



Observatory for the Protection of Taxpayers' Rights

Below you will find a questionnaire filled in by or with the contribution of the National Reporter of South Africa, Prof. Jennifer Roeleveld, a representative from the Academia.

This questionnaire comprises the National Reporter assessment on the level of compliance of the minimum standards and best practices on the practical protection of taxpayers' rights identified by Prof. Dr. Pistone and Prof. Dr. Philip Baker at the 2015 IFA Congress on "*The Practical Protection of Taxpayers' Rights*". This report was filled in considering the following parameters:

1. It contains information on those issues in which there were movements towards or away from the level of compliance of the relevant standard/best practice in South Africa between 2015 and 2017.
2. It is indicated, by the use of a checkmark () whether there were movements towards or away from of the level of compliance of the relevant standard/best practice in South Africa between 2015 and 2017.

It contains a summarized account on facts (legislation enacted, administrative rulings, circulars, case law, tax administration practices) that serves as grounds for each particular assessment of the level of compliance of a given minimum standard / best practice, in a non-judgmental way.

Country: South Africa

Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
1. Identifying taxpayers, issuing tax returns and communicating with taxpayers				
Implement safeguards to prevent impersonation when issuing unique identification numbers				No change
The system of taxpayer identification should take account of religious sensitivities				No change
Impose obligations of confidentiality on third parties with respect to information gathered by them for tax purposes	Where tax is withheld by third parties, the taxpayer should be excluded from liability if the third party fails to pay over the tax			No change
Where pre-populated returns are used, these should be sent to taxpayers to correct errors				No change
Provide a right of access for taxpayers to personal information held about them, and a right to apply to correct inaccuracies	Publish guidance on taxpayers' rights to access information and correct inaccuracies			No change
Where communication with taxpayers is in electronic form, institute systems to prevent impersonation or interception				No change
Where a system of "cooperative compliance" operates, ensure it is available on a non-discriminatory and voluntary basis				No change
Provide assistance for those who face difficulties in meeting compliance obligations, including those with disabilities, those located in remote areas, and those unable or unwilling to use electronic forms of communication		✓		Revenue authority (SARS) has increased the number of mobile offices to assist those who are located in remote areas to meet their compliance obligations.
2. The issue of tax assessment				
	Establish a constructive dialogue between taxpayers and revenue authorities to ensure a fair assessment of taxes based on equality of arms			No change

Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
2. The issue of tax assessment (cont)				
	Use e-filing to speed up assessments and correction of errors, particularly systematic errors	✓		
3. Confidentiality				
Provide a specific legal guarantee for confidentiality, with sanctions for officials who make unauthorised disclosures (and ensure sanctions are enforced)	Encrypt information held by a tax authority about taxpayers to the highest level attainable			No change
Restrict access to data to those officials authorised to consult it. For encrypted data, use digital access codes	Ensure an effective fire-wall to prevent unauthorised access to data held by revenue authorities			No change
Audit data access periodically to identify cases of unauthorised access				No change
Introduce administrative measures emphasising confidentiality to tax officials	Appoint data protection/privacy officers at senior level and local tax offices			No change
If a breach of confidentiality occurs, investigate fully with an appropriate level of seniority by independent persons (e.g. judges)				No change
Introduce an offence for tax officials covering up unauthorised disclosure of confidential information				No change
Provide remedies for taxpayers who are victims of unauthorised disclosure of confidential information				No change
Exceptions to the general rule of confidentiality should be explicitly stated in the law, narrowly drafted and interpreted				No change
If “naming and shaming” is employed, ensure adequate safeguards (e.g. judicial authorisation after proceedings involving the taxpayer)	Require judicial authorisation before any disclosure of confidential information by revenue authorities			No change
No disclosure of confidential taxpayer information to politicians, or where it might be used for political purposes	Parliamentary supervision of revenue authorities should involve independent officials, subject to confidentiality obligations, examining specific taxpayer data, and then			No change

	reporting to Parliament			
--	-------------------------	--	--	--

Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
3. Confidentiality (cont).				
Freedom of information legislation may allow a taxpayer to access information about himself. However, access to information by third parties should be subject to stringent safeguards: only if an independent tribunal concludes that the public interest in disclosure outweighs the right of confidentiality, and only after a hearing where the taxpayer has an opportunity to be heard				No change
If published, tax rulings should be anonymised and details that might identify the taxpayer removed	Anonymise all tax judgments and remove details that might identify the taxpayer			No change
Legal professional privilege should apply to tax advice	Privilege from disclosure should apply to all tax advisors (not just lawyers) who supply similar advice to lawyers. Information imparted in circumstances of confidentiality may be privileged from disclosure			No change. Privilege is still only available to Lawyers and this privilege is also restricted. A new section in the Tax Administration Act introduced to provide a procedure where legal privilege is asserted. Where a person alleges the existence of legal privilege such a person must provide certain information to Revenue/or a presiding officer/attorney [S 42(A)]
Where tax authorities enter premises which may contain privileged material, arrangements should be made (e.g. an independent lawyer) to protect that privilege				No change
4. Normal audits.				
Audits should respect the following principles: (1) Proportionality (2) <i>Ne bis in idem</i> (prohibition on double jeopardy) (3) <i>Audi alteram partem</i> (right to be heard before any decision is taken) (4) <i>Nemo tenetur se detegere</i> (principle against self-incrimination). Tax notices issued in violation of these principles should be null and void		✓		Recent Tax case: Port Elizabeth Tax court of South Africa IT 13726 (as yet unreported). Although this case does not set a precedent for higher courts it does challenge the Commissioners non-compliance with the Tax Administration Act (due procedures) and offends both the constitution and the principle of legality. The Commissioner may not issue an additional assessment without notice as this does not comply with the peremptory prescripts of the applicable legislation and is constitutionally unsound. Entire additional assessment was declared to be invalid, interest had to be remitted and the commissioner was ordered to pay all of the appellant's costs of the appeal.
In application of proportionality, tax				No change

authorities may only request for information that is strictly needed, not otherwise available, and must impose least burdensome impact on taxpayers				
---	--	--	--	--

Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
4. Normal audits (cont).				
	In application of <i>ne bis in idem</i> the taxpayer should only receive one audit per taxable period, except when facts that become known after the audit was completed			No change
In application of <i>audi alteram partem</i> , taxpayers should have the right to attend all relevant meetings with tax authorities (assisted by advisors), the right to provide factual information, and to present their views before decisions of the tax authorities become final				No change
In application of <i>nemo tenetur</i> , the right to remain silent should be respected in tax audits.				No change
	Tax audits should follow a pattern that is set out in published guidelines	✓		See case above
	A manual of good practice in tax audits should be established at the global level			No change
	Taxpayers should be entitled to request the start of a tax audit (to obtain finality)			No change
Where tax authorities have resolved to start an audit, they should inform the taxpayer	Where tax authorities have resolved to start an audit, they should hold an initial meeting with the taxpayer in which they spell out the aims and procedure, together with timescale and targets. They should then disclose any additional evidence in their possession to the taxpayer			No change
Taxpayers should be informed of information gathering from third parties				No change
	Reasonable time limits should be fixed for the conduct of audits			No change

Technical assistance (including representation) should be available at all stages of the audit by experts selected by the taxpayer				No change
Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
4. Normal audits (cont).				
The completion of a tax audit should be accurately reflected in a document, notified in its full text to the taxpayer	The drafting of the final audit report should involve participation by the taxpayer, with the opportunity to correct inaccuracies of facts and to express the taxpayer's view	✓		See case mentioned above. SARS seems to differentiate between a verification and audit. In cases where there was an audit it provides an audit report. Where it was conducting a verification – it revises an assessment without issuing a letter of findings to a taxpayer.
	Following an audit, a report should be prepared even if the audit does not result in additional tax or refund			No change
5. More intensive audits.				
	More intensive audits should be limited to the extent strictly necessary to ensure an effective reaction to non-compliance			No change
If there is point in an audit when it becomes foreseeable that the taxpayer may be liable for a penalty or criminal charge, from that time the taxpayer should have stronger protection of his right to silence, and statements from the taxpayer should not be used in the audit procedure				No change
Entering premises or interception of communications should be authorised by the judiciary				No change
Authorisation within the revenue authorities should only be in cases of urgency, and subsequently reported to the judiciary for <i>ex post</i> ratification				No change
Inspection of the taxpayer's home should require authorisation by the judiciary and only be given in exceptional cases.	Where tax authorities intend to search the taxpayer's premises, the taxpayer should be informed and have an opportunity to appear before the judicial authority, subject to exception where there is evidence of danger that documents will be removed or destroyed			No change

	Access to bank information should require judicial authorisation			No change
	Authorisation by the judiciary should be necessary for interception of telephone communications and monitoring of internet access. Specialised offices within the judiciary should be established to supervise these actions			No change
Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
5. More intensive audits (cont).				
Seizure of documents should be subject to a requirement to give reasons why seizure is indispensable, and to fix the time when documents will be returned; seizure should be limited in time				No change
	If data are held on a computer hard drive, then a backup should be made in the presence of the taxpayer's advisors and the original left with the taxpayer			No change
Where invasive techniques are applied, they should be limited in time to avoid disproportionate impact on taxpayers				No change
6. Review and appeals.				
	E-filing of requests for internal review to ensure the effective and speedy handling of the review process			No change
The right of appeal should not depend upon prior exhaustion of administrative reviews				No change
	Reviews and appeals should not exceed two years			No change
<i>Audi alteram partem</i> should apply in administrative reviews and judicial appeals				No change
Where tax must be paid in whole or in part before an appeal, there must be an effective mechanism for providing interim suspension of payment	An appeal should not require prior payment of tax in all cases	✓		A senior SARS official may suspend payment of disputed tax or a portion thereof having regard to relevant factors including: <input type="checkbox"/> whether the recovery of the disputed tax will be in jeopardy or there will be a risk of dissipation of assets; <input type="checkbox"/> the compliance history of the taxpayer with SARS; <input type="checkbox"/> whether fraud is <i>prima facie</i> involved in the origin of the dispute; <input type="checkbox"/> whether payment will result in irreparable hardship to the taxpayer not

				justified by the prejudice to SARS or the fiscus if the disputed tax is not paid or recovered; or ☐ whether taxpayer has tendered adequate security for the payment of the disputed tax and accepting it is in the interest of SARS or the fiscus. [S 164(3)]
	The state should bear some or all of the costs of an appeal, whatever the outcome			No change
Legal assistance should be provided for those taxpayers who cannot afford it				No change No change
Taxpayers should have the right to request the exclusion of the public from a tax appeal hearing				No change
Tax judgments should be published				No change

Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
7. Criminal and administrative sanctions.				
Proportionality and <i>ne bis in idem</i> should apply to tax penalties				No change
	Where administrative and criminal sanctions may both apply, only one procedure and one sanction should be applied			No change
	Voluntary disclosure should lead to reduction of penalties			No change
Sanctions should not be increased simply to encourage taxpayers to make voluntary disclosures				No change
8. Enforcement of taxes.				
Collection of taxes should never deprive taxpayers of their minimum necessary for living		✓		No change. Where SARS collects tax debt from third parties, a person affected by the notice/taxpayer may request SARS to amend the notice to allow the taxpayer to pay basic living expenses and his /her dependents. [S 179(5)(a)]
	Authorisation by the judiciary should be required before seizing assets or bank accounts			No change
Taxpayers should have the right to request delayed payment of arrears		✓		A taxpayer may within 5 days of receiving a letter of demand apply to SARS for a reduction of the amount to be paid based on his/her living expenses and those of his/her dependants. (S 179(4) of TAA)

	Bankruptcy of taxpayers should be avoided, by partial remission of the debt or structured plans for deferred payment			No change
Temporary suspension of tax enforcement should follow natural disasters				No change
9. Cross-border procedures.				
The requesting state should notify the taxpayer of cross-border requests for information, unless it has specific grounds for considering that this would prejudice the process of investigation. The requested state should inform the taxpayer unless it has a reasoned request from the requesting state that the taxpayer should not be informed on grounds that it would prejudice the investigation	The taxpayer should be informed that a cross-border request for information is to be made			No change, taxpayer still not informed in all circumstances

Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
9. Cross-border procedures (cont).				
	Where a cross-border request for information is made, the requested state should also be asked to supply information that assists the taxpayer			No change
	Provisions should be included in tax treaties setting specific conditions for exchange of information			No change
If information is sought from third parties, judicial authorisation should be necessary				No change
	The taxpayer should be given access to information received by the requesting state			No change
	Information should not be supplied in response to a request where the originating cause was the acquisition of stolen or illegally obtained information A requesting state should provide confirmation of confidentiality to the			No change

	requested state			
A state should not be entitled to receive information if it is unable to provide independent, verifiable evidence that it observe high standards of data protection				No change
	For automatic exchange of financial information, the taxpayer should be notified of the proposed exchange in sufficient time to exercise data protection rights			No change
	Taxpayers should have a right to request initiation of mutual agreement procedure			No change
Taxpayers should have a right to participate in mutual agreement procedure by being heard and being informed as to progress of the procedure				No change
10. Legislation.				
Retrospective tax legislation should only be permitted in limited circumstances which are spelt out in detail	Retrospective tax legislation should ideally be banned completely			No change – however retrospective legislation was applied where it was warranted eg. S12 E of the Income Tax Act, where policy makers realized that the Tax legislation was not brought in line with the New Companies Act.
	Public consultation should precede the making of tax policy and tax law			No change

Minimum Standard	Best Practice	Shift towards	Shift away	Development
11. Revenue practice and guidance.				
Taxpayers should be entitled to access all relevant legal material, comprising legislation, administrative regulations, rulings, manuals and other guidance				No change
Where legal material is available primarily on the internet, arrangements should be made to provide it to those who do not have access to the internet				No change
Binding rulings should only be published in an anonymised form				No change
Where a taxpayer relies upon published guidance of a revenue authority which subsequently proves				No change

to be inaccurate, changes should apply only prospectively				
12. Institutional framework for protecting taxpayers' rights.				
Adoption of a charter or statement of taxpayers' rights should be a minimum standard	A separate statement of taxpayers' rights under audit should be provided to taxpayers who are audited	✓		SARS has now adopted a statement of taxpayer rights, obligations and service timelines. It is rolling this out from April 2018. See annexure entitled, Developments since 2015.
	A taxpayer advocate or ombudsman should be established to scrutinise the operations of the tax authority, handle specific complaints, and intervene in appropriate cases. Best practice is the establishment of a separate office within the tax authority but independent from normal operations of that authority	✓		No change
	The organisational structure for the protection of taxpayers' rights should operate at local level as well as nationally			No change