

UZBEKISTAN ANTI-CORRUPTION DIGEST**CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS****IS CORRUPTION RISK ASSESSMENT VIABLE IN UZBEKISTAN? OR HOW DOES THE COUNTRY'S FIRST ANTI-CORRUPTION LABORATORY WORK?**

The anti-corruption laboratory is a new trend for Uzbekistan in the field of combating corruption, a kind of experiment. The project 'Establishment of the first anti-corruption laboratories in Uzbekistan' is being implemented by the Nationwide Movement 'Yuksalish' in partnership with the Anti-Corruption Agency of Uzbekistan, and the international non-governmental organization Regional Dialogue (Slovenia).

Corruption is like a disease that takes root deep in the subconscious, becomes a habit, affects the culture of good manners and integrity, infects the entire system. To cure the disease, we need to make the correct diagnosis, find out the cause. Same with combating corruption: before taking measures, it is necessary to find out people's attitude to the problem, to investigate its causes, or the factors that lead to malpractice, conflict of interest, or force people to violate integrity, make informal payments, collude, and so on. In short, the policies require an accurate diagnosis first.

This stands behind the creation of the expert platform. It allows exploring the factors of corruption risks using different methods of analyzing statistical data, media content, scientific materials, legislation, surveys of target groups throughout the country, and international experience. The factors are surveyed based on a pre-developed methodology in line with international standards, and with the support of international experts and researchers in the field of combating corruption.

Late in 2021, the laboratory published the results of the first study as part of the project, which involved the public, and volunteers. It helped to assess corruption risk factors, which lead to corruption or unethical behavior in the process of admission of children to primary school.

The surveys covered almost 5,000 people, including 114 school principals, 1,563 primary school teachers and 3,243 parents of first-

graders in 114 schools in 14 regions of Uzbekistan. In April, pilot surveys were conducted among three groups of respondents in two schools in Tashkent. In May-June, large-scale surveys were carried out throughout the country, covering 28 cities, 31 regional centers, 31 rural settlements.

The value of the data obtained is that the anonymous surveys documented the rumors and anecdotal evidence faced by participants in the admissions process. Among these are unequal opportunities for children under the main and additional admission quotas, the involuntary necessity for school principals to resort to the help of parents due to the lack of budget funding, infrastructure and provision, pressure from parents and higher authorities to place a child in a good school, and many other interesting facts.



**BOBUR BEKMURODOV,
Chairman of the
Nationwide Movement
"Yuksalish":**

— *"Such surveys are important, because they can convey the real voice of the public to decision-making bodies, to show the real picture and the state of affairs in the regions. They provide ready-made recommendations based on expert experience and work based on the voiced needs of the target audience."*

The analysis of the data collected helped identify six main factors that lead to corruption or unethical behavior, and are closely interrelated with each other. Thus, the lack of transparency in the admission of children to primary school leads to the introduction of additional quotas, and to overcrowded classrooms.

Parents and principals get a ground for unethical behavior (including gifts, material values, pressure from outside). The lack of funding for schools forces the administration of the educational institution look for additional sources of funding, thereby shaping a field of influence and exchange of services between parents/teachers/principals. This causes violation of integrity and corrupt behavior.

As the study showed, to get a child enrolled at school, 37% of the surveyed parents across the country would bargain directly with the director, and 22% would try to do that with the selection commission. Approximately every 10th principal faces pressure from parents, every 10th principal faces pressure from higher authorities, individuals and organizations in the public sector.

All groups of respondents (26% of parents, 29% of teachers, 3.7% of school principals) claimed the need for transparent admission to school. Teachers in most regions see a transparent admissions process as a solution of overcrowded classrooms and low-quality education.

71.5% of surveyed teachers in all regions confirmed that information about the financial activities of schools should be transparent and accessible. 45% of parents are dissatisfied with the transparency, completeness and accessibility of financial and budget information of district departments of public education, and schools.

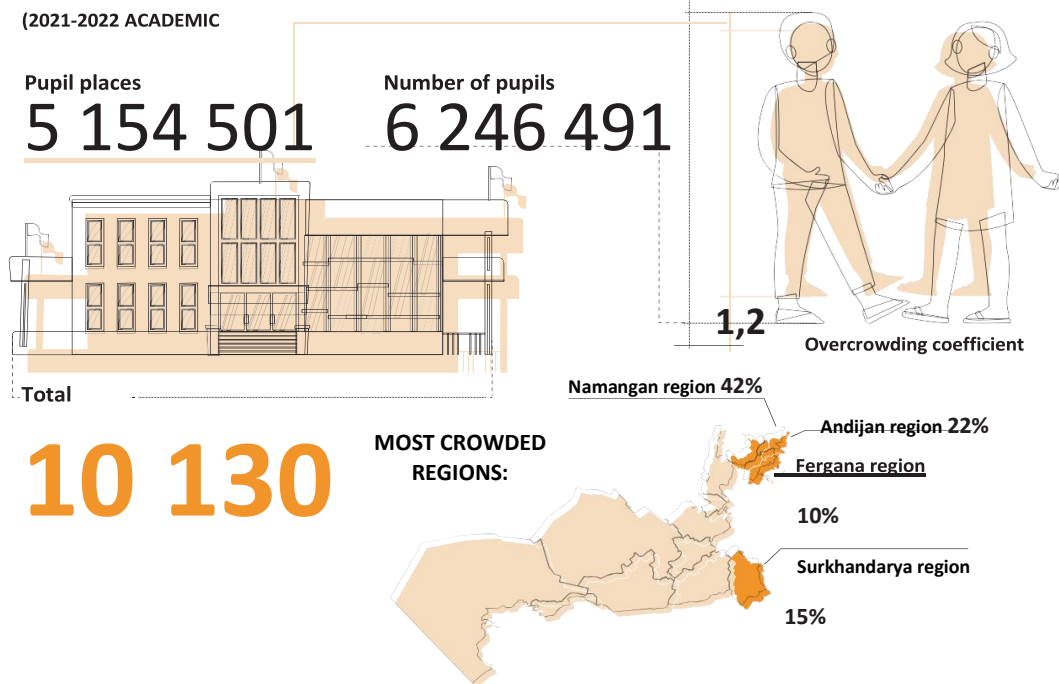
Despite the fact that the Ministry of Public Education is implementing the online queue management system qabul.maktab.uz, the results of the study showed the dissatisfaction of the respondents. An analysis of the answers of all three categories of respondents ranging by territories showed a shortage of student places due to the fact that the calculation of quotas and places by quotas does not take into account the capacity and infrastructure of classrooms, schools and the demographic aspect. Infrastructure issues of educational institutions rank the second among teachers' comments, after salaries.

**Rustam Karimjonov,
Deputy Minister of Public Education of the Republic of
Uzbekistan:**

— *"We have the resources to conduct this kind of surveys, but we have failed to make an unbiased assessment using such an in-depth analysis. Since we work in a single system, it is difficult to get honest answers from lower-level-staff."*



RESULTS OF SURVEY: THERE IS NOT ENOUGH SPACE FOR MORE THAN MILLION PUPILS

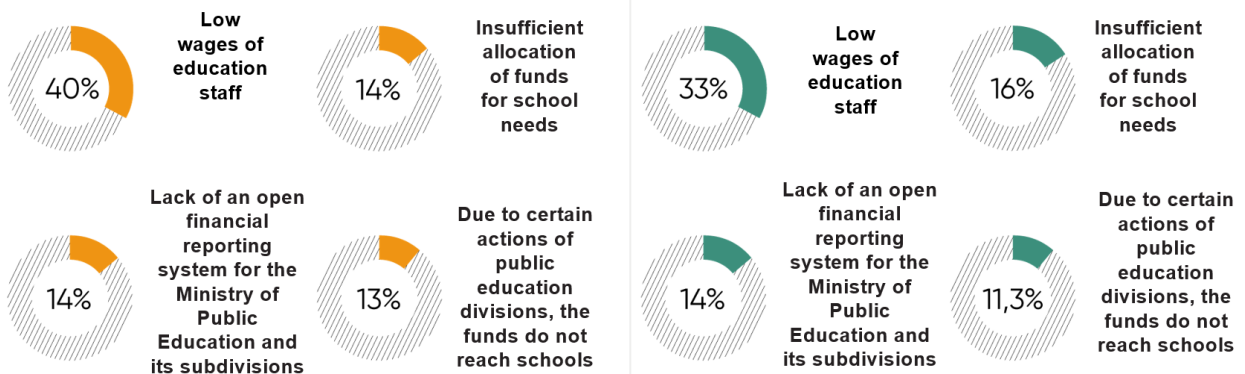


22% of parents, or every fifth respondent, could not arrange a child according to the quota of the microdistrict where they live, due to the fact that there were no places in the chosen school. The highest rates of this problem are in Navoi region – 41%, and Kashkadarya region – 28%.

At the same time, the admission process is directly related to the lack of budget funding. About 19% of the surveyed teachers answered that they were forced to turn to their parents for help due to lack of budget funding. In response to the question "How did

you know that you should help or reward the school?", 40% of parents chose the option "I was told directly." The answer option "No one asked for this, I did it to facilitate / speed up the admission procedure of admission" was confirmed by 27% of parents. 83.3% of principals welcomed the financial support of schools by parents, if that it was provided on a voluntary basis, transparent, and regulated by law.

REASONS FOR INFORMAL PAYMENTS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM



One of the reasons for extra-budgetary fees in the system of public education, according to teachers, is that funds do not reach schools because of certain actions of district or city centralized accounting departments (27% in Karakalpakstan, 20% in the Khorezm region, 20% in the Navoi region and the city of Tashkent, 18% in Andijan, 16% in Jizzakh, 14% in Kashkadarya regions, 12% in Syrdarya and Ferghana regions). Parents noted similar trends, referring to the lack of administrative and public control oversight over the formation and implementation of the school budget (36% in Navoi region and 17% in Karakalpakstan), as well as the fact that the money does not reach schools due to certain actions of the accounting departments of public education (average 11.3% of respondents in the republic). Some parents believe that schools are not financed at all (33% in Tashkent, 22% in Karakalpakstan, 21% in Tashkent region, 17% in Ferghana, 16% in Namangan, and 15% in Surkhandarya regions).

Low salaries of school workers also force to seek for alternative sources of income – tutoring, favoritism, exchange of favors with parents. As a result, unethical behavior is enrooted as a normal practice. Corruption risk factors come to the underdevelopment of infrastructure due to the opportunity of misusing of state funds and theft at different levels, as well as the influence and pressure of the school principal on teachers and parents, pressure on the school administration from outside by parents and higher structures.

45.5% of teachers confirmed that they are forced to take on additional work due to low

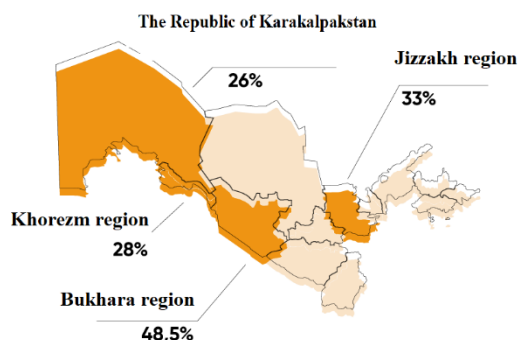
salaries. 26.3% of teachers noted that they agree with the proposal of parents to teach children for a fee. At the same time, 40% of teachers see the reason for extra-budgetary fees in low salary. Also, about a third of parents think that the low salary of school employees is the reason for the practice of extra-budgetary payments in the school system, and see a solution to this problem in raising the salaries of all school employees, including the cleaning staff.

Despite the fact that, according to the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education, there is a sufficient number of graduating young teachers, in practice, due to the low image of the profession of a teacher, the human resources in general education institutions do not meet the pedagogical needs of schools. The insufficient level of qualifications and skills of school teachers hinders the successful implementation of the tasks set for the system of general secondary education, and contributes to inequality between schools and classes, and is seen as a corruption risk factor.

Problems with the psychological maturity of students is a separate challenge. Respondents from among teachers and principals point out to the lack of preparedness of children for school. That is conditioned by a weak connection between pre-school and primary education: nurseries do not always provide proper pre-school education, and not all parents send their children to nurseries. As a result, children come to school with different levels of preparedness. Some parents try to enroll their child in school before the specified age (under seven years old).

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF CHILDREN IN ADMISSION TO SCHOOL

TEACHERS PROVIDED THE MAJORITY OF COMMENTS ON THE NEED OF INTERVIEW WITH A PSYCHOLOGIST AND A TEACHER



THE TOPIC WAS RAISED BY TEACHERS FROM NINE REGIONS OF THE REPUBLIC. THE HIGHEST INDICATORS ARE AS FOLLOWS:



SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: THE REASON IS IN THE LACK OF FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOGICAL THINKING SKILLS FROM AN EARLY AGE IN FAMILIES, A WEAK CONNECTION BETWEEN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AND PRIMARY SCHOOL.

An analysis of the perception of integrity of school staff and the ethical behavior of parents showed the need to raise awareness of parents about the procedures for applying to schools, and their responsibility for their children's performance.

The study gave an opportunity to respondents to voice other problems existing in the education system from all regions of the country, to make proposals for their elimination. Advanced global experience shows that the use of modern technologies, the widespread introduction of open data can significantly increase the transparency of processes, and, as a result, minimize a significant number of corruption risk factors.

The key product of the anti-corruption laboratory is expert recommendations to reduce corruption risks on identified issues.

Upon the analysis of all the data collected, the laboratory experts provided the following key recommendations:

- **Creation of a unified open data platform** covering all institutions of the public and preschool education sector, providing open data on the number of classrooms, students, vacant places in schools and preschool education institutions, with the opportunity of online admission to the primary schools without the need for parents to visit schools.

- **Development of legal norms** regulating the financial assistance of parents and ensuring transparency in the collection, distribution and use of funds, ensuring the full engagement of school administration and parents in planning and implementing the financial resources of schools.

- **Mandatory coordination with the public** and strengthening of public oversight over the transparency of planning and placement of designs of future schools, which provide a sufficient number of student places, as well as over the allocation and use of budgetary funds.

- **Implementation of a comprehensive integrity system**, which includes the practical application of the values and norms of integrity, enshrined in relevant rules and procedures (Code of Ethics, best practices for ethical employment).

- **Organization of work with parents** on a fundamentally new platform for a better understanding of their role, the rules of the ethics of the educational process, the integrity of school staff, and for the elimination of parental distrust in the system.

- **Implementation of a notification system for cases of violation of integrity or poor conduct** for all participants in the process

(within the Ministry of Public Education, its departments and within schools), and a system of sanctions in order to correct and prevention such behavior.

- **Revision of the training** (taking into account the needs of the regions, subjects and languages of learning) **and advanced training system** of pedagogical and managerial staff, ensuring transparent selection based on revealing natural abilities for the profession of a teacher, increasing the share of practical training in educational training portfolios. Effectively shape the skills of integrity and pride in the high title of a pedagogue among future teachers;

It is important to understand that the unethical behavior of adults, including parents, can be enrooted in the memory of children, who, from childhood, begin to perceive, for example, a gift to a teacher in

exchange for a good grade, influencing a school principal to be transferred to another/better class, as a normal behavior. This makes it much more difficult to prevent the risks of corruption and violation of integrity in the present and in the future, and also downgrades the status of the teacher. The developed mechanism and methodology can be used to assess corruption risks in other areas as well. The anti-corruption laboratory submitted the recommendations to the Government of Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Public Education and the National Anti-Corruption Council for amendments and additions to the legislation.

Ensuring the transparency of the education system in Uzbekistan would reduce corruption risks, and ultimately might become a breakthrough and an example for other key areas.

MJUŠA SEVER,
Director of the Regional Dialogue NGO (Slovenia):

“ *The Nationwide Movement "Yuksalish" conducted a large-scale study that covered not only schools in the capital, but in all regions of the Republic. Its results show the need to work with preschool education institutions, local communities and the health care system. We know that the leadership of Uzbekistan is investing heavily in the development of education. Since more than half of the population is young, the demand for education is very high.* ”



UMIDA TUKHTASHEVA,
Deputy Director of the Anti-Corruption Agency:

“ *The project clearly demonstrates that public associations can be active participants in anti-corruption processes, and show good results. The chosen topic is quite relevant and concerns almost every resident of the country.* ”



**KHUSHNUDBEK KHUDAYBERDIEV,
Deputy Director General of Uzbekistan National
News Agency, lawyer, blogger:**

“ *Such surveys and studies are essential for reforming the state and society. Commonly, certain strategic decisions, documents and programs are based on the outlook of heads of specialized bodies, on how they understand and see the system. That is why, I believe, the decision-making process primarily requires fundamental research, scientific justification and social surveys.* ”



**Lyudmila Stayshyunayte,
Project Manager, Anti-Corruption Laboratory**