

# Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Estonia Design Report 2018–2020

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## Executive Summary: Estonia

Estonia’s fourth action plan continues the priorities of previous action plans such as fostering transparent and inclusive policy making and developing democratic participation skills. Overall, the fourth action plan is more strategic in its focus compared to previous plans and thus has a higher potential to change government practices. Moving forward, Estonia can further improve the ambition of its commitments by including activities that can last through several action plans and aligning the OGP process with other long-term strategic processes.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a global partnership that brings together government reformers and civil society leaders to create action plans that make governments more inclusive, responsive, and accountable. The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) monitors all action plans to ensure governments follow through on commitments. Estonia joined OGP in 2011. Since then, it has implemented three action plans. This report evaluates the design of Estonia’s fourth action plan.

### General overview of action plan

Estonia enters its fourth action plan as a leading performer in the areas of good governance, transparency, and e-government. The fourth action plan continues to promote inclusive and open policy making (at the national and local levels) as well as fostering civic engagement and democratic skills through technological solutions. Overall, the commitments in the fourth action plan are narrower and more strategic in focus and have a higher potential to improve open government compared to previous action plans.

To develop Estonia’s fourth action plan, the Government Office actively solicited input from the OGP Coordinating Council and government institutions and held regular stakeholder meetings. Civil society was highly involved during the idea-gathering phase and while adopting the final commitments. For the next action plan, the government could prioritize engaging a more diverse set of stakeholders who have not been involved the OGP process, such as people with disabilities and rural communities.

Estonia’s fourth action plan includes six commitments that mostly focus on advancing civic engagement and transparency in national-level policy-making processes and local governance

### Table 1. At a glance

Participating since: 2011  
Action plan under review: 4  
Report type: Design  
Number of commitments: 6

#### Action plan development

Is there a multistakeholder forum? Yes  
Level of public influence: Collaborate  
Acted contrary to OGP process: No

#### Action plan design

Commitments relevant to OGP values: 6 (100%)  
Transformative commitments: 2 (33%)  
Potentially starred commitments: 2 (33%)

#### Action plan implementation

Starred commitments: N/A  
Completed commitments: N/A  
Commitments with Major DIOG\*: N/A  
Commitments with Outstanding DIOG\*: N/A

\*DIOG: Did it Open Government?



and fostering democratic participation skills. Several commitments are carried forward from the previous action plan but are more strategic in their focuses.

Notable commitments include creating a new e-consultation system that allows citizens to engage during all phases of the policy-making process (Commitment 1) and developing an online tool for citizens to obtain information and leave feedback on public services offered at the local level (Commitment 5). Also of note is Commitment 3, which aims to improve the transparency of the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu) by publishing data on plenary meetings and minutes of committee sittings.

**Table 2. Noteworthy commitments**

<b>Commitment description</b>	<b>Moving forward</b>	<b>Status at the end of implementation cycle</b>
<p><b>1. Information technology supporting transparent and inclusive policy making</b></p> <p>Prepare a new online tool to enable citizens to track the status of policy initiatives throughout the policy cycle and participate in different stages of policy development.</p>	<p>The IRM researcher recommends continuing this commitment in future action plans and engaging different groups of users into all phases of the system design to shape the system according to their expectations. The government could also integrate the new system with existing platforms that citizens already use and continue developing policymakers' skills in public engagement.</p>	<p>Note: this will be assessed at the end of action plan cycle.</p>
<p><b>5. Simple and user-friendly presentation of the local public service levels</b></p> <p>Develop an online tool available for citizens to obtain information on local public services and for the government to improve public services offered.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Finance could design the system development in a collaborative way to involve representatives of key user groups and ensure their needs are addressed. The tool can also be used by municipalities to further develop innovative data-driven services to citizens.</p>	<p>Note: this will be assessed at the end of action plan cycle.</p>

## Recommendations

The IRM recommendations aim to inform the development of the next action plan and guide implementation of the current action plan.

**Table 3. Five KEY IRM Recommendations**

Prioritize engaging more diverse stakeholders in the development of OGP action plans, in particular groups facing more barriers to political participation (e.g. people with disabilities, rural communities).
Dedicate funds to the Government Office's Strategy Unit for strengthening stakeholder engagement around OGP action plans. Part of these activities may also be carried out in partnership with members of the Coordinating Council and the civil society roundtable.
Continue focusing on 5-6 commitments in a few priority areas. The areas could be selected on the basis of stakeholders' priorities, in agreement with the implementing institutions.
Continue implementing commitments that involve the development of civic tech, fostering open government at the local level, and bringing civil society and public officials together around a common interest or goal (e.g. joint projects, events and platforms).
Design more ambitious commitments that can last through several action plans, providing verifiable milestones for each step. Align the OGP process with other large-scale strategic processes such as the state reform or the Estonia 2035 strategy process and determine where OGP can add value.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Maarja Toots** is a researcher and PhD candidate in Public Administration at the Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance of the Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia. Her main research areas include e-government and ICT-driven innovation in the public sector, with a particular focus on the use of ICT for citizen participation and collaboration with external stakeholders. She has worked both in the public and non-governmental sector, managing projects on issues such as development cooperation and civic education.

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



## **I. Introduction**

The Open Government Partnership is a global partnership that brings together government reformers and civil society leaders to create action plans that make governments more inclusive, responsive, and accountable. Action plan commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete ongoing reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area. OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) monitors all action plans to ensure governments follow through on commitments. Civil society and government leaders use the evaluations to reflect on their own progress and determine if actions have made an impact on people's lives.

Estonia joined OGP in 2011 and adopted its first action plan in 2012. This report covers the development and design of Estonia's fourth action plan for 2018-2020.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism of OGP has partnered with Maarja Toots from the Tallinn University of Technology, who carried out this evaluation. The IRM aims to inform ongoing dialogue around development and implementation of future commitments. For a full description of the IRM's methodology please visit

<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/independent-reporting-mechanism>.

## II. Open Government Context in Estonia

During almost three decades of democratic rule, Estonia has developed a solid foundation in open government, further improving in 2017-2018. In recent years, civil society groups have become more vocal and persistent in defending their policy positions, such as in environmental areas. Additionally, recent administrative-territorial reforms in Estonia have accentuated the importance of strong cooperation between newly-merged municipalities and civil society on open government policies at the local level.

Estonia is widely considered one of the most developed post-communist countries, with well-consolidated democratic institutions and good governance practices. Since 2005, Freedom House's Freedom in the World index<sup>1</sup> has consistently ranked Estonia among the "most free" countries in the world. In Freedom House's 2018 Nations in Transit report,<sup>2</sup> Estonia improved its democracy score from 1.93 to 1.82, keeping the highest ranking among post-communist countries.

Estonia's constitution grants everyone fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, association and assembly. The constitution also gives citizens the right to obtain information about the government's work. Freedom of information is further regulated by the Public Information Act (2000). Amendments have been introduced to the law over the years to incorporate new requirements from the European Union's directive on the reuse of public sector information, such as the "open by default" principle. This obliges public sector organizations to publish government information as machine-readable open data unless specific restrictions apply. The government has also developed a comprehensive policy framework on civic participation, which builds on the 2002 national Civil Society Development Concept that defines the core principles of partnership between government and civil society. In 2005, government and civil society organizations (CSOs) jointly developed the Good Practice of Engagement, which gives policymakers guidelines for engaging the public in decision-making processes. In 2007, most ministries appointed civic engagement coordinators to support their public engagement activities, whereas the 2011 Rules for Good Legislative Practice and Legislative Drafting Act require government institutions to engage interest groups both in *ex ante* and *ex post* policy evaluation.

Despite a strong legislative framework, actual public engagement practices do not always follow best practices. The Government Office's 2018 study of ministries' engagement practices found that some ministries still conduct participation processes in a formalistic manner, simply uploading policy documents to the Information System of Draft Acts (*Eelnõude infosüsteem* or EIS) without actively informing and engaging the concerned stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> CSOs have also voiced concerns about government organizations giving tight deadlines for participation and not providing sufficient information on how civil society input was considered in the final policy decision.<sup>4</sup> This points to the persistence of the problem of "window dressing" highlighted in the previous IRM progress report,<sup>5</sup> which refers to a situation where the public seemingly has the opportunity to participate but in fact has little actual impact on the policy process. Youth organizations have experienced similar problems at the level of local municipalities, who often engage youth only at a stage where decisions have already been made.<sup>6</sup> The government addresses these problems in the new OGP action plan by reviving the network of ministries' civic engagement coordinators and building their capacity through tailor-made training and best practice sharing. The Government Office also plans large-scale training activities for public officials and CSOs to increase their civic participation and engagement skills, while the Ministry of Education and Research works on integrating participatory democratic values into the school curriculum.

Electronic governance and online participation tools for citizens have long been a priority for the Estonian government. The government has experimented with online citizen participation since 2001, first launching the platform TOM (*Täna Otsustan Mina* – "Today I Decide"), followed by Osale.ee in 2007 and *Rahvaalgatus* (Citizen Initiative) in 2016. In 2011, the government adopted the Information System of Draft Acts (EIS) for internal policy coordination but the system, including the option to comment on draft legislation, is also open to the public. E-participation has been a consistent priority in Estonia's OGP action plans. An evaluation of existing e-participation platforms,

conducted as part of the 2014-2016 action plan, suggested to develop EIS into a public engagement tool by upgrading its functionalities. However, the IRM end-of-term report assessed the upgrades as insufficient for facilitating public participation.<sup>7</sup> The 2016-2018 action plan involved additional but limited upgrades and did not result in increased civic participation.<sup>8</sup> In the new action plan, the government has worked on developing a new information system that would provide policymakers and the public with comprehensive information on the full lifecycle of a policy from inception to adoption, along with opportunities for public participation.

Despite the challenges, several cases from the past few years hint at citizens' increasing ability to defend their position and openly confront public authorities. For example, the movement *Eesti Metsa Abiks* (Estonian Forest Aid) has actively advocated against the government's forestry policies, participating in policy debates and mobilizing public protests against the government's plans to increase logging volumes in forests. The representatives of the movement have accused the Ministry of Environment of failing to engage a balanced group of stakeholders in policy making and bias towards the industry lobby.<sup>9</sup> Recently, there have been several cases of environmental activism leading to delays or reversals of planned projects, such as the reconstruction of an intersection in Tallinn<sup>10</sup> or the termination of a proposed wood refinery by the river Emajõgi near the city of Tartu.<sup>11</sup>

According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index,<sup>12</sup> Estonia has done well in fighting corruption, ranking 18th out of 180 countries, although Freedom House<sup>13</sup> and the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO)<sup>14</sup> still suggest further measures for preventing corruption risks. Estonia's Anti-Corruption Act (2012) targets both public sector officials and legislators and requires officials in certain positions to disclose their interests and assets annually. Citizens can access the declarations online in the Tax and Customs Board's e-service portal but need to authenticate themselves with an eID. Although previous OGP action plans have included commitments targeting public ethics and integrity, the multi-stakeholder forum steering Estonia's OGP process decided to exclude anti-corruption activities from future action plans as these are already addressed in national anti-corruption strategies.<sup>15</sup>

The tone for 2017-2018 was also set by a large-scale administrative-territorial reform that reduced the number of local municipalities from 213 to 79, creating a period of confusion and adaptation for local governments.<sup>16</sup> The transition also affects government-civil society relationships as the newly-merged municipalities need to work out new governance and partnership structures.<sup>17</sup> Soon after the local elections in October 2017, political parties started campaigning for the parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2019. During the campaign, two new parties were established: *Eesti 200*, which criticized established parties' lack of long-term vision<sup>18</sup> and *Elurikkuse Erakond*, which promotes environmental sustainability and community empowerment.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the right-wing populist *Estonian Conservative People's Party*, which has openly spoken against minority rights, is gaining increasing traction in society.<sup>20</sup> For example, the party's leaders have made headlines with racist and xenophobic statements,<sup>21</sup> rallied against what they have deemed "gay-ideological brainwashing" at schools<sup>22</sup> and attacked judges for their decisions to legally recognize same-sex marriages concluded abroad.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World Data and Resources, <https://freedomhouse.org/content/freedom-world-data-and-resources>

<sup>2</sup> Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/estonia>

<sup>3</sup> Riigikantselei, Kaasamise ja mõjude hindamise uuring 2018, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/riigikantselei/strateegiaburoo/kaasamise\\_ja\\_mojude\\_hindamise\\_uuringu\\_raport\\_2018.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/riigikantselei/strateegiaburoo/kaasamise_ja_mojude_hindamise_uuringu_raport_2018.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Section 2 of the IRM progress report, [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Estonia\\_Mid-Term\\_Report\\_2016-2018\\_EN.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Estonia_Mid-Term_Report_2016-2018_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Alari Rammo, Miks kaasamine pekki läheb? Hea Kodanik, 26 November 2018, <https://heakodanik.ee/uudised/miks-kaasamine-pekki-laheb/>

<sup>7</sup> IRM end-of-term report, [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Estonia\\_EOTR\\_2014-2016.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Estonia_EOTR_2014-2016.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> IRM end-of-term report, [http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia\\_End-of-Term\\_Report\\_2016-2018\\_EN.pdf](http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia_End-of-Term_Report_2016-2018_EN.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Lea Larin, Eesti Metsa Abiks, Sirp, 27 July 2018, <http://www.sirp.ee/s1-artiklid/c21-teadus/eesti-metsa-abiks/>

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- <sup>10</sup> For example, the description of the events in the Environmental Justice Atlas, <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/vaike-oismae-park-housing-area>; and the article in the Estonian Public Broadcasting news portal, <https://news.err.ee/602989/utility-board-haabersti-willow-would-dry-up-even-if-intersection-rerouted>
- <sup>11</sup> Estonian Public Broadcasting, Estonian government decides to terminate pulp mill spatial plan, 8 November 2018, <https://news.err.ee/875491/estonian-government-decides-to-terminate-pulp-mill-spatial-plan>
- <sup>12</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2018, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>
- <sup>13</sup> GRECO, Fifth Evaluation Round: Preventing Corruption and Promoting Integrity in Central Governments (Top Executive Functions) and Law Enforcement Agencies: Evaluation Report Estonia, <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-evaluation-round-preventing-corruption-and-promoting-integrity-i/1680900551>
- <sup>14</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2018, Estonia, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/estonia>
- <sup>15</sup> Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2013-2020, [https://www.korruptsioon.ee/sites/www.korruptsioon.ee/files/elfinder/dokumendid/estonian\\_anti-corruption\\_strategy\\_2013-2020.pdf](https://www.korruptsioon.ee/sites/www.korruptsioon.ee/files/elfinder/dokumendid/estonian_anti-corruption_strategy_2013-2020.pdf)
- <sup>16</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Jüri Vöigemast, Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities, 15 November 2018.
- <sup>17</sup> Vello Pettai, Pille Ivask, Estonia: Executive Summary, Nations in Transit 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/estonia>
- <sup>18</sup> Eesti 200's political manifesto: Political manifesto: Estonia 200 needs bold leaders, <https://news.postimees.ee/4482606/political-manifesto-estonia-200-needs-bold-leaders>
- <sup>19</sup> Elurikkuse Erakond, Elurikkuse Erakonna eesmärkide selgitus, <https://elurikkuseerakond.ee/elurikkuse-erakonna-manifest/>
- <sup>20</sup> Johannes Voltri, EKRE toetus oli juulis rekordiline, Postimees, 2 August 2018, <https://poliitika.postimees.ee/6026605/ekre-toetus-oli-juulis-rekordiline>
- <sup>21</sup> Estonian Public Broadcasting News, Conservative Politician: If You're Black, Go Back, 29 May 2013, <https://news.err.ee/107416/conservative-politician-if-you-re-black-go-back>
- <sup>22</sup> Objektiiv, EKRE korraldab meelevalduse koolides toimuva homopropaganda vastu, 28 September 2018, <https://objektiiv.ee/ekre-korraldab-meelevalduse-koolides-toimuva-homopropaganda-vastu/>
- <sup>23</sup> Estonian Public Broadcasting News, Nestor, Kaljulaid condemn MP's verbal attack against circuit court judges, 24 March 2017, <https://news.err.ee/585840/nestor-kaljulaid-condemn-mp-s-verbal-attack-against-circuit-court-judges>



### III. Leadership and Multi-stakeholder Process

Estonia developed its 2018-2020 OGP action plan through a process of co-creation between the government and civil society. The Government Office actively solicited input from the OGP civil society roundtable and government institutions and held regular stakeholder meetings. The public could provide input into the action plan both in the ideation phase and before adopting the final text. However, efforts to engage the broader public remained weak and did not result in bringing additional ideas and participants on board.

#### 3.1 Leadership

This subsection describes the OGP leadership and institutional context for OGP in Estonia.

The coordination of the OGP process is the responsibility of the Government Office, the public body serving the Prime Minister and the cabinet. The Government Office coordinates the government's work, but its role is confined to providing administrative support. Consequently, it has no legal mandate to force ministries and other government institutions to take on OGP commitments or secure their implementation. The Government Office is run by the Secretary of State, a high official appointed by the Prime Minister. The Secretary of State also leads the OGP process and the OGP Coordinating Council, which is a multi-stakeholder forum overseeing the development and implementation of OGP action plans in an advisory capacity to the Secretary of State (see Section 3.2 for more details). The development and implementation of OGP commitments involves administrative staff from ministries and the Parliament but has no political leadership.

An advisor of the Government Office's Strategy Unit is responsible for the administrative management of OGP action plans, although OGP is only one among the advisor's many tasks. The Strategy Unit does not have a dedicated budget solely for financing OGP activities. The resources for implementing commitments are usually provided by the responsible institutions, often using European Union structural funds. The Government Office itself has occasionally used resources from the European Social Fund's program for improving the quality of policy making to finance smaller OGP-related projects. This was done, for example, to support individual engagement and participation projects under Commitment 6 in the previous action plan.<sup>1</sup> According to Merilin Truuväärt, former advisor of the Government Office who coordinated the development of the 2018-2020 action plan, existing human and financial resources have been generally sufficient for administering OGP activities in Estonia.<sup>2</sup> However, she notes that it could be beneficial to dedicate extra resources for more active communication around action plans.

#### 3.2 Multi-stakeholder process throughout action plan development

In 2017, OGP adopted the OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards intended to support participation and co-creation by civil society at all stages of the OGP cycle. All OGP-participating countries are expected to meet these standards. The standards aim to raise ambition and quality of participation during development, implementation, and review of OGP action plans.

OGP's Articles of Governance also establish participation and co-creation requirements a country or entity must meet in their action plan development and implementation to act according to OGP process. Estonia **did not act** contrary to OGP process.<sup>3</sup>

Please see Annex I for an overview of Estonia's performance implementing the Co-Creation and Participation Standards throughout the action plan development.

#### Table [3.2]: Level of Public Influence

The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) "Spectrum of Participation" to apply to OGP.<sup>4</sup> 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 "collaborate."

Level of public influence		During development of action plan
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	

### Multi-stakeholder forum

For the 2018-2020 action plan, the OGP Coordinating Council continued to serve as the multi-stakeholder forum (MSF) overseeing the development and implementation of the action plan.<sup>5</sup> The Coordinating Council was formed in 2014 by an official order of the Secretary of State and has an advisory role to the Secretary of State. While the previous IRM progress report's (2017)<sup>6</sup> recommendation to upgrade the Council's status to that of an advisory body to the Estonian government, the Council decided to refrain from any action before the upcoming elections in March 2019.<sup>7</sup>

The Council includes an equal number of government and civil society representatives and currently comprises representatives of five ministries, the Parliament, Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities (AECM),<sup>8</sup> and seven non-governmental organizations: the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO), e-Governance Academy, Estonian Education Forum, Open Estonia Foundation, Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Estonian Trade Union Confederation and Praxis Center of Policy Studies. Although ministries are officially represented in the Council at the level of secretary-generals, they rarely attend the meetings in person and send lower-ranking officials from the departments responsible for implementing OGP commitments in their place.

Civil society participants were selected by members of the OGP civil society roundtable<sup>9</sup> and predominantly include professional CSOs working on broad issues related to civil society, democracy and governance. As the coordinator of the civil society roundtable, NENO has recently worked to involve new members in the roundtable, for example inviting the Estonian Environmental Law Center to join in 2018.<sup>10</sup> However, the roundtable representatives in the Coordinating Council have largely remained the same over the years. The group of people attending the Council's meetings tends to include more women than men, although the gender balance varies slightly from meeting to meeting.<sup>11</sup>

The Council's tasks are specified at a general level in the Secretary of State's orders.<sup>12</sup> However, its actual way of working has evolved through practice rather than any formal regulations. According to the Council's meeting minutes,<sup>13</sup> the Council does not apply formal voting procedures and takes decisions based on a collective agreement. Meeting minutes are published online in the government's OGP repository<sup>14</sup> and include a summary of the main discussion points, including issues where participants' opinions diverge.

During the development of the 2018-2020 action plan, the Council met three times: on 13 March, 8 May and 19 June 2018.<sup>15</sup> All meetings were held in Tallinn and the government made no targeted efforts to engage participants from other parts of Estonia. In between meetings, the Government Office and NENO conducted public consultations, email communication and informal meetings with CSOs and government institutions to solicit input for the new action plan.

## Participation and engagement throughout action plan development

The action plan was designed through a co-creation process where civil society stakeholders were able to shape the commitments from the initial ideas to the final wording. Those that participated in the process were satisfied with the extent to which their priorities are represented in the action plan.<sup>16</sup> However, according to Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), collaboration between the Government Office and NENO was particularly close, while other members of the OGP civil society roundtable were less involved.<sup>17</sup>

In its meeting on 13 March 2018, the Coordinating Council agreed on the timeline of the action plan development and two key principles guiding the process: 1) the action plan would focus on a small number of specific but ambitious commitments, 2) all participants would take some responsibilities and any proposed commitments should be agreed on with the responsible institution.<sup>18</sup>

The development process closely followed the timeline agreed on 13 March. On 19 April, a small group of officials and NGOs met to discuss the commitments targeting local municipalities; on 21 April, commitments targeting the central government level were discussed; and on 15 May the Parliament's commitments were discussed. These meetings also involved participants outside of the Coordinating Council – for example, members of the OGP civil society roundtable, Board of the Parliament and officials from the Chancellery of the Parliament attended the meeting of 15 May. In parallel, the Government Office invited government institutions to propose ideas to the action plan by email, whereas NENO assembled the OGP civil society roundtable<sup>19</sup> and conducted an online public crowdsourcing of ideas for the action plan on the Citizen OS platform<sup>20</sup> from 13 March to 12 April. NENO invited civil society to participate in the crowdsourcing campaign through its newsletter, members' mailing list, roundtable and individual communication with NGOs. According to NENO, information reached a large number of civil society stakeholders.<sup>21</sup> However, in practice, no input was received from organizations other than those already participating in the OGP process. In the public crowdsourcing platform, only NENO, e-Governance Academy and the Estonian Cooperation Assembly proposed ideas; all were already well involved in the process.

Alari Rammo from NENO suggests that the lack of broader participation may be due to several reasons.<sup>22</sup> First, although CSOs do care about open government issues, they may find it difficult to fit their concerns and possible solutions into the framework of OGP action plans. Second, many organizations may lack the resources to stay informed and actively contribute to broader issues of governance beyond their scope of work, rather trusting the judgement of CSOs with longer experience in the OGP process. Teele Pehk, former director of the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, suggests that the government should invest more resources in engaging input from CSOs working in different fields.<sup>23</sup> According to Kai Klandorf from NENO, public awareness of OGP remains limited and any future public engagement efforts should dedicate more time to explaining what OGP is and how it works.<sup>24</sup> The Government Office created a subpage to its OGP repository dedicated to the action plan development, publishing key dates, events and links to public consultations.<sup>25</sup> However, some civil society representatives consider this information to be difficult to find online.<sup>26</sup>

In collaboration with NENO, the Government Office consolidated all proposals made in the meetings and consultations into nine proposals, out of which the Coordinating Council selected six to be included in the action plan. Three proposals were rejected on the grounds of either being too ambiguous, not relevant to OGP priorities or better implemented as part of other strategic frameworks, such as the national anti-corruption strategy. The final action plan was published for inter-institutional approval on the Information System for Draft Acts (*eelnõude infosüsteem*)<sup>27</sup> and for public consultation on the government's e-participation platform Osale.ee<sup>28</sup> from 29 May to 15 June 2018. Six ministries and the Riigikogu submitted comments to the action plan,<sup>29</sup> while the public consultation on Osale.ee yielded no comments.<sup>30</sup> In this phase, the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People, who had previously not been involved in the OGP process, also submitted a comment requesting that the government consider accessibility for disabled people throughout action plan implementation. According to the comment, events and trainings should be held in accessible buildings and the development of information systems should engage people with visual impairments. As a result, the government added a statement to the action plan on making access for people with disabilities a priority.

The Government Office documented all proposals collected in the process in the Coordinating Council's minutes and the explanatory memorandum to the final action plan.<sup>31</sup> This included the reasoning behind decisions to include or exclude certain commitments and responses to the key recommendations in the previous IRM progress report.

Overall, the action plan development process was conducted in a transparent and participatory manner, providing both online and offline participation opportunities. However, attempts to reach a broader range of stakeholders remained weak and did not bear fruit. This implies a need to strengthen proactive communication efforts, diversify the means through which input is collected and step up public awareness-raising activities around OGP.

### **Co-creation and participation recommendations throughout development**

Estonia showed evidence of achievement and strong performance in areas of MSF mandate, composition and conduct. For example, the OGP Coordinating Council involves an equal number of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and the action plan was designed through a process of collaboration and co-creation, giving civil society a genuine influence in shaping the action plan. An area where Estonia can improve is in OGP Coordinating Council communication and outreach during action plan development.

In order to improve performance in these areas, the IRM researcher suggests that moving forward, the following actions be taken:

- The government could dedicate resources for more concentrated and proactive public communication efforts during action plan development, for example by hiring (part-time) staff or contracting a communication partner for times of intense OGP activity.
- The governmental and civil society stakeholders involved in the Coordinating Council could make better use of existing civil society cooperation platforms, forums and events to raise awareness of the OGP process and opportunities for advancing open government goals in the framework of OGP action plans.
- The government could also work to further diversify the options for providing input to OGP action plans. In addition to publishing online consultations, the Government Office could partner up with CSO umbrella organizations such as NENO or Kodukant<sup>32</sup> (and, if necessary, supply them with the necessary resources) to proactively solicit input from their members and networks. This may include attending events that are not specifically dedicated to OGP but allow to reach diverse CSO participants, particularly those not based in the capital.
- The Government Office could prioritize upgrading their OGP repository and linking it to websites that CSOs frequently use to improve the findability of information online. Information about the OGP process and progress on commitments should be easy to access and use (this means going beyond publishing PDFs) and updated regularly.<sup>33</sup>

According to Ott Karulin (the current OGP coordinator at the Government Office), the Government Office is already working on upgrading the OGP repository in 2019 and developing a technical solution for automating part of the data collection on action plan progress.<sup>34</sup> The Government Office also intends to maintain more regular communication with the organizations implementing commitments to support their timely completion.

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<sup>1</sup> The previous action plan, <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/kaasamisprojektid-2015-2020>

<sup>2</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Merilin Truuväärt (Government Office), 19 March 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Acting Contrary to Process - Country did not meet (1) "involve" during the development or "inform" during implementation of the NAP, or (2) government fails to collect, publish and document a repository on the national OGP website/webpage in line with IRM guidance.

<sup>4</sup> "IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum," IAP2, 2014,

[http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations\\_course/IAP2\\_P2\\_Spectrum\\_FINAL.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Up to 2016, the Coordinating Council's mandate only included overseeing the implementation but not the development of OGP action plans.

<sup>6</sup> Estonia Mid-Term Report 2016-2018, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/estonia-mid-term-report-2016-2018>

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- <sup>7</sup> Minutes of the Coordinating Council's meeting, 19 June 2018, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp\\_19.06.18.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp_19.06.18.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> AECM represents 75 out of Estonia's 79 municipalities, <https://www.elvl.ee/liikmed>.
- <sup>9</sup> The Civil Society Roundtable is an informal collaboration platform of CSOs created in 2011 to inform and monitor OGP action plans in Estonia. The roundtable currently involves 21 organizations.
- <sup>10</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Kai Klandorf (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations), 15 March 2019.
- <sup>11</sup> This assessment is based on the list of attendees available in the Council's meeting minutes.
- <sup>12</sup> The orders, <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/avatud-valitsemise-partnerlus>
- <sup>13</sup> The minutes, <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/avatud-valitsemise-partnerlus>
- <sup>14</sup> The OGP repository, <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/avatud-valitsemise-partnerlus>
- <sup>15</sup> The schedule and minutes of the meetings, <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/avatud-valitsemise-partnerlus>
- <sup>16</sup> IRM researcher's interviews with Kai Klandorf (NENO), 15 March 2019, Alari Rammo (NENO), 22 March 2019, and Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), 27 March 2019.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Minutes of the meeting, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp\\_13.03.18.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp_13.03.18.pdf)
- <sup>19</sup> Alari Rammo (NENO), email interview with IRM researcher, 22 March 2019.
- <sup>20</sup> The Citizen OS platform, <https://app.citizenos.com/en/topics/cbe29001-967d-4bc7-9e59-0d6ad094d13e?argumentsPage=2>
- <sup>21</sup> IRM researcher's interviews with Kai Klandorf and Alari Rammo.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Teele Pehk (former Estonian Cooperation Assembly), 12 March 2019.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Merilin Truuväärt (Government Office), 19 March 2019.
- <sup>26</sup> Such concerns were expressed in the IRM researcher's interview with Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly), 29 March 2019, and by Mall Hellam (Open Estonia Foundation) in the 2016-2018 action plan's IRM end-of-term report.
- <sup>27</sup> See <http://eelnoud.valitsus.ee/main/mount/docList/7caa1be4-e7d3-4036-9ae8-3a857cb5cee1#WPP1Un8p>
- <sup>28</sup> See <https://www.osale.ee/konsultatsioonid/index.php?page=consults&id=294>.
- <sup>29</sup> See <http://eelnoud.valitsus.ee/main/mount/docList/7caa1be4-e7d3-4036-9ae8-3a857cb5cee1#WPP1Un8p>
- <sup>30</sup> See <https://www.osale.ee/konsultatsioonid/index.php?page=consults&id=294>.
- <sup>31</sup> See <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/kaasamisprojektid-2015-2020>.
- <sup>32</sup> Kodukant, the Estonian Village Movement, is an association of about 5,000 CSOs working mostly in rural areas, <https://kodukant.ee/en/>
- <sup>33</sup> Some examples include the OGP repositories of Australia, <https://ogpau.pmc.gov.au/>, and Canada, <https://open.canada.ca/en/commitment/tracker>
- <sup>34</sup> IRM researcher's interview, 21 March 2019.

## IV. Commitments

All OGP-participating governments develop OGP action plans that include concrete commitments over a two-year period. Governments begin their OGP action plans by sharing existing efforts related to open government, including specific strategies and ongoing programs.

Commitments should be appropriate to each country's/entity's unique circumstances and challenges. OGP commitments should also be relevant to OGP values laid out in the OGP Articles of Governance and Open Government Declaration signed by all OGP-participating countries.<sup>1</sup> The indicators and method used in the IRM research can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual.<sup>2</sup> A summary of key indicators the IRM assesses is below:

- **Verifiability:**
  - Not specific enough to verify: As written in the commitment, do the objectives stated and actions proposed lack sufficient clarity and specificity for their completion to be objectively verified through a subsequent assessment process?
  - Specific enough to verify: As written in the commitment, are the objectives stated and actions proposed sufficiently clear and specific to allow for their completion to be objectively verified through a subsequent assessment process?
- **Relevance:** This variable evaluates the commitment's relevance to OGP values. Based on a close reading of the commitment text as stated in the action plan, the guiding questions to determine the relevance are:
  - **Access to Information:** Will the government disclose more information or improve the quality of the information disclosed to the public?
  - **Civic Participation:** Will the government create or improve opportunities or capabilities for the public to inform or influence decisions or policies?
  - **Public Accountability:** Will the government create or improve public facing opportunities to hold officials answerable for their actions?
  - **Technology & Innovation for Transparency and Accountability:** Will technological innovation be used in conjunction with one of the other three OGP values to advance either transparency or accountability?
- **Potential impact:** This variable assesses the *potential impact* of the commitment, if completed as written. The IRM researcher uses the text from the action plan to:
  - Identify the social, economic, political, or environmental problem;
  - Establish the status quo at the outset of the action plan; and
  - Assess the degree to which the commitment, if implemented, would impact performance and tackle the problem.
- **Completion:** This variable assesses the commitment's implementation and progress. This variable is assessed at the end of the action plan cycle, in the *IRM Implementation Report*.
- **Did It Open Government?:** This variable attempts to move beyond measuring outputs and deliverables to looking at how the government practice, in areas relevant to OGP values, has changed as a result of the commitment's implementation. This variable is assessed at the end of the action plan cycle, in the *IRM Implementation Report*.

### What makes a potentially starred commitment?

A potentially starred commitment has more potential to be ambitious and to be implemented. A good commitment is one that clearly describes the:

1. **Problem:** What is the economic, social, political, or environmental problem? Rather than describing an administrative issue or tool (e.g., 'Misallocation of welfare funds' is more helpful than 'lacking a website.').
2. **Status quo:** What is the status quo of the policy issue at the beginning of an action plan (e.g., "26 percent of judicial corruption complaints are not processed currently.")?
3. **Change:** Rather than stating intermediary outputs, what is the targeted behavior change that is expected from the commitment's implementation (e.g., "Doubling response rates to information requests" is a stronger goal than "publishing a protocol for response.")?



Based on these criteria, Estonia's action plan contains two potentially starred commitments:

- Commitment 1: Information technology supporting transparent and inclusive policy making
- Commitment 5: Simple and user-friendly presentation of the local public service levels

### Starred commitments

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/entities. Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:

- Potential star: the commitment's design should be **verifiable**, **relevant** to OGP values, and have **transformative** potential impact.
- The government must make significant progress on this commitment during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of **Substantial** or **Complete** implementation.

This variable is assessed at the end of the action plan cycle, in the *Implementation IRM report*.

### General Overview of the Commitments

Estonia's 2018-2020 action plan focuses on promoting open and inclusive policy making through three key areas: 1) advancing civic engagement and transparency in national-level policy-making processes, 2) promoting civic engagement and transparency in local governance, and 3) fostering positive attitudes and skills of democratic participation through general education. The action plan continues the strategic priorities of the previous action plans but is more focused and narrower in scope, this time including six commitments (compared to nine in the previous action plan).

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<sup>1</sup> “Open Government Partnership: Articles of Governance,” OGP, June 2012 (Updated March 2014 and April 2015), [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP\\_Articles-Gov\\_Apr-21-2015.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP_Articles-Gov_Apr-21-2015.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> “IRM Procedures Manual,” OGP, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-procedures-manual>

## 1. Information technology supporting transparent and inclusive policy-making

### Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan<sup>1</sup>:

“The Government Office in cooperation with other agencies, and stakeholders will define requirements for creating a new information system that would at least cover the functions of the current e-Consultation system and osale.ee.”

#### Milestones:

1.1 Assessing current situation and needs of the citizens, stakeholders and state agencies, including analysis of user experiences

1.2 Considering alternatives and describing the functions and interfacing of the new environment

1.3 Preparing terms of reference, including describing the requirements of the information system and making a prototype

**Start Date:** April 2018

**End Date:** December 2019

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
1. Overall		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

### Context and Objectives

This commitment continues the previous action plans' work on increasing the transparency of public decision-making processes. According to the problem statement in the 2018-2020 action plan, CSOs often learn about the government's plans too late in the policy cycle and lack information on when and how they can participate in policy-making processes.<sup>2</sup> The government's e-participation platform Osale.ee has been in use since 2007 but users consider it to be outdated and unable to facilitate meaningful participation.<sup>3</sup> In 2011, the government adopted the Information System of Draft Acts (*eelnõude infosüsteem* or EIS) for inter-institutional coordination of draft legislation and other policy documents. Although the system is accessible to the public and allows any user to register and submit comments, users find the technical platform and user interface too difficult to use.<sup>4</sup> According to CSOs, the main gap that needs to be addressed is citizens' lack of access to complete information on the process whereby proposals become an actual policy, and limited understanding of where and how the public can have a say.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, information on the policy-making process in the executive branch is currently detached from the subsequent proceedings in the Parliament, making it difficult for the public to track the status of a policy initiative that interests them.<sup>6</sup>

The government has attempted to address the problem in previous OGP action plans by adding new functions to EIS and providing information on public participation opportunities across government websites in a standard format (see Commitment 2.2 in the 2016-2018 action plan<sup>7</sup>). However, the new action plan and the IRM End-of-Term Report<sup>8</sup> note that EIS's new functionalities are barely used in practice and fail to provide the public with early access to policy processes. According to Kai Klandorf from NENO, government agencies sometimes add information about ongoing policy processes to EIS more than a year into the process, as recently happened with the new civil society development strategy.<sup>9</sup>



In order to address this problem, this commitment aims to prepare a new online tool that would aggregate the currently dispersed pieces of information into one user-friendly system. This system would enable citizens to track the status of policy initiatives throughout the policy cycle and participate in different stages of policy development. In addition to improving transparency, the system also aims to increase the efficiency of policymakers' work flows and encourage policymakers to assess the impacts of policies before adopting them.<sup>10</sup> To this end, the government plans to engage government agencies and civil society in analyzing user needs and defining the requirements for the new system.

According to stakeholders' assessment, the commitment clearly addresses the current gaps in government transparency and public participation.<sup>11</sup> Firstly, it aims to create a single access point for citizens and policymakers to the full cycle of policy development, reducing the burden of having to consult a number of different websites and information systems to acquire an overview of ongoing policy processes. Secondly, the government will prioritize the creation of an easy-to-use interface, aiming to engage experts and users to the system development from the outset.<sup>12</sup> This focus on usability has the potential to fix the shortcomings of the existing EIS that both CSOs and public officials have criticized. The government also foresees creating online participation opportunities for citizens in different phases of policy development, which citizens could access through that single window.

The description of the commitment in the action plan does not give a detailed overview of the exact methods that will be used for user engagement in the information system development. However, interviews with the Government Office<sup>13</sup> and the CSOs involved in the commitment's implementation<sup>14</sup> suggest that the government has designed a participatory process that starts from involving different types of stakeholders and users through thematic working groups. The scope of this work not only involves discussing the desired functionalities of the new system but rethinking the policy development process more deeply from the perspective of different stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> Since several government information systems that contain information about different parts of the policy development (EIS, Osale.ee, State Gazette) need updating, and the Ministry of Justice is planning a new online legislative drafting tool for policymakers, this commitment aims to link all these developments together to ensure the systems' compatibility, interoperability and integration.<sup>16</sup> As evidence of an integrated approach, the government has given the responsibility for coordinating the first phase of the development process and stakeholder consultations to its inter-departmental innovation team.<sup>17</sup> As planned, this commitment therefore constitutes a notable shift towards a citizen-centric and whole-of-government approach to policy making that has been previously lacking.

The commitment includes verifiable milestones that are reasonable given the complexity of information system development. Although the intended outputs of the two-year action plan (requirements and a first prototype of the new system) only constitute the first steps in the process, the commitment has the potential to transform policy-making practice towards a whole-of-government approach, provided that the activity is continued in the next action plans.

### **Next steps**

If implemented in practice, the planned steps constitute a good basis for reaching the intended goals. However, in order to unlock the transformative potential of this commitment, the following recommendations could be considered:

- First, it is important that the activity is continued in the next action plan(s) with a clear statement of the desired impact on government openness and the time perspective in which this impact would be achieved. The commitment wording in the next action plan should clearly describe the activities and milestones for the two-year action plan but also provide an outlook on the next steps that would be taken in future action plans. This gives the public a better understanding of the contribution of each milestone and action plan to the final outcome (change in government practices), which may require more than one action plan cycle to achieve.
- In order to reduce the risks of adoption failure, it is important to engage different groups of users into all phases of the system design to shape the system according to their expectations. This may be challenging – for example, CSOs expect the system to be able to send customized notifications based on the user's interests, show who gave input to policy

and how the government responded,<sup>18</sup> and allow comments.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the government is encouraged to dedicate ample time and human resources to facilitating feedback collection from different types of users. The Estonian Chamber of Disabled People recommends information system developers also consult with the Estonian Blind Union to ensure the system's usability for visually impaired people.<sup>20</sup> They also suggest government institutions provide summaries of policy documents in plain language to enable the participation of people with hearing disabilities for whom Estonian is a "foreign" language.

- The application of agile development practices and an iterative approach to system development could be a good way of integrating user feedback into the core of the process. Working through a number of quick cycles of prototyping and feedback can help speed up the learning process and reduce the risk of failing to meet user needs.
- The government should also prioritize the system's integration with the platforms that citizens commonly use. Teele Pehk, former director of the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, suggests that integration with the Eesti.ee single window for citizens should be key.<sup>21</sup>
- Even though a well-designed technological solution may do a lot for transparency and engagement, the barriers to citizen participation are often not technological. It is therefore important that the government continues developing policymakers' skills regarding public engagement. The training program conducted under Commitment 2 in this action plan is a useful step in this direction. In addition, the government could consider providing funding to increase the volume of ministries' public engagement projects and CSOs' capacity-building initiatives, such as those funded under the previous action plan.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The full commitment text, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp\\_2018-2020\\_estonia.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp_2018-2020_estonia.pdf), pp 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The usability assessment of EIS and Osale.ee from 2015, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/Osalusveeb%2C%20EIS%20lopparuanne\\_8-05-15.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/Osalusveeb%2C%20EIS%20lopparuanne_8-05-15.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> IRM researcher's interviews with Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), 27 March 2019, and Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly), 29 March 2019.

<sup>6</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Liia Hänni.

<sup>7</sup> The 2016-2018 action plan, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp\\_2016-2018\\_tegevuskava\\_en.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp_2016-2018_tegevuskava_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Estonia End-of-Term Report 2016-2018, [http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia\\_End-of-Term\\_Report\\_2016-2018\\_EN.pdf](http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia_End-of-Term_Report_2016-2018_EN.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> IRM researcher's interview, 15 March 2019.

<sup>10</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Merilin Truuväart (Government Office), 19 March 2019. Merilin Truuväart left her position as the OGP point of contact at the Government Office in November 2018 to join the government's innovation team where she is responsible for facilitating stakeholder engagement in analyzing the needs and developing the requirements for the new information system.

<sup>11</sup> IRM researcher's interviews with Liia Hänni; Maarja-Leena Saar; Teele Pehk (former Estonian Cooperation Assembly), 12 March 2019; Kai Klandorf (NENO), 15 March 2019.

<sup>12</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Merilin Truuväart.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly), Teele Pehk (former Estonian Cooperation Assembly), Kai Klandorf (NENO).

<sup>15</sup> IRM researcher's interviews with Merilin Truuväart (Government Office), Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly).

<sup>16</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Merilin Truuväart.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> IRM researcher's interviews with Teele Pehk and Kai Klandorf.

<sup>19</sup> IRM researcher's interviews with Liia Hänni and Maarja-Leena Saar.

<sup>20</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Anneli Habicht (Estonian Chamber of Disabled People), 2 April 2019.

<sup>21</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Teele Pehk.

<sup>22</sup> Commitment 2.4 in the 2016-2018 action plan, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp\\_2016-2018\\_tegevuskava\\_en.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/avp_2016-2018_tegevuskava_en.pdf)

## 2. Shaping a policy-making process that is inclusive, knowledge-based, and citizen-centred, and developing skills

### Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan<sup>1</sup>:

“Improve the work of the network of engagement coordinators, strengthen the role of coordinators in ministries, and develop their leadership skills.

Improve the attitudes and skills of top civil servants in leading inclusive, citizen-centred, and knowledge-based policy-making.

Develop the skills of central governments and local officials and non-governmental organisations in engagement, negotiation, and impact assessment.

### Milestones:

#### 2.1 (April 2018—December 2018):

- The organisation of work of the network of involvement coordinators has been revised and the network is actively operating.
- A procurement has been published for carrying out the policy-making training programme for senior managers of civil services.
- 100 state or local government officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations have been trained. The programme has been reviewed and updated based on feedback.

#### 2.2 (April 2018—December 2019):

- The network of involvement coordinators is actively operating.
- 40 top civil servants have been trained.
- 600 state or local government officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations have been trained.

#### 2.3 (April 2018—June 2020):

- The network of involvement coordinators is actively operating.
- 40 top civil servants have been trained.
- At least 700 state or local government officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations have been trained.”

**Start Date:** April 2018

**End Date:** December 2019

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
2. Overall		✓		✓				✓			Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

### Context and Objectives

This commitment aims to raise policymakers’ awareness of public engagement methods and improve their skills to coordinate civic participation in policy-making processes. According to the problem statement in the action plan, there has been a gap of several years in public service training on engagement skills. Although the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) holds yearly civic participation schools where officials can participate, the government has not organized training

courses on engagement and participation for public officials since 2013.<sup>2</sup> The action plan also states the need to foster supportive attitudes to citizen engagement among top civil servants due to their importance in shaping their organizations' engagement culture. The commitment follows the recommendation of the IRM 2016-2018 progress report, which suggested improving civil servants' skills and attitudes towards citizen involvement.

This commitment also aims to build the capacity of ministries' engagement coordinators. In 2007, all ministries appointed "public engagement coordinators," tasking one or more officials with the responsibility of supporting the ministry's public engagement processes. In the same year, the government created a network of engagement coordinators to assist the coordinators' work and harmonize engagement practices across the government. However, the action plan states that the activity of the network has stalled, and engagement coordinators' roles and leadership skills should be strengthened. The IRM researcher's survey among engagement coordinators<sup>3</sup> found that coordinators indeed feel a need for more collaboration with their colleagues and improving their knowledge on issues such as co-creation and moderation methods or ICT solutions for engagement. One coordinator also expressed the need to define the role of engagement coordinators more clearly.

In order to address these needs, the government plans capacity-building and networking activities for three target groups: 1) 700 civil servants and CSO stakeholders, 2) 40 top civil servants, and 3) the engagement coordinators of ministries. The commitment's objectives and activities are clearly relevant to civic participation and address the stated needs. The government lists verifiable milestones and provides a timeline for their completion. While the milestones related to civil servants' trainings are specific and easy to measure, the milestones related to the network of engagement coordinators are rather vague. For example, the commitment does not specify what is meant by an 'actively operating' network. According to the network coordinator Ivar Hendla, the Government Office aims to set up meetings of the network three to four times per year to provide a regular collaboration platform and conduct trainings on an as-needed basis.<sup>4</sup>

Although the three streams of activity are relevant and mutually supportive, their overall potential impact taken together will likely be moderate. The scale and scope of the training plans for the 700 civil servants (and their civil society partners) promise substantial improvements in civic engagement skills in the public sector, provided that sufficient time is allocated to civic participation in the program and the trainings are followed up by activities that help to sustain the results.

Moreover, when designing the training in 2017, the State Shared Service Center required at least 30 percent of participants to be recruited from local municipalities and CSOs.<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the training group will likely increase the impact, giving participants the opportunity to learn from each other and foster a common understanding of good civic engagement practices among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

Similarly, offering tailor-made trainings to public engagement coordinators and building a network for collaboration and sharing<sup>6</sup> could have a substantial impact on improving engagement practices in public sector organizations. According to the IRM researcher's survey<sup>7</sup>, engagement coordinators see the network as a highly beneficial platform for learning, capacity building, collaboration, discussing solutions to common problems and creating motivation to do their job well.

On the other hand, the third stream of activity (trainings for 40 top civil servants) will likely slightly less impact on open government compared to the other activities. The IRM researcher's communication with Külli Toomet-Björck from the Government Office's Top Civil Service Excellence Center revealed that some of the trainings conducted in the action plan period do include topics related to civic participation – for example, innovation leadership training also relates to collaboration with external stakeholders.<sup>8</sup> However, their content is based on already existing training plans which is no different from the usual practice of training top officials.

In the long-term, this commitment could be more impactful. The number of civil servants whose job entails policy-making is below 10,000 in Estonia, so at least 5% of them will have been trained as part of this commitment. Since these officials are leaders in their respective offices, a regular follow-up peer-to-peer training is expected, which could change practices of central and local government officials.

## Next steps

As written, the commitment is relevant and moderately ambitious, with the three elements of the commitment reinforcing each other. However, the government could increase its impact by considering the following:

- To add value to the usual training, the module targeting top public officials could give citizen engagement a more prominent place on the agenda.
- Plan additional and follow-up activities to help sustain the positive outcomes of the training program for public officials and CSOs. Synergies could be created with the Government Office's funding scheme for engagement projects<sup>9</sup> by encouraging training participants to initiate and apply for funding for new collaboration projects. This would help transform the theoretical knowledge acquired during the training into practical experience of involvement and participation.
- Analyze what further support ministries' engagement coordinators would need to steer their organizations towards better civic engagement practices. The engagement coordinators that participated in the survey suggested that the role and tasks of engagement coordinators should be discussed and defined more clearly across ministries as not all ministries consider this a priority. The coordinators also proposed to work out a common methodology to evaluate the quality of civic engagement practices in ministries, and develop joint goals and activities based on the gaps identified.

This commitment addresses issues that will likely require continuous attention from the government beyond the action plan period. The IRM researcher therefore recommends the government plans follow-up activities in the next action plan to continue building the participation and engagement skills of both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> The full commitment text, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp\\_2018-2020\\_estonia.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp_2018-2020_estonia.pdf), pp 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> Estonia's OGP action plan 2018-2020, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp\\_2018-2020\\_estonia.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp_2018-2020_estonia.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The IRM researcher conducted a small online survey among engagement coordinators from 19 to 29 March 2019. See Section VI (Methodology and Sources) for more information.

<sup>4</sup> IRM researcher's interview, 21 March 2019.

<sup>5</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Cherlin Agu (State Shared Service Center), 26 March 2019.

<sup>6</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Ivar Hendla (Government Office), 21 March 2019.

<sup>7</sup> See Section VI (Methodology and Sources) for more information on the survey.

<sup>8</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Külli Toomet-Björck (Government Office), 28 March 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Government Office funding scheme, <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/kaasamisprojektid-2015-2020>

### 3. Increasing the openness and transparency of the Riigikogu Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan<sup>1</sup>:

“In order to make the information on the web page of the Riigikogu more available and user-friendly, the web page is further developed in a manner which allows processing data related to the plenary assembly in a machine-readable format.

Publishing of minutes of committees is hastened and harmonised between committees.”

#### Milestones:

3.1 Open data of the Riigikogu are being tested

3.2 Open data of the Riigikogu are constantly available

3.3 Minutes are published as soon as possible after a sitting of a committee has finished

**Start Date:** July 2018

**End Date:** June 2020

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
3. Overall		✓	✓			✓			✓		Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

### Context and Objectives

The transparency of the work of the Estonian Parliament (the Riigikogu) was raised as a problem in the previous OGP action plan. The action plan had focused on developing internal guidelines for Members of Parliament for interacting with lobby groups, while the new action plan seeks to improve public access to information about the Riigikogu’s work. According to the problem statement in the action plan, the Riigikogu’s practice of publishing minutes from parliamentary committees’ sittings is not harmonized, minutes are often published with delays and access to the Riigikogu’s publications and open data could be improved. CSOs confirm that gaps exist. Maarja-Leena Saar, the manager of the Citizens’ Initiative platform<sup>2</sup> at the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, notes that monitoring the status of the citizens’ initiatives sent to Parliament could be substantially simplified if committees’ minutes were available in a timely manner and the Riigikogu’s data repository sent notifications of their publication in real time, with a link to the minutes.<sup>3</sup> According to her experience, minutes sometimes only become available a month after a sitting and occasionally only as printed and scanned PDF files, which need to be manually copied to the Citizens’ Initiative portal. Regarding access to open data, citizens have repeatedly asked for Riigikogu’s data on the Estonian open data issue tracker on Github,<sup>4</sup> indicating demand for this data in open, machine-readable and reusable formats.

When proposing this commitment for inclusion in the action plan, Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy) also raised the more fundamental need to agree on how discussions and voting results in committees’ meetings should be recorded and on the legal grounds on which committees may restrict public access to their meeting minutes.<sup>5</sup> However, the Riigikogu did not refer to this part of the problem in the final commitment wording. According to Hänni, different interpretations of this right have been a source of controversy for years and have not been resolved in a satisfactory manner.<sup>6</sup>



In order to improve public access to information, the Riigikogu has committed to carrying out two types of activities: 1) publishing data about the Riigikogu's plenary sittings in machine-readable open data formats, and 2) publishing minutes of committees' sittings as soon as possible after a sitting. These objectives address the stated needs, although Liia Hänni's suggestion to revise the legal bases of declaring committees' minutes confidential remains beyond the scope of these activities. The commitment is clearly relevant to the OGP value of access to information and intends to employ technology to make information available to the public quickly and in open formats. Although the commitment also claims relevance to civic participation, it does not envisage any mechanisms for directly engaging citizens beyond simply informing them and is therefore not directly relevant to civic participation.

The commitment sets milestones that are verifiable, although it is not clear from the wording whether the publication of committees' minutes "as soon as possible" means immediately or whether committees could delay publication by arguing that publishing them sooner would not have been possible. Based on the IRM researcher's interview with Tiina Runthal from the Riigikogu's chancellery, the Riigikogu's objective is to make minutes available within seven days from the day following the committee's sitting.<sup>7</sup> This deadline may be extended for justifiable reasons, such as the signatories' illness or travelling on duty.

If implemented as planned, this commitment could potentially have a moderate impact on the Riigikogu's transparency and public access to information about the Riigikogu's work. According to Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly), publishing Riigikogu's open data through an API<sup>8</sup> would be a major improvement and help solve their problem of missing information and manual work.<sup>9</sup> However, in Liia Hänni's (e-Governance Academy) opinion, this commitment only does the necessary minimum to improve the Riigikogu's transparency, and should continue in the next action plan to address the more fundamental questions of documentation and restrictions on public access to the committees' work.<sup>10</sup> According to the IRM researcher's assessment, both the provision of open data and the publication of committees' minutes in seven days are important steps forward but the Riigikogu could do more to present the minutes on the website in a way that allows citizens to easily find information. For example, the current search function only allows users to search minutes by selecting the respective committee and date of the sitting but does not enable search by keywords or offer users the option of browsing the history of a committee's sittings. According to Tiina Runthal (Chancellery of the Riigikogu), the Riigikogu does not plan any further activities for improving access to committees' minutes besides publishing them within seven days.<sup>11</sup>

### Next steps

As civil society stakeholders consider access to information about the Riigikogu's work important, the Riigikogu could consider continuing efforts towards better public access to information in the next action plan. If implemented as planned, the current action plan will likely substantially improve the provision of open data. It will also create a basis to pursue the more ambitious goal of not only publishing committees' minutes more quickly but also making more of them open to the public and improving the findability of relevant information. Given that this commitment has been mostly implemented, the following recommendations could be considered to increase the commitment's impact during the implementation of the current action plan:

- The Riigikogu is encouraged to continue interaction with the main users of the Riigikogu's open data (e.g. the Estonian Cooperation Assembly) and the broader open data community on Github to improve the quality and usability of the published data and add new datasets based on users' needs. In order to increase data reuse, it is also important to keep the metadata and links to the Riigikogu's repository on the Estonian Open Data Portal up to date.
- For the sake of ensuring equal access to information, the Riigikogu could analyze the accessibility of the information on its website (including committees' minutes) for people with disabilities, in particular those with visual impairments. To this end, the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People recommends the Riigikogu to involve the Estonian Blind Union in evaluating the accessibility of the website for visually impaired and blind people.<sup>12</sup>
- The Riigikogu could also consider ways of improving the ease of use of its website, in particular the search function for the minutes of plenaries and sittings of parliamentary committees. Meeting minutes can be an important source of information for the public and

merely publishing them on the website may not be sufficient to make the information truly accessible to citizens.

- Moving forward, the Riigikogu could also enable citizens to subscribe to notifications about events in the legislative process to proactively encourage the use of information that is available online.

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<sup>1</sup> The full commitment text, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp\\_2018-2020\\_estonia.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp_2018-2020_estonia.pdf), pp 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> The Citizens' Initiative (<https://rahvaalgatus.ee/>) is an online public participation instrument adopted as part of Estonia's OGP action plan for 2014-2016 that allows citizens to submit collective addresses (petitions) to the Riigikogu if signed by at least 1000 citizens.

<sup>3</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly), 29 March 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Estonian open data issue tracker, <https://github.com/okestonia/opendata-issue-tracker/issues?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=is%3Aissue+riigikogu>

<sup>5</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), 27 March 2019.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Hänni's blog post from 2015, [https://ega.ee/blog\\_post/kui-avatud-riigikogu-me-vajame/](https://ega.ee/blog_post/kui-avatud-riigikogu-me-vajame/)

<sup>7</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Tiina Runthal (Chancellery of Riigikogu), 29 March 2019.

<sup>8</sup> APIs (application programming interfaces) allow information to be exchanged directly between software programs and are an increasingly common way of providing open data services.

<sup>9</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Maarja-Leena Saar.

<sup>10</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Liia Hänni.

<sup>11</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Tiina Runthal.

<sup>12</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Anneli Habicht (Estonian Chamber of Disabled People), 2 April 2019.



## 4. Developing open government action plans and activities in local governments

### Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan<sup>1</sup>:

“Supported by the European Social Fund, the Ministry of Finance is organising a call for proposals to increase the cooperation and leadership capabilities of local governments, enabling, among other things, application for support for promoting an open government; applications can be submitted by all local governments, their associations, organisations engaged in other areas, and non-governmental associations that wish to contribute to raising awareness on activities of open government or its implementation on the local level.”

### Milestones:

4.1 Discussing the conditions of the call for proposals with stakeholders

4.2 Announcing the call for proposal

4.3 At least five local governments have developed their open government action plans or implemented activities that increase awareness on the open government principles and their implementation

**Start Date:** September 2018

**End Date:** December 2020

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
4. Overall		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

### Context and Objectives

This commitment carries on the previous action plan’s work in addressing the gaps in implementing open government principles in Estonian local municipalities. According to the problem statement in the action plan, most municipalities adhere to open government values but their approach to implementing open government principles is not systematic, in particular in providing opportunities for public access to information and citizen participation. Some steps have already been taken. In 2014-2016 the e-Governance Academy carried out the project “Open Government Partnership in Local Municipalities”<sup>2</sup> where eight local municipalities adopted a local plan for implementing open government principles. In 2017, the government finalized a large-scale administrative-territorial reform which reduced the number of local governments from 213 to 79 and affected the work of most municipalities. Immediately after the reform, the e-Governance Academy implemented the test project “Open Government in Merging Municipalities”<sup>3</sup> in two local municipalities (Elva and Lääneranna) that had recently gone through mergers. As a result of a collaborative process, the Academy developed tailored recommendations for implementing open government principles in the two municipalities and generic recommendations for other local governments.<sup>4</sup>

Krista Habakukk from the Estonian Village Movement Kodukant agrees that the newly-merged post-reform municipalities need to build new structures for interaction and collaboration with local communities and many need support in developing open government practices.<sup>5</sup> According to Kodukant, communities perceive a need for strengthening the position of “village elders” and local community leaders as mediators between the community and the local government. Both local officials and CSOs also need systematic training to develop skills for democratic involvement and

participation. According to Ott Kasuri from the Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities (AECM), municipalities could benefit from capacity building in management and collaboration skills as well as community involvement and open communication with citizens.<sup>6</sup>

This commitment builds on the results of the previous projects to encourage more municipalities to adopt open government action plans. According to Kaie Kõngas from the Ministry of Finance, the government's main aim is to increase local municipalities' awareness of open government.<sup>7</sup> To this end, the Ministry of Finance plans to fund the development of local open government action plans through a European Social Fund's (ESF) call for proposals. As the local governments are free to develop the content of these projects, the relevance of the commitment to OGP values will only be revealed once the projects have been chosen. However, based on the focus of similar projects in the previous action plan, this commitment can be assessed as potentially relevant to access to information and civic participation. Ott Kasuri (AECM) believes that funding such projects is a much-needed support measure for local governments that helps scale up the results of previous projects and foster an open governance culture.<sup>8</sup>

The commitment has three verifiable milestones, which involve discussing the call for proposals with relevant stakeholders, announcing the call, and implementing open government projects in at least five local governments. Despite this quantitative target, the action plan states that the exact number of funded projects depends on the number of applications submitted and the budget limitations. According to Kaie Kõngas from the Ministry of Finance, the ministry's actual interpretation of this milestone is flexible – besides the projects funded under the ESF call, they also count local municipalities' own initiatives of developing open government action plans as well as the ministry's support activities towards the target.<sup>9</sup> As an example of the latter, the ministry plans to conduct an open government information day for municipalities with the e-Governance Academy in 2019.

Despite its relevance, the commitment only addresses part of local municipalities' needs. It does so at a small scale by implementing five projects, out of which one may include carrying out an information event for municipalities. During the action plan development, the e-Governance Academy proposed to fund at least 20 projects. However, due to budget limitations and the uncertainty about the number of municipalities that would want to implement open government projects, the ministry reduced this to five.<sup>10</sup> Although this is not a particularly ambitious goal, the ministry has taken means to widely promote the ESF funding opportunity among local governments and share the existing good practices beyond the municipalities that have implemented open government projects.<sup>11</sup> This allows the potential impact of this commitment to be assessed as moderate in case the existing plans are followed through. While funding individual projects and conducting information events are an important step towards the government's objectives, achieving a major impact would still require a more systematic and diverse set of activities on a much larger scale.

### **Next steps**

The needs and gaps that stakeholders identified and the positive results of the test projects of the previous action plan indicate the value and importance of OGP commitments targeted to local municipalities. Therefore, the IRM researcher recommends the government carry this commitment forward to the next action plan and design a more systematic set of activities with more ambitious goals. Instead of funding a few projects in individual municipalities, the Ministry of Finance could involve AECM and CSOs such as the e-Governance Academy, Kodukant and the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) to jointly develop a comprehensive program for advancing open government and participatory democracy in local municipalities. The program could include diverse measures, such as:

- Conduct awareness-raising activities to disseminate information on open government values and Open Government Partnership, existing success stories (e.g. Elva municipality) and guidelines (e.g. instructions for implementing participatory budgeting at the local level developed as part of the previous OGP action plan<sup>12</sup>).
- Provide continued financial support to municipalities for developing local open government action plans. The Ministry of Finance could support these efforts by disseminating information on previous similar projects, so that new applicants can learn from the results.

The collaborative action plan development process that the e-Governance Academy applied in previous projects appears to be a potentially useful model to replicate.

- Provide regular counselling to municipalities that are interested in building structures and processes to support open government values.
- Design a training program on democratic participation and engagement targeted to local municipalities' officials and CSO stakeholders. Although the ongoing training program for officials (Commitment 2 of this action plan) also targets local government officials, the government could consider developing a specialized training program that is tailored to the needs and particularities of decision-making processes at the local level. In the view of Krista Habakukk (Kodukant, The Village Movement), one of the crucial areas to work in should be trust-building between local-level decision-makers and local communities.<sup>13</sup> Joint trainings and a platform for constructively discussing local issues could be one way of helping increase mutual trust.
- According to Habakukk, village elders have also raised the need for a potential legislative amendment in the Local Government Organization Act to support citizens' use of the right to initiate legislation. The current law allows the residents of a municipality to make legislative proposals to the local government if signed by at least 1 percent of the municipality's residents.<sup>14</sup> However, in the new and large municipalities, smaller and more remote communities within the municipality may find it more difficult to collect the signatures of at least 1 percent of residents and may thus be in an unequal position to use this democracy instrument.
- Finally, Ott Kasuri (AECM) notes that the Ministry of Finance and local governments could also consider further developing the KOVTP and VOLIS information systems that many municipalities use to interact with citizens, broadcast local assemblies' sittings, implement participatory budgeting processes, and so on.<sup>15</sup> According to Kasuri, this requires solving the question of funding and ownership of these systems.

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<sup>1</sup> The full commitment text, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp\\_2018-2020\\_estonia.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp_2018-2020_estonia.pdf), pp 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> E-Governance Academy projects, <https://ega.ee/et/projekt/avatud-valitsemise-partnerlus-kohalikes-omavalitsustes/>.

<sup>3</sup> E-Governance Academy projects, <https://ega.ee/et/projekt/avatud-valitsemine-uhinevates-omavalitsustes/>.

<sup>4</sup> This project was implemented as part of Estonia's OGP action plan 2016-2018. The IRM end-of-term report contains a more detailed discussion of the results, [http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia\\_End-of-Term\\_Report\\_2016-2018\\_EN.pdf](http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia_End-of-Term_Report_2016-2018_EN.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Krista Habakukk (Kodukant, the Village Movement), 29 March 2019.

<sup>6</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Ott Kasuri (Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities), 29 March 2019.

<sup>7</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Kaie Küngas (Ministry of Finance), 28 March 2019.

<sup>8</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Ott Kasuri.

<sup>9</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Kaie Küngas.

<sup>10</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), 27 March 2019.

<sup>11</sup> The IRM researcher obtained this information from Kaie Küngas (Ministry of Finance) during the pre-publication review of this report.

<sup>12</sup> Instructions for Participatory Budgeting, [https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/et/system/files\\_force/document\\_files/kaasava\\_eelarve\\_juhend.pdf](https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/et/system/files_force/document_files/kaasava_eelarve_juhend.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Krista Habakukk.

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 4 of the Local Government Organization Act, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/506112013013/consolide/current>

<sup>15</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Ott Kasuri.

## 5. Simple and user-friendly presentation of the local public service levels

### Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan<sup>1</sup>:

“The methodology and analysis completed in the summer of 2018 gives an overview of which services are provided in local governments and on what level. An attractive and comprehensive tool available for all citizens is developed based on this methodology and analysis, and each citizen, local government, and ministry can use this tool to view the data of their local government categorised by areas and compare these to Estonian averages and data of other local governments. The users can give feedback in the application.”

### Milestones:

5.1 Developing a presentation prototype in cooperation with partners

5.2 Preparing terms of reference for the development in cooperation with partners

5.3 Completion of the development

5.4 Promoting active use of the tool

**Start Date:** July 2018

**End Date:** June 2020

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
5. Overall		✓	✓			✓				✓	Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

### Context and Objectives

This commitment aims to advance open government at the local level by improving information provision on the availability and quality of public services that local governments provide. This commitment was driven by the perceived uneven quality of public services in different parts of Estonia and citizens' lack of access to information about their municipality's performance. In its 2012 audit, the National Audit Office found that while the bulk of public services are provided at the municipality level, the central government has not set standards for the expected minimum level required of the services and has no overview of how well local municipalities perform their tasks.<sup>2</sup> Saar Poll's 2014 study on citizens' satisfaction with local public services also pointed to notable regional and local differences in public service quality.<sup>3</sup> One of the main objectives of the 2017 amalgamation of local municipalities was to improve the quality of local public services.<sup>4</sup> However, the level of public services has so far not been measured systematically.

In order to create a reference base for monitoring and improving the level of local public services, the Ministry of Finance is developing an ICT tool that would present and visualize local governments' performance in a range of domains. According to the action plan, the tool has three target groups: 1) the public, who can use it to obtain information; 2) local governments, who can use it as a management tool and plan interventions to improve service quality; and 3) the central government, who can use it to compare local municipalities and devise policies. The tool will apply the methodology and detailed indicators developed by the University of Tartu Center for Applied Social Sciences and Geomedia, a consultancy.

The commitment is clearly relevant to the OGP value of access to information as the online tool would provide public access to information that has previously not been available. The four milestones of the commitment are verifiable, although the action plan does not say much about what information the ICT tool would eventually include and what functionalities it would provide to users. A better overview can be obtained from the University of Tartu's and Geomedia's analysis and methodology report, which proposes hundreds of evaluation criteria to measure local governments' performance in 16 domains.<sup>5</sup> The proposed indicators also include certain open government indicators, such as the existence of an open government action plan, and regulations for CSO engagement and funding, etc. CSOs have high hopes for this activity and believe it could have a potentially transformative impact on open government at the local level, in particular on transparency. Teele Pehk and Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly) both see it as a step forward in developing civic technology and emphasize the value of the data that would be collected and published.<sup>6</sup> They suggest the datasets should be released as open data to enable their reuse by interested stakeholders. If this is achieved, the commitment may also involve enriching the open data landscape in Estonia with hundreds of new high-value datasets. Liia Hänni, from the e-Governance Academy, believes this activity could create potential synergies with developing open government action plans in local municipalities as it would help analyze the situation of open government in municipalities and identify gaps.<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Finance indeed plans to start regularly monitoring the implementation of local open government action plans as part of data collection on local-level public service quality and publish the results through the ICT tool.<sup>8</sup> According to Ott Kasuri from the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM), the ICT tool could serve as a useful means for visualizing strategic processes and planning the development of new services.<sup>9</sup>

### Next steps

This commitment uses state-of-the-art means to address an important gap. However, in order to transform the status quo, the Ministry of Finance should plan additional activities to ensure the targeted stakeholders will actually use the ICT tool. It is also advisable to devise measures for feeding the information revealed through the tool into policy to support the municipalities that lag behind. The IRM researcher therefore advises to continue this commitment in the next action plan and expand it to include these supportive measures. The following considerations may be useful when implementing the commitment and planning the next steps:

- The Ministry of Finance could design the system development in a collaborative way to involve representatives of the key user groups and make sure their needs are addressed in the system's design. The process should also involve disabled people, in particular those with visual impairments, e.g. experts from the Estonian Blind Union. According to Andrus Jõgi (Ministry of Finance), the ministry plans to make the application usable for color-blind people by using icons and numerical values where possible.<sup>10</sup> In the next action plan, the ministry could continue this commitment and include activities to promote the use of the tool among all intended target groups.
- The ministry could prioritize designing processes for data collection that would be standardized and automatized to the extent possible in order to ensure users' continued access to up-to-date data without the need for extensive manual work. According to Andrus Jõgi, data collection will involve a lot of manual work in the first years, but the ministry plans to gradually automatize the process, once it becomes clear which datasets are used more and which data can be obtained and updated at a reasonable cost.<sup>11</sup>
- For a broader impact, the data collected for the ICT tool could be published on the Estonian national open data portal in the form of open, downloadable and machine-readable datasets. Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly) suggests adding an open license to all the data used in the tool and encouraging citizens to reuse the data for new applications and projects.<sup>12</sup> In her view, the next OGP action plan could include activities to monitor the compliance of the data with open data standards and to promote data reuse by non-governmental stakeholders.
- In order to further advance open government values, the ministry could pay special attention to refining (and possibly adding) indicators that reflect the state of open

government practices in municipalities. These indicators should be developed and selected in collaboration with CSOs.

- To achieve the expected impact and avoid unwanted outcomes, the IRM researcher highly recommends the Ministry of Finance devise a comprehensive plan for transferring the knowledge obtained through using the tool into actual policy measures. According to Krista Habakukk (Kodukant, the Village Movement), publishing data about municipalities' performance is good for transparency but also entails the risk of exacerbating already existing inequalities between municipalities.<sup>13</sup> She notes that simply publishing rankings may result in increased migration to municipalities that have more resources to provide better services, accelerating the marginalization of municipalities with fewer resources. Habakukk expects the government to have a clear plan for helping the municipalities that lag behind to improve their services and governance practices.
- Finally, the impact of the ICT tool could also be increased by using it to help municipalities develop innovative data-driven services to citizens. According to Ott Kasuri (AECM), municipalities should increasingly develop proactive services, for example by issuing citizens automated notifications about school or kindergarten places, and eligibility for social benefits, etc.<sup>14</sup> Municipalities' obligation to regularly provide data for the ICT tool could also help improve their data management practices, which would facilitate the use of data for service provision.

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<sup>1</sup> The full commitment text, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp\\_2018-2020\\_estonia.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp_2018-2020_estonia.pdf), pp 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> National Audit Office, *Assumptions for provision of public services in small and remote local authorities* (2012), <https://www.riigikontroll.ee/DesktopModules/DigiDetail/FileDownloader.aspx?FileId=11431&AuditId=2210>

<sup>3</sup> Saar Poll, *Elanike rahulolu kohalike avalike teenustega* (2014), [https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/dokumendid/Uuringud/Regionaalhaldus\\_ja\\_maavalitsused/2014\\_elanike\\_rahulolu\\_kohalike\\_avalike\\_teenustega.pdf](https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/dokumendid/Uuringud/Regionaalhaldus_ja_maavalitsused/2014_elanike_rahulolu_kohalike_avalike_teenustega.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Finance, *Haldusreform*, <https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/et/kov/haldusreform>

<sup>5</sup> Tartu Ülikooli sotsiaalteaduslike rakendusuringute keskus RAKE, Geomedia OÜ, *Kohalike avalike teenuste seire metoodika väljatöötamine ja testimine ning analüüsi läbiviimine* (2018).

<sup>6</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Teele Pehk (former Estonian Cooperation Assembly), 12 March 2019; IRM researcher's interview with Maarja-Leena Saar (Estonian Cooperation Assembly), 29 March 2019. Maarja-Leena Saar is also a member of the board of Open Knowledge Estonia, a non-governmental organization and member of Open Knowledge International that works to advance open knowledge and open data.

<sup>7</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Liia Hänni (e-Governance Academy), 27 March 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Email from Kaie Kungas (Ministry of Finance), 15 April 2019.

<sup>9</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Ott Kasuri (Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities), 29 March 2019.

<sup>10</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Andrus Jõgi (Ministry of Finance), 21-22 March 2019.

<sup>11</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Andrus Jõgi.

<sup>12</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Maarja-Leena Saar.

<sup>13</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Krista Habakukk (Kodukant, the Village Movement), 29 March 2019.

<sup>14</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Ott Kasuri.



## 6. Develop attitudes towards and skills in participatory democracy

### Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan<sup>1</sup>:

“When updating the national curricula of basic schools and upper secondary schools and preparing the education and research strategy in 2018–2019, the Ministry of Education and Research consults with appropriate stakeholders, including youth organisations, to ensure the inclusion of skills necessary for participatory democracy in the strategy and curricula.

The interested parties (including non-governmental organisations) present their proposals to update the learning objectives and learning outcomes pursuant to the principles of the new concept of learning<sup>2</sup>.”

#### Milestones:

6.1 The working group of the field of study prepares and presents primary proposals for the updated learning outcomes

6.2 Consultations with stakeholders

**Start Date:** January 2016 (carried over from the previous OGP action plan)

**End Date:** December 2019

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
6. Overall		✓	✓					✓			Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

### Context and Objectives

This commitment aims to develop citizens’ skills of democratic participation and fostering attitudes that favor participatory democracy in school curricula. This commitment continues the previous action plan’s process of strengthening the component of participatory democracy in the syllabi of social science subjects. According to the initial timeline, drafting the new syllabi (in particular formulating new learning outcomes) should have finished by June 2018. However, since the government decided to develop a completely new national curriculum based on a new learning approach, the ministry integrated the process of updating the syllabi with the broader curriculum reform process. Therefore, some planned milestones were not achieved on time and the commitment was extended into the new action plan with a slightly changed scope.

Studies indicate a need for this activity: Estonians tend to be slightly less interested in democratic processes than their counterparts in other European countries,<sup>3</sup> and young Estonians exhibit only lukewarm interest in voting, while their participation in voluntary work and CSOs has stalled.<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Education and Research aims to address these gaps by integrating participatory democratic skills and knowledge into the new curriculum and the new research and education strategy. The ministry also plans to carry out stakeholder consultations in the process. The planned objectives and activities contribute to solving the problem, although their effects will only manifest in the long term due to the inevitable lag of translating the new curriculum into actual teaching practice and young people’s new skills into actual government practice. It is, however, relevant to the OGP value of civic participation inasmuch as the curriculum is developed through a participatory process involving experts and stakeholders.

The commitment sets generally verifiable milestones but does not specify by which process stakeholders would be engaged. The lack of specificity on this aspect was raised in Section 9 of the

previous IRM progress report<sup>5</sup> but has remained unaddressed in the new action plan. Based on the IRM researcher's interview with Pille Liblik and Kaisa Musting (Ministry of Education and Research),<sup>6</sup> the ministry has a well-developed plan for conducting stakeholder consultations. First, the core principles of the curriculum development would be discussed in seminars with a range of stakeholders, including youth organizations, schools, teachers, parents, local municipalities, and so on. The resulting concept of learning outcomes would be emailed to additional interest groups for consultations. Feedback would be accepted by email and online via Foundation Innove's (the ministry's executive agency) curriculum portal. As the next step, Innove would involve schools and teachers through seminars dedicated to specific subject areas, including social sciences. The draft syllabi would then be edited based on stakeholder input, negotiated with the respective stakeholders in case of conflicting proposals, and the end result would be a draft legal act, which would go through a public consultation before final adoption.

The commitment also mentions fostering participatory democracy through a new research and education strategy but does not provide any milestones to address that issue. Based on information from Elo Tuppits (Ministry of Education and Research), the strategy process has started from experts (including youth organizations) developing three vision documents on the topics of values and responsibility, welfare and cohesion, and competitiveness.<sup>7</sup> The first two also involve developing youth's civic participation skills. According to Tuppits, the next steps have not yet been decided but the development will likely continue in working groups.

Due to this commitment's focus on the education system, its future impact on fostering participatory democratic values among youth may well be major. In the long-term, changes to Estonia's education system could lead to a more informed citizenry and to a more participatory democracy. However, its potential impact on changing government practices in the near future is only indirect and will likely not manifest within the timeframe of one or even several action plans. That said, the collaborative model of designing the curriculum reform may turn out to be a valuable result on its own and could set an example for future reforms within and outside the education policy domain.

### **Next steps**

Because of this commitment's lack of immediate change to government practices, the IRM researcher recommends excluding this activity from the next OGP action plan. Although the education system may play an important role in strengthening democratic participation in the long term, the two-year timeframe of OGP action plans favors focusing on activities that can elicit faster changes in government practices. Nevertheless, the commitment's effects on government practices could be increased by:

- Implementing the ministry's plan of broad-based stakeholder consultations in the curriculum development process, while remaining adaptable to stakeholders' suggestions on involvement methods that would work best for them. Particular attention should be paid to using formats that allow people with disabilities to participate.
- Promoting and sharing the good practice of stakeholder involvement more broadly among other ministries that implement large-scale reforms in their areas. Allocating sufficient time for the policy development process and the engagement of a range of experts and interest groups through diverse methods and channels all serve as good examples to follow. The Ministry of Education and Research could collaborate with the Government Office in disseminating best practices. The ministry's engagement coordinator could also share this experience in the network of ministries' engagement coordinators as part of the activities under Commitment 2.
- Planning adequate resources for supporting the actual implementation of the curriculum. Kersti Kivirüüt (Foundation Innove; former representative of the Estonian History and Civic Teachers' Association) notes that the new learning approach formulates learning outcomes in a very general way, which gives teachers freedom to decide on the teaching methods but also requires high professional skills from them.<sup>8</sup> According to Kivirüüt, having a new curriculum alone is not sufficient for developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes for participatory democracy – it is much more important to provide long-term support for the implementation of the curriculum at school.



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<sup>1</sup> The full commitment text, [https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp\\_2018-2020\\_estonia.pdf](https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/AVP/ogp_2018-2020_estonia.pdf), pp 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> The new learning approach is based on the principles of supporting individual, personalized and activity-based learning, collaboration towards common goals, and autonomy, which gives schools, teachers and pupils more freedom to decide how the jointly agreed learning outcomes would be achieved. The approach emphasizes fostering democracy and participation not only in the curriculum but also in managing schools and designing classes. For more information about the new learning approach, <https://www.hm.ee/et/opikasitus>

<sup>3</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 88, Estonia national report, [https://ec.europa.eu/estonia/sites/estonia/files/docs/st88\\_report\\_repee.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/estonia/sites/estonia/files/docs/st88_report_repee.pdf); Piret Ehin, Mare Ainsaar, Liisa Talving, Andres Reiljan "Eesti elanike suhtumine demokraatiasse" (2014), [https://www.ut.ee/sites/default/files/www\\_ut/eesti\\_elanike\\_suhtumine\\_demokraatiasse\\_euroopa\\_sotsiaaluuringu\\_andmete\\_pohjal.pdf](https://www.ut.ee/sites/default/files/www_ut/eesti_elanike_suhtumine_demokraatiasse_euroopa_sotsiaaluuringu_andmete_pohjal.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (2016) International Civic and Citizenship Study, [https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/iccs\\_2016\\_eesti\\_raport\\_lyhi\\_final\\_121217.pdf](https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/iccs_2016_eesti_raport_lyhi_final_121217.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The IRM Progress Report, [http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia\\_Mid-Term-Report\\_2016-2018\\_EN\\_for-public-comment.pdf](http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Estonia_Mid-Term-Report_2016-2018_EN_for-public-comment.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> IRM researcher's interview with Pille Liblik and Kaisa Musting (Ministry of Education and Research), 24 March 2019.

<sup>7</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Elo Tuppits (Ministry of Education and Research), 29 March 2019.

<sup>8</sup> IRM researcher's email communication with Kersti Kivirüüt (Foundation Innove; former representative of Estonian History and Civic Teachers' Association), 29 March 2019.

## V. General Recommendations

This section aims to inform development of the next action plan and guide implementation of the current action plan. It is divided into two sections: 1) IRM key recommendations to improve OGP process and action plans in the country or entity and, 2) an assessment of how the government responded to previous IRM key recommendations.

### 5.1 IRM Recommendations

- The OGP Coordinating Council and civil society roundtable could engage more diverse stakeholders in developing OGP action plans. They could, in particular, prioritize the involvement of vulnerable groups and those facing more barriers to participation in policy-making processes, such as people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, or smaller civil society organizations (CSOs) working in rural areas. Existing networks and events of CSO associations, such as the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) or the village movement Kodukant, could help reach these kinds of organizations.
- The government could also work to further diversify the sources of input and options for providing input to OGP action plans. In addition to publishing online consultations, the Government Office could partner with CSOs to proactively solicit input from their members and networks and raise awareness of OGP in the process. This may include attending events that are not specifically dedicated to OGP but allow to reach diverse CSO participants, particularly those not based in the capital.
- The Government Office could dedicate funds to its Strategy Unit for strengthening communication and stakeholder engagement efforts around OGP action plans, for example, for hiring (part-time) staff or contracting a communication partner during times of intense OGP activity. Part of these activities may also be carried out in partnership with members of the Coordinating Council and the civil society roundtable. If this is achieved, the government should allocate adequate resources to the partners.
- The Government Office could prioritize upgrading the OGP repository on its website to improve public access to information about the OGP process. The repository could also be linked to websites and social media forums that CSOs frequently use to improve the findability of information about OGP online. Information about the OGP process and progress on commitments should be up to date, easy to access and written in plain language.
- In the next action plan, the OGP Coordinating Council could continue this action plan's practice of concentrating the government's efforts on five to six commitments in a few selected areas. These areas should be selected according to stakeholder priorities and the responsible institutions' willingness and capacity to implement the commitment. According to the stakeholders that provided inputs for this assessment, the current action plan's focus on building public officials' and CSOs' participation and engagement capacities, developing ICT tools for government transparency and citizen participation, and fostering open government in local municipalities should be continued in future action plans. Stakeholders also appreciate activities that bring civil society and public officials together through joint projects and trainings.
- When designing commitments, the OGP Coordinating Council should keep in mind the OGP criteria of relevance, verifiability and impact on open government practices. Commitments (e.g. Commitment 6 in this action plan) that can yield valuable results but do not directly affect government practices should be pursued through frameworks other than OGP action plans. At the same time, commitments that involve funding a few isolated and small-scale projects (e.g. Commitment 4) should be developed into more systematic and comprehensive interventions.

- As Estonia has a generally strong baseline in government transparency, civic participation and public accountability, further qualitative changes in government practices may require more ambitious commitments that last through several action plans. Such commitments should be divided into feasible two-year chunks with verifiable milestones. The action plans should describe the desired end result and indicate which part of the overall objective would be achieved by the end of each two-year period.
- In order to design and implement more ambitious commitments, the government could link the OGP process more closely to existing large-scale policy processes such as the state reform and the Estonia 2035 strategy process. The Government Office and the OGP Coordinating Council could evaluate which objectives and activities of these processes could benefit from being implemented in the OGP framework. Only activities that are in line with OGP core values and to which the OGP framework can add clear value should be chosen for implementation as part of OGP action plans.

**Table 5.1: Five Key Recommendations**

1	Prioritize engaging more diverse stakeholders in the development of OGP action plans, in particular groups facing more barriers to political participation (e.g. people with disabilities, rural communities).
2	Dedicate funds to the Government Office’s Strategy Unit for strengthening stakeholder engagement around OGP action plans. Part of these activities may also be carried out in partnership with members of the Coordinating Council and the civil society roundtable.
3	Continue focusing on five to six commitments in a few priority areas. The areas could be selected on the basis of stakeholders’ priorities, and agreement with the implementing institutions.
4	Continue implementing commitments that involve the development of civic technology, fostering open government at the local level, and bringing civil society and public officials together around a common interest or goal (e.g. joint projects, events and platforms).
5	Design more ambitious commitments that can last through several action plans, providing verifiable milestones for each step. Align the OGP process with other large-scale strategic processes, such as the state reform or the Estonia 2035 strategy process, and determine where OGP can add value.

## 5.2 Response to Previous IRM Key Recommendations

**Table 5.2: Previous IRM Report Key Recommendations**

	Recommendation	Responded to?	Integrated into Current Action Plan?
1	Establish motivation and tools for stronger everyday leadership, both in the Coordinating Council and OGP Civil Society Roundtable and consider revising the status of the Coordinating Council.	✓	✗
2	Include activities that are coherent with the state reforms that already have their own	✓	✗

	budgets but would offer clear additional value to already planned activities. Find a better balance between pre-existing plans and new initiatives.		
3	Each commitment should have a CSO responsible for monitoring its implementation, while also having enough capacity and resources to fulfill this task.	✓	✗
4	Include commitments that are well defined, ambitious, and feasible over a two-year period, and that have a public-facing element.	✓	✓
5	Include stakeholder priority areas (such as anti-corruption activities, local decision-making structures, and youth policy) in the action plan.	✓	✓

This action plan addressed parts of the recommendations of the previous IRM progress report. Based on the Coordinating Council's meeting minutes, the recommendations were discussed when developing the new action plan. However, most did not end up being fully integrated into the new action plan.

Recommendation 1 called for strengthening the leadership and leverage of the OGP Coordinating Council and civil society roundtable in the OGP process. According to the explanatory memorandum of the action plan,<sup>1</sup> the Coordinating Council agreed that the Council would meet at least once a year and collaboration would mainly happen through the joint implementation of individual commitments. However, no measures were taken to strengthen the Council's mandate and collective leadership in the day-to-day implementation of commitments. At the same time, some civil society members of the Coordinating Council find this recommendation difficult to implement due to the different nature of the commitments.<sup>2</sup> According to this view, the potential role of CSOs in implementing and monitoring commitments whose implementation is fully within the responsibility of a government institution is inherently limited.

Recommendation 2 was not fully addressed as the action plan still includes some pre-planned activities with an unclear added value from the OGP framework.

According to the explanatory memorandum to the action plan, the Coordinating Council addressed recommendation 3 by assigning non-governmental partners to each commitment. However, based on information from the CSOs listed as partners, their actual responsibility is limited to consulting government institutions in the process of commitment implementation when invited, but not closely monitoring the commitment implementation on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the previous action plan included exceptions – commitment 3 was carried out by the e-Governance Academy as a contractor to the Ministry of Finance, while NENO had an important role in carrying out commitment 8.

Recommendation 4 was mostly implemented as the commitments in this action plan are more specific than in the previous action plan and most have a public-facing element. However, some are not particularly ambitious (e.g. Commitment 4), while the ambitious commitments (e.g. 1 and 5) could provide more information on how they would be continued in the next action plans to achieve the intended impact.

According to the interviewed stakeholders, the action plan reflects their priorities; hence, recommendation 5 has been addressed, even though some priorities listed in the original recommendation were no longer considered relevant. For example, the action plan did not include anti-corruption activities because of the decision to pursue anti-corruption activities

through the national anti-corruption strategy instead of OGP action plans. None of the stakeholders has argued against this approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of the action plan, [https://heakodanik.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018\\_08\\_30\\_AVP\\_2018-2020\\_tegevuskava\\_seletuskiri.docx.pdf](https://heakodanik.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018_08_30_AVP_2018-2020_tegevuskava_seletuskiri.docx.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> E-mail from Alari Rammo (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations) during the pre-publication review on 18 July 2019.

## VI. Methodology and Sources

The IRM reports are written by researchers for each OGP-participating country or entity. All IRM reports undergo a process of quality control to ensure that the highest standards of research and due diligence have been applied.

Analysis of progress on OGP action plans is a combination of interviews, desk research, observation, and feedback from non-governmental stakeholders. The IRM report builds on the evidence available in Estonia's OGP repository (or online tracker)<sup>1</sup>, website, findings in the government's own self-assessment reports, and any other assessments of process and progress put out by civil society, the private sector, or international organizations. At the beginning of each reporting cycle, IRM staff share a research plan with governments to open a seven-day period of comments or feedback regarding the proposed research approach.

Each IRM researcher carries out stakeholder interviews to ensure an accurate portrayal of events. Given budgetary and calendar constraints, the IRM cannot consult all interested parties or visit implementation sites. Some contexts require anonymity of interviewees and the IRM reserves the right to remove personal identifying information of these participants. Due to the necessary limitations of the method, the IRM strongly encourages commentary during the pre-publication review period of each report.

Each report undergoes a quality-control process that includes an internal review by IRM staff and the IRM's International Experts Panel (IEP). Each report also undergoes an external review where governments and civil society are invited to provide comments on the content of the draft IRM report.

This review process, including the procedure for incorporating comments received, is outlined in greater detail in Section III of the Procedures Manual.<sup>2</sup>

### Interviews and stakeholder input

The selection of stakeholders for interviews was based on three considerations:

- the inclusion of the views of the government institutions responsible for implementing the OGP process and individual commitments in the action plan;
- the inclusion of the views of the civil society stakeholders actively involved in the OGP process;
- the inclusion of the views of selected additional civil society stakeholders that are not actively involved in the OGP process but work in areas in which the government has undertaken OGP commitments.

The IRM researcher conducted interviews with the following stakeholders:

Government representatives:

- Merilin Truuväärt, Government Office (point of contact for OGP during the action plan development), telephone interview, 19 March 2019. Issues discussed: OGP process and leadership, Commitment 1 (new information system for policy making).
- Ott Karulin, Government Office (current point of contact for OGP), interview, 21 March 2019. Issues discussed: further plans as regards OGP process and action plan implementation.
- Ivar Hendla, Government Office, interview, 21 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 2 (network of engagement coordinators).
- Andrus Jõgi, Ministry of Finance, email communication, 21-22 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 5 (online application for measuring local public service levels).
- Pille Liblik and Kaisa Musting, Ministry of Education and Research, Skype interview, 24 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 6 (fostering participatory democracy in general education curricula).

- Cherlin Agu, State Shared Service Center, Skype interview, 26 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 2 (training activities to foster civic engagement and participation skills among public officials and civil society).
- Kaie Küngas, Ministry of Finance, Skype interview 28 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 4 (open government projects in local municipalities).
- Külli Toomet-Björck, Government Office, email communication, 28 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 2 (training activities to foster civic engagement skills and attitudes among top civil servants).
- Elo Tuppits, Ministry of Education and Research, email communication, 29 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 6 (fostering participatory democracy in the new education and research strategy).
- Tiina Runthal, Chancellery of Riigikogu (Parliament of Estonia), email communication, 29 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 3 (transparency of the Parliament's work).
- Ott Kasuri, Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities, email communication, 29 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitments 4 and 5 (open government projects in local municipalities; online application for measuring local public service levels).

#### Civil society representatives and non-governmental experts:

- Teele Pehk, former Estonian Cooperation Assembly, interview, 12 March 2019. Issues discussed: OGP process, OGP civil society roundtable, Commitments 1, 3 and 5, civil society priorities.
- Kai Klandorf, Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations, Skype interview, 15 March 2019. Issues discussed: OGP process, OGP civil society roundtable, all commitments, civil society priorities.
- Rauno Vinni, Praxis Center for Policy Studies, interview, 18 March 2019. Issues discussed: OGP process, Commitment 2.
- Alari Rammo, Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations, email communication, 22 March 2019. Issues discussed: OGP process, OGP civil society roundtable.
- Liia Hänni, e-Governance Academy, interview, 27 March 2019. Issues discussed: OGP process, OGP civil society roundtable, Commitments 1, 3, 4 and 5, civil society priorities.
- Kersti Kivirüüt, former representative of Estonian History and Civic Teachers' Association<sup>3</sup>, email communication, 29 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitment 6.
- Krista Habakukk, Kodukant, the Estonian Village Movement, Skype interview, 29 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitments 4 and 5, civil society priorities.
- Maarja-Leena Saar, Estonian Cooperation Assembly, interview, 29 March 2019. Issues discussed: Commitments 1, 3 and 5, civil society priorities.
- Anneli Habicht, Estonian Chamber of Disabled People, email communication, 2 April 2019. Issues discussed: civil society priorities, Commitments 1, 2, 3 and 4.

In addition to individual interviews, a small survey was sent out to engagement coordinators in 10 ministries to acquire a better overview of the coordinators' actual work tasks and needs as regards developing their skills in civic engagement. The survey was open from 19 to 29 March and yielded four responses. Anonymity was granted to participants in order to encourage the coordinators to freely express their views and needs.

The survey included multiple-choice and open-ended questions on the following topics:

- the coordinators' work tasks related to civic engagement;
- the coordinators' needs as regards improving their knowledge and skills in coordinating civic participation processes;

- their experience of exchanging information and best practices with engagement coordinators in other ministries;
- their experience of participating in the network of engagement coordinators and views on the utility of the network;
- their needs for additional support from their ministry and the government.

### **About the Independent Reporting Mechanism**

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is a key means by which all stakeholders can track OGP progress in participating countries and entities. The International Experts Panel (IEP) oversees the quality control of each report. The IEP is comprised of experts in transparency, participation, accountability, and social science research methods.

The current membership of the International Experts Panel is

- César Cruz-Rubio
- Mary Francoli
- Brendan Halloran
- Jeff Lovitt
- Fredline M’Cormack-Hale
- Showers Mawowa
- Juanita Olaya
- Quentin Reed
- Rick Snell
- Jean-Patrick Villeneuve

A small staff based in Washington, DC, shepherds reports through the IRM process in close coordination with the researchers. Questions and comments about this report can be directed to the staff at [irm@opengovpartnership.org](mailto:irm@opengovpartnership.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Estonia’s OGP repository, <https://riigikantselei.ee/et/avatud-valitsemise-partnerlus>

<sup>2</sup> IRM Procedures Manual, V.3, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-procedures-manual>

<sup>3</sup> At the time of conducting the interview, Kersti Kivirüüt had recently assumed the position of a chief expert at Foundation Innove, an executive government agency within the domain of the Ministry of Education and Research that administers the national curriculum development process.



## Annex I. Overview of Estonia's performance throughout action plan development

Key:

Green= Meets standard

Yellow= In progress (steps have been taken to meet this standard, but standard is not met)

Red= No evidence of action

<b>Multi-stakeholder Forum</b>	
<b>1a. Forum established: There is a forum to oversee the OGP process</b>	Green
1b. Regularity: The forum meets at least every quarter, in person or remotely	Green
1c. Collaborative mandate development: Members of the forum jointly develop its remit, membership and governance structure	Green
1d. Mandate public: Information on the forum's remit, membership and governance structure is available on the OGP website/page	Green
<b>2a. Multi-stakeholder: The forum includes both governmental and non-governmental representatives</b>	Green
2b. Parity: The forum includes an even balance of governmental and non-governmental representatives	Green
<b>2c. Transparent selection: Non-governmental members of the forum are selected through a fair and transparent process</b>	Green
2d. High-level government representation: The forum includes high-level representatives with decision-making authority from government	Green
<b>3d. Openness: The forum accepts inputs and representation on the action plan process from any civil society or other stakeholders outside the forum</b>	Green
3e. Remote participation: There are opportunities for remote participation in at least some meetings and events	Green
3f. Minutes: The OGP forum proactively communicates and reports back on its decisions, activities and results to wider government and civil society stakeholders	Green

Key:

Green= Meets standard

Yellow= In progress (steps have been taken to meet this standard, but standard is not met)

Red= No evidence of action

<b>Action Plan Development</b>	
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4a. Process transparency: There is a national OGP website (or OGP webpage on a government website) where information on all aspects of the national OGP process is proactively published.	Green
4b. Documentation in advance: The forum shares information about OGP to stakeholders in advance to guarantee they are informed and prepared to participate in all stages of the process.	Green
4c. Awareness-raising: The forum conducts outreach and awareness-raising activities with relevant stakeholders to inform them of the OGP process.	Yellow
4d. Communication channels: The government facilitates direct communication with stakeholders to respond to action plan process questions, particularly during times of intense OGP activity.	Green
<b>4e. Reasoned response: The multi-stakeholder forum publishes its reasoning behind decisions and responds to major categories of public comment.</b>	Green
<b>5a. Repository: Government collects and publishes a document repository on the national OGP website/webpage, which provides a historical record and access to all documents related to the national OGP process, including (but not limited to) consultation documents, National Action Plans, government self-assessments, IRM reports and supporting documentation of commitment implementation (e.g links to databases, evidence of meetings, publications)</b>	Green

**Editorial note:** If a country “meets” the six standards in bold, the IRM will recognize the country’s process as a Starred Process.