



Addressing corruption in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic



3 June 2021, 1:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m., Virtual

*High-level supporting event of the President of the General Assembly on the margins of
the 32nd Special Session of the UN General Assembly*

Concept Note

Background

Corruption is a threat to stability and security of societies and has negative implications for the rule of law, development, and human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic and its unprecedented impact on most spheres of public and social life make the fight against corruption an ever more urgent and critical issue. In taking emergency measures during the pandemic, governments have necessarily relaxed safeguards by trading compliance, oversight and accountability for speed of response and achievement of rapid impact, leading to the creation of significant opportunities for corruption to thrive. Corruption reduces access to health care, education and social protection services which in turn have an effect at the individual, family, community and country levels, increasing vulnerabilities and socioeconomic inequalities. Corruption disproportionately affects the most vulnerable and marginalized people.

Corruption also has deleterious effects on public health management and the delivery of efficient, effective and equitable health services. The proliferation and increased impact of corruption can seriously jeopardize a State's ability to respond to and recover from the crisis. The scale and complexity of manufacturing, allocation and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines globally have also given rise to corruption risks, thus threatening vital public health goals at national and international levels.

In response to the pandemic, governments have announced trillions of dollars of emergency fiscal measures to support their citizens and economies. While this additional spending has created opportunities to recover better, it has also posed corruption risks. The lack of sufficient accountability and oversight mechanisms in the allocation and distribution of economic stimulus packages, as they were deployed towards the urgent needs resulting from the crisis, has increased the risk that corruption and fraud would weaken the impact of the measures being taken and result in a shortfall of desperately needed aid reaching the intended beneficiaries. Accordingly, stringent oversight of the funds allocated for social protection, recovery efforts, and provision and allocation of medical supplies, including vaccines, are among the measures that are essential to recovery and building back better.

At the global level, vast financial resources and extensive efforts have been directed towards the development of COVID-19 vaccines. These vaccines must be treated as global public goods, affordable and accessible for all. For this reason, public institutions should identify and address any potential gaps and barriers, including the risk of corruption in the manufacturing, distribution and allocation processes, to ensure that populations have equitable access to

safe and viable vaccines. A range of corruption risks have been associated with vaccine manufacturing, deployment and distribution processes, including the *“entry of substandard and falsified vaccines into markets, theft of vaccines within the distribution systems, leakages in emergency funding designated for the development and distribution of vaccines, nepotism, favoritism, and corrupted procurement systems”*¹. Public institutions should have mechanisms in place to strengthen their transparency and accountability to the people they serve, particularly in those institutions vital to the development, distribution and allocation of COVID-19 vaccines.

Governments, international and regional organizations, in partnership with civil society and the private sector, as appropriate, have a crucial role to play in increasing awareness and trust in recovery efforts and mitigation measures taken in response to pandemic, including by providing full and transparent information on economic rescue packages, the distribution of resources, vaccine allocation, and more generally, on systematic mitigation of corruption risks at all stages of responses to, and recovery efforts from COVID-19.

Mandate

In **operative paragraph 16 of resolution 74/276**, the General Assembly invited the President of the General Assembly to convene a high-level supporting event on the margins of the special session on challenges and measures to prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation.

The event is expected to provide an opportunity to assess the emerging corruption risks in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to discuss possible policy and enforcement measures to tackle these risks.

The event will feature a panel discussion, with a participation of experts from international organizations, civil society, and the private sector, involved in assessing and mitigating corruption risks during the fight against and recovery responses to COVID-19.

Guiding questions

- How to **prioritize anti-corruption measures** in the fight against and recovery responses to COVID-19, and in the development of long-term response frameworks for possible future pandemics?
- How to ensure a balance between the urgent need of allocating **economic stimulus funds** quickly and adequate **auditing, oversight, accountability and reporting**, so that those in need receive the allocated resources?
- How to monitor and report on the use of the **international assistance funds** provided for the fight against and recovery from the pandemic, to ensure that they are used for the designated purposes?

¹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/COVID-19/Policy_paper_on_COVID-19_vaccines_and_corruption_risks.pdf

- How to oversee pre-bidding, bidding, and post-bidding phases of **vaccine procurement**, in order to mitigate corruption risks, such as inaccurately estimating the demand for a particular product, deliberately favoring certain vaccine producers, failing to deliver purchased products, circumventing tender procedures risk of collusion and market division between bidders and other risks?
- How to better inform the public about criteria for the **priority distribution of vaccines**? What can be done to develop and strengthen the access to **data on the allocation of vaccines** to increase social auditing and transparency?
- How to increase **public awareness and trust**? What role can **civil society** play in helping governments to monitor and report on vaccine distribution processes?