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Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): North Macedonia Transitional Results Report 2018–2020

This report was prepared in collaboration with Liljana Cvetanoska, Independent Researcher.

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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 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 progress and determine if efforts have impacted people's lives.

The IRM has partnered with Liljana Cvetanoska to carry out this evaluation. The IRM aims to inform ongoing dialogue around the 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.

This report covers the implementation of North Macedonia's fourth action plan for 2018-2020. In 2021, the IRM will implement a new approach to its research process and the scope of its reporting on action plans, approved by the IRM Refresh.[1] The IRM adjusted its Implementation Reports for 2018-2020 action plans to fit the transition process to the new IRM products and enable the IRM to adjust its workflow in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on OGP country processes.

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[1] For more information, see: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/process/accountability/about-the-irm/irm-refresh/

II. Action Plan Implementation

The IRM Transitional Results Report assesses the status of the action plan's commitments and the results from their implementation at the end of the action plan cycle. This report does not re-visit the assessments for "Verifiability," "Relevance" or "Potential Impact." The IRM assesses those three indicators in IRM Design Reports. For more details on each indicator, please see Annex I in this report.

2.1. General Highlights and Results

North Macedonia's fourth action plan contained 23 commitments, including five Open Parliament commitments, allowing for the Assembly of North Macedonia to be included in the process for the first time. Out of the 23 commitments, 12 had "substantial" implementation, whereas four were noted as "complete". In comparison, in the third action plan (2016-2018), of a total of 33 commitments, five were fully completed and 13 were substantially completed.[1] However, it is difficult to provide an objective comparison between the two action plans due to the impact of COVID-19 on the fourth plan. The IRM Design Report noted that the action plan contained four noteworthy commitments, focusing on asset declarations of public officials, open treasury and access to justice, with an emphasis on access to justice for marginalized groups. Out of these, Commitment 3 on open treasury was completed, and the access to justice commitments (Commitments 6.1 and 6.2) were substantially implemented. Overall, the commitments focusing on access to information and open data yielded positive, if marginal, results.

An important factor that contributed to the positive progress in the implementation of the commitments was the cooperation of relevant institutions with CSOs, allowing for sharing knowledge and experience in the realization of milestones. Factors that limited progress in implementation included lack of institutional infrastructure, overly ambitious timelines, as well as delays in the adoption of legal solutions on which some commitments depended. Some activities were postponed due to the preventive measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commitment 3 resulted in substantial change in government practice in the area of fiscal transparency. This commitment allowed for increased transparency and access to information on budgetary revenues and expenditures, for which data is now publicly and freely available via the Open Finance portal from 2010 onwards. Commitment 6.1 on access to justice is also noteworthy. A new Law of Free Legal Aid entered into force in 2019. The previous law lacked practical applicability and contained ambiguities, whereas the new law broadens the scope of the areas for which free legal aid is provided and reduces the criteria for accessing free legal aid.[2] To improve citizens' access to information regarding their legal rights, a user-friendly webpage has been created. While activities regarding the implementation of the new law are to be continued and improved, especially regarding legal aid for marginalized groups, this legal solution is a foundation for building better access to justice for those that need free legal support.

In May 2020, during the implementation period, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration formed North Macedonia's first formal multi-stakeholder forum to oversee OGP matters. In addition, the ministry created a new OGP webpage on the implementation of the commitments, which is a step towards better access to information regarding the activities undertaken, providing the page is regularly updated.

2.2. COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Implementation

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the general implementation of North Macedonia's fourth action plan. It prevented the adoption of a separate OGP budget and several public procurements relevant for the completion of certain commitments were postponed.[3] While the OGP priorities remained, engagement between stakeholders was affected. For example, between March and June 2020 it was not possible to organize stakeholder meetings for improving and coordinating efforts towards social mapping of poor and marginalized groups.[4] Preparatory activities for organizing a hackathon related to the cataloging and opening of datasets in institutions were initiated, but the event was postponed due to

COVID-19. Moreover, the implementation of some commitments was linked to parliamentary rulings, but the Assembly was dissolved for seven months as a result of the pandemic[5] and political decisions were postponed.[6] The work of the Assembly has resumed, but the plenary hall could not be used because of pandemic-related restrictions and the new space is not equipped with an electronic voting system.[7] The Rules of Procedure of the Assembly do not contain provisions on remote work, meaning that MPs need to be physically present in order to achieve a quorum, which has been a challenge during the pandemic. The limited movement of people and clusters of infections also impacted the work of the Assembly Staff office but technical conditions for remote work were introduced to continue with the activities.[8]

Notwithstanding these challenges, some positive achievements have been noted. The OGP forum was introduced despite the preventive measures, and online meetings between stakeholders have been taking place. The activation of the national OGP webpage allows for meetings to take place directly via the page, easing access for participants.[9] Finally, a step towards access to information has been made with the introduction of a webpage[10] on fiscal transparency related to COVID-19, which deals with open finances and public procurement.

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[1] Open Government Partnership, IRM: Republic of Macedonia End-of-Term Report 2016-2018, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Macedonia_End-of-Term_Report_2016-2018_EN.pdf

[2] Pravdiko, Новиот Закон за бесплатна правна помош со подобрени решенија за пристап до правда, 22 Мау, https://www.pravdiko.mk/noviot-zakon-za-besplatna-pravna-pomosh-so-podobreni-reshenija-za-pristap-do-pravda/

[3] Interview with Gordana Dimitrovska, MISA, 15 December 2020.

[4] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Information on the results of the Working Group for Implementation of the OGP Action Plan 2018-2020 Including a Final Self-Assessment Report (Draft Version), December, https://ovp.gov.mk/en/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/, p 17.

[5] Interview with Vlora Rechica, Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis', 16 December 2020; Interview with Zlatko Atanasov, Parliamentary Institute, 29 December 2020.

[6] Interview with Damir Neziri, WFD, 10 December 2020; Interview with Petar Trajkov, WFD, 10 December 2020.

[7] Interview with Zlatko Atanasov, Parliamentary Institute, 29 December 2020.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Interview with Gordana Dimitrova, MISA, 15 December 2020.

[10] See https://finansiskatransparentnost.koronavirus.gov.mk/#/home

2.3. Early Results

The IRM acknowledges that results may not be visible within the two-year timeframe of the action plan and that at least a substantial level of completion is required to assess early results. For the purpose of the Transitional Results Report, the IRM will use the "***Did it Open Government?***" (DIOG) indicator to highlight early results based on the changes to government practice in areas relevant to OGP values. Moving forward, new IRM Results Reports will not continue using DIOG as an indicator.

Section 2.3 focuses on outcomes from the implementation of commitments that had an ambitious or strong design, per the IRM Design Report assessment, or that may have lacked clarity and/or ambition but had successful implementation with "major" or "outstanding" changes to government practice. Commitments considered for analysis in this section had at least a "substantial" level of implementation, as assessed by the IRM in Section 2.4. While this section provides the analysis of the IRM's findings for the commitments that meet the criteria described above, Section 2.4 includes an overview of the level of completion for all the commitments in the action plan.

Commitment 3.1 Open treasury	
Aim of the commitment	The commitment set out to improve transparency of information regarding budget expenditures by making national and local-level budget expenditure data in North Macedonia more accessible to the public. To do so, this commitment would introduce an online database and web application for data on all transactions disbursed by the Treasury ("Open Finance"), including budgetary data for local self-governments.
Did it open government? **Major**	The International Republican Institute (IRI), with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ministry of Finance, developed the content for the publicly available database on budgetary expenditure, available on open.finance.gov.mk/home. The database, released on 20 November 2019, contains information on the spending of state- funded institutions administered through the Treasury. It includes data on national and local-level information from 2010 onwards and is updated every 15 days. The system publishes information automatically and is adapted for people with impaired vision.[1] Therefore, the commitment as set out in the action plan was completed. The adoption of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Character in 2019 contributed to the successful implementation of this commitment. The law obligates budgetary data to be made publicly available and regularly updated, which was not the case under the previous law.[2] The lack of transparency around budgetary expenditure, both at the national and local levels, had been a long-standing challenge for North Macedonia.[3] Prior to the commitment, citizens had to submit freedom of information requests to obtain information on the spending of state institutions, which, except for key budget documents, was not automatically publicly available. Submitting such requests did not guarantee access to the information in question, as decisions regarding requests were reached by legal officials working in the institutions from which the information had been requested.[4] This is no longer the case and according to the new Law on Free Access to Public Information (Article 7) state and local institutions are obliged to provide data related to payments which are published by the Treasury of the Ministry of Finance. Prior to the release of the database some documents, such as the budget and its execution, were available but not in open or machine-readable formats (only as PDFs).[5] With the implementation of this commitment, the data is freely accessible, apart from the following: transactions related to salaries, interest payments, principal repayments, sick leave paid by the Health Insurance Fund of the Republic of North Macedonia, payment of VAT on equipment purchased from donations, and paid reserves for the Kumanovo conflict in 2015.[6] The portal also provided information

	regarding public spending of local-government units, which was not available before the action plan, allowing citizens to monitor how public money is spent in their municipalities.
	Media outlets in North Macedonia have already begun using the data from the Open Finance portal for their investigative work. For example, information regarding bonus payments received by the former special public prosecutor, which were not previously publicly available, was brought to public attention[7] and prompted an investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office's Department for Organized Crime and Corruption in November 2019.[8] The newspaper "Focus" used the data to raise concerns over the amount paid by the ombudsman for rents, and the amounts for petrol.[9] Similarly, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network's (BIRN) "Prizma" media outlet used the data to report that the government spent more than EUR 26 million on media expenditures between 2010 and 2017, with 95 percent of this amount paid to only three national television channels.[10] After consulting the Open Finance portal, BIRN Prizma also published several articles highlighting the lack of information regarding freelancers who were hired to provide services by the government. Namely, by using the Open Finance portal, BIRN journalists noted that amounts have been paid for freelance services, but no information regarding the names of the freelancers or the nature of the service agreements was provided.[11] BIRN submitted a request for access to information to the government to obtain the names of the freelancers and the services they provided. Upon an initial refusal, in an appeal procedure, the Agency for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information decided that these service agreements should be publicly available.[12] The President of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption also opened an investigation into the matter as they deemed this to be public information.[13] A few days later, a government spokesperson made the information publicly available.[14] [15] According to the country director of BIRN Macedonia, the Open Finance portal is a useful tool for journalists as it significantly reduces the time needed to collect certain information and is an important contribution towards improving transparency.[16] BIRN journalists have written several investigative stories using information available on the portal.[17]
	The portal activities improved disclosure of information and allow for better scrutiny of the activities of public officials. To further improve transparency and access to information it would be beneficial for the portal to incorporate descriptions of the costs, as this will provide clarity regarding the reason for the expenditure.[18] Information on the country's public debt is also included, albeit with some delays due to lack of human capacity and the impact of COVID-19.[19] Information on budget inflow is also missing[20] and donations, except those related to COVID-19, are not available at present.[21]
	According to an IRI representative, a recommendation for future improvement is to include data from 1991 onwards, though this will be challenging, as budgetary classifications have changed over time.[22]

Commitment 6.1 Access to justice	
Aim of the commitment	This commitment sought to strengthen the legal framework around access to justice in North Macedonia by adopting a new Law on Free Legal Aid, monitoring the implementation of this new law, and preparing a national strategy for legal empowerment. It also involved conducting a legal needs survey to prioritize the major legal needs in the country and identify fair, cost-effective means of support. Finally, the

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<td>commitment entailed updating the www.pravnozajakni.mk webpage with information on options for free legal assistance and to improve the quality of the legal aid provided.</td>
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Did it open government?

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This commitment was substantially implemented overall. The new Law on Free Legal Aid was adopted in May 2019[23] and entered into force in October 2019. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) published the report on the implementation of the law in March 2020[24] and planned to analyze the capacities of the ministry's employees.[25] The ministry continued to publish annual reports on legal assistance, and activities regarding the campaign for legal empowerment have taken place, including workshops for citizens and trainings.[26] A review of the approaches and modalities for preparation and implementation of the legal needs assessment in the country was submitted to the ministry for approval (prepared within a project between the MoJ and the Council of Europe).[27] The MoJ, together with the Foundation Open Society Macedonia (FOSM), was to conduct national level research regarding citizens' legal needs, but this is now planned as part of the project between the MoJ and the Council of Europe so as to avoid duplication.

Awareness of legal aid was promoted in print and electronic media, talk shows, and sessions for legal empowerment by involved CSOs in cooperation with local authorities, the ministry, and lawyers.[28] Some of the planned activities are still being implemented as a result of the impact of COVID-19 and the delayed entry into force of the new Law on Free Legal Aid.[29] The 2018-2020 action plan envisaged for the new law to be adopted in October 2018, but it was not adopted until 16 May 2019. It became applicable on 1 October 2019.[30] However, these activities are a positive step towards raising awareness and access to information regarding citizens' legal rights.

The FOSM provided introductory trainings for ministry staff, CSOs, and local legal aid providers, which was the precondition for the preparation of the national strategy for legal empowerment.[31] In addition, a working group within the ministry in partnership with CSOs for intersectoral coordination with other institutions has been formed.[32] However, some of the planned activities under this commitment, such as the national research concerning citizens' legal needs and preparing the national strategy,[33] are yet to be implemented. The national-level research on citizens' legal needs was not implemented because it is now planned as part of a project between the ministry and the Council of Europe.[34]

The new Law on Free Legal Aid significantly strengthens the legal framework in the country.[35] The previous law lacked practical applicability and contained ambiguities; hence, the new law was drafted in cooperation with experts via the European Commission's Technical Assistance and Information Exchange to ensure citizens' needs are met and that its provisions are compatible with EU acquis requirements.[36] The new law relaxes the conditions for citizens to obtain free legal aid, which promotes equal access to justice, especially for poor and marginalized groups.[37] It provides free legal assistance for almost all legal matters. Additional expenses related to legal proceedings, such as judicial expertise and court fees, are also covered, which was not the case before.[38] In practical terms, the new law eases access to justice as it lowers the criteria for obtaining legal assistance and allows legal aid for a variety of legal problems. Any citizen has the right to primary legal aid[39] (i.e. general legal information, general legal advice, or assistance with filling in forms), which can be provided by the MoJ or a legal clinic in a faculty of law. However, according to a MoJ representative, further amendments to the new law may be needed based on analysis of its implementation over a certain period.[40]

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Since the introduction of the new Law on Free Legal Aid, the number of applications for legal aid has increased. In 2020, the MoJ, through its regional offices, authorized associations, and legal clinics, provided primary legal aid in 2,727 cases, and approved 132 of 207 requests for secondary legal aid (i.e. professional legal aid for specific legal matters for those unable to pay for the expenses).[41] In 2018, under the old law, 156 requests for legal aid were submitted, and free legal aid was provided in 80 cases.[42] These numbers suggest that the simplified division of legal aid into primary and secondary encourages citizens to seek initial legal advice and obtain support for their application for secondary legal aid where applicable.   As part of this commitment, FOSM updated the webpage www.pravnozajakni.mk, which is now the main source for information on legal assistance in North Macedonia. The webpage includes video materials explaining the legal and institutional changes from the new Law on Free Legal Aid, legal advice for citizens including examples of human rights breaches, and guidance on how to seek legal protection when needed. In addition, the webpage has contacts available from CSOs whose work involves providing legal assistance to citizens, i.e., free legal aid, paralegal assistance, strategic litigation, advocacy, etc. It improves upon the existing webpage of the MoJ, www.pravnapomos.mk, which does not contain video material or hypothetical examples for access and understanding of legal situations. However, the information on FOSM's webpage is currently available only in the Macedonian language, while the ministry's page is available in both the Macedonian and Albanian languages. In addition, the www.pravnozajakni.mk webpage is not financed and maintained by the MoJ, as envisaged in the action plan, but is maintained by FOSM with financial support from the EU. While it is not clear the extent to which citizens have used these webpages to obtain information regarding their right to free legal assistance, the significant increase in the number of applications for legal aid suggests that more citizens are aware of their rights.[43]

Commitment 6.2 Improving access to justice for marginalized groups	
Aim of the commitment	This commitment aimed to improve access to legal services and information on legal rights for marginalized and vulnerable communities by opening four centers for access to justice in North Macedonia. The activities focused on training public employees, lawyers, and paralegals that work on providing access to justice for these groups, including employees in 14 Roma Information Centers (RICs).
Did it open government? **Marginal**	This commitment saw substantial implementation overall. Preparatory work to provide trainings for employees and paralegals of the 14 RICs was made, that is, the trainers have prepared training plans, but part of the trainings have not taken place, as the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) did not provide FOSM with an up-to-date list of employees in the RICs.[44] [45] This activity was postponed because the government suspended all electoral activities in March 2020 due to COVID-19. FOSM organized two trainings for lawyers and paralegals online during the action plan period.[46] In May 2021, after the action plan period, FOSM held additional trainings for employees at the RICs on providing legal and paralegal aid.[47] Two of the four planned centers for access to justice have been established, in Shuto Orizari and Prilep. Efforts to establish the other two centers in Delchevo and Tetovo will continue beyond the action plan period.[48] The two centers are managed by CSOs and supported by the local self-governments. Local cooperation between the stakeholders exists and the local authorities support participation in the intersectoral creation of policies for legal empowerment.[49]

The MLSP, the Ministry of Justice, the legal clinic from Ss. Cyril and Methodius University's Faculty of Law, FOSM, and other CSOs organized a seminar on the concept of legal empowerment in June 2019. Furthermore, local authorities in 12 municipalities adopted operational plans as part of their local action plans for Roma integration.[50] The inclusion of legal empowerment in the local action plans for Roma integration provides a basis for municipalities and local CSOs to apply for MLSP funds for social services, including for legal empowerment. This is relevant because the new Law on Social Protection provides municipalities with funds from the central budget for providing social services. The funds will be allocated via public calls based on the local programs of the municipalities.[51]

This commitment aimed to improve access to legal services and information on legal rights for marginalized and vulnerable communities. This goal was partially achieved by opening the two new centers in Shuto Orizari and Prilep. The opening of the center in Shuto Orizari, in which the majority of the population is Roma, is an important milestone for improving information on and access to legal services. The center regularly publishes information regarding the rights of the Roma community on social media and raises concerns about lack of protection of Roma rights. However, the center in Prilep were not provided with adequate office space for functioning and its activities are currently conducted in the spaces of the CSOs involved in the process.[52] Despite these drawbacks, the center in Prilep (the Association for Legal Education and Transparency LET Station) has provided legal and paralegal assistance for around 1,200 cases since the start of the pandemic.[53]

Overall, while the completed activities are positive steps towards access to justice for marginalized groups in the municipalities where the centers exist, the results remain marginal so far. Specifically, they provided 752 services to marginalized families, the Roma community, and persons from rural areas in the territory of Prilep and the surrounding rural areas.[54] LET Station has introduced two telephone lines for free legal assistance, one of which provides urgent paralegal assistance since March 2020, available 24/7, and the other, introduced in January 2021, offers consultations with health professionals regarding protection of the right to healthcare to support citizens during the pandemic. The Prilep center also has a team that works on the ground with citizens from the municipality[55] and publishes information regarding concerns over healthcare rights for marginalized groups and information for citizens on the tools available to them.

The MLSP has not prepared the report for services provided by the RIC for each year because a complete systematization of employees in RICs is missing.[56]

[1] Interview with Ilina Mangova, IRI, 10 December 2020.
[2] Law on Free Access to Information of Public Character, Official Gazette No. 101/ 2019.
[3] Open Budget Survey 2017, Macedonia, https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/macedonia-open-budget-survey-2017-summary.pdf.
[4] Interview with Ilina Mangova, IRI, 25 June 2021.
[5] Interview with Ilina Mangova, IRI, 25 June 2021.
[6] Ministry of Finance, Open Finance, Help, https://open.finance.gov.mk/en/help
[7] Apostolov, V., Базата на финансии фи откри бонусите на Јанева, 22 November, https://prizma.mk/bazata-na-finansii-gi-otkri-bonusite-na-janeva/d
[8] Naumovski. G., Специјалните обвинители не се плашат од истрагата на Рускоска. https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/speczijalnite-obviniteli-ne-se-plashat-od-istragata-na-ruskoska/
[9] Fokus, Омбудсманот Ицет Мемети или деспотот од Раковец, 13 September, https://fokus.mk/ombudsmanot-idhet-memeti-ili-despotot-od-rakovets/
[10] Apostolov, V., Грујовизијата чинела 26 милиони евра, 25 November, https://prizma.mk/grujovizijata-chinela-26-milioni-evra/
[11] Maglesov, V., Тајните хонорарци во Владата, 6 April, https://prizma.mk/tajnite-honorartsi-vo-vladata/
[12] Ibid.

[13] 360 Stepeni, Антикорупциска отворила предмет за тајните хонорарци во Владата, https://360stepeni.mk/antikoruptsiska-otvorila-predmet-za-tajnite-honorartsi-na-vladata/.

[14] Maglesov, V., Владата се премисли: Имињата на хонорарците не се тајна, 9 April, https://prizma.mk/vladata-se-premisli-iminata-na-honorartsite-ne-se-tajna/.

[15] Interview with Ana Petruseva, country director of BIRN Macedonia, 28 June 2021.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Interview with Darko Antik, ESE, 7 December 2020.

[19] Mangova, I. and Sazdevski, M, North Macedonia Takes a Step Forward in Open Data and Budget Transparency, 27 November, https://www.democracyspeaks.org/blog/north-macedonia-takes-step-forward-open-data-and-budget-transparency.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Interview with Ilina Mnagova, IRI, 10 December 2020.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Law on Free Legal Aid, Official Gazette 199/2019.

[24] Ministry of Justice, Annual Report on the Implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid, March. https://www.pravda.gov.mk/Upload/Documents/%D0%93%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%98%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B0_2019.pdf

[25] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Access to justice development, 4 December, https://ovp.gov.mk/nap_proposals/%d1%83%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b8%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b0%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b4%d0%be-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b4%d0%b0/.

[26] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, Program Coordinator - Foundation Open Society, 14 December 2020.

[27] Ibid. See also Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Access to justice development, 4 December, https://ovp.gov.mk/nap_proposals/%d1%83%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b8%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b0%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b4%d0%be-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b4%d0%b0/.

[28] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, FOSM,14 December 2020.

[29] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, FOSM, 14 December 2020; Interview with Irena Dimitrovska, MoJ, 16 December 2020.

[30] Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, Decree for the Proclamation of the Law on Free Legal Aid, No. 08-2895/1, 16 May.

[31] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, FOSM, 14 December 2020; Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Access to justice development, 4 December, https://ovp.gov.mk/nap_proposals/%d1%83%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b8%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b0%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b4%d0%be-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b4%d0%b0/.

[32] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, FOSM, 14 December 2020; Interview with Irina Dimitrovska, MoJ, 16 December 2020.

[33] This activity is now planned as part of a project cooperation between the Ministry and the Council of Europe, so according to stakeholders, it was postponed in order to avoid duplication (Interview with Ivona Stalevska, FOSM, 14 December 2020; Interview with Irina Dimitrovska, MoJ, 16 December 2020).

[34] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, Program Coordinator - Foundation Open Society, 14 December 2020; Interview with Irina Dimitrovska, Ministry of Justice, 16 December 2020.

[35] Interview Irina DImitrovska, Ministry of Justice, 16 December 2020.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Pravdiko, Новиот закон за бесплатна правна помош со подобрени решенија за пристап до правда, 22 May, https://www.pravdiko.mk/noviot-zakon-za-besplatna-pravna-pomosh-so-podobreni-reshenija-za-pristap-do-pravda/

[38] Ibid.

[39] For more information on the differences between primary and secondary legal aid, see https://mhc.org.mk/en/news-en/access-to-justice-free-legal-aid/

[40] Interview with Irina Dimitrovska, MoJ, 16 December 2020.

[41] Ministry of Justice, Annual report for the Implementation of the Law of Free Legal Aid, 31 December, https://www.pravda.gov.mk/Upload/Documents/%D0%93%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BD%20%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%98%20%D0%91%D0%9F%D0%9F%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%202020%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4.pdf

[42] Ministry of Justice, Annual report for the Implementation of the Law of Free Legal Aid, March, https://www.pravda.gov.mk/Upload/Documents/13.03.2018.pdf

[43] According to FOSM, between 1 January 2020 and 21 July 2021, the www.pravnozajakni.mk webpage has received a high number of visitors and page views, suggesting a high level of usage of the webpage's recourses by citizens.

[44] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, Program Coordinator - Foundation Open Society, 14 December 2020.

[45] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Improving access to justice for marginalized groups of citizens, December, https://ovp.gov.mk/nap_proposals/%d1%83%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b8%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b0%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b4%d0%be-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b4%d0%b0-%d0%b7/. ;
Interview with Ivona Stalevska, Program Coordinator - Foundation Open Society, 14 December 2020.

[46] FOSM, Trainings for lawyers and paralegals, see https://www.pravnozajakni.mk/2021/06/10/обука-за-унапредување-на-капацитетит/

[47] Information provided to the IRM by Ivona Stalevska, Program Coordinator - Foundation Open Society, during the pre-publication review of this report, 23 July 2021.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Improving access to justice for marginalized groups of citizens, December, https://ovp.gov.mk/nap_proposals/%d1%83%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b8%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b0%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b4%d0%be-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b4%d0%b0-%d0%b7/. ;
Interview with Ivona Stalevska, Program Coordinator - Foundation Open Society, 14 December 2020.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Information on the results of the Working Group for Implementation of the OGP Action Plan 2018-2020 Including a Final Self-Assessment Report (Draft Version), December, https://ovp.gov.mk/en/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/.

[52] Interview with Ivona Stalevska, FOO, 14 December 2020.

[53] Stargoski, D., Пандемијата ги изнесе на површина сите слабости на нашето општество и го уназади остварувањето на правата на граѓаните, 12 May, https://infokompas.com.mk/2021/05/12/%d0%bf%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b5%d0%bc%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%b3%d0%b8-%d0%b8%d0%b7%d0%bd%d0%b5%d1%81%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d0%be%d0%b2%d1%80%d1%88%d0%b8%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b8%d1%82/?fbclid=IwAR280ZXYxqs26VuuiLITsDPYBgj_a-VtGyB2ensgnRkhDD3q-s1WxPAOEfU

[54] FOSM, Во време на пандемијата граѓаните бараа правна помош од граѓанските организации, https://www.pravnozajakni.mk/2020/12/24/%d0%b2%d0%be-%d0%b2%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%bc%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b5%d0%bc%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b0-%d0%b3%d1%80%d0%b0%d1%93%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%82%d0%b5-%d0%b1%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b0/.

[55] Stargoski, D., Пандемијата ги изнесе на површина сите слабости на нашето општество и го уназади остварувањето на правата на граѓаните, 12 May, https://infokompas.com.mk/2021/05/12/%d0%bf%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b5%d0%bc%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%b3%d0%b8-%d0%b8%d0%b7%d0%bd%d0%b5%d1%81%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d0%be%d0%b2%d1%80%d1%88%d0%b8%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b8%d1%82/?fbclid=IwAR280ZXYxqs26VuuiLITsDPYBgj_a-VtGyB2ensgnRkhDD3q-s1WxPAOEfU

[56] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Information on the results of the Working Group for Implementation of the OGP Action Plan 2018-2020 Including a Final Self-Assessment Report (Draft Version), December, https://ovp.gov.mk/en/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/.

2.4. Commitment Implementation

The table below includes an assessment of the level of completion for each commitment in the action plan.

Commitment	Completion:
	(no evidence available, not started, limited, substantial or complete)
1.1 Free access to public information	**Substantial**: In its 2020 Active Transparency Index,[1] the Center for Civil Communications has classified North Macedonia as "average" regarding active transparency, with 58.2 percent, noting an improvement of 2.2 percent from 2019.[2] The webpage of the Agency for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information[3] provides information on the holders of public information and links to their webpages, relevant forms for seeking public information, brochures, and a link to an appeals procedure. The Agency took ownership from FOSM of the slobodenpristap.mk platform where requests for public information should be published, but no requests have yet been made. The page contains an Excel file with webpages for holders of public information which is incomplete and is not presented in a user-friendly format. The Agency plans to make further improvements to the platform as part of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II project "Promoting transparency and accountability of public administration".[4] The Agency, with the Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women, organized nine trainings to raise citizens' awareness of their rights to free access to public information.[5] However, there is no information on whether the effectiveness of these trainings has been measured.
1.2 Data for registered entities in the Central Register of the Republic of North Macedonia (CRRNM)	**Complete**: Since 19 October 2020, when the new portal was launched, the following data is available free of charge on the CRRNM's Trade Register for all registered entities: registry number of the subject (RNS), unique tax number, full name and short name, date of establishment, legal form, legal status, address, additional information (in bankruptcy/liquidation), activity (code and description), and size.[6] Prior to this commitment, only the following data was available free of charge: RNS, full name, size, legal status, and additional information. The remaining information was only available for a fee.[7]
1.3 Mapping homeless and socially endangered families and individuals	**Limited**: The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy held several meetings with CSOs to discuss data collection and database improvements. The ministry, in cooperation with the Inter-Municipal Center for Social Affairs of the City of Skopje and the CSO Ljubeznost, agreed on what data will be collected and defined how the gathered data from the mapping activities for the City of Skopje will be presented.[8] However, work on the memorandum of cooperation and related trainings for social work centers, municipalities, and CSOs have not commenced. There is no information available regarding the status of the other milestones.[9] According to the government's self-assessment report, the ministry postponed the regular database update in relation to detected needs and provided services and plans to start these activities in September 2021.[10] Some activities were impacted by COVID-19, but the self-assessment report suggests that the ministry will continue the initial efforts as described in the action plan, with adjustments.[11]

2.1 Monitoring the property status of elected and appointed officials	**Limited**: In January 2019, North Macedonia adopted a new Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest,[12] which obliges elected and appointed persons to submit asset declarations and property status both electronically and in written form (Article 82(5)). In June 2019, the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) agreed to the content of the new asset declaration submission form (electronic and paper) for public officials. However, at the end of the action plan period, the software for submitting the new form electronically has not been prepared[13] though SCPC has produced a public procurement specification for it.[14] SCPC consulted an expert with the support of USAID, who analyzed the functional shortcomings of the existing Register. The analysis suggested that access to data is restricted in terms of searchability and visibility and does not contain background data in an open and machine-readable format.[15] The analysis also suggested that a new Register of Elected and Appointed Persons would be a more suitable solution, as opposed to upgrading the current Register.[16] The public procurement for the new software is planned for 2021.[17]
2.2 Collaboration with civil society on anti-corruption assessment of legislation	**Not started**: SCPC did not have sufficient human resources to ensure effective functioning of the Department for Anticorruption Legislative.[18] SCPC, in cooperation with the Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis and FOSM, plans to conduct four analyses for corruption proofing of legislation. However, the participants have not yet agreed on the timeline and details of these activities.[19]
3.1 Open treasury	**Completed**: For details regarding the implementation and early results of this commitment, see Section 2.3.
3.2 Basic information on public procurement on institutions' websites	**Substantial**: In June 2018, the Public Procurement Bureau (PPB) upgraded the Electronic System for Public Procurement (ESPP) to enable automatic publication of announcements for public procurement contracts on the webpages of public institutions.[20] This allows institutions to automatically include information from the ESPP on their calls for public procurement and on their reports on public procurement contracts concluded on their webpages in an automated manner and updated daily.[21] In addition, as per the 2019 Law on Public Procurement, article 41, public procurement calls over certain values as prescribed in article 40 of the same law, are to be published on the ESPP. However, the government's self-assessment report does not provide information on how many institutions are now using this option for updating public procurement data on their webpages. To implement the provisions in the Law on Public Procurement,[22] PPB upgraded the system to allow automatic publishing of public procurement plans, including amendments and automatic publication of the reports on public procurement contracts realized.[23] According to the self-assessment report, PPB sent a circular letter to institutions with information regarding these upgrades, and details on how to incorporate the upgrades on their webpages.[24] However, the report does not mention how many institutions have incorporated the upgrades. According to a shadow report published in December 2020 by the Center for Civil Communications, transparency of public procurement remains a concern and public institutions only publish around 50 percent of the information that they are required to make publicly available.[25] The new Law on Public Procurement incorporated provisions for increasing transparency and accountability, but these

	changes have not been implemented as intended, which questions their actual role in ensuring effective and efficient public procurements.[26] According to the same report, while the criteria for awarding public procurement changed with the introduction of the new law, in practice 97 percent of public procurements have been awarded based only on one criterion – lowest price, which was the main criterion for awarding public procurement in the old law.[27]
3.3 Transparency in health programs	**Substantial**: The Ministry of Health published on its webpage the narrative-financial reports on its fulfillment of health programs for the years 2018, 2019, and 2020. However, of 24 reports published in 2020, five cannot be accessed because the links are missing.[28] All reports for the year 2019 are accessible, but one report for 2018 is not accessible.[29] The ministry, in cooperation with the Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women (ESE), developed trainings on the impact of budgetary expenses on end users for representatives of the Institute for Public Health (responsible for implementing the Program for Protection of the Population from HIV).[30] However, despite the dates for the trainings being set, these activities were delayed due to COVID-19, and ESE aims to carry them forward to the next action plan.[31]
3.4 Transparency in employment programs	**Limited**: ESE submitted recommendations on improving the annual reports on the work of the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (AERNM). AERNM only accepted the recommendations related to the improvement of budgetary transparency but not ESE's other recommendations.[32] The methodology for impact measurement of costs on end users and the report with recommendations were not prepared. ESE and AERNM aim to carry these activities forward to the next action plan.[33]
4.1 Cataloging data in state institutions	**Substantial**: The Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) published 28 data catalogs on the portal data.gov.mk. At the end of the action plan period, these catalogs included 251 datasets from 55 organizations using the portal.[34] MISA developed a proposal for standardizing the publication structure for identical datasets and published six datasets using this structure.[35] In cooperation with the Foundation Metamorphosis, MISA organized three workshops on open data attended by 63 participants from 28 state institutions.[36] However, the planned hackathon was postponed due to COVID-19.[37] Therefore, the IRM considers this commitment substantially implemented, even though the government considered it fully complete in its self-assessment report.
4.2 Regional initiatives for cooperation in open data	**Limited**: MISA held initial talks with the Regional Cooperation Council to establish a working group for creating a regional metadata standard for the six Western Balkans countries.[38] According to the government self-assessment, MISA now plans to establish the working group in 2021 in cooperation with the Regional School of Public Administration and OGP.[39] The remaining activities under this commitment were not started because they depended on the establishment of the working group.[40]
5.1 New tools for financial transparency and accountabilit	**Substantial**: Information dashboards which contain quarterly and annual financial reports have been set up on the webpages of the six municipalities (Cair, Veles, Ohrid, Strumica, Sveti Nikole, and Valandovo), and are also available on the indikatori.opstinskisoveti.mk webpage. Twenty-four municipalities (the above-

y of local self-government units (LSGUs)	mentioned six and an additional 18) were invited to publish their financial reports on this platform to gather systematic financial data for all municipalities in one place.[41]. However, not all municipalities update their webpages regularly. For example, the last quarterly report published for Mogila Municipality is for the period January to September 2020.[42] Additional innovative tools have been implemented in the 24 municipalities. They were able to select which tool they wished to implement, including broadcasting council meetings live, technical and special improvements to create conditions for citizens' participation, and participatory budgeting.[43] The 24 municipalities have introduced electronic tables where they provide financial information.[44] The six municipalities organized forums with citizens, civil society, business sector, education, and social protection representatives to select specific projects to be implemented by each municipality. The sessions of the six municipal councils are publicly available for the municipalities via the respective webpages and YouTube. Participants in each session jointly selected one project to be implemented by the respective municipality. Each municipality received 50,000 Swiss francs from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to implement selected projects (such as reconstruction of the roof or improvement of the equipment of kindergartens). Of the 24 projects, 20 have been completed, and the remaining four are expected to be completed by June 2021 (COVID-19 delayed some activities).[45] After a project was completed, one additional participatory forum session was usually held, but some sessions were postponed due to the pandemic. The forum sessions allowed citizens to prioritize projects that they considered important. Before the introduction of such forums, municipalities alone selected the projects for implementation and many projects were related to improving infrastructure, whereas after the introduction of the forums, projects mostly focused on improving facilities regularly used by citizens.[46] The citizen association Inkluziva prepared and published guidelines for adapting websites for people with disabilities.[47] [48] The municipalities in the East Planning Region adapted their webpages for people with visual impairments[49] to ease webpage navigation and searches.[50] Inkluziva also provided six trainings for 107 state officials on access to information for persons with disabilities,[51] a roundtable with 35 participants, and a public debate with 32 participants.[52]
5.2 Institutional cooperation between LSGUs and CSOs	**Complete**: The Ministry of Finance[53] provided five municipalities (Kumanovo, Strumica, Gostivar, Kavadarci, and Resen) with methodologies for transparent and accountable distribution of funds for CSOs from municipal budgets.[54] In cooperation with these municipalities, the ministry organized five trainings to familiarize municipal employees with the methodologies. They also organized five trainings (one in each municipality) in 2018 and five in 2019 for CSOs to improve knowledge and skills regarding project proposal preparation and application for projects under the Regional Program for Local Democracy in the Western Balkans.[55] The municipalities posted public calls for CSOs for social service projects and selected 22 proposals, which were all completed. Several projects focused on supporting citizens during COVID-19.[56]
5.3 Inclusive decision-making for local and regional development	**Complete**: The eight Planning Regions Developments Centers (PRDC) provided trainings and organized four forums on project planning in all eight planning regions of the country. The forums approved one investment project and one innovation project in each of the eight planning regions, such as inclusive classrooms for children with autism, renovation of schools, reconstructions of ski lifts, and renovation of a center for seniors,[57] which were implemented in 2019.[58]

	Based on the experience from the initial forum sessions, the Ministry for Local Self-Governance incorporated this model in the Law for Balanced Regional Development from 27 January 2021. All eight planning regions are now legally required to hold consultations via the forums before agreeing on the priority projects to fund. This mechanism is similar to the one that municipalities have adopted when selecting projects for implementation (under Commitment 5.1), but at the regional level. Each planning region has a Council, including the mayors of each municipality from the region. Before these changes, mayors alone decided which projects would be financed from the annual budget in the planning region, without having to consult civil society or citizens. With the commitment, a legal obligation was introduced for citizens to be included in the decision-making process via the regional forums.[59]
5.4 Resilient Skopje via data availability	**Substantial**: Three datasets (on characteristics of identified landslides, on torrential rain hotspots, and a register of wells for the City of Skopje region) were published to the national open data portal www.data.gov.mk. In addition, the webpage skopje.gov.mk contains information on six areas: environment, control of emissions from economic entities, climate change and sustainable development, nature protection, health and environment, and increasing public awareness of environmental issues.[60] The City of Skopje cooperated with the CSO Skopje Lab and UNDP on three solutions/services: redesign of green public areas, the "Future Cities of South East Europe" project, and redesign of the service for collecting bulky waste.[61] Based on fieldwork with citizens (interviews, observations, and online surveys) Skopje Lab developed seven detailed concepts for the redesign of green public areas (financed by the budget and private donations), which were published in the local media to allow additional citizen input prior to their adoption by the city.[62] These concepts are yet to be implemented.[63] In cooperation with the UNDP, Skopje Lab organized a two-day workshop in November 2020 for the "Future Cities of South East Europe" project, where more than 80 representatives from 40 institutions discussed solutions for improving air pollution, infrastructure, public services, immigration, and decreased faith in public institutions.[64] As a result of the workshop, the City of Skopje and Skopje Lab started work on the above project, led by EIT Climate KIC,[65] and have committed to the following priorities: improving air quality (per the standards of the World Health Organization) by 2023; achieving zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030; equal access to decent housing, healthcare, education, mobility, food, water, green and vibrant public places, safe and productive job opportunities; and reducing the effects of heat and floods.[66] Regarding the redesign of the service for collecting bulky waste, Skopje Lab prepared a draft redesign of the service, a draft of International Organization for Standardization standards, and concepts for the disposal of furniture, which are yet to be finalized and implemented.[67] Additionally, the government's self-assessment states that plans were made to organize the hackathon by the end of 2020[68] but there is no information on whether it took place.
6.1. Access to justice development	**Substantial**: For details regarding the implementation and early results of this commitment, see Section 2.3.
6.2 Improving access to justice for	**Substantial**: For details regarding the implementation and early results of this commitment, see Section 2.3.

marginalized groups	
7.1 Improving collective knowledge on climate change	**Substantial**: The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning provides relevant data on national greenhouse gas emissions on the klimatskipromeni.mk platform for the period 1990-2014, and the Third Biannual Update Report on Climate Changes from December 2020 contains information for 2015 and 2016.[69] Data from 1990 has been provided in reports that were available prior to the action plan.[70] Although this commitment called for providing data for 1990-2019, data for 2017-2019 is not available yet. Various scenarios are considered in the Third Biannual Update Report, including a scenario with the existing measures in place (greenhouse gas emissions decrease of 10 percent in 2040 compared to 2005), one with additional measures (taking into account a 45 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 compared to 2005), and a scenario with extended measures for reducing climate changes (more ambitious, including a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 of 55 percent compared to 2005).[71]
Open Parliament	
1.1 Filling vacant job positions and officials' training in the Assembly	**Substantial**: The Assembly established a working group for preparing the new acts for internal organization and job classification,[72] which are in the process of being adopted at the time of writing this report.[73] The Assembly, in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Westminster Foundation, also prepared a functional analysis of the Assembly Service to understand the readiness of this institution to incorporate changes in the medium and long term.[74] The Law on the Assembly Service was amended to achieve administrative independence of the service[75] and the risk management strategy of the Assembly for 2018-2020 was adopted. The annual training plan is a legal obligation and is part of the overall process for training civil servants of MISA and the Agency for Administration.[76] In addition, the Parliamentary Institute has a specific plan for trainings which addresses the needs of the Assembly. MISA lacks capacity to implement the trainings planned but the Assembly supports its employees when they request to attend specific trainings of interest.[77] The Assembly Service lacked specific trainings, but with the new systematization, additional employments are planned and the department that deals with human resources has been restructured.[78] In addition, efforts are needed to follow development of the employees post-training, and to provide opportunities for technical personnel (for whom access to a computer is not required as part of the job specification) to access trainings, because having access to computer equipment is a pre-requisite for attending many of the trainings offered.[79]
1.2 Increasing the financial transparency of the Assembly	**Substantial**: The Budget of the Assembly, as well as the Annual Procurement Plan, the End of Year Account, and the public procurements are available on the Assembly's webpage, separated in timeframes[80] which was not previously the case.[81] The publication of the amendments to the budget and the monthly realization of the budget is an improvement compared to the status quo before the action plan. However, they are published in PDF format, which is not user friendly.[82] Documentation for previous years has also been retroactively published on the Assembly's webpage. The amendments of the Law on Budgets have not been introduced.[83]

2.1 Better access to information	**Substantial**:
	While there is insufficient data to ascertain if the activities on the Assembly's social networks have increased from 30 percent to 60 percent (as envisioned in this commitment), the Assembly regularly publishes its activities on its social media platforms.[84]
	The Assembly's new webpage was part of the public procurement plan for 2020, but it was not completed due to lack of capacity, parliamentary elections, and COVID-19.[85] However, the current webpage was updated with publications, and activities such as EU journals, annual reports, informational briefs on the Assembly's work, a virtual tour, and opportunities to ask the President and MPs questions, aimed to increase awareness of the Assembly's work.[86]
2.2 Fully functional Parliament TV channel	**Limited**:
	Activities to equip the Assembly's TV studio were still in progress at the end of the action plan period. The Assembly prepared a technical specification and secured a donation for the activities through the Program for parliamentary support and has planned a public procurement procedure for 2021.[87]
	The quality of the Assembly's TV channel program scheme is still in need of improvement, despite efforts to produce new materials. The channel is broadcasted by the Macedonian Ratio Television, but the content is outdated and additional focus on educational and debating shows is needed.
3.1 Participation of citizens in the Assembly's legislative and supervisory process	**Limited**:
	The Act for regulating supervisory debates and the plan for supervisory debates were not adopted.[88] The self-assessment report mentions a public call on the Assembly's webpage for two technical experts to support the Commission for Supervision of the Implementation of the Measures for Interception of Communications.[89] However, it does not state whether these experts were hired. There is also no evidence available to determine if the percentage of working bodies that include experts in their work increased to 30 percent, as envisioned in the commitment. In addition, there is no evidence that the participation of citizens and CSOs in the working bodies has increased to 70, as planned.
	According to a Westminster Foundation representative, more effort is needed to include experts in the working bodies of the Assembly.[90] Improvements regarding openness and citizen participation have been made, with the Assembly organizing several public debates between 2018 and 2020, and the next step could focus on formalizing these mechanisms for consulting citizens.

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[1] The Center for Civil Communications has been publishing the Active Transparency Index on their webpage since 2016 with a list of the indices in Macedonian, https://www.ccc.org.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=392%3A2020-03-11-15-33-22&catid=17%3A2012-02-23-22-02-23&Itemid=93&lang=mk

[2] Center for Civil Communications, Active Transparency Index, https://www.ccc.org.mk/images/stories/ia2020m.pdf

[3] Agency for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information, List of Public Information Holders, http://komspi.mk/%d0%bb%d0%b8%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b8%d0%bc%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b5%d0%bb%d0%b8-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b8%d0%bd%d1%84%d0%be%d1%80%d0%bc%d0%b0%d1%86%d0%b8%d0%b8/

[4] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Proactive publication, promotion of electronic access and increased awareness of citizens on their rights to free access to public information, 3 December, https://ovp.gov.mk/nap_proposals/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b0%d0%ba%d1%82%d0%b8%d0%b2%d0%bd%d0%be-%d0%be%d0%b1%d1%98%d0%b0%d0%b2%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d1%83%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5/.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Central Register of the Republic of North Macedonia, Basic Profile of a Registered Legal Entity,https://www.crm.com.mk/mk/otvoreni-podatotsi/osnoven-profil-na-registriran-subjekt.

[7] Email correspondence with Vladimir Naumovski, Central Register of the Republic of North Macedonia, 7 May 2021.

[8] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Information on the results of the Working Group for Implementation of the OGP Action Plan 2018-2020 Including a Final Self-Assessment Report (Draft Version), December, https://ovp.gov.mk/en/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/

[9] See Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Information on the results of the Working Group for Implementation of the OGP Action Plan 2018-2020 Including a Final Self-Assessment Report (Draft Version), December, https://ovp.gov.mk/en/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/ p. 18.

[10] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Information on the results of the Working Group for Implementation of the OGP Action Plan 2018-2020 Including a Final Self-Assessment Report (Draft Version), December, https://ovp.gov.mk/en/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/.

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III. Multi-stakeholder Process

3.1 Multi-stakeholder process throughout action plan implementation

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 the OGP process. North Macedonia **did not act contrary** to OGP process.[1]

Please see Section 3.2 for an overview of North Macedonia's performance implementing the Co-Creation and Participation Standards throughout the action plan implementation.

Table [3.2]: Level of Public Influence
The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) "Spectrum of Participation" to apply it to OGP.[2] In the spirit of OGP, most countries should aspire to "collaborate."

Level of public influence		During development of action plan	During implementation 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		

The implementation of the action plan was supported by relevant CSOs, who were responsible for several milestones, by providing support in the form of trainings, knowledge sharing, and access to information. For example, the webpages on access to legal aid (Commitments 6.1 and 6.2) and open treasury (Commitment 3.1) were prepared with active involvement of CSOs working on these issues. The level of engagement was a continuation of the cooperation between CSOs and public institutions during the co-creating process.

A significant development was the creation of the OGP Council in May 2020 to serve as North Macedonia's first dedicated multi-stakeholder forum. The OGP Council oversaw the second year of implementation of the fourth action plan and will oversee the co-creation of future action plans.[3] It has an equal number of members from CSOs (working on corruption and transparency matters, improving democracy, gender equality, inclusivity, and citizen engagement etc.) and public institutions (14 members in total). It also has two co-presidents, one from each stakeholder group. The permanent members of the working group for OGP, within their respective subgroups, vote to select two representatives (one representative from CSOs and one from a public institution) for the Council.[4] However, the OGP CSO Network will select its representative to the Council, as the mandate of the current forum will end with the adoption of the next action plan. The OGP Council held seven meetings between 6 May and 28

December 2020. To support implementation of the fourth action plan, working groups for each priority area were established when the OGP Council was formed. The functioning of the working group is regulated by the Rules of Procedure of the OGP Council. Each group was composed of a coordinator, a deputy coordinator, and members, which were representatives from civil society and relevant institutions who contributed to the implementation of the commitments.[5] The working groups were responsible for planning and organizing their meetings, but regular meetings between the coordinators of the working groups were also held to prepare the biannual reports.[6] These activities provided a more formal structure for stakeholder engagement compared to the co-creation process.

The government produced three reports on the implementation of the fourth action plan, which are available on the OGP webpage, and the OGP Council adopted the biannual report on the implementation of the action plan for the period September 2019-March 2020, during its second session on 11 June 2020.[7] The OGP Council also adopted the government's self-assessment report on 28 December 2020.[8] The public could contribute to the discussion via the OGP webpage and the minutes from meetings and relevant documents are available online. Overall, the creation of the OGP Council and its ongoing activities provided a basis for ongoing cooperation of stakeholders involved in the OGP process.

The Open Parliament commitments from the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia were included in the government's self-assessment report from 28 December 2020.[9] The Assembly formed three separate subgroups for implementing these commitments.[10] The first subgroup was responsible for implementing the commitments related to accountability of the Assembly and had 11 members.[11] The second subgroup was responsible for commitments on improving the Assembly's ICT infrastructure and had 10 members. The third subgroup had 15 members and was responsible for the "citizen participation" commitment. While representatives from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy mentioned that they attended meetings to discuss the Open Parliament commitments,[12] the implementation of the activities and efforts went through the formal structure of the Parliamentary service, the Secretary-General, and the head of the Parliamentary Institute, together with heads of sectors of the Assembly Service.[13]

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

[2] IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum, IAP2, 2014, https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

[3] A council with a new mandate is planned for the 2021-2023 Action Plan.

[4] MISA, Decision for establishing the Council for cooperation and following the Open Government Partnership Process and the National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2018-2020. No. 03-1550/1, 14 April.

[5] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Information on the results of the Working Group for Implementation of the OGP Action Plan 2018-2020 Including a Final Self-Assessment Report (Draft Version), December, https://ovp.gov.mk/en/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/.

[6] Ibid.

[7] See https://ovp.gov.mk/council_news/%d0%be%d0%b4%d1%80%d0%b6%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b2%d1%82%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%ba%d0%be-2/

[8] See https://ovp.gov.mk/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/

[9] See https://ovp.gov.mk/council_sessions/7-%d0%bc%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%be%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/, p. 48-58.

[10] Decision for the establishment of subgroups for the implementation of the Action Plan for open parliament of the Assembly of the Open Government Partnership, No. 02-151811 from 01 March 2019, https://ovp.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/odluka-ogp-podgrupi.pdf

[11] That is - CSO representatives, the Parliamentary Institute coordinator, and Assembly representatives from the cabinet of the General Secretary of the Assembly, the President of the Assembly, human resources and coordinators from two sectors of the Assembly.

[12] Email correspondence with Damir Neziri, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 26 May 2021.

[13] Email correspondence with Zlatko Atanasov, Head of the Parliamentary Institute, 3 June 2021.

3.2 Overview of North Macedonia's performance throughout action plan implementation

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

Multi-stakeholder Forum	During Development	During Implementation
1a. Forum established: The OGP Council was established during the second year of the action plan's implementation on 6 May 2020.[1]	Yellow	Green
1b. Regularity: After it was established, the OGP Council met seven times during the implementation of the fourth action plan between 6 May and 28 December 2020.[2]	Yellow	Green
1c. Collaborative mandate development: The members of the OGP Council jointly develop its remits, membership, and governance structure. Members of the Council are selected by each subgroup and at the first session of the Council, members elect (via a secret vote) two co-presidents, one from the members representing state institutions and one from the members representing civil society. The co-presidents set the agenda for the meetings to which other members can add points. The Council can deliberate if more than half of its members are present, and most decisions are reached via a simple majority.[3]	Yellow	Green
1d. Mandate public: Information on the OGP Council's remit, membership, and governance structure is available on North Macedonia's OGP webpage.[4]	Yellow	Green
2a. Multi-stakeholder: The OGP Council includes both governmental and non-government representatives in proportionate numbers.[5] However, the OGP Council did not have a working group for the Open Parliament commitments, and additional information on how stakeholders engaged in those commitments of the fourth action plan is needed.	Green	Green
2b. Parity: The OGP Council includes an even balance of governmental and nongovernmental representatives.	Green	Green
2c. Transparent selection: Nongovernmental members of the OGP Council are selected through a fair and transparent process from the permanent members of the OGP working groups process.[6]	Yellow	Green
2d. High-level government representation: The OGP Council includes some high-level civil servants, such as a head of department or a ministry councillor.	Yellow	Yellow
3a. Openness: The OGP Council accepts input and representation on action plan implementation from any civil society and other stakeholders outside the forum.	Green	Green

3b. Remote participation: All OGP Council meetings during the second year of implementation of the fourth action plan (in 2020) took place virtually due to COVID-19.[7]	Yellow	Green
3c. Minutes: MISA publishes the minutes from the OGP Council meetings on North Macedonia's dedicated OGP webpage.[8]	Red	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

Action Plan Implementation	
4a. Process transparency: The national OGP webpage provides updates on the progress of some of the commitments, including progress against milestones, reasons for any delays, next steps. However, not all commitments are updated regularly and there was a delay in the publication of the end-of-term self-assessment report (on 28 December 2020). Also, no updates regarding the Open Parliament commitments have been included on the OGP webpage at the time of writing.	Yellow
4b. Communication channels: The OGP webpage has a feature to allow the public to comment on action plan progress updates by logging in.	Green
4c. Engagement with civil society: A questionnaire for evaluation of the implementation of the fourth action plan and the need for their inclusion in the next action plan has been prepared for the OGP working groups.[9] The results from the evaluation are not available on the OGP webpage. A procedure for conducting consultations with stakeholders has been prepared.[10]	Green
4d. Cooperation with the IRM: The link to the IRM report is available on the OGP webpage. The point of contact at MISA shares the draft IRM reports with stakeholders during the pre-publication review periods.	Green
4e. MSF engagement: The OGP Council monitored and deliberated on the implementation of the action plan starting in 2020, after it was formally established.	Yellow
4f. MSF engagement with self-assessment report: The self-assessment report was adopted by the OGP Council of 28 December 2020. The meeting minutes are publicly available via the national OGP webpage.	Green
4g. Repository: There is scope to improve the repository on the domestic OGP website in line with IRM guidance[11] by providing further evidence on the status and progress of the commitments, as at present evidence is missing for several commitments, including all Open Parliament commitments.[12]	Yellow

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[1] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Proceedings from the Constitutional session of the Council for coordination and monitoring of the process of Open Government Partnership and the National Open Government Action Plan partnership 2018-2020 held on 06.05.2020, https://ovp.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/zapisnik_od_konstitutivnata_sednica_na_sovetot_za_koordinacija_i_sledenje_na_procesot_na_ovp_8.05.2020.pdf

[2] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Sessions, https://ovp.gov.mk/%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b8/

[3] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Rules of Procedure for the work of the Council for coordination and monitoring of the Open Government Partnership and the Action Plan of the Open Government Partnership 2018-2020, https://ovp.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/odluka-ogp-podgrupi.pdf

[4] Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Open Government Partnership North Macedonia, Forum of the OGP, https://ovp.gov.mk/%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/

[5] Ibid.

[6] Article 5, Decision for the Formation of the Forum for Coordination and Monitoring of the Open Government Partnership Process and the National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2018-2020, No. 03-1550/1, 14.04.2020.

[7] Interview with Gordana Dimitrovska, Ministry of Information Technology and Administration, 15 December 2020.

[8] Documents and news from the sessions, https://ovp.gov.mk/%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/%d0%b4%d0%be%d0%ba%d1%83%d0%bc%d0%b5%d0%bd%d1%82%d0%b8/ and the proceedings from the sessions, https://ovp.gov.mk/%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%bf/%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b8/

[9] See https://ovp.gov.mk/council_documents/%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%81%d0%be%d0%ba%d0%b8-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d1%88%d0%b0%d0%bb%d0%bd%d0%b8%d0%ba-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d0%be/

[10] See https://ovp.gov.mk/council_documents/%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b0%d0%bf%d0%ba%d0%b0-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d0%b0%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%ba%d0%be%d0%bd%d1%81%d1%83%d0%bb%d1%82%d0%b0%d1%86%d0%b8/

[11] IRM Guidance for Online Repositories, March 2020, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/IRM_Guidance-for-Repositories_Updated_2020.pdf

[12] See www.ovp.gov.mk

IV. Methodology and Sources

Research for the IRM reports is carried out by national researchers. All IRM reports undergo a process of quality control led by IRM staff to ensure that the highest standards of research and due diligence have been applied.

The International Experts Panel (IEP) of the IRM oversees the quality control of each report. The IEP is composed of experts in transparency, participation, accountability, and social science research methods.

Current membership of the International Experts Panel is

- César Cruz-Rubio
- Mary Francoli
- Brendan Halloran
- Jeff Lovitt
- Juanita Olaya

This review process, including the procedure for incorporating comments received, is outlined in greater detail in Section III of the Procedures Manual[1] and in North Macedonia's 2018-2020 IRM Design Report.

About the IRM

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.

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[1] IRM Procedures Manual, V.3, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-procedures-manual

Annex I. IRM Indicators

The indicators and method used in the IRM research can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual.[1] 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?
- **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.

Results oriented commitments?
A potentially starred commitment has more potential to be ambitious and to be implemented. A good commitment design 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.")?

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. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:
- The commitment's design should be **Verifiable**, **Relevant** to OGP values, and have **Transformative** potential impact. As assessed in the Design Report.

- The commitment's implementation must be assessed by the IRM Implementation Report as **Substantial** or **Complete.**

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

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[1] "IRM Procedures Manual," OGP, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-procedures-manual