

Dr. Petra Burai – Dr. Kinga Vajda¹

Perceptions and experiences of Hungarian youth on corruption

*Analysis of data on Hungarian youth taken from the Special Eurobarometer 548 survey,
examining the citizens of the European Union*

SUMMARY

The Integrity Authority's educational initiative, the Integrity Academy, explores and introduces the perceptions and experiences of young Hungarians on corruption in multiple stages. At the first stage, this study gives an overview of the data on Hungarian youth, based on the *"Special Eurobarometer 548 - Citizens' attitudes towards corruption in the EU"*, a thematic survey conducted in 2024 which examines the perceptions of the citizens of the European Union. Eurobarometer, which is the polling instrument used by the European Commission, the European Parliament and other EU institutions and agencies, had provided the data to the Integrity Authority. The study depicts the perceptions of young people (aged 15 to 29) towards corruption by conducting desk research of the Eurobarometer results. By presenting the results, our aim is to support efficient financial management of the European Union's budget, and to ensure that the experiences and perceptions of the different groups within society, such as young people, are included in the reports and recommendations published by the Authority.

The vast majority of young Hungarians (87%), aged 15 to 29, believe that corruption is widespread in Hungary. Focusing on the 2021–2024 period, according to 38% of the respondents the level of corruption in Hungary *"stayed the same"*, 25% said it *"increased a little"*, and 25% of them indicated that it *"increased a lot"*. According to the respondents, corruption is most widespread amongst political parties (49%) and politicians (48%), as well as in the healthcare system (41%). Furthermore, more than 2/3 of the young respondents believe that corruption is also part of the Hungarian business culture.

Bribery and the use of connections is often the easiest way to obtain public services in Hungary, as believed by 74% of the respondents. Nonetheless, the young generation believes that it is less acceptable to exchange public services for money, gifts or favours as a form of compensation.

Only 29% of young people know where to turn to if they experience or witness corrupt practices. Amongst the possible reasons as to why they do not report such cases are: *"it is*

¹ The authors are employees of the Integrity Authority. Data analysis was carried out by Ádám Rézmovits, with visual design by Enikő Vida.

difficult to prove anything” (17%); *“there is no protection for those who report corruption”* (16%), *“everyone knows about these cases and no one reports them”* (15%).

1. Introduction

Nearly 1.6 million young people live in Hungary.² For them, countering corruption effectively is pivotal, as without such actions, corrupt practices will limit their opportunities, hinder their ambitions, and prevent them from getting ahead in life, accessing quality education, adequate healthcare, and achieving professional success.

Part of the Integrity Authority’s strategy for 2024-2028 is to establish the Authority’s educational and research activities. The Authority supports the active involvement of young people in tackling corruption by providing knowledge and opportunities through its educational initiative, the Integrity Academy. The Integrity Academy’s objective is not only to transmit knowledge, but also to communicate values that help prevent corrupt behaviour. In this way, young people can bring about substantial changes in strengthening integrity and ethical behaviour.

With the right values and knowledge, they can make decisions and take actions that benefit society, understand their roles in anti-corruption efforts, as well as recognise and report abuse to the authorities. Thus, it is our goal to promote the efficient financial management of the European Union’s budget and grants by presenting relevant research results. The experiences and perceptions of different social groups, such as young people, provide important added value in the reports and recommendations published by the Authority.

Few research results are available on the impact of corruption on young people, their experiences and perceptions. At the same time, the young people’s knowledge and way of thinking influence the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, as the lack of individual values and knowledge related to corruption weakens the ability to understand the detrimental impact of fraud and to identify such phenomena.

The Integrity Academy explores and introduces the perceptions and experiences of young Hungarians on corruption in multiple stages. At the first stage, this study provides an overview of the data on Hungarian youth, based on the *“Special Eurobarometer 548”*, a thematic survey that examines the perceptions of the citizens of the European Union. In addition, the Integrity Academy examines the indirect feedback of young people as part of focus group studies and large-scale questionnaire surveys. The presentation of the results is expected to take place in the fourth quarter of 2025.

² In this study, “young people” mean the age group of 15–29 years. Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2024) Population and population dynamics. <https://www.ksh.hu/stadat?lang=hu&theme=nep>

2. The study's objective

The study was conducted upon the results of the 2024 survey titled "*Special Eurobarometer 548 – Citizens' attitudes towards corruption in the EU*", which was designed to explore the level of corruption perceived and experienced by European citizens.³ The anonymised micro data of Hungarian young people aged 15 to 29 were provided to the Integrity Authority by the European Commission's office responsible for Eurobarometer surveys. The study provides an overview of the experiences and beliefs of young Hungarians on corruption through the desk research of the Eurobarometer results.

3. Brief overview of the original survey and measurement tool

Eurobarometer carries out surveys on behalf of various EU institutions in the member states of the European Union to provide credible and reliable data on EU-related matters. Surveys generally mean public opinion polls that investigate current or long-term relevant issues, often conducted regularly at specified intervals.

The characteristic of these analyses is that data are being collected simultaneously in several, or every EU member state, using a similar methodology. The Special Eurobarometer survey, which explores the topic of corruption, has been repeated many times since 2005, with the latest survey having taken place in 2024. The questionnaire used for this data collection is based on the measurement tool used for the 2013 data collection, while partially matching pre-2013, on-topic surveys. The 2024 data collection explored the following topics:⁴

- General perceptions of corruption, including acceptability, its extent, and perceived changes in the frequency of corruption.
- Attitudes towards corruption in public institutions and business, and the effectiveness of the government, the judicial system, and institutions tackling corruption.
- Personal experiences related to bribery, and the frequency of corruption cases in relation to different institutions.
- Reporting alleged corruption cases, awareness of where to report corruption, as well as the level of trust in these institutions. The possible reasons why respondents do not report alleged cases of corruption is also explored.

³ European Union (2024) Eurobarometer 548: Citizens' attitudes towards corruption in the EU in 2024. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3217>

⁴ European Union (2024) Eurobarometer 548: Citizens' attitudes towards corruption in the EU in 2024. p. 5-6

4. Methodology and results

In the case of Hungary, altogether 1,019 responses were gathered for the *“Special Eurobarometer 548 – Citizens’ attitudes towards corruption”* survey, and the sample was developed by using a stratified, multi-stage, random sampling approach, according to the description of the data collection company⁵. The questionnaires were completed through personal interviews (CAPI).

After filtering the examined age group (15–29), the anonymised micro data for Hungary were analysed based on the chosen variables of the questionnaire. Given the small size of the sample, in addition to descriptive statistics the bivariate correlation analyses are presented using Fisher’s exact test, partly the Chi-square test, as well as Cramer’s V coefficient⁶.

5. Defining corruption

According to the definition in the Eurobarometer survey, which serves as the basis for this study, corruption is the misuse of power entrusted to individuals for personal advantage. The EU research interprets the phenomenon broadly. In practice, corruption can manifest in many forms: *“from [...] bribery and influence peddling to subtler forms such as nepotism, conflict of interest, and the revolving door phenomenon between the corporate world and public service”*.⁷

The Eurobarometer survey emphasises that corruption deepens social inequalities, weakens trust in governmental institutions, undermines effective governance, has profound adverse effects on the economy, instigates business uncertainty, sabotages the European Union’s investment climate, jeopardises the operation of the Internal Market, and depletes public resources.

⁵ Stratification variables: NUTS 2 regions and the degree of urbanisation therein (DEGURGBA). The size of the sample selected in some strata mirrors the target population of the entire stratum (e.g. region). In the second stage, the sampling points were selected through random sampling, then data collection in most of the selected countries began using the “random walk” method. In this process, for each address included a respondent was randomly chosen from the members of the household, aged 15 and over, who were present and living at home. After sampling, the results were weighted.

⁶ The authors used version 8.4 of the SAS for the analysis.

⁷ European Union (2024) Eurobarometer 548: Citizens’ attitudes towards corruption in the EU in 2024. p. 5

6. Limitations of the study

After filtering the entire Eurobarometer database by country and specified age group, the sample examined for this study consisted of a total of 96 respondents⁸. Given the small size of the sample and the low measurement level of the questions asked in the questionnaire,⁹ the database is not ideal for conducting multivariate analyses. It must be noted that the data collection questionnaire primarily focuses on examining perceptions and attitudes while also including a few questions that explicitly pertain to experience.

7. Research participants

57% of the surveyed Hungarian young people were female and 43% male. The vast majority were aged 24 to 29 and lived in cities. Almost half of the respondents had completed secondary education, while 15% had higher education degrees.

⁸ For the survey titled “Special Eurobarometer 548: Citizens’ attitudes towards corruption in the EU”, the entire Hungarian sample was n=1,019 respondents. Filtering this sample by age group led to the creation of a database containing data from 96 respondents.

⁹ Nominal and ordinary measurement levels

Table 1

Baseline distribution of respondents by various socio-demographic criteria

Baseline distribution of respondents by various socio-demographic criteria		Frequency (no. of respondents)	Percentage distribution
Gender	Women	55	57%
	Men	41	43%
Age groups	15–18	11	11%
	19–23	19	20%
	24–29	66	69%
Level of education (grouped)	Elementary education	34	35%
	Secondary education	46	48%
	Higher education	14	15%
	Did not respond	2	2%
Type of settlement	Large city	36	38%
	Small and medium-sized city	36	38%
	Rural area, village	24	24%

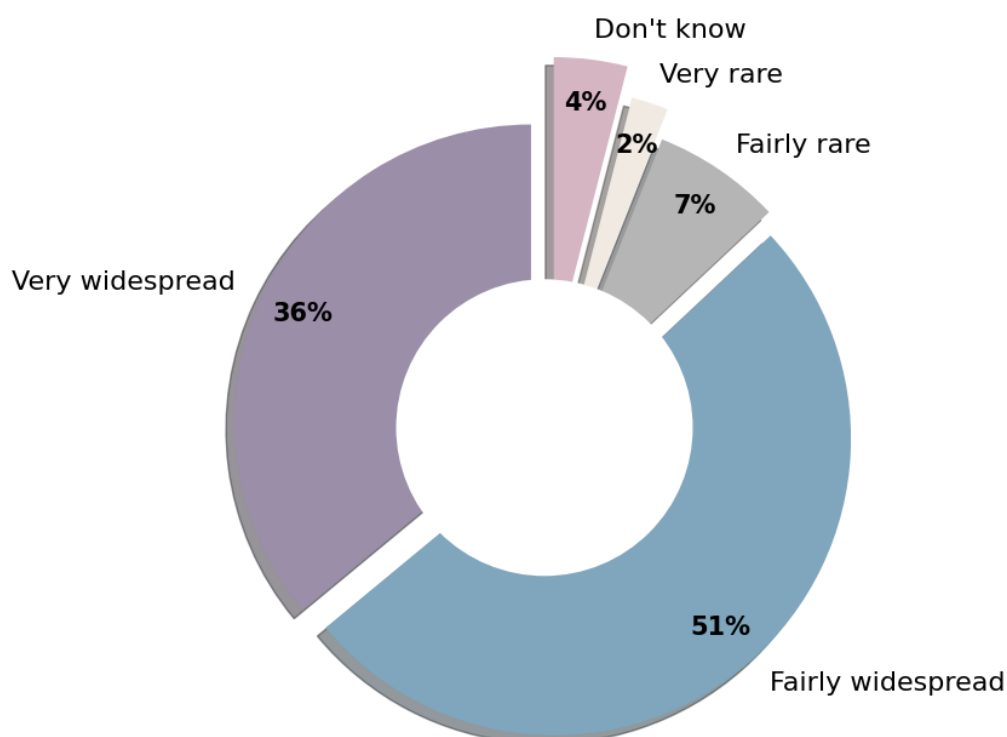
n=96 respondents

8. Research results

8.1. Hungarian youth's general opinions and perceptions on corruption

As part of the Eurobarometer survey, respondents were asked to evaluate the degree of how widespread corruption is in Hungary based on their own experiences and perceptions.

Figure 1: Prevalence of corruption in Hungary (%)



n=96 respondents

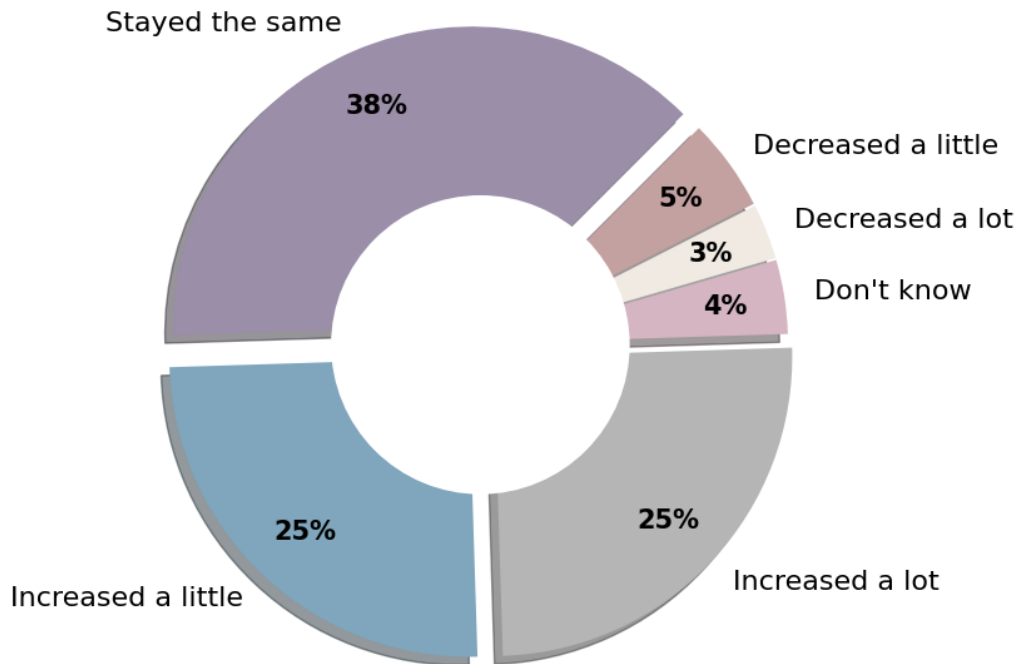
The vast majority of young Hungarians (87%), aged 15 to 29, responded that corruption has been widespread in Hungary¹⁰ (Figure 1). After grouping the response options to the question, a significant correlation emerged between the age groups¹¹ and the question¹². Based on the responses, the youngest age group, aged 15 to 18, was more uncertain, while it was mainly those aged 19 to 23 who considered corruption to be “widespread” in Hungary.

¹⁰ Very widespread+fairly widespread=widespread

¹¹ 15–18, 19–23, 24–29

¹² Chi-squared test= 0.018, Fisher’s test=0.016, Cramer’s V=0.260

Figure 2: How has the level of corruption in Hungary changed over the past 3 years? (%)

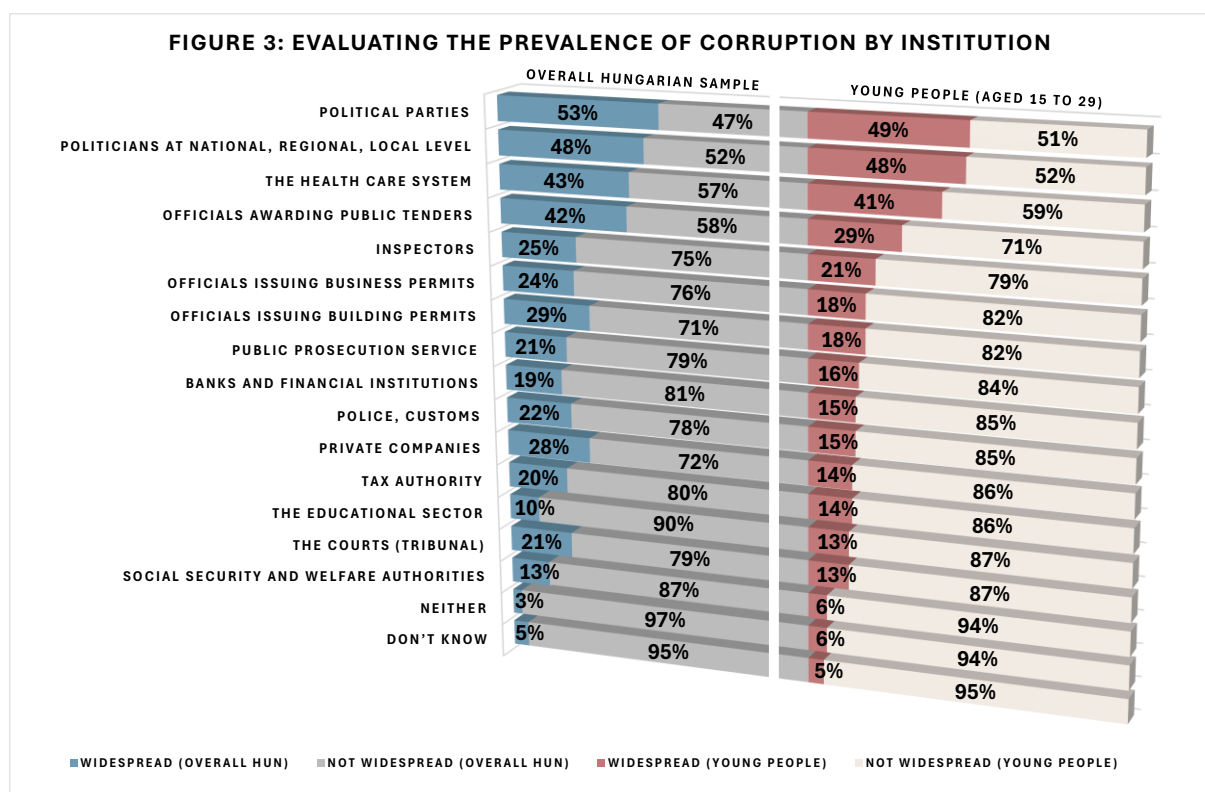


n=96 respondents

Focusing specifically on the 3 years preceding the questionnaire, 38% of the respondents perceived that the level of corruption in Hungary “*stayed the same*”, 25% said that it “*increased a little*”, and 25% indicated that it “*increased a lot*”, with only a few respondents reporting a decrease based on their own subjective opinions (Figure 2).

8.2. Institutions involved in corruption and the impact of misuse

In terms of negative trends, it is also worth examining where young respondents feel that bribery and/or the abuse of power is widespread within the group of institutions, actors and relevant services (Figure 3).

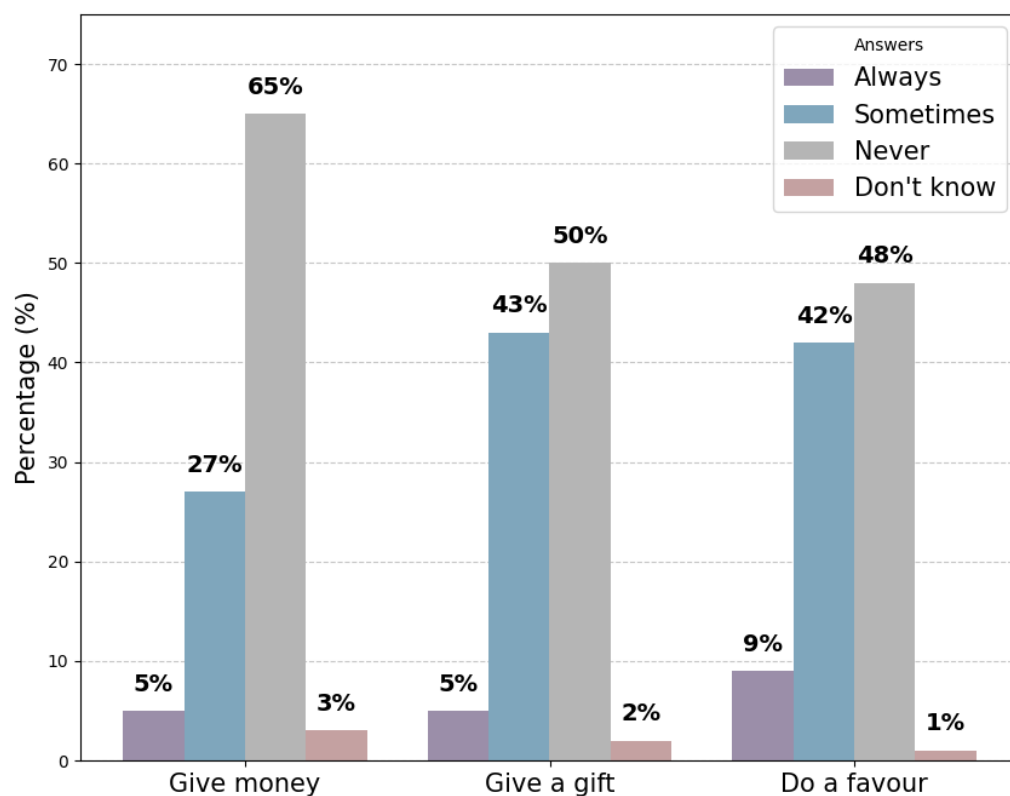


n_{young people}=96 respondents; n_{overall}=1,019 respondents

The opinions show that corrupt practices are most widespread amongst political parties (49%) and politicians (48%), with the health care system showing up most frequently amongst the responses after these two (41%). The opinions of the overall Hungarian population, and young people, are unified on this issue regarding the top three institutions and persons [(1) political parties; (2) politicians; (3) healthcare]. Even the percentages move together across these three domains, meaning that both Hungarian young people and the overall population indicated in similar proportions that – in their opinions – corruption is widespread in respect of a specific institution or person.

Both young people and the overall Hungarian population gave the 4th spot to “*officials evaluating public tenders*”. Responses in the two groups start to deviate from the 5th position onwards. While the younger age group assigned this spot to inspectors, when looking at the entire sample, this position is held by officials who issue building permits (29%), closely followed by “*private companies*” (28%).

Figure 4:
If you want to obtain something from public administration or public service, how acceptable are the following? (%)



n=96 respondents

All in all, the young generation believes it is less acceptable to exchange public services for money, gifts or favours as a form of compensation (*Figure 4*). Most respondents selected “never” for all three types of compensation. Moreover, it is evident that they consider money the least acceptable form of compensation, while being somewhat more lenient towards gifts and favours.

The survey also aimed to illustrate perceptions and attitudes towards corruption by using statements defined during the data collection, along with the degree of agreement or disagreement with them (*Table 2*).

Table 2

The percentages of respondents who agree with various corruption-related statements

	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	Don't know
There is corruption in national public institutions in Hungary.	8%	14%	36%	39%	3%
There is corruption in local or regional public institutions in Hungary.	3%	19%	40%	32%	6%
Bribery and the use of connections is often the easiest way to obtain public services in Hungary.	5%	19%	44%	30%	2%
Corruption is part of the business culture in Hungary.	5%	21%	36%	33%	4%
Too-close links between business and politics in Hungary lead to corruption.	6%	14%	36%	39%	5%
In Hungary, favouritism and corruption hamper business competition.	8%	22%	38%	27%	5%
You are personally affected by corruption in your daily life.	53%	30%	15%	2%	–
There are enough successful prosecutions in Hungary to deter people from corrupt practices.	22%	28%	33%	9%	7%

n=96 respondents

Young respondents perceive the extent of corruption higher in local, regional and national-level public institutions alike, with high percentages of “totally agree” or “tend to agree” responses in both cases. They think that the easiest way to obtain certain public services is by engaging in bribery and using connections (74%)¹³.

Young people do not hold significantly more positive views of the business sector either, with more than 2/3 of the young respondents perceiving that corruption is part of the Hungarian business culture. Most respondents think that too close business and political ties easily lead to corruption.

However, a low percentage of respondents indicated that corruption affects them personally (17% “totally agree” or “tend to agree”), a result that slightly deviates from the overall Hungarian population sample (-7%). The exact reason for this cannot be deduced from the data collection. It was suggested that the age group perceives corruption as having less of an impact on their lives. This assumption could not be substantiated by the correlation test conducted only within the young group¹⁴ across the 3 age groups, as no significant relationship was found between belonging to the 15–18, 19–23, or 24–29 age groups and the perception of personal involvement¹⁵.

The Mann-Whitney test was used to explore whether there were any significant differences between the responses of the young age group (aged 15–29) and the older age group (30 years and over). The results showed no significant differences regarding the two age groups, which means that it cannot be substantiated whether young people are more or less affected by corruption on a personal level compared to the older age group¹⁶.

8.3. Contrasting views of young women and men

Responses from young women and men diverged significantly on two questions in the survey. The variable titled *“there are enough successful prosecutions in Hungary to deter people from corrupt practices”* showed moderate correlation in the gender-based distribution¹⁷. While young men significantly more often selected the *“totally agree”* option, women selected the *“tend to disagree”* option.

Furthermore, the variable titled *“the only way to succeed in business is to have political connections”* significantly depended on gender¹⁸. Young men more often selected the

¹³ ‘Totally agree’ and ‘tend to agree’ responses, collectively.

¹⁴ The young age group means in this context the 15-29 years old people.

¹⁵ Fisher’s test=0.283

¹⁶ Mann-Whitney test sig=0.116

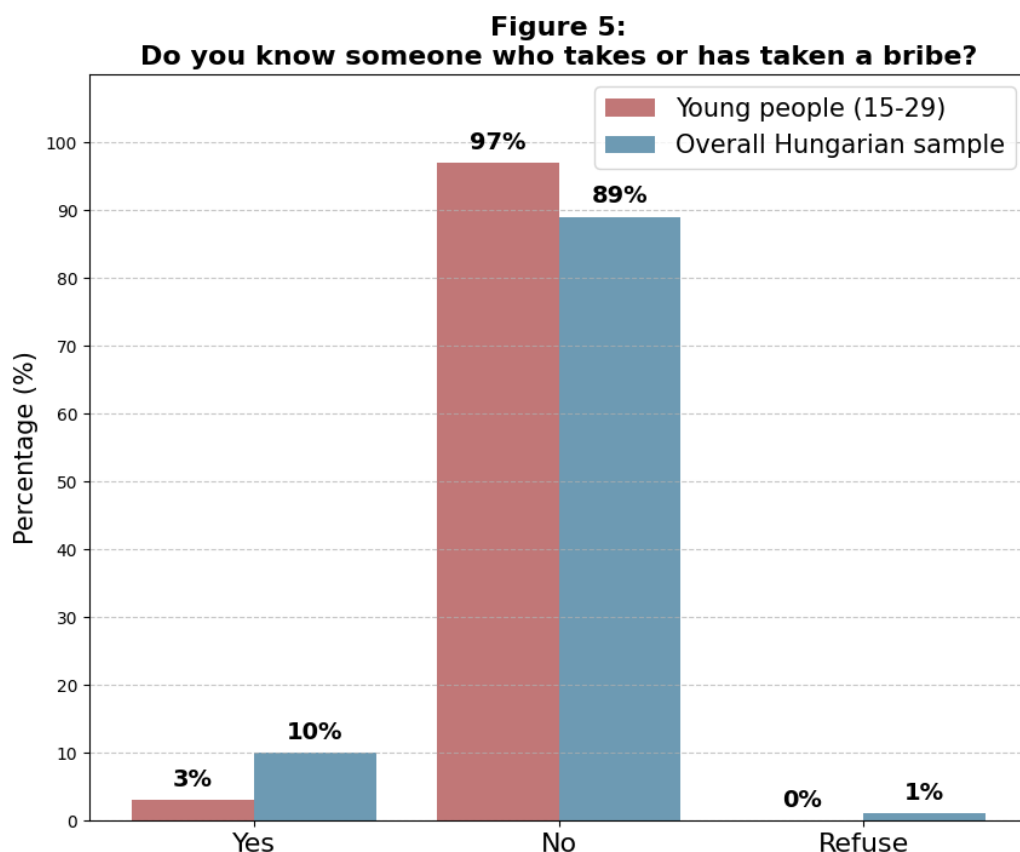
¹⁷ Chi-squared test=0.009, Fisher’s test=0.01, Cramer’s V=0.375

¹⁸ Mann-Whitney test sig=0.02 and Chi-squared test=0.042, Cramer’s V=0.321

“totally agree” option, whereas women selected the “tend to disagree” option more frequently.

8.4. Personal experiences with corruption and the reporting of corruption cases

Only a small percentage of respondents, namely 3% of them, know people who take or have taken a bribe before (Figure 5).

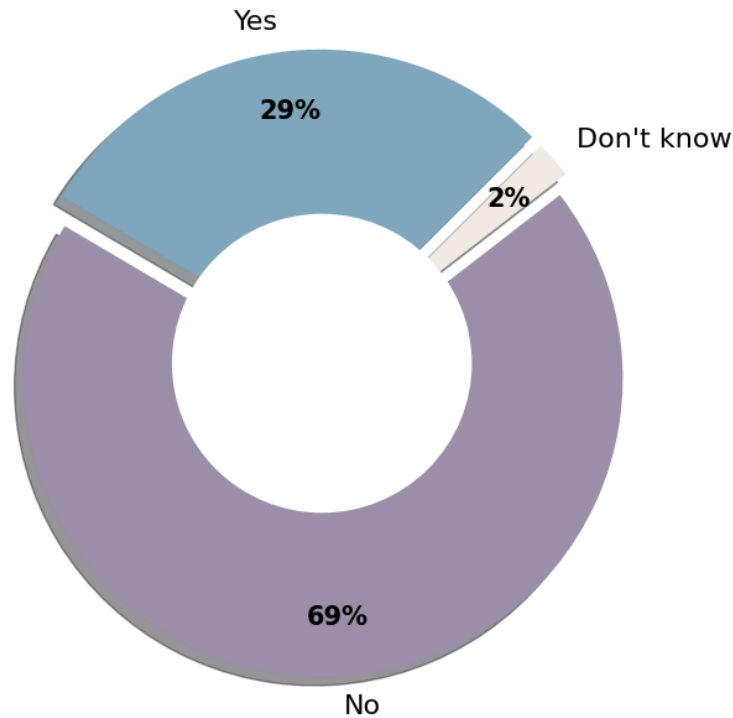


$n_{\text{young people}}=96$ respondents; $n_{\text{overall}}=1,019$ respondents

One explanation to this may be that this age group – especially its younger members, aged 15 to 18 – use only a narrower range of the various services regularly and independently. They are not necessarily involved in administration, obtaining permits, concluding contracts, business, and the broadly defined world of labour in the same form or capacity as an older citizen. 10% of the respondents indicated in the study processing the data from the overall Hungarian population that they knew such a person.

Only 29% of young people know where to turn to and report a case of suspected corruption if they experience or witness one. (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Do you know where to report if you experience or witness a suspected corruption case?



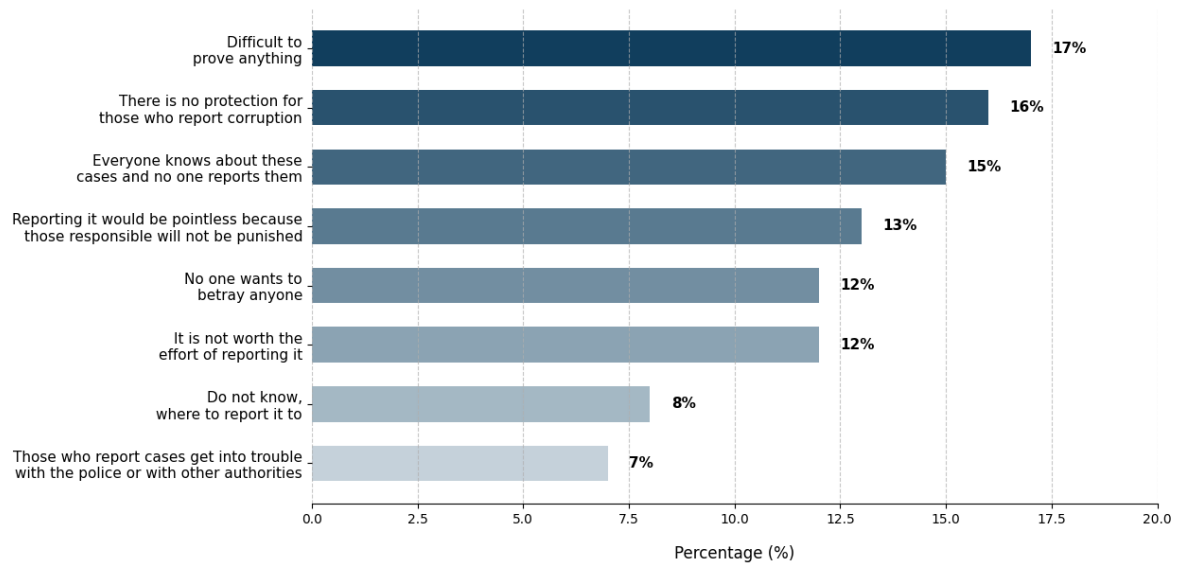
n=96 respondents

In the survey, respondents had the option to select the three most common reasons for not reporting such cases. Based on the results of the multiple-choice question, the most frequently selected reasons were the following (Figure 7):

- *"Difficult to prove anything"* (17%);
- *"There is no protection for those who report corruption"* (16%);
- *"Everyone knows about these cases and no one reports them"* (15%)¹⁹.

¹⁹ The respondents could select multiple (up to 3) answer options from the list (Nresponses=180). The frequencies given are the frequency of responses for all responses.

Figure 7:
Most important reasons as to why possible corruption cases are not reported, according to respondents.(%)



nresponses=180

Bibliography

European Comission DG HOME, Kantar (2022). *Corruption – report, Special Eurobarometer 523*, Source: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2866a500-07d4-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1/language-en#:~:text=This%20Eurobarometer%20survey%20is%20designed%20to%20explore%20the,in%202007%2C%202009%2C%202011%2C%202013%2C%202017%20and%202019.> (Downloaded on 12 February 2025)

European Comission DG HOME (2024). *Cizizens' attitudes towards corruption in the EU 2024 – Eurobarometer report, Special Eurobarometer 548*, Source: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3217?etrans=sv> (Downloaded on 12 February 2025)

European Union (2025). *About Eurobarometer*, Source: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/about/eurobarometer> (Downloaded on 12 February 2025))