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

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Overview: Georgia

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

Major achievements of Georgia's third OGP action plan include introducing verification of public officials' asset declarations, launch of the budget monitor portal, as well as an Environmental Assessment Code designed to inform and engage citizens during permitting processes. The plan did not deliver on the commitment to introduce the Freedom of Information Act, a key priority for the civil society.

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 period from July 2016 to July 2018 and includes some relevant developments up to October 2018.

The Analytical Department of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) serves as Open Government Georgia's Secretariat. The OGP Forum, is a multistakeholder group supporting the development and implementation of the national action plan. The Forum is composed of around 40 members, including different public agencies, such as line ministries, independent entities, Legal Entities of Public Law (LEPL), civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations, and several local self-governments. The commitments are carried out by various public agencies of the government, and both at national and local levels.

Georgia's third action plan covered a wide range of areas compared to previous action plans, such as environment, energy, courts, and new implementing entities, such as municipal local governments. By midterm, the IRM identified three starred commitments, including the creation of the verification mechanism for monitoring public officials' asset declarations, launching a unified online portal for increasing the transparency and accountability of public expenditures, and adopting the Environmental Assessment Code.

Table 1: At a Glance

	Mid-term	***End of term***
Number of Commitments	24	
Level of Completion		
Completed	6	10
Substantial	7	6
Limited	11	8
Not Started	0	0
Number of Commitments with…		
Clear Relevance to OGP Values	17	17
Transformative Potential Impact	4	4
Substantial or Complete Implementation	13	16
All Three (✪)	3	3
Did It Open government?		
Major	4	
Outstanding	0	
Moving Forward		
Number of Commitments Carried Over to Next Action Plan	6	

The Government of Georgia officially submitted its fourth National Action Plan (NAP) 2018–2019 to OGP on 30 November 2018.

This report was prepared by Lasha Gogidze, Tamar Gzirishvili and Mariam Sikharulidze

Out of the unfinished commitments, only two are part of the new Action Plan for 2018–2019,[1] including a commitment for the Supreme Court to proactively publish court decisions in a unified database at http://info.court.ge, and a commitment for the State Procurement Agency to integrate annual procurement plans of procuring entities into the new database of aggregated tenders at http://opendata.spa.ge/#/ and published in open data format. Additionally, three new commitments in the 2018–2019 NAP are related to existing commitments: creation of the innovative platform for citizen engagement by Public Service Hall (Commitment 2 under the new NAP), launching a feedback mechanism for increased citizen participation in oversight of public finances by the State Audit Office (Commitment 11), and activating an electronic portal for meeting the Environmental Assessment Code requirements by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (Commitment 5). These commitments aim to improve the existing initiatives. Of these three, only one has not been fully implemented (Commitment 16 under the third action plan on the adoption of the Environmental Assessment Code).

[1] Government of Georgia, Georgia Action Plan 2018-2019, (OGP, 4 Dec. 2018), https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-action-plan-2018-2019.

Consultation with Civil Society during Implementation

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

Consultations during implementation were centralized, with all consultations occurring at the Ministry of Justice in the capital Tbilisi or via exchanging written comments and recommendations. The main coordination mechanism, the OGP Forum, met once every two or three months. Meeting agendas were split between discussing implementation of the third action plan, development of commitments for the new action plan, as well as the OGP Summit of July 2018 hosted by the Government of Georgia in Tbilisi. For this reason, discussions in the months prior to the Summit shifted toward planning this event.[1]

During the meetings that focused on the implementation process, the responsible agencies presented progress of their commitments and Forum members gave input on that implementation. On some occasions, the agencies provided feedback to Forum members.[2] However, this was not always the case.[3] Additionally, civil society was deeply disappointed with the lack of government commitment to promptly draft and submit a new freedom of information law to Parliament.[4] Regarding the creation of the online feedback mechanism, which was an IRM recommendation from previous progress reports, the only change was an OGP banner on the Ministry of Justice website through which the citizens could contact the Ministry and request information. However, according to Ministry representatives, this mechanism saw little use despite an interested populace, which indicates that the Ministry did not proactively promote it to the wider public.

Table 2: Consultation during Implementation

Regular Multistakeholder Forum	Midterm	End of Term
1. Did a forum exist?	Yes	Yes
2. Did it meet regularly?	Yes	Yes

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.[5] 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] Levan Avalishvii (Programs Director) and Saba Buadze (Anti-Corruption Direction Head), interview with IRM researchers, 22 Aug. 2018.
[2] Id.
[3] George Topouria (Senior Analyst, Transparency International Georgia), interview with IRM researchers, 23 Aug. 2018.
[4] Transparency International and the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, interview with IRM researchers, Aug. 2018.
[5] 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, Georgia's action plan contained three starred commitments. At the end of term, the number of starred commitments had not changed and remains three.

Finally, the tables in this section present an excerpt of the wealth of data the IRM collects during its reporting process. For the full dataset for Georgia, 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 looking at 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 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.

[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 Georgia IRM progress report 2016–2017.

The third action plan focused on three key areas: improving the integrity of public administration agencies, improving the quality of public services, and improving the efficiency of using community resources.

All five OGP grand challenges—improving public services, increasing public integrity, more effectively managing public resources, creating safer communities, and increasing corporate accountability—were addressed by the government.

The IRM did not change the initial structure of the action plan as approved by the government. Due to the technical nature of the milestones, both midterm and end-of-term reports provided assessment at the commitment level, not at the milestone level. Finally, the assessment methodology did not change between the midterm and the end of term.

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. Adapting the Public Service Hall to the needs of people with disabilities				✔	Unclear					✔						✔			✔			
																✔						
2. Launch of the unified healthcare system information portal				✔	Unclear					✔				✔						✔		
														✔								
3. Introducing an electronic																						

licensing system for natural resource applications			✔		✔					✔				✔					✔	
																✔				
4. Spatial (geographic) data web-portal for the energy sector			✔		✔			✔		✔				✔				✔		
														✔						
5. Innovation ecosystem			✔		Unclear						✔			✔				✔		
														✔						
6. Electronic portal for registering and disposal of state property – Customer's Module			✔		✔			✔		✔				✔				✔		
														✔						
7. Development of the Freedom of Information Law				✔	✔		✔					✔		✔				✔		
														✔						
8. Development of a monitoring and assessment system of the government			✔		✔						✔			✔				✔		
														✔						
✪ 9. Introduction of the public officials' asset declarations monitoring system			✔				✔					✔			✔				✔	
															✔					
10. Establishing unified regulations to publish court decisions			✔		✔						✔			✔				✔		
														✔						
11. Development of transparency and integrity strategy and action plan for regional development and infrastructure			✔		✔						✔					✔			✔	
																✔				
12. Database of the convicted				✔	Unclear					✔				✔				✔		

and electronic workflow management													✔							
13. Publication of phone-tap data according to the nature of the crime and geographic area				✔	✔					✔						✔			✔	
																✔				
✪14. Increasing citizen participation in supervision of public finances (public audit)				✔	✔	✔	✔	✔				✔				✔				✔
																✔				
15. Electronic innovations for more transparent and efficient public procurement				✔	✔						✔		✔						✔	
														✔						
✪16. Adoption of the Environmental Assessment Code				✔	✔	✔						✔		✔					✔	
														✔						
17. Introduction of a mobile app as an alternative channel to connect to "112"			✔		Unclear					✔				✔			✔			
																✔				
18. Development of local councils for crime prevention			✔		✔	✔					✔					✔			✔	
																✔				
19. Development of a guidebook for economic agents			✔		✔					✔				✔					✔	
																✔				
20. Development and introduction of a quality				✔	Unclear						✔			✔			✔			

control program for commercial service																✔				
21. Presentation of company reports				✔	Unclear						✔					✔		✔		
																✔				
22. Introduction of an electronic petition portal and "Zugdidi-INFO" on the webpage of Zugdidi Municipality Assembly			✔		✔	✔		✔		✔					✔				✔	
															✔					
23. Transparency of Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly meetings				✔	✔	✔		✔			✔				✔					✔
															✔					
24. Electronic Mechanism for Local Budget Planning in Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Batumi, and Akhaltsikhe			✔		✔	✔		✔			✔		✔							✔
															✔					

1. Adapting the Public Service Hall to the needs of people with disabilities

Commitment Text: *In the framework of the Open Government Georgia's Action Plan of 2014-2015, LEPL – the Public Service Hall (PSH) successfully introduced a feedback system – "Voice of the Consumer". By means of this program customers can fill out a special application and submit their comments/ recommendations to the PSH. On its part, PSH is liable to review the received letters within 30 days and take particular steps, if possible, and afterwards, contact the citizen and provide him/her with detailed information about his/her case.*

In November 2015, PSH was addressed by a citizen with disabilities via "Voice of the Consumer". The author of the letter described the difficulties people with disabilities face in PSH while receiving public or private services. The letter also contained concrete recommendations about how to handle this problem.

Together with the author of the letter and other organizations competent in the field, PSH developed a new project, which later was translated into the current commitment of the 3rd Action Plan of Georgia.

The goal of this commitment is that the infrastructure of PSH shall meet the standards that are mandatory for people with disabilities to move around and receive services without any trouble. At the initial stage, PSH decided to adapt Tbilisi branch to the needs of people with disabilities.

- *In the hall of PSH Tbilisi branch a special navigation system will be created for blind people or people with poor eyesight;*

Training of Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi and Rustavi branch employees in terms of communication skills when interacting with disabled persons.

Responsible Institution(s): LEPL – Public Service Hall, Ministry of Justice of Georgia

Supporting Institution(s): UNDP, Embassy of Poland, Coalition of Independent Living, NGO Mariani

Start Date: July 2016 **End Date:** December 2017

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. Adapting the Public Service Hall to the needs of people with disabilities				✔	Unclear					✔						✔		✔			

Commitment Aim:
The commitment aimed to improve access to Tbilisi Public Service Hall (PSH) for blind and visually impaired citizens by adapting the infrastructure with a special navigation system, including tactile paths and braille maps both outside of and inside the Tbilisi PSH. The commitment was drafted as a result of requests from end-users.

Status
Midterm: Complete

The commitment was fully implemented by the midterm. The Tbilisi PSH started adapting its infrastructure to the needs of the blind and visually impaired in the Fall of 2016 and completed the project in February 2017 by adapting the navigation system, tactile paths, braille maps, as well as audio reading software on the website. The PSH also trained more than 400 PSH employees in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, and Batumi. According to the representative of Tbilisi PSH, the PSH planned to make similar adaptations to Kutaisi and Batumi, as well as to add a Voice of Consumer module to their website for collecting citizen feedback from the target group. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[1]

Since the midterm report, PSH continued work beyond the scope of this commitment. PSH drafted projects on adaptation of service halls in Kutaisi and Batumi, including needs assessment and expense calculations. As of October 2018, PSH was searching for donors to finance the project. However, according to the representative of the PSH, if they are unable to find donors, they will mobilize funds to carry out the project on their own.[2] An online version of the Voice of Consumer is also under development.

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

Previously, Tbilisi Public Service Hall was not adapted to people with special needs, which restricted their access to services provided at the PSH. The commitment, which was made after requests from end-users, aimed to provide necessary adaptations to the building for the blind and visually impaired. While the commitment is an important step toward improving access to services for citizens with special needs, it did not improve access to information that was otherwise unavailable, neither did it create new mechanisms for increasing civic participation in decision-making or for holding government accountable.

Carried Forward?
The 2018–2019 National Action Plan includes a related commitment.[3] The new commitment, Commitment 1, by PSH envisions to develop standard guidelines for service delivery for people with special needs (similar to a code of ethics), creating a sign language handbook, and increasing the competence of PSH employees to improve the quality of service delivery for this specific target group. Additionally, the PSH submitted another commitment under the 2018–2019 NAP aimed to collect feedback from beneficiaries, allowing them to vote for desired initiatives proposed by the PSH, and locating sensor monitors in the buildings to allow people with special needs (including the visually impaired and blind) to use the monitors for providing their feedback.

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[1] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[2] Ani Gigineishvili (Head of Marketing and Service Development Department, Tbilisi Public Service Hall), phone interview with IRM researchers, 8 Oct. 2018.
[3] The new NAP for 2018–2019 has been adopted. Approval through Government Decree is pending as of September 2018.

2. Launch of the unified healthcare system information portal

Commitment Text:

To raise public awareness, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (hereinafter, the MoLHSA) plans to set up an information portal in the framework of the unified healthcare system (E-Health).

This commitment aims to raise public awareness, improve transparency of health care system and increase accountability and effectiveness in the field.

In close cooperation with local civil society and international organizations, the main concept of the information portal will be created. Through this portal, citizens will have an access to reliable and complete information about: the state healthcare programs, medical services, service providers (professional qualification, etc.), medical equipment, blood bank, number of beds, beneficiaries, medical staff and their working places. The portal will enable a citizen to check his/her insurance status and see which services are available for him/her in the frames of the health care programs. Current and updated information about healthcare reforms and its monitoring results will also be uploaded on the portal.

Creation of the information portal will promote transparency and accountability of the processes undergoing in the healthcare field and increased response to the citizens' needs.

Responsible institution: Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): LEPL L. Sakvarelidze National Center for Disease Control & Public Health, LEPL Social Service Agency, World Health Organization

Start date: November 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
2. Launch of the unified healthcare system information portal				✔	Unclear					✔				✔					✔		

Commitment Aim:

While the Government of Georgia adopted a Universal Healthcare Program covering all citizens of Georgia in 2013, according to the Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia (hereinafter, the MoLHSA), citizens had limited information about their rights and the services

available under the plan. The Ministry made a commitment to create a unified electronic portal to provide information regarding hospital bed availability, the background of medical staff, service providers, as well as the patient's own personal information. The portal would allow citizens to browse information regarding medical facilities, retrieve their medical history and electronic prescriptions, and make appointments with healthcare service providers.

Status
Midterm: Limited

By the midterm, commitment completion was limited. While the MoLHSA held consultation meetings with partners such as the Office of the Personal Data Inspector, USAID's Good Governance Initiative (GGI), and the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), among others, as of August 2017, the portal's concept paper was not developed. The Ministry did not have a clear vision of which services and modules were already available on the website, and which were to be added on the new portal. As of August 2017, the Ministry was working with a consultant provided by GGI on developing the concept of the portal.

Among the challenges MoLHSA faced was a lack of a coordinated and unified vision of the portal, a lack of funding, and ongoing discussions with the Office of the Personal Data Inspector on possible implications for the portal regarding protection for sensitive patient data.[1]

End of term: Limited

Since the last evaluation, the Ministry developed the portal's concept paper with the help of GGI.[2] The Ministry started working on the patient's portal in the late Fall of 2017 and launched the portal in April 2018. While the new portal provides citizens with some information outlined in the commitment text, it does not combine all features envisioned by the commitment such as information on hospital beds, medical facilities, background of the doctors, blood bank, patient's medical history and more, which indicates it falls short of the result outlined in the commitment. According to one of the partners of the MoLHSA, the implemented activities (i.e., abovementioned platform and modules scattered on different websites of the Ministry) do not correspond to the concept paper.[3]

Did It Open Government?
Access to information: Marginal

The created website requires citizen's personal ID number for authorization. Registration on the portal is simple, which brings the user straight to the page on relevant insurance and social services available to the citizen under the Universal Healthcare Program. The portal features a FAQ section, as well as a section where citizens can ask questions directly to the site administrator.[4] The portal also redirects the user to the Social Service Agency website, where one can find information about health programs, social programs, and more. The website of the Service Agency existed prior to creation of the new portal. However, the platform simplifies access to existing information by providing relevant links in one space. As such, while several types of data outlined in the commitment text are missing, the portal makes existing information under the Ministry more accessible to the public.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019.

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[1] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[2] Ketevan Goginashvili (Head of Staff of the MoLHSA), phone interview with IRM researcher, 28 Aug. 2018.
[3] Mikheil Darchiashvili (Governance Program Manager) and Levan Samadashvili (Chief of Party, Tetra Tech ARD), interview with IRM researcher, 17 Oct. 2018.
[4] An IRM researcher tested the portal (http://citizen.moh.gov.ge/CitizenPortal/Home/Main) on 5 October 2018 at 4:11pm Georgia time. The researcher posed a question but did not get a response as of 7 February 2019.

3. Introduction of electronic licensing system in the field of natural resource application

Commitment Text:

Currently, issuance of licenses for using natural resources (except for oil and natural gas) are only partially electronized by the National Environment Agency. A licensee is only able to participate in the auction through electronic means.

A citizen who is willing to obtain a license and/or receive any other paid services outside the auction, within the auction or afterwards, must complete additional paperwork (for example, submission of an application and other accompanying documents, the owner's consent and decision, statistical form, etc.) before and after the auction. This process requires additional time and financial resources both for the citizen and the agency. Sorting and analyzing information received non-electronically is another complication. The current licensing system is problematic because it is important to distribute high quality information in a timely fashion not only for formation of the database, but to deliver virious services promptly for the licensees, license seekers, public structures and other stakeholders.

Through this commitment, the National Environment Agency shall issue licenses and render other paid services entirely in an electronic manner. The new electronic system allows for documents pertaining to the licensing field to be available electronically. As a result, the agency will be able to sort and form the statistical database of collected information in a much more efficient manner. The system will ensure prompt, high-quality delivery of the processed information. Furthermore, the customer will have simplified access to any public information (statistics, online map of resources, guidebook, etc.) available in the licensing field. It is important that and the licensees will be able to contact and share information with one another.

Responsible Institution(s): LEPL – National Evironment Agency, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia

Supporting Institution(s): None

Start Date: December 2015 **End Date:** December 2017

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
3. Introducing an electronic licensing system for natural resource applications			✔		✔					✔				✔		✔			✔		

Commitment Aim:
This commitment aimed to expedite license documentation processing for natural resource applications by introducing an electronic licensing system. At the time this commitment was adopted, investors in Georgia faced difficulties obtaining licenses from the National Environment Agency for using natural resources. There was significant paperwork, and the process dragged. More specifically, the commitment set out to:

- Provide licenses and other paid services entirely in an electronic manner;
- Make documents in the licensing field available electronically; and
- Give the customer simplified access to any public information in the field, including statistics, online maps of resources, and a guidebook.

Status
Midterm: Limited

This commitment saw limited implementation by the midterm. The first phase, including analyzing business processes of the new electronic system, was successfully completed in June 2017. However, the Agency decided to add two new components to the system that turned out to be more challenging to implement: 1) integrating the Environmental Supervision Department into the new system to monitor how licensees are implementing their obligations; and 2) developing more robust electronic modules for mineral resource applications. The Agency's IT specialists were busy analyzing whether it would be possible to add those two components to the system.

End of term: Complete

The December 2017 amendments transferred natural resource responsibilities from the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources to the newly created National Agency of Mineral Resources under the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development.[1] On 20 February 2018, the Agency launched a new portal on the Revenue Service webpage, https://nam.rs.ge/, which allows license-seekers to register their interest to participate in auctions and to submit all necessary documents to the Agency electronically, including license implementation action plans and relevant statistics. The portal also allows the Agency to send out notifications to all registered license-seekers or licensees. It contains full and up-to-date data on the licensees, location of licensed objects, a list of natural resources for licensing as well as dates, costs, and the scope of license agreements. In order to register on the portal, interested users should refer to the service center of the Agency of Mineral Resources to obtain the necessary username and the password, after which they will be assigned a unique registration number.[2] In addition, in April 2018, the Agency launched another portal which should contain data on all geological projects implemented in Georgia, including relevant reports, cadastral maps, characteristics and photos of geological objects, expert comments on the condition of those objects, as well as minutes of relevant inter-agency meetings.[3]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Marginal

The new electronic licensing system is not for public use since it requires the entry of username and password for registration, which must be obtained at the Agency of Mineral Resources. The system contributes to improving issuance of natural resource licenses and easing the flow of necessary documents between the Agency and license-seekers. The new geological portal, described above, is still under construction. Most of the data currently published are historical, archived documents in Russian and in scanned PDF form, which is not very useful for the reader. Finally, the Agency has not conducted any awareness-raising campaigns around its new portals. Neither has it tracked the number of users and the level of their satisfaction.

On a positive note, the Agency created a Facebook page, on 19 June 2018, which contains infographics, maps, and characteristics of natural resources in various regions of Georgia as well as new developments in the Agency and in the natural resource field. Some of this information was new to the public. Most Facebook posts were published after July, which falls outside of the reporting

period. As of October, 1,129 people have liked this new Facebook page while 1,140 have followed it.[4] Based on this description, the commitment has led to only a marginal change in improving public access to information in natural resources.

Carried Forward?

The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019. In line with the five key recommendations of the midterm report, the Georgian government could prioritize transparency of government contracts in the licensing of natural resources, as well as the privatization of and public procurements in infrastructure projects. Civil society representatives recommend the adoption and use of the Open Contracting Data Standard in conjunction with stakeholder collaboration.[5]

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[1] Law of Georgia, "Amendment to the Law of Georgia on the Structure, Competences, and Work of Georgian Government," Art. 2, doc. no. 1620-RS (7 Dec. 2017), https://bit.ly/2xUs0fw.

[2] Elene Kemashvili (National Agency of Mineral Resources), email correspondence with IRM researcher, 24 Aug. 2018.

[3] National Agency of Mineral Resources, "Geology Fund Catalogue," https://bit.ly/2DB8lHk.

[4] National Agency of Mineral Resources, "National Agency of Mineral Resource's Facebook Page" (Facebook, 2018), https://www.facebook.com/nationalagencyofmines/.

[5] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.

4. Creation of spatial (geographic) data web-portal for the energy sector

Commitment Text:
Geo-Information Systems (GIS) in the energy sector need development and further elaboration. There is no relevant software or united internet space where stakeholders can find information about the location of the energy objects and their various characteristics. This makes it difficult for interested stakeholders (investors among them) to obtain information in a timely manner; interest to implement various projects decreases, and projects are not developed efficiently.

In the framework of the given commitment, the Ministry of Energy shall create a publicly accessible electronic space to periodically update information about spatial data. The portal will enable stakeholders (both in the country and abroad) to remotely obtain information about the location of the energy objects and their characteristics. This will facilitate more efficient project implementation at the initial stage, as well as throughout the implementation process.

The commitment promotes improving principles of efficiency of governance, innovation and technologies.

Responsible institution: Ministry of Energy of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): None

Start date: September 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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. Spatial (geographic) data web-portal for the energy sector			✔		✔			✔		✔				✔				✔			
														✔							

Commitment Aim:
Georgian citizens have little information about the government's energy projects including their location and characteristics. To address this, the Ministry of Energy committed to creating a publicly accessible online portal that would contain this missing data.

Status
Midterm: Limited

At the midterm point, the commitment saw limited implementation as the new energy portal was not launched. The Ministry created an internal working group, including relevant public agencies and state-owned energy companies, and reached a consensus as to what kind of information should

available on the portal. The Ministry also identified energy companies under its jurisdiction that had to provide data for the portal. The companies started sharing some of their data and the Ministry was in the process of analyzing this data. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.

End of term: Limited

Similar to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Energy was also dissolved, and its functions were transferred to the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, according to the December 2017 amendments.[1] This government reorganization and restructuring hindered the smooth and prompt implementation of this commitment within the dates set out in the action plan. The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development plans to launch the unified energy portal on its website in the near future but was unable to provide a more specific date. Among other data, this new portal would contain data on hydropower plants and renewable energy sources as well as the methodology used for selecting energy objects (energy generating and distribution facilities) for exploitation.[2] As of the reporting period, energy-related data is scattered between the pre-existing portals of Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation (gas pipeline projects)[3] and the outdated portal of the then Ministry of Energy containing maps of hydropower plants, thermoelectric power stations, and companies extracting oil in Georgia.[4]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Did Not Change

As mentioned above, the government has not yet launched the unified and up-to-date energy portal for public use. The pre-existing portals contain limited and sometimes outdated information (only names and brief descriptions of energy objects and related projects) and the wider public is not aware of their existence. Therefore, the level of public access to information has not changed since the start of this commitment.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019. In addition to publishing the methodology for selecting energy resources for exploitation, stakeholders also recommended that the government disclose all relevant documents about investment projects (contract terms, memoranda, detailed assessments of the projects' impact on local climate, environment and population, etc.). The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development could also involve citizens in the initial phases of decision-making regarding the exploitation of the energy resources.

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[1] Law of Georgia, "Amendment to the Law of Georgia on the Structure, Competences, and Work of Georgian Government," Art. 2, doc. no. 1620-RS (7 Dec. 2017), https://bit.ly/2xUs0fw.
[2] Tamar Sabelashvili (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development), interview with IRM researcher, 27 Sept. 2018.
[3] Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation, https://bit.ly/2R3VOz3.
[4] Ministry of Energy, https://bit.ly/2ImC1GV.

5. Creation of innovation ecosystem

Commitment Text:
An idea to take commitment on creating innovation ecosystem derives from the research prepared by the World Bank.

In order to create an innovation ecosystem, it is important to have a complex infrastructure that would inspire forming innovative society and the knowledge-based economy.

By taking the two-component commitment in the framework of this Action Plan, Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency (hereinafter, GITA) aims to create easier citizen access to the modern high-tech units, computer technologies and high-speed internet. This will develop computer literacy in the society and relevant skills for business commercialization.

***Component I** – Innovation Agency plans to develop the innovation infrastructure (techno-park) currently available in the capital city and create additional innovation infrastructure in other Georgian regions through financial assistance from the World Bank. The development of innovation infrastructure envisages: 1. Development of innovation infrastructure currently available in the capital; 2. Establishment of regional innovation hubs in the big cities; 3. Establishment of innovation centers (innovation centers will be established on the basis of the available infrastructure (libraries, educational institutions) in close cooperation and with active participation of the municipalitites in the countryside); 4. Increase access to internet in the regions. To measure the results, IT-based beneficiary management system will be developed.*

A regional innovation hub (center) is a mini-technopark. One regional hub will be established in a big city of a region, which will be connected to a number of district innovation centers. The location of innovation centers will be selected based on the preliminary researches. These hubs will provide various training services. Based on the findings of the skills feasibility study, trainings will be conducted in response to the needs of a particular location. In addition to educational service, the innovation centers will have meeting-rooms to conduct meetings, presentations or monitoring on various topics. The services will be delivered free of charge.

***Component II** – Provides population with increased access to innovation services by conducting trainings, Olympiads, distant learning, consulting services, improves basic computer literacy and relevant skills of individuals and entrepreneurs.*

Responsible institution: LEPL – Innovation and Technology Agency, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): Advisory Body of Georgian Government – Research and Innovation Council, The World Bank

Start date: June 2015 **End date:** December 2017

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. Innovation ecosystem			✔		Unclear						✔			✔				✔			
														✔							

Commitment Aim:
Citizens living in rural areas of Georgia have limited access to continued education and training resources which in turn contributes to the lack of qualified candidates for the country's job market and low productivity levels. To address this, the Innovation and Technology Agency committed to supporting entrepreneurship and job creation by developing an innovation ecosystem of techno-parks and innovation centers, which would provide citizens with free access to modern technologies and skill-building. More specifically, the commitment aimed to:

- Develop innovation infrastructure in the capital, Tbilisi;
- Establish regional innovation hubs in big cities;
- Establish innovation centres in rural areas;
- Increase internet access in the regions; and
- Enhance public access to innovation services by providing skill-building training for interested citizens and entrepreneurs.

Status
Midterm: Limited

By the midterm point, the commitment saw limited implementation. The Agency opened one techno-park and three innovation centers instead of the initially planned two techno-parks and 13 innovation centers. This delay in implementation was mainly due to problems related to the lack of funding and the dire conditions of old buildings slated for those centers.

End of term: Limited

The status has not changed since the midterm evaluation. As of October 2018, the Innovation and Technology Agency had not opened any additional techno-parks or innovation centers but planned to open a techno-park in Telavi and two innovation centers in Akhmeta and Rukhi by the end of 2018.[1]

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

Despite providing free access to high-tech products, co-working space, and grants for various innovation projects, the techno-parks and innovation centers in their current form are not meant to open up government decision-making processes. According to Agency representatives, these centers occasionally host informative public meetings with local government and private sector representatives; these meetings mostly focus on youth, innovation, online technologies, computer

literacy, and entrepreneurship-related issues.[2] However, they do not serve as a platform enabling citizens to voice local concerns directly to their elected representatives or contribute to policy-making around those issues. Neither do the centers conduct surveys to measure user-satisfaction with existing services provided nor solicit feedback on future improvements. Therefore, this commitment fell short of increasing public access to information in the OGP context.

Carried Forward?

The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019, but the government intends to continue opening techno-parks and innovation centers outside of the OGP process.

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[1] Mariam Lashkhi (Head of International Relations Department) and Ana Gugushvili (Senior Adviser to the Head of International Relations Department, Innovation and Technology Agency), email correspondence with IRM researcher, 23 Aug. 2018.

[2] Gugushvili (Innovation and Technology Agency), interview with IRM researcher, 22 Aug. 2018.

6. Electronic portal for registering and disposal of state property – Customer's Module

Commitment Text: *The National Agency of State Property (hereinafter, Property Agency) is focused to offer its customers quick and affordable services, including remote services countrywide so that people can obtain information and services from the Agency without leaving homes.*

Under Action Plan, the Property Agency will create an electronic portal for registration and disposal of State property – customer's module. Creation of a customer's module not only serves to introduce electronic services, but also to build more transparent processes.

The customer's module will enable the stakeholders to obtain information about state property, objects under privatization, and announcements of auctions. This will increase competition and it will be easier for customers to identify the property and services (privatization/lease) they are interested in.

Responsible institution(s): LEPL – National Agency of State Property, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): None

Start Date: April 2016 **End Date:** July 2016

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. Electronic portal for registering and disposal of state property – Customer's Module			✔		✔			✔		✔				✔				✔			

Commitment Aim:
In order to minimize corruption and reduce paperwork, the National Agency of State Property sought to create an electronic portal, Customer's Module, which would allow citizens to register state property under their ownership and manage it online. Additionally, the portal would be used for publishing information about state-owned property, objects under privatization, and auction announcements. Information about bidders and their bids would not be published on the website, as such information is protected under commercial secrecy and privacy.

Status
Midterm: Limited

The commitment had limited implementation by the midterm. As of August 2017, the Agency was in the process of testing Customer Module, which was planned to be launched in September 2018. Additionally, initially envisioned as part of the NASP website, it was later decided to integrate the module into the existing my.gov.ge platform, due to technical problems. Online maps of state objects and their ownership information would be published on the Agency's website. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[1]

End of term: Limited

The status of completion has not changed since the midterm report. Development of Customer Module was stalled due to technical difficulties as well as a change in leadership. As of October 2018, the Agency was waiting for an agreement between the Ministry of Justice (as the initiative is implemented in coordination with Public Registry under the Ministry of Justice) and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. According to the Agency, two secondary services are available on my.gov.ge, but these do not constitute the main services envisioned by the Agency on privatization and monitoring of state property.[2]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Did Not Change
Since the commitment is not implemented, there was no change in government practice on increasing public access to information.

Carried Forward?
This commitment was not carried forward into the National Action Plan for 2018−2019. However, the NASP made a related commitment, Commitment 15, specifically focused on enhancing transparency of state enterprises (established with 100% state contribution) by 1) creating a standard with basic information about the enterprise including information on the director, capital, projects, and more, and publishing it on nasp.gov.ge; and 2) drafting a corporate management handbook for such state enterprises.

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[1] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[2] Maka Mikaberidze (Head of Planning and Control Unit of the Strategic Development Department, National Agency of State Property), phone interview with IRM researcher, 12 Oct. 2018.

7. Development of the Freedom of Information Law

Commitment Text:
Improving legal framework of freedom of information and elaborating new provisions in compliance with international standards which are gradually being implemented, is one of the top priorities for the government of Georgia.

In the framework of the first Action Plan of Georgia, decree of the government of Georgia "About the Form of the Electronic Request of Information and Proactive Disclosure of Public Information" was adopted. Through this reform, Georgia became one of seven finalist countries at the "Bright Spots" competition held by the OGP Global Summit in London. The goal of the competition was to demonstrate successful reforms implemented as a result of civil society-government cooperation.

At the next stage, the government started more ambitious project of elaborating a stand-along act on freedom of information. To carry out a wide-scale consultations, a special working group comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Justice, civil society, and independent experts was created. This working group carried out an important work: (1) to identified key problematic issues in the field, thematic working groups were established; (2) the first version of the project with potential amendments was drafted and submitted to the Anti-Corruption Council; (3) meetings with the focus groups (judges, journalists, persons responsible for information disclosure) were held; (4) the draft law prepared by the working group was presented to the Ministry of Justice; (5) the draft project underwent primary international expertise.

Ministry of Justice will negotiate the draft law with all governmental agencies in the framework of the given Action Plan. After the detailed review of the draft law, in the framework of the Anti-corruption Council activities, Ministry of Justice will conduct one more consultation round with governmental and civil society organizations to finalize the text of the draft law.

Responsible institution: Ministry of Justice of Georgia, Anti-Corruption Council

Supporting institution(s): Parliament of Georgia, Open Society Foundation – Georgia, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)

Start date: Not provided **End date:** December 2017

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. Development of the Freedom of Information Law				✔	✔		✔					✔		✔				✔			

Commitment Aim:
Under this long pre-existing commitment, the Ministry of Justice pledged to finalize the draft of a standalone Freedom of Information (FoI) law, discuss it within the government and submit it to the parliament for adoption.

Status
Midterm: Limited

At the midterm, the commitment had limited implementation since the updated draft was not approved by the government nor submitted to the parliament. This draft envisaged the following:

- Introduce an independent oversight body—Freedom of Information Commissioner—with the authority to fine agencies that violate the FoI legislation;
- Create a unified registry to categorize and manage public information, and to allow quick and simple access;
- Expand the list of agencies responsible for granting access to information, including state-owned enterprises;
- Reduce the number of working days from ten to three for issuing readily available information; and
- Require public agencies to publish their data on the unified open data portal, data.gov.ge, and explain the state and societal damage that could result from publishing classified information, and to declassify secret information that is in high public demand.

The MoJ put this draft on hold for more than two years. Only in May 2017, the Ministry shared the updated draft with all relevant stakeholders, including the Anti-Corruption Council and the members of the working group and the OGP Forum. The updated draft was largely based on the previous draft and contained all key provisions discussed above. The Ministry received numerous comments on this draft and was in the process of addressing those comments. They also held bilateral meetings with different public agencies to explain the proposed novelties. The MoJ planned to submit the new draft to the government by end of 2017.

End of term: Limited

No major progress has been made since the midterm evaluation. The MoJ was in the process of consultations with all relevant public agencies who had numerous reservations on the novelties proposed by the draft, especially those regarding the Freedom of Information Commissioner. The law enforcement agencies are particularly sensitive to the implementation of this oversight mechanism and the public interest test (i.e., the obligation of public agencies to explain the damage that could be inflicted on the state and society by publishing classified information and to declassify secret information that is in high public demand) especially with regard to information that is classified under the state security clauses.[1] The MoJ consulted public agencies on the new draft due to the complexity and sensitivity of the proposed provisions. The CSOs provided comments, however, the MoJ did not respond with feedback and CSOs were disappointed with the process.[2] According to the MoJ, interagency consultations on the draft are ongoing.[3]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Did Not Change

Given that the existing FoI draft law has not been approved by the government nor submitted to parliament, as of October 2018, there is no change in government practice regarding improved access to information and public accountability.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019. Civil society provided the government important recommendations for improving access to information in Georgia.

- The existing draft FoI law should be adopted promptly, including all key novel provisions discussed above. These provisions should also apply to companies founded by the state or

having 50% or more state ownership shares as well as to individual state-funded entrepreneurs performing public functions.

- The government needs to expand the list of information that should be published proactively, including detailed data of the individual salaries, bonuses, and business trip allowances of public servants.
- The government should define more clearly what type of information can be classified and under what reasons. It should also declassify personal information in high public demand if the benefit received from disclosing such information is higher than that of keeping it secret.

[1] Zurab Sanikidze (Head of the Analytical Department of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia) and Ketevan Tsanava (National Coordinator of OGP, Ministry of Justice), interview with IRM researcher, 30 Aug. 2018.
[2] Transparency International Georgia and IDFI, interviews with IRM researcher, Jul.–Aug. 2018.
[3] Ministry of Justice, comment received during pre-publication review period for this IRM report.

8. Development of a monitoring and assessment system of the Government policy and legislative acts

Commitment Text:

The Administration of the Government of Georgia in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice will develop a unified system for monitoring and assessment of the government policy planning documents and legislative acts. By means of the system, on the basis of ex-ante and ex-post assessment, it will be possible to identify challenges regarding the implementation of the commitments taken by the Government in a timely manner. This will make the policy management process more efficient. In addition to this, on the basis of ex-ante assessment it will be possible to identify particular problems that could be addressed by relevant legislative acts and/or policy planning. In order to engage society, the platform for dialogue will be enhanced. On the one hand, this will enable the government to provide citizens with information, while on the other hand, our society will also be able to use the space to offer the government its recommendations. In particular, citizens will have an access to the system and will be able to present their ideas in writing in an electronic form.

Following analysis of the information, obtained through the monitoring process, the monitoring report will be prepared, contributing to an even more transparent and accountable government. Monitoring on the changes implemented through a short-term and a long-term documents (for example, nation-wide documents or sectoral strategies) will be performed on an annual basis. Monitoring of short-term documents (annual working plan, Action Plan) shall be conducted quarterly or biannually. Monitoring and reporting of internal documents (Ministry plans, department plans and individual plans) shall be handled on a monthly basis. Monitoring and reporting mechanism for each planning document shall be defined during the strategy implementation process.

Furthermore, in 2017 a new electronic system will be introduced for the government to better carry out and monitor its activities. The system will ensure: (1) creating electronic reports about the activities planned by different public agencies in the framework of the government annual action plan; (2) monitoring and analysis of implementation process. Various sectorial and multi-sectorial action plans will also be integrated into the system. The platform will enable stakeholders to organize information by sector or direction.

Responsible institution: Administration of the Government of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): Ministry of Justice of Georgia

Start date: March 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
8. Monitoring and assessment system of the government			✔		✔						✔			✔				✔			
														✔							

Commitment Aim:
The Administration of the Government of Georgia committed to developing a unified system for ex-ante and ex-post assessment of the country's policy planning documents and legislative acts. This also included creating a monitoring and reporting system with the participation of citizens who would be able to submit their ideas and recommendations. Specific aims of the commitment included:

- Launch a new electronic system of reports on the activities planned by different public agencies as well as reports on the monitoring and analysis of the implementation process;
- Prepare quarterly or biannual monitoring reports on the implementation of the government's nationwide strategy and policy documents;
- Prepare monthly monitoring reports on the implementation of internal planning documents; and
- Give citizens access to the new system so they might present ideas electronically and organize the available information by sector or direction.

Status
Midterm: Limited

At the midterm, the commitment had limited implementation. In 2016, the government decreed that all public agencies must conduct monitoring and assessment of the implementation of their policy strategies and action plans. Based on this decree, the government administration selected five pilot ministries (Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Agriculture; and Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development), who had to draft their specific strategies and perform monitoring. The administration planned to add seven more pilot ministries to the system and, later, all remaining ministries. The lack of capacity in some ministries created a challenge for operating the system within all government agencies.

End of term: Limited

The commitment's implementation remained limited at the end of term. While the five pilot ministries developed the monitoring and assessment reports of their policy strategies and action plans, the new and unified electronic system envisioned in the commitment was not yet launched. During the reporting period, the administration was in the process of consulting with ministries and donors about the new system. An important topic under discussion concerned which part of this system would be made public: electronic reports about the activities planned by different public agencies or the monitoring and analysis of the implementation process.[1]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Did Not Change
The new monitoring and assessment system of the government's policy and legislative acts was not launched in the period covered by the action plan and this report. Therefore, there was no change in government practice in terms of improving public access to information.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019, but the government intends to continue this project outside the OGP process. Civil society thinks that the new system can improve the quality of government decision-making only if it includes elements of openness, public participation, and accountability. Explanatory notes and budget impact of each draft policy and legal act need to be published together with a simplified analysis of the pros and cons about the proposed change. Additionally, the government should publish the number and name of stakeholders consulted, including a summary consultation report and government responses. The government could also create an online mechanism for consultations with stakeholders, allowing interested parties to provide individual feedback.

[1] Mariam Danelia (Adviser to the Unit of Government Plans and Innovations at the Government Administration), interview with IRM researcher, 31 Aug. 2018.

✪ 9. Introduction of the public officials' asset declarations monitoring system

Commitment Text:
In compliance with the Law of Georgia on Conflict of Interest and Corruption in Public Service, starting from 2017, the Civil Service Bureau will conduct monitoring of the asset declarations of public officials. Monitoring shall be conducted annually by an independent committee based on obvious and objective criteria, also for the declarations randomly selected by the electronic system. Prior to the civil service reform, this issue was not regulated by the law. There was no tool to audit the economic interest and property data disclosed by public officials. Monitoring of the public officials' asset declarations aims to improve accountability of public officials and prevent corruptive offences.

Responsible institution: LEPL – Civil Service Bureau

Supporting institution(s): Government of Georgia, Anti-Corruption Council, LEPL – Data Exchange Agency

Start date: March 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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. Public officials' asset declarations monitoring system			✔				✔					✔			✔ ✔					✔	

Editorial note: This commitment is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has transformative potential impact, and is substantially or completely implemented and therefore qualifies as a starred commitment.

Commitment Aim:
This pre-existing commitment (since the second action plan in 2014) aimed to create a formal verification mechanism for public officials' asset declarations. Before, public officials were prone to hiding important information regarding their assets or providing wrong data in their declarations and there was no official mechanism to verify the accuracy of the provided content.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

At the midterm, the commitment had been substantially implemented. The legal amendments necessary for the operation of the new verification mechanism were approved by parliament in

December 2016 and entered into force on 1 January 2017. According to these amendments, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) started monitoring public officials' asset declarations, which were either selected randomly through the unified electronic system or reported as suspicious by external stakeholders. However, the CSB was not able to create an independent commission in charge of using special methodology for selecting asset declarations for monitoring due to an insufficient number of applications submitted for commission membership. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.

End of term: Substantial

As mentioned above, the CSB was unable to create an independent commission to be composed of CSO and academia representatives. This was due to the insufficient number of applications from academia representatives submitted for commission membership. CSOs critically assessed the provision allowing the CSB to refuse to create the independent commission if there are insufficient applications, arguing that civic groups and journalists should be given an opportunity to apply and help fill the academic quota. They also complained about the CSB's lack of effort to proactively promote the application announcement through various online and offline sources. The creation of the commission was an important part of the commitment since the commission was supposed to independently select public officials' asset declarations for monitoring based on the special criteria aimed to fight the corruption in public service. Therefore, the commitment remains incomplete at the end of term.

Did It Open Government?
Public Accountability: Major

Prior to this commitment, there was no official mechanism to verify the accuracy of public officials' asset declarations. During the reporting period, the CSB used its electronic system to randomly select a total of 284 asset declarations for verification. In addition, the CSB received three reports from external stakeholders, including Transparency International Georgia, to monitor asset declarations of public servants working in the offices of regional governors, local municipal bodies, courts and parliament. Of these, the CSB found irregularities and missing information in 224 declarations and consequently fined their authors or referred them to the Prosecutor's Office.[1] Based on recent amendments to the law, new sanctions were introduced for violating asset declaration rules, such as a reprimand for minor technical errors and a 20% deduction of the salary in the amount of no less than GEL 500 for providing incomplete or wrong data. At the same time, officials continue to face a fine of GEL 1,000 for late submissions and criminal liability for repeated failure to submit declarations.[2] Finally, in December 2017, the CSB published its first report summarizing the monitoring results of asset declarations described above.[3]

The aforementioned work of the CSB in monitoring asset declarations of Georgian public officials constitutes a major step forward for government accountability in the fight against corruption in public service, especially considering the Bureau's willingness to address requests of external stakeholders to monitor suspicious declarations. However, these efforts were limited due to the CSB's inability to establish an independent commission of CSOs and academia representatives who were supposed to use more robust criteria for selecting which declarations to monitor. The establishment of this commission would contribute more significantly to preventing the corrupt behavior of public officials.

Transparency International and the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) both acknowledged the major change in practice in terms of the CSB's asset declaration monitoring. They especially valued the CSB's practice of monitoring declarations requested by external stakeholders. They also commended the categorization of sanctions for minor and grave violations. Had the CSB created the independent commission, CSOs would have assessed this commitment as outstanding.[4]

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019. However, this is an important area for anti-corruption efforts in the country.

Civil society recommended that the government determine exactly how many declarations of public officials can be verified from each agency and which specific types of officials can submit classified declarations. They also believe that the CSB should not refuse to create the independent commission based on insufficient applications and should amend the law to allow more flexibility in this regard. For instance, the creation of the commission should not depend upon CSO and academia applications; other interested stakeholders such as journalists should also be given a chance to apply and fill the membership quota.[5] A related suggestion is to promote the application announcement beyond the CSB webpage, including various online, offline, and social media sources. The government plans to create the independent commission and to proactively promote the application process for commission membership per CSO recommendations.

Finally, stakeholders suggested that the government establish an independent anti-corruption agency with authority to investigate corruption cases of high-level politicians and government officials. The current mechanism is an anti-corruption council at the Ministry of Justice, which is composed of government representatives and a few CSOs, but it lacks the mandate to investigate high-level politicians, something CSOs have criticized for a long time. At the same time, the State Security Service is also reluctant to investigate cases involving the ruling party or high-level state officials. As an alternative, CSOs suggest creating a completely independent body that would be given an authority to investigate the cases of so-called "elite corruption." They believe this would give the fight against corruption considerable momentum at all levels of government in Georgia.

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[1] Civil Service Bureau, "2017 Results of Asset Declaration Monitoring" (29 Dec. 2017), https://bit.ly/2QqBUgB.
[2] Law of Georgia, "Conflict of Interest and Corruption in Public Service," Art. 20, doc. no. 982 (17 Oct. 1997), http://bit.ly/1Lo3Pbg.
[3] Civil Service Bureau, "2017 Results of Asset Declaration Monitoring."
[4] Giorgi Nasrashvili (Senior Analyst, Transparency International), Lasha Senashvili (Senior Analyst, TI), and Gigi Chikhladze (Senior Lawyer, TI), interview with IRM researchers, 23 Aug. 2018; Levan Avalishvii (Programs Director) and Saba Buadze, (Anti-Corruption Direction Head), interview with IRM researchers, 22 Aug. 2018.
[5] Nasrashvili, Senashvili, and Chikhladze, interview.

10. Establishing unified regulations to publish court decisions

Commitment Text:
Establishing unified regulations to publish court decisions aims to improve transparency, accountability and efficiency of the court system. This commitment intends to increase trust between a citizen and the court and also to improve access to information.

The working group will develop a project aiming to define key directions and principles in publishing court decisions through unified system. The given project will be submitted to the High Council of Justice for its approval.

Based on the unified regulations elaborated, the court decisions will be published on the court webpage.

In the framework of the third wave of the reform, in compliance with the Order of the Supreme Court Chairperson (Order #30-s/18.12.2015) a working group was formed that will develop main directions and principles for establishing a unified standard to improve court decision accessibility.
The objective of the working group is to work out recommendations on the rules concerning issuance of general court decisions, also concerning the rules for anonymization of personal data for transferring them to the third person.

Main objective – Improve accountability and transparency of the court system, also taking into account high public interest, improve information accessibility; publicity of the court decisions shall be ensured by observing international and national standards of the personal data protection.

Responsible institution: Supreme Court of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): General Courts, High Council of Justice of Georgia

Start date: July 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
10. Unified regulations to publish court decisions			✔		✔						✔			✔				✔			

Commitment Aim:
Under this commitment, the Supreme Court aimed to develop key directions and unified standards for publishing court decisions online in a way that would allow easy reuse of this data. Before, there was no such unified standard and citizens often faced difficulties searching for court decisions online.

Status
Midterm: Limited

At the midterm, the commitment had limited implementation. In July 2016, the Supreme Court created a working group of representatives of Supreme, Appellate, and District Courts, as well as the Personal Data Protection Inspector, the High Council of Justice and local CSOs (the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, IDFI, TI, the Lawyers' Association, and the Charter of Journalistic Ethics). This working group developed unified regulations in accordance with internationally recognized standards, including those on protecting personal data. The regulations were approved by the High Council of Justice on 12 September 2016, which published them on its website. However, due to the complexity of refining technical procedures for publishing decisions online and the lack of funds for expensive software necessary for the web design, the Court was unable to launch the unified portal. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.

End of term: Limited

The commitment's implementation status remained limited at the end of term since the unified online portal was not launched. The Supreme Court plans to launch this portal by the end of 2018. The portal would allow users to find information relating to their court cases, such as court sessions, their schedule and minutes, and to download those documents in PDF format. The Court would also provide Application Programming Interface (API) to interested organizations for them to integrate the court data in their own systems.[1]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Did Not Change

Given the Supreme Court was not able to launch the unified online portal to include court decisions published in a user-friendly way, there has been no change in the courts' existing practice of openness.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019. The 2018–2019 plan includes the Supreme Court's commitment, Commitment 9, to proactively publish court decisions in a unified database at http://info.court.ge. This redesigned portal would serve as a single registry of court decisions of all three tiers of courts: Supreme, Appellate, and District Courts. The portal's new search system would contain the list of final court decisions, including those with the concealed parts and names; public notifications; separate sections for petitioners; and information about the appointed court sessions.[2]

CSOs recommend that the Supreme Court disclose data on criminal charges of public officials as well as information of organizations involved in the court disputes.

[1] Giorgi Asanidze (Head of Unit of Information Technologies at the Supreme Court of Georgia), interview with IRM researcher, 7 Sept. 2018.
[2] Government of Georgia, Georgia Action Plan 2018-2019, Commitment 9 (OGP, 4 Dec. 2018), https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-action-plan-2018-2019.

11. Development of transparency and integrity strategy and action plan in the field of regional development and infrastructure

Commitment Text:

The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia (hereafter, Ministry of Infrastructure) disposes huge amounts of budget funds annually. Hence, it is expedient to further improve the Ministry's standard of transparency and integrity. The Ministry of Infrastructure, together with relevant international and nongovernmental organizations, is currently working on the development of the Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action Plan in the Regional Development and Infrastructure. In the given strategy document the standards of transparency and integrity will be elaborated for the Ministry of Infrastructure and the entities under its system or management. In order to introduce these standards, an Action Plan will be developed. The introduction of the standards set forth in the document will eventually facilitate improvement of accountability and efficiency of the Ministry.

Responsible institution(s): Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Good Governance Initiative in Georgia (GGI) Program

Start Date: 2016 **End Date:** March 2017

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
11. Transparency and integrity strategy and action plan for regional development and infrastructure			✔		✔						✔					✔			✔		
																✔					

Commitment Aim:
The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure (MRDI) committed to approve a Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action Plan with the overall objective to ensure a guiding document for transparency and integrity efforts in the Ministry and its subordinate units.[1]

Status
Midterm: Complete

The commitment was fully implemented by the midterm. The MRDI adopted the Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action Plan in April 2017, which includes four thematic areas: 1) increasing transparency and civic participation; 2) strengthening ethics and integrity standards; 3) improving human resource management; and 4) enhancing planning, monitoring, and internal financial control systems. The Action Plan entails activities such as proactive publication of information, enhancing whistleblower protection, and an electronic module for collecting citizen input on political documents. CSOs were consulted in the drafting process and asked for their feedback. However, some of the participants claim that key recommendations were not taken into account, such as the importance of incorporating procurement into the document, which is an important area based on the Ministry's line of work. According to the MRDI, policies on public procurement are made by the State Procurement Agency and the MRDI follows these rules as established through normative acts.[2]

By the midterm, the Ministry started implementing some activities under the Action Plan. Information on construction projects under sub-entities of the ministries were published on www.build.gov.ge. In terms of whistleblower protection, the Ministry's website featured a link to the whistleblower form, which redirects the user to www.mkhileba.gov.ge, the whistleblower page of the Civil Service Bureau responsible for such claims. While some of the trainings for Ministry employees envisioned by the commitment were underway by the midterm, more capacity-building activities were planned. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[3]

The commitment was fully implemented by the midterm. The Ministry continued to publish information on projects on build.gov.ge.[4] The Ministry continued training employees on issues such as procedures for disclosing public information, as well as employee evaluations, project management, and more.[5]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Marginal

Adopting the sectoral Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action Plan was a positive step as it created the first sectoral anti-corruption guiding document in one of the most risk-prone areas in the country, and underscored MRDI's readiness to implement anti-corruption measures. The site, build.gov.ge, which was launched in its current form in the first quarter of 2017, publishes basic information on projects implemented by subordinate entities of the Ministry. According to the Ministry, this information was public before launching build.gov.ge, but was scattered across different Ministry websites. The new platform collected project information on a single website and made it easier to find.[6]

While build.gov.ge provides information on projects for all subordinate units divided by their status (planned, current, implemented) and allows citizens to look up any project in the period of 2017–2020, project information is limited to: name, location, period of implementation, implementing entity, and the category (e.g., road reparation, drainage system, etc.). The website also provides a link to the procurement website, which gives more comprehensive information regarding the tender, price, and other accompanying documents such as project plans, and more. While information on the procurement website existed prior to build.gov.ge, build.gov.ge simplifies finding projects implemented by sub-Ministry bodies. The link to build.gov.ge, along with a link to the whistleblower page of the Civil Service Bureau was added to the websites of all sub-Ministry units.

The USAID project, Georgia Good Governance Initiative (GGI), which assisted MRDI in developing the strategy and the action plan, commented on the importance of the co-creation process, which featured both the adoption and the implementation of the strategy. In the future, GGI plans to collaborate with MRDI on improving the usability of build.gov.ge.[7]

Carried Forward?

The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019. In order to continue progress in this area, MRDI would need to ensure the full implementation of the Transparency and Integrity Action Plan. In addition, to increase transparency of simplified procurement and electronic tenders, MRDI could disclose information on its deals in a user-friendly format, along with detailed decisions and accompanying statistical data.

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[1] Subordinate units include LEPL – Municipal Development Fund (MDF), LEPL – Vano Khukhunashvili Center for Effective Governance Systems and Territorial Arrangement Reform, Roads Department of Georgia, LLC Solid Waste Company of Georgia, LLC United Water Supply Company of Georgia, and LLC State Construction Company.

[2] MRDI, comment received during the pre-publication review period.

[3] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.

[4] Projects of the Municipal Development Fund are available at: http://mdf.org.ge/index.php?site-lang=en.

[5] Eka Sepashvili (Advisor to the Minister, MRDI), phone interview with IRM researcher, 29 Aug. 2018.

[6] Sepashvili, (MRDI), e-mail correspondence with IRM researcher, 10 Oct. 2018.

[7] Mikheil Darchiashvili (Governance Program Manager) and Levan Samadashvili (Chief of Party, Tetra Tech ARD), interview with IRM researcher, 17 Oct. 2018.

12. Improvement of the database of the convicted and transfer of the penitentiary department entirely onto the electronic workflow management

Commitment Text:
The Ministry of Corrections of Georgia will improve the existing or create a new convicted database for 2017. The existing database cannot provide adequate processing/sorting of the data; complete data is not outlined in the database, and appropriate filtration is not possible.

Updated database will be introduced gradually. At the first stage the shortcomings of the existing system will be identified. The Ministry will study good practices of various countries and successful systems in this field. At the later stage, the future system model will be developed and tested.

The updated base will allow the entire transfer of Penitentiary System and Penitentiary Department to an electronic workflow management system. Concurrently, this will enable better processing and analysis of statistical data, and better protection of personal data.

Responsible institution: Ministry of Corrections of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): European Union (EU) Technical Assistance Project

Start date: April 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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	Maior	Outstanding
12. Database of the convicted and electronic workflow management				✔	Unclear					✔				✔				✔			
														✔							

Commitment Aim:
Georgian citizens had very little information about the processes within the penitentiary system; even specialized organizations faced difficulties obtaining official data about prisoners and their conditions. To address this, the then Ministry of Corrections pledged to study the shortcomings of existing prisoner databases, study the international standards for building and running those databases, and update or create a new database based on best standards.

Status
Midterm: Limited

At the midterm, the commitment had limited implementation. The Ministry of Corrections partnered with the European Union for Justice Project to improve the Ministry's databases. The assessment identified a need to harmonize different prisoner databases and create a new unified database, which would automatically generate the information needed. However, this information would be for internal use only and staff within the penitentiary system would have varying levels of access to the database.

End of term: Limited

The status of the commitment at the end of term remained limited. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Corrections continued cooperating with the European Union for Justice Project, the main donor for this commitment, on updating prisoner databases, a process that is expected to be completed by May 2019.[1] It should also be noted that following July 2018 amendments to the law, the penitentiary functions of the Ministry of Corrections were transferred to an agency under the Ministry of Justice, the Special Penitentiary Service.[2]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Did Not Change
Civic Participation: Did Not Change
Public Accountability: Did not Change

As written, the commitment is not clearly relevant to OGP values, given that the database was only intended for internal use. Neither did the commitment open the penitentiary system in practice, as no new data on the convicted or on the government work and expenses in the field has been made available to the public.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019.

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[1] Elena Beradze (Head of Department of International Relations at Special Penitentiary Service of Ministry of Justice), interview with IRM researcher, 22 Aug 2018.
[2] Law of Georgia, "Amendment to the Law on Special Penitentiary Service," doc. no. 3129-RS (5 Jul. 2018), https://bit.ly/2QpbADg.

13. Publication of phone tapping data according to the nature of the crime and geographic area

Commitment Text:
The given commitment is a prominent example of the cooperation of the government and the civil society. By the recommendation of the Forum member NGOs, in the framework of the second Action Plan of the Open Government Georgia, the Supreme Court of Georgia started to proactively publish phone tapping statistics. Due to this fact, Georgia entered a small group of countries where such data is publicly disclosed. Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) of OGP marked this commitment of the second Action Plan as 'starred' commitment.

In addition, the IRM report noted that data shall be published in such a manner that it can be sorted by crime and geographic area. The Chairperson of the Supreme Court directly reacted to the recommendation and stated that the court would adopt this as a new commitment in the framework of the Third Action Plan of OGP.

Hence, the court plans to introduce new statistical reporting forms that will allow for obtaining and publishing detailed phone tapping data, as well as processing the data according to the crime differentiation and courts. Data will be published in Excel files on the website www.supremecourt.ge under the section of OGP, on the News block and Statistics link.

Responsible institution: Supreme Court of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): None

Start date: July 2016 **End date:** January 2017

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
13. Publication of phone-tap data				✔	✔					✔						✔			✔		

Commitment Aim:
In accordance with IRM recommendations from the 2015 IRM progress report, the Supreme Court committed to publishing phone-tap data broken down by the nature and geographic distribution of crimes. The Supreme Court pledged to publish this data in Microsoft Excel files on its website.

Status
Midterm: Complete

The commitment was completed by the midterm. The Supreme Court started publishing the new data in January 2017. The data was published in PDF format and provided six-months of statistics based on the type of crime for which the courts granted the phone-tap motions. The data included the Criminal Code articles that suspects were charged with, the number of requests by the Prosecutor's Office to grant the motions for phone taps, and the number of motions that were granted, partially granted or not granted at all. In a separate PDF file, the Supreme Court provided geographic distribution of District Courts, the number of motions discussed by those courts, and the number of motions they granted, partially granted or denied.

While the commitment had already been completed, the Court started publishing the aforementioned data in Excel spreadsheets per the initial pledge.[1] This is an improvement since it allows interested parties to better reuse this data for their own purposes.

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Marginal

Given this commitment was carried forward from the previous action plan and envisaged publishing already available data but in a more disaggregated way, it only minorly increased openness within the court system. Before, phone-tap data was not disaggregated by the nature and geographic distribution of crimes. It only included the number of prosecutorial motions for phone taps and the number of motions granted. This data was published in PDF format.

Further, while this data is used by some watchdog CSOs, such as IDFI, other CSOs and the wider public are either unaware of its existence or find it lacks useful details, which are concealed due to state security considerations. TI and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) think the data is still very general and does not allow for rigorous analysis of government practice in the field. For instance, the existing data is not broken down by categories of persons for which the courts grant phone-tap motions and there is no data on how many phone records are destroyed by the Prosecutor's Office after the completion of their investigative activities.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019.

[1] Phone-tap data is available at: Supreme Court of Georgia (2018), https://bit.ly/2O2klkA.

✪14. Increasing citizen participation in supervision of public finances (public audit)

Commitment Text:

In cooperation with the civil sector, the State Audit Office plans to enhance citizen participation in the supervision process of public finances (public audit), that will build their trust in the State Audit Office.

At the initial stage a strategy will be drafted, in close cooperation with the civil sector. Considering the best practice of various countries, the strategy will provide mechanisms to ensure constructive citizen participation in the complete audit cycle, including the monitoring stage of recommendation implementation.

In addition, by means of an innovative ICT web platform mechanism, citizens will receive complete information about the state budget, public finance management, audit findings, given recommendations and the status of its implementation. Various methods of visualization will be applied to make information easily perceivable on the web-platform.

The web platform will form a channel for bilateral communication between the State Audit Office and citizens. On the one hand, citizens will become familiar with the information provided by the Audit Office, on the other hand, they will be able to notify the Office about a concrete malefaction, as well as the drawbacks of government services identified by them. Furthermore, citizens will be able to submit proposals based on professional surveys on the improvement of the identified shortcomings. The information received from a citizen will be analyzed and taken into consideration if recommended in the drafting and implementation process of the audit plan.

Citizens' participation in the public audit process will raise public awareness on the budgetary processes and will rise their demand for transparent management of the public resources. Thorough information will improve the quality of citizen supervision of the governance processes.

Milestones:
Conducting public consultations with the representatives of civil sector for developing and improving various mechanisms of citizen participation in the public audit process
Drafting the citizen participation strategy in the public audit process
Finishing and approving the citizen participation strategy in the public audit process
Defining the concept of webplatform and agreement with the representatives of civil sector
Technical development of a webplatform and its presentation to the society
At least 15 workshops with the representatives of the municipalitites, students and media are organized by the State Audit Office to rise awareness on the right to request public information and webportal
Shooting a short video on webplatform and its distribution through social media

Responsible institution(s): State Audit Office

Supporting institution(s): Advisory group comprising representatives of the State Audit Office and civil sector, working on the citizen participation issues in the public finance management supervision

Start Date: August 2016 **End Date**: December 2017

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	Maior	Outstanding
✪14. Citizen participation in supervision of public finances (public audit)				✔	✔	✔	✔	✔				✔				✔				✔	
																✔					

Editorial note: This commitment is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has transformative potential impact, and is substantially or completely implemented and therefore qualifies as a starred commitment.

Commitment Aim:
In order to increase transparency and accountability of public finances and involve citizens in decision-making, the State Audit Office (SAO) committed to establish a web platform budgetmonitor.ge. Through this platform, the SAO's would present up-to-date information on state and municipal budgets in an easily understandable manner; publish audit findings in a user-friendly format; allow citizens to select budget priority areas to be audited by SAO and enable citizens to report cases of corruption confidentially or anonymously.

Status
Midterm: Complete

The commitment was fully implemented as of September 2017. SAO formed a working group with CSO involvement, conducted 14 focus groups to identify end-user preferences, and launched the platform in March 2017. Budgetmonitor.ge offers different sub-pages, including "State Budget," "Municipal Budget," "Audits," "Citizen Page," and more. By the midterm, SAO conducted 13 out of 15 meetings across Georgia as indicated in the commitment to raise awareness of the portal. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[1]

After the midterm, SAO conducted numerous meetings with different target groups in order to raise awareness about the portal, including meetings with different Parliament committees and staff, media representatives, students, and others. In total, SAO presented the platform at 11 meetings.[2] Additionally, with the help of USAID, SAO collected feedback from budgetmonitor.ge users on the deficiencies and possible improvements of the portal. SAO also hired an external consultant to analyze the platform and develop an outreach strategy to further promote this resource.[3]

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

Since launching the platform, SAO estimates more than 15,000 unique visitors, with an average of 400-500 unique users each month. SAO's current efforts are directed at increasing returning users.[4] The platform contains multiple features, with information, a corruption-reporting feature, and assistance when being audited. According to end-users of the platform, budgetmonitor.ge simplified

access to basic financial data including the state budget, details of the Legal Entities of Public Law, and municipal budgets.[5] CSOs positively assess both the simplicity of the data, and the user-friendly interface of the platform.[6]

Much of the information on the platform, including the state and municipal budgets, and audit findings, was public prior to the platform. However, the information was in complex formats such as the legal form of approved budgets or audit reports. Municipal budgets were particularly challenging. The platform represents a big step toward 1) clarifying the information by providing visual aids, 2) making it more easily accessible to the public–now all of the abovementioned data is combined on a single platform as opposed to the prior system of multiple pages, some of which were outdated or unclear.

The "Citizen Page" enables citizens both to suggest government bodies for auditing as part of the following year's Annual Audit Plan and to select priority areas for examination–both features providing citizen participation. While the platform offers citizens a direct opportunity to get involved in audit planning and corruption reporting, there is still a low level of citizen participation based on statistics to date.

The "Fight Corruption" sub-page allows citizens to report cases of corruption, which are further studied by a specific auditor, thereby giving citizens a mechanism for holding the government accountable. According to CSOs, the creation of the platform in itself is already an indicator of strong political will to increase accountability.[7] According to SAO, citizen requests are received from various customer modules (e.g., annual audit planning, disclosing corruption, or selecting budget priority areas for examination) and initially screened for relevance. While many requests were received within one year, after initial screening, 25 were deemed relevant to SAO's work and competences.[8] Out of the 25, 7 identified corruption risks. In total, around 9 requests were taken into consideration in the audit plan. As the annual audit plan is decided at the end of the year, all suggestions received during the year can be potentially incorporated into the plan. It is challenging to make amendments to the existing plan for suggestions received after the plan is adopted, although it has been done.[9] As of September 2018, SAO had submitted 29 reports to the Prosecutor's Office for further investigation.

According to a researcher at ISET, the platform is a big step however, popularization of it remains problematic.[10] CSO representatives positively assess SAO's earlier efforts to promote the platform, and stress that meetings organized by the agency to introduce the platform were helpful. The platform was actively promoted through ads on Facebook. According to a Senior Analyst at Transparency International Georgia (TIG) using social media would further help.[11]

Carried Forward?

Based on IRM recommendations, SAO included a related commitment in the 2018−2019 Action Plan (Commitment 11), with a specific focus on citizen engagement in the audit process. Namely, SAO plans to establish a feedback mechanism for citizen input received through budgetmonitor.ge, which will improve the efficiency and timeliness of responses to citizen notifications (audit planning suggestions or corruption case reporting). This will increase citizen trust in the platform. SAO plans to conduct five working groups to increase awareness regarding the platform.

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1 Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.

2 Tsotne Karkashadze (Head of the State Budget Analysis and Strategic Department), e-mail correspondence with IRM researcher, 15 Oct. 2018.

3 Karkashadze (State Budget Analysis and Strategic Department), phone interview with IRM researcher, 10 Oct. 2018.

4 Karkashadze, interview, 10 Oct. 2018.

5 Lasha Senashvili (Senior Analyst at Transparency International Georgia), phone interview with IRM researcher, 26 Dec. 2018.

[6] Irakli Barbakadze (Researcher at ISET), phone interview with IRM researcher, 26 Dec. 2018; Giorgi Topouria (Senior Analyst at Transparency International Georgia), phone interview with IRM researcher, 23 Aug. 2018.
[7] Senashvili, interview, 26 Dec. 2018.
[8] Citizens often find it hard to distinguish competencies of different government agencies. Therefore, a lot of the suggestions submitted to SAO through the website are irrelevant to SAO's work (e.g., they refer to tax authorities or other unrelated bodies). SAO screens these suggestions and deals with those that refer to their work. Currently, there is no monitoring mechanism in place to oversee how suggestions are screened. Generally, the agency is assessed positively by local CSOs, and SAO's will to launch such a platform was commended as a step toward accountability.
[9] Karkashadze, interview, 10 Oct. 2018.
[10] Barbakadze, interview, 26 Dec. 2018.
[11] Senashvili, interview, 26 Dec. 2018.

15. Electronic innovations for more transparency and efficiency of public procurement

Commitment Text:

Transparent public procurement and increasing the level of accountability, elimination of geographic barriers and rising competitiveness in this process is a permanent priority of the Government of Georgia. To achieve this objective, the State Procurement Agency plans to introduce the following innovative projects:

Component 1 – Aggregated data on tenders: *Starting from December 2010, tenders on public procurement are held only through a unified electronic system (procurement.gov.ge) of public procurement. Around 36000 tenders are announced through this system and this number, as well as many other data tends to increase. The mentioned trend complicates the accumulation and analysis process of information on particular procurement object or tender for the stakeholders.*

Aggregation of tender data in one space will make the following data easily accessible:

- *Data on procurement objects, tender types, number of bidders, potential and contract values of a tender, winning bidders, number of disqualified bidders, etc.;*
- *Annual data (data will be located in the machine-readable format (CSV, JSON, XML)).*

Aggregated data on tender in a new format will allow contracting authorities, interested organizations to participate in public procurement, start-ups and representatives of small businesses and NGO sector to fully analyze the state of the market and make business forecasts.

Component 2 – Aggregated data on annual plans of public procurement: *Public procurement is carried out in compliance with pre-defined annual procurement plans, registered in the unified electronic system of public procurement – e-Plan module by contracting authority. As for stakeholders, they currently have access only to general information about the annual plan. The planned changes in the electronic module will allow the customer to obtain detailed information on the annual procurement of each procuring organization, and consolidate information on the planned public procurement according to the regions and price. As a result, the representatives of the business sector will have a unique opportunity to obtain information on scheduled procurement, its price and location (region) by one or more entities among 4469 procuring organizations registered in the e-Procurement system by using a CPV code. Additionally, the publication of a list of top procurement objects and their total amount is planned on the official webpage of the public procurement. These innovations will enable better assessment of the market requirements and better planning of the future activities of the business representatives.*

Component 3 – E-catalogue on the procurement objects and economic operators (e-Market): *Establishment of the estimated value of the procurement object is preceded by a market research conducted by the contracting authorities, which is important for both arranging a concrete tender objectively, and for correctly defining the annual procurement budget while developing the annual plan.*

Hence, elaboration of an electronic catalogue for key procurement products is recommended, which will:

- *objectively reflect the market prices;*
- *accumulate prices of various products by economic operators;*
- *reflect information on economic operators countrywide, as well as regionwide; etc.*

This innovation will allow the agencies to plan procurement more efficiently and obtain information on the market prices, economic operators, and conditions in a short period of time at the public procurement preparation stage. Maximum data openness will help the procuring agencies to define correctly the estimated price of the procurement object, which will reduce the risks of setting high prices by contracting authorities, corruption and failed tenders.

Introduction of innovations envisaged by these three components ensures transparency, elimination of geographic inequality, enhancement of anticorruption endeavor and support to business in the public procurement process countrywide.

Responsible institution: LELP – State Procurement Agency

Supporting institution(s): LELP – National Agency of Public Registry

Start date: June 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
15. Electronic innovations for more transparent and efficient public procurement				✔	✔						✔			✔	✔				✔		

Commitment Aim:
To comply with open contracting requirements and to allow for deeper analysis of available procurement data, the State Procurement Agency (SPA) committed to publishing aggregated data on tenders, annual plans of procuring agencies, and the estimated value of each procurement object in open data format. The commitment specifically aimed to:

- Publish data on procurement objects, tender types, the number of bidders, potential and actual values of tender contracts, winning bidders, and number of disqualified bidders;
- Publish the aforementioned data annually in CSV, JSON, and XML formats;
- Publish detailed information on the annual procurement plans of each procuring agency, and categorize this information by regions and price; and
- Publish a list of top procurement products and their total amount on the SPA's official public procurement platform. This includes the estimated market prices of those products and information on their producers.

Status
Midterm: Limited

By the midterm, the commitment had limited implementation as the aggregated data on tenders (component 1) and annual procurement plans of public agencies (component 2) were not published in open data format. The SPA conducted research and a workshop on Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS), developed an action plan, and worked on the implementation together with World Bank experts.

The third component of the commitment, an e-Market module, was launched in the Fall of 2016. The module contained information about suppliers, their products, prices, warranty terms, and shipment locations. The SPA planned to promote this new module on its Facebook page as well as during meetings with stakeholders. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.

End of term: Substantial

The commitment was substantially implemented by the end of term. In August 2017, the SPA launched a separate webpage containing aggregated data on tenders, published in JSON format. As of October 2018, this webpage included the following information for about 248,154 tenders: the number, type, dates, completion status, and potential value of tenders as well as the names and ID codes of winning bidders and procuring entities.[1] However, the SPA did not update the e-Plan module, which includes annual purchase plans of procuring entities, to integrate it with its new open data format and to make the available data more accessible to public. As of October 2018, the e-Plan module continued to be hosted by the SPA's main webpage. It contains 23,734 data entries on annual procurement plans of procuring entities, specifically data on the procurement object, type of tender, its potential value, sources of financing, and the responsible person for the data provided.[2] Finally, the SPA continued to update the pre-existing e-Market module with the information about suppliers, their products, prices, warranty terms, and the shipment location.[3]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Marginal

The government publishes its procurement tenders on a unified electronic portal, procurement.gov.ge, which contains a large amount of data on tenders and beyond and requires opening multiple pages to access the data. By launching a separate portal containing aggregated and more detailed data on tenders and in open data format, the government has shown its commitment to complying with open contracting requirements to make the tender data more easily accessible to citizens. Since September 2017, the SPA has shared information about its new web-portal, www.opendata.spa.ge with beneficiaries of the state procurement system using social media, newsletters, and annual reports, as well as trainings and events organized by different agencies. However, CSOs remain critical of the fact that the SPA's new open data portals have not been promoted to the wider public and that only a handful of stakeholders engaged actively in monitoring the public procurement processes are aware of their existence. Furthermore, CSOs think that the aggregated tender data contains insufficient filters to allow for deeper analysis of the content. The data is not linked to other related databases, and some important details about sub-contractors are missing. Further, as the data is in JSON format, regular users are not able to access it without special computer software. The stakeholders suggest the SPA consider publishing data in CSV format instead. Finally, the SPA does not provide an Application Programming Interface (API) to interested organizations to link their portals, such as tendermonitor.ge, to the new SPA webpage.[4] Based on the aforementioned findings, the IRM researcher assesses this commitment as having a marginal impact on improving access to information in the public procurement field.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019. Under Commitment 13 in the new action plan, the SPA plans to integrate the e-Plan module and annual procurement plans of procuring entities into the new database of aggregated tenders at http://opendata.spa.ge/#/, and to publish this data in open data format. They also commit to publishing more details on the tenders, adding more filters for deeper analysis, and updating this data on a regular basis. Finally, the SPA plans to provide an API to registered users of its new open data portal and redesign the portal to align it better with the open contracting data standard.[5] For their part, stakeholders recommended the government limit the number of exemptions from the e-procurement system and to introduce a ceiling on the value of tenders that can be processed under simplified procurement rules while imposing additional regulations for tenders that exceed this maximum. This would help prevent corruption and further increase transparency of the public procurement system.

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[1] State Procurement Agency, aggregated tenders, are available at: https://bit.ly/2zS3E8i.
[2] State Procurement Agency, e-Plan module, are available at: https://bit.ly/1JBkNSe.
[3] State Procurement Agency, e-Market module, are available at: https://bit.ly/2O80VAj.
[4] Sandro Kevkhishvili (Analyst/Editor at Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)), interview with IRM researcher, 21 Aug. 2018.
[5] Government of Georgia, Georgia Action Plan 2018-2019, Commitment 13 (OGP, 4 Dec. 2018), https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-action-plan-2018-2019.

✪16. Adoption of the Environmental Assessment Code

Commitment Text:

This commitment implies adoption of the environmental assessment code that will envisage the requirements of the convention "on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters" (hereafter, Aarhus Convention) in the environmental protection issues and will ensure public participation in the decision-making process in relation with effects on the environment, particularly:

- *to bring potential negative impact of high risk activities on the condition of the natural environment, as well as on human life and health under the environment assessment regulation, in compliance with the requirements of EU directive 2011/92/EC "on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on environment";*
- *Public participation in the elaboration and adoption process of bylaws (strategic documents) regulating activities that might have potential impact on natural environment and human life and health as well, dissemination of the information through printing media and electronically at the initial stage of the elaboration of strategic documents, involvement of public and scientific opinion in the process of public discussions conducted for the purposes of elaboration above mentioned documents;*
- *Environmental decision-making, public engagement at the initial stage according to the principles of public administrative proceedings. Publication of information on the place of planned activities, as well as electronically and through printing media, conducting public discussions on the place of planned activity, consideration of proposals and opinions during the decision-making process.*

Responsible institution(s): Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): Financial support – EU, program "Greening Economies in the European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP) Countries" – EaP GREEN; program implementer UN Economic Commission for Europe–UNECE

Start date: Not provided **End date:** August 2017

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
✪16. Adoption of the Environmental Assessment Code				✔	✔	✔						✔			✔				✔		

Editorial note: This commitment is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has transformative potential impact, and is substantially or completely implemented and therefore qualifies as a starred commitment.

Commitment Aim:
The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia (MENRP)[1] committed to adopt an environmental assessment code to bring activities with potential environmental effects under the Ministry's regulation, assess activities against environmental protection interests, and inform and engage citizens in the decision-making process for approving these projects.[2] The commitment aimed to adopt an environmental assessment code; train a specific structural unit to adjust MENRP's work to the new regulations; inform other administrative bodies involved in the authorization process regarding these changes; and train academics and other stakeholders in how to participate in environmental impact assessments (EIAs).

Status
Midterm: Substantial

The Environmental Assessment Code was adopted in the beginning of 2017, to be enforced starting January 2018. The Code opened up the environmental assessment process to citizens by obliging the Ministry to:

- Inform citizens regarding project proposals via different channels such as the Ministry website, newspapers, and the building of the Ministry;
- Collect feedback from citizens in electronic or written form, as well as through public discussions; and to
- Provide feedback on which proposed suggestions were taken into account.

However, by the midterm, the Ministry had yet to address the other milestones, such as staffing the structural unit, informing other administrative bodies involved in the authorization process of the new regulations, and training academics and the general public in how to participate in the assessment process.

Some CSOs working in the field were concerned of shortcomings in the legislation, such as in the case of subsoil, where the National Environmental Agency is authorized to issue permits prior to environmental assessment. In their opinion, this might diminish the importance of the assessment and influence the outcome of the assessment process. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[3]

End of term: Substantial

After the adoption of the Environmental Assessment Code, the government of Georgia made significant changes to the structure of the ministries. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia (MENRP) merged with the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development to form a new Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture (MEPA). According to Green Alternative, an environmental CSO, this merger shuffled individuals responsible for implementing the commitment, resulting in a lack of competence by staff working on the environmental assessment process, thereby affecting the quality of information published about the projects in question. These staffing issues also impeded the full implementation of the remaining milestones. Additionally, since the two ministries merged their websites, information on environmental assessments gets lost in the shuffle of news regarding agriculture.[4]

According to MEPA, two trainings were conducted in September 2018 on environmental impact assessments and strategic environment protection assessments. In total, 56 participants were trained including employees of MEPA and other ministries, as well as implementing companies and planning departments. Additionally, the Ministry increased their capacity by adding specialists to the responsible department.[5]

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

The commitment sought to open up environmental assessments to citizens by involving them in the screening and scoping process–a process which excluded civic participation since the mid-2000s.

In October 2018, the Ministry provided statistics on civic participation in the environmental assessments. According to the Ministry, since 1 January 2018 when the Environmental Assessment Code came into force, all incoming requests are published on the Ministry's website including screening requests (127 in total), scoping requests (61), their respective decisions to date (screening: 75, scoping: 37), as well as public meeting announcements (55 in total).[6] The Ministry does not have statistics on citizen engagement. However, the Ministry accepts citizen suggestions in written and oral forms and includes them in the meeting transcripts.[7]

While CSOs commended the Ministry for adopting the Code and opening citizen participation channels during environmental impact assessments, several loopholes remain both in legal norms and in practice. According to a recently published policy brief by Green Alternative, there are two deficiencies in the legislation. First, while citizens can participate in all three stages of the environmental assessment, the Ministry and the project implementer exercise the right to initiate a change to the resulting decision. If such a change is initiated, instead of a public administrative procedure with citizen participation, simple administrative procedure is conducted, leaving citizens outside of the process. Secondly, the Code has two annexes which list types of projects that are subject to mandatory environmental assessment. While activities listed in Annex 1 are automatically subject to EIA, activities under Annex 2 are subject to assessment only if the Ministry decides that the EIA is necessary. According to this annex, open-cast mining of minerals is only subject to mandatory EIA if the surface of the mining site exceeds 25 hectares; peat extraction falls under the same requirement if the surface of the site exceeds 150 hectares. Environmental experts believe that 25 and 150 hectares are exceedingly high thresholds and inadequate for protecting natural resources and the environment.[8] As noted in the Midterm Report, the Code also falls short of regulating EIAs in forestry.[9]

According to experts in the field, the practical implementation of the new Code has shortcomings as well. For example, the Ministry violates procedural norms by publishing insufficient information regarding the project proposals, and by changing public hearing dates without notifying stakeholders. Environmental experts have the impression that while some of the shortcomings might be due to a lack of competence, on some occasions the Ministry deliberately avoids following the procedural norms. As the first two years implementing the Code set the precedent for years to come, these concerns were brought to Parliament and a hearing with the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee was requested. While Parliament promised to hold a hearing on the loopholes in legal norms and their implementation, no such hearing was held as of December 2018.[10] Additionally, experts in the field call for increased human and financial resources in the relevant department of the Ministry to increase competency in implementing the Code.[11]

As for assessing the impact of the commitment, according to a leading NGO in the field, at this early stage of implementation it is difficult to assess the extent citizen inputs are taken into consideration in the final decision regarding the proposed projects.[12]

Carried Forward?
The LEPL Environmental Information and Education Centre under the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture made a new, related, commitment in the new 2018−2019 National Action Plan to increase the efficient application of the Environmental Assessment Code. The new commitment, Commitment 5, envisions creating a web-platform for publishing information regarding assessments and decisions; this will increase citizen access to information regarding upcoming projects and simplify their involvement in the assessment process.

According to Green Alternative, this platform would enable efficient dissemination of project information and would allow for easier citizen participation by offering online space for comments. Additionally, this platform could be used for involvement in other assessment processes, including assessment of government strategies among other documents.[13]

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[1] The Ministry was merged with the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia and is now the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.
[2] Government of Georgia, Georgia National Action Plan 2016-2017 (OGP, 3 Nov. 2016), http://bit.ly/2t2eFxU.
[3] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[4] Keti Gujaraidze (Policy Analyst) and Irakli Macharashvili (Biodiversity Program Director, Green Alternative), interview with IRM researcher, 22 Aug. 2018.
[5] Salome Dvali (2nd Category Senior Specialist in the Strategic Planning Unit of the Environmental Assessment Department, Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture), e-mail correspondence with IRM researcher, 19 Oct. 2018.
[6] Id.
[7] Id.
[8] Kety Gujaraidze, "A Year After the Enactment of the Environmental Assessment Code: the Shortcomings Identified" (Green Alternative, 14 Dec. 2018), http://greenalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/EIA_policy_brief_2018_FINAL_ENG.pdf.
[9] Rezo Getiashvili (Environmental Projects Coordinator, Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN)), interview with IRM researcher, 28 Dec. 2018.
[10] Keti Gujaraidze (Policy Analyst, Green Alternative), interview with IRM researcher, 26 Dec. 2018.
[11] Id.
[12] Ann Inasaridze (Environmental Resources Management Specialist, CENN), email correspondence with IRM researcher, 29 Dec. 2018.
[13] Gujaraidze and Macharashvili, interview, 22 Aug. 2018.

17. Introduction of a mobile app as an alternative channel to connect to "112"

Commitment Text:
The mission of LELP "112"of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is to reduce the time of emergency response. In order to process the emergency message without delay, identification of exact location of the caller is of utmost importance. When the caller is in the location without an address or he/she is not able to exactly identify the location, identification of his/her location is complicated. Furthermore, there are cases when, due to the specificity of the situation, the caller is not able to talk on the phone with the 112 call-taker.

In order to identify the location without delay introduction of a mobile app – an alternative communication channel to "112" is recommended. Respectively, a long-term strategy was drafted, one of the priorities of which is creation alternative communication channels to connect to "112".

The biggest advantage of the project is a) immediate contact between the caller and 112 call-taker and b) the possibility to identify the location of the caller without delay- vital for a citizen waiting for emergency assistance.

Responsible institution(s): LELP – "112" Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): None

Start date: 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
17. Mobile app as an alternative channel to connect to "112"			✔		Unclear					✔					✔	✔		✔			

Commitment Aim:
The Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL)'s "112" Emergency Response Center under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, committed to launch a mobile application which would decrease emergency assistance response time by locating the user using a GPS signal. The application would feature an SOS button for calling in extremely critical situations when a caller cannot speak on the phone.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

By the midterm, the mobile application was developed and ready to be launched in Fall 2017. "112" partnered with leading Georgian universities to involve students in testing the application for

operational glitches and usability. "112" planned to conduct awareness-raising activities in February 2018. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[1]

End of term: Complete

The application was launched in February 2018 in its full capacity. According to "112," the application has over 15,000 users who downloaded and retained the application on their phones.[2] The application offers three services: 1) users can call "112" to request emergency services; 2) users can request emergency services via an online chat option; and 3) users can use the SOS button in cases of extreme danger such as domestic violence, kidnapping, etc. when the user is unable to communicate with "112." According to statistics provided by "112," from February 2018 to October 2018, the response center registered 312 SOS requests and 687 requests through the chat functions; calls through the application are registered as regular calls and are not visible in application statistics.[3]

"112" conducted several meetings with students (Georgian and international) to test the application and collect user feedback.[4] According to "112," a main recommendation referred to adding basic health information along with blood type in the registration part of the application. This recommendation was taken into account, and by the end of 2018, "112" launched a mobile application intended for blind and visually impaired users.[5]

"112" also took IRM's recommendation to use this application for informing citizens. Namely, the responsible entity added tips and recommendations for different emergency situations, available to all users of the application. Outside the assessment period of this report, in collaboration with UNDP, "112" joined a campaign against domestic violence, and added information on regional organizations and centers that victims of domestic violence can access in case of need.[6] Also, "112," in collaboration with NCDC, added a feature to inform users about tobacco control, negative health effects of tobacco, and other useful information.

Did It Open Government?
Access to information: Did Not Change
Civic participation: Did Not Change
Public accountability: Did Not Change

The commitment aimed to provide citizens with easier access to the emergency response service of "112" by launching a mobile application. While the mobile application is a step forward toward reducing emergency response time and simplifying citizen access to the services, including the benefit for tourists and other non-Georgian speakers, the commitment does not answer OGP values directly. While useful tips for different emergency situations is beneficial for users, this feature does not entail disclosing information previously unavailable to citizens.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018−2019.

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[1] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[2] Natia Piriashvili (Head of Analysis and Project Management Office, LEPL 112), interview with IRM researcher, 9 Oct. 2018.
[3] Piriashvili (Analysis and Project Management Office), e-mail correspondence with IRM researcher, 9 Oct. 2018.
[4] Piriashvili, e-mail correspondence, 9 Oct. 2018.
[5] Piriashvili, interview, 9 Oct. 2018.
[6] Id.

18. Development of Local Councils for crime prevention

Commitment Text:

Starting from 2016, the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia launched the project "Local Council", the goal of which is to coordinate the crime prevention measures between relevant agencies and initiate new measures. At the current stage, crime prevention is a prerogative of a number of government agencies. Enhancing coordination between them is essential to avoid implementation of duplicate prevention measures by various agencies.

The main goal of the project is to discuss criminal situation in the region, to make decisions about preventive measures required for the region, to develop initiatives and to draw up a coordination plan about fighting crime in cooperation with other government agencies and nongovernmental organizations. The project was created according to the model of the USA and represents a coordination organ on the regional level. Permanent members of the Council are the representatives of the law-enforcement (Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Interiors, Ministry of Corrections), municipalities, lawyers' corps, NGOs. The Council may also have temporary members from the civil society.

Implementation of Local Councils was launched in a pilot regime in Adjara region. In the framework of the commitment, Local Councils will be set up in Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo in the nearest future and later in other regions of Georgia.

Responsible institution(s): Prosecutor's Office of Georgia

Supporting institution(s): Municipality bodies, National Probation Agency, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Nongovernmental organizations

Start date: March 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
18. Local councils for crime prevention			✔		✔	✔					✔					✔			✔		

Commitment Aim:

In March 2016, the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia (hereinafter, Prosecutor's Office or POG) started a project "Local Council." The aim of the project is to provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss the criminal landscape and coordinate crime prevention activities in regions of Georgia, as well as to increase public awareness of the law, and develop trust

toward the Prosecutor's Office.[12] According to the action plan, there was a risk of different government agencies duplicating crime prevention activities, therefore, the project aimed to reduce this possibility by increasing coordination through local council meetings. The initial goal of the Prosecutor's Office within the action plan was to establish local councils in at least six regions of Georgia and conduct at least ten meetings by the end of 2017.

Status
Midterm: Complete

The commitment was fully implemented on time. By the midterm, the Prosecutor's Office set up 12 crime prevention councils across the country, including in Zugdidi, Ozurgeti, Akhaltsikhe, Rustavi, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Khelvachauri, and Telavi. At least one meeting per council was held. The events were publicized in the local media, including television channels and newspapers. By the midterm, a few projects proposed during the council meetings were implemented, including an advocacy campaign promoting road safety and a campaign against domestic violence.[3]

The commitment can be assessed as complete, considering that the lead agency established 22 councils and organized 36 meetings in past two years. Since the midterm assessment in August 2017, the Prosecutor's Office conducted 22 meetings, including in the capital, Tbilisi, as well as other regions of Georgia.[45] The first meetings were in Tbilisi and Sighnaghi, while 16 local councils later met within the timeframe of the action plan. During the meetings in Tbilisi, the participants discussed measures to prevent drug crimes, while domestic violence was an important topic for discussion on meetings in the regions.

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

The local councils provided a platform for information-sharing about crime prevalence and relevant statistics in their respective locations, as well as about studies published by the Prosecutor's Office. It also allowed CSOs and the population to voice concerns about pressing issues, such as domestic violence in Kvemo Kartli for instance.[6] During the meetings, local state authorities and CSO representatives were able to plan activities around domestic violence and violence against women in eight cities: Telavi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, Gori, Zugdidi, Mtskheta, Samtredia, and Kutaisi.[7]

The meetings are usually planned on a central level; the Chief Prosecutor's Office schedules and invites participants to ensure monitoring and coordination. The Prosecutor's Office provides suggestions and advises on topics to be discussed at the local council meetings in the regions, depending on the crime situation in respective geographical locations. The councils allow "free space" at the end of the agenda, where participants are able to put forward issues of their own interest. Thus, stakeholders get information regarding crime prevalence and discuss its possible solutions, but also can provide input and engage in dialogue. Generally, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia publishes records on crime prevalence, which are also publicly available through the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat)'s website, with monthly reports and criminal justice statistics by region.[8] While this information was previously available through these websites, the local councils expanded communication channels and made the information more accessible, especially in regions where internet access is low. All councils send meeting minutes to the Prosecutor's Office, which collects, analyzes, and publishes relevant information in the "Report of the Chief Prosecutor of Georgia." There also exists an annual report on the work of the local councils, however, the document is not publicly available. Despite numerous requests to the representative of the Prosecutor's Office, the IRM researcher could not get the document.

The Prosecutor's Office developed a document regulating the councils' functions, responsibilities, and scope of activities, which was expected to be formalized by the end of 2018.[9] The councils usually consist of permanent and non-permanent members, including local prosecutors, the public defender, representatives of law enforcement agencies, and relevant CSOs.[10] In terms of civic engagement, prior to the local councils, there was no formal mechanism to regulate how CSOs and the public could provide recommendations and suggestions to local law enforcement agencies or the POG. This initiative created this space and formalized the process.

As the POG representative stated, as a result of the local council activities, crime victim appeals, and criminal prosecution have both increased in past years; however, there is no verified evidence or studies about causality between the initiatives and increase in the mentioned data.[11]

On the other hand, the civil society representative noted a lack of communication and low public awareness of the local councils.[12] A representative of Transparency International (TI) Georgia mentioned discussing the local criminal landscape and preventative measures, as well as plans for future cooperation at two council meetings in Batumi, however they did not result in concrete joint initiatives.[13]

Focus group participants in three municipalities (Akhlatsikhe, Ozurgeti, and Zugdidi) were unaware of the council activities,[14] which supports expanding the scope of public and CSO outreach. While local media covered the meetings, media coverage and TV appearances can be insufficient visibility. In the majority of the reported meetings, participants included representatives from state and nongovernmental sectors, however citizen participation was limited.[15]

Carried Forward?

The commitment was not carried forward into the fourth action plan. Nevertheless, the Strategy of the Prosecutor of Georgia 2017−2021 involves expansion of local councils in the regions of Georgia.[16] For the sustainability of the initiative, the IRM midterm report recommended that the Prosecutor's Office develop and adopt formal participation rules, ensure regular meetings, and adopt a standard procedure for council meetings. It would also be beneficial to publish meeting minutes and encourage inter-municipality information exchanges between permanent councilmembers.

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[1] Report of The Chief Prosecutor of Georgia 2018 (Prosecution Service of Georgia, 6 Feb. 2016), http://pog.gov.ge/res/docs/ReportoftheChiefProsecutor2017.pdf.
[2] Government of Georgia, Georgia National Action Plan 2016-2017 (OGP, 3 Nov. 2016), http://bit.ly/2t2eFxU.
[3] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[4] Natia Mukhiashvili (Prosecutor at Analytical Division of the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia), interview with IRM researcher, 16 Oct. 2018.
[5] Report of The Chief Prosecutor of Georgia 2018 (Prosecution Service of Georgia, 6 Feb. 2016).
[6] Bolnisi Regional Prosecutor's Office, "Presentation of the Permanent Council" (Bolnisi Newspaper's YouTube Channel, 16 Nov. 2016), https://bit.ly/2qR4LzV.
[7] Report of The Chief Prosecutor of Georgia 2018 (Prosecution Service of Georgia, 6 Feb. 2016).
[8] National Statistics Office of Georgia's criminal justice statistics are available at: http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=602&lang=eng.
[9] Mukhiashvili, interview 16 Oct. 2018.
[10] Gogidze and Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018).
[11] Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, "Specialized Prosecutors will supervise the cases of Domestic Violence" (7 Mar. 2018), http://pog.gov.ge/geo/news?info_id=1555.
[12] Malkhaz Chkadua (Regional Offices Manager at Transparency International), e-mail correspondence with IRM researcher, 31 Oct. 31, 2018.
[13] Chkadua, interview 31 Oct. 2018.
[14] Focus Groups conducted by IRM researcher: Akhaltsike 19 Oct. 2018; Ozurgeti 22 Oct. 2018; Zugdidi 23 Oct. 2018.

Kvira, "Presentation of the Local Council in Bolnisi, within the "Local Councils" project" (29 Jun. 2018), http://kvira.ge/407472; ProfNews, "Samtredia Regional Prosecutor's Office organized presentation of the Local Council" (4 Aug. 2017), https://bit.ly/2CPtsUm; Zari News, "The Prosecutor's Office established a Local Council" (Zari News' YouTube Channel, 10 Aug. 2017) https://bit.ly/2Q83H5s.

[16] Strategy of Prosecutor's Office of Georgia 2017-2021 (Prosecution Service of Georgia), http://pog.gov.ge/res/docs/saqartvelosprokuratuirsstrategia.pdf.

19. Development of a guidebook for economic agents

Commitment Text:

Economic agents who apply only the Law on Competition and the normative acts based on it do not have relevant information about the application of legislation on competition. In addition, the society does not have sufficient information on the newly established Competition Agency.

The communication between the control organ and relevant business entity is necessary so that an economic agent can be informed on their commitments derived from the Law on Competition. As a result, the work of the agency will become more efficient, and entities on their part, will take relevant measures to minimize activities interfering the free competitive market.

The commitment serves to improve transparency and accountability principles of the public administration. The Competition Agency will develop a guidebook/brochure, the main topic of which will be problematic and urgent issues of the Law on Competition and key action principles of the agency. The guidebook will be distributed both in a print version and electronically to inform businesses and society about the competition matters.

Responsible institution: LEPL – Competition Agency

Supporting institution(s): None

Start date: September 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
19. Guidebook for economic agents			✔		✔					✔					✔	✔			✔		

Commitment Aim:
To prevent violation of the Law of Georgia on Competition adopted in March 2014, and thus, to maintain competition among market players, the LEPL Competition Agency committed to instruct economic agents on regulations by drafting a Guidebook for Economic Agents. The commitment consisted of two main steps: 1) developing the Guidebook; and 2) disseminating information regarding the document. The Guidebook would serve as instruction manual for the private sector on existing norms, by translating legal norms into more accessible and understandable language, with the aim to improve compliance with the Competition Law.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

By the midterm, the commitment was substantially implemented. The Competition Agency adopted the Guidebook for Economic Agents in May 2017, which defines what an economic agent is,

discusses possible scenarios where a market player might violate competition standards (e.g., abuse of a dominant position in the market, predatory pricing, price discrimination, and/or refusal to supply), and referred to rulings by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

The Agency had yet to conduct dissemination activities. According to Agency representatives, awareness-raising activities were planned for the Fall of 2017, including a conference for the business community where the Guidebook would be disseminated. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[1]

End of term: Complete

After the midterm, the Competition Agency met with various stakeholders to disseminate the Guidebook including media representatives in the Summer of 2017 (25 participants in total), business representatives in the Fall of 2017, and events like the International Competition Conference and World Competition Day. The Agency also trained 30 judges three courts and discussed the Guidebook with these judges. Hard copies of the Guidebook were distributed during Competition Agency events, as well as electronic copies specifically directed at individuals actively working in market competition.[2] The Agency planned another meeting with journalists in December 2018.[3]

Did It Open Government?
Access to Information: Marginal

The Guidebook for Economic Agents was adopted and disseminated as planned, clarifying violations of competition standards. The Guidebook defines what an economic agent is and describes various scenarios which might constitute a violation of competition standards. Theoretical discussion is supplemented by rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). The Guidebook is illustrated and easy to understand for an untrained reader.

The improvement in terms of enhancing access to information is marginal. According to a representative of an insurance company actively collaborating with the Competition Agency, explaining provisions in the Law on Competition to non-lawyers is challenging, which is why he and colleagues in other insurance firms find the Guidebook to be helpful in explaining regulations to their clients. Based on his feedback, all active insurance firms employ the Guidebook in their daily work.[4] Similarly, the Chair of the Commercial and Competition Law Committee of the Georgian Bar Association positively assesses the Guidebook, and stresses that the document was helpful in designing training modules for lawyers. While lawyers have no difficulty interpreting the Law on Competition, the simplicity of the Guidebook and its accompanying visualizations serve as a backbone for their training on competition regulations aimed at raising awareness regarding the existing legal framework.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018−2019.

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[1] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[2] Mari Nikabidze (Chair of the Commercial and Competition Law Committee of the Georgian Bar Association), phone interview with IRM researcher, 28 Dec. 2018.
[3] Sopo Momtselidze (Head of the Legal Department, Competition Agency) interview with IRM researcher, 10 Oct. 2018.
[4] Vakhtang Shurghaia (Head of the Legal Department at the Insurance Company "Unison" and Executive Secretary at the NNLE "Insurance Network"), phone interview with IRM researcher, 26 Dec. 2018.

20. Development and introduction of the quality control program of commercial service

Commitment Text:

In the framework of the Action Plan, Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (further on, Commission) shall ensure development and introduction of the program of quality control of commercial service.

The Commission by Resolution #13 of July 25, 2016 approved "Commercial Quality Rules of Service" which aims at improving commercial quality of service rendered to customers by electricity and natural gas distribution licensees, water supply licensees and natural gas suppliers (further on, enterprise).

Commercial quality of service is important from the point of view of customers' rights since it consists of key standards for electricity and natural gas distribution and accessibility of customers in the field of water supply and customers' rights protection, which is a vital issue both internally and internationally. For example, as of 2011, in the framework of the project Doing Business, in the common rating developed by WB, Georgia occupied 17th position, however, in one of the criteria of the survey, access to the electricity (connecting to the network), Georgia occupied only 91st position. After the Commission adopted and introduced regulation addressing customer access to the service of connecting to the network, Georgia moved from 91st to 50th position.

Now the main challenge of the Commission is development and regulation of an efficient mechanism for monitoring commercial service quality. One of the components is to inform customers about their enterprise rights and obligations, which will improve accountability and transparency regarding customers' rights.

Responsible institution(s): Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission

Supporting institution(s): None

Start date: January 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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	Maior	Outstanding
20. Quality control program for commercial service				✔	Unclear						✔				✔	✔		✔			

Commitment Aim:

The Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (GNERC) committed to develop an internal mechanism to monitor performance of utility companies according to nine

standards set out in the law, "Commercial Quality Rules of Service," adopted in 2016. The commitment envisioned developing a quality assurance program to improve service, as well as protecting the rights of customers through monitoring and recording company violations.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

By the midterm, the commitment was substantially implemented. The program allowing the Commission to monitor service provision was launched in February 2017. The program consists of nine standards to assess companies, although a few standards are difficult to implement. For example, one standard is that if a company ceases utility provision due to delayed customer payment, the company must resume service within five hours of payment. Otherwise, the company must pay the customer five GEL compensation. As of August 2017, the GNERC had yet to implement all nine standards of envisioned by the program. For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[1]

End of term: Complete

The quality assurance program was functional as of 1 January 2017, with the compensation mechanism being implemented in July 2017. According to a GNERC representative, the GNERC's website and social media page regularly has information on citizen rights and their protection mechanisms, as well as information on violations by the licensees and GNERC's response.[2] However, sometimes such information is published in the news section of the website, and therefore, is quickly archived and difficult to find later.

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

The GNERC aimed to create a quality assurance program to monitor delivery of utility services by the licensees, register violations, and react in a timely manner to protect customer rights. All nine standards of the program are fully functional. The program is vital for ensuring that service delivery is in line with "Commercial Quality Rules of Service," and thus, improves service delivery to end-users. While GNERC publishes some information on citizen's rights on its website, the commitment itself is internally focused, and did not lead to increasing citizen access to information, nor did it create new mechanisms for civic participation or public accountability.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019.

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[1] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[2] Tamar Bazgadze (Leading Specialist in the Legal Department, GNERC), e-mail correspondence with IRM researcher, 12 Oct. 2018.

21. Presentation of company reports in an electronic form and provision of their accessibility

Commitment Text:

In the framework of this commitment, presentation of electronic reports by enterprises will allow the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission to: create a trustworthy database, conduct a multi-sided analysis of the information obtained, keep an eye on the dynamics of the enterprise indicators, monitor fulfillment of licensing conditions and in the shortest possible time to provide stakeholders with systematized information. Introduction of the electronic report system will assist companies and facilitate efficient application of the Commission administrative resources and information accessibility.

The aim of the commitment is to create a special electronic platform of report submission by enterprises in order to ensure mobility and transparency of the mentioned process.

Responsible institution(s): Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission

Supporting institution(s): None

Start date: Not provided **End date:** December 2017

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
21. Presentation of company reports				✔	Unclear						✔					✔		✔			
																✔					

Commitment Aim:
The Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (GNERC) committed to introduce a normative act, which would allow licensees to submit company reports electronically. The GNERC wanted to improve systematization of information submitted by companies as reports were submitted in hard copy. Electronic submissions would simplify systematization of the information and allow more efficient data analysis.

Status
Midterm: Complete

By the midterm, the commitment was fully implemented. The electronic platform for report submissions was launched in January 2017. GNERC adopted necessary normative acts for electronic report submission by licensees. According to a GNERC representative, this system was fully functional, and companies could submit their quarterly and yearly reports in electronic format. However, until July 2018, companies still had to submit hard copies as well, before the Law of Georgia on Electronic Documents and Reliable Electronic Service-Provision came into force. This

law's enactment enables GNERC to officially accept company reports in electronic form.[1] For more information, please see the 2016–2017 IRM midterm report.[2]

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

The GNERC changed regulations to allow electronic submission of company reports, which enables more efficient data systematization and analysis. The commitment was a big step forward in optimizing internal processes of the GNERC. However, the initiative is fully internally oriented and does not publicly disclose more information.

Carried Forward?
The commitment was not carried into the new Action Plan 2018–2019.

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[1] Tamar Bazgadze (Leading Specialist in the Legal Department, GNERC), phone interview with IRM researcher, 12 Oct. 2018.
[2] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.

22. Introduction of an electronic petition portal and "Zugdidi-INFO" on the webpage of Zugdidi Municipality Assembly

Commitment Text:

In the framework of the Action Plan, Zugdidi Municipality Assembly is implementing two projects in the direction of public participation and informativeness: a) by means of webpage www.zugdidi.gov.ge, administered by Zugdidi Municipality Assembly, it will be possible to present petitions in electronic format to the representative body; 2) by means of the information center Zugdidi-INFO, citizens will receive information about ongoing infrastructural, cultural, sports or other projects, also about healthcare and social protection programs in the form of SMS. Using the same method, population receives information about the date and agenda of the Assembly meetings.

Zugdidi-INFO, a fast and direct communication space with citizens, will improve public participation in self-governance and decision-making process.

By means of webpage www.zugdidi.gov.ge, administered by the City Assembly, citizens concerned with the various issues will have the opportunity to easily submit petitions in electronic form about their needs and interests to the municipalities.

Responsible institution: Zugdidi Municipality Assembly
Supporting institution(s): Zugdidi Municipality Town Hall and Municipality non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities

Start date: (Month not provided) 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
22. Electronic petition portal and "Zugdidi-INFO"			✔		✔	✔		✔		✔					✔ / ✔				✔		

Commitment Aim:
Within the commitment, the Zugdidi Municipality Assembly took the responsibility to launch: 1) the Zugdidi-INFO SMS service to deliver news and announcements regarding the local governance and Assembly meetings to citizens; and 2) the electronic petitions portal on the municipality website, in order to diversify the means and simplify the process of submitting policy suggestions to the local government.[1] By sending SMS notifications and

providing relevant updates to citizens, the Assembly intended to bolster public interest and engagement in local self-governance. The e-petition mechanism was expected to provide an additional platform to voice citizens' needs and suggestions for local decision-making.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

By the midterm, the commitment was implemented to a substantial degree, considering that the SMS service was up and running, and the electronic petition portal was under development. Within the Zugdidi-INFO initiative, 11,000 citizens were receiving regular announcements with the time, date, and location of Assembly meetings. Other text messages informed the public about local municipal news, including reconstruction developments. As a result, the service was multifunctional.[2]

End of term: Substantial

The commitment has remained substantially complete at the end of term. Its two key components were technically implemented; however, one is not fully functional.

Zugdidi-INFO SMS service: The SMS service was launched in May 2016 and has been running since. The number of SMS recipients remains at 11,000.[3] SMS notifications are sent from one of the Assembly staff member's phone numbers. According to a Transparency International (TI) representative, users usually receive announcements regarding the Assembly meetings, as well as report presentations by local government officials.[4] Several local residents who participated in the focus group conducted by the IRM researcher, recalled receiving SMS about an upcoming concert, infrastructure work, and news associated with the local Public Service Hall.

Electronic mechanism for submitting e-petitions: The new website for Zugdidi Municipality Assembly incorporates the electronic petitions portal. However, because of the technical issues, it is not in service and it is not possible to submit e-petitions to the Assembly.[5]

Did It Open Government?
Access to information: Marginal
Civic Participation: Did not change

The Zugdidi-INFO SMS service increased access to information by sending text messages to citizens about the local news and Assembly meetings. While this is a good tool for informing the public, the number of recipients has remained the same since the midterm–reaching up to 11,000 citizens, or a quarter of the population of the Zugdidi municipality.[6] There are no formal procedures for citizens to register for the service. They can write the Assembly on their Facebook page, or contact them through e-mail with the request to add their number to the general database. However, offline registration methods are important, as 35% of Georgians never use the internet, although this number is higher in rural areas (61%) than in urban areas (e.g., Tbilisi has only 15%).[7] While all focus group participants were active internet users, they still mentioned low internet penetration in the villages.

The electronic mechanism for submitting e-petitions did not become functional within the NAP 2016–2018 cycle. Despite incorporating the portal on the new website, the online petition mechanism is not in service and as a result, the e-library of pending, awarded, and rejected online petitions is empty.[8] The Assembly's plans for launching the electronic portal are vague and might require development of a new website.[9]

A TI representative also stated that there is no legal framework for submitting electronic petitions. The citizens are still able to submit hard copies to the Assembly. However, the overall numbers remain low; in 2017, three petitions were submitted to the Assembly in 2018.[10] Some of the proposals requested developing proper drinking-water tanks in two villages, fixing streetlights and other infrastructure, managing waste, installing public litter bins and establishing shelters for stray dogs. The first initiative was fully funded, while the remaining proposals from petitions were either partially funded or rejected.[11]

As the focus group results showed, among the reasons for low engagement can be a lack of public awareness on formal procedures, as well as skepticism about the local government considering citizens' initiatives. A focus group participant recalled working on an initiative to reduce public transport costs for students, which took around six years of persistent negotiations before being made free in September 2018. Another attendee advised the village representatives to proactively reach out to the population and inform them about ways to engage in the local governance.

The majority of the focus group participants did not know about either of the services. Two participants out of six had received SMS updates; the remaining four participants said they would be interested to get such text messages. In order to increase the impact of Zugdidi-INFO, it is important to raise awareness about the service and offer the public different registration methods.

Carried Forward?

This commitment was substantially completed by the end of term and was not carried forward within the new Action Plan 2018–2019. However, the Zugdidi Municipality Assembly made a new commitment to introduce a Mobile Application for citizens to increase access to information.[12] This multifunctional app intends to provide updates on Assembly meetings and the issues under discussion, while it will also grant access to the calendar of cultural and sports events, and dates for implementing infrastructure projects. NAP 2018–2019 includes another commitment for Zugdidi, which is the development of an online portal allowing citizens to register proposals to the Zugdidi Mayor, who will be responsible for providing feedback.[13]

To improve citizen engagement in local governance, the IRM researcher recommends that the Zugdidi Municipal Assembly and the Town Hall fully utilize tools created through this commitment and explore ways of offline engagement for citizens, particularly in villages, where internet penetration is lower.

- A standardized registration form could be introduced for the Zugdidi-INFO service, allowing citizens to indicate areas of interests for relevant updates.
- In order to maximize the effect of the SMS service, conduct awareness-raising campaigns allowing citizens to register on-site, especially in rural areas, with low internet penetration rates.[14]
- Village representatives could act as mediators between the population and the local governing body by organizing regular meetings.

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[1] Government of Georgia, Georgia National Action Plan 2016-2017 (OGP, 3 Nov. 2016), http://bit.ly/2t2eFxU.
[2] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.
[3] Giga Kilasonia (Head of the Public Relations and Civil Sector Unit), phone interview with IRM Researcher, 1 Nov. 2018.
[4] Archil Todua (Transparency International Zugdidi Regional Office Coordinator), e-mail correspondence, 1 Nov. 2018.
[5] Kilasonia, interview, October 2018

[6] National Statistics Office of Georgia's statistics on population by regions and self-governed units is available at: https://bit.ly/2SnTK5w. The total population of the Zugdidi municipality is 42,700, according to the latest National Census data.
[7] Caucasus Research Resources Center, "FRQINTR: Frequency of internet usage by SETTYPE: Settlement type (%)," https://bit.ly/2SCa3M9.
[8] Zugdidi Municipality, "Registered petitions" (2019), http://zugdidi.mun.gov.ge/ge/petitions.
[9] Kilasonia, interview, 1 Nov. 2018.
[10] Kilasonia, interview, 1 Nov. 2018.
[11] Institute of Democracy, "Zugdidi Municipality Sakrebulo Responding to citizens' petitions" (2017), https://bit.ly/2DTwGrx.
[12] Government of Georgia, Georgia Action Plan 2018-2019, (OGP, 4 Dec. 2018), https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-action-plan-2018-2019.
[13] Konstantine Kakava (Member of Zugdidi Municipality Assembly), phone interview with IRM Researcher, 1 Nov. 2018.
[14] Caucasus Research Resources Center, "FRQINTR: Frequency of internet usage by SETTYPE: Settlement type (%)."

23. Transparency of Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly meetings

Commitment Text:

Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly is actively working to improve transparency, accountability and public participation and to introduce modern technologies in the Assembly activities.

In the framework of this commitment, Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly shall ensure direct transmission of assembly meetings and uploading of their complete video recordings on the Ozurgeti Municipality webpage.

The following innovations are envisaged by this commitment:

- *During direct transmission citizens will be able to leave comments and questions, the number and the content of which will be publicly published by Assembly office, the results of the interaction will be reflected in the Assembly annual report.*
- *Stakeholders' groups will be created and with each member (employees of government, private or nongovernmental organizations and private persons) a form-memorandum will be drawn, providing members with relevant information. The system of SMS will also be introduced for these groups. The Assembly will also create a database so that information delivery will be systematic.*
- *Population will be notified about the meetings and current services by email and SMS. Database of stakeholders will be created and those included in the database will receive information about the topics of their interest via special software.*
- *Electronic interviews will be introduced; the results of which will be reflected by the Assembly in the normative acts.*
- *In 28 territorial units of Ozurgeti Municipality, Centers of Civic Engagement will be set up and equipped with modern digital technologies (today similar centers function in 5 villages of the Municipality: Konchkati, Melekeduri, Likhauri, Tkhinvali and Bakhvi).*

Responsible institution: Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly

Supporting institution(s): None

Start date: September 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
23. Transparency of Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly meetings				✔	✔	✔		✔			✔				✔					✔	
															✔						

Commitment Aim:
The Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly committed to introduce a number of services to increase transparency of the Assembly meetings and enhance civic engagement in local governance. These included live transmission of Assembly meetings, an archive of meeting videos, online questionnaires, centers for civic engagement, and an SMS service to inform the local population about municipality activities, upcoming Assembly meetings, and events.

Status
Midterm: Substantial

The commitment was substantially completed by the midterm, as the municipality introduced most of the services proposed in National Action Plan (NAP) 2016–2018. Live transmission of Assembly meetings, the video archive, online questionnaires and the SMS service were all launched by August 2017. The key remaining activity was the establishment of 23 out of 28 Centers for Civic Engagement in different villages in the municipality. With five fully functioning centers, the Assembly had to make 23 new centers available to citizens within the remaining action plan cycle.

End of term: Substantial

"Manage from Home:" live transmission of the Municipality Assembly meetings: The Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly introduced "Manage from Home" on its website, which allows users to leave comments and ask questions of decision-makers. An Assembly representative stated that the exact number of users and interaction outcomes are to be published in the Assembly annual report 2017, which is still in the development process as of October 2018.[1] Since the launch of "Manage from Home" in 2016, there have been 123 published comments on the transmission page, including greetings, questions, and various remarks.[2] Some comments pointed out concrete infrastructure problems (such as damaged roads, insufficient streetlights, or expanding internet penetration in villages), while other comments criticized decision-makers about budget spending and general local government performance. Video recordings are also available in a video gallery on the website for those who could not watch it live.[3]

SMS notifications about meetings and relevant updates: As a second activity, the Assembly created a database of citizen stakeholders who signed a memorandum with the Assembly to receive thematic SMS updates, based on their selected interests regarding

the Assembly meetings.[4] The service has up to 2,000 subscribers, or 14% of the overall population of Ozurgeti.[5]

Electronic interviews: This service is also functional on the municipality website, which allows citizens to submit three important issues of their villages.[6] According to an Assembly representative, the proposals are then transferred to relevant thematic groups at the Assembly, which decide whether the proposal will proceed to the Assembly meetings.[7]

Establishing 28 Centers for Civic Engagement: At the end of the action plan period, Centers for Civic Engagement are not operational in all 28 territorial units of Ozurgeti Municipality, as planned within NAP 2016–2018. There are fully functional centers in five villages (Konchkati, Melekeduri, Likhauri, Tkhinvali and Bakhvi).[8] Despite buildings in place for the remaining 23, the municipality could not equip them with needed digital technologies in the 2016–2018 period due to financial constraints.

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

By introducing the direct transmission of Assembly meetings, "Manage from Home", the Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly took a major step toward increasing residents' access to information and the opportunity to monitor local decision-making. As a result, citizens can follow agenda items of Assembly meetings, including discussions on budget spending, petitions, debates on new initiatives, or progress of socio-cultural and sports projects. Direct broadcasts enable following the live meetings remotely, and the archived video recordings permit their viewing at any time. Prior to "Manage from Home," Assembly meeting reports were published on the municipal website. However, the process was unsystematic and irregular, did not seek a wide public audience, nor did it allow interaction.[9] In terms of expanding civic engagement, the new platform makes it easier for citizens to engage with current Assembly discussions without the need to travel, and delivers information in a more accessible and engaging way. Citizens can comment and ask relevant questions, and online questions are read at the end of Assembly meetings.[10] This enables the public to become part of the public discourse.

In addition to increasing transparency of Assembly meetings, by sending out SMS notifications and e-mails to subscribers, the government diversified its communication channels, which resulted in providing more people information on upcoming Assembly meetings. A representative of a local CSO, "Progress House," assessed the service as useful for active citizens, who like to be informed of Assembly activities.[11] Previously, the information on upcoming meetings was posted on social media and its reach was limited. Yet, stakeholder interviews and the focus group results showed that there is a general reluctance of the population to subscribe, engage in civic activities, and receive the information, which was explained by a general distrust toward the local government.[12]

A representative stated the Assembly would organize outreach campaigns with partner CSOs, through which they had met already with the local populations from 24 out of 28 territorial units, introduce them to e-services and offer a form on-site for new SMS-update subscribers. Focus group participants expressed willingness to receive such information with their consent. They also mentioned e-mails were useful for receiving municipality updates. However, there is lower internet penetration in the rural settlements in Georgia and alternative outreach methods should also be considered.[13] A representative of another local group, Democratic Development Union of Georgia, stated that information desks at administrative buildings in each of the 28 territorial units in Ozurgeti must be updated regularly to provide detailed information for citizens without internet.[14] These information

desks inform the public on local news and announcements, for example, upcoming Assembly meetings and presentations of local governors' reports. However, as mentioned by this representative, they are not updated regularly, and information is often missing.

Despite the meetings, representatives of both the Assembly and local CSOs (i.e., Guria Youth Resource Center and Progress House) noted low public interest in using the provided services.[15] They stressed the importance of expanding outreach initiatives to better inform the public. Focus group participants stated that the population was reluctant to engage in local governance initiatives due to skepticism that the municipality would consider their complaints and suggestions.[16] This underscores the need for stronger communication to build trust and inform the public on available services.

Three out of 6 Ozurgeti focus group participants recalled receiving SMS texts from the municipality in the Fall of 2016 without signing up or being registered on any platform. As a result, they expressed concern regarding confidentiality and disclosure of their numbers to third parties for advertising reasons. However, according to a Progress House representative, this was a single campaign held in the 2016 pre-election period, where citizens received notifications regardless of their preference, while the current SMS service requires subscription. Some participants have heard about the SMS service, however, they thought that only media representatives and journalists received SMS notifications on upcoming Assembly meetings, while ordinary citizens did not. This indicates a lack of awareness on some of the services provided by the Assembly.

Beyond the commitment, the Assembly introduced an electronic petition mechanism in Spring 2018. The municipality has received 6 e-petitions since. It must be noted that the government lowered the number of voter signatures required to register petitions to the Assembly, which made the petition submission process easier for citizens.[17]

Carried Forward?

The commitment was not carried forward in the new Action Plan 2018–2019. According to an Assembly representative, they are working on resource mobilization to finalize the establishment of the remaining 23 centers, especially as the buildings are already in place; resources will be directed at purchasing digital technologies. As the number of Centers for Civic Engagement has remained the same since the midterm assessment, it is still important that the remaining 23 CCEs become fully functional.

Within the latest NAP 2018–2019, the Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly and the Ozurgeti City Hall has committed to develop evaluation standards to assess previously introduced public services and citizen satisfaction with these services. This can be seen as a logical step after launching the services in order to identify gaps and plan sufficient actions to address them, including communication and outreach.

As a continuation of the SMS service, a Progress House representative recommended sending follow-up text messages regarding outcomes of Assembly meetings, with links to the municipality website for more detailed information. To take the commitment forward, the IRM researcher also advised development of a standardized procedure, which will require the Assembly to provide feedback on citizens' proposals submitted to the Assembly through the online survey portal.[18]

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[1] Nana Tavdumadze (Chief of Staff, Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly), phone interview with IRM researcher, 25 Oct. 2018.

[2] Ozurgeti Municipality, "Manage from Home" live transmission of Assembly meetings is available at: http://ozurgeti.mun.gov.ge/ge/live.

[3] Ozurgeti Municipality, "Video Gallery," http://oz.gov.ge/ge/pages/view/video.
[4] Tavdumadze, interview, 25 Oct. 2018.
[5] Id.; National Statistics Office of Georgia's statistics on population by regions and self-governed units (2017) is available at: https://bit.ly/2SnTK5w.
[6] Ozurgeti Municipality, "Online Poll," https://bit.ly/2qeXlpM.
[7] Tavdumadze, interview, 25 Oct. 2018.
[8] Government of Georgia, Georgia National Action Plan 2016-2017 (OGP, 3 Nov. 2016), http://bit.ly/2t2eFxU.
[9] Tavdumadze, interview, 25 Oct. 2018.
[10] Id.; Levan Khintibidze (Democratic Development Union of Georgia), interview, 28 Oct. 2018.
[11] Mindia Salukvadze ("Progress House"), phone interview with IRM researcher, 25 Oct. 2018.
[12] Id.
[13] Caucasus Research Resources Center, "FRQINTR: Frequency of internet usage by SETTYPE: Settlement type (%)," https://bit.ly/2SCa3M9.
[14] Khintibidze, interview, 28 Oct. 2018.
[15] Tamar Glonti (Guria Youth Resource Center), phone interview with IRM researcher, 25 Oct. 2018.
[16] Focus Group with the local population, Ozurgeti, 22 Oct. 2018.
[17] Glonti, interview, 25 Oct. 2018; Ketevan Magalashvili, "House of Progress in Guria" (Europe Foundation), https://bit.ly/2DkfzQ2.
[18] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.

24. Creation of electronic mechanism for local budget planning in Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Batumi, and Akhaltsikhe

Commitment Text:

Relevant services of Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Batumi and Akhaltsikhe municipalities actively work on the issues of budgetary process transparency. By the support of USAID's Good Governance Initiative in Georgia (GGI) the work is carried out on the local level to promote budgetary processes and improve mechanisms for public participation.

In the framework of the third Action Plan OGP, four identified cities will ensure creation of an electronic mechanism "Plan City Budget" and add it to the municipality webpage. Furthermore, in regard to the local budget, a citizen's guidebook will be developed.

Milestones:

Prepare local program budget of the municipality
Create electronic mechanism "Plan City Budget" to define local budget priorities of the municipality
Develop citizen's guidebook in regard to local budget of the municipality

Responsible institution: Kutaisi Municipality Town Hall, Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly, Batumi Municipality Town Hall, Akhaltsikhe Municipality Town Hall

Supporting institution(s): The project of USAID Good Governance Initiative in Georgia; Forum participant nongovernmental organizations

Start date: September 2016 **End date:** December 2017

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
24. Electronic Mechanism for			✔		✔	✔		✔			✔			✔						✔	

Local Budget Planning in Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Batumi, and Akhaltsikhe														✔						

Commitment Aim:
In order to increase public access to information, as well as to bolster civic engagement in budgetary planning processes, four municipalities of Georgia committed to introduce electronic mechanisms for budget planning. Specifically, Akhaltsikhe Municipality Town Hall, Batumi Municipality Town Hall, Kutaisi Municipality Town Hall, and Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly assumed the responsibility to implement three key activities proposed within the commitment: 1. preparing local program budgets; 2. creating the electronic mechanism, "Plan City Budget," to define local budget priorities; and 3. develop a citizen's guidebook on local budgets.

Status
Midterm: Limited

The commitment was completed to a limited degree as of August 2017. Three out of four municipalities, excluding Ozurgeti, had prepared and published their respective municipality budgets on their websites in a format showing a breakdown of expenses by programs. Ozurgeti Municipality had not published a program budget, due to the fact that it was not part of USAID's Good Governance Initiative (GGI) and as a result, lacked resources and expertise.[1] As for a citizens' guidebook, it was developed by Batumi, Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe Municipalities, however only Batumi published it online, with the remaining two disseminating print versions. By August 2017, all four municipalities had still to introduce the "Plan City Budget" mechanism on their websites.

End of term: Substantial

USAID's Good Governance Initiative (GGI) played an important role in the commitment progress, as it supports three municipalities engaged in the initiative (Akhaltsikhe, Batumi and Kutaisi). Ozurgeti Municipality does not get funding, therefore, there was a lack of coordination in implementing the commitment activities.

Preparation of the local program budget: The four municipalities published their respective budgets in a budget program format online by the end of term.[2]

'Plan City Budget' electronic mechanism: Within the GGI project, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) together with the E-Governance Academy (eGA) developed new websites for Kutaisi (www.kutaisi.gov.ge) and Akhaltsikhe Municipalities (www.akhaltsikhe.gov.ge), which incorporate the participatory budgeting mechanism, "Plan City Budget." While a new website with a similar interface and participatory services was also developed for Batumi Town Hall, it has yet to be launched.[3] In 2018, citizens registered in Akhaltsikhe and Kutaisi municipalities can submit budgetary proposals through the electronic portal, "VOLIS," which is an Estonian model for participatory budgeting.[4]

Batumi Town Hall decided to introduce additional safety mechanisms for submitting budgetary proposals online, which required more time for setting up the system and resulted in postponing the launch of the platform.[5] However, a representative of the Town Hall anticipated launching "Plan City Budget" by the end of 2018.

Ozurgeti Municipality could not introduce the service within the 2016–2018 action plan cycle. Instead, the Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly intends to set up an interactive "Problem

Map," which will allow citizens to indicate concerns for their respective communities on a map. This service, together with the budget guidebook, is in the development process and was expected to be launched by the end of 2018.

Citizen's Guidebook on Local Budget: Three municipalities (Batumi, Akhaltsikhe, and Kutaisi) developed guidebooks on local budgets, however only Batumi Municipality uploaded it to their website. Neither Akhaltsikhe nor Kutaisi municipalities have made electronic versions available. However, Akhaltsikhe Municipality Town Hall printed pamphlets and made a public presentation of the budget guideline. By the time of this report, the Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly was working on the document.[6]

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

Per the NAP 2016–2018, low public knowledge of local budget governance was cited as problematic in municipalities. After publishing program budgets, citizens can access the information for all four municipalities in more detail. Budget program format is different from previously available budgets as it provides spending information by programs (rather than by implementing agencies), is more detailed, and illustrates a clearer link between financial resources and outputs.[7] The citizen's guidebook also serves as an important information source for the population, making budgetary processes more understandable. However, as focus groups in Akhlatsikhe and Ozurgeti showed, there is lack of information on these new resources. One issue raised by group participants was general skepticism toward decision-makers about their tendency to disregard concerns of the population. Therefore, regular communication with citizens is crucial to strengthen trust and encourage civic participation.

"Plan City Budget" is a novelty that seeks citizen input on budget priorities. Since its introduction in the beginning of 2018, Akhaltsikhe Municipality received 78 budget proposals, while Kutaisi Municipality received 28 proposals; this indicates active civic interest and participation. Both Akhaltsikhe and Kutaisi Municipalities created working groups to assess the proposals. However, their structure and methods to process the proposals differ. The newly established working group at Kutaisi Municipality Town Hall consists of representatives from the government, CSOs, media and private sectors, as well as independent citizens; the Akhaltsikhe group consists of Town Hall representatives.[8] While Akhaltsikhe Municipality does not restrict the number of proposals for public voting, Kutaisi publishes only three, which may limit the population's role.[9] The Kutaisi working group provides feedback to authors whose proposals were rejected.[10] Leading proposals for Akhaltsikhe included creating green and recreational spaces, painting houses and fixing streetlights, building a stadium, and constructing a building in the village Atskuri. Others concerned fixing water pipelines, creating playgrounds for children, and road construction. Akhaltsikhe Town Hall already allocated funds for the selected proposal within the 2019 budget on creating green areas, while proposals in Kutaisi municipality are still undergoing the evaluation process.

To increase public awareness and engagement, the GGI project experts plan to visit Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe to develop outreach campaigns.[11] As Batumi and Ozurgeti Municipalities did not introduce the mechanism within the National Action Plan 2016–2018 cycle, there was no civic engagement in the budgetary planning process in this regard. Kutaisi Municipality Town Hall conducted awareness-raising activities, including appearances on television programs and meetings with youth, to inform them about the portal. However, a representative of the Town Hall stressed the lack of civic participation due to the inconvenience of timing the outreach campaign during the summer period.[12]

Carried Forward?

The commitment was not carried forward in the new action plan (2018−2019). However, through GGI support, Batumi Municipality Town Hall made a related commitment, which aims to enhance civic participation in budgetary planning processes through institutionalizing the participatory planning mechanisms. The commitment details awareness-raising activities to promote participatory mechanisms, as well as envisages adapting legal framework to institutionalize them.

On a long-term perspective, the IRM researcher advises developing standardized institutional procedures for budgetary proposal discussions and public voting, as well as creating uniform websites and participatory tools for all municipalities across the country. Beyond this commitment, in 2017, Tbilisi City Hall took steps to develop a participatory budget planning mechanism.[13] As other municipalities desire to adopt the system, it would be useful to coordinate these activities and agree on a unified approach. The central government could provide support and coordination to make budgetary processes in municipalities sustainable across all Georgian municipalities. The responsible agencies could be the Ministry of Justice (which operates the State Development Agency (SDA)),[14] the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (which facilitates state budget governance and modern technologies),[15] and the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure (which coordinates the Municipal Development Fund of Georgia to strengthen institutional capacity and local government unit services).[16] Municipalities can also approach IDFI for support in developing user-friendly websites with participatory tools, similar to Zugdidi and Kutaisi.[17]

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[1] Lasha Gogidze and Tamar Gzirishvili, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2016-2017, 107 (OGP, 30 Apr. 2018), https://bit.ly/2NIr097.

[2] Law of Georgia, "Approval of the 2018 budget of the city of Kutaisi municipality" doc. no. 21 (18 Jan. 2018), https://bit.ly/2Ri8UI2; Law of Georgia, "On Changes and Amendments to the Resolution # 1 of 12 January 2018 of Ozurgeti Municipality Sakrebulo "On Approval of the 201 Year Ozurgeti Municipal Budget"" doc. no. 44 (27 Aug. 2018), https://bit.ly/2AtTL0M; Law of Georgia, "Approval of the 2018 Akhaltsikhe Municipality budget" doc. no. 28 (22 Dec. 2017), https://bit.ly/2CL0S6v; Law of Georgia, "Approval of the budget of the Batumi city municipality in 2018" doc. no. 41 (26 Dec. 2017), https://bit.ly/2PnoipA.

[3] Mikheil Darchiashvili (Governance Program Manager) and Levan Samadashvili (Deputy Chief of Party, Tetra Tech ARD), interview with IRM researcher, 19 Oct. 2017.

[4] The VOLIS portal is available at: https://bit.ly/2yILd54.

[5] Ednar Nataridze (Head of the Financial Department, Batumi Town Hall), phone interview with IRM researcher, 28 Oct. 2018.

[6] Nino Tvaltvadze (Deputy Mayor, Kutaisi City Hall), phone interview with IRM Researcher, 29 Oct. 2018.

[7] Mikheil Kukava, "When will the country's software budget be implemented?" (Transparency International Georgia, 7 Nov. 2013), https://bit.ly/2P29W9B.

[8] Tvaltvadze, interview, 29 Oct. 2018.

[9] VOLIS, "Selected proposals for voting (number of votes: 207)," https://bit.ly/2Q60HGT.

[10] Guram Melikidze (Deputy Mayor of Akhaltsikhe Municipality Town Hall), phone interview with IRM Researcher, 29 Oct. 2018.

[11] Mikheil Darchiashvili (Governance Program Manager) and Levan Samadashvili (Deputy Chief of Party, Tetra Tech ARD), 19 Oct. 2018.

[12] Tvaltvadze, interview 29 Oct. 2018.

[13] Dea Tsartsidze, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Tbilisi, Georgia Final Report 2017 (OGP, 2017) https://bit.ly/2PPUsLg.

[14] State Development Agency, https://sda.gov.ge/?lang=en.

[15] The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, https://bit.ly/2zqmB1o.

[16] Municipal Development Fund, http://mdf.org.ge/?site-path=fund/about/&site-lang=en.

[17] Saba Buadze (IDFI, Anti-Corruption Direction Head), interview with IRM researcher, 1 Nov. 2018.

Methodological Note

The end-of-term report is based on desk research, interviews with governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders and focus groups with citizens in three Georgian towns: Akhaltsikhe, Ozurgeti, and Zugdidi. The IRM report builds on findings of the government's self-assessment report; other progress assessments by civil society, the private sector, or international organizations; and the previous IRM progress report.

As in the case of midterm report, IRM researchers in Georgia interviewed representatives of responsible public agencies, civil society actors, and donor representatives to inform the end-of-term assessment of the national action plan. The interviewees were selected according to their relevance and involvement in the development and implementation of government commitments, or expertise in the field. IRM researchers interviewed representatives from around 20 public agencies, several CSOs, and one key donor. Some of the interviewees had sectoral expertise while others covered a wide range of cross-cutting issues. The interviews were conducted over the phone, in person, or via email.

In order to provide additional insight on four commitments (18, 22, 23, and 24), the IRM researcher organized three focus groups. The researcher contacted and invited group participants by phone, using the citizens' database bought from the local Centers for Civic Engagement (CCE). Participants consisted of people with different occupations, gender, and age group, including students, employed, and unemployed individuals. The majority of individuals refused to participate, resulting in small focus groups. The largest group was in Akhaltsikhe (nine participants) followed by Ozurgeti and Zugdidi (six and five participants respectively).

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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.

Open Government Partnership