

Methodology: The Open Budget Survey's special COVID assessment

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 causing extensive additional stress to public financial management systems around the world, IBP set out to supplement the [Open Budget Survey \(OBS\) 2021](#) with a rapid assessment of transparency, oversight and opportunities for public participation on the emergency fiscal policy packages (EFPPs) introduced by governments between 1 March and 30 September 2020. The assessment covered all 120 countries that are included in the upcoming OBS 2021.

This expedited assessment was carried out through a set of 26 new indicators designed to reflect emerging norms and standards being developed by various international bodies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT) and the Open Contracting Partnership (OCP), among others. These indicators were refined in collaboration with relevant international organizations, including GIFT, the IMF, the INTOSAI Development Initiative, OCP, the World Bank and UNICEF, who participated in an online consultation and submitted comments and further contributions to the draft indicators. Before being finalized, the draft questionnaire was tested by both civil society groups and governments at country level.

Coverage of the assessment

The COVID study – referred to as the “COVID module” by the research team – assessed the transparency, extent of public engagement on, and oversight of EFPPs introduced by governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our use of the term “emergency fiscal policy packages” refers to any comprehensive set of fiscal measures – including revenue, spending and financing, and related institutional arrangements – adopted by central governments to respond to various aspects of the COVID-19 crisis. Such measures covered direct fiscal support, tax relief measures, and credit and liquidity support. The assessment did not cover policy responses using monetary policy, and policy responses by subnational governments.

To focus the research on the period when the first and most comprehensive sets of government responses were introduced, we confined the assessment to EFPPs adopted by central governments between 1 March and 30 September 2020. If more than one EFPP was introduced during this period, researchers were asked to select the largest package as the basis for the assessment, or the one that was generally considered to be the most important for pandemic response.

Limiting the coverage of the assessment to a specific package and to a specific period inevitably limits the scope of our findings, as governments may have opted for introducing several smaller policy initiatives at different times rather than a single, more comprehensive package, and may have published significant information after the cut-off date for our research. Nevertheless, we are confident that our approach allows for a reliable assessment of accountability arrangements around governments' fiscal policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research process

Research for the COVID Module was conducted in December 2020 and January 2021 by the same in-country researchers that are working on the OBS 2021. Given its expedited nature, the COVID Module was not submitted to peer reviewers. However, all responses were reviewed by IBP to ensure compliance with the methodology and cross-country comparability, and all governments were invited to submit input to Part 1 of the COVID Module Questionnaire.

Researchers consulted publicly available documents and information that was published as part of normal budgetary procedures, as well as those that were published as part of separate, emergency processes and procedures. These documents included supplementary budgets, emergency decrees, other relevant legislation, online portals, budget execution reports, audit documents, and other relevant governmental publications. While to be considered for this assessment the EFPP had to have been introduced by 30 September 2020, to ensure adequate coverage of implementation reporting, documents and information about the implementation of the package were considered if they were published by 31 December 2020.

COVID assessment questions and response options

The COVID Module questionnaire was structured in four parts: a narrative overview of the key facts about governments' EFPPs and three sets of indicators on aspects of the design, implementation, oversight and participation of such packages.

The 26 indicators in Parts 2, 3, and 4 included a series of answer options that covered specific types of data or information governments should publish, or actions they should take, to ensure adequate oversight and participation. These answer options were presented as a series of "tick boxes." Researchers assessed which options were included in governments' EFPPs and selected all that applied; if none were satisfied, then the "none of the above" box was ticked. Researchers were asked to provide detailed citations and information to explain and justify their answers.

Assessing transparency, oversight and public participation in COVID emergency packages

To measure each country’s performance against the 26 indicators included in the assessment, IBP determined the share of “tick boxes” that were selected for each indicator and normalized the result for each indicator on a 0 to 1 scale to account for the different number of “tick boxes” associated with each indicator. Performance categories were assigned to each score as follows:

Category	Score
Minimal	0 to 0.20
Limited	0.21 to 0.40
Some	0.41 to 0.60
Adequate	0.61 to 0.80
Substantive	0.81 to 1.00

The decision to publish performance categories rather than scores was deliberate. As the assessment includes a relatively small number of indicators which are based on emerging versus established norms and standards and given that the expedited nature of the study did not allow for an external review process, IBP believes it is more appropriate to publish performance categories than scores.

Additionally, scores for groups of indicators were calculated to present measures of the transparency, oversight and participation of countries’ EFPPs. Scores for the questions pertaining to each topic were averaged, and each topic was given a separate score and assigned a performance category. The aggregate measures or topics assessed as part of the COVID Module include the following:

Topic	Indicators
I. Transparency of the emergency package	1 - 19
A. Introduction of the emergency package	1 - 13
1. Macroeconomic and aggregate budget information	1, 2
2. Information on policy measures	3, 4, 5, 6
3. Information on recipients and performance	7, 8, 9
4. Information on sources of financing	10, 11, 12
5. Information on extra-budgetary funds	13
B. Implementation of the emergency package	14 - 19
1. Information reporting on execution	14, 15, 16
2. Information on extra-budgetary funds	17
3. Information on procurement	18, 19
II. Oversight of the emergency package	20 - 24
A. Role of legislatures	20, 21, 22
B. Role of national audit offices	23, 24
III. Public participation in emergency packages	25, 26

ADDENDUM: For questions 20, 21 and 22 on legislative oversight, we corrected a methodological issue stemming from not having included "None of the above" among the response options. We reclassified countries based on whether their emergency fiscal policy packages had been introduced through a legislative act or an executive decree. Countries that used executive decrees in most cases completely bypassed their legislatures, and therefore got the minimum score on both questions 20 and 21, unless their legislatures held ex-post votes on the policy measures introduced. Five countries (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Yemen) were not scored on legislative oversight as they did not have functioning legislatures during our assessment period.

Also, responses to question 21 were "reverse scored", giving a better score to countries that adopted fewer of the "fast track" procedures that limited legislative oversight during the crisis.

For more information

This annex presents a basic description of the methodology used in producing the OBS COVID assessment. For further details on any aspect of the methodology, please contact IBP at info@internationalbudget.org.