# MOLDOVA

## REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF OPEN DATA

The concept of Open Data has been gaining enormous popularity in the age of information and technological advancement. Open Data espouses the idea that certain data should be freely available to use, reuse and redistribute by the public, subject only to the requirement to attribute. In that sense it is more ambitious than the concept of transparency, because it allows citizens to not just access data but to analyze, visualize and share it with others.

### FEATURES OF THE INITIATIVE

In April 2011, Moldova became one of the first countries within Eastern Europe to launch an Open Data portal. The portal, www.date.gov.md brings together disparate and disconnected datasets published by various Ministries and central administration offices, under a single umbrella platform.  A defining characteristic of the portal is that it is an initiative conceived by the government, as opposed to one driven by civil society organizations (CSOs).

With rapidly improving connectivity among citizens, public service delivery fraught with inefficiency, and an incentive to modernize the economy before joining the European Union (EU), e-Governance was a priority for the Prime Ministers Office. Following technical and financial support from the World Bank, the portal started off with publishing 67 datasets from five public agencies in education, healthcare, economics, finance and agriculture.

By the time Moldova joined OGP in April 2012, the number of datasets had increased to 334, 226 of which were being published for the first time.

### MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES

The accession to OGP was an opportunity to further crystallize the initiative. It circumscribes a set of commitments that address the stages from initial launch to institutionalization and finally impact of the Open Data portal. First among these is the need to establish a legal framework that would oblige Ministries and government agencies to embrace the Open Data initiative. This is because the move towards e-Government throws up issues around data provenance, re-use as well as privacy. "These issues lay the foundation to sustain an Open Data initiative but are rarely talked about. That we have paid close attention to these details is what makes the Moldovan case exemplary", says Irina Tisacova, who coordinates the initiative at the e-Government center.

The initial launch in April 2011 was driven by a directive issued by the Prime Minister, which required Ministries to release three new datasets each month. To make sure this continued, the OGP Action Plan included a commitment to draft a law on public sector information re-use, modeled upon the EU Directive. The law has recently been drafted and is in the process of approval. It lays down a consistent standard on data licensing and gives citizens not only the access to data but also the ability to repurpose it in productive ways.

Intricately tied to this law is the question of what constitutes open data and what is deemed a personal, commercial or state secret. Irina recalls an example of this dilemma during a Hackathon organized last May. One of the winning teams developed an app with information on all the doctors in the country by their first and last name, their specialization and the hospital in which they work. However, restrictions posed by the personal data protection law halted the launching of the app. To ensure clarity around these issues, the

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e-Government Center is working with the National Center for Personal Data Protection.

## EARLY RESULTS

Alongside working on the legal and regulatory aspects, the portal has been adding new datasets. The OGP goal was to publish data from 26 categories by the end of 2012, around 80 percent of which has been published. The current number stands at 672 datasets. Another unique addition is a link to the open geospatial repository, www.geoportal.md with datasets ranging from a cadastral map, aerial photograph, topographic map and information on the location of some public amenities.

These features spark the demand for citizens to cross-reference, visualize and create useful applications. Moldova has been trying to harness citizen-centered innovation through multiple channels. Open Innovation week, Data Journalism training, and competitive Hackathons are all events that took place last year to raise awareness and promote use of open public data. Alerte.md for example, was the winner of a nation-wide contest to promote young talent in information technology. It is a map-based platform that crowd-sources the public's knowledge on the state of roads, streetlights and other important infrastructure problems in the Municipality of Chisinau. It won the support of the Mayor of Chisinau and was posted on the official website of the Chisinau municipality.
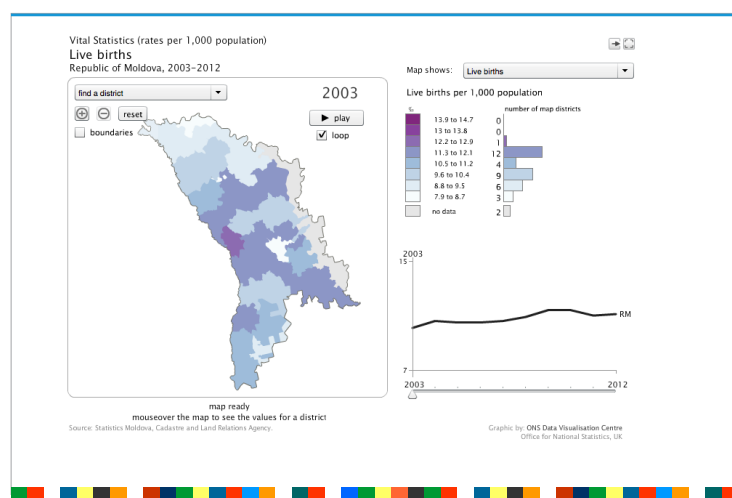
## FACING CHALLENGES

Moldova's e-Governance progress was captured in its climb from 80th in 2010 to 69th in 2012, in the ranking by the United Nations e-Government Survey. But the path to institutionalization of an Open Data initiative is still inchoate. Although the initial launch of the portal was built around support from a small coalition of ministries, overcoming bureaucratic encumbrances across government can take longer. Each government agency is at a different stage in terms of information infrastructure and management, and also political will to share data. This is why the OGP Action Plan includes the development of government data standards that would codify a way to collect, archive and publish data in a digital format. Each central government authority is also required to publish on its webpage and on the portal, a catalogue of data they hold that could potentially be published. However, both of these actions are progressing slower than desired and may feed into the next year's Action Plan.

Veronica Cretu, President of the CMB Training Center, a civil society organization and also member of the OGP Steering Committee stresses that "Transparency is at the core of both Open Data and Open Government, and in order to sustain them it is important to ensure they are embedded into the way government agencies do their business. We need Open Data champions in our Ministries to boost both the demand and the supply side".

If the merits of Moldova's Open Data portal are to materialize, policymakers must pay attention to institutionalizing it in order to maximize citizen's ability to harness its potential. Ultimately, the value of data is in the number of people who will use it, and how they will transform it into economically or socially valuable services for society.



AN ANIMATED DATA VISUALIZATION FEATURED IN WWW.DATE.GOV.MD. IT PRESENTS THE CHANGES IN TERRITORIAL ASPECT OF VITAL STATISTICS INDICATORS, NAMELY: LIVE BIRTHS, DEATHS, NATURAL INCREASE, MARRIAGES, DIVORCES, INFANT MORTALITY, FROM 2003 TO THE PRESENT. THE APPLICATION WAS DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH DATA VISUALISATION CENTRE OF UNITED KINGDOM'S OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS.