the country, even as an ordinary person.”*

As to what made the interviewees think corruption was so noticeable was not revealed. It is possible that – as the quote suggests – they are better-informed than earlier generations. This could be influenced by the fact that the media as a mediating tool has assumed a significantly greater role in this generation than it played in the lives of previous generations, or even by the emergence of a much more conscious and focused media consumption alongside an enhanced media presence. As far as media as a tool is concerned, they emphasised the role of online content and the products of content producers, which they follow regularly.

Apart from the media, their families and peer groups, as key opinion shapers, also have an important impact on their views on corruption and integrity.

4.5 The place and role of young people in the fight against corruption

One of the key objectives of the pre-survey focus group interviews was to explore the ways young people see their own roles in the fight against corruption. After discussing the concepts of integrity and corruption, the places and frequency of their occurrence, as well as sharing their own experiences, focus group participants went on to discuss what they would – or could – do if they came across a suspected case of corruption.

A crucial question was whether they regarded anti-corruption efforts as an activity beyond their control, or whether they felt that society as a whole, including themselves, also had a role, a place, and – last but not least – a responsibility in these efforts. This is a pivotal aspect, as a significant portion of international policies, recommendations and research studies underline

that education and the shaping of social attitudes may be at the forefront of an effective fight against corruption – with youth as one of its key target groups.⁵



Engaging the younger generations, and their voluntary recognition that they cannot remain passive outside observers if they want to take responsibility for and improve their own future, are among the most important requirements for effective anti-corruption efforts.

The way young people – a key social target group – assume and see their own roles in anti-corruption efforts is therefore a decisive aspect.

In reviewing reactions from the focus group interviews, we distinguished three large groups:

- Reactions of passive acceptance
- Reactions of active engagement
- Reactions urging systemic changes

4.5.1 Acceptance of corruption and disillusionment among young people



When judging corruption, young people primarily consider whether it affects them positively or negatively.

If the consequences were positive for them, respondents found it possible that they would not do anything; whereas if they were harmed by corrupt practices, they would hold those responsible to account. They concluded that if everyone does it, it is acceptable; so, why would anyone reject it:

“If everybody, you know... why shouldn't I do it? So, this is clearly part of it, too. How should we handle it? Do we see it as an opportunity, or do we condemn it? Or do I only condemn it if I suffer the consequences, but otherwise I also do it? So, it's that kind of thing. Maybe it can be integrated in a sort of value system. But I think this can be interpreted very broadly.”

The crucial role of socialisation was discussed apropos of tolerance and the evolution of social norms: *“So anyone who, from an early age, is used to gaining some sort of advantage through personal connections, they will carry that expectation into adulthood as well.”* Besides socialisation and the social context, participants also highlighted the key role of changing attitudes, which played an important part in the focus group interview also because respondents believed that if a certain action is accepted at the societal level, even undesirable patterns of behaviour are unlikely to change.

However, if they do condemn it, the individual will also become less likely to act in a similar way, as the fundamental pressure from society encourages compliance with actions considered the norm: *“... Maybe there's already something like that in society today... That this is part of our everyday lives, and it's normal... And the more negative the value judgement that we express in relation to such stories, the less tolerant the individual will become towards themselves”.*

⁵ Across the world, numerous programmes aim to engage youth in the fight against corruption. In this regard, international organisations and anti-corruption institutions primarily focus on contents integrated in the education systems, research programmes, training courses, and the adoption of international experience and best practices. For instance, one leading programme of this kind, the UN's (UNODC) GRACE initiative, focuses on the shaping of social attitudes, improving integrity, and raising awareness in order to make younger generations more resistant to corruption. <https://grace.unodc.org/>

Systemic corruption and a resigned acceptance of impossibility of taking action against it were raised in several focus groups. In certain cases, this directly took the form of acceptance and resignation: *“And I’ve already accepted it to the point, this whole corruption thing... I think it’s, how to say... that I’ve come to accept it – [trails off] So, it doesn’t even bother me anymore. It’s just part of life now”*. At the same time, participants also noted that, as opposed to the passivity of *“silent endurance”*, they have seen cases where somebody *“blew the whole thing wide open”*, and this elicited their sympathy.

Regarding the topics of fight and action, many participants contemplated the question of whether corruption could or must be done away with completely: *“Otherwise, corruption must not be completely eradicated from society. What I mean by that is that it would be difficult to declare plainly that corruption is bad.”*

This kind of ambivalent emotion appeared at several locations when participants formulated not only negative but also more neutral emotions toward corruption. Young people questioned whether corruption could ever be completely eradicated, and they tended to believe that it had always been – and would likely always be – inherent in people and in society.

4.5.2 Rejection of corruption and active engagement against corruption

Citizen participation is the foundation of democracy. Participation in anti-corruption efforts is particularly important, as citizens can actively contribute to countering corruption by reporting abuse, supporting initiatives that reinforce integrity, and resist corrupt practices. New technologies provide additional tools for such participation.

Rejecting corruption is a fundamental form of taking action against corruption. Participants at one location spent several minutes discussing whether consciously choosing not to participate in corruption – for instance, by not using their personal connections to get into a better school or get better results – would give them a sense of moral superiority.



Distancing themselves from corruption gives young people a sense of satisfaction and credibility.

In terms of taking an active part in the fight against corruption – contrary to passivity and tolerance – young respondents mentioned several ways and opportunities.

Interviewees brought up

- demonstrations,
- participation in elections,
- complaints and reports,
- threats of filing a complaint,
- arrangements and assembly,
- and use of media publicity.

These proactive actions were brought up in the interviews as tools that young respondents thought would enable them to take action in the situations described above.

Interviewees spoke about participation in strikes and demonstrations as a clear form of taking a stand while noting that they are also free to vote – a tool that allows them to express their opinions either in favour or against a system.



Taking collective action – coming together as a group – was considered key to active engagement, as respondents felt that they could do much more against corruption collectively than they would be capable of on their own.

Participants also mentioned complaints and reports as possible options, but they indicated in several interviews that they did not find them effective, as these are extremely time-consuming and often costly processes. Furthermore, it was also mentioned as an obstacle that the authorities themselves might also be involved in corruption.

4.5.3 Systemic changes to counter corruption

Anti-corruption efforts can only be truly effective if they are based on both individual action and comprehensive, systemic changes. During the interviews, young respondents cited several examples of issues and areas that are both extremely important and complex in terms of corruption. Increasing incomes – or adjusting wages – was suggested in several interviews, but respondents cited a variety of factors as reasons for this. On the one hand, they thought that if wages were raised, people would not need to resort to supplementing their income with corrupt money. On the other hand, if people have decent wages, they are more likely to report suspected cases of corruption because they do not need to be afraid of jeopardising their everyday livelihoods.

A critical question emerged in one of the discussions: would wage growth be sufficient to reduce corruption when people – to use the participants' own words – are *“insatiable”*? This line of reasoning suggested that according to young people, moral attitudes and social norms strengthening integrity are factors at least as important as structural conditions (meaning wage growth in this particular case).

Among systemic changes, participants mentioned bringing in a new government, joining the European Public Prosecutor's Office, or establishing more transparent and more accountable institutional systems: *“We could establish an institutional system that... for instance, Norwegians aren't so corrupt because they're, I don't know, blond, [laughter] but because they've established an institutional system where institutions can be held accountable, and the system of checks and balances is working.”* Respondents would subject these institutions to independent investigations.

Besides emphasising the importance of socialisation and a change of attitude, they also mentioned education as a potential instrument of systemic action. Young people believe that various campaigns and education should be used to call people's attention to corruption, as people are generally not even aware of which practices count as corruption, and which do not. Although they had already indicated during the interviews that they feel better informed and more skilled in recognising corruption than older generations, young people also believed their role was extremely important in fighting corruption, as this is how they can shape the world in which they will live:



“It [Young people's role] is crucial, as we are the ones who get news and information from multiple sources, like not only from public channels, and we have a wider, more comprehensive perspective on the world. And then I'll say that maybe the future is already theirs, they will be living their lives in it”.

Elsewhere, they put it in even more straightforward way elsewhere: *“Some have something to lose, while others don't.”*

4.6 The most widely accepted forms and directions of education on integrity

At the conclusion of the focus group interviews, participants discussed what kinds of educational forms they could envision as effective ways to provide young people with input on integrity, corruption, and the fight against corruption.

- **Chance to participate online:**

Participants at almost all locations suggested that educational materials should be made available online and that online access should (also) be enabled. Online training can help bridge **distances, but it is important to keep participants motivated**, as the lack of personal attendance may cause participants to quickly lose interest and drop out.

- **Maintaining motivation:**

They envisioned **quizzes, interactive games, as well as prize draws, gifts and vouchers linked to the tasks to be completed**. In addition to providing interesting materials, this can help sustain participants' interest and offer an objective that can motivate them. For instance, in higher education, awarding credits in exchange for participation and performance could help maintain motivation.

- **Short and longer video and audio contents:**

Young respondents find it important that the **content be well-defined** and separated from one another, while also aligning with the main themes of the training: "Well, yes, I mean, it should be straightforward and arranged in a structure that I can also understand; so that I know where the knowledge I get will be integrated."

- **Involving influencers and role models:**

More young people can be involved if the key messages, or parts of the content, are conveyed by credible role models and influencers whom they frequently follow and value. **It is essential that they are credible, politically not overly committed, and not so-called "empty billboard" influencers** who advertise and promote a very wide range of products.

- **Getting familiar with rights and obligations:**

It is important to make training participants' rights and obligations completely clear, so that they know what they can and must report, and what practices fall under the definition of corruption.

- **Practical examples:**

According to young people, **practical examples make training courses more interesting, for example through the presentation of previously investigated cases**, as these are much more likely to be retained and integrated into the thinking of participants. Although it is possible to discuss these examples in group settings, **it is preferable for practical, collaborative work to take place in person** in this case, while theoretical instruction can still be carried out online. They would divide the topics into modules and consider the instruction to be most effective in a structure that the young generation can easily understand.

- **Encouraging critical thinking skills:**

Corruption and integrity should not be presented in a *"sterile"* environment, through clear-cut, black-and-white examples. Instead, the thought-provoking *"grey zone"* should be shown, where reflection and critical approach are needed. The training courses should demonstrate that it is better not to believe everything right away, that information should be treated with scepticism, and that it is worth looking more closely into things, using multiple sources.

- **Active participation:**

Training sessions should create an atmosphere where trust can develop and students are encouraged to participate proactively. If possible, everybody should comment on the topic, and active participation should be ensured. Participants should feel that they become committed and develop a sort of inner drive to live with integrity.

- **General complaining should be avoided.**

This can never be considered forward-thinking in training courses where the objective is to transmit and deepen knowledge, as well as to promote prevention.

- **Complex training package:**

Although participants at several data collection sites argued for integrating the subject into the curriculum, others suggested that for a training course with such serious objectives, a **complex transfer of knowledge must be designed – one that provides information from early childhood to higher education:** *“If they really mean it, I think they should gradually introduce education about this right from elementary school, and not under a particular subject, but by teaching it continuously, just like they do for a lot of other citizens’ duties, or in the case of teaching responsibility. And I wouldn’t teach it – especially to adults – in a specific way, because whoever is already hard-wired to be open to corruption, 10, 20, or any number of lessons will not work or make a difference.”*

They consider the accurate planning and preparation of transferring educational content to be indispensable for a successful training programme:

1. Engagement:

Young people need to be engaged so that they actually participate in training programmes and take an interest in the content presented there. The issues the training programme will be centred on must be explained, highlighting how they specifically affect participants and the potential damages they may cause. To communicate it more positively: why will this type of knowledge be useful and essential for them?

2. Sensitisation:

Young people must be supported to understand how corruption affects different social strata. In discussions about emotions related to corruption and its potential practices, interviewees noted that if corruption has a positive effect on them, participating in it, or simply not reporting it, might even be desirable. However, it must be made clear that not everybody is affected positively, even if they see it that way. There are classes and groups within society who suffer its consequences, cannot access certain services, or are excluded from numerous opportunities, etc.

3. Deriving benefits:

It must be made clear how they will benefit from actively participating in training programmes. If participants are successfully involved in the first stage (engagement), they must be shown how these promised benefits can manifest in their everyday lives.

4. Systematic approach:

Young people’s participation is definitely a priority, but they are still greatly influenced by their relatives and family members, so it is important to educate them as well: “Even after a youngster grows up, up to 30 or so, the way a relative thinks about certain subjects can still have a big influence on them. And what’s the point in learning about anti-corruption and having a system that goes against graft if what they constantly hear from their families is that this is all baloney and nonsense”.

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