

STAR REFORMS IN THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

Open
Government
Partnership



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INTRODUCTION

In less than five years, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) has grown from eight founding governments to nearly 70. Each OGP government partners with civil society to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to improve governance. OGP has become a global movement of reformers working to make government more effective and responsive to its citizens.

A National Action Plan, developed in collaboration with civil society, is at the heart of each country's participation. The National Action Plan translates the political will demonstrated when a country joins OGP into concrete action. Each National Action Plan contains specific commitments to enhance transparency, accountability, and public participation in government. Commitments are subject to independent review. OGP encourages reformers to use innovations in public policy and new technologies to transform the culture of government and to serve the public better.

OGP's model is unique. It does not prescribe standards for openness that countries should follow, nor does it specify sectors to target. Its deliberate, context-specific approach is designed to bring government and citizens together to define their own priorities for reform. As a voluntary partnership that emphasizes collaboration, OGP trusts in the power of ideas. Governments are encouraged to experiment with bold reforms that address urgent public policy challenges, learning from and inspiring each other along the way. This emphasis on big ideas drives the nearly 2,500 commitments in more than 110 action plans since OGP was founded in 2011.

This guide showcases a selection of commitments from OGP action plans that the OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) awarded "star" status in its latest cycle of reports. They represent exemplary reforms that have potentially transformative impact on citizens in the country of implementation. Our goal is to update and to share continually new commitments that are awarded star status in subsequent IRM reports. For more information on how the IRM awards stars, refer to the Annex.

Star commitments should encourage a race to the top among OGP countries by highlighting ambitious and innovative approaches to tackling major public policy challenges. By drawing attention to these ideas, we hope government and civil society reformers will adopt and adapt them in future National Action Plans to push the frontiers of open government in their countries.



STAR REFORMS IN THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

The Open Government Partnership Independent Reporting Mechanism awarded the following commitments 'star' status. They represent exemplary open government reforms that have the potential for far-reaching impact in their countries of implementation.

UKRAINE

LIFTING THE LID ON ITS COMMUNIST PAST

The 2014 Euromaidan protests sparked an ambitious program of reform in Ukraine. With low public trust in government institutions and the perception of rampant corruption, civil society continues to push for important laws to devolve power, strengthen government transparency, target corruption, and improve public administration. Ukrainian government and civil society reformers have used OGP to consolidate reforms underway and to develop new policy to open up historically opaque public institutions. A new law granting the public full access to classified Communist-era archives most clearly embodies Ukraine's renewed commitment to greater openness.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO SOVIET-ERA ARCHIVES

Ukraine passed the Law on Access to Archives of Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917–1991, which establishes open and effective access to classified documents on the struggle for Ukraine's independence in the 20th century. Drafted in close partnership with local NGOs, the law mandates security and law enforcement agencies to transfer classified records to a special state archive managed by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. Ukrainians can now examine records on the political persecutions and human rights violations of relatives and friends carried out by the Soviet state.

WHY IT MATTERS

Examining and confronting the country's difficult past opens the door for dialogue on the future course of Ukraine's democracy. By providing unhindered access to documents that have long been kept a secret and are clearly in the public interest, the law signals a clear break from the country's totalitarian past. Open access to the archives helps enforce Ukrainians' right to the truth on the abuses suffered under the Soviet regime and understand the circumstances in which those violations took place. Decisive steps toward greater transparency when taken in the immediate wake of the Euromaidan revolution can serve as the springboard to launch enduring open government reforms.

PHOTO: SERGEI BERTOV

IRELAND

SHINING A LIGHT ON INFLUENCE PEDDLING

Ireland's economy was hard hit by the 2008 global financial crisis. The crisis—largely driven by excessive risk-taking coupled with a lack of transparency in the financial sector—in part was the result of a governance failure. Historical opacity and “backroom deals” in Irish politics are seen as contributing factors that worsened the impact of the financial crisis and that gave certain special interests disproportionate influence on policy. The effects of the crisis underscored the need to make politics and policymaking in Ireland more transparent and accountable.

REGULATING LOBBYING

In the aftermath of the economic crisis, the government of Ireland committed to implement legislation to regulate lobbying. The goal of the legislation is to shine a light on lobbyists attempting to influence government policy. The government developed a public register which all lobbyists are required to join. By publishing the register online, citizens now can see who attempts to influence whom in government. An innovative feature of the register is that it allows citizens to search the register by dates of registration, policy area, lobbying organization, and specific public officials by name.

WHY IT MATTERS

Disclosing information on people attempting to influence public policy can be a powerful tool in preventing abuses of power and in restoring public trust in government. By publishing a register of lobbyists, Ireland is bringing much-needed transparency to the policymaking process. This approach signals a shift away from developing public policy behind closed doors. It also enables greater public oversight of policymaking and influence-peddling, which are particularly important in the post-financial crisis context.

MONGOLIA

STRENGTHENING NATURAL RESOURCES GOVERNANCE

The abundance of coal, copper, gold, other minerals, and natural resources in Mongolia has grown the economy rapidly over the years. However, falling commodity prices have derailed this growth, making the economy more vulnerable to external shocks. In the face of these economic headwinds, the outsized role of the extractive industries in Mongolia's economy remains contentious. For example, civil society has demanded greater accountability in these sectors through increased transparency of revenues and contracts. While Mongolia is an active participant in the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) and some foreign investment and major stability agreements are now transparent, other types of natural resource contracts—especially oil production-sharing agreements—remain closed.

IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL DISCLOSURE AND CONTRACT TRANSPARENCY

Mongolia is boosting natural resource transparency by developing comprehensive policies and systems to disclose information on licenses, contracts, and environmental information across the sector. For example, the government publishes information on actions taken by companies and other legal entities that are potentially harmful to the environment and to people's health. Because no centralized repository for natural resource licenses exists, steps are being taken to develop a centralized database of minerals, oil, and land tenure license owners. The database will be open to the public. Efforts also are underway to publish investment, stability, and production-sharing contracts for resources such as water, minerals, oil, and land.

WHY IT MATTERS

Natural resource governance is an important issue in Mongolia given the country's significant mineral wealth. Continued exploitation of natural resources requires transparency and accountability to safeguard community interests, to enforce liability in the event of violations, to prevent corruption, and to ensure sustainability. Reforms are already underway. For example, the country's mineral regulatory authority implemented a computerized mining registry system, and the environmental ministry published 22 environmental datasets, including information on pollution. The full potential of open government on natural resource governance can be realized when ongoing efforts are completed.

PHOTO: BERND THALLER



ROMANIA

STRENGTHENING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE LAW

Historically, there has been a lack of transparency and restricted public access to basic information on Romanian laws and legal codes. To address this, Romania continues to modernize its legal system in line with European Union requirements on transparency and accountability. The challenge for policymakers is to assure citizens that laws do not exist only nominally but also are universally accessible and backed by credible enforcement.

ENABLING FREE ACCESS TO NATIONAL LEGISLATION

The government of Romania is giving citizens free and unrestricted access to national legislation. This could help advance the rule of law by strengthening a shared understanding of the nation's laws. For the first time, Romanians—including lawyers, judges, civil society groups, and citizens—can view and search national legislation without restriction. Previously, this was available only upon payment to the Official Gazette. The Ministry of Justice developed the N-Lex legislative portal, a legislative database that is integrated fully with the European Union's catalogue of national laws, a requirement for member states.

WHY IT MATTERS

Clear and publicly available laws are the lynchpin of the rule of law. The website allows the public unfettered and universal access to the country's laws, a public resource that previously private businesses managed. It already has proven to be very popular. According to the Ministry of Justice, more than three million visitors have accessed the portal since its launch, and the daily average is 10,000 visits. There appears to be demand for this information and particularly for normative acts and for new civil and penal procedure codes, which have been searched more than two million times.

UNITED STATES

OPENING FEDERAL SPENDING

President Obama took office amid the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression. Plunging housing prices, an ailing stock market, persistent high levels of unemployment, and the contraction of credit took a huge toll on families and businesses. In response, the President signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) in February 2009 to stimulate an economy in deep recession. The \$800 billion Recovery Act entailed numerous spending and revenue provisions that set the economy on the path to recovery. The sheer size of the stimulus package called for unprecedented levels of transparency and accountability to ensure prompt and fair disbursement of taxpayer dollars and to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.

PUBLISHING AN OPEN SOURCE BUDGET

In 2015, the budget of the United States (US) government was made available in an open source format for the first time, giving Americans a valuable tool to understand how the federal government spends their tax dollars. The government's fiscal transparency efforts were bolstered by the re-launch of USAspending.gov, which provides groundbreaking transparency in federal spending in one searchable location. The website's improved design makes the information more comprehensible, enabling citizens to explore and to understand better the data using interactive features, including maps. Beyond opening federal spending data, the government also engages regularly with stakeholders through town hall meetings, interactive workshops, and via online collaborative tools to identify and to prioritize measures to improve fiscal openness.

WHY IT MATTERS

Improving fiscal transparency has been a recurring theme across the US government's OGP National Action Plans. Reporting disaggregated federal spending allows citizens, journalists, and public interest groups to trace grants, contracts, loans, insurance, and other federal disbursements down to the award level quickly. By uniting various financial reporting databases in a single window, the USAspending.gov website offers the public unprecedented and continuous access to information on federal obligations and disbursements. Strengthening the transparency and accountability of federal spending through open source budgeting tools can ensure that taxpayer dollars are distributed fairly and promptly, while minimizing corruption.

PHOTO: TONY WEBSTER



CHILE

PHOTO: ANTOFAGASTA MINERALS



STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY

Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration recognizes that the right to access information, justice, and participation in environmental issues are fundamental to achieving sustainable development. Without strong environmental democracy and access to justice frameworks, countries with a significant extractive industry are more susceptible to conflict, especially in the early stages of planning mining and forestry projects. Like other Latin American countries, Chile has experienced an increase in socio-environmental conflicts because with the expansion of natural resources extraction, citizens feel community and environmental concerns are subordinated to industry interests.

IMPLEMENTING PRINCIPLE 10

Chile is accelerating regional progress on the implementation of Principle 10, which entails developing a national and regional citizen-centered environmental policy framework underpinned by the right to information, public participation, and access to justice. Chile also is leading efforts to raise awareness of access rights among civil society and is strengthening the capacity of the public sector to engage in the regional process on Principle 10.

WHY IT MATTERS

Realizing Principle 10 could strengthen natural resource governance and alleviate future conflict. Greater transparency enables citizens to monitor changes in policy and to track extractive projects to ensure accountability of results. Robust and inclusive mechanisms for public participation can help citizens safeguard community interests and prioritize development resources. Open access to justice would allow citizens and advocacy groups to redress grievances when community interests are at stake.

UNITED KINGDOM

TRANSFORMING INTERNATIONAL AID TRANSPARENCY

The United Kingdom (UK) continues to lead the world on international development assistance. With seven-tenths of one percent of gross national income dedicated to foreign aid, it is the only G7 country to meet that target. Under UK leadership, the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) developed a ground-breaking international open data standard for publishing information on development assistance. Adoption of a common data standard will accelerate the publication and comparison of data on international aid flows so donors and recipients can coordinate better and be held accountable for results.

IMPROVING THE TRACEABILITY OF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

The UK is attempting to transform the transparency of global development assistance by publishing foreign aid data in line with the IATI open data standard, which will allow UK assistance to be tracked through the delivery chain. Working with donors and partner countries to link development assistance with budget data better, the UK also is helping recipient countries to understand and to trace how development assistance is spent. In addition, the government is helping partners to improve the transparency of their development assistance programs by making the technology of its online development tracker platform available for others to use.

WHY IT MATTERS

The UK's Department for International Development was the first agency to adopt the common open data standard, developed by the IATI. By publishing more information and developing interactive platforms to access data, users are better equipped to find, to compare, and to reuse data so that donors, recipients, and civil society advocates can better plan, coordinate, and execute their development programs. This information also could help detect fraud, avoid waste through resource duplication, and ensure accountability of results.

PHOTO: DFID. UK DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GEORGIA

UNMASKING GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE

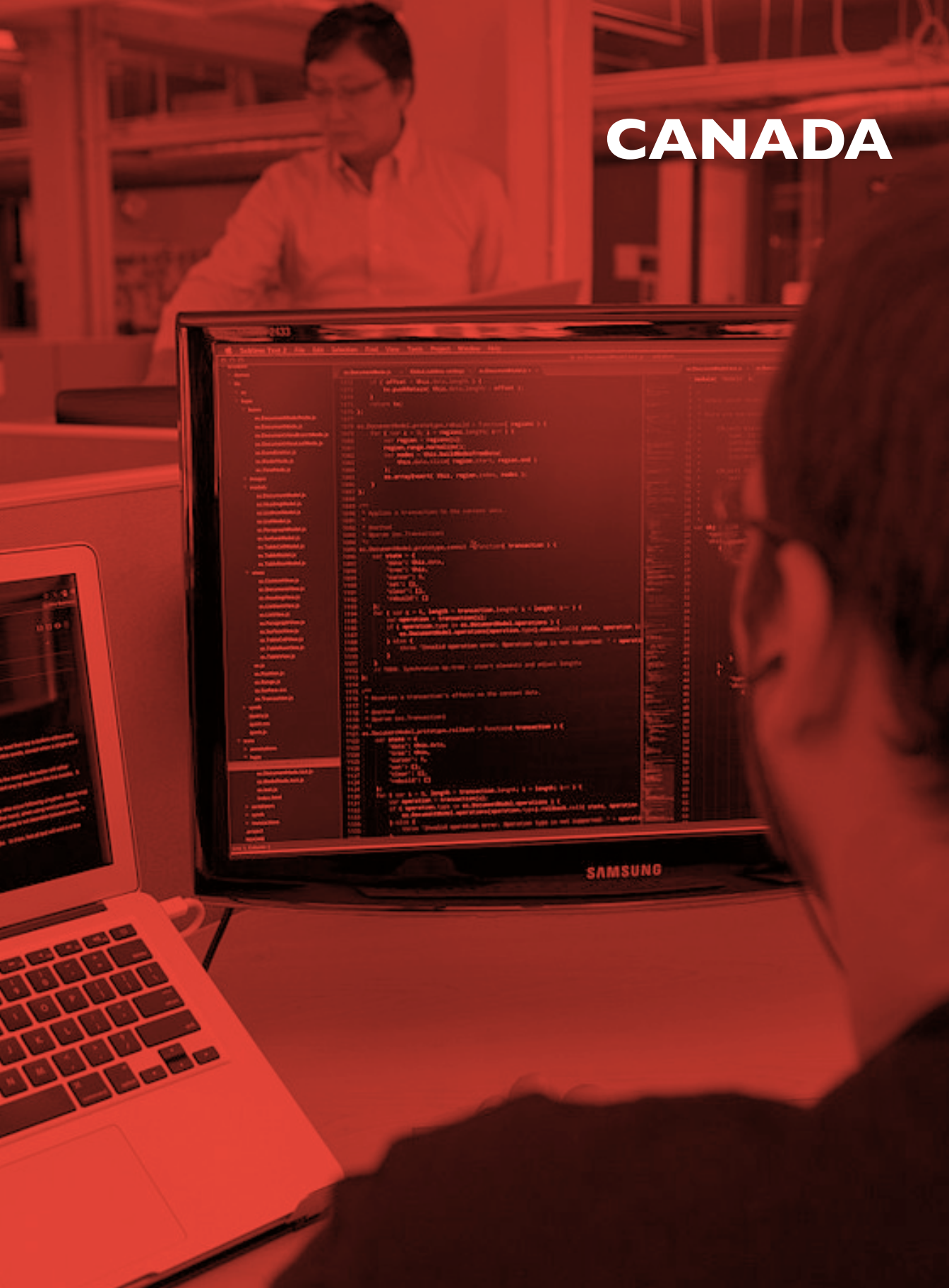
Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 presented the country with an opportunity to break from its Soviet past. In the decade since the revolution, the country has embarked on an ambitious program to transform the former authoritarian state's bureaucratic machinery into open and accountable public institutions. Efforts have persisted through successive administrations, and Georgia continues to reform the civil service and to improve public services through various open government initiatives. What began as an executive-led effort now has begun to take hold in other government institutions, including the legislature, judiciary, and law enforcement.

PUBLISHING PHONE TAPPING DATA

Georgia's Supreme Court is publishing phone tapping records proactively to shed more light on government surveillance activities. Given widespread public interest in this issue, the Supreme Court began collecting statistics on phone tapping for internal use. In response to vigorous advocacy from civil society, the court subsequently began making the data publicly available on its website. It then began publishing annual surveillance statistics proactively, including the number of motions on phone tapping the prosecutors submitted to the courts and the number of motions the courts granted. These data are reported on the court's website on a quarterly basis.

WHY IT MATTERS

Georgia is one of the few countries in the world to publish surveillance data proactively. This helps ensure that law enforcement agencies are subject to oversight. The Supreme Court's leadership on surveillance transparency underscores the shared responsibility of open government. Making governments more open should not be an exclusively executive-led effort. Georgia's experience clearly demonstrates that all branches of government, including the judiciary, have a role in ensuring that the nation's public institutions serve the public interest by becoming more open, transparent, and accountable.



CANADA

SCALING UP OPEN DATA

Canadian legislation, policy, and practice historically has sought to advance transparency, integrity, and openness of government. In fact, Canada became one of the first countries to enact access to information legislation almost three decades ago. However, legislation has not always kept up with technology. The government has begun modernizing the public sector through the adoption of technology and through innovative policy, particularly in the open data space.

HARMONIZING OPEN DATA POLICY ACROSS GOVERNMENT

The government of Canada is developing the infrastructure for a shared, sustainable, and harmonized open data program across all levels of government. This involves working with provinces, territories, municipalities, and departments to remove existing barriers and to develop common open data principles and standards. Additional initiatives to build tools and capacity for open data users complement these efforts. For example, the government is building federated search services with provinces and municipalities to allow users to find information across the government's various open data portals in a single location.

WHY IT MATTERS

By harmonizing and integrating fragmented open data programs and initiatives, the government is building the foundations for open data to spur innovation, to increase productivity, and ultimately to improve the lives of Canadians. This can transform the way data and information is released, searched, and reused, regardless of the government that owns it. Adopting common or compatible open data licenses across government institutions indicates that open data reforms are beginning to take effect.



BULGARIA

INTEGRATING ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND OPEN DATA

Bulgaria continues to improve public services and to modernize its legal transparency and accountability framework—a process that began with the integration of Bulgarian legislation with the European Union acquis. However, in light of persistent reports of corruption, Bulgaria continues to suffer low levels of public trust in state institutions, including parliament. For example, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index places Bulgaria among the lower scoring EU countries, underscoring the problem. Recent efforts to strengthen the country's access to information law can help shore up public confidence by closing the information gap between citizens and government and by giving the public new tools for oversight.

STRENGTHENING THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION LAW

By reforming its access to information law to bring it in line with European Union policy, Bulgaria is strengthening the cornerstone of transparent and accountable government. As part of this effort, the government is amending the law to include provisions for proactive disclosure and is expanding the types of information published online by public bodies. Reform of the law also entails strengthening implementation, oversight, and enforcement mechanisms, which requires a platform for processing requests and administrative sanctions for violating the requirements of the law. The access to information law also is being integrated with an open data framework by establishing data standards across government departments and prioritizing high-value datasets for publication. The government has identified 119 high priority data sets so far.

WHY IT MATTERS

Strengthening Bulgaria's access to information framework could increase proactive disclosure, lead to a common access point for all information requests, and establish common open data standards across government departments. Moreover, prioritizing datasets using public input can help ensure that information published meets the needs of people using government data. This has the potential to narrow the information gap between government and citizens, to break down bureaucratic silos, to improve the accountability of public services, and to ensure prudent management of public resources.



ITALY

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

Marred by frequent changes in government, Italy's unpredictable politics have resulted in fitful reforms. Trust in public institutions has been the real casualty and has continued to erode in a climate of economic uncertainty. Rising populist and anti-establishment movements such as the Five Pillars increasingly are demanding full transparency and technology-enabled, direct democracy. Recent movements towards greater openness, marked by Italy's participation in OGP, have brought into focus the need for reform in a number of areas, including media transparency, the legal framework for access to information, and fiscal accountability.

PUBLISHING PUBLIC EXPENDITURE DATA

Italy is building tools that enable citizens to understand and to track public spending better, with the goal of enhancing accountability for taxpayer money. The [Soldipubblici.gov.it](https://soldipubblici.gov.it) website publishes information on public expenditure from all central and local government agencies on an open data platform, offering citizens a window into how funds are spent. Cash transactions, payments, and collections made by every public administration treasurer are accessible through the online platform. Making the data publicly searchable gives citizens a powerful tool to follow the money and to identify misuse of public funds.

WHY IT MATTERS

Strengthening fiscal transparency through the [Soldipubblici.gov.it](https://soldipubblici.gov.it) website can rebuild public trust by showing citizens how the government conducts business. When complemented with the establishment of an active community of users, the online platform becomes a powerful monitoring and oversight mechanism to bolster government accountability. For example, it could allow civil society advocates to track specific payments to electronic invoices, public contracts, and individuals, with the goal of uncovering fraud, waste, and corruption. Early signs that public officials and civil society are motivated to use the data are promising. The website already averages 1.5 million views each month.

PARAGUAY

EMPOWERING CITIZENS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Corruption in local governments often affects the quality and efficiency of public service delivery in Paraguay. A lack of transparency and accountability is compounded by the general absence of public participation in local government. Recognizing the important function that citizen oversight can play in reducing corruption, Paraguay adopted an ambitious program of developing more than fifty Municipal Development Councils in cities across the country.

ESTABLISHING MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

The government already established seventeen Municipal Development Councils, with forty more currently underway. The councils will provide citizens with an unparalleled opportunity to participate in local government decision making. Designed to bring people together to discuss management of public funds and services, they provide a participatory forum for citizens to develop, to monitor, and to conduct hearings on local development initiatives. This will help make sure that public services become more responsive to community needs.

WHY IT MATTERS

With increased urbanization, the need for effective local government has never been greater. Strengthening open government at the local level can improve citizens' lives directly because many crucial public services are administered locally. Increased transparency and active community engagement in policy deliberation and decision making can enhance the responsiveness and accountability of local government.

Municipal Development Councils are among the most direct forms of open government, allowing direct citizen access and participation in government decision making. The government of Paraguay recognizes that opening the doors to public input in municipalities could have a positive impact on improving governance and public service delivery outcomes. Implementing these councils throughout the country could transform how local governments conduct business.



ANNEX: STAR COMMITMENTS METHODOLOGY

The IRM is a key means by which all OGP stakeholders can track progress on open government commitments in participating countries. The IRM produces progress reports for each country participating in OGP through an internationally reviewed process, led by IRM researchers in each country. These reports are intended to stimulate dialogue and to promote accountability between governments and citizens.¹

The IRM recognizes model commitments in its reports and awards them “stars.” Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments and are used to highlight the major achievements countries are making in their National Action Plans. Commitments encourage a race to the top between OGP-participating countries by highlighting ambitious and innovative approaches to open government reform. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:

- 1 It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have “medium” or “high” specificity on the IRM’s scale.**
- 2 The commitment’s language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of access to information, civic participation, or public accountability.**
- 3 The commitment would have a transformative potential impact if completed. The IRM researcher assesses the context in which the commitment is implemented to evaluate its potential impact. As a consequence, a commitment identified as potentially transformative in one country may not carry over to other contexts.**
- 4 Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving a ranking of “substantial” or “complete” implementation on the IRM’s completion scale.**

For more details on the star commitments, refer to the data from the reports that the IRM publishes regularly in open format. The data for 2016 reports will be made available in mid-2016 and will contain all background data for the starred commitments. Until that database is published, readers are referred to the original reports, from which all IRM data is pulled: <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/irm/irm-reports>

¹ The International Experts Panel tightened this criterion in 2015.
For more information visit: <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/node/5919>

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The Open Government Partnership

is an international multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. To participate in OGP, countries must endorse a high-level Open Government Declaration, deliver a National Action Plan developed with public consultation with civil society, and commit to independent reporting on their progress.

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