

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND TRANSPARENCY POLICY AT THE IMF

Access to Information

Website

The most accessible way to retrieve many information and documents is the IMF website (www.imf.org). Country documents are found on the "Country Info" tab on the website. Country Policy Intention documents, prepared by the country governments, are found under the "Publication" tab.

Civil Society Liaison

The IMF has a NGO Liaison office within its External Relations Department. They can be contacted with questions and concerns to which they will usually respond via email (although a response is not always prompt or guaranteed).

NGO Liaison Office

Tel: (202) 623-9400

Email: ngoliation@imf.org

<http://www.imf.org/civilsociety>

Resident Representatives

The IMF has a "resident representative" based in its member countries who can be contacted for country-related IMF information. The contact information of this representative is located on the country page on the website, or in some cases, in a section titled "Relations with the Fund" within the annex to the staff report on the country.

Mission Chief

The "mission chief" of the IMF country mission is the key decision-maker in IMF negotiations with the country-level Ministry of Finance. The mission chief's name is listed on the cover page of a loan review document.

Executive Directors

The Executive Director (ED) that represents your country can be contacted with questions and concerns regarding the IMF's activities in your country. A list of the EDs and the countries that they represent is available under the "About the IMF" tab of the website, at the following page: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/memdir/eds.htm>. However, their contact information is not listed. For their email addresses, you can refer to: <http://www.bicusa.org/en/Article.3063.aspx>. For their phone numbers you can call the IMF Switchboard: +1-202-623-7000. The Executive Director for

Kenya, Malawi and Sierra Leone is Peter Gakunu (from Kenya). He can be reached at pgakunu@imf.org. The Alternate Director is Samura Kamara (from Sierra Leone). He can be reached at skamara@imf.org.

IMF Departments

There is no staff directory, or specific websites, for the IMF's Regional and Policy Departments. To reach an IMF staff member, you can call the IMF switchboard number at +1-202-623-7000 and ask for the particular department or the staff person's phone number and email. The standard email format for IMF staff is the first initial followed by the surname (e.g. John Doe is jdoe@imf.org).

IMF Archives

The Archives office in Washington, D.C. stores documents that are not published, such. Appointments to visit the Archives Office must be made 10 days in advance via email.

The Archives Office:

Tel: +1-202-623-4913

Email: archives@imf.org

Web: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/arc/eng/archive.htm>

Transparency Policy at the IMF: An overview of the key issues

Voluntary but Presumed

This the IMF's current (2004) policy on transparency, which states that publication of country documents require an "explicit consent" from the member country. This is actually a **presumption of non-disclosure**, in that if a country does not grant consent there is no disclosure. Out of 185 country members, 22 countries refuse to publish their Article IV reports and 3 borrowing countries refuse to publish their Letters of Intent (Kenya, Iraq and Paraguay).

Draft Documents

The IMF does not publish any draft documents—their transparency policy clearly states "Documents may be published...only after their consideration by the Executive Board." This is a clear violation of the principle of **access to decision-making**, which requires that draft documents be published in advance of the final decisions taken by the Board. In particular, drafts of the papers being discussed by the Ministry of Finance and the IMF during the staff visits to the country are critical.

Country Visits

The schedules of IMF staff visits to its member countries, as well as the transcripts of the meetings between the Ministries of Finance (MOF) and the IMF mission team, are important in order to access the decision-making process and key information on the negotiations between MOFs and the IMF. However, neither are currently published. This is a key issue on which to pressure the IMF to implement meaningful transparency.

Transparency of the Executive Board

The transcripts and statements related to the Executive Board are **withheld from publication for 10 years in the IMF Archives** office in Washington, D.C. There is no clear process of requesting disclosure from the IMF. **The Executive Board's work program is only available one week in advance**—and this does not provide sufficient time for external stakeholders to organize advocacy strategies or input. The internal communications documents of the IMF are only available 20 years after they are first produced.

Side Letters and Deletions:

Side letters are confidential and binding agreements between a country and the IMF containing economic policy conditions and plans, and are **not released**, sometimes not even to the Executive Board.

Thus, side letters enable the IMF and country governments to keep controversial decisions on economic policy out of the public eye.

The IMF's transparency policy allows member countries to request deletions from country documents on material that is "highly market-sensitive" and not in the "public domain." The grounds upon which countries can request deletions are that premature disclosure would undermine the ability to implement the policy by the government or raise its cost.

However, the IMF does state in its Transparency Policy that deletions are often made on:

- **Reductions in public sector employment and wages**
- **Financial sector vulnerabilities, exchange rate or interest rate issues**
- **Changes in the tariffs of public enterprises**
- **Privatization plans**