Independent Reporting Mechanism

Action Plan Review:
North Macedonia 2024–2026

Open
Government
Partnership

Independent
Reporting
Mechanism

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Section I: Overview

North Macedonia's sixth action plan includes promising commitments on beneficial ownership, political finance transparency, and public consultation at the local level. The action plan is ambitious and covers a wide range of policy areas in support of North Macedonia's EU accession process. During implementation, it will be crucial for public institutions to collaborate closely with civil society to produce strong results.

The commitments in North Macedonia's sixth action plan are organized under five themes: fight against corruption, participatory decision-making and civic participation, legal empowerment and access to justice, development and use of digital technologies, and promotion of climate change activities. They cover numerous topics, including access to the beneficial ownership register, digitalization of political parties' financial reports, citizen participation in local government decision-making processes, access to information at the central level, access to justice, and access to environmental information. In parallel to the action plan, North Macedonia will also be implementing its third Open Parliament and second Open Judiciary action plans.

The action plan continues and expands on some commitments from the previous plan, which include Commitments 1.2 on beneficial ownership transparency, 3.1 on improving access to free legal aid, and 3.2 on protecting victims of domestic violence. North Macedonia submitted Commitment 1.2 as an Open Gov Challenge.

The action plan also introduces new commitments, for example Commitments 1.1 on the transparency of government sessions and meetings, 2.5 on digital tools for public consultation at the local level, and 4.1 on political finance transparency.

The OGP Council, North Macedonia's multi-stakeholder forum, led a robust co-creation process while the newly created Ministry of Public Administration (formerly the Ministry for Information Society and Administration) assumed the coordinating role. Civil society actively shaped the scope of commitments, particularly around beneficial ownership and the political party finance. Most discussions on commitment design took place in smaller thematic working groups, which will also monitor the implementation stage.

AT A GLANCE

Participating since 2011
Action plan under review: 2024–2026
Number of commitments: 25

Overview of commitments
Commitments with an open government lens: 25
Commitments with substantial potential for results: 2
Promising commitments: 3

Policy areas
Carried over from previous action plans:
- Beneficial ownership in public procurement
- Government concessions
- Participation in public-service delivery
- Access to justice and free legal aid
- Prevention of violence against women
- Environmental awareness
- Open Parliament
- Open Judiciary

Emerging in this action plan:
- Transparency of government sessions and meetings
- E-consultation at the local level
- Political party finance transparency

Compliance with OGP minimum requirements for co-creation
Acted according to OGP process: Yes

The President of the Assembly of North Macedonia issued a decision to form a working group to develop and adopt its 2024–2026 Open Parliament Action Plan.[1] It carries forward several previous activities but contains vague indicators for the milestones. Separately, the Open Judiciary Council decided to continue the six commitments from its first action plan (2021–2023), all which were unfulfilled, for the second Open Judiciary Action Plan.

In this review, the IRM has assessed three promising commitments. Commitment 1.2 targets the disclosure of beneficial ownership information of companies that bid and win public tenders. It has the potential to improve transparency in government spending and allow stakeholders to flag possible corruption in public procurement. Commitment 4.1 could transform how political parties publish their financial reports, therefore making parties more transparent and accountable. At the local level, Commitment 2.5 could result in the introductions of new, innovative methods to enable citizens participation in government decision-making.

Several commitments in this action plan depend on the adoption of legislative amendments, whereas public institutions operate with inadequate human and financial resources. These present a challenge in the implementation of the action plan. Additionally, stakeholders have noted the urgency of training new coordinators and civil society representatives, particularly those who are involved in the OGP process for the first time. The Ministry of Public Administration is taking steps to address these concerns during implementation by coordinating meetings with working groups, OGP Council sessions, meetings with subgroup coordinators, and individual meetings with new coordinators.[2]

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[1] "National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024–2026," Ministry of Information Society and Administration, February 2004, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/north-macedonia-action-plan-2024-2026-june.

[2] Working meetings were held with the Working Group with all stakeholders for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024-2026, Ministry of Information Society and Administration, https://ovp.gov.mk/%d0%be%d0%b4%d1%80%d0%b6%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8-%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b1%d0%be%d1%82%d0%bd%d0%b8-%d1%81%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%b1%d0%b8-%d1%81%d0%be-%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b1%d0%be%d1%82%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%b3-2/

Section II: Promising Commitments

The following review looks at the three commitments that the IRM identified as having the potential to realize the most promising results. Promising commitments address a policy area that is important to stakeholders or the national context. They must be verifiable, have a relevant open government lens, and have modest or substantial potential for results. This review also provides an analysis of challenges, opportunities, and recommendations to contribute to the learning and implementation process of this action plan.

Table 1. Promising commitments

Promising Commitments
Commitment 1.2: Public disclosure of beneficial ownership in companies
Commitment 2.5: Methodology and tools for participatory citizen inclusion at the local level
Commitment 4.1: Digitalization of processes for the financial reporting of political parties

Commitment 1.2: Public disclosure of beneficial ownership in companies
Deputy President of the Government in charge of Good Governance Policies, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Public Procurement Bureau, Central Register, Center for Civil Communications

For a complete description, see Commitment 1.2 in North Macedonia Action Plan.

Context and objectives
Under the previous action plan, the Public Procurement Bureau (PPB) committed to publishing beneficial ownership information of companies that are awarded state tenders on the Electronic System for Public Procurement System (ESPP).[1] A working group reached an agreement on publishing beneficial ownership information related to public procurement contracts and transferring this data via a national interoperability platform.[2] However, doing so would require amendments to the Law on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing and the Law on Public Procurement.[3]

The new commitment broadens the scope of beneficial ownership information to cover companies that take part in government tender, contracts for concessions, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) in addition to companies that have concluded public procurement contracts. It involves the detection and implementation of personal data protection pre-requisites for the public announcement of the names of beneficial owners, which were obstacles in the previous action plan. Its scope marks an expansion on the previous beneficial ownership commitment.

The commitment supports the harmonization and implementation of international and EU standards in anti-corruption, money laundering, and terrorist financing, which are not fully functional in North Macedonia.[4] It aligns with the country's public procurement reforms, identified in its 2021–2025 National Anti-Corruption and Conflict of Interest Strategy.[5] Notably, the government submitted this commitment as an Open Gov Challenge.[6]

Potential for result: Substantial
At present, the Central Register of the Republic of North Macedonia (CRRNM) holds information on beneficial owners. However, the data can only be accessed upon request, for a fee, and not available in machine-readable, which limit the possibilities for data processing.[7] Authorities rarely use the register to obtain data related to money laundering and terrorist financing or for anti-corruption investigations.[8]

The European Commission has pointed out the need for North Macedonia to align its legislation on money laundering and terrorist financial legislation with EU acquis.[9] Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has raised concerns over money laundering in North Macedonia due to the lack of enforcement of the beneficial ownership register.[10] This commitment would make all data on beneficial ownership publicly accessible without a cost and in an open data format. Civil society stakeholders highlight that having the data in a machine-readable format would be a major improvement in accessibility and would reduce processing times for investigative research.[11] Moreover, access to the names of beneficial owners of companies that were awarded contracts and/or taking part in government procurement process, plus concessions and PPPs, will make it easier for users to detect irregularities, misuse, and conflict of interests.

The commitment could allow users to more easily detect illicit financial practices, such as collusion among bidding companies. A 2024 report highlights that over 50% of trading companies have been involved in prohibited arrangements for coordinated behavior in tenders with rarely any sanctions.[12] Similarly, concession contracts and PPPs are also vulnerable to corruption and political influence due to a lack of transparency.[13] There are concerns, for example, over the criteria for the selection of entities, affecting the effectiveness of control mechanisms and supervision.[14] Anticipation of a new law on concessions and PPP is expected to address these concerns.[15] Additionally, opening beneficial ownership data also carriers environmental impact with regard to concessions awarded for mineral resource exploitation and the construction of small hydropower plants.[16]

Opportunities, challenges, and recommendations during implementation
Since the previous commitment was not implemented due to legal discrepancies, it is critical to consider how to mitigate further delays should the proposals to the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing and the Law on Public Procurement take longer than expected.[17] Some measures could include voluntary disclosures by companies as part of their corporate responsibility to incentivize compliance with beneficial ownership transparency standards.

 The implementing agencies will also need to consider what information will be publicly available shared and what mechanisms will be put in place to protect beneficial owners while adhering to international transparency standards. A possible solution could be providing different levels of access with varying degrees of information, while ensuring as low a threshold for publishing beneficial ownership information as possible.[18] During implementation, the IRM recommends the following steps:

- Introduce mechanisms for reporting inaccurate data on the beneficial ownership register. Civil society could help identify discrepancies and improve data reliability.
- Make the beneficial ownership register data interoperable with other registrars and databases, such as the asset register, and the elected and appointed persons register.[19]
- Publish beneficial ownership data in an open and reusable format, such as the Open Ownership's Beneficial Ownership Data Standard.[20]
- Provide training for public officials, civil society, and journalists, and researchers on using beneficial ownership data to prevent and detect corruption, fraud, and illegal activities.

Commitment 2.5 Methodology and tools for participatory citizen inclusion at the local level
Ministry of Local Self-Government, Rural Coalition, ZELS, Metamorphosis

For a complete description, see Commitment 2.5 in [North Macedonia Action Plan](#).

Context and objectives

This commitment aims to introduce a unified system of public consultations at the local level and improve e-consultations for all municipalities. The goal is to introduce standardized mechanisms at the local level that mirrors the central Electronic National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER). The commitment would inform citizens of the schedule and topics for local council sessions.[21] Its implementation is expected to be carried out through collaboration between the Association of Local Self-Government Units (ZELS), the Ministry of Local Self-Government (MLSG), and the civil society organization (CSO) Metamorphosis. The commitment would prepare and publish a list of documents for obligatory consultations in partnership with the International Republican Institute (IRI) and specify the procedure for public consultations followed by steps related to the ENER.[22] A similar commitment was included in the previous action plan but was not completed during implementation.[23]

Potential for results: Modest

At present, citizen engagement in local governance in North Macedonia is limited. The action plan notes that two-third of a sample of 400 citizens from all eight planning regions are uninformed about how to engage in local consultation processes.[24] There are concerns over the transparency of municipalities, including inadequate consultation processes, insufficient advanced notice, and insufficient information dissemination, especially in rural areas. This affects citizens' abilities to take part in decision-making processes and affects the functioning of local communities. While some municipalities use public fora (introduced during previous OGP action plans) for consultations, many do not, even though these fora are often effective.[25]

Municipalities are only legally obligated to consult citizens and provide relevant documentation of the consultation results in two instances: the preparation of municipal budgets and urban plans.[26] Beyond these, municipalities consult citizens when deemed necessary based on their preferred timing and scope.[27] Furthermore, research by the Rural Coalition revealed that none of the 350 surveyed women and young people from the Northeastern and Poloshki regions had participated in budget fora or were aware of available participatory tools and mechanisms.[28] Only an estimated 12 percent have attended public municipal council sessions and 36 percent are aware of how to participate in local decision-making.[29]

The national government has adopted the ENER portal for the consultation of all draft laws and documents within 30 days before being added to the government's daily agenda. This commitment would replicate such practice at the local level.[30] If consultation processes are standardized and digital tools introduced, it will be easier for citizens to take part in local-level decision-making. Identifying queries for obligatory consultations and developing a methodology, in consultation with civil society and local self-governance, could help address the issues identified above. The plan is to include a calendar to announce ongoing activities as well as establish a clear procedure: announce the issue at hand, initiate a consultation process, and then publish the draft document with a 20-day period for public input. Having a calendar will clarify what is happening and when.[31]

By providing tools for engagements and improving transparency, citizens will have improved access to information and greater opportunities to influence local-level decisions. This is crucial in rural areas where traditional communication channels are limited. Transparency and accountability at the local level directly impact corruption.[32] The commitment could strengthen the fight against corruption at the local level. The commitment could also address the

discrepancies in digital capacities among municipalities leveraging digitalization to create effective e-consultation solutions[33] by centralizing the process on the ENER webpage.

Opportunities, challenges, and recommendations during implementation

To successfully implement this commitment, it is crucial to establish tools and mechanisms for public and e-consultations that will be applicable to all municipalities.[34] According to Metamorphosis, municipalities often lack the resources to implement such mechanisms so they are aiming to develop solutions with minimal financial resources by engaging all stakeholders—ZELS, MLSG, and CSOs—to find a sustainable model.[35] Amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government are planned during the implementation period. This offers an opportunity for the government to incorporate into the law the practices introduced with this commitment and create a legally binding obligation for municipalities to follow a consultation process.[36]

The main challenges that could arise during implementation is the ability of the MLSG to engage all municipalities to take part in the initiative and implement the methodology and tools. The MLSG cannot force municipalities to take part in this commitment.[37] Moreover, financial constraints are common in municipalities.[38] The MLSG indicated that the commitment is unlikely to implemented without donor support.[39] UNDP funding was used in the past for a similar commitment. This avenue of funding is being explored for the current commitment, as financial obstacles already affected the preparation of queries as a part of obligatory consultations.[40]

During implementation, the IRM recommends the following steps:

- Measure the increase in the number of consultations in municipalities because of this commitment and whether more citizens, particularly young people and women, participate. An increase in openness among municipalities from the current level to over 50% would be an improvement. Another target could be to replicate the initiative to cover all 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje.
- Since many municipalities do not have adequate webpages and platforms to communicate consultations and e-consultations, especially in rural areas, a target of all municipalities having such capacity would signal successful implementation.
- To mitigate risks of funding constraints, the lead agencies and CSOs could train and support the staff who will be implementing the methodology and digital tools so that that the municipalities have adequate capacity to implement the changes. Donor funding to support municipalities could be explored in addition to the time of staff members from the lead agencies and CSOs.

Commitment 4.1 Digitalization of processes for the financial reporting of political parties

Ministry of Finance, State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, Ministry of Justice, State Audit Office, Internal Revenue Service, State Electoral Commission, Central Register, Council of Municipalities, City of Skopje, Association for Research and Analysis, Institute for Democracy Societal Civilis, International Republican Institute, Metamorphosis, Centre for Civic Communication.

For a complete description, see Commitment 4.1 in North Macedonia Action Plan.

Context and objectives

This commitment aims to address inefficiencies in the current financial reporting system for political parties. The financing of political parties has not been addressed in previous action plans. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) is responsible for adopting the relevant by-laws and coordinating implementing activities.[41] The commitment would map relevant bylaws to the

financing of political parties adopted by the Ministry of Finance (MOF) for the legal basis for the digitization of the electronic reporting procedure, followed by the adoption of new by-laws and the preparation and the electronic filing of reports. Political parties, media and CSOs will be trained to use the data on party funding. To realize the commitment, a working group was formed, comprising all implementing institutions alongside civil society organizations.[42]

Political parties use forms prescribed with by-laws which they submit in paper format to institutions such as the State Audit Office (SAO), the State Election Commission (SEC), and the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC).[43] This process involves the manual submission of paper-based reports, which are not machine-readable, leading to labor-intensive data entry and delayed analyses.[44] The by-laws under the Electoral Code and the Law on Financing Political Parties (LFPP) include rules governing financial reports for electoral campaigns, donations, and advertising expenditures, such as the Rulebook on Campaign Location Reports,[45] the format and content of donation registers (30/2009),[46] and other financial reporting requirements.[47] Political parties receive funding from the state but also rely on private donations for their functioning and electoral activities, making disclosure crucial for monitoring how public money is spent and identifying party donors. However, the reporting system is confusing as parties must submit reports to different institutions multiple times during elections.[48] Moreover, not all parties publish their financial information on their webpages and the MOF's reporting template does not currently have such a tab dedicated to these funds..[49] This commitment would centralize the submission and publication of these reports in one database on the SCPC webpage.

Potential for results: Substantial
Digital submissions could make reporting timely, complete, and accessible by reducing manual processing.[50] Currently, some institutions, such as the Public Procurement Office, allow online submission of financial reports.[51] However, according to the MOF, there is scope to improve parties' financial transparency overall.[52] A digital solution for financial reporting could enhance transparency in political party financing should the reports be publicly accessible in a machine-readable format. Political finance reports are only available in the form of scanned PDF documents, a format that significantly limits the potential for meaningful analysis and oversight.[53] By making financial information available in a machine-processable format, the commitment could allow citizens to monitor political party financing more effectively. These changes, should they be made legally binding, could help users to detect irregularities and potential corruption in a timely manner, strengthening the integrity of the political system. Moreover, having access to the data could empower citizens and CSOs to hold parties politically accountable, and possibly improving trust in political processes. This, combined with enforcement of sanctions as prescribed in the LFPP, could strengthen the oversight of political party financing.

The baseline is that no political party funding reports are submitted electronically in machine-readable format, whereas the target is to achieve 100 percent electronic submission by the end of the action plan. It could also reduce the time needed to submit the reports, time spent to analyze the reports by supervisory institutions, speediness of identifying errors and areas for improvement, as well as number of political parties, media outlets, and CSOs trained to use and analyze the data from the reports.

Opportunities, challenges, and recommendations during implementation
This commitment could enhance party funding transparency, reduce undue influences over political parties by donors and ease and strengthen supervision of responsible institutions over

party spending. The commitment focuses on digitizing the process of submitting the financial reports only, for which legal changes are unlikely to be needed.[54] Instead, the government could consider making electronic submissions obligatory through a by-law. This would allow for the sanctions that are already prescribed in the LFPP to be applied in cases of non-submission.

During implementation of this commitment, the IRM recommends taking the following steps:

- Make political finance data interoperable with different databases for better anti-corruption monitoring. For example, linking the political finance platform to the e-procurement system (ESPP) could help identify when public procurement contracts are being directed towards politically connected companies.
- Make the digital platform easy to access and use by both citizens and parties. The MOF could consult users such as CSOs, researchers, and journalists to ensure data is useful.
- Include information on how the MOF tracks actions taken against political parties, candidates, or third-party campaigners for violations of the Law on Political Party Financing and other political finance regulations.
- Provide adequate training for political parties to incorporate the changes in providing funding reports. In addition, it could be important to consider including political parties in the development of the software. Their involvement can help align the changes with the needs of political parties and those of the institutions that will oversee the reporting.
- Include funds spent on social media political advertisement in the reporting template.

Other commitments

Other commitments that the IRM did not identify as promising commitments are discussed below. This review provides recommendations to contribute to the learning and implementation of these commitments.

The fifteen national commitments in North Macedonia's sixth action plan are organized under five themes: anti-corruption (three commitments), participatory decision-making and civic participation (six commitments), access to justice (two commitments), digital technologies (two commitments), and climate change (two commitments). The action plan also includes four Open Parliament commitments and six Open Judiciary commitments.

Anti-corruption

Under Commitment 1.1, the General Secretariat of the Government aims to improve the transparency of government sessions and meetings. The secretariat will develop a procedure for publishing meeting calendars for government representatives, including participants, topics, standardized meeting notes, and the announcements of agendas at least seven working days in advance of the session. The European Commission's 2024 report for North Macedonia found that the number of items added to government session agendas at the last minute is high, citizens often do not have access to relevant documents prior to the meetings, while minutes and decisions are not systematically published online.[55]

The new publication procedure could improve the timeliness of government sessions and agendas and reduce the need for citizens to submit freedom of information requests for this data. During implementation, the IRM recommends publishing meeting notes and agendas as open text, in addition to .pdf format, to improve usability. The IRM also recommends the secretariat to make the information easily searchable on its website. For example, they could allow users to browse meeting minutes and agendas by keyword, draft acts, documents, and discussion topic. In addition, the IRM recommends including the working groups of the government in this commitment, if this is not planned already. Lastly, the secretariat could

consider amending its rules and procedures to require the publication of this information for in a timeline manner.

Under Commitment 1.3, the Ministry of Economy (MOE) aims to publish concluded agreements for concessions and for public-private partnerships (PPPs), like public procurement contracts. According to the action plan, only the announcements for PPPs and the tender documents are published on the Electronic System for Public Procurement (ESPP) but not the notices for the concluded agreements or the agreements themselves. Considering that between 1-2% of the state budget is spent on PPP annually,[56] publishing these agreements will be an important step towards improving fiscal transparency.

There are 344 active concessions related to mineral goods in North Macedonia.[57] The MOE maintains a register of concessions for mineral resources on its website, but not the concluded agreements. The register is not completely updated with data on concluded concessions agreements. For example, there is no conclusive data on the concessional subsidies and interest is not charged on all unpaid concession subsidies.[58] According to the OGP working group for this commitment, a draft law on concessions of goods of general interest has been announced, which will oblige each ministry that issues and concludes concession contracts for goods of general interest (such as mineral resources, game, fish, waters, hydroelectric plants, beaches, et cetera) to establish a register, from which data will be submitted to the main consolidated register maintained by the MOF.[59]

The IRM assesses Commitment 1.3 as having modest potential for results. While the commitment "implies the mandatory public disclosure" of concession and PPP agreements, it is not clear on the mechanism for enforcing the publication of these agreements. Due to the establishment of the new Ministry of Energy, Mining, and Mineral Resources, which has taken over the competencies for concessions and PPPs, there is a need to appoint new representatives for the commitment.[60] The MOE will focus on publishing only concession agreements for the exploitation of mineral resources and for geological research.

A new Law on Concessions and PPP is expected during the implementation period.[61] Stakeholders will need to consider whether the legal obstacles related to personal data (as identified regarding the public procurement contract beneficial owners) will also impact the publication of this information and apply similar measures as those identified for Commitment 1.2. The working group has already agreed on alternative steps in order not to halt the implementation due to the change of ministerial structures.[62] This involves allowing bidders in public procurement contract award procedures to voluntarily choose an option in the bid form for the name of the true owner of the economic operator to be disclosed, which would then be published in the contract award notice. The IRM recommends MOE to adopt the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) for PPPs, which outlines important information to publish in line with the World Bank's PPP disclosure framework,[63] as well as publish concession agreements concluded by other institutions besides mineral exploitation in the next action plan.

Participatory decision-making and civic participation
Commitment 2.1 aims to improve stakeholder engagement in the Employment Service Agency (ESA) when creating and implementing its annual operational plans for employment. The ESA will also create a database of NGOs, academia, businesses, and unemployed individuals interested in being consulted and develop a consultation section on its website. It continues the collaboration between The ESA and the Association for Emancipation, Solidarity, and Equality of Women (ESE) collaborated in the previous cycle to involve citizens in designing and monitoring employment services.[64] The IRM recommends documenting and responding to feedback from

consultations on the annual operational plans, and to feedback gathered through the ESA's website.

Under Commitment 2.2, the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) and ESE will provide civil servants with e-learning materials and training on anti-corruption, transparency, and citizen participation. According to the commitment, the government should adopt a decision on mandatory annual attendance for all civil servants and obtaining a certificate for successful completion of the training. The stated goal is for 60 percent of civil servants to obtain the certificate by January 2026. While the commitment sets ambitious targets, the MPA and ESE will have to carefully determine the long-term benefits and continued progress after implementation. The IRM recommends measuring the impact of the training, for example by assessing changes in attitudes and understanding of civil servants in anti-corruption, transparency, and citizen participation in the long term.

Commitment 2.3 aims to standardize the templates for consultation plans and the minutes of consultations. It will also promote the use of the Unique National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER) for public input on policy proposals. Ministries are obliged to publish draft laws for public input on the ENER but not bylaws, and draft laws submitted by members of parliament (MPs) are not required to be published.[65] The ENER is often not used effectively as the administration either fails to provide feedback to public input or rejects proposals without justification.[66] Moreover, ministries often do not publish a comprehensive record of all rejected proposals and do not publish their consultation plans, making policy tracking difficult.[67] The 2019 Law on Free Access to Public Information mandates transparency of the policy-making process, but gaps in practice persist, such as institutions not providing answers on why proposals were not accepted.[68] The commitment has modest potential to improve public consultations in policymaking. During implementation, the Ministry of Public Administration could look at examples from other OGP members in making the ENER a hub for public consultations in policymaking. For example, Estonia is developing a platform to promote legislative and regulatory co-creation, where the public can access the edit history, meeting records, and government responses to feedback related to policies.[69] In New Zealand, the government is requiring the use of a Policy Community Engagement Tool to increase public participation in designing policies, particularly for those most affected by an issue.[70]

Under Commitment 2.4, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) aims to improve gender equality annual reporting by ministries and municipalities, which is required by the Law on Equal Opportunities requires[71] but are rarely published. The reports are supposed to contain data on the extent to which women are involved in the economic, political and social life as well as the measures and activities that state administration bodies and municipalities have taken to promote equal opportunities for men and women. By assessing the publication challenges in pilot municipalities, the MLSP seeks of define a minimum criteria and indicators to assess report quality. Beyond annual reports, the IRM recommends publishing disaggregated gender data on North Macedonia's open data portal (with personal data protections). This data could cover crime and justice, economics, education, health, and employment.

Under Commitment 2.6, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) aims to draft a plan for addressing environmental changes affecting citizens' health in cooperation with civil society. It will be important for the MESP to ensure this plan is sustained over time.

Access to justice
Under Commitment 3.1, the MOJ aims to upgrade the software for managing free legal aid (FLA) cases, improve the data collection and data exchange system, and amend the Law on

Free Legal Aid (LFLA). This commitment was unfilled during the previous action plan, since the amendments to the LFLA were not passed.[72] On 17 September 2024, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the amendments to align it with the Law on Expertise of 2023.[73] The amendments define the subjects authorized to perform expert examination in cases for which FLA is approved as well as the method of their selection and appointment. Additionally, the amendments regulate the procedures for making an expert finding and opinion, giving testimony before the court in the context of FLA, and payment of the award and costs of the expert witness. Now that the amendments have passed, the MOJ could ensure that its employees are fully trained in using the upgraded FLA case management software. The IRM also reiterates a recommendation from the 2021–2023 Action Plan Review for the MOJ to work with entities that provide access to expert witnesses for frequently requested fields for FLA cases in the implementation of this commitment.

Under Commitment 3.2, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) is continuing efforts towards the prevention of domestic violence and violence against women. The previous action plan included a commitment to improve data collection and publication on domestic violence cases. The MOI began to publish data on domestic violence cases in 2022 and continued in 2023, but the courts needed to improve their data systems for proceedings related to these cases.[74] The collection and publication of data need to be expanded to cover other forms of violence against women that were criminalized in the amendments to the Criminal Code in 2023 (Official Gazette No. 36 from 2023). The new commitment aims to develop a domestic violence prevention plan, raise awareness through educational materials and public fora, distribute resources across key institutions, and conduct practitioner workshops and training to improve case handling. The IRM reiterates recommendations from the 2021–2023 Action Plan Review to assess the justice sector's performance on domestic violence cases (such as the rate prosecutions and unresolved cases) and consider alternative justice mechanisms such as community paralegal programs or dispute resolution mechanisms.[75]

Development and use of digital technologies
Commitment 4.2 aims to introduce an automated system for aggregating and digitalizing municipal economic data from the ESA on the website of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The data will be revised regularly. The IRS will publish data on the amounts of the average salary, total paid salaries, and salaries divided by municipality, gender, activity and age group. The ESARNM will publish data on total employment in a specific activity, in a specific municipality, at a specific point in time divided by municipality, gender, activity and age group. During implementation, the IRS and the ESA could consider how the automated system will support researchers and municipalities in using the data in fostering local growth. They could also consider using the system to produce high-value data sets in line with the EU Directive on Open Data and the Reuse of Public Sector Information.

Climate change
Under Commitment 5.1, the MESP aims to improve access to information on and public participation in decision-making related to water resources. The MESP will publish water law documents that are mandatory for public consultation on its website, as well as all water resource permit requests from 2024–2026. Additionally, the commitment would amend Article 24 of the Law on the Environment to enable public participation in the preparation and approval of environmental protection reports.[76] This commitment could help align Macedonian legislation with European Commission recommendations on access to information and public participation in decision-making related to the environment. It is important to consider mitigation measures if the amendments do not pass within the prescribed timeline. This could involve engaging

citizens voluntarily via consultations or public fora and deepening cooperation with civil society and academia to increase discussions and participation.

Commitment 5.2 aims to improve public awareness of climate-related activities of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management (MAFWM) and the MESP. The ministries will establish an intersectoral group or mechanism for publication of climate-related information on both ministries' portals in consultation with farmers. The MAFWM will create a climate change tab on its website and a tool for farmers and CSOs to share news and activities. This commitment has modest potential for results. The IRM recommends establishing clear responsibilities and designate focal points in both ministries to ensure implementation.

Open parliament

The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia will implement four commitments in the country's third Open Parliament action plan. This Open Parliament action plan contains fewer commitments compared to the 2021–2023 action plan (11). The expected outputs for each milestone are not defined, unlike in the previous action plan.

Commitment 1 aims to create a central digital registry for regulatory bodies established by the Assembly to reduce information requests. The Assembly will form a working group to compile a list of these bodies, including their mandates and managers, and provide real-time updates on appointments and expirations. It will be supported by a new software tool for publishing this data on the Assembly's website and on its open data portal, if needed. The IRM recommends specifying mandate and membership of the working group.

Commitment 2 continues efforts to improve the Assembly's television channel. This commitment would form a council managed jointly by the parliamentary majority and the opposition to develop legislative news, debates, and multimedia content, improving public communication and legislative transparency. It will be important to define how decisions will be reached in the council to avoid delays in its work from political disagreements.

Commitment 3 obliges the executive and the judiciary to report to the Assembly about the implementation of their commitments in the OGP action plan and to participate in discussions which will be open to the public. While the commitment is likely modest, this initiative could strengthen the checks and balances of the branches of power regarding open governance.

Commitment 4 continues the "parliamentary caravan" (mobile parliament) initiative from the previous action plan. The commitment aims to bring the parliamentary caravan to all cities that have contact offices for MPs' and citizens. The commitment could provide greater visibility of the Assembly and improve citizens' access to MPs' offices. The IRM recommends measuring the impact of the caravan on citizen engagement in public life.

Open judiciary

All six Open Judiciary commitments are carried over from the 2021–2023 action plan. These commitments were interrupted during the previous action plan by the dismissal of the president of the Judicial Council by its deputy president in April 2023.[77] Some members of the Judicial Council did not recognize the legitimacy of the current leadership of the Judicial Council.[78] The Council for Open Judiciary, the body responsible for implementing the Open Judiciary commitments, agreed that its activities could not proceed without the Judicial Council's involvement. The Council for Open Judiciary has not met since then and the commitments were carried forward to the sixth action plan. The ambition of these commitments was assessed in the IRM 2021–2023 Action Plan Review.[79] Future Open Judiciary commitments could improve transparency in the appointment, promotion, and dismissal of judges.

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[22] Eli Cakar (Ministry of Local Self-Government), interview by IRM researcher, 24 October 2024.

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[33] Danilovksa-Bajdevska, interview.

[34] Danilovksa-Bajdevska, interview.

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[36] Cakar, interview.

[37] Cakar, interview.

[38] Danilovksa-Bajdevska, interview.

[39] Cakar, interview.

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[43] Stanojkova Arsovski, interview.

[44] Stanojkova Arsovski, interview.

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Section III. Methodology and IRM Indicators

This product is a concise, independent, technical review of the characteristics of the action plan and the strengths and challenges the IRM identifies to inform a stronger implementation process. The IRM highlights commitments that have the highest potential for results, represent a high priority for country stakeholders, acknowledged as a priority in the national open government context, or a combination of these factors.

The IRM products provided during a national action plan cycle include:
- **Co-Creation Brief:** A concise brief that highlights lessons from previous IRM reports to support a country's OGP process, action plan design, and overall learning.
- **Action Plan Review:** A technical review of the characteristics of the action plan and the strengths and challenges the IRM identifies to inform a stronger implementation process.
- **Midpoint Review:** A review for four-year action plans after a refresh at the midpoint. The review assesses new or significantly amended commitments in the refreshed action plan, compliance with OGP rules, and an informal update on implementation progress.
- **Results Report:** An overall implementation assessment that focuses on policy-level results and how changes happen. It also checks compliance with OGP rules and informs accountability and longer-term learning.

In the Action Plan Review, the IRM reviews commitments using three indicators:

1. Verifiability: The IRM determines whether a commitment is verifiable as written in the action plan. The indicator is assessed as:
- **Yes/No:** Are the stated objectives and proposed actions sufficiently clear and include objectively verifiable activities to assess implementation?
- Commitments that are not verifiable are considered not reviewable, and no further assessment is carried out.

2. Open Government Lens: The IRM determines if the commitment relates to the open government values of transparency, civic participation, and/or public accountability as defined by the Open Government Declaration and the OGP Articles of Governance. Based on a close reading of the commitment text, the indicator is assessed as:
- **Yes/No:** Does the commitment set out to make a policy area, institution, or decision-making process more transparent, participatory, or accountable to the public?

The following questions for each OGP value may be used as a reference to identify the specific open government lens in commitment analysis:
- **Transparency:** Will the government disclose more information, improve the legal or institutional frameworks to guarantee the right to information, improve the quality of the information disclosed to the public, or improve the transparency of government decision-making processes or institutions?
  Civic Participation: Will the government create or improve opportunities, processes, or mechanisms for the public to inform, influence or co-create policies, laws and/or decisions? Will the government create, enable, or improve participatory mechanisms for minorities, marginalized or underrepresented groups? Will the government improve the enabling environment for civil society (which may include NGO laws, funding mechanisms, taxation, reporting requirements, et cetera)? Will the government improve legal, policy, institutional or practical conditions related to civic space such as freedom of

expression, association and peaceful assembly that would facilitate participation in the public sphere? Will the government take measures which counter mis- and disinformation, especially online, to ensure people have access to reliable and factual information (which may include digital and media literacy campaigns, fact-checking or fostering an independent news media ecosystem)?

- **Public Accountability:** Will the government create or improve opportunities to hold officials answerable for their actions? Will the government enable legal, policy, or institutional frameworks to foster accountability of public officials?

3. Potential for Results: The IRM analyzes the expected results and potential that would be verified in the IRM Results Report after implementation. Potential for results is an early indication of the commitment's possibility to yield meaningful results based on its articulation in the action plan in contrast with the state of play in the respective policy area. The indicator is assessed as:

- **Unclear:** The commitment is aimed at continuing ongoing practices in line with existing legislation, requirements, or policies without indication of the added value or enhanced open government approach in contrast with existing practice.
- **Modest:** A positive but standalone initiative or change to processes, practices, or policies. The commitment does not generate binding or institutionalized changes across government or institutions that govern a policy area. Examples are tools (e.g., websites) or data release, training, or pilot projects.
- **Substantial:** A possible game changer for practices, policies, or institutions that govern a policy area, public sector, or the relationship between citizens and state. The commitment generates binding and institutionalized changes across government

This review focuses its analysis on promising commitments. Promising commitments are verifiable, have an open government lens, and at least a modest potential for results. Promising commitments may also be a priority for national stakeholders or for the particular context. The IRM may cluster commitments with a common policy objective or that contribute to the same reform or policy issue. The potential for results of clustered commitments is reviewed as a whole.

This review was prepared by the IRM in collaboration with Liljana Cvetanoska as researcher and Ernesto Velasco Sánchez as external expert reviewer. During the internal review process of this product, the IRM verifies the accuracy of findings and collects further input through peer review, OGP Support Unit feedback as needed, interviews and validation with country stakeholders, an external expert review, and oversight by IRM's International Experts Panel (IEP).[1] The IRM methodology, product quality, and review process are overseen by the IEP.[2]

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Annex 1. Commitment by Commitment Data[1]

Commitment 1.1: Transparency of government sessions and meeting
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 1.2: Public disclosure of beneficial ownership in companies
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Substantial

Commitment 1.3: Public disclosure of concluded concession agreements and public-private partnership establishment
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.1: Public participation in creating active measures, employment policies and services
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.2: Compulsory training for administrative servants on transparency and accountability
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.3: Improve public consultation quality at national level
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.4: Regular and continuous publication of annual reports on equal opportunities for men and women by ministries and municipalities
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.5: Determine the methodology for selection of e-consultation and participatory citizens' inclusion in decision making processes in municipalities
- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes

- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.6: Draft a plan for dealing with environmental changes affecting citizens health, with participation of NGOs

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 3.1: Digitization and improvement of the free legal aid system

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 3.2: Prevent violence against women and domestic violence

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 4.1: Digitalization of processes for financial reporting of political parties

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Substantial

Commitment 4.2: Digitalization of data for the promotion of local economic policies

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 5.1: Effective participation of the public in decision-making in the field of water resources law

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 5.2: Increased awareness of citizens regarding activities of institutions related to climate change through ministerial cooperation

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Open Parliament

Commitment 1: Registry of the regulatory bodies established by the Assembly

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes

- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2: Informing the public through the Assembly TV channel

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 3: Supervisory discussion in the Assembly on the national OGP implementation

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 4: Parliamentary caravan

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Open Judiciary

Commitment 1.1: Improving the electronic judicial portal

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 1.2: Improving the public relations of the court

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 1.3: Improving the quality and accessibility of data and information regarding the functioning of the Judicial Council

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.1: Strengthening the supervisory role of the Judicial Council over court transparency

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Unclear

Commitment 2.2: Standardizing the structure of court reports and data quality

- Verifiable: Yes
- Does it have an open government lens? Yes
- Potential for results: Modest

Commitment 2.3: Improving the electronic system for basic and continuous training of judges
- Verifiable: Yes   - Does it have an open government lens? Yes   - Potential for results: Modest

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[1] **Editorial note**: Commitment short titles may have been edited for brevity. For the complete text of commitments, see "National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024–2026," Ministry of Information Society and Administration, February 2004, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/north-macedonia-action-plan-2024-2026-june.

Annex 2: Action Plan Co-Creation

The OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards are guidelines to support OGP members in undertaking collaborative OGP processes.[1] The standards include minimum requirements that set a baseline for participatory and transparent OGP processes. In the Action Plan Review, the IRM assesses compliance with the minimum requirements applicable during co-creation of the action plan.[2] Members that have not met all minimum requirements are considered acting contrary to OGP process.

North Macedonia is acting according to OGP process, as it met all the minimum requirements applicable during development of the action plan. The IRM will assess North Macedonia's compliance with OGP process again in two years. Members that are currently not acting according to OGP process can rectify their status by meeting the minimum requirements relevant at the next moment of assessment.[3]

Table 2. Compliance with minimum requirements

Minimum requirement	Met during co-creation?	Met during implementation?
1.1 Space for dialogue: North Macedonia's multi-stakeholder forum, the OGP Council, was re-established on 17 May 2024 to oversee the sixth action plan. It continued to have 16 members comprising equal members of the public sector and civil society (six members from the government, one from the Assembly, one from the Supreme Court, and eight from civil society). Its basic rules are available on the OGP webpage.[4] For the sixth action plan co-creation, the council had new membership. The meeting notes demonstrate that the council discussed the draft action plan in six sessions between 20 April 2023 and 23 January 2024.[5] Since the adoption of the action plan, the council has held three further sessions in 2024[6] on 17 May (constitutive session), 5 June, and 23 December.[7] There were also co-creation working groups for each of the five priority areas, which are continuing to function in the implementation phase of the action plan.[8]	Yes	*To be assessed in the Results Report*
2.1 OGP website: All OGP information is shared on ovp.gov.mk. It contains the latest action plan, information on the OGP Council and minutes for most of its sessions, information on the working groups, news, and all commitments categorized by priority area.[9]	Yes	*To be assessed in the Results Report*
2.2 Repository: The ovp.gov.mk webpage is updated at least twice a year. OGP Council meeting notes, membership, contact, as well as working group information and news updates are regularly shared. During implementation, it will be important to continuously update progress on the commitments in the action plan monitoring page.[10] At the time of writing, progress of commitments was rarely updated in the repository. However, some working groups have started a good practice of publishing implementation plans and are adding meeting minutes.[11]	Yes	*To be assessed in the Results Report*
3.1 Advanced notice: The Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) published a co-creation timeline on ovp.gov.mk two	Yes	Not applicable

weeks before the process started.[12] A public call for applications for participation in the co-creation process was published from 1 to 14 June 2023[13] alongside a registration form.[14]		
3.2 Outreach: There were several outreach activities and opportunities to get involved in the co-creation process. For example, a public call for participation and registration was announced prior to a kick-off event. Subsequently, working groups were formed while educational materials on the OGP process were shared as consultation meetings started.[15]	Yes	Not applicable
3.3 Feedback mechanism: There was a mechanism to gather inputs from a wide range of stakeholders through the OGP webpage.[16] When the co-creation started, the OGP Council opened a call for the inclusion of interested parties to take part in the OGP process. The MPA asked institutions about their experience of the process, and those who expressed interest were included in the co-creation stage to prepare commitments. The OGP Council selected the priority areas with a decision, during which a moderator from the civic sector was present. The council considered commitment suggestions from civil society based on certain criteria and grading system, after which they decided which commitments would be included in the action plan. According to stakeholders, this opportunity was made available for an adequate period of time.[17]	Yes	Not applicable
4.1 Reasoned response: According to multiple interviewees, contributions from stakeholders were documented,[18] and the OGP Council and the MPA provided written or verbal feedback on their proposals along with discussion in the working groups.[19]	Yes	Not applicable
5.1 Open implementation: The IRM will assess whether meetings were held with civil society stakeholders to present implementation results and enable civil society to provide comments in the Results Report.	Not applicable	*To be assessed in the Results Report*

An example of good practice is the transformation of the co-creation working groups into implementation groups. The civil society organizations that participated in the groups have prepared voluntary working plans with clear division of duties and responsibilities.[20] For example, the working group on funding of political parties made a work plan and met with the new Minister for Finance to familiarize them with the process and provide support. Another meeting with the Minister of Justice is planned to facilitate potential legislative proposals that may be required during implementation.[21] Frequent staffing changes in public institutions remain one of the biggest challenges during co-creation as well as later in the implementation stage.[22]

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[2] "IRM Guidelines for the Assessment of Minimum Requirements," Open Government Partnership, 31 May 2022, www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-guidelines-for-the-assessment-of-minimum-requirements.

[3] **Editorial note**: The IRM will assess compliance with minimum requirements applicable to implementation and provide a comprehensive analysis of participation and co-creation practices throughout the action plan cycle in the Results Report. See: "OGP National Handbook – Rules and Guidance for Participants (2024)," Open Government Partnership, 11 April 2024, www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/ogp-national-handbook-rules-and-guidance-for-participants-2024.

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[10] "Open Government Partnership Portal – NAP monitoring," Government of North Macedonia, accessed 31 December 2024, https://ovp.gov.mk/%d1%81%d0%bb%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%b5%d1%9a%d0%b5-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%bf.

[11] Dimitrovska, interview.

[12] Dimitrovska, interview; Danche Danilovksa-Bajdevska (Metamorphosis), interview by IRM researcher, 24 September 2024.

[13] "Јавен повик за пријавување учество во процесот на ко-креирање на Акциски план за Партнерство за отворена власт 2024-2026 година," [Public call for applications for participation in the process of co-creating the Open Government Partnership Action Plan 2024-2026], Ministry of Information Society and Administration, 1 June 2023, https://www.mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/javen-povik-za-prijavuvane-ucestvo-vo-procesot-na-ko-kreirane-na-akciski-plan-za-partnerstvo-za-otvorena-vlast-2024-2026-godina.nspx.

[14] See: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScQk7j2fpy4SAFjHejrgFRdhcDTFX_y3SOYknkxBIkIK6WA1Q.

[15] "National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024–2026," Ministry of Information Society and Administration, February 2004, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/north-macedonia-action-plan-2024-2026-june.

[16] "Open Government Partnership Portal," Government of North Macedonia.

[17] Danilovska-Bajdevska, interview.

[18] Dimitrovska, interview; Danilovska-Bajdevska, interview.

[19] Dimitrovska, interview.

[20] Dimitrovska, interview.

[21] Dimitrovska, interview.

[22] Marina Stanojkova Arsovski (Ministry of Finance), interview by IRM researcher, 25 October 2024.