

OGP Local Roundtable

Building Local Leadership and Democratic Resilience in the Eastern Partnership

Outcome Document

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Introduction

On Friday, October 10, 2025, during the OGP Summit in Spain, the Open Government Partnership and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe convened a high-level roundtable for the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova). The Local Open Government High-Level Roundtable brought together 14 local government leaders, civil society representatives, and development partners from across the region to exchange experiences, reflect on progress, and identify next steps for advancing open government. The discussion focused on how local governments are applying open government principles to implement reforms that respond directly to community needs, deliver services effectively, and defend democratic values under pressure. Through these efforts, local authorities are fostering citizen trust in public institutions and shaping the future of democracy from the ground up.

The full-scale war in Ukraine, along with its security, economic, and social consequences across the region, has underscored the urgent need for inclusive governance.

Continued dialogue between civil society and government, as well as citizen engagement in the design, implementation, and monitoring of reforms and public spending—including reconstruction and recovery efforts—is more important than ever. Political engagement, citizen participation, and accountability in reform and reconstruction processes are essential for building resilient democracies and sustaining trust in public institutions. At the same time, local governments are navigating heightened political polarization, demographic change, and the arrival of internally displaced persons and migrants seeking safety and employment. Despite these pressures, they are expected to maintain and improve service delivery in education, health, social protection, and public utilities. Their proximity to citizens enables them to build trust, deliver services transparently, and advance participatory reforms that respond directly to people’s needs. As such, local governments are emerging as critical actors demonstrating how open local government can work for all.

This outcome document presents key insights from the discussion, highlighting successful reforms, regional trends, and shared challenges faced by local reformers. It concludes with reflections and takeaways on how to strengthen and scale up open government efforts across the region.

“We have long believed that democracy must be built from the bottom up, from the ground up, and not only because you’re the closest to citizens, but mainly also because you are the most trusted level of governance.”

Marité Moras, Head of the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.



Progress and Trends in Local Open Government Reforms

OGP Local members across the Eastern Partnership are strengthening open governance to respond to citizens' needs and reinforce trust in public institutions. Local governments in Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine are expanding participatory budgeting, improving fiscal transparency, engaging young people in governance, and institutionalizing citizen participation and oversight. Together, these efforts are helping communities build more responsive and accountable public institutions.

Fiscal openness

Fiscal openness ensures that government planning and spending align with public priorities by making budget information accessible and enabling public input and oversight. Fiscal transparency and participatory budgeting are core pillars of open government, strengthening accountability in how public resources are allocated and used. At the local level, these practices support better services, foster public trust, and contribute to more responsive and inclusive development.



“For the first time, citizens voted [...] on proposed projects, from street lighting to social infrastructure. Transparency and co-creation proved to be practical tools that give citizens ownership of development.”

Alexandru Bujorean, Mayor of Leova, Republic of Moldova.

In the Republic of Moldova, Leova's participatory budgeting process has doubled citizen engagement. Through its first OGP action plan, Leova will expand and introduce innovations to this process. Building on previous cycles, participatory budgeting will be extended to all localities within the newly amalgamated community, enabling citizens to propose projects, vote online and in deliberative assemblies, and monitor implementation through a dedicated digital platform. This platform will include real-time tracking, an interactive map, and an archive of past participatory budgeting cycles. The process is complemented by policy discussions on climate change, youth engagement, active aging, accessibility, and green urbanism. A community monitoring group oversees adherence to commitments, while annual open government reports ensure transparency and accountability. Leova seeks to institutionalize citizen participation as a long-term pillar of local governance and position participatory budgeting as a model for democratic engagement and inclusive decision making, illustrating how fiscal openness can evolve from transparency toward sustained, citizen-driven governance.

In Armavir (Armenia), the municipality has institutionalized participatory budgeting by allocating dedicated municipal funds and establishing mechanisms for residents to submit proposals and vote on budget priorities.



“This reform not only ensured transparency and accountability in how budget funds are distributed, but also gave citizens real influence over local development.”

Varsham Sargsyan, Mayor of Armavir, Armenia

This initiative addresses historically low levels of local participation by fostering civic responsibility and building trust in local governance. A public campaign, launched with the Armavir Development Centre, invited residents to participate and propose ideas for the use of one million Armenian Dram (AMD) allocated to community projects. Citizens proposed and voted to build a new playground, which has since become a community hub for social interaction and healthy living. This experience demonstrates how opening the budget to public participation can transform it into a shared space for collaborative decision-making.

In Chuhuiv (Ukraine), the Open Budget initiative has transformed how residents engage with municipal finances. Through tools such as electronic petitions, online consultations, and livestreamed council meetings, citizens can track spending and influence priorities. Central to this approach is the participatory budget, which has been in place for six years and has led to the co-creation of 10 community projects.

Across Armenia, as highlighted by GIZ Armenia, participatory budgeting has evolved from individual commitments into a nationwide movement for shared decision-making. What began in four municipalities now reaches more than 40, engaging thousands of citizens in shaping community priorities. This expansion reflects growing trust between citizens and local governments.

“Armenians now see that they can build something tangible and real: football pitches, playgrounds, tennis courts, and even irrigation systems. Local governments are discovering that being open to citizens and working with them doesn't create problems, but instead it builds trust and makes decisions stronger.”

Lusine Avalyan, Decentralization and Public Finance Advisor at GIZ, Armenia



Fiscal openness strengthens democratic local governance. Transparent budgets provide residents with the information needed to understand public spending, while participatory budgeting involves them directly in setting priorities. Together, these practices enhance accountability, improve services, and build trust. The experiences of Leova (Republic of Moldova), Armavir (Armenia), Chuhuiv (Ukraine), and other communities across Armenia demonstrate that when citizens engage in public spending decisions, local development becomes more inclusive, responsive, and resilient.

Youth

Progress in youth participation, education, and civic engagement reflects the region's growing investment in its younger generation. Young people are a driving force for open government, advocating for transparency, proposing innovative ideas, and asserting their role in decision making. In a context of increasing polarization, often affecting young people disproportionately, local governments must further strengthen inclusive participation and create opportunities for constructive civic engagement.

In Armenia, the municipality of Metsamor committed to establishing a Young Ambassadors Network and a municipal advisory body to enable youth representatives to participate in policymaking. While many young people wish to engage actively in their communities, they often lack avenues to influence decisions. To address this gap, the municipality will provide leadership training and develop a policy framework that better integrates youth perspectives into local governance. This commitment won the Open Gov Challenge at the OGP Global Summit 2025 in Spain in the thematic area of Gender and Inclusion, highlighting the importance of youth participation in Armenia and across the region.

Across Ukraine, youth participation and inclusive education are increasingly central to advancing open government at the local level. In Kyiv, civic education programs in schools, vocational institutions, and universities introduce young people to urban governance and participation mechanisms, including public consultations, petitions, and youth councils. These initiatives empower youth to shape community development by providing training and fostering partnerships with local authorities and civic organizations.

In Chuhuiv (Ukraine), young people are gaining hands-on experience in leadership and community collaboration. They have implemented initiatives such as Voice of the Community in Local Self-Government and transformed bomb shelters into learning hubs equipped with computers. These efforts demonstrate how innovation and civic responsibility can flourish even in times of crisis, showing that openness and resilience go hand in hand. As the Mayor of Chuhuiv emphasized, “even in difficult times, you can create space for development, learning, training, and exchange of ideas among our young people.” From the creation of the City Youth Hub to participatory club competitions and community projects, young residents are actively shaping the city's development agenda. Their contributions are reflected in strategic documents and have improved public spaces, supported local defenders, and strengthened civic pride.

In Zvyahel and Orzhytsia (Ukraine), municipalities are pioneering innovative budgeting approaches that strengthen civic engagement while cultivating a new generation of active citizens. In Zvyahel, the School Participatory Budget demonstrates how participatory budgeting can function as a practical tool for youth-led governance and civic empowerment. The initiative enables students from 12 community schools to propose, develop, and vote on projects using a digital platform designed for broad accessibility. It includes specific adaptations for children with special educational needs, supported by mentorship and training from certified teachers and student group members. Over 2,100 students participated in the first voting cycle, developing 53 projects, 38 of which were approved for implementation.

In Orzhytsia (Ukraine), the municipality has introduced a School Public Budget that similarly enables students to propose, vote on, and implement school projects through a digital tool, fostering a practical understanding of budget allocation.

Together, these initiatives show how local governments can create inclusive, participatory school governance systems that empower youth, build capacity, and encourage long-term civic engagement, demonstrating that young people can meaningfully influence local decisions.

Whether through civic education in Kyiv (Ukraine), youth participation structures in Metsamor, or school-based budgeting in Zvyahel and Orzhysia (Ukraine), young people are showing that they want to shape the decisions that affect their lives. Investing in youth is, therefore, an investment in the future of open local governance.

Citizen Engagement

Across the region, local governments are increasingly positioning themselves as partners, working alongside residents to define priorities and address community challenges.

Local authorities are deepening dialogue with citizens and rebuilding trust through inclusive engagement. In Vinnytsia (Ukraine), local authorities introduced public consultations even before national legislation required them, demonstrating proactive leadership in strengthening citizen dialogue. According to Transparency International Ukraine, “we see the request for trust for dialogue and for really active leadership.”

In Zviahel (Ukraine), the community developed a strategy that engaged more than 3,000 residents in collectively addressing future challenges. The municipality launched a platform where farmers, teachers, veterans, schoolchildren, and government officials could come together to discuss ideas and concrete actions, ranging from equipping public spaces to supporting military families. Zviahel held Ukraine’s first citizens’ assembly focused on creating centers for communication and interaction.



“Our main breakthrough came when we stopped writing politics for people and started creating it together with people.”

Iryna Gudz, Deputy Mayor of Zviahel, Ukraine

In Orzhysia, initiatives such as “Ask the Mayor” provide direct channels for citizen engagement. In Chuhuiv, the City Council focuses on implementing mechanisms that expand access to information—such as information boards and digital platforms—strengthening transparency and enabling meaningful citizen participation. Through these ongoing efforts, Chuhuiv continues to build trust from the ground up, demonstrating how participation and openness contribute to a more connected community.

Together, these experiences reflect a broader regional shift toward embedding participation as a structural component of local governance, underscoring that citizen engagement is foundational to strong communities.

“We are proud that we were able to make the community a real partner in decision-making.”

Halyna Minaieva, Mayor of Chuhuiv, Ukraine



Transparency

Transparency remains a core pillar of open government across the Eastern Partnership region. Local governments are expanding access to information and developing tools that enable citizens to understand, monitor, and influence public action. These efforts strengthen accountability and reinforce trust at a time when reliable information is essential for security, resilience, and democratic participation.

According to Transparency International Ukraine, more than 80 percent of major cities have improved their openness in measurable ways, and the average level of transparency across local communities has increased by 40 percent.

In Vinnytsia (Ukraine), city authorities promote transparency through regular reports from the mayor, deputies, and heads of executive bodies. These reports are delivered in formats that allow residents to access information, ask questions, and receive responses. All plenary sessions, commission meetings, and council proceedings are broadcast live, enabling citizens to follow decisions and engage directly with local governance. Officials stress the importance of continuously improving these tools to ensure inclusive democratic participation.



“When we invest in open data and smart tools, it creates real and visible impact for our communities.”

Meri Harutyunyan, Deputy Director of Yerevan, Armenia

In Khmelnytskyi (Ukraine), the city has developed an [online public information portal](#) featuring interactive maps and databases on land use, urban planning, cultural heritage, and municipal infrastructure. Authorities emphasize that building trust with residents is central to effective governance and is critical not only for European integration but also for safety and security.

In Yerevan (Armenia), the city introduced an Integrated Geographic Information System that centralizes urban data on land use, construction permits, infrastructure, and public services. By consolidating this information, the platform enhances transparency, efficiency, and accessibility, enabling citizens and businesses to interact more easily with municipal services.

From open reporting in Vinnytsia to digital platforms in Khmelnytskyi and Yerevan, and neighborhood information systems in Chuhuiv, transparency underpins accountable and participatory local governance. These initiatives enable citizens to access information, engage in decision-making, and hold authorities accountable.

Challenges

Despite meaningful progress, municipalities across the Eastern Partnership face a range of persistent challenges. War and insecurity, economic pressures, corruption risks, disinformation, and centralization of power continue to constrain reform momentum. These factors directly affect local budgets, service delivery, leadership continuity, and citizen trust.

War

In Ukraine, local governments continue to operate under the immense strain of full-scale war and displacement. Communities face human loss, institutional disruption, and social pressure, yet local leaders remain committed to advancing open governance and sustaining citizen engagement. As emphasized by the Council of Europe, resilience depends not only on military or economic strength, but also on the public institutions' ability to support and engage citizens, uphold transparency, and include them in decision-making, even in times of crisis. "It's about having people work together with the local government to co-create the vision and the goal of the local authority on a specific territory," explained Marité Moras.

Transparency International Ukraine noted that the invasion created an immediate governance shock, testing municipalities' capacity to respond and adapt. Their analysis shows that communities with stronger open government practices were better prepared to manage risks, organize services, and maintain communication with residents.

In Zvyahel (Ukraine), for example, authorities received and integrated large numbers of displaced people in the early days of the war. Many chose to remain, prompting the community to prioritize inclusion and support measures that enable participation in local life. In Khmelnytskyi, leaders highlighted the dual responsibility of sustaining open governance while ensuring safety and supporting families affected by wartime losses. Even under these conditions, local governments remain committed to openness and citizen engagement.

Economy

War-related economic shocks and limited local resources continue to slow reform efforts. Communities face immediate pressures to provide housing, social services, and employment while sustaining long-term development priorities. As displaced populations arrive, municipalities must ensure access to housing, jobs, and schools despite constrained budgets. In Vinnytsia, new local offices were established to help displaced residents access administrative and community services efficiently.

Leova (Republic of Moldova) demonstrates that even under financial and capacity constraints, local governments can advance reforms through digitalization and citizen engagement. Across the region, small budgets, limited technical capacity, and human resource shortages hinder reform implementation and service delivery. Strategic planning, community prioritization, and external support—such as that provided by the Council of Europe—remain essential to overcoming these constraints.

Maintaining reform momentum amid worsening economic conditions highlights the need for innovative approaches that maximize limited resources while continuing to meet citizen needs.

Corruption

Corruption risks continue to undermine trust and institutional capacity, particularly during crises. In Yerevan (Armenia), officials stressed that addressing corruption and resource mismanagement requires both transparency and active citizen engagement. In Vinnytsia (Ukraine), regular executive reporting, live access to council proceedings, and participatory budgeting provide residents with tools to monitor spending, helping ensure effective use of resources and reducing corruption risks.

The ongoing challenge is to institutionalize transparency and accountability measures further so that anti-corruption practices become embedded in local governance, strengthening resilience and public trust.

Disinformation

Disinformation continues to threaten local stability, democratic engagement, and public trust. In Leova (Republic of Moldova), regional instability has intensified disinformation pressures, reinforcing the need for transparency as a democratic safeguard.



“In regions like Eastern Europe, where democracy is still fragile, and security risks are high, open government must become a shield against disinformation and disengagement.”

José María Marín, Lead OGP Local.

In Khmelnytskyi (Ukraine), local leaders emphasized that building trust with residents is central to countering disinformation. They stressed that democracy and transparency are essential not only for European integration but also for safety and security.

“Our focus right now is on building trust with our residents... this is the main way to fight disinformation.”

Mykola Vavryshchuk, Deputy Mayor of Khmelnytskyi, Ukraine.



As Anastasiia Mazurok, Deputy Executive Director from Transparency International Ukraine, noted, “we see that open government is no longer nice to have, but necessary for survival and resilience. Local openness is helping communities rebuild trust, coordinate humanitarian aid, and fight disinformation.”

Looking forward

Building on the progress achieved, emerging trends, and shared challenges, the focus ahead is on consolidating reforms and scaling impact. Advancing open government requires fostering trust, strengthening networks, supporting leadership continuity, and ensuring decentralization reforms translate into meaningful citizen engagement. Together, these priorities lay the foundation for resilient, inclusive, and locally rooted governance capable of responding to current challenges while preparing for the future.

Building and sustaining trust between citizens and local governments is central to effective open government, particularly in crisis-affected contexts. Trust enables communities to navigate uncertainty, support resilient institutions, and participate actively in decision making. Across the Eastern Partnership, local governments demonstrate that transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement are essential to maintaining public confidence. As highlighted by GIZ Armenia, redefining the relationship between the local authorities and citizens has been a guiding principle of reform. The Council of Europe further emphasizes that trust is built from the bottom up: municipalities are often the most trusted level of government and play a critical role in crisis response, recovery, and reconstruction.

Horizontal, citizen-led networks are key to amplifying impact, sharing knowledge, and sustaining reforms. Participants at the roundtable emphasized the importance of networks that enable expertise and support to flow across communities, as well as the role of local champions in shaping national and regional agendas. These networks strengthen resilience, counter disinformation, and promote collective problem-solving. Peer learning and community exchange allow municipalities to adapt innovations and align local priorities with broader reforms. In practice, such networks transform open government from isolated initiatives into a structural asset embedded across communities, ensuring that lessons learned in one locality benefit the wider region. Open government networks are therefore essential for building capacity today and sustaining collaboration during future recovery and reconstruction.

Local reforms often rely on committed champions, making continuity vulnerable to leadership change. Sustaining participatory tools such as e-petitions, participatory budgets, and digital portals requires institutionalization beyond individual projects and electoral cycles. Long-term policy anchoring, succession planning, and cultivating a culture of transparency and citizen engagement are essential for resilience, as emphasized by the Council of Europe.

“Leadership in democratic governance is the driving force that enables the development of these issues in the future.”

Andrii Shportun, Deputy Mayor, Vinnytsia, Ukraine



Leadership that listens, collaborates, and responds to community needs is critical for sustaining trust and engagement. The Deputy Mayor of Vinnytsia (Ukraine) highlighted how capable leadership provides the infrastructure for democratic governance to grow. Armavir echoed this perspective, emphasizing that strong communities are built when leaders prioritize collaboration and shared needs.

Open government is a sustained commitment to trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Building networks that connect citizens and local leaders, advancing decentralization, and ensuring continuity through institutionalized practices and stable leadership give people real influence over public life. While the path ahead remains challenging, the progress demonstrated across the region shows that trust can be cultivated, citizens can be empowered, and local governments can lead with openness, even in times of crisis, reconstruction, and renewal.

Conclusion

The roundtable underscored the shared conviction that open government at the local level is not an abstract ideal, but a practical way to protect democracy and improve daily life—especially under pressure. From participatory budgeting and open financial tools to youth engagement, civic education, and accessible information systems, local leaders in Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine described reforms that make institutions more responsive, services more effective, and decisions more legitimate because they are shaped with people, not only for them. Across the Eastern Partnership, local leaders and civic partners emphasized that trust is built through tangible practices, showing residents how resources are used, creating real channels for participation, and maintaining openness even when crises and polarization make it harder.

A clear message emerged from the experiences shared: openness strengthens resilience. Municipalities confronting war, displacement, economic strain, corruption risks, and disinformation are demonstrating that transparency and participation are not “nice to have,” but essential to stability, recovery, and social cohesion. Where citizens can see decisions, influence priorities, and monitor results, local governments are better able to manage risk, coordinate support, and sustain public trust. Participants also highlighted that reforms last when they are institutionalized, anchored beyond individual champions and electoral cycles, through clear rules, sustained civic dialogue, and investments in capacity, digital tools, and public communication.

The takeaway is that leadership in open government is a choice to govern with citizens as partners, and that this choice delivers stronger outcomes and greater legitimacy. It is a reminder that participation is not symbolic; it can shape budgets, services, and local development when it is structured, accessible, and respected. The discussion highlighted a high-impact path to supporting democratic resilience: locally led reforms that combine transparency, inclusive participation, and robust civic infrastructure. The roundtable closed with a sense of momentum and responsibility, showing that the region's local governments are not waiting for ideal conditions to advance openness; they are proving, step by step, that democracy can be strengthened from the ground up.

Roundtable Participant List

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