Research plan

I. **Research title:** Research Study on Youth Perspectives on Integrity and Corruption to Support the Educational Initiatives of the Integrity Academy

II. **Research objective:**

This research study aims to evaluate the knowledge of Hungarian youth aged 15–29 on integrity, attitudes towards and perceptions of corruption, and experiences with anti-corruption efforts. It also seeks to gather their opinions on the effective use of European Union funds. By examining these topics, the study will inform the precise planning of training content, ensuring a solid foundation for successful education. Additionally, the study aims to establish a stable, methodologically sound research framework that will provide long-term data. Another goal is to collect feedback from the target group on the preferred format and frequency of training, as well as insights on effective short communications and awareness campaigns related to the study's topics.

III. **Research rationale, brief literature overview:**

1. **Rationale for the research:**

The core activities of the Integrity Authority are governed by Act XXVII of 2022 on the control of the use of European Union budget funds ('Integrity Authority Act'). The Integrity Academy ('Academy'), a newly established unit within the Integrity Authority, is dedicated to providing comprehensive educational content on integrity, corruption prevention and detection, integrity development, and anti-corruption efforts. These educational initiatives target various segments of Hungarian society, thereby supporting prevention as one of the most effective strategies in combating corruption.

Prior to developing the educational content and launching training courses, it is imperative to conduct foundational research and surveys to accurately target and tailor the thematic and

training materials. Understanding the target group's knowledge, opinions, insights, and expectations is essential to ensure the effectiveness of the training workshops and campaigns. Following the foundational research and training, it is recommended to evaluate their usefulness and impact through post-measurements.

By offering training, raising awareness, and conducting research studies, the Academy aims to adopt a preventive and proactive role. This approach will, in the long term, foster the development and maintenance of integrity and corruption-averse behaviour among various social groups. The data collected during the research will not only form the basis for effective training programs but will also support the Integrity Authority's integrity risk assessments and contribute to its analytical reports, thereby underpinning and enhancing the findings presented therein.

2. A brief literature review of the topic:

Many research studies on the subject highlight that the phenomenon of corruption is as old as humanity itself. The study and measurement of corruption present various challenges, and these difficulties extend to the specific demographic of young people as well. (Tanzi, 1998; Graycar & Smith, 2011; Uslaner & Rothstein, 2016; Kuru, 2023). In general, and specifically concerning youth, corruption lacks a universally accepted definition (Kó, 2021; Fenyvesi, 2014). It manifests in a latent form (Kikalishvili, 2023; Corrado et al., 2023; Gnaldi & Del Sarto, 2024) and cannot be directly measured using conventional instruments (Bello y Villarino, 2021; Gnaldi & Del Sarto, 2024). Consequently, many measurement efforts rely on perception and attitude surveys, although statistical data and proxy indicators—whose popularity has grown within the scientific community in recent years—are also utilized. Each measurement approach presents distinct advantages and disadvantages, which must be taken into account to select the most suitable methodology for data collection after formulating the research questions.

Regarding the younger generation, it can be stated that they are similarly exposed to corruption as the broader society (UN, 2021). In fact, this demographic is equally or, in some instances, even more affected by corruption, particularly within the educational sector. The vulnerability of young people is further underscored by the significant negative impacts that ongoing corrupt activities can have on the long-term success of current investment projects

aimed at enhancing public services (UN, 2021; Bergin, 2024). Some young individuals have been socialized to view corruption and various corrupt practices as acceptable and routine. Nonetheless, a growing body of evidence indicates that targeted education can reduce the acceptance of corruption, improve the identification of corrupt activities, and bolster the commitment to integrity (Bergin, 2024). Education is recognized as a critical factor that can have a long-term impact on a country's level of corruption (Goldin & Katz, 1998; Uslaner & Rothstein, 2016:228). It is crucial to promote the concept of integrity among today's youth and encourage them to integrate this concept into their daily actions, as they will become the leaders of the near future. Some researchers argue that individual-level changes can lead to long-term social transformation (Leonard, 2013). Education and training are regarded as essential tools for primary prevention among young people.

Looking at previous national research studies done on this topic in Hungary, a survey involving 1,000 people was commissioned by Transparency International in 2012, specifically targeting young people's perception of corruption (Transparency International (Székely, Lakatos, Molnár, 2012)). In 2016, a new cross-sectional study with a sample of 500 participants was conducted on young people's perception of corruption and their media consumption habits by the same NGO in collaboration with Corvinus University of Budapest (Bokor, 2016). Then, in 2018, a corruption study specifically focusing on Hungarian higher education was conducted with a sample of also 500 participants. Apart from the above-mentioned data collections, we have not identified any other independent research study in Hungary specifically targeting this issue and target group.

Highlighting the sub-sample of the 16–29 age group from the Eurobarometer[1] survey conducted in the European Union, researchers have found that there are notable—and in many cases significant—differences across geographic regions (Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe) in the perception and attitudes towards corruption, as well as in the fight against corruption (Toleikiené et al, 2024). Researchers have included the questions aimed at mapping perceptions, attitudes and behaviours into the conceptual framework of the fight against corruption. According to time-series data, the most significant positive changes have been observed in Southern Europe, while Western and

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[1] Special Eurobarometer on Corruption

Northern Europe consistently demonstrate positive results across various measurement points. In contrast, Central and Eastern Europe rank lowest in terms of intolerance to corruption, exhibiting high levels of corruption, low intolerance, and a low willingness to report corrupt activities (Toleikiené et al., 2024). In this region, young people perceive corruption as highly prevalent. Despite the prevailing low levels of intolerance, the study suggests that the youth in Central and Eastern Europe might possess the greatest potential to leverage this currently untapped opportunity and enhance anti-corruption efforts within their age group (Toleikiené et al., 2024). Internationally, the initiatives undertaken by Far Eastern countries, including Indonesia and Hong Kong, in developing training programs focused on anti-corruption and integrity for young people are noteworthy. Additionally, the efforts of supranational organizations and their projects, such as the UNODC-GRACE project, are also commendable.

IV.   Expected added value of the research:

- **Getting in-depth insights into the attitudes, knowledge, personal experiences, and training needs of the younger generation concerning integrity and corruption.**
- **Enhancing the focus and effectiveness of training programs by integrating the gathered insights into educational curricula, thereby bolstering the integrity of young people, supporting their anti-corruption attitudes, and improving their ability to identify and report corruption.**
- **Identifying intervention points and developing potential responses through future programs of the Integrity Academy, which may include policy recommendations for fostering early and effective social attitude development.**
- **Investigating the perspectives of the target group regarding the use of EU budgetary funds and its connection to integrity risk factors.**

In line with the research objectives, obtaining detailed insights into how a specific population group perceives integrity and corruption, along with their related experiences and viewpoints, represents a valuable contribution. The younger generation is anticipated to possess the greatest potential to impact future corruption dynamics. Consequently, accurately understanding their perspectives and experiences regarding integrity and corruption, as well as their ability to identify corrupt practices, is crucial for designing a training program that empowers and equips them with the necessary skills.

Insights from previous surveys indicate that the younger generation often has a limited understanding of corruption, highlighting the importance of addressing these knowledge gaps when designing training programs (Abraham & Pradipto, 2016; Steklova & Steklov, 2018; Mengzhen et al., 2021). The international literature further supports the notion that combating corruption extends beyond legal reforms and institutional changes. A critical aspect of this effort involves cultivating and sustaining a societal intolerance towards corruption, particularly among young people (Toleikiené, 2020; Mengzhen et al., 2021; Fatyhah et al., 2022).

V.   Research questions:

- **To what extent are Hungarian youth familiar with the concept of integrity, what meanings do they associate with it, and how much of a priority is it for them to practice it in different fields of their daily lives e.g.: personal life, education, community, public services?**
- **Do young people have any practical experiences with corruption[2] in different fields of everyday life? If so, what types of experiences do they have, and what prevention and intervention strategies do younger generation perceive and feel as effective for reducing corruption (existing and potential future practices)?**
- **How comprehensive or superficial is their knowledge and understanding of integrity and corruption, and what are their main sources of information?**
- **What is their opinion about the effect of integrity and corruption to the whole society and their own life?**
- **What are their attitudes towards both international and domestic corruption, and how do they perceive the effectiveness and prudent use of national and international funds?**
- **In what areas related to integrity and corruption do young people feel they could benefit from more relevant knowledge? What forms of awareness-raising campaigns and knowledge-sharing are they most receptive to?**

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[2] Under corruption we try to catch different corrupt practices e.g.: bribery, gifting, favoritism, nepotism, fraud, embezzlment, kickbacks etc.

VI. Definition of research concepts (conceptualisation):

In research, it is essential to clearly define the key concepts being used to ensure clarity regarding the context and meaning ascribed to them by both the researcher and the participants. Without proper conceptualization, it becomes exceedingly difficult to make comparisons or draw parallels with other data sets at later stages, as the exact meaning of the terms used in a study would remain ambiguous. The definitions applied in this research are as follows:

Youth: For the purposes of this survey, this term specifically refers to individuals aged 15–29 residing in Hungary.

Integrity/behavioural integrity[3]: The definitions of integrity and behavioural integrity vary across scientific fields, such as law, psychology, and public administration. However, for this research, we adopt the definition provided by the Integrity Authority: "The unity of thought, word, and action. Acting in line with professed and declared values."

Corruption: While numerous definitions exist, this research employs a broadly interpreted definition for data collection, processing, and analysis:

Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain[4] which harms the public interest, typically breaching laws, regulations, and/or integrity standards (Dobson Phillips et al., 2021). Corruption can occur anywhere: in business, media, government, courts, civil society, and in all sectors, from health to education, etc. Corruption can affect anyone. In most cases

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[3] An earlier definition captures the concept as follows: "Integrity means value-driven behaviour. In private life, someone is said to have integrity if he or she has a conscious and consistent set of values and their decisions and actions are guided by these values" (Pallai, 2012).

[4] It is important to note that while the work definition quoted verbatim and used here focuses on private gain, the question arises whether, in the long term, consideration should be given to whether the corrupt use of power for public gain could also appear, and whether these two interests can be clearly separated.

corruption occurs covertly, adapting to different contexts and changing circumstances (Transparency International, 2024).

The first part of the definition we use is taken from a study on the definition of corruption in 2021, revised in 2023 (Dobson Phillips et al., 2021), and from Transparency International's comprehensive definition of corruption and the potential of its occurrence (Transparency International, 2024).

Perception-based research: Although in many literatures perception-based research is classified as research that involves composite indicators, such as the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) or the Control of Corruption Indicator (CoC), in this survey we use the term perception-based research to refer to large sample, representative (at least by gender, age group and level of education) surveys based on probability sampling, involving the general population.

VII. Research methodology and measurement tools (operationalisation):

The data collection for this research will follow a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Mixed-methods research seeks to combine the richness and exploratory nature of qualitative approaches, with the precision and quantifiability of quantitative techniques (Hesse-Biber, 2010:3). Mixed-methods research is distinct in terms of type, and two approaches will be applied in this research: an "exploratory sequential" approach and an "explanatory sequential" approach.

Given the limited data collection on integrity and corruption within the target group in Hungary, the research will begin with a qualitative phase involving focus group interviews (pre-survey focus group phase) to design the most reliable measurement instrument. This phase aims to understand the target group's views and perceptions, evaluate how questions on various topics are received, identify potential effects, determine which sub-topics require further exploration, and refine question formulation for accurate responses. The primary objective of this phase is to provide a solid foundation for developing the measurement tool. In mixed-methods research, this is known as the "exploratory sequential" design, where a qualitative method is followed by a quantitative questionnaire. "This approach is typically used when no measurement tool or procedure has been applied to quantitatively study the

phenomenon, or when there are no quantitatively assessable criteria available for effective research on the phenomenon" (Király et al., 2013).

The second phase of data collection involves a questionnaire survey designed based on the insights gained from the initial focus group interviews. This is followed by a concluding phase of focus group interviews (post-survey focus group phase), which will include more participants than the first round. During this phase, the "explanatory sequential" designof mixed-methods will be employed. The two methodologies are interlinked: the quantitative findings inform the development of the subsequent qualitative phase, while the final qualitative results can enhance the interpretation of the quantitative data by providing additional context and meanings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Király et al., 2013).

Thus, the research will involve a complex design combining three phases of data collection, maintaining a close interconnection between each step. The complex methodology aims to facilitate the presentation of reliable and valid data-driven findings on the sensitive topics of integrity and corruption, as examined among young people.

VIII. Sampling method used in the research:

The sampling strategy for the survey, outlined across the three phases of data collection, is as follows:

- For the pre-survey focus groups, we plan to conduct 5-7 interviews, ensuring diverse group compositions in terms of gender, age, education level, region/county, and type of municipality, where feasible. This approach aims to create a sufficiently heterogeneous sample, allowing the incorporation of opinions from young people with varying socio-demographic backgrounds into the questionnaire design.
- The quantitative data collection will involve a probability sample of at least 1,000 respondents[5], representative of young people (ages 15–29) by gender, age group, region/county, and type of municipality. Ensuring true randomness in the probability

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[5] The sample to be analysed must include responses from at least 1,000 respondents

sample is crucial, so that every individual in the targeted age group has an equal chance of selection. A hybrid data collection technique will be employed, reaching part of the group online and the rest through personal outreach. This approach addresses the misconception that the entire youth population can be easily accessed online, given their high internet usage. However, considering the Hungarian context, it is clear that while many young people can be reached online, the youth population (like the broader population) is highly segmented by factors such as family income, which may limit access to opportunities or services. The research prioritizes true representativeness, aiming to capture the views of all relevant groups.

- In the post-survey phase, we plan to conduct a slightly larger number of focus groups (10–13 interviews) compared to the pre-survey phase, to further explore and interpret the data after processing the survey results. It is important to apply the same sampling principles as in the pre-survey focus group phase.

Special attention must be given to the specific characteristics of the target group when planning the timing of all three sampling phases. A significant portion of this age group is either unavailable or difficult to reach during the summer months, so data collection timing should be adjusted accordingly.

IX. Research timeline:

Q4 2024	- Preparation of project plan - Preparation of the theoretical foundation for the research - Preparation of research plan - Establishing contact with relevant experts and involving them in the preparatory phase - Establishing preliminary contact and, if possible, signing contracts with data collection companies - Starting working group discussions with the experts and data collection company/companies involved
Q1 2025	Continuing working group discussions with experts involved

	• Developing a template for the (pre-data collection) focus group interviews that will form the basis of the questionnaire • Conducting (pre-data collection) focus group interviews to form the basis of the questionnaire • Analysis of the (pre-data collection) focus group interviews forming the basis of the questionnaire • Selection of questionnaire(s) related to our own questionnaire • If necessary, validation and optimisation of questionnaire(s) • Compilation and finalisation of own questionnaire
Q2 2025	• Conducting questionnaire-based data collection • Analysis of questionnaire results • Compilation of an interview guide for the (post data collection) focus group interviews based on the results of the questionnaire • Designing the sample for the (post data collection) focus group interviews
Q3 2025	• Conduction of (post data collection) focus group interviews • Processing the results of the (post data collection) focus group interviews • Compilation of a research report (which will include the results of the questionnaire data collection and the focus group interviews, and complementary/substantiating data from both data collections) • Dissemination of results
Q4 2025	• Dissemination of results

X.   Planned dissemination:

The results of the research are crucial for the development of the Integrity Academy's educational content, so the knowledge gained will be disseminated and utilised partly through the development of training materials. In addition, the results will be disseminated through various platforms, through press releases of the Integrity Academy as a brand, short articles, and in a thematic volume. Since one of our objectives during the research preparation phase is to ensure that data is collected and processed in a scientifically rigorous manner, the findings will also be presented at domestic and international academic conferences and published in scientific journals to reach the widest possible audience. The research is linked to the core activities of the Integrity Authority, and its scientifically valuable results will be included in reports prepared by the Authority, supporting and complementing them.

XI.   Bibliography

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