



Comunidad Autónoma de Aragón

El Presidente

Zaragoza, 22 September 2020.

Dear Open Government Partnership Co-chairs,

As the President and most senior representative of the Autonomous Community of Aragón, I would like to express the genuine interest that all Aragonese people have in forming part of Open Government Partnership Local. Our region is located in northern Spain with a population of over 1.3 million. The Aragonese are known for their honest and friendly nature, as well as for their determination and tenacity. In addition, we are straightforward people, convinced that progress is only possible if we work together. It is with good reason that Aragón is known as a land of agreements – it has almost always been governed by coalitions and our parliament has been an example of diversity and plurality. Our motivation to become part of the international network of Open Government Partnership stems from this.

The Government of Aragón is highly committed to upholding the principles included in the Open Government Declaration. Since 2008, we have been busy working to integrate and circulate these principles in our region, and promote them nationally by means of different networks and bodies, which we form an active part of.

Consequently, including Aragón in OGP Local is fundamental for the development of the management and strengthening of our commitment to transparency, public integrity and citizen participation. We would like to form part of a global culture that empowers citizens and promotes the ideals of a 21<sup>st</sup> century, accessible and participatory government. Becoming a member of OGP is essential to achieving this.

### **Our challenges: depopulation and an under-represented population**

Aragón has a complex territorial idiosyncrasy. It covers an extensive area of land (larger than the Netherlands) that is scarcely populated and rapidly ageing, and 50% of its inhabitants live in its capital, Zaragoza. Twenty-two percent of our citizens are aged over 65 and the population density in certain districts is a demographic desert (10 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>). The population is distributed across almost 600 towns of fewer than 1000 inhabitants, of which, 77 are directly governed – with no representation mechanisms – by means of an open council. This territorial context defines one of our priority lines of action given that, as you are aware, depopulation represents a major challenge for the effective participation of citizens in public policies and the integration of the Open Government principles.

In this regard, our work is also strongly geared towards achieving the greater integration of the currently under-represented collectives in our democratic system: children, young people, women, disabled people, people with reading comprehension difficulties or who are at risk of social exclusion. We aim to help individuals like this, who currently encounter several barriers to exercising their full participation.

### **The present, the future**

Digital governance is, as the current pandemic has reminded us, a major challenge that we have to tackle. However, it is also a great opportunity to evolve and improve policies that we cannot, or should not, let escape. The social distancing that we are experiencing in Spain as a result of COVID-19 pushes us to further strengthen the digital presence of our teams, to guarantee our citizen's participation – particularly those traditionally excluded and with digital connection difficulties – in all levels of public decision-making.

To this end, we work in collaboration with other administrations to bring the institutions closer to non-digitalised environments and to the collectives that face substantial barriers to exercising their participation. This is a line of work, which is already a reality, thanks to digital projects such as *Gobierno Fácil* [easy government], dedicated to facilitating access for people with reading comprehension difficulties; *Open Kids* focused on children's participation; and *Aspasia*, geared towards reducing the existing gender gap in the design of participatory public policies.

### **A great team**

In Aragon, we believe in teamwork and the strength of our character to come out of complex challenges even more consolidated. Undoubtedly, the current health crisis situation and the open government challenges affecting us call for a shared commitment by the multiple social actors involved in citizen participation.

At the Government of Aragon, my direct team as well as the general directorates of the different government departments, collaborate on a daily basis to guarantee the highest level of transparency and of implementation of the open government principles in Aragon. We know that greater transparency results in an improved handling of the challenges by the institutions and by the citizens, particularly in situations of crisis like the one affecting us at present. Our team has therefore been particularly dedicated to guaranteeing the highest level of transparency during these recent months of the health emergency in our region. In this context, we have also wanted to channel social energy into collaborative projects, by means of *Frena la Curva* [flatten the curve], the open innovation platform promoted by LAAAB (*Laboratorio de Gobierno Abierto de Aragón*) [open government of Aragon laboratory], which ended up being replicated in 22 countries and that is, perhaps, the best proof of our commitment to social innovation and participation.

In addition, we frequently collaborate with the Federation of Towns, Districts and Provinces of Aragon, supporting participatory processes in local entities; and with the different bodies of civil society that are involved in the integration of vulnerable collectives. Among them, I would like to highlight the Third Sector Platform. It is a leading institution in the field of social action, that encompasses the majority of social organisations from our region, and with which we submit this joint application to OGP Local.

### **Collaborative work**

Without a doubt, we still have to make a lot of progress and, as such, forming part of OGP will enable us to have access to other local experiences capable of promoting the integration of the open government principles in our region. The collaborative work together with the mentorships, training and assistance provided by the Partnership would be essential to further our digital governance policies – and specifically inclusive digital governance policies – with more resources and knowledge.

In addition, the experience gathered in Aragon can enrich the practices developed by other institutions particularly interested in improving their transparency, the right of access to their public information, or the citizen participation processes. We believe that *Visual Gob* [visual government], the tool that will monitor government action in real time to address the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, or *Codiseño de Servicios Públicos* [collective design of public services], which incorporates collective intelligence to redesign government projects, may be initiatives of interest to other institutions.

Integrating the open government principles in an Autonomous Community like Aragon is complex and requires a team that is committed and prepared to evolve with other entities and institutions. Experience has shown us that our team at the Government of Aragon has these qualities, is ready to form an active part of OGP and to incorporate – with a touch of our region's characteristically persistent nature too – new processes and policies that favour the full participation of our citizens.

Yours faithfully,

Javier Lambán Montañés