

ACRC Korea Transparency Newsletter (Dec. 2023)

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ACRC, Attending the 10th Session of the CoSP to the UNCAC

- Vice Chairperson Chung Seung-Yun presented key achievements in anti-corruption practices, including the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of public institutions -

(11, Dec. 2023, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) presented Korea's major accomplishments in anti-corruption practices at the 10th Session of the Conference of the States Parties (CoSP) to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) held in Atlanta from December 11 to 15.

The Korean delegation, led by Vice Chairperson and Secretary General Chung Seung-Yun, participated in the 10th Session of the CoSP to the UNCAC, where 190 States Parties were in attendance.

The CoSP to the UNCAC has convened biennially since its inaugural session in 2006, which serves as a platform for discussions over reinforcing efforts and fostering international cooperation in the prevention and fight against corruption.

Since the National Assembly ratified the UNCAC in 2008, Korea, as the State Party, has remained committed to implementing the Convention, both domestically and internationally.

< Overview of the UNCAC >

- Official name: United Nations Convention against Corruption
- Purpose: Aimed at improving the quality of life for global citizens suffering from corruption by combating corruption that undermines democracy, ethical values, and justice and jeopardizes sustainable development and the rule of law
- Current status of the States Parties: 190 States Parties (As of October 10, 2023)
- Signature: December 10, 2003, Entry into force: December 14, 2005
- Ratification by National Assembly: February 29, 2008

At the CoSP, ACRC presented Korea's anti-corruption efforts made over the past year, encompassing ▲the establishment of the Integrated Center for Reporting on Hiring Irregularities, ▲publication of the Integrity and Ethics Compliance Program Guideline for businesses, and ▲introduction of a mobile application enabling citizens' convenient participation in the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of public institutions.

Throughout the CoSP, scheduled until December 15, discussions over the prevention of corruption, asset recovery, and technical assistance and international cooperation for the prevention of corruption were held. Several resolutions, including the "Atlanta Declaration" on "promoting accountability in the fight against corruption," were adopted.

In addition, ACRC had bilateral meetings with other parties, including Australia's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) and Austria's Federal Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAK), aiming to share anti-corruption policies of respective countries and establish the foundation for cooperation.

ACRC Vice Chairperson and Secretary General Chung Seung-Yun said, "The UNCAC is the only legally binding universal anti-corruption convention. With this regard, the implementation of the Convention and sharing practices of enhancing anti-corruption laws and institutions with other States Parties have significance in the anti-corruption efforts made by the international community. I hope that our efforts in discussing Korea's exemplary anti-corruption institutions with the international community and sharing them through international cooperation will contribute to preventing and combating corruption."

Efforts Should be Exerted to Eradicate Corrupt Practices Personally Encountered by Civil Petitioners and Public Officials

- *Public institutions' efforts to prevent corruption have led to an overall improvement in their respective comprehensive integrity levels*
- *ACRC released the 2023 Public Institution Integrity Assessment Results*

(28, Dec. 2023, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) announced the results of the '2023 Comprehensive Integrity Assessment of Public Institutions,' which comprehensively evaluated the integrity levels of 498 administrative agencies and related public entities.

The results of the 2023 Comprehensive Integrity Assessment was derived by combining the scores of: ▲ the "Integrity Perception Index" the result of which is based on the survey of approximately 224,000 participants, including 157,000 citizens with experience in public institutions and 67,000 public officials working in those institutions; ▲ the "Integrity Effort Index," which assesses the anti-corruption efforts undertaken by various institutions over the past year; and ▲ the "Corruption Status Index," which evaluates the occurrence of corruption incidents in the public institutions.

The overall integrity score for administrative agencies and public organizations in 2023 decreased by 0.7 points compared to the previous year, reaching 80.5 points. While the integrity effort score remained at the same level as the previous year, at 82.2 points, the perceived integrity score dropped, leading to a decline in the overall integrity score.

By institution, 123 institutions saw an increase in their overall integrity grade compared to the last year, while 134 institutions experienced a decline. The number of institutions in the top grade decreased from 28 in 2022 to 16 in 2023.

The public institution that showed an increase of three or more grades in overall integrity level compared to last year was Pocheon-si in Gyeonggi Province. Additionally, 41 institutions, including the Korea Meteorological Administration and the Ministry of Personnel Management, experienced an increase of two or more grades.

In the area of perceived integrity, Busan Metropolitan City Office of Education and Gyeongsangbuk-do Development Corporation, both of which were in the 5th grade in 2022, have ascended by 4 grades, achieving Grade 1 in perceived integrity. Furthermore, in the pursuit of anti-corruption policies, five institutions demonstrated significant progress in their integrity efforts, each experiencing a three-grade increase. These institutions are the Public Procurement Service, Gimje-si in Jeonbuk Province, Songpa-gu in Seoul, Korea Mine Rehabilitation and Mineral Resources Corporation, and Korea National Oil Corporation.

In particular, only six institutions have achieved Grade 1 in the overall integrity assessment for two consecutive years. These excellent institutions include: the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, Yeosu-si in Gyeonggi Province, Gyeongju-si in the North Gyeongsang Province, Boseong-gun in the South Jeolla Province, Buyeo-gun in the South Chungcheong Province, and Guro-gu in Seoul. In the area of perceived integrity, only the Korea Trade Insurance Corporation secured Grade 1, while in the integrity effort domain, only the National Health Insurance Service achieved Grade 1 for the second consecutive year.

Assessment of Integrity Perception

The external integrity perception level, evaluated directly by 157,000 complainants with experience of public services provided by the public institutions, slightly decreased compared to the previous year. On the other hand, the internal integrity perception level, assessed by 67,000 public officials, showed a slight improvement.

However, it appeared that the internal perception level was significantly lower* than the external perception level, indicating the need for measures to eradicate corrupt practices in the internal operational processes of the public institutions.

* External perception score (87.0 points, down 3.3 points from last year), Internal perception score (63.3 points, up 0.7 points from last year)

When examining specific items related to integrity perception, external complainants gave the lowest evaluation to 'Lack of transparency in the standards and procedures of public institution business processing (86.8 points).' Internal public officials, on the other hand, gave a very low score to 'Special favors granted due to personal relationships or personal interests (55.4 points).'

The percentage of complainants who experienced corruption in the business processing with public institutions was 0.42%, while the percentage of internal officials who experienced corruption in internal processes was 1.99%, more than four times higher than the complainants' experience rate.

The areas of work where the proportion of complainants with corruption experience was very high, exceeding 5%, were 11 in total, including finance, taxation, and subsidy support, all of which were the basic tasks of local governments. Even in the detailed analysis of the task of local governments subject to the integrity assessment, the area where the corruption experience rate increased the most compared to the previous year was 'subsidy support' for both metropolitan and provincial governments. It was evident that urgent measures to enhance the soundness and transparency of public finances were needed.

Assessment of Integrity Efforts

The score for the Integrity Efforts of 498 public institutions was 82.2 points. Public institutions of various levels faithfully implemented customized anti-corruption action plans of their own, including the tasks of improving corruption-prone areas, etc. given the characteristics of their tasks and members.

In particular, in order to strengthen transparency in the hiring process of non-civil servants in public institutions, 87.9% of the 306 central administrative agencies, local governments, and metropolitan and provincial offices of education reflected "the Standard Criteria for Fair Non-Civil Service Recruitment" which provides for matters to be complied by public institutions in each stage of the hiring processes into their own recruitment rules, etc.

Among the 192 public service-related organizations evaluated this time, 98.4% have actively pushed ahead with national tasks by stipulating routine audits of the recruitment process in their internal audit regulations.

On the other hand, among the institutions rated as Grade 4 and 5 in the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment last year, 13 out of 24 institutions that received integrity consulting from the ACRC showed an improvement in their overall integrity ratings. In particular, Pocheon-si in Gyeonggi Province achieved a three-grade increase in the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment through the integrity consulting and transformed into an outstanding institution.

The anti-corruption efforts of public institutions have resulted in actual improvements in their overall integrity levels. Statistical analysis reveals that institutions with higher anti-corruption efforts in the previous year demonstrated excellent results in this year's comprehensive integrity scores, indicating that the efforts exerted by public institutions at all levels continue to show sustained effects.

Assessment of the Current Status of Corrupt Public Officials

Cases where corrupt acts are detected by external organizations such as the ACRC, supervisory agencies, prosecution, and police, resulting in disciplinary action, prosecution, and conviction, lead to deductions of up to 10 points in the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment. This year, 531 corruption incidents resulted in deductions in 160 institutions. By type of corruption, misappropriation of public funds and embezzlement accounted for 36.3%, bribery for 17.5%, and improper solicitations for 8.1%, indicating that

corruption incidents related to monetary bribery and improper solicitations still constitute a significant proportion.

Major cases of deductions include: demanding money from subordinates by abusing high-ranking positions and providing personnel and contractual favors (A public service-related organization); incidents involving bribery and corruption related to promotions to high-ranking posts, as well as bid and contract irregularities (B public service-related organization); and disciplinary actions against 139 employees who received license allowances based on fraudulently obtained certifications (C public service-related organization).

The results of the Comprehensive Integrity Assessment will be made public to the citizens through the official websites of the ACRC and the respective institutions. For public enterprises and quasi-governmental institutions, the results will be reflected in the Ministry of Economy and Finance's evaluation of public institution management. Additionally, improvement measures for areas identified as vulnerable to corruption, pointed out by complainants and public officials, will be promptly developed by each institution and prioritized for implementation.

The ACRC plans to conduct focused inspections in collaboration with government agencies on institutions revealed to be vulnerable to corruption in this assessment, and also intends to provide diverse support, including anti-corruption education and integrity consulting, for a year.

The ACRC Vice Chairperson and Secretary General Chung Seung-yun stated, "While the enforcement of laws such as the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act and the Conflict of Interest Prevention Act has significantly improved the integrity level in the public sector, citizens still experience corruption first hand in the internal and external processes of public institutions," emphasizing that "based on the results of this assessment, we will implement strong anti-corruption measures for vulnerable institutions and thoroughly eradicate lingering corrupt practices in the public sector."

Establishing a Fair Recruitment Environment

- One-year anniversary of the launch of a hiring-irregularity reporting center, establishing a fair recruitment management system in the public sector

(26, Dec. 2023, ACRC)

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) has laid the foundation for establishing a fair recruitment management system by taking measures such as establishing a Hiring-Irregularity Reporting Center within the ACRC to ensure the realization of the 2023 government task ‘Ensuring Fair Opportunities for Youth to Leap Forward.’

The ACRC Hiring-Irregularity Reporting Center, launched on January 1 this year, has initiated new efforts in **‘institutional improvement for fair recruitment’**, **‘specialized education,’** and **‘consulting on recruitment regulations’** for proactive prevention of hiring irregularities, as well as implementing the conventional post-detection measures such as **‘comprehensive investigation of recruitment practices’** and **‘handling reported cases,’** in order to establish a continuous management and supervision system for securing fairness in hiring practices.

The ACRC conducted year-round activities such as ‘handling reported cases,’ ‘comprehensive investigation of recruitment practices,’ and ‘investigations into pending issues’ for post-detection and management following the occurrence of hiring irregularities.

The ACRC promptly identifies the factual circumstances related to allegations of hiring irregularities reported by the public and actively refers or transfers such cases to investigative agencies and supervisory authorities when deemed necessary.

In addition, the ACRC made efforts to thoroughly investigate allegations of corruption in hiring practices raised by the public. As a result, 116 cases

among a total of 128 reported cases received by the ACRC were processed this year, and there was a significant increase in the number of cases referred or transferred compared to the previous year (27 cases à 49 cases).

< Current Status of Reported Cases of Hiring Irregularities Processed by ACRC >

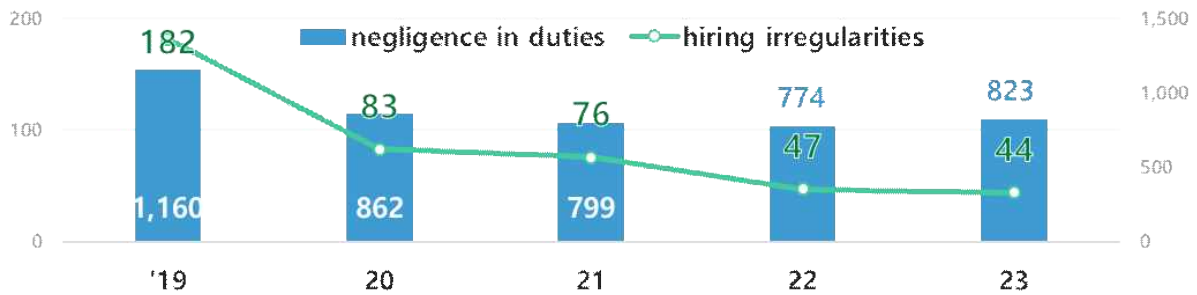
Year	No. of Received Cases	No. of Processed Cases		
		Referred	Transferred	Closed
2022	53	-	27	31
2023	128	17	32	67

< Cases into which investigation/inquiry has been completed among those referred/transferred by the ACRC in 2023 >

- ① (Case of Institution A) A team leader of a business department **has been transferred for prosecution** as he sent specific information related to the ○○ business to a particular applicant during recruitment process, affecting the outcome of the job interview and undermining fairness in the institution's hiring process.
- ② (Case of Institution B) A head of a public institution, who instructed the interview panel to disqualify a final top-ranked candidate during ◇◇ recruitment process, thereby obstructing the performance of duties of the interview panel members through coercion, **has been transferred for prosecution.**
- ③ (Case of Institution C) **Request for disciplinary action has been made** against the recruitment officer who unfairly disqualified a candidate meeting the qualification criteria stated in □□ recruitment announcement by categorizing the candidate as 'not meeting applicant qualifications' during the recruitment process.

Furthermore, the ACRC conducted a comprehensive investigation into hiring practices from February to October 2023, targeting 825 public service-related agencies. Through this investigation, a total of 867 cases of violations of fair employment practices were identified, leading to requests for investigation and disciplinary action against 68 individuals involved in corrupt hiring practices.

<No. of Cases Detected in Investigation of Hiring Practices over the past 5 years>



Additionally, to enhance public trust and promote fairness in recruitment, the ACRC conducted thorough ‘investigations into pending issues’ to address suspicions raised over preferential hiring of high-ranking officials’ children and hiring irregularity at the National Disaster Relief Association.

On the other hand, the ACRC actively promoted ‘institutional improvements’ to eliminate blind spots in hiring-related regulations, not only for post-detection of hiring irregularities but also to prevent the occurrence of such irregularities at its source, and conducted ‘specialized education for fair recruitment’ and ‘consulting on hiring regulations’ in order to prevent corruption in hiring process due to inadequate understanding of regulations and flaws in internal recruitment regulations.

As for ‘institutional improvement,’ the ACRC recommended institutional improvements on March 15, establishing fair recruitment standards (31 articles) and urging all administrative agencies to internalize these standards since the absence of common hiring standards has led to frequent occurrences of hiring irregularities, despite the scale of non-civil servant recruitment in administrative agencies being approximately 430,000 as of 2020.

The results of the ACRC's inspection of institutional improvement implementation status, which showed that among 550 institutions, 401 institutions reflected fair recruitment standards by 70% or more, have revealed that fair recruitment standards for non-civil servant recruitment in administrative agencies are rapidly becoming established in the field.

With respect to ‘specialized fair recruitment education’ targeting officers responsible for personnel and auditing affairs in public service-related organizations, monthly group training and online courses (introduced in July) were organized, and 5,066 officers responsible for personnel and auditing matters from 907 institutions completed the courses.

The results of a survey on satisfaction regarding the specialized education showed that out of 757 respondents, 684 individuals (90%) responded that it ‘helped performance of duties,’ indicating the effectiveness of the education in enhancing expertise in recruitment affairs.

With regard to the ‘recruitment regulation consulting,’ the ACRC had each institution submit their own recruitment regulations and conducted consulting to see to it that these institutions comply with higher laws and guidelines and reflect fair recruitment standards that are not stipulated in their existing regulations into their own recruitment regulations. This year, the ACRC issued recommendations to 354 public-related organizations to improve a total of 8,485 provisions.

The most frequently recommended items included: ▲ compliance with hiring regulation that provides for granting additional points and preferential treatment for job applicants categorized as persons eligible for employment assistance under ‘the Act on the Honorable Treatment of and Support for Persons of Distinguished Service to the State,’ (335 cases); and ▲ strengthening the management of pre-training of job interviewers to prohibit discriminatory questions (331 cases).

The ACRC Vice Chairperson and Secretary General Chung Seung-yun said, “To ensure that the younger generation starting their social life in 2030 does not experience unfairness due to hiring irregularities at the first gateway, the ACRC will strive to more firmly establish a fair recruitment management system in the public sector.”

The Number of Collective Complaint Mediations “Doubled” in 2023, Resolving Long-standing Issue Raised by 120,000 Local Residents

- Launching the Collective Complaint Task Force to identify regional conflicts in advance and listen to voices on the ground -

(28, Dec. 2023, ACRC)

A large-scale collective complaint triggered by prolonged conflicts between local residents and administrative agencies was “mediated,” resolving a longstanding issue raised by 120,000 local residents.

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) resolved a total of 211 collective complaints, including by mediating* 63 cases out of 360 collective complaints raised by multiple persons of 5 people or more.

* In accordance with Article 45 of the “ACRC Act,” ACRC conducts mediation for grievance complaints that involve multiple persons or are deemed to have a significant impact on society, initiated at the request of persons concerned or by its authority. If successfully concluded, the mediation has the effect of reconciliation under the Civil Act.

In the wake of the spread of COVID-19, the number of mediated collective complaints decreased to 41 and 33 in 2021 and 2022, respectively, from 53 in 2020 over the past two years.

In this regard, ACRC launched the Collective Complaint Task Force team in 2023, while identifying issues regarding conflicts in advance and strengthening onsite visits by monitoring regional pending issues of local governments and media reports.

As a result, as of December 2023, the number of mediated cases amounted to 63, reflecting a two-fold (91%) increase compared to the previous year, while

the number of citizens benefiting from the mediation more than doubled, reaching 116,107 from 45,000 in 2019.

The representative cases addressed in 2023 include a collective complaint regarding the “request for the completion of the Youngju Multipurpose Dam, delayed due to the restoration of cultural assets” (raised by 33,434 people) and a collective complaint on the “lifting of the military facility protection area at Anheung Castle in Taean for repair and public access” (raised by 19,544 people).

The construction of the Youngju multipurpose dam began in 2009 with the purpose of ensuring a reliable water supply and preventing flood damage. However, there has been a seven-year delay in the completion of the dam resulting from the delay in settling project costs for the relocation and restoration of cultural assets, due to differing opinions among relevant agencies in 2016.

In August, through arbitration by ACRC, Youngju-si and the Korea Water Resources Corporation settled the project costs associated with the relocation and restoration of cultural assets conducted up to date. Subsequently, the Ministry of Environment and the Korea Water Resources Corporation have agreed to initiate the administrative procedure for approving the completion of the dam once the project costs are settled. All these efforts expedited the approval of completion in the same month, resolving long-standing issues raised by residents.

Anheung Castle in Taean, Chunchungnam-do is a stone castle standing at a height of 3.5 meters with a perimeter of 1.7 kilometers, holding significant value as cultural assets.

However, in 1976, the Anheung Center of the Agency for Defense Development was established, which restricted access to approximately 45% of the castle’s areas. Moreover, the castle was designated as an important national

facility in 2022. Consequently, there have been limitations on restoration and repair, causing inconveniences for local residents.

Following the arbitration by ACRC in September, Taean-gun and the Agency for Defense Development agreed to discover and restore Anheung Castle by 2025 through identifying the areas to be opened to the public. The Cultural Heritage Administration decided to provide support to ensure that Taean-gun completes restoration of the Castle and opens it to the public in a timely manner, resolving long-standing issues raised by local residents.

ACRC Vice Chairperson Kim Tae-Gyu said, “ACRC’s “mediation” is a meaningful function ensuring that residents and administrative agencies seek ways for the co-existence. Since it holds significant impact on the livelihood of citizens, we will actively resolve pending issues of conflicts by listening to the voices on the ground and enhancing the Collective Complaint Task Force team.”

Administrative Appeals Autofill Request Form Service being Expanded and Now Covers 51 Agencies

- “EASY Administrative Appeals”: Anyone can easily complete administrative appeals request forms by utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) -

(29, Dec. 2023, ACRC)

The number of agencies providing the Administrative Appeals Autofill Request Form Service (EASY Administrative Appeals) has expanded to 51.

The Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) announced that any citizens can utilize the “EASY Administrative Appeals” service, designed to assist users in completing administrative appeals request forms and various application forms, covering 51 agencies, including city halls, provincial offices, and offices of education, for easy and swift access to administrative appeals system.

While people can receive assistance when filing administrative appeals related to addressing illegal and unfair administrative dispositions, such as the suspension and cancellation of licenses, suspension of business, imposition of disciplinary fines, and disqualification from various national examinations, completing administrative appeals request forms in accordance with legal forms is not easy for the general public who are not legal experts.

Since February 2023, in an effort to resolve such inconveniences, ACRC has been operating the “EASY Administrative Appeals” service, designed to automatically complete request forms by referencing similar administrative appeals cases (best practices) utilizing AI technology when applicants input simple data, such as the disposition date.

The “EASY Administrative Appeals” service was initially provided for administrative appeals filed with the Central Administrative Appeals Commission (CAAC), which has now been expanded to include those filed with a total of 51 agencies, including city halls, provincial offices, and offices of education.

In order to access the Administrative Appeals Request Form Autofill Service, people can visit the “Online Administrative Appeals” (www.simpan.go.kr) and click on the “EASY Administrative Appeals.”

According to a satisfaction survey involving users who utilized “EASY Administrative Appeals” service, 93% of respondents replied that they were satisfied with the service, demonstrating that public response to the “EASY Administrative Appeals” service is highly positive.

In this regard, ACRC plans to further expand the “EASY Administrative Appeals” service by incorporating an additional 34 agencies commonly used by the general public, including city halls, provincial offices, and offices of education, bringing the total to 60 agencies during 2024.

ACRC Vice Chairperson and Chairperson of CAAC Park Jong-Min said, “To fulfill the national policy task of realizing a digital platform government, we will further expand the EASY Administrative Appeals service to encompass every agency operated based on the online administrative appeals to facilitate citizens' convenient access to administrative appeals.”