

Bribery 'hits 1.6 billion people a year'

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A total of 1.6 billion people worldwide – nearly a quarter of the global population – are forced to pay bribes to gain access to everyday public services, according to a new book by academics at the Universities of Birmingham and Strathclyde.

The bribes are paid for healthcare and education, to obtain permits, or after being stopped by police.

The evidence on grassroots corruption comes from surveys interviewing more than 250,000 people in 119 countries in Africa, Asia, the European Union, former Communist European nations, Latin America and the Anglo-American world. The surveys identify important differences in the extent of [bribery](#) between countries, between public services and between individuals.

The book has been written by Professor Richard Rose of Strathclyde and Dr Caryn Peiffer of Birmingham. Their research is funded by a grant from the UK Economic and Social Research Council.

Dr Peiffer, a post-doctoral research fellow in the Developmental Leadership Programme at Birmingham, said: 'Within each continent there is a wide range of bribery rates. The range is largest in Africa, with 63% of people from Sierra Leone reporting paying a bribe and only 4% in Botswana doing so. That 4% is significant, as 5% of the British public has paid a bribe in the last year. Within Europe the range begins at less than 1% bribery in a few Scandinavian countries and 29% bribery in Lithuania.'

From a global perspective, Europe has exceptionally low rates of bribery, with only 4% on average making such payments. By contrast, the average is 22% in Latin America and 29% in the 30 African countries surveyed.

In each country, those paying a bribe are usually in a minority of the population. One reason is that most people do not have regular contact with every public service and, in the case of the police and courts, do not wish to do so. However, after controlling for the effect of low contact with police and courts, the percentage paying bribes for their services is higher.

Professor Rose, professor of politics at Strathclyde, said: 'The European contribution to global corruption is in the bribes that multi-national corporations pay to political elites to obtain "big bucks" contracts for such things as building dams or supplying military aircraft.

'While most people receive the health care to which they are entitled, because the number using health services is so large, an estimated 10% of the global population pays a bribe for health care each year.

'Some public officials like to blame their citizens for being ready and willing to pay bribes, as part of a so-called "moral economy" of corruption, in which everybody sees services as corrupt and therefore takes payment of a bribe as a part of everyday life.

'However, survey data shows this is not the case. The great majority of people in every country think that bribery is wrong. They pay bribes because the alternative is doing without health care or a better education for their children.'

The use of public services varies throughout life. Parents of school-age children are most likely to be in contact with education officials, while

older people, especially widows, are most likely to need health care, and young men are most likely to have contact with the police.

Dr Peiffer said: 'Our evidence points to six principles that governments could follow to reduce bribery. These include mainly technical fixes that should reduce the incentives of bureaucrats to demand bribes. It is equally acknowledged, however, that in order to enact technical reforms, the political will on the ground has to be fully supportive. Without getting the technical fix and politics right, efforts to reduce bribery will fail.'

The spread of public services across the life cycle means that at some point in their lives, everybody is at risk of being affected by bribery.

The book, *Paying Bribes for Public Services: A Global Guide to Grass-Roots Corruption*, is published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Provided by University of Birmingham

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