

# Independent Reporting Mechanism

Bulgaria Co-Creation Brief  
2025

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Open  
Government  
Partnership



Independent  
Reporting  
Mechanism

### Overview

This brief from the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) supports the co-creation process and design of Bulgaria's fifth action plan. It provides an overview of OGP processes in the country and presents recommendations based on collective and country specific IRM findings. The co-creation brief draws from prior IRM reports for [Bulgaria](#), the [OGP National Handbook](#), [OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards](#), and IRM guidance on [the minimum requirements](#). Section 1 offers guidance for OGP processes and co-creation and Section 2 for commitment design. Government and civil society can determine the extent to which this brief is used to shape the next action plan's trajectory and content.

Bulgaria's fourth OGP action plan (2022-2024) ended four years of inactivity in OGP. Despite a challenging political environment, the action plan was developed under an open and participatory co-creation process, involving diverse civil society organizations (CSOs) and commitment thematic areas. Bulgaria's multi-stakeholder forum (MSF), the Transitional Council for Coordination of Bulgaria's Participation in OGP, is co-chaired by government and civil society. The structure of the MSF led to the inclusion of more CSO proposals into the action plan. Bulgaria's OGP website contains information on action plan co-creation but does not include information about commitment implementation.

For the next co-creation process, Bulgaria could consider the following recommendations:

- Ensure that the multi-stakeholder forum meets regularly during periods of political transition
- Provide regular updates on action plan co-creation and commitment implementation
- Include new stakeholder groups in the co-creation process
- Include the National Assembly as an observer in OGP action plan commitment implementation
- Publish reasoned response to commitment proposals during the action plan co-creation process

## Section I: Action Plan Co-Creation

The following recommendations present opportunities for national reformers to strengthen OGP institutions and processes in the country.

### Recommendation 1. Ensure that the multi-stakeholder forum meets regularly during periods of political transition

Bulgaria's multi-stakeholder forum (MSF), the Transitional Council on Coordination on OGP, was reinstated in 2021 and met for the first time in November 2021. Bulgaria's multi-stakeholder forum (MSF) did not meet during the last seven months of the co-creation process of the 2022-2024 action plan. A deputy prime minister and a civil society organization (CSO) co-chair the Council. However, as no government co-chair was appointed for long periods of time, the MSF has only met three times since its establishment.

For the fifth action plan, the MSF should meet at least every six months between the start of the co-creation process until the end of the implementation period, as required under the [OGP's Participation and Co-Creation Standards](#). If there is a gap between the end of the co-creation process and the approval and submission of the national action plan to OGP, the MSF should continue to meet regularly. If there continues to be no government MSF co-chair, the Council of Ministers could substitute the MSF with regular working group meetings on commitments. Alternatively, the Council of Ministers could hold informal MSF meetings, without the government co-chair. The dates and topics of the working groups or informal MSF meetings would need to be documented to prove that they took place. If Bulgaria does not meet the minimum requirements for OGP's Participation and Co-Creation Standards, it could be found acting contrary to OGP process.

### Recommendation 2. Provide regular updates on action plan co-creation and commitment implementation

Bulgaria's [Public Consultations Portal](#) is the country's OGP repository. Standard 2 of [OGP's Participation and Co-Creation Standards](#) requires that countries provide open, accessible and timely information about activities and progress within their participation in OGP. While Bulgaria's fourth action plan met this standard during co-creation of the 2022-2024 action plan, the repository [was not regularly updated](#) during implementation.

The Council of Ministers and the MSF could publish timely information regarding the co-creation process for the fifth action plan, such as invitations to MSF meetings, MSF meeting minutes and commitment proposals received during the co-creation process. To ensure full compliance with OGP's Participation and Co-Creation Standards during action plan implementation, the Public Consultations Portal should be updated with evidence for the implementation of commitments at least twice a year. Evidence could include links or documents that allow the independent verification of commitment implementation status. The MSF could learn from [Canada's OGP commitment monitoring](#), which provides detailed evidence of action plan commitment implementation.

### Recommendation 3. Include new stakeholder groups in the co-creation process

Bulgaria's previous co-creation process included diverse civil society stakeholders focusing on transparency, media freedom and citizen participation. The Council of Ministers held an [open public call](#) to collect commitment proposals and a [public discussion](#) of commitments submitted. While the process was open and inclusive, stakeholders could strengthen the diversity of civil society stakeholders participating in the co-creation of the next action plan.

To make sure that a wide array of civil society priorities is included in Bulgaria's fifth action plan, the Council of Ministers and the MSF could contact stakeholder groups that have not participated in past OGP processes, such as people with disabilities through organizations like the [National Council of People with Disabilities](#), and ethnic minorities like the Roma people through organizations like [Amalipe](#) and [Integro](#). The government could engage new stakeholder groups through thematic workshops, online discussions and surveys. In preparation, it could be helpful to plan for time and resources to communicate with new groups. This may include an in-depth explanation of the OGP process and how the groups' priorities could be addressed in the next action plan.

### Recommendation 4. Include the National Assembly as an observer in OGP action plan commitment implementation

Bulgaria's parliament, the [National Assembly](#), monitors implementation of international conventions through reporting mechanisms. To ensure transparency of the OGP process and consistent monitoring of commitment implementation, especially regarding commitments that face challenges, the Council of Ministers could invite the National Assembly to act as an observer of commitment implementation in the country's fifth OGP action plan. Commitment implementation monitoring by the National Assembly could include regular reports by implementing agencies. North Macedonia is implementing a [similar commitment](#), aiming to include a supervisory discussion on OGP action plan implementation in the country's parliament, the Assembly.

### Recommendation 5. Publish reasoned response to commitment proposals during the action plan co-creation process

Under OGP's [Participation and Co-Creation Standards](#), countries are required to document stakeholders' contributions related to the development of the action plan and report back or publish written feedback to stakeholders on how their contributions were considered. While Bulgaria met the minimum requirement for this standard for the fourth action plan, in the next action plan the MSF could strengthen the transparency of the co-creation process by documenting and publishing the reasoned response for commitment proposals, as was done with submitted [commitment proposals](#). The reasoned response could include a summary of the feedback received from public discussions as well as the explanations for how this feedback informed the final commitment selection and scope.

## Section II: Action Plan Design

The following recommendations offer policy areas for national actors to consider in the next action plan. They may represent opportunities for new commitments to address issues of national importance or to advance existing reforms.

### Area 1. Lobbying transparency

According to [Transparency International Bulgaria](#), lobbying in Bulgaria is largely unregulated and happens without public scrutiny. The [European Commission](#), the [Group of States Fighting Against Corruption](#) (GRECO), and the [OECD](#) have recommended that Bulgaria establish a legal framework on lobbying transparency. Bulgaria's OECD accession process [requires](#) that it pass lobbying transparency legislation. While Bulgaria's [2021-2027 National Strategy for Preventing and Combatting Corruption](#) commits to proposing legislative measures to regulate lobbying activities, this has not yet happened.

The fifth action plan could include a commitment on lobbying transparency. Stakeholders could conduct preparatory work for the creation of a lobbying register, including a needs analysis and mapping of relevant legislation. Such a process could include global best practices such as defining the terms 'lobbying' and 'lobbyist', specifying a potential law's scope of application, as well as providing concrete proposals for a lobbying transparency legal framework. It could also include an analysis of potential barriers to establishing a lobbying register and strategies to address them. Stakeholders could draw lessons from Ireland, which used the OGP process to [implement](#) a commitment reviewing and amending the country's lobbying framework.

### Area 2. Whistleblower protection

The European Union's [Whistleblower Protection Directive](#) requires organizations with more than 50 employees or municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants to establish internal reporting systems and provide external reporting options through designated authorities for breaches of EU law, allowing for the confidential submission of reports. Bulgaria [transposed](#) the Whistleblower Protection Directive into national law in February 2023 through the Protection of Persons Reporting or Publicly Disclosing Information on Breaches Act, which came into force in May 2023. However, many private sector employers face challenges in establishing internal reporting channels, while there are gaps in tracking and follow up on complaints.

Bulgaria could develop a commitment to support the implementation of the whistleblower protection law in the next action plan. For example, it could include a commitment to establish a common reporting system that all organizations subject to the whistleblower law could use. Bulgaria could also create monitoring tools to ensure that public and private organizations covered by the whistleblowing act follow the rules for handling whistleblower reports. The Council of Ministers could include a consultation process with civil society organizations (CSOs) in creating the reporting system and the monitoring tool. The IRM recommends raising public awareness about the rights of whistleblowers, as well as training public officials on handling whistleblower reports. The Slovak

Republic's [Whistleblower Protection Office](#), which produces methodological materials and regularly convenes public and private sector contact persons responsible for handling whistleblower reports for trainings and peer learning, could serve as an example.

### Area 3. Legal transparency

CSOs in Bulgaria have been consistently [advocating](#) for the publication of consolidated versions of laws and other normative acts online for free. Publishing the consolidated versions of laws helps citizens understand and comply with them as well as enhances accountability of public officials. While some private platforms provide simplified versions of laws, there are no official government channels disseminating free consolidated versions of the country's laws.

In the next action plan, the MSF could include a commitment to provide consolidated versions of laws and other normative acts online for free on a government website. To publish the consolidated versions of laws, the MSF could include civil society organizations working on this issue, such as the [Access to Information Program](#) and the [Bulgarian Center for Not-For-Profit Law](#), in the conceptualization, design and usability testing of the platform. Civil society organizations working on the topic could also be involved in monitoring commitment implementation and in flagging errors or omissions. The commitment could be implemented by the National Assembly through the [State Gazette](#) or at bylaw level by each individual government agency. The MSF could use Canada's experience with introducing the [Justice Laws Website](#), a platform providing access to all acts and regulations in consolidated form, as an example.

### Area 4. Budget transparency

While Bulgaria's score in the International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey has been steadily [rising](#), the country has faced [challenges](#) in ensuring transparency of infrastructure spending. According to the European Public Prosecutor's Office [2022 report](#), 143 investigations are currently conducted in Bulgaria, with estimated total funds affected up to €492 million. These discrepancies have led to civil society organizations conducting independent civil [monitoring](#) of public spending.

In the next action plan, the MSF could include a commitment to monitor public sector infrastructure expenses. Such monitoring could require national and municipal authorities to disclose information on public spending like origin of the financing, criteria for project selection, total cost of an investment, cost-benefit analyses as well as details on operating and maintenance costs after commissioning the project. The MSF could include civil society organizations in identifying high-value information about the public spending process, as well as involve them in the monitoring process, by providing channels to flag data omissions or inconsistencies. The MSF could learn from Romania's recent implementation of a [commitment](#) to increase transparency on national investment allocations, which ensured that implementation data for two national investment programs are published multiple

times per year, allowing citizens, journalists and academics regular access to up-to-date data on state funding for local development.

### Area 5. Civic space

The protection of civic space is an important policy area for Bulgaria's open government process. Civicus has consistently assessed the country's civic space as [narrowed](#). Despite a challenging political environment, Bulgaria has taken steps to strengthen civic space through the creation of the [Council for the Development for Civil Society](#) (CDCS). CDCS is an advisory body composed of 14 CSOs supporting the government in elaborating and implementing policies for the development of civil society, including a public CSO funding framework. It also functions as an expertise-sharing platform for CSO public policy recommendations. The creation of the CDCS was also a [commitment](#) in the country's second OGP action plan. However, the CSO network European Civic Forum has [noted](#) that the CDCS's work is irregular, while the Bulgarian Center for Not-For-Profit Law expressed [concerns](#) about the CDCS not having started to implement two of the Council's central priorities, a funding mechanism for CSOs and the new Strategy for Supporting CSOs.

The MSF could consult with civil society to design a commitment that addresses key civic space challenges. For instance, the MSF could include a commitment to strengthen the work of the CDCS in the next action plan. This could include ensuring that the CDCS itself is provided with sufficient financial and administrative resources to conduct and expand its work on civil society state funding and the new Strategy for the Development of Civil Society. Stakeholders could draw from [Lithuania](#) and [Latvia](#), which introduced NGO funds to strengthen the institutional capacities of civil society organizations to participate in government decision-making and [Finland](#), which established a comprehensive CSO strategy to support the continued functioning of CSOs in the country. Morocco's [commitment](#) addressing civil society's legal, funding and capacity priorities could also serve as a good example.

The brief was reviewed by IRM senior staff for consistency, accuracy, and with a view to maximize the context-relevance and actionability of the recommendations. Where appropriate, external reviewers or members of the IRM International Experts Panel (IEP) review briefs.