



RIIGIKANTSELEI

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### Letter of Candidacy

Republic of Estonia is hereby confirming its intent to run for a government seat on the Steering Committee of the Open Government Partnership (OGP).

Estonia joined the Open Government Partnership in 2012 and we are currently in the process of formulating ideas for the next national action plan. In Estonia's long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035' we have set a goal for Estonia to be an innovative, reliable and people-centred country. The core values of the Government Office, which is responsible for coordinating the activities of Open Government Partnership in Estonia, are openness, reliability, and mastery. We see open governance as a vital building block of our country's development and are continuously looking for new ways to raise the transparency and accountability of political decisions and to make co-creation with Estonia's people a norm in policy-design.

Throughout 10 years of open Government action plans, Estonia has planned and implemented over 60 different activities, which help to enhance transparent, inclusive, and responsible governance. Our focus has been on transparent and inclusive policy-making and the digital infrastructure that supports it. For us the digital means provide opportunity to engage different group into policy-making in a transparent way and this is also in the core of building trust with the citizens.

In October 2022 Estonia assumed the role of government chair of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Steering Committee together with the civil society co-chair Anabel Cruz, Founder and Director of the Communications and Development Institute in Uruguay. The 8<sup>th</sup> Open Government Partnership (OGP) Global Summit held in September 2023 in Tallinn concluded our terms as Co-Chairs and was a success story. The event brought together over 1500 people from around 101 countries, including heads of state and government, civil society organizations, and policy-makers. The Summit reaffirmed the importance of open government, the resilience of civil society, and the pivotal role of technology in shaping the democracies of tomorrow. All those around 50 sessions that were held in two Summit days emphasized that, despite challenges, the global community remains committed to enhancing accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement on a digital frontier.

The organisation of the Summit was also a successful platform that involved different stakeholders and was based on the whole-of-government approach. Different Ministries and other institutions contributed to the organisation of the event, including Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations and hundreds of volunteers from different organisations. Estonian government was represented in the Summit by the prime minister and other ministers. The Summit also paved the way for more sustainable way of organising Global Summits. It was one of the first events in Estonia that analysed its CO<sub>2</sub> footprint allowing future summit organisers to learn from this experience and reduce its footprints in the future. We strongly believe that by organising the Summit, Estonia has shown its commitment to contribute to the management of the Open Government Partnership and we are ready to share our lessons learned with other countries even more than before.

**Estonia has several strengths that it can bring to the Steering Committee** of the OGP, leveraging its past experience and current initiatives. These strengths include:

- E-Government initiatives: Estonia is renowned for its advanced digital infrastructure and e-government services. Its e-Residency program, e-Tax, and digital ID system are exemplary models of how technology can streamline and improve governmental operations and citizen interactions.
- Open data practices: Estonia has been a leader in implementing open data policies, making government data accessible to the public, fostering transparency, and enabling innovation.
- Culture of transparency and anti-corruption measures: Estonia has made significant steps in preventing corruption. Estonia is one of the few countries (if not the only one) where lobbying meetings between high officials and lobbyists are disclosed without the requirements in the law. The meetings are quarterly disclosed on the public dashboards, which gives easy access to journalists and other parties to lobbying activities. The fact that the regulation was approved by the government and obliges government officials to disclose their meetings without tough sanctions in the law demonstrates the existence of the culture of transparency in Estonia.
- Public sector innovation: Estonia's proactive approach to innovation in the public sector, including initiatives like X-Road, an interoperable data exchange layer, showcases how governments can efficiently share information across various departments. Estonia is in the process of development of a collaborative environment for legislative drafting. A comprehensive environment is being created with the state's co-creation project, encompassing the entire lifecycle of a draft bill, allowing for the creation and management of legal changes on the same platform. The system helps engage the public and increases transparency and oversight of state lawmaking. The transition from document-based to information-based processing will increase legislative transparency, allow greater co-creation and reduce the workload of both officials and interest groups spent preparing, updating and processing documents.
- Citizen participation: Estonia has a strong track record of engaging its citizens in decision-making processes through platforms like the Citizen OS, the citizen initiative portal rahvaalgatus.ee and the participatory budgeting initiatives. We also need to focus on the question of how to keep policy-making open and transparent in the era of uncertainties and crises. We see that engaging openly with the civil society is a key to manage different crises, which Estonia has had its share in the recent years. Resilience starts from the cohesive society and cohesiveness starts with strong communities. Therefore, we are looking into ways to improve local-level inclusiveness and open decision-making and working on promoting a community-based governance model.

**Estonia's open government aspirations are well aligned with the OGP strategy** and thus will contribute towards achieving its goals. The OGP strategy emphasizes integrating open government principles across all levels and branches of government. This shift moves from individual actions and commitments to embedding these principles as standard practice throughout governmental operations. We believe that data-based development supports the implementation of the aforementioned OGP principles. We are conducting an innovative pilot project that will create a solution allowing all relevant information related to a presented problem statement to be automatically compiled from the state's textual data and presented comprehensively, clearly, and objectively to policymakers or those preparing policy decisions. Simultaneously, we are developing legal framework and technological solution that in the future will enable the automated use of all available data in the state registers for the aims of policy analysis, while ensuring people's privacy.

An important component of data-driven decision-making is finding solutions where all data can be used for policymaking in a way that does not infringe on people's privacy. Rapid spread of generative AI, the abundance of data, and its destructive use to influence decisions and their transparency, are becoming an increasingly significant problem. Estonia is convinced that this can be avoided or at least mitigated only by using the same technology. We see a lot of potential in the topic of digital democracy and therefore we want to share our experiences and learn from others of how to make policy-making more transparent, also keeping in mind that not all groups are as digitally advanced and we need to be mindful of the gaps.

OGP has a goal of becoming a hub for inspiration and innovation: OGP seeks to position itself as the leading source of innovation, evidence, and stories related to open government. This goal is strongly intertwined with innovation as a whole. The Government Office Estonia leads Estonian public sector innovation. We lead by example: we have a small, dedicated team of people 'Innovation team' that have for 5 years worked with traditional organisations. Although financed by the Government Office they situate mostly with the clients. They are promoting new types of public sector organisations: open, creative, caring. We see public sector organisations developing from specialists' lens to the lens of a citizen. This includes a shift towards more dialogue and consultation between citizens, indicating a move away from the traditional one-sided monologue. Embracing co-creation can make public sector organizations more transparent, enabling them to respond more effectively to changing societal needs. To support these aims Estonia has launched co-creation accelerator for ministries, which will boost open government aims on a bigger scale.

**We see being part of the Steering Committee as a possibility to advocate for an open government on a global scale as well as in Estonia.** In 2023 an Open government roadmap was created, which aimed to improve inclusive policy-making and propose new ways of open and trustful collaboration in the public affairs. This initiative was also awarded by the Transparency International Estonia as the "initiative of the year" in the end of 2023. The roadmap includes around 30 proposals for the ministries and public sector organisations and local governments, which would help to plan and implement activities that would improve the openness, transparency and inclusiveness of the decision-making processes. In the end of 2023, we also concluded a roadmap for better inclusiveness in the EU affairs lead by the European Union Secretariat in the Government Office ([EL asjade menetlemise juhiste lisa 2-Kaasamise teekaart EL asjades.pdf](#)).

Being part of the Steering Committee would help to better communicate and implement these roadmaps, build transparency through data-based decision-making and build innovative co-creation initiatives in Estonia.

In the context of the new action plan for open government in Estonia, we aim to proactively engage groups that have been absent or underrepresented in previous OGP processes to bring their perspectives and challenges into the action plan and to source commitment ideas on fostering inclusive decision-making. We are also committed to continue implementing the open government roadmap through direct engagement of different relevant stakeholders. Our focus in the Steering Committee would be, in collaboration with other countries, on seeking, testing, and implementing solutions that empower open government principles.

**Estonia envisages an inclusive role for all branches of government** should it be elected to the OGP Steering Committee. The Government Office will provide strategic leadership and advocacy for open government initiatives, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will strengthen international collaborations and share Estonia's digital governance and data-based decision-making expertise globally. Additionally, the Ministry of Interior is planning to discuss in the Parliament local-level inclusiveness and citizen participation as a matter of significant national importance this year. Furthermore, the parliament and other ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Justice with relation to anti-corruption initiatives, the Ministry of Economics with respect to digital governance and data-based policy) will be actively involved in implementing and promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement across all levels of government.

To conclude: Estonia is willing to take the responsibility once again of being a member of the Steering Committee. As the head of the Government Office, the OGP point of contact in Estonia, I promise to lead by example in following the principles of open governance and to use the possibilities that come with my position to raise the awareness of these principles among politicians, civil servants, and people of Estonia alike.



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