Drawing on internationally accepted criteria developed by multilateral organizations, the Open Budget Survey uses 109 equally weighted indicators to measure budget transparency. These indicators assess whether the central government makes eight key budget documents available to the public online in a timely manner and whether these documents present budget information in a comprehensive and useful way.

Each country receives a composite score (out of 100) that determines its ranking on the Open Budget Index – the world’s only independent and comparative measure of budget transparency.

How has the OBI score for South Korea changed over time?

How comprehensive and useful is the information provided in the key budget documents that South Korea publishes?

Public availability of budget documents from 2008 to 2017

South Korea’s score of 60 out of 100 is substantially higher than the global average score of 42.
South Korea’s score of 60 on the 2017 Open Budget Index is largely the same as its score in 2015.

Since 2015, South Korea has failed to make progress in the following ways:
- Not producing a Mid-Year Review.
- Publishing a Pre-Budget Statement that only contains minimal budget information.

Transparency alone is insufficient for improving governance. Public participation in budgeting is vital to realize the positive outcomes associated with greater budget transparency.

To measure public participation, the Open Budget Survey assesses the degree to which the government provides opportunities for the public to engage in budget processes. Such opportunities should be provided throughout the budget cycle by the executive, the legislature, and the supreme audit institution.

The questions assessing participation in the Open Budget Survey 2017 were revised to align them with the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency’s new principles on public participation, which now serve as the basis for widely accepted norms on public participation in national budget processes. Therefore, data on the extent of public participation in budgeting in the Open Budget Survey 2017 cannot be compared directly to data from earlier editions.

How does public participation in South Korea compare to other countries in the region?

South Korea’s score of 39 out of 100 indicates that it provides few opportunities for the public to engage in the budget process. This is higher than the global average score of 12.

To what extent do different institutions in South Korea provide opportunities for public participation?
The Open Budget Survey examines the role that legislatures, supreme audit institutions, and independent fiscal institutions play in the budget process and the extent to which they are able to provide effective oversight of the budget. These institutions play a critical role — often enshrined in national constitutions or laws — in planning budgets and overseeing their implementation.

These indicators were revised to better assess the role of formal oversight institutions in ensuring integrity and accountability in the use of public resources. Therefore, data on the role and effectiveness of oversight institutions in the Open Budget Survey 2017 should not be compared directly to data from earlier editions.

To what extent does the legislature in South Korea provide budget oversight?

The legislature provides adequate oversight during the budget cycle. This score reflects that the legislature provides adequate oversight during the planning stage of the budget cycle and adequate oversight during the implementation stage of the budget cycle.

Oversight by an Independent Fiscal Institution

South Korea’s independent fiscal institution (IFI) is called the National Assembly Budget Office. Its independence is set in law, and it reports to the legislature. It publishes its own macroeconomic forecasts and its own cost estimates of all new policy proposals.

While IFIs are not yet widespread globally, they are increasingly recognized as an important source of independent, nonpartisan information. IFIs take a variety of different institutional forms. Common examples include parliamentary budget offices and fiscal councils. For more information, see Lisa von Trapp, Ian Lienert, and Joachim Wehner, "Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions and Case Studies," OECD Journal on Budgeting, March 2016 (special issue), pp. 9-24.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For more detailed information on the survey findings for South Korea, please see the Open Budget Survey Data Explorer at survey.internationalbudget.org.

How can South Korea improve transparency?

South Korea should prioritize the following actions to improve budget transparency:

- Produce and publish a Mid-Year Review.

- Increase the information provided in the Pre-Budget Statement with additional information on the macroeconomic forecast and estimates of government borrowing and debt.

To what extent does the supreme audit institution in South Korea provide budget oversight?

The supreme audit institution provides adequate budget oversight.

- Under the law, it has full discretion to undertake audits as it sees fit.
- Moreover, the head of the institution is appointed by the legislature or judiciary and cannot be removed without legislative or judicial approval, which bolsters its independence.
- Finally, the supreme audit institution is provided with sufficient resources to fulfill its mandate, but its audit processes are not reviewed by an independent agency.
How can South Korea improve participation?
South Korea should prioritize the following actions to improve public participation in its budget process:

■ Pilot mechanisms for members of the public and executive branch officials to exchange views on national budget matters during the formulation of the national budget. These mechanisms could build on innovations, such as participatory budgeting and social audits. For examples of such mechanisms, see www.fiscaltransparency.net/mechanisms/.

■ Hold legislative hearings on the formulation of the annual budget, during which members of the public or civil society organizations can testify.

How can South Korea improve oversight?
South Korea should prioritize the following actions to make budget oversight more effective:

■ Ensure the legislature holds a debate on budget policy prior to the tabling of the Executive’s Budget Proposal and approves recommendations for the upcoming budget.

■ Ensure audit processes are reviewed by an independent agency.

METHODOLOGY

The Open Budget Survey uses internationally accepted criteria developed by multilateral organizations from sources such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTO-SAIs) and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT).

It is a fact-based research instrument that assesses what occurs in practice through readily observable phenomena. The entire research process took approximately 18 months between August 2016 and January 2018 and involved about 300 experts in 115 countries. The Open Budget Survey 2017 assesses only events, activities, or developments that occurred up to 31 December 2016. The survey was revised somewhat from the 2015 version to reflect evolving methods for disseminating budget information and to strengthen individual questions on public participation and budget oversight. A discussion of these changes can be found in the Open Budget Survey Global Report (see link below).

Survey responses are typically supported by citations and comments. This may include a reference to a public document, an official statement by the government, or comments from a face-to-face interview with a government official or other knowledgeable parties.