

Introduction and context

Technology and the increased availability of data have evolved rapidly in the last decades, transforming the public and private sectors in numerous ways, raising expectations of citizens, and elevating the importance of responsible digital innovation for governments around the world. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in public administration and in the delivery of public services, if harnessed appropriately, can reduce opportunities for corruption and increase transparency and accountability across the public sector. ICT can also be used to support public engagement on the topic of anti-corruption, for example allowing wider public reach when sharing information and seeking public engagement. Finally, ICT can be leveraged directly by the public sector, private sector and civil society, working separately and jointly, to improve the effectiveness of detection, reporting and investigation of corruption. Embracing responsible ICT innovations in anti-corruption can enhance cooperation and partnership in the fight against corruption and in the protection of government integrity, by enabling cross-sector collaboration among state institutions, citizens, civil society, academia, and private sector organizations.

It should also be considered that ICT opportunities bring associated risks, including criminal misuse, potential misuse by public entities and security and accessibility concerns. The use of ICT for anti-corruption purposes should include safeguards against criminal misuse and for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and in particular the right to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, including as related to the protection of personal data. In addition, some people may have limited or no access to digital solutions (e.g. no internet or smart phone) and therefore traditional channels should be maintained (e.g. town hall, radio etc.). In this sense, multichannel approaches should be embraced to secure that all segments of the population are included, and ensure that no one is left behind.

The relevance of ICT has been recognized in five resolutions adopted by the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC): resolution 6/7 entitled *Promoting the use of information and communications technologies for the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption*; resolution 6/8 entitled *Prevention of corruption by promoting transparent, accountable and efficient public service delivery through the application of best practices and technological innovations*; resolution 7/6, entitled *Follow-up to the Marrakech declaration on the prevention of corruption*; resolution 8/5 entitled *Enhancing integrity by raising public awareness*; and resolution 8/13 entitled *Abu Dhabi declaration on enhancing collaboration between the supreme audit institutions and anti-corruption bodies to more effectively prevent and fight corruption*. These resolutions provide a framework on the use of ICT for achieving the goals of UNCAC.

The *G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2019-2021* calls for the ACWG to “take concrete actions to strengthen and promote integrity and transparency in the public and the private sector”, and “share experiences and best practices relating to opportunities and risks of new technologies in relation to corruption.” As part of its anti-corruption effort, the ACWG, under the Japanese G20 Presidency, agreed on the *Compendium of Good Practices for Promoting Integrity and Transparency in Infrastructure Development*, which identified specific measures to be taken by G20 and non-G20 members to strengthen integrity and transparency of public infrastructure projects by utilizing ICT. Therefore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has identified promoting public sector integrity through the use of

information and communications technologies as a priority issue for the 2020 G20 Presidency, with the aim of sharing experiences on how the use of technology could enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector; strengthen transparency, government data, and public trust; and help prevent corruption. The Saudi G20 Presidency tabled an innovative program aiming for pragmatic outputs, working with international organizations in developing, among others, the following:

- *High-Level Principles for Promoting Public Sector Integrity Through the Use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)*

Applicability, scope and definitions

The High-Level Principles focus on three core pillars: A. Effective and transparent public administration and digital public services; B. ICT in public engagement on anti-corruption; C. ICT in the detection, reporting and investigation of corruption.

These Principles build on existing international standards and recommendations by international organizations, including the *Introductory Note to the G20 Anti-Corruption Open Data Principles and G20 Principles for Promoting Integrity in Public Procurement*. The High-Level Principles offer flexibility to enable countries to effectively apply them in accordance with their respective legal systems.

The Principles do not seek to be prescriptive about any specific technologies to be used given that the most suitable technologies will vary over time, and between countries depending on national priorities, resources and digital maturity. There is no 'one size fits all' solution. Instead, these High-Level Principles support the identification of opportunities to use ICT in the fight against corruption and provide pragmatic guidance for developing anti-corruption ICT solutions.

For the purpose of these Principles, the following definitions and references will be used:

“Transparency” refers to the disclosure of government information, data, rules, plans, processes, and actions. It ensures that public officials act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities. It also means that the public can easily perceive and understand what actions are being performed by the government.

“Accountability” refers to holding individuals, agencies and organizations responsible for reporting their activities and executing their powers properly. Typical approaches to transparency and accountability as enablers of government openness focus on reducing information asymmetries. Transparency and accountability are essential principles of guarding against corruption and help increase trust in the institutions. Both are amongst the fundamental principles of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) – the only global anti-corruption legal framework.

“Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)” refers to existing and emerging digital technologies including the Internet, mobile technologies and devices, as well as data collection and data analytics used to improve the generation, collection, exchange, aggregation, combination, analysis, access, searchability and presentation of digital content, including for the development of services and software.

“Financial inclusion” means that individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs – transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance delivered in a responsible and sustainable way.

A. A. Effective and Transparent Public Administration and Digital Public Services

Principle 1: Provide digital public services to improve efficiency and reduce opportunities for corruption

Measures to achieve these ends may include, inter alia:

- a. G20 countries should explore the ways in which ICT can facilitate programmes that are consistent with United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) for the proper management of public affairs and public property.
- b. G20 countries should introduce or enhance the use of such technologies, where appropriate, to provide government services, such as identity documents for citizens, company registration, taxation, customs clearance, licensing, etc. Since corruption often occurs in, and is masked by, slow and non-transparent bureaucratic processes, such digital innovations can reduce corruption risks by improving efficiency and reducing opportunities for corruption in the delivery of government services by restricting where appropriate, the discretion of public officials. Through automation, it can also enhance the measurement of productivity and accountability for service delivery.
- c. In doing so, G20 countries should ensure that adequate measures are introduced to address the risk that these technologies can be used for illicit purposes and ensure that the use of ICT does not weaken the enforcement of other anti-corruption measures.

Principle 2: Promote e-procurement and open data standards to enhance transparency and promote fair competition

E-procurement and open data standards are a means of preventing corruption, enhancing transparency and promoting fair competition. Online platforms facilitate access to public tenders, reduce direct interaction between procurement officials and companies, increase outreach and competition, and allow for easier detection of irregularities, such as bid rigging. The digitalization of procurement processes strengthens internal anti-corruption controls and the detection of integrity breaches, and it provides audit trails that may facilitate investigation activities. G20 countries should develop and promote, within available resources, the use of electronic tools for the provision of managing and publishing public procurement processes, including planning, tendering, awarding, and post-awarding. G20 countries are also encouraged to develop and implement open data standards (such as the *Open Contracting Data Standard*) across government, including in budget expenditure for public procurement. G20 countries should also consider, as appropriate, leveraging big data, and exploring new technologies, to better identify risks and red flags in procurement, expose corrupt practices, and enhance preventive measures.

Principle 3: Use electronic payment systems to reduce opportunities for corruption and increase transparency and traceability

In line with the *G20 High-Level Principles on Organizing Against Corruption*, G20 countries should consider expanding the use of electronic payment tools to reduce cash transactions

in public administration. This can reduce opportunities for corruption and increase transparency and traceability. This should be done with due attention to adequate provision of data security and financial inclusion.

Principle 4: Ensure an inclusive approach to the availability of innovative ICT systems to increase the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures

When providing digital public services, G20 countries should ensure that digital applications and tools are easily accessible to the widest range of users (e.g. by considering ease of access, language options, digital literacy of users, etc.) and that the privacy and security of personal data are protected. This may encourage greater use of services and therefore may increase the effectiveness of the anti-corruption measures (e.g. by increasing the use of online grievance redress mechanisms, digital government services etc.). G20 countries should welcome responsible innovation that could improve efficiency, enhance competition, and expand access, however, such innovation must not come at the expense of national security and other public policy objectives. As appropriate, G20 countries are encouraged to consider gender-specific issues in this inclusive approach.

B. ICT in public engagement on anti-corruption

Principle 5: Promote the adoption and implementation of open government standards

- a. G20 countries are encouraged to publish and to give access to government information, unless there are clearly circumscribed exceptions, as provided by national legislation and in line with UNCAC article 13 1d, including through the creation of government information platforms.
- b. Taking into account standards pertaining to security, privacy, confidentiality, and the protection of personal data, G20 countries should promote secure online platforms to facilitate public consultation in order to encourage a wide range of participation and citizens' feedback on essential public services, public policies, and legislation.
- c. G20 countries should explore the possibility of using ICT to encourage the effective, proactive engagement of civil society, academia, and the media, to increase public awareness of corruption risks, for instance, through existing or new online platforms, or exploring the possibility for upcoming consultation opportunities via social media.

C. ICT in the detection, reporting and investigation of corruption

Principle 6: Facilitate the exchange of information and networking to better prevent, detect, and respond to corruption risks

- a. G20 countries should, consistent with the fundamental principles of their domestic legal systems, explore the possibility of utilizing ICT systems which facilitate the electronic sharing of relevant information (i.e. that can assist in the prevention, detection, investigation and response to corruption risks) between public sector organizations with anti-corruption responsibilities. The protection of privacy rights and other legal protections attaching to data should be ensured, including clear and strong rules on the limits for storing and exchanging data.

- b. Recognizing the increasing digitization in both the public and private sector, G20 countries are encouraged to explore how ICT can facilitate cooperation between national authorities and the private sector in line with article 39 of UNCAC.

Principle 7: Consider the use of new technologies to prevent, detect, and investigate corruption

G20 countries should, consistent with the fundamental principles of their domestic legal systems, consider utilizing new technology-based systems to identify possible instances of corruption. This may help public sector organizations to identify and manage corruption and money-laundering risks. When developing and using these tools, G20 countries should ensure full respect of individual rights, including in terms of privacy.

Principle 8: Improve the monitoring of public finances

G20 countries should consider, where appropriate, utilizing ICT, and innovative technologies, to monitor public finances and projects in order to better detect corruption risks and inefficiencies. This may contribute to more transparent, accountable and effective public financial management. This could include partnering with stakeholders outside of the public sector to develop innovative technologies and/or methods to monitor public finances.

Principle 9: Encourage reporting on corruption

G20 countries should establish ICT-based communication channels, measures and systems to facilitate public reporting of corruption offences in line with the *G20 High-Level Principles for the Effective Protection of Whistleblowers* and in accordance with articles 13 and 33 of UNCAC. G20 countries should require that such public reporting is appropriately followed up by the competent authorities.

Principle 10: Promote the use of ICT in international anti-corruption cooperation

G20 countries should consider utilizing ICT to facilitate and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of international anti-corruption cooperation. For example, by utilizing online platforms for the communication and exchanges of information between anti-corruption law enforcement officials from different jurisdictions.

Principle 11: Promote effective capacity-building

G20 countries should make efforts to ensure that anti-corruption investigators, prosecutors and public officials with anti-corruption responsibilities are equipped with sufficient knowledge, appropriate digital skills, tools, guidelines, and broad-based education. This will allow them to operate in the rapidly changing world of technology to tackle corruption-related risks more effectively.