

POLITICAL INTEGRITY DATA SCOPING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

INTEGRITY WATCH WESTERN BALKANS &

~~TURKEY~~

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Political Integrity Data Scoping in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) faces significant challenges in terms of corruption and political integrity. Following the latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) Bosnia and Herzegovina (34) has the lowest score in the Western Balkans region and is significantly declining in the degree of perception of corruption, losing eight CPI points since 2012. Increasingly pronounced political divisions along ethnic lines continue to hinder democratic institutions necessary for governing the country and fighting corruption.

In terms of the legal framework for political integrity open data, BiH has made some efforts on certain levels to establish regulations and institutions to address corruption. For example, the “Canton Sarajevo Anti-Corruption and Quality Control Office” established various datasets (“AnticorruptiKS”) regarding publication of information of public interest, in order to increase transparency in Sarajevo Canton. Datasets cover areas of public procurement, asset declarations, public officials, employees, public transfers, etc. Anti-Corruption Team of Central Bosnia Canton followed by publishing registers of employees in Central Bosnia Canton. Furthermore, Sarajevo Canton adopted Law on Prevention and Suppression of Corruption in Sarajevo Canton. However, the governmental system of BiH often hampers the need for uniformed legal framework.

While there are provisions for access to information, the right to information framework faces challenges in practice, especially when it comes to timely and efficient information delivery. The extent of disclosure by default varies across the datasets assessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Public procurement data tends to be more accessible, with a higher level of publicly available information and timely updates. On the other hand, asset declarations and political finance data may have more limited public disclosure, leading to challenges in obtaining comprehensive and up-to-date information.

A centralized government data portal in BiH is available to a limited extent. Certain data portals are centralized, but majority of the datasets are decentralized, non-uniform, fragmented and non-interoperable. A centralized and user-friendly data portal would greatly facilitate access to political integrity data, enabling citizens and stakeholders to monitor and hold public officials accountable.

Institutions responsible for collecting and verifying political integrity data in BiH are not centralized. They face challenges in terms of mandate, resources, and independence. The capacity and effectiveness of these institutions vary, and their ability to collect and analyse comprehensive data is limited. Strengthening their mandate, providing adequate resources, and ensuring their independence are crucial steps in enhancing data collection and verification processes.

Regarding current trends, certain institutions have shown will to advance the open data agenda, recognizing the importance of transparency and accountability in combating corruption. For example, Public Procurement Agency has started upgrading the e-Procurement system, which also includes the access to public procurement data and is expected to be operating in 2023. However, further progress is needed to convert political commitments into tangible outcomes and establish a culture of openness and integrity.

LIST OF DATASETS ASSESSED

This report builds on the assessment of datasets relevant to political integrity, particularly with regards to developing risk indicators and promoting transparency in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to specificities of Bosnia and Herzegovina's governance system, there are separate datasets of varying quality and availability for different levels of government in the cases of company registers, directories of public officials, government budget and spending, voting records and land registries. Hence, our assessment focuses on datasets that are available at the national level and are crucial tools for detecting political corruption.

Assets and interests of public officials shed light on the financial holdings and potential conflicts of interest among elected public officials. By matching this data with other relevant datasets, such as public procurement or political party financing data, identification of risk factors concerning conflict of interest and abuse of public resources will be easily achievable.

Political party financing plays a crucial role in tracking the flow of funds within the political sphere. It enables the identification of potential risks related to political contributions, campaign financing and undue influence, promoting transparency in the electoral process.

Public procurement data plays a crucial role in fighting corruption and promoting fair competition as it enables the examination of potential irregularities in public fund allocation, facilitates, detection of money flow and development of risk indicators, and when combined with datasets on public officials' assets and interests, it allows for the assessment of corruption risks between politically connected companies and non-politicized firms in public procurement contracts.

Indicative list of data sources
D2 – Asset and interests of public officials: containing the key assets and interests of public officials above a certain level of seniority (and in some cases their families)
D3 – Political financing: containing data on the financial contributions received by a politician, a political party, their committees and third parties during a period of time.
D7 – Public procurement: containing details of the contracts issued by the national or federal government, including contract award data, not just requests for bids

ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The chosen data sources, namely assets and interests of public officials, political financing and public procurement, have undergone a comprehensive assessment to evaluate their transparency and availability. This assessment considered various indicators, presented in the Table below. Among these data sources, the datasets related to public procurement have shown the most promising results.

However, the assessment revealed some shortcomings in this and other two registers: the assets and interests of public official's registry, as well as the political financing data. These datasets received scores of 8.5 points respectively. While these registries do exist, they are not published in machine-readable format by governmental institutions, which can hinder transparency and accessibility. Additionally, a common issue across the majority of the registries is the lack of higher level of interoperability, making it difficult to integrate and analyse the data effectively. Furthermore, there is a lack of clear accompanying documentation for the published datasets provided by the government, which can limit the understanding and usability of the data.

Overall, while there are areas of strength in terms of transparency and availability of data, there is room for improvement in terms of publishing the datasets in machine-readable formats, ensuring interoperability, and providing comprehensive documentation. Addressing these areas will enhance the overall transparency and usability of the data sources, ultimately supporting evidence-based, decision-making and risk assessment processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Improve Publication by Governmental Institutions:** Enhance transparency and accessibility by encouraging governmental institutions to publish currently unavailable public data at all levels, such as company registers, lobby meetings, land registers and similar. Making these datasets publicly available will foster greater accountability and trust.
2. **Enhance Interoperability:** Address the lack of interoperability across the majority of registries by implementing standardized data formats and structures. This will enable seamless integration and analysis of the data from different sources, facilitating more comprehensive insights and decision-making. For example, private enterprises winning tenders can be connected to the legal entities that are financing political parties by using a unique code for each private company. Furthermore, connecting beneficial ownership information with public procurement data can help identify potential conflicts of interest and prevent companies with hidden ownership from participating in governmental contracts.
3. **Develop Clear Accompanying Documentation:** Governmental institutions should provide comprehensive documentation for the published datasets. This documentation should include clear explanations of data fields, definitions, and any relevant context. This will help users understand and interpret the data accurately, increasing its usability and value. For example, publication of public procurement contracts and information about payments on online public procurement portal would enable higher level of transparency and accuracy of information.
4. **Regularly Update Data Sources:** Ensure the timely and regular update of all data sources to maintain their relevance and usefulness. Outdated information can hinder effective decision-making and risk assessment processes. Establish mechanisms for frequent data updates and clear responsibilities for data maintenance.
5. **Foster Collaboration and Data Sharing:** Encourage collaboration between governmental institutions and other relevant stakeholders to promote data sharing. This can include sharing data between different registries, collaborating with external organizations, or leveraging existing partnerships to enhance the quality and availability of data.
6. **Strengthen Metadata Standards:** Implement standardized metadata practices across all datasets. This will improve the discoverability and understanding of the data, making it easier for users to identify relevant information and explore the datasets effectively. By implementing standardized metadata practices, the government can attach consistent and descriptive information to each dataset, such as data source, date of collection, data format, and key variables.
7. **Promote Open Data Initiatives:** Advocate for open data principles and encourage the release of datasets under open licenses. Open data initiatives can enhance transparency, innovation, and public participation by allowing individuals and organizations to freely access, use, and share the data for various purposes.
8. **Engage with Data Users and Stakeholders:** Establish channels for feedback and engagement with data users and stakeholders. Regularly seek inputs and insights from the data source users to understand their needs and identify areas for improvement. This collaborative approach can help tailor the data sources to better serve the requirements of the users. For example, databases developed by Transparency International in Bosnia and Herzegovina always enable the option to report on findings and offer recommendations.

Endnotes