

Executive summary

Similar to other countries in the region and around the world, citizens in Ecuador consider corruption as one of the most crucial challenges of the country and their trust in government has almost halved between 2009 and 2018 according to the results of the Latinobarómetro surveys. Promoting integrity in the public sector is a necessary condition for responding to corruption and reversing this decline of trust. Currently, however, the institutional responsibilities for promoting integrity in Ecuador are fragmented and not clearly assigned. Furthermore, no mechanisms are in place to co-operate and define common goals and actions among institutions, resulting in a lack of a comprehensive strategy and vision to effectively address corruption. Rather than mainstreaming a preventive approach throughout the public sector, existing policies mostly focus on sanctioning corruption and do not address underlying systemic challenges.

Key findings

In Ecuador, integrity-related responsibilities are assigned to various institutions belonging to the five branches – or functions (*funciones*) – of the state. While some co-operation mechanisms are in place among institutions within the same branch and others have been developed among institutions from different branches on enforcement, there are currently no formal or informal arrangements that enable comprehensive co-operation on corruption prevention by bringing together all relevant actors and allowing a dialogue with civil society.

Ecuador has defined some integrity-related objectives in the National Development Plan 2017-2021 and has developed the Public Integrity and Anti-corruption Plan 2019-2023. However, neither plan has brought Ecuador closer to a strategic, comprehensive approach to integrity. The former could not achieve its integrity objectives because it was not accompanied by continuous follow-up activities and monitoring of progress. While identifying some key areas for public integrity, the latter lacks ownership and commitment outside the Transparency and Social Control branch, which developed the Plan. Therefore, its uptake remains limited, especially from the executive branch.

The fragmented institutional context has also hampered the development of an integrity system within the executive branch, where leadership for the integrity and anti-corruption agenda has been passed from one secretariat to another over the last few years. Most recently, the Anti-corruption Secretariat created in 2019 was dissolved a year later without any formal handover of its competences and responsibilities to any other institution. In addition to a lack of institutional leadership and continuity on public integrity, the role of other key integrity actors is undervalued, especially that of the Ministry of Labour. Indeed, this ministry is responsible for a broad range of relevant policy areas, including meritocracy, professionalisation, capacity building, organisational culture, change management, control of the public service and disciplinary enforcement.

Furthermore, laws and policies supporting public integrity at the organisational level, such as managing conflict of interest, whistleblowing or integrity risk-management, are unevenly implemented in the executive branch and do not follow a preventive approach aimed at building organisational cultures of integrity.

Key recommendations

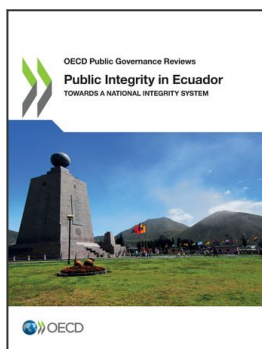
Considering the institutional set-up of the country and experience in other policy areas, Ecuador could establish a National Integrity and Anti-corruption System, led by the President of the Republic and bringing together relevant institutions from all branches of the state and sub-national entities. This mechanism should enable continuous co-operation and ensure the ownership of all actors in the design and implementation of integrity and anti-corruption policies. Learning from past experiences, this system should build on a dialogue phase among all relevant actors, including civil society and the private sector, which would ensure its legitimacy as well as the ownership and commitment of all institutions. Ecuador could take the opportunity to include the development of such a system as one of the priority objectives on public integrity in the National Development Plan 2021-2025.

The National Development Plan 2021-2025 could also define a roadmap leading towards a National Integrity and Anti-corruption Strategy for the 2023-2026 term. This roadmap could include two sequenced steps: first, drafting an Action Plan to implement some key priority actions of the current Public Integrity and Anti-corruption Plan 2019-2023; and, second, developing the new Strategy for the 2023-2026 term following a participative and inclusive co-creation methodology. The recommended National Integrity and Anti-corruption System should lead these efforts to ensure participation, contribution and ownership of all relevant actors in its design and implementation.

In addition, Ecuador could consider the development of a long-term state policy on integrity and anti-corruption to fulfil the constitutional anti-corruption duties of the state as well as to contribute to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal no. 16 and other integrity and anti-corruption international commitments. This long-term policy would provide a public integrity vision for Ecuador and further address the challenges of institutionalisation, continuity and sustainability of the current integrity and anti-corruption policies.

Finally, Ecuador could define clear integrity responsibilities within the executive branch by leveraging the roles and strengths of the existing institutional context. First, the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic could be responsible for leading and co-ordinating the integrity agenda across the executive and for advising the President of the Republic on public integrity and corruption prevention issues. Given the leading role envisaged for the President as head of the National Integrity and Anti-corruption System, this would allow to ensure the coherence between the strategy set at the national level for all state's branches and the initiatives taken within the executive branch. The mandate of the General Secretariat of the Presidency should be limited to integrity and corruption prevention only, and not include any tasks related to detection or investigation of possible corruption cases.

At the same time, Ecuador could enhance the role of the Ministry of Labour by assigning it a clear mandate to promote, support and mainstream a culture of public integrity within all the public institutions and entities of the executive branch. Indeed, the Ministry of Labour co-ordinates the human resources units as well as the organisational change and culture units of all public entities. It also manages integrity-related policies such as the code of ethics, conflict of interest, organisational culture, change management, training and disciplinary enforcement. In this context, the organisational change and culture units, whose functions include improving the organisational culture at the entity level, could lead the promotion of a culture of integrity in co-ordination and coherence with the work of the existing Ethics and Anti-corruption Committees, which could maintain their focus on detecting and assessing integrity breaches.



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