Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Estonia End-of-Term Report 2016-2018

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Overview: Estonia

Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) End-of-Term Report 2016-2018

In its third OGP action plan, Estonia focused on promoting open government values and digital solutions in public service provision, policy-making, public funding, local governance, and school curricula. Most commitments were fully or substantially completed but did little to change government practices. Moving forward, Estonia could design commitments that add clear value to existing government initiatives and involve mechanisms for scaling up, spreading, and sustaining good practices. Efforts could also be made to engage more diverse societal groups to the OGP process.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary international initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) carries out a review of the activities of each OGP-participating country.

This report summarizes the results of the Estonian OGP action plan for the period of July 2016 to June 2018. Since a detailed review of the first year of the action plan is available in the OGP progress report, this end-of-term report devotes more attention to developments since July 2017.

During the third action plan, the Government Office continued to coordinate the OGP process in Estonia. The action plan was designed and implemented in collaboration with the OGP Coordinating Council that involves an equal number of public sector and non-governmental organizations, the latter mostly representing members of the national OGP Civil Society Roundtable (CSR). The implementation also involved government organizations such as the Ministry of Education and Research and the Tax and Customs Board that are not members of the Coordinating Council but were responsible for carrying out specific commitments.

The commitments for the third action plan aimed to advance citizen participation in public service design and public governance processes, promote open government in local municipalities, increase the transparency of the law-making process and public funding practices, and foster democratic participation and digital skills in general education. The commitments were mostly substantially completed, although a few suffered from delays due to staff changes or unforeseen technical obstacles. However, the effect of the activities on government practices seems to be limited—although some had an overly internal focus and missed a public-facing element, others lacked well-designed mechanisms to enforce noticeable changes in practices. The findings of this report confirm the conclusion of the IRM Progress Report that several action plan commitments (e.g., the e-Tax and

Table 1: At a Glance	Mid-term	End of term
Number of Commitments	9	
Level of Completion		
Completed	0	3
Substantial	5	5
Limited	3	1
Not Started	1	0
Number of Commitments with...		
Clear Relevance to OGP Values	8	8
Transformative Potential Impact	0	0
Substantial or Complete Implementation	5	8
All Three (⊙)	0	0
Did It Open Government?		
Major		*1*
Outstanding		*0*
Moving Forward		
Number of Commitments Carried Over to Next Action Plan		*5*

This report was prepared by Maarja Toots, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, in an independent capacity.

Customs Board, Zero Bureaucracy project, reviewing public funding practices to NGOs) would likely have been implemented in the same way regardless of Estonia's participation in OGP. However, according to the Government Office[1] and stakeholders involved in the OGP process,[2] activities such as upgrading government information systems to enable better public engagement or the promotion of open government principles at the local level were clearly driven by the action plan.

The government published an end-of-term self-assessment report at the end of November 2018. The report was compiled by the OGP coordinator at the Government Office in close collaboration with the coordinator of the Civil Society Roundtable, involving the organizations directly responsible for implementing the commitments. No public consultations were held in the process. The government approved the report on 29 November 2018. The report was published on the national[3] and international[4] OGP website.

Estonia adopted its fourth action plan (2018–2020) on 30 August 2018. The action plan includes six commitments that build on the results and continue advancing the priorities of the previous action plan. The commitments aim to develop digital tools for transparency and public participation, build public engagement skills of government officials, increase the transparency of the Parliament's work, advance open government at the local level, and foster democracy-related skills and attitudes in general education. Although several commitments (e.g., the development of democracy skills in school curricula) directly continue the activities of the third action plan, other commitments in the fourth action plan pursue the same goals through new types of activities. For example, instead of funding being provided for individual projects to foster public engagement and participation, engagement and participation capacities will be strengthened through a training program specifically for civil servants and civil society activists.

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[1] Explanatory note to OGP action plan 2018-2020, Annex 1 ("AVP tegevuskava 2018-2020 ettepanekud ja nende vastused"), p 13. Accessible at: https://heakodanik.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018_08_30_AVP_2018-2020_tegevuskava_seletuskiri.docx.pdf

[2] Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), interview by IRM researcher, 6 November 2018.

[3] Accessible at: https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/2018_11_30_avp_2016-2018_lopparuanne.pdf

[4] Accessible at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/estonia-end-term-self-assessment-report-2016-2018

Consultation with Civil Society during Implementation

Countries participating in OGP follow a process for consultation during development and implementation of their action plans.

The OGP Coordinating Council served as the multi-stakeholder forum to oversee the implementation of Estonia's third action plan. The Council is chaired by the secretary of state and includes seven public sector and seven civil society representatives. Compared with previous action plans, two new members were involved in the Coordinating Council for the third action plan – the Parliament of Estonia (Riigikogu) and the Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities (AECM.)[1] Members of the Coordinating Council led the implementation of most commitments, except for Commitment 1 (led by Tax and Customs Board) and Commitment 9 (Ministry of Education and Research).

According to the government's self-assessment report, the action plan was implemented and monitored by the Coordinating Council, the OGP Civil Society Roundtable,[2] and all organizations responsible for coordinating certain action plan commitments. Although the implementation of most commitments involved collaboration among different organizations, the commitments were carried out in a largely independent manner without regular information sharing or consultation with the Coordinating Council.[3] The Council only met three times to discuss the action plan's implementation. The first meeting on 21 September 2016 focused on the general organization of the action plan implementation, the second meeting on 20 June 2017 involved a midterm overview of the action plan implementation, whereas at the third meeting on 13 February 2018, the conclusions of the IRM Progress Report 2016–2017 were discussed.[4]

According to the OGP coordinator at the Government Office[5] and members of the Coordinating Council,[6] neither the Coordinating Council nor the Government Office monitored the implementation of the commitments on a regular basis. The coordinator only requested updates on implementation status for the midterm overview meeting and the end-of-term self-assessment report. Moreover, at a 13 February 2018 meeting, the Council decided to avoid overview meetings of several hours in the future and instead requested the Government Office to regularly update the OGP section on its website with information about the progress of each commitment. Following the decision, the Government Office published information about the implementation status of each commitment in the third action plan on its website. In November 2018, the website contained the status of commitments as of early June 2018 but did not yet provide a final overview of commitment completion at the end of the action plan period (July 2018).

Participants of the Coordinating Council have diverging views about the usefulness of the Government Office's OGP website as a primary source of information. Whereas Alari Rammo (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations)[7] sees the provision of more information on the website as a positive step, Mall Hellam (Open Estonia Foundation)[8] considers it of little use unless the website is actively promoted among potential readers. Some members of the Council[9] stress the importance of also continuing face-to-face meetings to be able to discuss the implementation of the commitments in more detail. That said, the availability of public information on the action plan implementation does address a criticism of the IRM Progress Report, which noted that due to the lack of up-to-date information online, information about action plan progress could only be acquired by emailing the national point of contact or the institutions responsible for each commitment.

Implementation of the third action plan did not involve broader consultations with civil society or the general public. However, certain individual activities involved a wider group of stakeholders in their implementation. For example, 35 different non-governmental organizations and individuals contributed proposals to the Zero Bureaucracy initiative (Commitment 2), and the OGP projects in municipalities (Commitment 3) involved local civil society organizations (CSOs) in co-designing recommendations to the local government for advancing open government.

Table 2: Consultation during Implementation

Regular Multistakeholder Forum	Midterm	End of Term
1. Did a forum exist?	Yes	Yes
2. Did it meet regularly?	No	No

Table 3: Level of Public Influence during Implementation

The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) "Spectrum of Participation" to apply to OGP.[10] This spectrum shows the potential level of public influence on the contents of the action plan. In the spirit of OGP, most countries should aspire for "collaborative."

Level of Public Influence during Implementation of Action Plan		Midterm	End of Term
Empower	The government handed decision-making power to members of the public.		
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue AND the public helped set the agenda.		
Involve	The government gave feedback on how public inputs were considered.		
Consult	The public could give inputs.	✔	✔
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.		
No Consultation	No consultation		

[1] AECM was officially established through the merger of the Association of Estonian Cities and the Association of Municipalities of Estonia on 27 February 2018, but the two organizations have jointly participated in the multi-stakeholder forum since February 2016. It represents 73 local governments in Estonia.

[2] The Civil Society Roundtable is an informal collaboration platform of CSOs created in 2011 to inform and monitor OGP action plans in Estonia. The roundtable currently involves 21 organizations.

[3] IRM researcher's interviews with the organizations responsible for commitment implementation

[4] The Council conducted several additional meetings in 2018 but these were devoted to designing the 2018–2020 action plan.

[5] Merilin Truuväärt (Government Office), interview by IRM researcher, 6 November 2018.

[6] IRM researcher's interviews with Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), 6 November 2018; Alari Rammo (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations), 7 November 2018; Kaarel Haav (Estonian Education Forum), 8 November 2018; Mall Hellam (Open Estonia Foundation), 14 November 2018; Jüri Võigemast (Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities), 15 November 2018; Mait Palts (Chamber of Commerce and Industry), 16 November 2018.

[7] Alari Rammo (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations), interview by IRM researcher, 7 November 2018

[8] Mall Hellam (Open Estonia Foundation, interview by IRM researcher, 14 November 2018

[9] IRM researcher's interviews with Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), 6 November 2018, and Jüri Võigemast (Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities), 15 November 2018

[10] For more information on the IAP2 Spectrum, see:
http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf

About the Assessment

The indicators and method used in the IRM research can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual.[1] One measure, the "starred commitment," (✪) deserves further explanation due to its particular interest to readers and usefulness for encouraging a race to the top among OGP-participating countries. Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:

- Starred commitments will have "medium" or "high" specificity. A commitment must lay out clearly defined activities and steps to make a judgment about its potential impact.
- The commitment's language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability.
- The commitment would have a "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented.[2]
- The government must make significant progress on this commitment during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of "substantial" or "complete" implementation.

Starred commitments can lose their starred status if their completion falls short of substantial or full completion at the end of the action plan implementation period.

In the midterm report, Estonia's action plan did not contain any starred commitments. At the end of term, Estonia's action plan still did not contain any starred commitments.

Finally, this section's tables present an excerpt of the wealth of data the IRM collects during its reporting process. For the full dataset for Estonia, see the OGP Explorer at www.opengovpartnership.org/explorer.

About "Did It Open Government?"

To capture changes in government practice, the IRM introduced a new variable "Did It Open Government?" in end-of-term reports. This variable attempts to move beyond measuring outputs and deliverables to examining how the government practice has changed as a result of the commitment's implementation.

As written, some OGP commitments are vague and/or not clearly relevant to OGP values but do achieve significant policy reforms. In other cases, commitments as written appear relevant and ambitious but fail to open government as implemented. The "Did It Open Government?" variable attempts to captures these subtleties.

The "Did It Open Government?" variable assesses changes in government practice using the following spectrum:

- Worsened: Government openness worsens as a result of the commitment.
- Did not change: No changes in government practice.
- Marginal: Some change but minor in terms of its effect on level of openness.
- Major: A step forward for government openness in the relevant policy area but remains limited in scope or scale.
- Outstanding: A reform that has transformed "business as usual" in the relevant policy area by opening government.

To assess this variable, researchers establish the status quo at the outset of the action plan. They then assess outcomes *as implemented* for changes in government openness.

Readers should keep in mind limitations. IRM end-of-term reports are prepared only a few months after the implementation cycle is completed. The variable focuses on outcomes that can be observed in government openness practices at the end of the two-year implementation period. The report and

the variable do not intend to assess impact, because of the complex methodological implications and the time frame of the report.

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[1] IRM Procedures Manual, http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/about-irm.
[2] The International Experts Panel changed this criterion in 2015. For more information, visit http://www.opengovpartnership.org/node/5919.

Commitment Implementation

General Overview of Commitments

As part of OGP, countries are required to make commitments in a two-year action plan. The tables below summarize the completion level at the end of term and progress on the "Did It Open Government?" metric. For commitments that were complete at the midterm, the report will provide a summary of the progress report findings but focus on analysis of the "Did It Open Government?" variable. For further details on these commitments, please see the Estonia IRM progress report (2018).

Estonia's third action plan focused on four crucial areas: 1) fostering user participation in designing and developing public services, 2) increasing transparency and engagement in policy-making, 3) increasing the transparency of the use of public funds, and 4) developing democracy and ICT-related skills in school curricula. Most commitments concerned the central government level, while two specifically targeted local government.

Table 4: Assessment of Progress by Commitment

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion (Midterm / End of Term)				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
1. e-Tax and Customs Board 2020				✔		✔		✔			✔				✔			✔			
															✔						
2. Zero bureaucracy				✔		✔		✔			✔				✔				✔		
															✔						
3. Open governance at local level		✔				✔				✔					✔					✔	
																✔					
4. Inclusive policy-making at central government level		✔				✔		✔		✔					✔			✔			
															✔						
5. Open and transparent law-making		✔			Unclear					✔					✔			✔			
															✔						
6. Increase of engagement and participation capacities		✔				✔				✔				✔					✔		
																✔					
		✔				✔				✔			✔					✔			

7. Participatory budgeting at local level													✔						
8. Transparent NGO funding				✔	✔					✔		✔		✔			✔		
9. Democracy and digital competences in general education			✔			✔		✔		✔		✔				✔			

Theme I: Increase User Participation in the Design and Development of Public Services

Commitment 1: e-Tax and Customs Board 2020

Commitment Text:

The Tax and Customs Board's new self-service environment is being developed with the aim of making the submission of data to the state and the payment of claims in public law simple, comprehensive, central, and contactless for the taxpayer (residents, non-residents incl. e-residents), while supporting the development of real-time economy solutions. The following will be done:

1) administration of taxpayer's data;

2) administration of taxes;

3) administration of claims;

4) single submission of data to the state and reuse.

Milestones:

1.1. Technical analyses of the IT systems' platforms of the Tax and Customs Board (TCB) are carried out to build the new system.

- A visual of e-services is created in cooperation with end users to enable them to avail of the TCB self-service environment and its services as conveniently and simply as possible in the future.

1.2. User needs are analysed in cooperation with the consumer, asking for input from various associations and entrepreneurs in the course of direct meetings and as a result of the recommendation index method.

- Test environments and a product environment are created for the new developments being created.

- New non-functional requirements for the systems are developed in cooperation with IT.

1.3. The following is created as central components: administration of persons, administration of users, new payment methods, central administration of claims.

- The completed prototypes will be given to end users for testing. The feedback received will be taken into account in a further development activity.

1.4. Data-based taxation will be switched to; the submission of declarations will be minimised. For this, the respective legislation will be amended, and entrepreneurs that are end users of the service will be engaged though active communication.

1.5. A new platform (freeware) and a new architecture of the TCB information systems will be implemented.

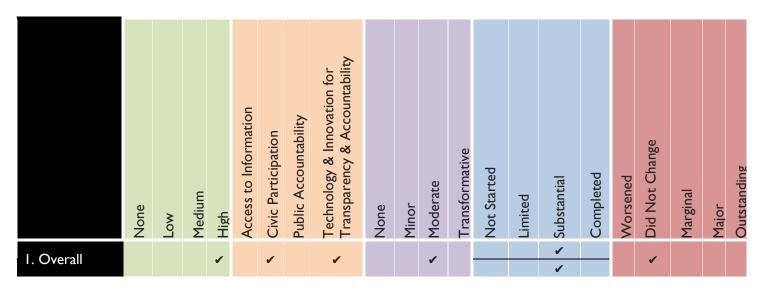**Responsible Institution:** Estonian Tax and Customs Board

Supporting Institutions: All ministries, Employers' Confederation, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, enterprises

Start Date: January 2016

End Date: December 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity	OGP Value Relevance (as written)	Potential Impact	Completion	Midterm / End of Term	Did It Open Government?

	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
1. Overall				✔		✔		✔		✔					✔ / ✔			✔			

Commitment Aim

This commitment sought to develop a new architecture and platform for the online self-service environment of the Tax and Customs Board ("e-TCB") to simplify the submission of tax information and support the transition to data-based taxation. It planned to involve end users (including entrepreneurs, accountants, citizens) in different phases of the information system development process (from analyzing user needs to test the prototype) and the transition to data-based taxation. An additional objective of the commitment was to publish part of tax data as open data to enable the creation of new data-driven services, although this was not associated with a specific milestone.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

By the midterm, the commitment had been substantially completed, though some preparatory activities had already started in 2014, before the action plan period. In 2016–2017, TCB carried out the technical analysis of the system (milestone 1.1), conducted meetings with users to analyze their needs (milestone 1.2), and involved users in testing the new e-TCB prototype (milestone 1.3).

TCB also made some progress regarding the planned shift to a data-based taxation system, including consultations with new platform businesses such as Uber and Airbnb. The next steps were to launch the new e-TCB platform by September 2018 and transition to a data-based taxation system by the end of 2018, although some further developments of the e-TCB were to continue until 2020. For a detailed overview of the activities, please see the 2016–2017 IRM Progress Report.

End of Term: Substantial

By the end of the action plan period, the commitment remains substantially implemented. Milestone 1.5 (transitioning all TCB information systems to a new platform and architecture) has been implemented, but milestones 1.3 and 1.4 remain in progress. According to the government's end-of-term self-evaluation report, part of developing the central components of the new e-TCB is ongoing. This mostly concerns the implementation of the new authentication, access, and authorization solution, which is expected to be completed by spring 2019.

TCB continued to make progress toward shifting to taxation based on bank transaction data instead of declarations. A pilot project has been launched in cooperation with the LHV Bank enabling automatic payments of the required taxes along with the salary payments to employees. Apart from this pilot, milestone 1.4 remains far from being fully implemented, as the government is still discussing the legal feasibility and consequences of abolishing different kinds of tax declarations.[1] Regarding the publication of tax-related data as open data, the TCB is planning more concrete steps in 2019.[2]

Did It Open Government?
Civic Participation: Did Not Change

Experts consider Estonia's tax system to be among the most advanced ones in the world. The Tax Foundation's International Tax Competitiveness Index has ranked Estonia first among OECD countries since 2014.[3] Estonian residents have also been able to declare their taxes online since 2000. However, by the start of the action plan, the e-TCB system had been in use for 16 years and was technologically outdated. This commitment sought to modernize TCB's information systems by designing cost-effective and user-centric e-services for tax reporting and collection. Although many of the planned activities and goals were related to in-house procedures, the commitment included a civic participation component, as it involved consultations with end users in designing the e-TCB. The IRM Progress Report found that during the development process, a number of individuals, professional associations, and local governments were consulted in all 15 Estonian counties.

According to Kersti Karuse-Veebel, the development manager of TCB, different user groups (in particular business representatives and accountants) have been engaged throughout the development process, involving on average 10 to 20 people in each user group.[4] Mait Palts (Chamber of Commerce and Industry) considers the commitment to have been implemented in a highly participatory manner and is satisfied with the extent to which user feedback has been taken into account, such as customizing the e-TCB user interface to the needs of different types of users.[5] The development of the e-TCB has made use of a range of user engagement methods – from customer satisfaction surveys to interviews and online feedback forms on the prototype of the new interface.[6] However, both Palts and Karuse-Veebel claim that user engagement in ICT development has already been a regular practice of TCB for several yearsTherefore, the commitment did not bring any changes to government practice compared to the status quo prior to the action plan.

Carried Forward?

This commitment has not been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan. As two milestones of the commitment have not yet been reached, the crucial next steps for TCB include completing the technical developments by 2019 and continuing the analysis and planning for the shift to data-based taxation.

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[1] Kersti Karuse-Veebel (Estonian Tax and Customs Board), interview by IRM researcher, 13 November 2018
[2] Kersti Karuse-Veebel (Estonian Tax and Customs Board), interview by IRM researcher, 13 November 2018
[3] See: https://taxfoundation.org/publications/international-tax-competitiveness-index/
[4] Kersti Karuse-Veebel (Estonian Tax and Customs Board), interview by IRM researcher, 13 November 2018
[5] Mait Palts (Chamber of Commerce and Industry), interview by IRM researcher, 16 November 2018
[6] "Avaliku sektori lugu: Maksu- ja tolliameti uus kliendikeskne e-keskkond", 22 November 2017. Accessible at: https://disainikeskus.ee/disainiblogi/maksu-ja-tolliameti-uus-e-keskkond-e-mta

Commitment 2: Reducing bureaucracy and a simpler state – the Zero Bureaucracy project

Commitment Text:

To ensure the implementation of proposals for a reduction in bureaucracy made by business organizations and to develop and implement a mechanism for a constant reduction in the burden arising for entrepreneurs when communicating with the state and when dealing with the requirements of legislation, and bureaucracy within the public sector.

Originally, proposals were gathered from entrepreneurs for a reduction in bureaucracy, but the opportunity to make proposals is constantly open to everyone. To simplify this, a web-based opportunity will also be created for the constant submission of proposals for a reduction in bureaucracy. Furthermore, regular collections of proposals and analyses of options for their implementation will be organized in cooperation with entrepreneurs.

The representatives of non-governmental partners and government authorities are also involved in the work of the task force responsible for implementing the proposals. The Ministries have analyzed the proposals submitted so far and have decided together with the representatives of entrepreneurs which proposals can be implemented in full and which in part. Each Ministry shall prepare a more precise plan for a reduction in bureaucracy.

Proposals which presume greater changes than a reduction in bureaucracy are reviewed separately.

Meetings at ministerial and business organizational levels shall be organized to discuss the implementation of these proposals and to deal with further reduction in bureaucracy (e.g. field-based special requirements).

Milestones:

2.1. Gathering proposals from business organizations and companies for a reduction in bureaucracy

2.2. Analysis of proposals by government authorities

2.3. Making decisions about the implementation of the proposals for a reduction in bureaucracy

2.4. Developing organization-based plans (projects) for implementing proposals to reduce bureaucracy

2.5. Coordinating the development of the applications of IT developments

2.6. Developing and launching the monitor for reducing bureaucracy

2.7. Interim report to the Government on the status of implementing the proposals for reducing bureaucracy

2.8. Agreeing on the priorities for a reduction in special requirements arising from activity licenses, and launching the reduction

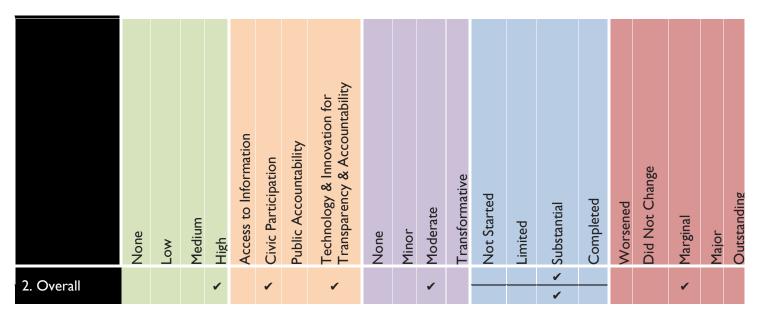*2.9. Final report to the Government on the results of implementing the proposals*

Responsible Institution: Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications

Supporting Institutions: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Social Affairs, Bank of Estonia, Health Insurance Fund, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Employers' Confederation, Service Industry Association

Start Date: 1 June 2015

End Date: 30 April 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity	OGP Value Relevance (as written)	Potential Impact	Completion	Midterm	Did It Open Government?
					End of Term	

	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
2. Overall				✔		✔		✔			✔				✔				✔		
															✔						

Commitment Aim

This commitment aimed to crowdsource proposals from businesses to reduce unnecessary bureaucratic procedures and requirements. More specifically, it involved the collection and analysis of proposals and determining how best to implement them in collaboration with the relevant public sector organizations. It also called for launching a website to enable the collection of new proposals on a rolling basis and for monitoring the implementation of the proposals.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

The commitment was substantially completed by the midterm. However, this was largely possible because the first three milestones were already completed before the official start of the OGP action plan period.

During the first year of the action plan, a special task force coordinating the "Zero Bureaucracy" initiative continued the synthesis and implementation of the 252 proposals that had been collected from businesses and NGOs before the action plan's inception. By the end of 2016, 26 proposals had been implemented, and 50 more were scheduled to be implemented in 2017. An interim report was presented in April 2017 as planned, but the milestones related to developing action plans for the implementation of the proposals and for launching a monitor of the initiative were delayed.

End of term: Substantial

The implementation of the commitment activities continued into 2018. However, due to the large number and wide scope of the proposals received, the implementation of the proposals has taken longer than originally foreseen, and the completion of some milestones (e.g., 2.8) has been further delayed beyond 2018. In 2018, the government decided to extend the work of the task force until the end of December of that year. Therefore, milestone 2.9 (final report of the Zero Bureaucracy initiative) was also delayed until several months after the end of the action plan period. Nevertheless, a number of activities took place in the second year of the action plan. According to the task force's website, 92 proposals had been carried out based on the organization-based implementation plans by April 2018, covering 52% of all proposals that government institutions considered possible to implement.[1] By the time the task force ended its work in December 2018, 115 proposals had been partly or fully implemented, composing 70% of all proposals made.[2]

As many of the proposals require complex solutions, some will only be implemented in 2019–2020 according to the government's end-of-term self-assessment report. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications also updated the initiative's website[3] with more information on the implementation status of the proposals to provide the public the possibility to better monitor the commitment's implementation (milestone 2.6).

Did It Open Government?
Civic Participation: Marginal

Despite the general ease of conducting business in Estonia,[4] prior to the start of this action plan, companies have not been satisfied with the level of bureaucracy involved in their interactions with public administration.[5] This commitment aimed to reduce the administrative burden for businesses to enable companies to focus on their core activities. The goal of reducing bureaucratic requirements and the administrative burden of companies is not directly relevant to OGP values. However, as the process placed the interests and needs of companies and citizens at the center and was designed in a highly participatory and collaborative manner, the initiative has had an impact on civic participation practices. At the start of the initiative, a large-scale crowdsourcing exercise was carried out, yielding 252 proposals by 35 organizations and groups that in turn represented thousands of member organizations.[6]

As a result of the proposals, the government has implemented a number of changes in its administrative procedures. These include, for example, expanding data reuse within the public sector (this relieves companies from the need to submit certain data to government institutions several times), the abolishment of certain duties (e.g., the reporting duties of travel companies), and so on. The proposals have also led to the government piloting an e-service that saves small companies from submitting income and social tax declarations to the government and to the consolidation of a large number of environmental permit and reporting procedures into one information system.

During implementation, the initiative expanded to include an additional 900 proposals by public sector organizations for reducing bureaucracy within the public sector itself. As the task force kept the option of proposing new ideas open throughout the implementation process, the Estonian Employers' Confederation initiated a smaller spin-off initiative, comprising 80 proposals from companies for simplifying the process of employing foreign workers.[7] Business representatives were also involved in the task force's composition along with a committee of ministers that oversaw the task force's work. Mait Palts from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry evaluates the initiative as extremely participatory and open to input from businesses.[8]

However, the scale of the change remains marginal because the participation process has been limited to one specific initiative and time frame. According to Liis Kasemets, coordinator of the task force, it is not likely that such a large-scale participation will continue after the task force ends its work. Although the crowdsourcing model implemented during the initiative could constitute an excellent example and a good practice to be widely disseminated across the government, no measures have been implemented so far to disseminate and replicate the model in other policy-making initiatives.

Carried Forward?
The commitment has not been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan. The work of the Zero Bureaucracy task force ended in December 2018, and its final report contains proposals for sustaining the results of the commitment by means other than the OGP action plan. For example, the government continues to accept proposals for bureaucracy reduction by e-mail. However, the results of the task force's work may have a bearing on Commitment 1 in Estonia's next OGP action plan, which involves the creation of a proto-type IT-platform for policy making that officials and the public can use for co-creation. In their final report, the Zero Bureaucracy task force recommended that this platform also provide guidelines and tools for policy-makers to assess new policies' potential impact on the administrative burden.

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[1] Website of the Zero Bureaucracy initiative, accessible at https://www.mkm.ee/et/nullburokraatia
[2] Final report of the Bureaucracy Reduction task force to the government, accessible at https://www.koda.ee/sites/default/files/content-type/content/2018-12/B%C3%BCrokraatia%20v%C3%A4hendamise%20rakker%C3%BChma%20l%C3%B5pparuanne.pdf
[3] https://www.mkm.ee/et/nullburokraatia

[4] Estonia," Doing Business, World Bank, http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/estonia.

[5] „Kaubandus-tööstuskoda: bürokraatia ettevõtluses kasvab iga aastaga", 5 January 2015. Accessible at https://www.err.ee/527456/kaubandus-toostuskoda-burokraatia-ettevotluses-kasvab-iga-aastaga

[6] The list of proposals and proposers can be accessed at https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/nullburokraatia_ettepanekute_kokkuvote.xlsx

[7] Liis Kasemets (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications), interview by IRM researcher, 26 November 2018

[8] Mait Palts (Chamber of Commerce and Industry), interview by IRM researcher, 16 November 2018

Theme II: Increase Engagement and Transparency in Policy-Making

Commitment 3: Implementation of the principles of open governance at local level as a result of the administrative reform

Commitment Text:

As part of the activities, the merging local governments will be advised and supported when implementing the principles of open governance following the merger, also in preparing joint development before the merger takes place (by more advanced local governments), incl. in the field of applying various activities and e-solutions promoting open governance. A suitable time for implementing the project would be from the beginning of 2017. By then, the voluntarily merged local governments will have submitted their applications to join and will have made the relevant legal preparations. Furthermore, they will have had the time and opportunity until the elections in October to deal with implementing the principles of management and inclusion and open government partnership in the merged parish.

The selected local governments include about 8-10 local governments, which are sufficient to achieve an impact, but to enable a personal approach for the participating local governments, setting goals and evaluating their achievements will be necessary. The activities are directly related to the priority of the OGP Action Plan, which increases the engagement of citizens and openness in the policy-making process.

The implementation of activities is planned through the open application round of the Ministry of Finance. Project applicants can be an umbrella organization of local governments and/or non-profit associations together with the e-Governance Academy.

Milestones:

3.1. Preparing the measures, submitting applications, evaluation and selection

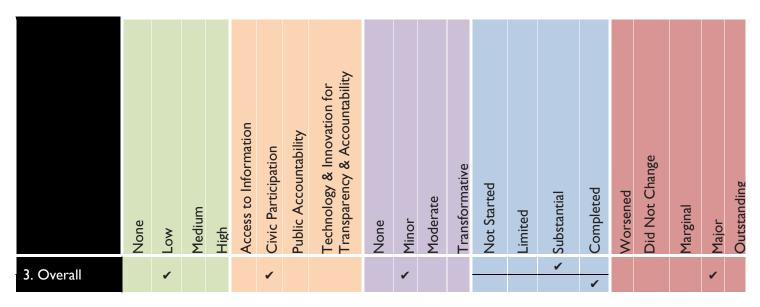*3.2. Implementing test projects*

Responsible Institution: Ministry of Finance

Supporting Institutions: Ministry of the Interior, local governments, e-Governance Academy, Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO), non-governmental organizations valuing participatory democracy

Start Date: 1 January 2017

End Date: 30 June 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity	OGP Value Relevance (as written)	Potential Impact	Completion	Midterm	Did It Open Government?
					End of Term	

	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
3. Overall		✔				✔				✔					✔	✔				✔	

Commitment Aim

This commitment sought to use the ongoing merger of Estonian local municipalities to foster open government values and principles at the local level. To this end, it called for open government test projects to be implemented in newly merged municipalities.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

By the midterm, the commitment had seen substantial implementation. In early 2017, two newly merged municipalities were chosen for the test project "Open Government in Merging Municipalities."[1] The e-Governance Academy (a non-governmental consultancy and think tank) with support from the European Social Fund implemented this test project. One of the chosen municipalities (Lääneranna municipality) comprised four previously independent municipalities, whereas the other (Elva municipality) comprised six.

The test project was ongoing, and the e-Governance Academy coordinated a number of community meetings, trainings, and advisory activities in both municipalities. It also developed tailored written recommendations for the implementation of open government principles for both municipalities based on the academy's expertise and on stakeholder discussions held in the local communities.

End of term: Complete

The test project was completed at the end of November 2017, meaning that milestone 3.2 was achieved ahead of schedule. By the end of 2017, the e-Governance Academy had developed a set of seven general recommendations for the implementation of open government principles targeted to all local governments in the form of written guidelines and seven short video clips. These were based on the more specific recommendations developed for the Lääneranna and Elva municipalities in the course of the project. The development occurred through a collaborative process involving stakeholder discussions and community engagement days in both municipalities.

The recommendations included guidelines for local municipalities for improving public access to information, civic participation, and public accountability in each respective municipality, thus covering all core OGP values.[2] The e-Governance Academy disseminated the recommendations through an article in *Eesti Päevaleht* and the Estonian Public Broadcasting news and shared the videos via its partners' newsletters.[3]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Major
Civic Participation: Major

Although the situation of local democracy in Estonia has improved over the years, a 2017 report of the Council of Europe notes that access to public information and citizen involvement in policy planning could be improved at the local level.[4] This commitment called for implementing test projects to showcase how open government principles could be integrated into local governance and to set an example to other municipalities. The e-Governance Academy started the projects shortly after the administrative-territorial reform, which reduced the number of municipalities from 213 to 79. This reform aimed to increase the service provision capacity of local governments, improve their competitiveness and ensure even development across regions.[5]

As a result of the commitment's implementation, government practices in terms of access to information and civic participation have become more open at the individual municipality level. First, the process itself was participatory. The activities in both municipalities involved events and discussions bringing together both public sector and non-governmental stakeholders. These included a community engagement day in Lääneranna on 5 June 2017[6] and in Elva on 8 June 2017[7] where various stakeholders discussed how open government could be fostered in the respective municipality. The community day was preceded and followed up by active communication and meetings with the local assemblies.

Second, the eventual recommendations proposed ways and tools for improving the provision of public information online and offline, engaging in dialogue with the local community, public service co-production, youth participation, corruption prevention, and so forth. According to Marika Saar, the deputy mayor of the Elva municipality, the municipality has already implemented many of the recommendations regarding access to information and civic participation.[8] For instance, the implementation of open government principles has been established in Elva's current coalition agreement and strategy, and access to information has been improved by issuing a weekly newsletter with detailed information about events in the municipality, broadcasting the local government's sittings live on the VOLIS online platform and more active communication in social media. The municipality is also currently developing an app to notify local citizens about news and events that interest them. Additionally, Elva has adopted clear regulations for funding local initiatives[9], regularly holds public consultations on major policy issues (the funding regulations also went through a public consultation process) and engages different geographical areas and communities of the newly amalgamated municipality through community events in villages and participatory budgeting initiatives.

Civic participation and access to information have also improved in Lääneranna. For instance, the municipality has substantially improved its website and adopted the VOLIS platform for sharing information about the local government's work online. It also established a youth assembly[10] to promote youth participation and funds its work from the municipality's budget.[11] The municipality's strategy for 2018–2028 involves several other goals that have the potential to foster open government.[12]

During the action plan period, the project's positive outcomes were not actively disseminated among other local municipalities. The Ministry of Finance (the institution responsible for implementing the commitment) just published information about the project on its website and mentioned the example in public presentations when relevant.[13] However, some activities have followed the conclusion of the action plan. Based on information from the Ministry of Finance and e-Governance Academy, one additional municipality (the municipality of Valga) has decided to implement a similar model to develop an open government action plan.[14] The Ministry of Finance is also planning an information day in 2019 to promote open government among local municipalities. As part of the next OGP action plan, the ministry plans to start regularly monitoring the level of open government in municipalities, using the existence of an open government action plan as an important indicator of success.

Marika Saar from the Elva municipality suggests the Estonian Association of Cities and Rural Municipalities (EACM) should also have a core role in disseminating and scaling up best practices. According to Jüri Võigemast from the EACM, the association has not undertaken any active

dissemination efforts so far. However, he agrees that the events and communication channels of its network could be used for this purpose in the future.[15]

Carried Forward?

This commitment has been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan through the inclusion of two commitments targeting local municipalities. The first involves an open call for funding local municipalities' proposals (with financing from the European Social Fund) for promoting open government values at the local level, such as through the development of a local open government action plan or conducting awareness-raising activities. In addition, another commitment seeks to develop an online benchmarking and visualization application. This application would provide citizens easy access to information about the quality and usage of public services that different Estonian local governments offer. The online tool can also be used by local municipalities for benchmarking and for comparison with their peers and by the central government to devise policy measures to increase the quality of public service provision at the local level.

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[1] For more information, see the project website: https://ega.ee/et/projekt/avatud-valitsemine-uhinevates-omavalitsustes/
[2] e-Governance Academy (2017) "Seitse ettepanekut omavalitsuse avatumaks ja kaasavamaks muutmiseks", accessible at https://ega.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ettepanekud-avatumale-omavalitsusele_logo.pdf and https://haldusreform.fin.ee/static/sites/3/2017/10/ettepanekud-avatumale-omavalitsusele.pdf.
[3] See one of the newsletters here: https://mailchi.mp/f1f679a6139a/seitse-ettepanekut-omavalitsusele-1283285
[4] "Local democracy in Estonia" (2017) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, accessible at https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806fda83
[5] Ministry of Finance, Administrative-Territorial Reform: https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/objectivesactivities/local-governments-and-administrative-territorial-reform/administrative.
[6] See https://lihulateataja.ee/laaneranna/moodustuva-laaneranna-valla-esindajad-osalesid-e-riigi-akadeemia-mottekojas/ for more information on the community day in Lääneranna
[7] See http://blogid.sotsid.ee/elva/avatud-valitsemise-mottetalgud/ for more information on the community day in Elva
[8] Marika Saar (Municipality of Elva), interview by IRM researcher, 15 November 2018
[9] Accessible at https://www.elva.ee/ametnik-vastab2
[10] Website of Lääneranna municipality: https://www.laanerannavald.ee/noortevolikogu.
[11] Statute of the Lääneranna youth assembly: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/403012019025?leiaKehtiv.
[12] Lääneranna strategic development plan: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/aktilisa/4061/0201/8004/arengukava.pdf#.
[13] Kaie Küngas (Ministry of Finance), interview by IRM researcher, 14 November 2018
[14] Kaie Küngas (Ministry of Finance), interview by IRM researcher, 28 March 2019; Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), interview by IRM researcher, 27 March 2019. This project is being implemented as part of commitment 4 in Estonia's OGP action plan 2018-2020.
[15] Jüri Võigemast (Estonian Association of Cities and Rural Municipalities), interview by IRM researcher, 15 November 2018

Commitment 4: More inclusive policy-making on a central government level

Commitment Text:

The aim of the activity is to improve the availability of information about the government's plans, which would enable earlier participation in policy-making.

The full picture of engagement offered on the government website increases the comprehensibility of the policy-making process and offers a direct link to the engagement websites of ministries, where the interested parties can contribute to policy-making. The engagement sections ensure that it is not duplicating information. Instead, it offers the opportunity of the same function to move from the aggregate information of all ministries on the government website to more detailed information in the engagement section of a specific ministry. This section has more detailed information about the respective field and engagement activities in the areas of responsibility of the ministry.

Introducing the practice of the initiation stage so that people are able to receive information for earlier participation in policy-making.

Milestones:

4.1. Development of the engagement sections of ministries and introduction of practice

4.2. Introducing the practice of use of the initiation stage created for supporting earlier engagement as an Information System of Draft Acts (EIS) development

Responsible Institution: Government Office

Supporting Institutions: Ministries, non-governmental organizations, social partners

Start Date: 1 July 2016

End Date: 30 June 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion		Midterm / End of Term		Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
4. Overall		✔				✔		✔		✔					✔ / ✔				✔		

Commitment Aim

This commitment planned to increase public participation in the early stages of the policy cycle by improving information provision about participation opportunities on the ministries' websites and upgrading the Information System of Draft Acts (EIS).[1]

Status
Midterm: Substantial

This commitment had been substantially completed by the midterm. By that time, all ministries and the Government Office had updated the public participation-related sections on their official websites and the Government Office worked with the ministries' engagement coordinators to encourage ministries to use these participation sections in practice to elicit citizen involvement (milestone 4.1). For milestone 4.2, the new function for informing the public about the development of new draft laws had already been added to EIS in early 2016 during the previous action plan cycle. The Government Office prepared guidelines for all ministries for using the new function, but most ministries had not used this new function after the first year. A more detailed overview of the commitment status at the midterm is available in the IRM Progress Report.

End of Term: Substantial

At the end of the action plan period, the websites of all 11 ministries and the Government Office contained uniform general information about public participation opportunities in the policy-making process, and all had updated the participation section of their websites in 2017 or 2018. During the second year of the action plan, the Government Office made some additional efforts to promote the use of the ministries' websites and the new functionality of EIS for citizen engagement in earlier policy-making phases. This involved communicating with the ministries' public engagement coordinators and training activities. Toward the end of the action plan cycle, the Government Office and Ministry of Finance started a large-scale training program for public officials. The first training module involved a training day on citizen engagement that also included information on EIS.[2] The trainings have been implemented as part of Commitment 2 in Estonia's fourth OGP action plan (2018–2020), and the program will continue into 2019.

According to the government's end-of-term self-assessment report, engagement coordinators in ministries are responsible to monitor that information about the initiation of larger policy-making processes, such as the development of a strategy, is available on EIS earlier in the process. However, the self-assessment report and interviews with stakeholders[3] also reveal that the actual use of the early-phase participation function in EIS remains low due to users' preference for other tools. This is attributed to EIS's outdated technical platform and that many public officials responsible for policy making are not regular EIS users. Similarly, the analysis of ministries' websites that the IRM researcher conducted for the end-of-term assessment shows that about half of the ministries (the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Justice, Ministry or Rural Affairs, Ministry of Education and Research) keep an up-to-date list of ongoing engagement initiatives in the participation sections or front page navigation bar of their websites.[4] Other ministries only provide general information about the policy process and citizen participation opportunities.

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Marginal
Civic Participation: Did Not Change

The Good Practice of Engagement, a collection of recommendations for state authorities for civic engagement, has been in place in Estonia for more than ten years. However, civil society organizations have noted a lack of information about the opportunities to participate in the early phases of policy-making.[5] The main aim of the commitment was to increase public access to information about civic participation opportunities and to encourage policy makers to engage citizens and civil society in the early phases of the policy-making cycle. Although all ministries had a dedicated citizen participation section on their official websites prior to the action plan, information on these sites was often insufficient or outdated. In addition, it was only possible to post draft laws to EIS when they had reached the final, inter-institutional coordination stage of the policy-drafting process.

As a result of the commitment, public access to information on participation opportunities improved to some extent with all 11 ministries having updated and improved the information on participation

opportunities. The new features of EIS now provide the government more opportunities to share information about new policy initiatives and for citizens to learn about the government's plans earlier in the policy cycle.

However, the activities have not resulted in a change in civic participation practices. Only about half of the ministries' websites provide specific information about their own ongoing and upcoming initiatives in which citizens could participate, and only five ministries list the name and contact details of their engagement coordinators. The commitment has thus only had a marginal effect on access to information and no demonstrable effect on actual public participation. According to Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), one of the initiators of this commitment, ministries were also expected to promote the new participation features of EIS on their websites. So far, this has not been done. The lack of this information limits the likelihood of citizen participation in an ongoing policy-making process. EIS has also not been taken up as a tool for stakeholder engagement in the early policy planning stage. Ministries have used the new function a few times to provide information on an upcoming policy planning initiative, but no actual input or feedback has been submitted via this feature. Previous studies have found that civil society users find EIS complicated and uncomfortable to use and tend to prefer other channels for communication with government organizations.[6] As EIS was never originally designed as an online participation tool, the initiator of this commitment admits that EIS might work better as a tool for information provision rather than for active participation.[7]

Carried Forward?

This commitment has been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan. Commitment 1 of the 2018–2020 action plan ("Information technology supporting transparent and inclusive policy-making") aims to develop the terms of reference for a new user-friendly government information system that would replace the current Information System of Draft Acts (EIS) and Osale.ee (an e-participation platform), including the public participation functionalities. In the next action plan, the government plans to develop the terms of reference for the new system through a collaborative process involving the Government Office, public sector organizations, and non-governmental interest groups.

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[1] EIS is a government information system used for the inter-institutional coordination of draft laws, policies, and strategies. It is also accessible for all other interested organizations and individuals, allowing all users to follow the proceedings of drafts, search for documents, and comment on drafts.

[2] See the government's end-of-term self-assessment report: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/estonia-end-term-self-assessment-report-2016-2018

[3] Merilin Truuväärt (Government Office), interview by IRM researcher, 6 November 2018; Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), interview by IRM researcher, 6 November 2018

[4] The ministries' websites: https://www.envir.ee/et/kaasamine-osalemine/kaasamine-ja-osalemine; https://www.sm.ee/et; https://www.kul.ee/et; https://www.just.ee/et; https://www.hm.ee/et; https://www.agri.ee/et/kaasamine-osalemine/kaasamine-ja-osalemine

[5] See the usability assessment of EIS from 2015: https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/Osalusveeb%2C%20EIS%20lopparuanne_8-05-15.pdf

[6] The usability assessment of EIS (2015)

[7] Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), interview by IRM researcher, 6 November 2018

Commitment 5: More open and transparent law-making

Commitment Text:

Developing lobbying rules and principles of representation of interests for members of the Riigikogu for increasing the openness of law-making, creation of the respective self-regulation mechanism as a code of good practice. Implementing open law-making and strengthening engagement practice.

Monitoring the minutes of the committees' sittings (§39) and the part of the participation of interest groups (§36) on compliance with the Riigikogu Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act.

Milestones:

5.1. Supplementing the handbook of the member of the Riigikogu "Good practice of the member of the Riigikogu"

5.2. Developing the lobbying rules / good practice of representation of interests of a member of the Riigikogu (engaging interest groups) and adding rules to the handbook of the member of the Riigikogu

5.3. Implementation of the engagement practice and open law-making process according to the new wording of the Riigikogu Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act.

Responsible Institution: Riigikogu

Supporting Institutions: Transparency International Estonia, Open Government Partnership Roundtable, parties related to representing interests

Start Date: 1 July 2016

End Date: 30 June 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion / Midterm / End of Term				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
5. Overall		✔			Unclear					✔					✔ / ✔			✔			

Commitment Aim

This commitment sought to increase transparency in the lawmaking process of the Parliament of Estonia (the Riigikogu) by updating the handbook of Riigikogu members with a code of good practice for engaging lobby groups. It also called for amending the Riigikogu Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act based on these updates.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

To implement the commitment, the Anti-Corruption Select Committee of the Riigikogu handed its proposal for amending the Good Practice of the Members of the Riigikogu to the Parliament's Council of Elders (chairpersons of the parliament's factions) in May 2017. However, Parliament rejected the proposal to amend the Good Practice. Instead, on 29 May 2017, the Riigikogu approved another type of document, the "Recommendations of the Anti-Corruption Select Committee to the Members of the Riigikogu for Interaction with Interest Representatives." This document included eight general recommendations[1] and example cases helping members of the Riigikogu (MPs) assess potential conflict of interest and ethical issues in preparing legislation and coordinating with interest groups.

End of term: Substantial

Since 29 May 2017, the Riigikogu has not carried out any specific activities related to this commitment. Although the first two milestones were implemented in a different format than originally planned, both had been completed by the midterm to the extent possible under the circumstances. However, the completion of milestone 5.3 (implementation of the adopted guidelines and recommendation) is difficult to assess due to the lack of verifiable information as to whether or how MPs actually implement the recommendations in their daily practices. The government's end of term self-assessment report evaluates the commitment as "substantially" but not fully completed.

According to Tiina Runthal from the Chancellery of the Riigikogu,[2] Parliament took the following measures to support the recommendations' implementation:

- The recommendations[3] and examples[4] have been published on the Riigikogu website;[5]

- The recommendations are included in the package of rules and codes of conduct that are always introduced to new members of the Parliament as they start their work;

- In case the Board of the Riigikogu receives information about cases of non-compliance with the recommendations, e.g., through MPs' declarations of economic interest, information from other MPs, or via the media, the board will take the case to the Council of the Elders to discuss the need to change or to update the recommendations.

According to Tiina Runthal, no cases of noncompliance have been given to the Board of the Riigikogu so far.[6] It is not clear whether the lack of reported cases is a result of MP's full compliance with the recommendations or whether it is due to limited awareness of the recommendations. No verifiable information about the MPs' actual awareness of the recommendations is available, as Parliament has not conducted surveys to learn about the awareness level.

Did It Open Government?
Access to information: Did not change
Civic participation: Did not change
Public accountability: Did not change

The commitment aimed to address the problem of lack of transparency and public oversight of lobbying activities in the law-making process that organizations such as Transparency International Estonia had previously raised in reports. According to the original wording of the commitment, the Riigikogu committed to creating a self-regulation mechanism that would provide decision-makers and the general public better information on who and how has shaped the legislative bills in the Parliament. Though this commitment is a positive first step toward regulating the influence of special interest groups in the decision-making process, the IRM Progress Report assessed it as not directly relevant to the core OGP values. The report noted that a significant change in lawmaking practices and MPs' interaction with lobby groups would require including actual enforcement mechanisms of the lobbying regulations.

According to the government's self-assessment report and evidence from Riigikogu, no such enforcement or redress mechanisms were created during the project's implementation. Transparency International Estonia suggests that this commitment is a step in the right direction, but a more thorough and legally binding set of lobbying rules is needed to increase the actual transparency of MPs' interactions with lobbyists.[7] It recommend that Riigikogu follow "International Standards for Lobbying Regulation"[8] when designing further lobbying regulation mechanisms. Therefore, despite the initial ambitions, the commitment has had no effect on opening government. The potential effects are further reduced by the lightweight non-binding format of the recommendations and the lack of proactive promotion efforts of the guidelines among the Riigikogu members.

Carried Forward?

This commitment has been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan. Commitment 3 of the 2018–2020 action plan ("Increasing the openness and transparency of the Riigikogu") continues to advance the goal of an open and transparent law-making process by focusing on two main strands of activities: 1) releasing data about the Parliament's plenary meetings as machine-readable open data and 2) harmonizing the publication practice and speeding up the process of publishing parliamentary committees' meeting proceedings on Riigikogu's website.

[1] The document included the following recommendations: 1) when meeting with interest representatives, check what interests they represent and who is funding them; 2) Request interest representatives to disclose, in writing and in advance, the purpose of the meeting, names of participants, the issue for discussion, and any relevant background information; 3) Before the discussion of a particular bill or a topic at the committee sitting, inform the members of the committee that you have been contacted by an interest representative and ask it to be entered in the minutes of the committee sitting; 4) Assess any risk of conflicts between your private interests and the public interest and how your interaction might be perceived; 5) Err on the side of caution. If in doubt, consult somebody, and if you decide to go ahead, add an explaining note to the documents; 6) Invite interested representatives to substantiate statements or presentations in writing after meetings or telephone calls; 7) Maintain good record-keeping habits, including recording the date and location of the meeting, names of participants and issues discussed; and 8) Report unacceptable lobbying practices to the Anti-Corruption Select Committee. See the full recommendations at https://www.riigikogu.ee/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Recommendations-of-the-Anti-Corruption-Select-Committee-to-the-members-of-the-Riigikogu-for-interaction-with-interest-representatives.pdf

[2] Tiina Runthal (Chancellery of Riigikogu), interview by IRM researcher, 26 November 2018

[3] See https://www.riigikogu.ee/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Recommendations-of-the-Anti-Corruption-Select-Committee-to-the-members-of-the-Riigikogu-for-interaction-with-interest-representatives.pdf

[4] See https://www.riigikogu.ee/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Case-examples-of-possible-situations-where-there-is-a-conflict-of-interests.pdf

[5] See https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/parliament-of-estonia/committees/anti-corruption-select-committee/

[6] Tiina Runthal (Chancellery of Riigikogu), interview by IRM researcher, 26 November 2018

[7] IRM researcher's email communication with Transparency International Estonia, 30 November 2018

[8] "International Standards for Lobbying Regulation" (2015), Transparency International, Access Info Europe, Sunlight Foundation and Open Knowledge. Accessible at http://lobbyingtransparency.net/lobbyingtransparency.pdf.

Commitment 6: Increase of the engagement capacity of state authorities and participation capacity of non-governmental organizations in policy-making

Commitment Text:

Improve the quality of policy-making by supporting the increase in the engagement capacity of state authorities and participation capacity of non-governmental partners in policy-making. The testing of new engagement-related solutions, the development of the state's engagement policy, and the development of the capacity of non-governmental organizations to participate in policy-making are supported.

Milestones:

6.1. Planning and implementing projects

Responsible Institution: Government Office

Supporting Institutions: Ministries, non-governmental organizations

Start Date: 1 July 2016

End Date: 30 June 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion / Midterm End of Term				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
6. Overall		✔				✔				✔				✔		✔			✔		

Commitment Aim

This commitment sought to support the engagement of CSOs in the policy-making process by providing funding to three types of projects: 1) the testing of new engagement solutions, 2) the development of the state's engagement policy, and 3) the development of CSO participation capacity. Government institutions and civil CSOs were invited to propose their project ideas to the Government Office in any of the three categories.

Status
Midterm: Limited

During the first year of the action plan, the project selection committee at the Government Office (composed during the previous action plan and involving an equal number of governmental and non-

governmental experts) approved three project proposals. A European Structural Funds financing scheme managed by the Government Office was used for funding the three projects.

By the midterm, two projects had been completed, one was ongoing, and four proposals were under consideration. The completed projects included the technical developments of the Information System of Draft Acts (EIS), which supported the implementation of Commitment 4 in the current action plan, and a project of the Ministry of the Environment supporting public engagement in the development of a climate policy strategy for 2050. The Estonian Network of Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) and Policy Centre Praxis (a non-governmental think tank) had implemented the ongoing project "CSO Development Program – Advocacy Lab" and aimed to train civil society leaders and counsel 25 CSOs to increase their policy advocacy capacity.

End of Term: Complete

By the end of the action plan, the CSO advocacy lab project had been completed, and the Estonian National Youth Council and the Estonian Social Enterprise Network had fully implemented one more project – an analysis of the social impact of youth organizations. This project evaluated the institutional capacity of Estonian youth organizations to represent the interests of youth and to participate in public decision-making processes, mapped these organizations' needs, and proposed a model for a systematic evaluation of the role and influence of youth organizations.[1] At the time of the writing of the end-of-term report, the Ministry of Rural Affairs had started an additional project that aims to engage stakeholders in the development of a policy strategy for 2030 in the field of agriculture and fisheries. To this end, the ministry is engaging stakeholders and experts through the strategy steering committee, thematic working groups, and public information events throughout 2018 and 2019[2]. Finally, the project selection committee has approved one more project idea for funding. The Ministry of Internal Affairs proposed this project, which aims to increase the strategic partnership capacity of public sector organizations and non-governmental partners. As the project is currently in preparation, the project's exact activities and details are yet to be specified.

Altogether, four projects supporting civic engagement and participation were fully implemented during the action plan period.[3] As the commitment text included no verifiable quantitative or qualitative indicators other than the goal of funding and implementing projects, the commitment can be considered completed.

Did It Open Government?
Civic Participation: Marginal

This commitment aimed to address the discrepancy between actual policy-making practices and the existing principles and guidelines for public participation in policy-making processes specified in documents, such as the Rules for Good Legislative Practice and Legislative Drafting and the Good Practice of Involvement. The objective of funding projects in the area of public participation was to make civic engagement and participation a systematic part of policy-making processes, thereby increasing the quality of public decisions.

According to the project reports available online, the government's end-of-term self-assessment report, the views of the organizations involved in implementing the projects expressed in the IRM Progress Report, and interviews conducted for the IRM end-of-term report, the projects have had some positive effects on civic participation. For example, the public engagement project in the climate policy strategy is viewed as clearly having improved the public engagement practices of the Ministry of Environment.[4] The project report states that the initiative involved representatives of more than 80 interest groups designing the national climate policy strategy for 2050 through the work of five thematic working groups, 22 meetings, and active email communication.[5] The Ministry of Environment had not previously conducted stakeholder involvement processes of that scale.[6] In addition to holding civic engagement activities, the ministry hired a civic engagement consultant to train, advise, and support the ministry's officials in the planning and implementation of civic engagement activities. The project thus gave the ministry an important experience in stakeholder engagement and contributed to the ministry's capacity to undertake similar initiatives in the future.

However, due to the small scale of the projects funded and completed under Commitment 6, the overall impact of this commitment on the government's public engagement practices remains limited. For example, based on the assessment of Commitment 4 above (more inclusive policy-making on a central government level), the upgrading of the Information System of Draft Acts (EIS) has likely had no effect in terms of opening government. At the same time, Alari Rammo from NENO sees the CSO advocacy lab project as having slightly increased the non-governmental organizations' policy advocacy capacity.[7] The project's final report states that the project's expected quantitative and qualitative results were achieved and the CSOs that participated reported improving their knowledge and skills of policy advocacy and participation in public decision-making processes.[8] Although Rammo is skeptical about the possibility to substantially change policy-making practices within a two-year period, he does highlight the importance of positive collaboration and partnership experiences in changing civic participation practices in the long term. This points to the value of funding projects such as those implemented in the field of climate policy and agriculture and fisheries wherein public sector organizations design and implement large-scale stakeholder engagement processes to gain hands-on experience and learn from the process. According to the Government Office, the government plans to take the outcomes and suggestions developed in these projects into account in future activities.[9] Hence, the actual impact of this commitment will likely only be seen in the coming years.

Carried Forward?

This commitment has been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan (Commitment 2 – "Shaping a policy-making process that is inclusive, knowledge-based, and citizen-centred, and developing skills"). In the next action plan, citizen participation and engagement in policy-making processes will be supported through a dedicated module in a civil service training program that is targeted to public officials, including top managers and public engagement coordinators in ministries, along with CSOs. The trainings aim to increase public officials' skills in engaging citizens, designing citizen-centric policies, and assessing the social impact of policies. The commitment seeks to enhance the engagement and participation skills of 700 officials and civil society activists by the end of the action plan period.

[1] See the final evaluation report: https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/noorteuhenduste_moju_analuus_raport.pdf
[2] More information on the strategy process and participation opportunities can be found on the ministry's website: https://www.agri.ee/et/eesmargid-tegevused/pollumajanduse-ja-kalanduse-valdkonna-arengukava-aastani-2030
[3] A full list of the funded projects and project reports are available on the Government Office's website: https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/kaasamisprojektid-2015-2020
[4] This view was expressed by Kairi Toiger (Ministry of Environment) in the IRM Progress Report
[5] See https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/kliimapoliitika_kaasamisprojekti_6ppetunnid.pdf
[6] Minutes of the project selection committee meeting, 11 March 2015: https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/kaasamisprojektide_komisjoni_i_koosolek_11.03.2015_rk_kodulehele.pdf
[7] Alari Rammo (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations), interview by IRM researcher, 7 November 2018
[8] See the final report of the project: https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/huvikaitselabori_koondaruanne.pdf
[9] The IRM received this information from the Government Office during the pre-publication review period. The comment was received by email on 25 February 2019.

Theme III: Increase the Transparency of the Use of Public Funds

Commitment 7: Intensify participatory budgeting on the local level

Commitment Text:

To introduce the inclusive budget more broadly the aim will be to analyze the various current examples of inclusive budgeting and the possible necessary amendments in the legal order and to prepare instructions and raise awareness in local governments.

Milestones:

7.1. Collecting examples implemented in local governments

7.2. Analysis of theoretical literature

7.3. Analysis of legislation

7.4. Preparation of instructions

7.5. Introducing inclusive budgeting to local governments

Responsible Institution: Ministry of Finance

Supporting Institutions: Association of Estonian Cities, Association of Municipalities of Estonia, local government units implementing open budgeting

Start Date: 1 September 2016

End Date: 31 March 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion / Midterm End of Term				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
7. Overall		✔				✔				✔			✔		✔			✔			

Commitment Aim

This commitment aimed to increase public participation at the local level by encouraging the adoption of participatory budgeting by local governments. More specifically, it planned to collect data on existing examples of participatory budgeting at the local level and to prepare and disseminate instructions and best practices among local governments.

Status
Midterm: Not Started

The first three milestones were supposed to be completed by the end of July 2017, but by the midterm, none of the planned activities had started. The delay was attributed to staff changes in the Ministry of Finance (see the IRM Progress Report for more details).[1]

End of term: Substantial

According to the Ministry of Finance, implementation of the commitment started in summer 2018 when a new chief specialist joined the ministry's Local Governments' Financial Management Department.[2] Over a couple of months, the ministry compiled theoretical information and analyzed the legal context and empirical examples of the use of participatory budgeting at the local level. This work also involved personal communication and consultation meetings with local governments that have implemented participatory budgeting, such as the municipalities of Tartu, Rapla, Tapa, and Kuressaare. Due to the e-Governance Academy's previous work (eGA, an independent nonprofit consultancy) in promoting participatory budgeting among local governments in Estonia and elsewhere, the ministry and eGA discussed the possibility to reuse and adapt eGA's guidelines for participatory budgeting from 2012.[3] According to eGA,[4] the suggestion was to design new guidelines that would be directly applicable in today's context and have a more practical orientation. As of November 2018, the Ministry of Finance is in the process of officially approving the new guidelines, which are scheduled to be published by the end of the year.

Did It Open Government?
Civic Participation: Did Not Change

The instructions on participatory budgeting for local governments are scheduled for publication at the end of 2018, several months after the action plan period (June 2018). Because the government has not undertaken any dissemination or awareness-raising activities to introduce the guidelines to local governments, the commitment has had no impact on public participation at the local level so far. However, according to the Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities, local municipalities view the guidelines as a useful measure to support participatory budgeting at the local level.[5]

Carried Forward?

This commitment has not been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan. The fourth action plan continues no follow-up activities on participatory budgeting. However, according to the IRM researcher's interview with the Ministry of Finance, the ministry plans to conduct awareness-raising activities (press releases, blog posts, events) in 2019 to promote the guidelines and advise individual local municipalities interested in adopting participatory budgeting.

The guidelines on participatory budgeting for local governments were published and introduced to local governments at the beginning of 2019, after the conclusion of this action plan.[6] Data from the Ministry of Finance shows that 20 local governments out of 79 used participatory budgeting in 2018 and this number is expected to rise.[7]

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[1] See the IRM Progress Report at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/estonia-mid-term-report-2016-2018
[2] Mari Kalma (Ministry of Finance), interview by IRM researcher, 14 November 2018
[3] e-Governance Academy (2012) "Kaasav eelarvemenetlus kohalikes omavalitsustes", accessible at https://ega.ee/et/publikatsioonid/kaasava-eelarve-juhendmaterjal/
[4] Liia Hänni and Jelizaveta Krenjova-Cepilova (e-Goverance Academy), interview by IRM researcher, 6 November 2018
[5] Jüri Võigemast (Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities), interview by IRM researcher, 15 November 2018
[6] See: https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/system/files_force/document_files/kaasava_eelarve_juhend.pdf?download=1
[7] The IRM received this information from the Government Office during the pre-publication review period. The comment was received by email on 25 February 2019.

Commitment 8: Increasing the transparency of the funding of non-governmental organizations

Commitment Text:

In order to increase the transparency of financing non-governmental organizations, it is necessary, on the one hand, to harmonize the financing practice, and on the other hand, to disclose the data describing financing.

In order to harmonize the practice of financing non-governmental organizations, a knowledge-based analysis methodology shall be prepared for evaluating compliance with the principles of financing and the first analysis shall be carried out. (Ministry of the Interior is responsible)

In order to disclose financing data, making inquiries from the central financial accounting software in respect of funds allocated to non-governmental organizations through state authorities and sending information to NENO for analysis preparation shall be continued. In addition, similar data are aggregated from intermediaries of the support, whose respective data are not on the central system. The aggregate analysis made by NENO is disclosed in the application of the public funds (Ministry of Finance is responsible).

Milestones:

Analysis activities of the financing principles of non-governmental organizations (Ministry of the Interior is responsible):

8.1.1. Developing the methodology of the analysis of the financing principles of non-governmental organizations.

8.1.2. The first analysis that evaluates the financing practices as well as changes in the dynamics of financing has been carried out on the basis of the methodology and the recommendations have been implemented.

Gathering, analyzing and disclosing data describing the financing of non-governmental organizations (Ministry of Finance is responsible):

8.2.1. Overview of funds transferred through state authorities in 2015 has been sent to NENO

8.2.2. NENO analyses and prepares an overview

8.2.3. Aggregating 2015 data through intermediaries of support and sending to NENO

8.2.4. NENO prepares an aggregate analysis

8.2.5. Introducing the analysis and disclosing it in the application of public funds

8.2.6. Overview of funds transferred through state authorities in 2016 has been sent to NENO

8.2.7. Aggregating 2016 data through intermediaries of support and sending to NENO

Responsible Institutions: Ministry of the Interior (analysis), Ministry of Finance (data provision)

Supporting Institutions: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Interior, National Foundation of Civil Society, Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO)

Start Date: 1 July 2016

End Date: 30 June 2018

Commitment Overview	Specificity	OGP Value Relevance (as written)	Potential Impact	Completion	Midterm	Did It Open Government?
					End of Term	

	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
8. Overall				✔	✔						✔			✔		✔			✔		

Commitment Aim

This commitment aimed to increase the transparency of public financing of NGOs by developing a methodology for analyzing NGO financing. It also called for gathering, analyzing, and disclosing data on NGO financing from the public budget in an online application. In the long term, the disclosure of funding data will help harmonize funding practices across public sector organizations and increase their compliance with the national principles and guidelines for civil society funding.

Status
Midterm: Limited

During the first year of the action plan, the Ministry of the Interior held meetings to develop the methodology for the analysis of the public funding data and commissioned an analysis of financing practices from the Center for Applied Social Sciences at the University of Tartu. The Ministry of Finance gave the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) and the Center for Applied Social Sciences the data about public funds allocated to NGOs in 2015 and 2016. However, due to problems with data quality and compatibility, data cleaning for the aggregate analysis was difficult, delaying implementation of all milestones related to data analysis and publication. The next steps for the remaining action plan period included the completion of the analysis of funding practices, the analysis of funding data, and the publication of the data in the existing online application Riigiraha https://riigiraha.fin.ee, which the Ministry of Finance manages.

End of Term: Complete

Despite the initial delays, the commitment was fully implemented by the end of the action plan, although some changes were made to the initial work plan due to unforeseen circumstances. Namely, due to problems with data quality and errors and gaps in data, NENO made the decision not to publish the analysis of the 2015 funding data online. According to the government's self-assessment report and Alari Rammo (NENO), data on 2016 were of a much higher quality thanks to the government's change of its accounting software in 2016.[1] The results of the analysis of the 2016 data were thus published online as planned. In parallel, the study on the government's NGO funding practices was published in September 2017.[2] According to Alari Rammo (NENO), the study's one unexpected side effect was the decision to build a separate online application for publishing and visualizing the NGO financing data instead of integrating the data into the existing Riigiraha application. The data have thus been made available on the website http://mtyraha.heakodanik.ee to anyone interested.

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Marginal

The commitment aimed to increase the transparency of public funding of NGOs by aggregating and disclosing funding data in an online application. According to NENO's 2016 shadow report on NGO funding,[3] Estonian NGOs received between 60 and 100 million euros annually from public funds

based on 2013–2015 data. The report found these funds are often allocated through unclear funding criteria and project selection procedures. For many years, civil society organizations have also criticized the Parliament's habit of allocating several million euros to civil society and community initiatives and local or regional infrastructure projects through the state budget without any predefined funding criteria or public competition.[4] The collection and public release of funding data were seen as enabling a more effective monitoring of the disbursement of public funds and as helping shed light on the government's practices of allocating public funds to the non-governmental sector. In the long term, the aim was to build on this information to work on aligning actual funding practices with the existing guidelines and principles of public funding for civil society. As a result of the activity, information about public sector funding to NGOs that was previously fragmented and not easily accessible to the general public has been disclosed online in one place, clearly improving public access to information. However, because the online application (http://mtyraha.heakodanik.ee) currently only contains data for the year 2016 and has not been actively promoted among potential user groups,[5] its actual use remains extremely limited. Its effect on access to information can therefore only be considered to be marginal.

The commitment also lacked a clear mechanism whereby the publication of data could foster an actual change in funding practices. According to Alari Rammo (NENO), quantitative data about funding have helped identify certain problems, such as duplication and ineffective use of funds, but are not sufficient to explain the source of major problems in funding practices. The latter would also require regular document analysis involving the funding rules and conditions that individual public sector organizations have set up along with interviews with the officials responsible for managing grants and funding programs. Such activities, however, were not in the scope of the commitment. That said, according to interviewed stakeholders, the work of aggregating, cleaning, and analyzing the data has helped pinpoint problems with data quality and availability. In the future, such an overview can be used to suggest improvements to the way data about NGO financing are stored and published by public sector organizations. Although easy public access to financing information is not sufficient to ensure the funds are allocated and used in a more transparent manner in the future, such access does constitute an important building block for promoting accountability on both sides.

Carried Forward?

This commitment has not been carried forward to Estonia's fourth action plan. However, the activity will continue as part of a strategic cooperation agreement between NENO and the Ministry of the Interior at least for the timeframe of their existing agreement (until 2020). According to the agreement, the application will be updated annually with new data and will incorporate funding data from local governments and data on service contracts with NGOs and so on. According to interviews with both parties, the work on updating the application with 2017 data has already started. The Ministry of the Interior and NENO signed a contract on 20 December 2018 to follow up with this project.[6]

[1] Alari Rammo (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations), Interview by IRM researcher on 6 November 2018;
[2] Kiisel, M., Veskimäe, M., Rammo, A., Lees, K. (2017) "Valitsuse rahastamispõhimõtete hindamine." Accessible at https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/rake_loppraport_0.pdf
[3] See the report here: https://heakodanik.ee/sites/default/files/files/variraport.pdf
[4] For more information, see NENO's website: https://heakodanik.ee/katuseraha/ (in Estonian), Chapter 4 of the Fundamental Rights Agency's report "Standing and operational space of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in contributing to respecting and promoting fundamental rights in EU Member States" (2017) http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/estonia-civil-space_en.pdf, and the Estonian Public Broadcasting's article "Party protection money: storm in a teacup or embarrassing anachronism?" (13 December 2018): https://news.err.ee/884642/party-protection-money-storm-in-a-teacup-or-embarrassing-anachronism
[5] Alari Rammo (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations), Interview by IRM researcher on 6 November 2018; Marten Lauri (Ministry of the Interior), interview by IRM researcher on 19 November 2018
[6] The IRM received this information from the Government Office during the pre-publication review period. The comment was received by email on 25 February 2019.

Theme IV: Development of Social and ICT Knowledge and Skills Taking into Account the Opportunities of the Information Society and E-government

Commitment 9: Defining participatory democracy and development of digital competences in school education

Commitment Text:

In the development work of the subject syllabi of social subjects between 2016 and 2018 the Ministry of Education and Research shall consult with the respective interest groups, incl. civil society organizations. The interested parties, non-governmental organizations, etc. shall submit their proposals for supplementing/renewing the learning aims and learning outcomes of the field of social subjects in accordance with the general part of the syllabus.

Milestones:

9.1. The subject syllabi of social subjects will be updated by 2019 and the study materials necessary for studying and teaching will be made available through the digital study resources portal e-Koolikott.

9.2. Plans of the drafts of syllabi will be ready.

9.3. According to the national syllabus, the schools must prescribe the development of their students, including digital competences, in their syllabi. Foundation Innove advises schools in developing their syllabi.

Responsible Institution: Ministry of Education and Research

Supporting Institutions: Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication, Foundation Innove, Information Technology Foundation for Education, Government Office, universities, interested citizen initiatives, teachers, school administrators, students

Start Date: 1 January 2016

End Date: 31 December 2019

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion / Midterm / End of Term				Did It Open Government?				
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
9. Overall			✔			✔		✔			✔			✔ ✔				✔			

Commitment Aim

This commitment sought to foster participatory democracy by improving Estonian pupils' competencies related to democratic citizen participation and the use of ICTs. To this end, the Ministry of Education and Research committed to updating the syllabi of social science subjects taught at the basic and secondary school level, consulting CSOs and interest groups in the process. Advisory activities were meant to support the use of the syllabi and to develop teaching materials for the digital learning portal e-Koolikott.

Status
Midterm: Limited

Although some related work had already begun before the start of the action plan, the IRM Progress Report documented only limited implementation of this commitment. By the midterm, the Ministry of Education and Research had formed a special model for digital competencies and a working group of two teachers and two researchers to develop the concept notes for social science subject syllabi. The actual development and advisory work and consultations with civil society and interest groups had not started.[1]

End of Term: Limited

At the end of the action plan period, the completion of this commitment remains limited. According to the government's self-assessment report, some progress was made following the midterm evaluation, though none of the milestones were complete.

By autumn 2018, the expert group responsible for developing the syllabi of social science subjects produced an initial concept note describing the core competences and learning outcomes for social science subjects and was in the process of drafting the new syllabi based on this work.[2] According to the Ministry of Education and Research, a few selected interest groups had been consulted in the process, including the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations, the National Institute for Health Development, and the School Students Union. However, it postponed all broader stakeholder consultations to 2019.

According to Pille Liblik and Kaisa Musting from the Ministry of Education and Research, the delays in implementation are due to the logic and pace of an ongoing broader national-level reform in school curricula. This reform centers on a new conceptual approach to learning, which aims to give teachers more autonomy in developing their own teaching methods and practices and to foster democratic decision-making practices at school.[3] As the curricula of all subjects taught at school are integrated, the ministry did not consider it reasonable to start changing the syllabi for social science subjects before reaching an agreement on the overarching reform goals. Therefore, most of the actual work on developing the new syllabi (milestones 9.1 and 9.2) only started in 2018, in alignment with the process of reviewing the whole curriculum.

Regarding milestone 9.3 (advising schools), part of the milestone has been implemented. The Innove Foundation provides advice to schools on a needs basis to support the implementation of the digital competences model. However, all advisory activities regarding the adoption of the new syllabi for social sciences have been postponed until 2019–2020.

The government's self-assessment report and the interviewed officials also highlight the recent introduction of the concept of human rights in general education as an achievement toward the goals of the commitment. However, as this activity was not originally part of the action plan, it is not included in the assessment of the commitment completion.

Did It Open Government?
Civic Participation: Did Not Change

Estonia consistently ranks high in digital development.[4] However, evaluations of young people's digital skills have found that youths' understanding and use of ICTs for civic participation and interaction with the government remains limited.[5] This commitment aimed to contribute to an educational system and support participatory democracy by fostering digital competences of pupils. This would

enable young people to effectively participate in civil society in the digital era. Although the impact of curriculum development on actual civic participation can only be observed and evaluated in the long term, the commitment also included the aim of involving civil society and interest groups in the process. In this regard, the commitment could have potentially contributed to open government practices within the time frame of the action plan. However, as the implementation was significantly delayed and has so far not involved notable stakeholder consultation and engagement activities, it has not changed government practices regarding civic participation. Moreover, some experts who have closely observed the process also claim that information about the progress of the commitment has not been available to all interested stakeholders,[6] thus limiting effective participation. The Ministry of Education and Research justifies this choice based on the logic of the curriculum development process – a broader debate on the syllabi of social science subjects is seen as yielding more fruitful results once a group of experts has formulated an initial concept note.[7]

Carried Forward?

This commitment has been carried forward to the next action plan (Commitment 6 – "Develop attitudes towards and skills in participatory democracy"). Because the implementation of the commitment milestones was delayed, some of the same activities have been extended into the next action plan. The new action plan's commitment focuses on the consultation and involvement of interest groups (including CSOs and youth organizations) in the development of the national research and education strategy for 2021–2035 and digital and democratic participation-related competences in school curricula. As expert groups finalized their work on drafting the concept note for integrated syllabi of social subjects at the end of 2018, the document will be opened up for a broader stakeholder discussion and input from January to April 2019, mainly through discussion seminars.

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[1] Please see the IRM progress report 2016-2017 for more details.
[2] Pille Liblik and Kaisa Musting (Ministry of Education and Research), interview by IRM researcher, 22 November 2018
[3] See https://www.hm.ee/en/learning-approach for more information
[4] See, for example, the Digital Economy and Society Index 2017: http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/document.cfm?doc_id=43003
[5] Cenely Leppik, Hanna-Stella Haaristo, and Eve Mägi, IKT-haridus: Digioskuste Õpetamine, Hoiakud ja Võimalused Üldhariduskoolis ja Lasteaias (Tallinn: Praxis Centre for Policy Studies, 2017), 5-11, http://www.praxis.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/IKT-hariduse-uuring_aruanne_mai2017.pdf.
[6] Kaarel Haav (Estonian Education Forum), interview by IRM researcher, 8 November 2018
[7] Pille Liblik and Kaisa Musting (Ministry of Education and Research), interview by IRM researcher, 22 November 2018

Methodological Note

The end-of-term report is based on desk research and interviews with governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders. The IRM report builds on the findings of the government's self-assessment report; other progress assessments put out by civil society, the private sector, or international organizations; and the previous IRM progress report.

This report is based on an analysis of documents related to the implementation of the commitment and interviews with stakeholders within and outside the government. The analyzed documents included the original action plan 2016–2018, the government's self-assessment report, the IRM Progress Report 2016–2017, information on government websites and the Civil Society Roundtable's OGP website, reports and deliverables of individual projects, minutes of the Coordinating Council's meeting, press releases, media articles, and other materials helping assess the completion and implementation process of the commitments. The document analysis was followed by 17 semistructured personal interviews with 11 representatives of public sector organizations and six representatives of civil society organizations and non-governmental interest groups. The purpose of the interviews was to complement and validate the document analysis findings and to complement the analysis with stakeholders' assessment of the implementation and outcomes of the action plan.

The IRM researcher conducted with the following stakeholders:

- Merilin Truuväärt, Government Office, 6 November 2018
- Kersti Karuse-Veebel, Tax and Customs Board, 13 November 2018
- Liis Kasemets, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, 26 November 2018
- Kaie Küngas, Ministry of Finance, 14 November 2018
- Jüri Võigemast, Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities, 15 November 2018
- Marika Saar, Municipality of Elva, 15 November 2018
- Tiina Runthal, Chancellery of the Riigikogu, 26 November 2018
- Mari Kalma, Ministry of Finance, 14 November 2018
- Marten Lauri, Ministry of the Interior, 19 November 2018
- Pille Liblik, Ministry of Education and Research, 22 November 2018
- Kaisa Musting, Ministry of Education and Research, 22 November 2018
- Mall Hellam, Open Estonia Foundation, 14 November 2018
- Mait Palts, Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 16 November 2018
- Liia Hänni, e-Governance Academy, 6 November 2018
- Jelizaveta Krenjova-Cepilova, e-Governance Academy, 6 November 2018
- Alari Rammo, Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations, 7 November 2018
- Kaarel Haav, Estonian Education Forum, 8 November 2018

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The Open Government Partnership (OGP) aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, to empower citizens, to fight corruption, and to harness new technologies to strengthen governance. OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism assesses development and implementation of national action plans to foster dialogue among stakeholders and to improve accountability.

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