

Enhancing Fiscal Transparency in Lebanon

Note prepared by:

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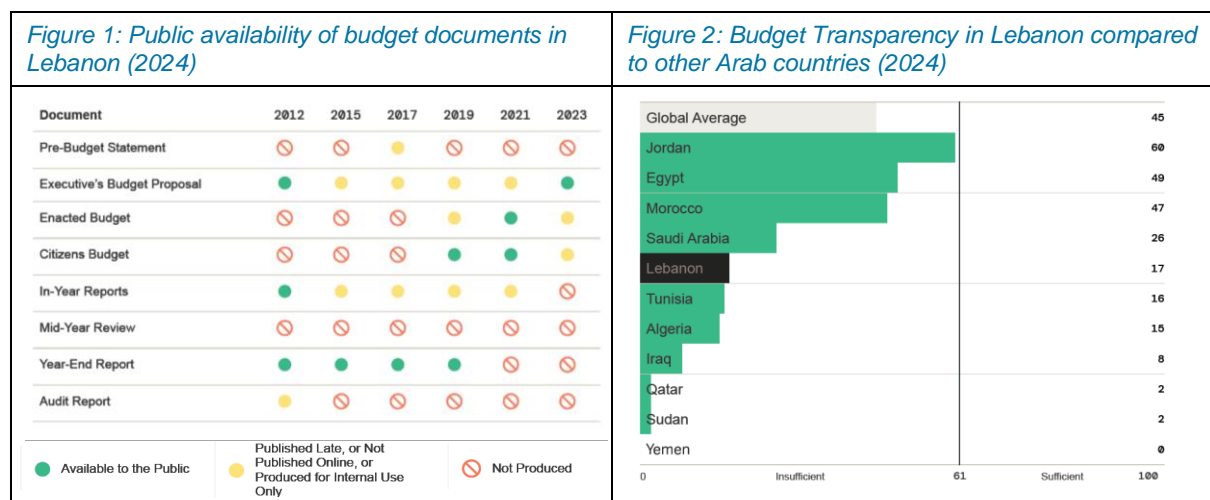
Context

Since October 2019, demands for greater transparency in the management of public funds and more active involvement in the decision-making process have been central to the public's call for accountability worldwide. In Lebanon, the agendas of fiscal transparency and citizen engagement gained significant momentum, particularly after Lebanon scored a dismal **6/100 on the Open Budget Survey 2019** in terms of budget transparency and **received a score of zero for citizen participation**.

This weak performance positioned Lebanon among the bottom 10% of countries worldwide in terms of transparency (Figure 1).

Despite this, efforts led by the Ministry of Finance and the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan have yielded some improvements. By 2024, Lebanon's budget transparency score rose to 17/100. While this marks progress, it remains substantially lower than the regional average, with other Arab countries scoring significantly higher.

Globally, the average score stands at 61/100, a benchmark that suggests sufficient budget transparency to facilitate informed public debate (Figure 2).



Enhancing fiscal transparency

The Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan started working more systematically on enhancing fiscal transparency since 2018, with two main objectives:

1. To improve public access to fiscal and budget information and data so that citizens can further engage on informed grounds with their government on budgetary decisions, become stakeholders in policy discussions and exercise better accountability.
2. To inform and drive evidence-based policy-research and policymaking on sectoral issues weighting upon fiscal management and having a direct impact on the livelihoods of Lebanese citizens.

The Institute's commitment came in response to a series policy, structural and data gaps among which the most important are:

- The absence of a fiscal statement and of a medium-term perspective to the budgeting process.
- The uneven commitment of policy makers to the budget calendar.
- The structure of the budget, as an administrative tool (line-item budget) rather than a policy instrument that does not put forth programs, sectoral spending nor performance indicators.
- The weaknesses in oversight agencies that are not playing their role efficiently and the absence of a debate of the global budget policy by the Parliament.
- The limited availability of usable data: data is not always available in standardized formats and requires lengthy transformation processes.
- The lack of comprehensive of data, with many public institutions having only their net accounts included in the state budget.

Services and products

Since 2018, and with the contribution and support of key partners from the Civil Society¹ and the international community², the Institut was able to:

1. **Digitize budget data through the [Lebanon Citizen Budget Dashboard \(LCBD\)](#)** – a digital platform that provides access to budget data (2017-2024) – budgeted and executed - and one of the main tools available to raise awareness and build engagement on budget matters and promote transparency.
2. **Develop and publish the [Citizen Budget in two formats](#)**: One for professionals (detailed version) and one for citizens (simplified pamphlet), in online and paper formats, in the Arabic and English languages. Citizens were provided with a straightforward, easy-to-read summary of the Budget Laws since 2018 and of the implications of budget decisions on their daily lives.
Since 2022, the Citizen Budget has been developed and published for the Executive's Budget Proposal (submitted by the Council of Ministers to Parliament) and for the Budget Laws.
3. **Contribute to the [mapping of off-budget spending](#)** and recommendations to improve budget coverage and comprehensiveness.

¹ In particular the NGO Financially Wise

² In particular the UNICEF and the IMF-METAC

4. **Conduct and publish Budget Spending Reviews (sectoral or institutional), notably on the Government Spending on Social Protection**, in partnership with the ILO and UNICEF, with the aim to inform both fiscal and social policy reforms, support the State's response to the ongoing crisis, and guide strategic decisions on the financing and implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy.
5. **Run a dedicated capacity development program addressed to the economic media**, on issues of fiscal transparency and reforms, in collaboration with the Maharat Foundation (2024-2025).
6. **Design a micro-learning module on Public Financial Management for the youth**, in collaboration with two NGOs, Financially Wise (FiWi) and the Lebanese Alternative Learning (LAL), offering bite-size learning to the wide public, and in particular to youth aged between 16 and 24, on the issues of public money, taxes, State budget, debt and the role of municipalities.
7. **Design a self-paced online training module for civil society on Lebanon's legal and institutional budget framework**, covering an introduction to the state budget, the budget preparation cycle, Budget principles, the types and structure of budgets, budget execution, financial oversight, fiscal transparency and the role CSOs in the Budget process.
8. **Organize webinars, awareness-raising sessions for youth and the media** on fiscal transparency, upon the request of organizations from the Civil Society. It is worth to mention that through its engagement with CSOs, the Institut witnessed a growing demand for accessing and understating fiscal information either through social media, request for awareness-sessions or media and feedback received on the Lebanon Citizen Budget Dashboard.
9. **Produce short awareness-raising and informative movies** on fiscal transparency and the role of NGOs in advocating for budget transparency, gender budgeting, etc., available on the Institut's [YouTube](#) channel.

The Way Forward

Building on the momentum created and on the built-up demand, the Institut is working to expand its partnerships in support of the Fiscal Transparency agenda and to continue building its capacities in the various fields of action. It aims to consolidate and spread informed citizenship and accountability in Lebanon, that will in turn translate into more inclusive budgets and public policies, catering for the real needs of all communities. Figure 3 below provides a summary of actions and projects that can be rolled-out on the short and medium term, at the policy and technical levels.

Figure 3: Charting the way forward to enhance fiscal transparency in Lebanon

