



Research summary: The Governmental Accessibility Project

Trends threatening a democratic state have been evident in Lithuania for the past few years already. They include the gap between society and government, reticence of government and extremely high public distrust of government institutions. In order to solve these problems and especially reduce the gap between government institutions and the public, it is essential to ensure greater accessibility to government institutions.

By implementing a comprehensive analysis of the openness and accessibility of Lithuanian government institutions, the following main limitations have been exposed:

- Issues in access to information. To begin with, there is no single and citizens-friendly system providing information with regards to debates on various issues and drafting of legislation. Even if a lot of information is provided, it is difficult for the citizens to use it, as it is not clear and consistent enough. Furthermore, there is a lack of a single decision impact assessment system. Therefore, the consequences of decisions are rarely competently evaluated. The issues are even more evident with regards to the executive authorities and municipalities. Information provided by them is very incomplete, compared to the other institutions. Moreover, project coordination at the government level is not transparent. The public is only introduced with the final results when it is already too late for their opinion to be expressed and taken into account. Consequently, government decisions are rather unpredictable.
- Issues limiting citizens' participation in the decision-making process. To begin with, the relationship between government and citizens is too formalized. Furthermore, the opportunities for citizens to participate at the municipality-level institutions are unused, even though they do formally exist. Also, citizens are not educated how to use their civil and political rights. Therefore, there is a lack of interest in public affairs, finances and participation in the decision-making processes. As well as that, there is a lack of feedback from the government institutions. Opinions expressed by citizens are rarely taken into account and it is often not justified why they were rejected. Finally, the practises of public consultations and hearings are not present. Government institutions avoid using these forms of public dialogue, whereas citizens do not have enough experience to use them.

Based on the issues outlined above, the following recommendations are provided. They are aimed at improving the accessibility and openness of government institutions.



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- Improving the system of information provision to citizens. In order to do this, it is important to eliminate all the unnecessary informational restrictions and barriers as well as ensure the quality standards of information provided, such as its consistency and comprehensiveness. Also, it is necessary to introduce a single online database available to all the citizens. It should include the following features: documents accompanying and clarifying various projects, which would make government decisions more transparent; consistent and detailed interconnected network, which would allow users find all the inter-related legislations; legislations and their drafts should be announced in real-time; opportunities for the public to submit their feedback on various projects prepared by the government; information about activities and financing of all levels of government institutions; the database should be as user-friendly as possible.

Legislations and their drafts prepared by local self-government institutions should also be included in the database. In additions to this, it is important to ensure that the information is provided as soon as possible, without delays. When applicable, electronic questionnaires should be provided for the interested citizens willing to express their opinion and observations. Registered users should also be allowed to selectively subscribe to adopted legislations and draft decisions that are being prepared by government institutions. The staff of these institutions should also be trained about the principles of information provision to society. Finally, government institutions should take the initiative and encourage society to contribute to political decisions.

- Expanding opportunities for people to get involved in the decision-making process. In order to do this, it is important to establish the principle of government institutions actively seeking society's participation in the decision-making. The principle should be clearly established in both legislations and work practices. In additions to this, it is necessary to provide society with consistent civic and political education. Also, the practices of public consultations and hearings should be established. Most legislation should only be adopted after the citizens had some time to express their opinions on publicly available legislation drafts. The level of petition support should be differentiated and the procedure of e-petitions should be legitimized and simplified. There should also be an opportunity to implement the citizens-right of legislative initiative electronically. The rights of citizens to participate in the legislative processes of self-government institutions should be regulated as well. Finally, the institute of *actio popularis* should be established in Lithuania.