



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISË
KRYEMINISTRIA

SECRETARIAT MEETING NOTES

E-MEETING WITH THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY/ KËSHILLIT KOMBËTAR PËR SHOQËRINË CIVILE

(KKSHC)

OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP (OGP)

Place: Hosted by the Office of the Prime Minister virtually

Date: 26.11.2020

Headed: Ms Alberta Nikolla, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection,
Ministry of Health and Social Protection

Annexes:

Annex 1: Attendance of the Meeting

Annex 2: Operational Conclusions

The list of participants is presented in the Documentation Package (referred to in the last section)

I. Opening Remarks by Alberta Nikolla, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Health and Social Protection

The Chair of the meeting, Ms. Albert Nikolla began the meeting by thanking the Department of Development and Good Governance (DD&GG) unit under the Prime Minister's Office for the progress made on the New Action Plan (NAP) 2020-2022. She further thanked all the Lead Focal Points (LFPs) and every person who has taken initiative and discharged their duties for the success of this NAP.

II. Introduction of 4 Newly Elected Members, Representatives of Civil Society

Following the Opening Remarks, the Deputy Minister also welcomed four new representatives of the National Council for Civil Society. These are Armando Bala and Dritan Sakuta working in the areas of democratization, rule of law, human rights and EU integration, Ermelinda Mahmutaj working in the areas of economic, territorial and environmental development, and Andi Rabaj working in the field of improving welfare, social services, health protection and quality of life.

III. Presentation on the Consultation of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plan, Ms Oriana Arapi, Unit Director on Strategic Planning and Development

Ms Oriana began her session by thanking the entire team for the commitment to the OGP cause over the months. She also thanked the Deputy Minister for chairing the meeting. She emphasized how the New Action Plan 2020-2022 also relates to the National Election Plan.

In her presentation, she stressed the New Action Plan for the OGP process being created by combining the forces of government and civil society, working together to co-create ambitious commitments across a range of issues. From July 2020 until now the Albanian Government, under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister & the Development and Good Governance Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister has worked with key public institutions and members of civil society organizations (CSOs) during 14 stakeholder consultations to draft a set of ten reform commitments for inclusion in Albania's 2020-2022 OGP Action Plan.

Ms Oriana emphasized the core principles of the OGP process- transparency, accountability, civic and public participation, and technology and innovation as cross-cutting themes across the 4 components- anti-corruption, digital governance, access to justice, fiscal transparency- of NAP 2020-22. She also outlined the calendar plan for the NAP 2020-2022 in Albania beginning in July and ending in December. Further enumeration of each component and associated LFPs was done. This was followed by explanation of the role of the Technical Secretariat (DD&GG) as the Government Point of Contact (POC) towards improved coordination, accountability and stakeholder involvement through guidance on the OGP website, thematic stakeholder consultations, feedback and design of management calendar.

IV. Presentation of TA to Support the Implementation of the Civil Society Road Map

1) Anti-Corruption, Ms Adea Pirdeni MD, Deputy Minister of Justice:

The Deputy Minister began by thanking everyone for the assistance on the OGP process thus far. She acknowledged that civil society has played an important role in supporting the fight against corruption and improving access to justice.

MoJ/NCAC has established a network of CSO-s for consulting and discussing the anticorruption policy documents and reports. NCAC has a very good experience working with CSO-s as it is the drafting of the integrity instruments. During the pre-consultation phase, 34 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were contacted for eliciting feedback, and 3 responded. However, during the stakeholder feedback phase 14 stakeholders participated.

The main issues raised by stakeholders include adoption of acts to check for corruption cases, ethical behavior and accountability; oversight mechanisms, percentage of audited budgets, percentage of recruitment of new public servants transparently; lack of transparency regarding Public Procurement Contracts / Public Private Partnerships; improving the public services and promoting of ethic and transparency; trainings of civil servants on risks of integrity and IP; corruption proofing of legislation methodology drafted; and continuous trainings on whistle blower internal mechanisms.

The main recommendations provided by the civil society were the following:

- Budget reports should be simplified to be understandable by citizens;
- Publication of concession contracts' /PPP;
- User friendly of public administrations acts and standardization of reporting in webpages of institutions; programs of transparencies;
- Increasing the number of CSO-s and their involvement in monitoring and implementation of the strategic policy documents; and
- Government – CSO partnership to be established in revising of strategic policy documents.

These feedbacks have fructified into two commitments- integrity plans and beneficial ownership. The priority measures under integrity plans include: a) they are drafted and approved by central government institutions; b) comprehensive analysis on the applicability of integrity plans in the Ministry of Justice and line ministries. The priority measures under beneficial ownership include: a) Approval of the draft law “Register of Beneficial Ownership”; b) Implementation of the Law on the Register of Beneficial Ownership.

2) Access to Justice, Ms Adea Pirdeni MD, Deputy Minister of Justice:

The Open Society Foundation for Albania has supported the establishment of the *Directorate of Legal Aid Guaranteed by the State* to help citizens who do not have the financial means to pursue their problems; Through this, the State ensures state-guaranteed legal representation and assistance, coordination and collaboration with civil society organizations to ensure that all citizens have access to quality legal support and resources.

Elaborating on the pre-consultation process, Ms Adea remarked that 90 civil society organizations were invited to provide feedback on the survey questionnaire. However, only 14 organizations responded. Limited response may have been due to busy agendas, inadequate conditions due to the Covid-19 situation, the publication of the questionnaire in August when most are on leave or that many stakeholders do not have direct contact with the Ministry of Justice regarding access to information published by the MoJ.

Despite these, the feedback received highlighted increased access to complete and more detailed information on the MoJ website; full functioning of mediation for resolving legal issues; increasing cooperation with civil society & universities; capacity building of the Directorate of Prisons, the Institute of Forensic Medicine and the Rehabilitation System; increasing the efficiency in giving answers to the citizens and solving the problems that arise in their complaints; and reducing the bureaucracy in the justice system.

The main recommendations provided by the civil society are the following:

- Improve the quality of representation in trials;
- Strengthen the system of transparency, efficiency & impartiality in Albanian courts;
- Increase the capacity of civil society to monitor & address these issues;
- Create simpler & less bureaucratic mechanisms to facilitate citizens' access to justice;
- Accelerate justice reform: improve independence & impartiality of the justice system;
- Organize training courses for administrative staff of courts & prosecutor's offices;
- Increase stakeholder involvement in consultative roundtables & establish dialogue to strengthen cooperation in the consultation & decision-making process for justice reforms;
- Establish an electronic register for magistrates, judges & prosecutors;
- Increase control & periodic reporting on aspects of changes in justice; and

- Legislation review focusing on collective claims, small claims.

The commitments identified through this process are the following: a) Access to justice is guaranteed & aligns with EU standards & best practices; b) Transparency & accountability strengthened in the Ministry of Justice.

3) *Fiscal Transparency, Ms Blerina Gjati and Mr Eros Angjeli, Ministry of Finance and Economy*

CSOs with related missions on economic development and public finance issues and/or Universities-such as Faculty of Economy have been involved in PFM consultation workshops/ committees. (as: EMA, Open Society Foundation, Open Data Albania, Co-Plan, GADC etc.). With specific regard to the OGP process, 57 CSOs were invited to provide feedback, and 4 CSOs responded. Total of 6 stakeholders participated in the consultation process.

The main issues identified by stakeholders include limited publication and access to the government financial statistics data to the public; non-simplified budget documents, as citizen budget at central and local level, budget execution report; limited publication of concession contracts and specially for monitoring the concession authorities on the basis of performance; limited citizens engagement in the budget process etc.

The key recommendations to have emerged from the stakeholder consultation process are the following:

- Increase the public trust of government work;
- Fight corruption perception;
- Increase citizens' engagement in budget process;
- Unify taxpayer system at all municipalities;
- Simplify content of key budget documents;
- Increase public participation in budget processes;
- Improve the monitoring of concessionaire contracts & publish information based on their performance;
- Publish concessionaire contracts;
- Set clear targets & performance management (sometimes there are not clear targets during the budget process formulation);
- Strengthen role of auditing in budgetary process;
- Simplify Citizen's Budget document at local level;
- Publication & public access to government financial statistics data;
- Provide unique account system for all BIs at local levels;
- Expand AGFIS in BIs at local level;

Budget transparency and transparency in public revenue are the key commitments that have been identified for the fiscal transparency component.

4) *Digital Governance, Ms Marseda Prifti, National Agency for Information Services (NAIS), Ms Deborah Hatellari, Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services (ADISA)*

In order to increase collaboration with civil society ADISA has periodical meetings and Focus Groups with representatives of civil society to promote continuous improvement in

service delivery process, and to support the necessary change in the institutional and management culture.

There were 44 CSOs whose feedback was elicited in the pre-consultation survey phase of the OGP process 2020-2022. During the stakeholder consultation process, 4 stakeholders participated. The main issues raised by the stakeholders were the lack of accessibility in public services for people with intellectual disabilities; and insufficient accessibility for marginalized groups of public service delivery.

The main recommendations that came up from the CSOs are the following:

- The addition of a section which identifies marginalized groups in the questionnaire that ADISA uses to measure citizen satisfaction in the Integrated Service Centres (ISC's);
- Converting the official website in an easy-reading format;
- Training of ADISA office clerks to deliver public services to people with intellectual disabilities.

The commitments that have been identified include: a) development of e-government through provision of interactive electronic public services for citizens & businesses; b) expansion and increased accessibility of the open data portal; c) establishment of Integrated Service Centres (ISCs); and d) monitoring the quality of public service delivery at ISCs.

Discussion:

Comment 1: After the first two presentations, Indrit Seferi, representative of civil society asked how government institutions can facilitate civil society/ various non-governmental organizations to create a bridge of real and effective cooperation. Elaborating further, he opined that this question was of significance in the contemporary development world which is very results-drive. Hence it was imperative for both government institutions and civil society to transition together and contribute towards each other's growth and development. Ms Alberta requested Indrit to wait until the end of all presentations for the question to be answered.

Comment 2: At the end of all presentations, Mr Vladimir Thanu asked Ms Oriana Arapi if there exists any civil society organization that is directly related to OGP in Albania. Ms Oriana replied in the negative and clarified that she is not informed of any such organization. Mr Vladimir responded that he is aware of the existence of a CSO (some time back) with representatives from the OGP based in the USA.

Comment 3: Mr Vladimir further elaborated that the tasks of the National Council of Civil Society are precisely defined: advises the council of ministers, proposes to the council of ministers the main programs for all sustainable developments of civil society, advises the council of ministers in legislation, gives recommendations for public policies (towards which today's presentation on the OGP process contributes) and for the distribution of public funds. He elaborated that the National Council of Civil Society, according to article 7, reports on its activity at least once a year to the Council of Ministers. He opined that this is a legal commitment that needs to be improved and the Prime Minister should be brought a report on the work of the Council, and not limited to the engagements that have been made during the period.

Comment 4: Indriti Seferi asked how much has been communicated with health associations regarding the pandemic situation, especially those attached to the Ministry of Health which is the first to operate and direct all other institutions towards this challenge. Associations that may not have a direct association with medicine, health etc could also contribute towards meeting the pandemic challenge now. How do we find common terms to be able to contribute towards better managing the pandemic?

Reiterating the previous point of his, he said it must be seen how government institutions in particular can help civil society, and also for the civil society to give its contribution in a realistic way, to benefit the community to be healthier, more effective and more developed. The entire burden towards this objective should not be left to the Ministry of Health- even in the organization and structure of the Council, line ministries can help the Ministry of Health according to expertise, so that all organizations can ensure better quality and have a better structured approach towards solving the crisis.

Comment 5: Ms Alberta Nikolla, in response to the concerns raised, emphasized that the pandemic situation has brought to attention a special focus 'needs in the health system'. For this reason, the health system has become one of the priority sectors of the Albanian government today. We have made a series of consultations with civil society organizations regarding the draft budget for 2021-2023, during the period in which this draft budget was open for consultation. We have also been in constant communication with the associations of doctors and nurses to receive valuable expert opinions on the systemic health issues. At the moment, communications have been made only at the expert level. We will soon initiate consultations with the civil society organization on the new health strategy. Moreover, we have prepared the report for the implementation of the existing strategy, and the order of the Minister for drafting the new strategy has been issued. When we start the consultation process for the new health strategy, civil society organizations will be involved in the whole consultation process. She further clarified that no association has been involved so far, as the responsibility lies with the experts who are part of the group set up by special order based on the legislation in force.

Conclusions and Follow up:

- 1) It was decided to provide a window until 6th December, 2020 to receive feedback on the OGP process from civil society organizations.
 - 2) In accordance to the abovementioned rule, Armando Bala, President of New Vision organization e-mailed his feedback on 2nd December, 2020. He wanted to bring to attention that there is a state portal <https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/> , where all public announcements and consultations are presented. Based on the format of this portal, he believes that it is valuable for Civil Society consultations to have an information format, where these consultations are published on the official website of the NSCC and social networks. This innovation will bring a productive interaction between the NCSC and Civil Society organizations, where the NCSC will have an informative and supportive role for these institutions. Also, this mechanism will bring benefits to the NCSC, where it will increase its visibility by affecting a large stakeholder and will increase credibility as an institution vis- Civil Society.
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Attached documents:

1. *Attendance list.*

Support Unit of the General Secretariat