



2020

# Openness in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Prepared by the Department  
of International and Regional Cooperation  
Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation

# Table of contents

I. Openness of Information.....	2
1. Concept and Value of Openness.....	2
2. Openness as a Source of Manageable Public Change.....	5
3. Consequences of Openness.....	10
4. Tools for Implementing and Maintaining Openness.....	11
II. Openness in the context of the Pandemic.....	13
1. Government Openness.....	13
1.1 Openness of Information.....	13
1.2 Functional Openness.....	15
1.3 Open Dialogue .....	16
2. SAI Openness as Part of the Government Openness .....	17
2.1 International Standards.....	17
2.2 National Level.....	18
2.3 Request for information from citizens during the pandemic .....	20
2.4 How do SAIs adapt to the pandemic? .....	22
3. Openness in International Organisations .....	24
III. Conclusions .....	27

# I. Openness of Information

## 1. Concept and Value of Openness

Public legislative process, availability of data on government institutions and all government activities are becoming an important criterion for assessing the "maturity" of public administration. The issue of government openness is based on the idea of accountability of elected government representatives and officials they appoint.

The relevant "ideology" in countries with an advanced civic culture is embodied in public policy discussions, debates, the ability to keep track of bills introduced by an official or an elected politician, transparent government spending, access to public records and many other tools.

According to the [OECD principles](#), an open government means that businesses, civil society organisations and citizens can:

- "know," i.e. obtain relevant and understandable information
- "acquire," i.e. obtain public services and engage with the government
- "create," i.e. participate in the decision-making process

The following internationally accepted principles of *good governance* lay the foundation for an open government:

- transparency and accountability
- integrity and equality
- efficiency and effectiveness
- rule of law and high standards of ethical conduct.

Openness of information implies a broad range of legal and communication tools that should be at citizens' disposal in order to obtain information which is in the domain of the government. The key to providing this category of openness is specialised legislation on openness of information that acts as an anti-corruption tool.

There is still no universally accepted definition of an open government; different countries are developing and conceptualizing this agenda, giving their own features and accents.

First of all, open data requires a mechanism to proactively obtain information (data) from the government. This means that the government publishes data whether it is requested or not, i.e. autonomously and regularly. Open data is generally published online in the public domain. Examples of open data in Russia are data on government procurement and budget institutions, tax data, government statistics.

Information openness is not just demonstration of activities to the public, but also the willingness to engage with it. Such engagement is aimed at improving the quality of decisions made and achieving a balance of interests. Open dialogue is a category that involves citizens' and businesses' direct participation in government decision-making and their ability to control its quality. The mechanisms may include public consultations, review of draft laws, participatory and initiative budgeting, public discussions, voting on particular issues, online petition mechanisms and online receptions. For example, in Russia there are such services such as [Aktivny Grazhdanin](#) (*Active Citizen*) in Moscow, or the possibility for citizens to participate in discussions of draft bills through the [Federal Portal of draft regulations](#).

In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the Government of the Russian Federation launched [стопкоронавирус.рф](#) (*stopcoronavirus*) website to inform about the situation in the country.

The idea of open government has been conceptualised and developed in the world since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The evolution of this process can be traced back to major international standards and recommendations on government openness and access to information held by public authorities.

Another example of the evolution of government openness is the gradual introduction of openness into national legislation.

[The first countries](#) to have laws providing for a right to access information are: Sweden (1766), Finland (1951), the United States (1966), Denmark (1970), Norway (1970), Austria (1973), France (1978), the Netherlands (1978), New Zealand (1982), Australia (1982), Canada (1982) and Japan (1982).

On 2 December 1766, Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) passed the world's first *His Majesty's Gracious Ordinance Relating to Freedom of Writing and of the Press*

providing citizens with freedom of speech.

The right of citizens to receive official information is now recognised by international law as a fundamental human right. Laws ensuring this right and regulating the provision of information are now in force in more than 40 countries around the world.

For example, China has adopted laws on personal data protection, E-commerce, protection of intellectual property rights on the Internet aimed at curbing violations of human rights on the Internet.

The USA has adopted the [Freedom of Information Act](#) (FOIA) in 1966. This Act is focused on specific mechanisms for citizens to access clearly defined types of information, for example documentary information held by U.S. federal agencies. The U.S. law has been used as a benchmark for similar acts in other countries. A fundamental concept of FOIA is that all information collected and held by any government agency is considered public domain and that all U.S. citizens have access to it, while the burden of proving that the disclosure of any information is likely to harm the national interest rests with the government and its agencies.

The U.S. is struggling today for the safe Internet use. The major document is the 2011 [U.S. International Strategy for Cyberspace](#). It is a fundamental document that supports three principles: freedom of expression, privacy and free flow of information. The Strategy is consistent with the core U.S. goal of "working internationally to promote an open, interoperable, secure, and reliable information and communications infrastructure that supports international trade and commerce, strengthens international security, and fosters free expression and innovation."

The importance of citizens' access to public information as a means of ensuring government transparency and public participation in the democratic process has been accepted in Europe at least since 1950, when the Council of Europe drafted the [European Convention on Human Rights](#). Article 10.1 of this document states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."

Although there is no law in the UK giving citizens a common right to access government information, there is the [Code of Practice on Access to Government Information](#) published in 1995. It provides the right of access to information within a limited range, but this right is not enforceable.

The Code was a response to the Right to Know Bill drafted in 1993. The Bill was not passed, but the government responded with a White Paper setting out the principles included in the Code. It contained the right of access to information held by local authorities, as well as to various types of personal data such as medical records and social services documents.

As part of the G8, Russia along with other member countries signed the [Open Data Charter](#) in summer 2013.

Public openness in Russia has improved significantly over the past few years: there are more websites, more information, more interactive services and opportunities for communication. The Russian Federation is constantly improving its position in high-profile international ratings that directly or indirectly characterise the development of information and communication technologies, their role in the work of the government and information openness of social life.

## 2. Openness as a Source of Manageable Public Change

Social progress today is driven by the distribution of information.

The level of information openness of the authorities is one of the most comprehensive indicators of the country's development level. To see how democratic a society is, you can look at how the right of its citizens to information on decisions and efforts of the authorities is legally established and implemented. Information openness of the authorities enables citizens and organisations to get an adequate idea and form a judgment on the state of society and public administration.

World experience leads to the conclusion that information openness is the driver of society and government. It both affects changes in the conduct of the authorities, increasing their responsibility and efficiency, and contributes to a major breakthrough

in the society.

Information exchange facilitates development of a new environment, new social and moral values, a new way of life and new management principles in modern society. Information-closed systems are not competitive today. Countries where people have complete information about the government efforts have less corruption, the bureaucracy observes the rule of law and works in a more responsible and effective way. On the other hand, lack of transparency, withholding information and information monopoly are the key weapons the red tape uses to impose its will on the society, while remaining without control.

It results in irresponsibility, incompetence, corruption and incapacity of bureaucracy.

[The Open Government Index](#) was developed in 2014 and measures government openness based on the general public's experiences and perceptions worldwide. This is a hybrid indicator based on data from both expert sources and opinion polls in the countries covered by the study. The authors of the rating assessed the government openness in 102 countries and regions based on four key indicators showing the degree of public awareness of public authorities' activities and assessing public participation in decision-making processes, as well as the ability of citizens to exercise their rights:

- Openness of government data to the public (public awareness of the efforts of government agencies).
- Right of citizens to information (access of individuals and organisations to information about the efforts of government agencies, including means of implementing the right of citizens to receive such information). Civic engagement (civic engagement in decision-making of public importance, including public control mechanisms).
- Mechanisms for citizens to exercise their rights (opportunities for citizens to exercise their rights, including mechanisms for considering and responding to petitions and complaints).

The international independent organisation [World Justice Project](#) presented [The Open Government Index 2015](#). The first six places are: Sweden, New Zealand, Norway,

Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland. These countries have almost no corruption, and they have the highest levels of press freedom. Russia ranks 67<sup>th</sup> among 102 countries.

The movement towards openness in terms of global practices can be explicitly focused on particular instruments and mechanisms of openness.

The UK assesses openness through open data. The government believes that the publication of open data sets on all possible areas of government efforts helps to increase the government accountability to society, puts the government under public control, reduces the government costs of processing information from the outside and, most importantly, develops innovative economic sectors by encouraging the establishment of commercially successful companies that use some open public data in their work.

The US government, developing all areas of open government, focuses on civic engagement and cooperation with the government in order to form initiatives to improve the quality of interaction with society and reduce its own costs. Such development is possible in the US because there is a high level of civic activism and even civic pressure through specialised non-profit organisations on citizens' rights to information (such as [Sunlight Foundation](#)) to form independent initiatives and proposals that government agencies must listen to and take into account. It is important to emphasize the entrepreneurial nature of the emerging relations between the government and society, when cooperation based on openness results in economic benefits for partners. An example of a very popular project in the U.S. is [www.challenge.gov](#), a website where authorities at all levels provide an opportunity for everyone to propose solutions to various government challenges through grants.

The Brazilian Government sees openness as major mobilisation and engagement of citizens in public administration and a cooperative search for solutions. Brazil is at the stage of building and strengthening civic society and tightening the anti-corruption campaign through the use of openness tools. Not only does the government raise public awareness by creating public information systems in a way to ensure transparent budget expenditures and accountability of public officials' expenditures, but it also compiles blacklists of officials and companies directly or indirectly involved

in corruption. In 2012–2013, Brazil organised many conferences that mobilised more than 160,000 citizens and brought more than 20,000 new ideas for improving interaction between the government and civil society. Another area of openness is globally linked to open scientific findings. When scientists from different countries disclose and upload scientific findings in a certain way, they will have unlimited opportunities to access and use new knowledge.

The government of South Korea has focused its efforts on improving the quality of public services, especially e-services, by widely introducing public feedback and assessment of the quality of services received.

Citizens can promptly inform the government about the way of interaction they think is the most convenient to apply for public services and in which information clusters this interaction is most in demand.

OECD experts [summarised global practices](#) of open government initiatives and described three major strategies for public administration reforms.

- **Customer orientation in relations with citizens.** The government mobilizes civil society by offering each social group interesting services and convenient ways of communication, building a dialogue and providing access to public resources and benefits.
- **Engagement of the private sector and civil society.** The government delegates a number of services to businesses and NPOs, while retaining control and supervisory powers. A number of countries (e.g. the UK) have managed to establish volunteer activities, involving citizens in the provision of public services, for example in the social sector. In this case, the incentive system is not directly linked to cash rewards but provides benefits and rights to use the infrastructure. Businesses and NPOs become partners of the government in service delivery.
- **Involvement of all reference groups, including regional and especially municipal governments.** This strategy is relevant for countries with independent and well-resourced municipalities that are integrated into the public service network. The government is to mobilise and integrate resources and skills at all levels of governance in order to achieve high quality of public services and effective interaction with society.

**The Government of the Russian Federation**, while implementing the openness

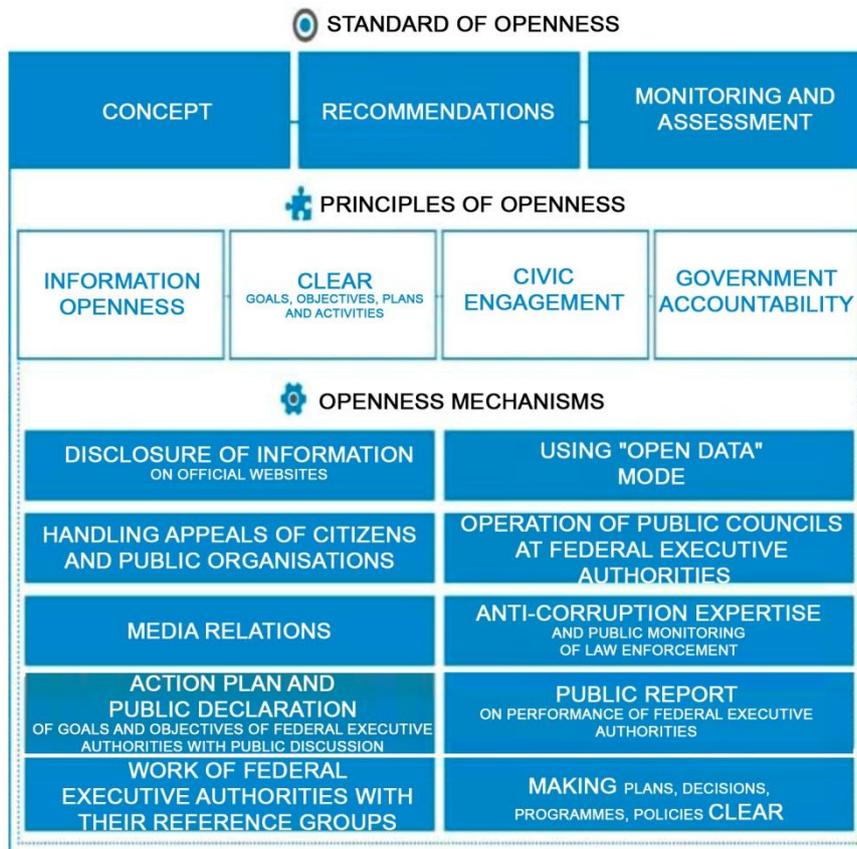
ideology at the federal level, approved the [Federal Executive Authorities Openness Concept](#) in January 2014, which served as a basis for the Standard of Federal Executive Authorities Openness.

The Standard distinguishes four principles of openness:

- Information openness of federal executive authorities (reliable information, formats convenient for further work, timely publication, disclosure "by default" unless there are special restrictions);
- clarity of goals, objectives, plans and activities of the federal executive authorities;
- involvement of civil society in the development and implementation of management decisions (consideration of opinions and priorities, systematic dialogue);
- accountability of the authorities (development of public control mechanisms).

According to the Standard, the principal openness mechanisms include

- information disclosure on official websites of federal executive authorities;



- maintaining an open data policy (publication of data in a machine-readable format suitable for further automated processing);
- processing and responding to appeals from citizens and public organisations;
- Operation of public councils at federal executive authorities;
- Media relations;
- independent anti-corruption expertise and public monitoring of law enforcement;
- adoption of an activity plan and annual public declaration of goals and objectives of the federal executive authorities, their public discussion and expert support;
- public report on performance of federal executive authorities;
- ongoing work of federal executive authorities (FEAs) with their reference groups (broad social groups whose members have similar requests to a ministry or department);
- making plans, decisions, programmes, policies and regulations of FEAs clear (explaining their necessity and targets).

Therefore, openness as a source of manageable social change is a multi-factor tool that is quickly developing. Countries that use it in their development emphasize different elements of this tool. It is obvious that this is determined by the context of a particular country. However, in general, this is an integrated and universal mechanism.

### 3. Consequences of Openness

Information openness is now becoming a prerequisite for gaining trust. Investors need full information about business prospects, legislation and opportunities for cooperation with partners in the relevant industries and regions. Lack of necessary information is considered to be an investment risk: poor "transparency" of government activities, lack of access to investment-significant information indicate the probability of losing investments and income. Information that does not meet the openness criteria can severely compromise investment [attractiveness](#).

One of the serious resources to create a favourable investment climate is to increase transparency of public [procurement](#) at the regional and municipal levels, since public procurement is one of the key elements of business trust in the government. If they are transparent, new proposals will appear from both small and medium-sized

businesses and non-profit organisations, which will fill a niche in social services. It is also important to increase transparency of state-owned enterprises and natural monopolies.

Modern principles of government openness include not only higher transparency of information about the government activities, but wider access for citizens to information from automated databases maintained by the government and its subordinate agencies.

Automated access to government databases will make it possible to create innovative methods of interaction between the government and society in a wider area of relations, give an impulse for the development of modern tools for automated analysis of government activities based on open data as well as significantly reduce the cost of providing automated interagency and interregional information interaction.

## 4. Tools for Implementing and Maintaining Openness

Today we can see digital technology transforming all traditional relationships. *Uber* and *Yandex* taxi are available in different countries with convenient interaction between passengers and taxi drivers. *Airbnb* offers a flexible, controlled interaction between owners and tenants. *Kickstarter* enables authors of innovative ideas to raise money for future products or services, *Upwork* in the U.S. and similar platforms in other countries provide a full cycle of relations between freelancers and employers.

The relationship between the government and citizens is realised through the same "digital platforms." This is a set of convenient and effective electronic tools and services that combine all the existing disparate systems of ministries and agencies and digitise all types of interaction between citizens and the government. The goals of the government and business related to digital public administration platforms to improve the quality of services and interaction with consumers are similar in the strategic perspective.

All government digital platforms are based on the following principles:

- technology (artificial intelligence, big data and predictive analytics, virtual,

augmented and mixed reality technologies, new communication technologies and increased use of the Internet of Things, development of blockchain, new interfaces of human-machine interaction, development of security technologies, including cyber security, development of 3D technologies);

- open government activities;
- stronger public confidence in the government;
- public availability of government information resources. Providing real-time availability of public services, services, electronic data through any digital channels from any user devices;
- enabling an open dialogue between citizens and public authorities, the so-called E-democracy – real-time availability of all tools from any device (debate, voting, survey, discussion, e-referendums, feedback, crowdsourcing projects);
- personalization of public e-services that takes into account the constantly updated profile of the citizen through analysis based on big data and artificial intelligence technology.

*The first document signed by Barack Obama as President of the United States was the [Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government](#), which outlined the underlying principles of building open government in the United States. This was the document that introduced the term "open government."*

*Therefore, the United States became the ideologue and the first country to start translating the "open government" project into practice: the federal portal [Data.gov](#) was launched back in 2009 by Vivek Kundra, the Federal Chief Information Officer, who at the time headed the chief board of IT managers. In addition to the launch of the Data.gov open data portal, another important project of Kundra was the [IT dashboard](#), an information system that allows for a clear assessment of the information processing costs of departments. The IT dashboard has become part of another more ambitious project [USASpending.gov](#), which clearly and comprehensibly estimates major government expenses and expenses flow by states.*

## II. Openness in the context of the Pandemic

### 1. Government Openness

One of the core principles of the government is transparency, which is especially important today when a need for information openness of public authorities is considered to be one of the fundamental values of a modern government.

The [concept](#) of open government is based on three key elements:

- information openness,
- functional openness (open data),
- open dialogue.

#### 1.1 Openness of Information

The information openness of the state is defined as accessibility of information on its fundamental institutions, about efforts of the authorities.

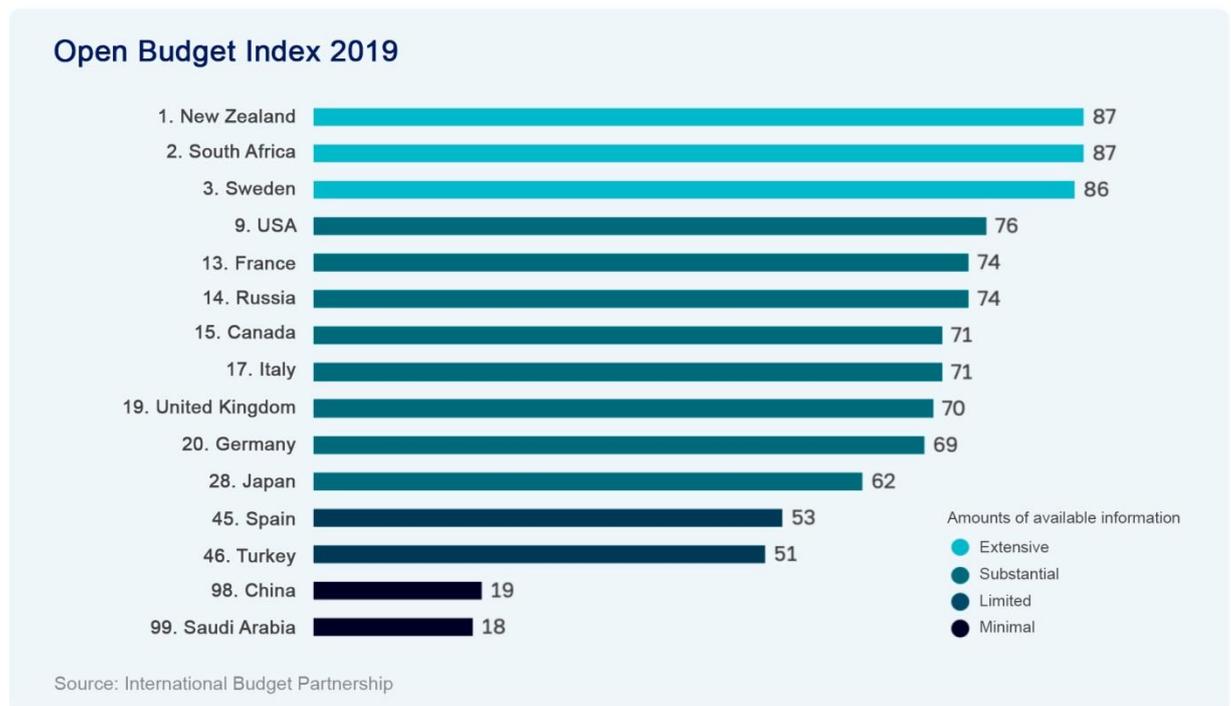
The [principle](#) of information openness provides for transparency mechanisms in the activities of the government and municipal bodies as well as tools for feedback, enabling citizens to interact with the government.

One important indicator of government openness is budget transparency. According to the annual [rankings](#) of the *International Budget Partnership (IBP)* based on integral transparency parameters of information on government finances of 117 countries, New Zealand has been demonstrating high transparency for many years. Its budget transparency index reached 90 points out of 100 in 2010 and 93 points in 2012. Today, it scores 87 and remains the highest transparency in the world. The leader of the ranking, [according to analysts](#), properly discloses broad parameters of fiscal policy, describes the economic outlook of the government, expected income, expenses and public debt.

The second is South Africa. The draft budget describes in detail sources of income, distribution of funds among ministries, proposed policy changes and other

information important for understanding the fiscal situation in the country, [says the report](#).

Russia ranks 14<sup>th</sup> between France and Canada and is much higher than Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany. IBP specialists [commend](#) the annual Budget for Citizens compiled in Russia as a simple and not overloaded version of the state budget, designed to deliver basic information to the public.



During the COVID-19 outbreak, amendments to many countries' budgets and the openness of data on the budgetary management of the response to the epidemic and related crisis are under the scrutiny of civil society and its institutions.

*The French Court of Auditors [has published](#) the report of the High Council for Public Finances on its website on the epidemic-related amendments to the 2020 state budget. The high degree of uncertainty associated with the health crisis affects all macroeconomic forecasts and leads to their frequent revision, the conclusion says.*

*The SAI of Germany has prepared an [analytical report](#) “Federal Budget Policy Measures to Combat the Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic (Key Figures for the 2020 Supplementary Budget)” showing the supplementary budget and the crisis management package for citizens in graphs and tables.*

*The SAI of Finland [monitors](#) the impact of the coronavirus epidemic on*

*public finances and prepares a report on the public budget plan.*

## 1.2 Functional Openness

The second underlying principle of government openness is the **functional openness** of institutions. It is assessed in terms of the quality of open data and the resources that provide access to it.

The degree of functional openness of the authorities shows their readiness to transfer the available data to external contractors, such as businesses and NPOs. Functional openness, high quality and completeness of published open data sets makes government actions more predictable for businesses and allows commercial and civic initiatives to be more successfully involved in dealing with socially important issues, which, among other things, are the responsibility of the government. This is how functional openness affects the social and economic performance of the government.

In the COVID-19 outbreak, functional openness is illustrated by open data on public procurement conducted in a short time with simplified procedures. In this regard, the European transparency and anti-corruption organisations have jointly **published** principles for such emergency public procurement:

The application of emergency procurement should be justified, registered and made public.

1. Emergency procurement should be the exception rather than the rule, and its need should be strictly assessed on a case-by-case basis.
2. Emergency procurement data should be centralised on public e-procurement portals.
3. Complete data should be published to maintain trust.
4. Emergency procurement data should be made public and accessible.
5. E-procurement portals should be regularly updated.
6. Transparency is needed to prevent overpricing.
7. Open data is needed for more rigorous supplier selection and fraud prevention.
8. Sanctions for fraudulent activity and bid rigging should be published.

## 9. Cooperation with civil society and media is needed.

*The SAI of Cyprus regularly monitors emergency public procurement related to the COVID-19 epidemic. The public contracts concluded by the Ministry of Health of Cyprus with a number of private medical centres in order to test 20 thousand public and private employees for SARS CoV-2 were **analysed**. SAI concluded that the test prices set out in the contracts were inflated and also indicated the risks of oligopoly or unfair competition. The SAI of the Czech Republic **started** to check public procurement for personal protective equipment during the state of emergency, for which CZK 11 billion (\$430 million) was spent from the state budget.*

## 1.3 Open Dialogue

Cooperation with civil society and its institutions, such as the media, forms the third pillar of government openness: open dialogue.

Open dialogue provides an opportunity for citizens to influence government agencies and political decision-making processes. It is constantly evolving and taking on various forms. It is also important to develop open dialogue across the entire structure, including between different levels of authorities: national, regional and municipal.

Coordination of measures to counteract the COVID-19 spread and to overcome its impact on the economy with the position of regions, cities and citizens becomes particularly important in the conditions of COVID-19 outbreak.

To decide on whether to introduce or lift lockdown, to restrict activities in some fields or to take measures to stimulate the work of these fields, governments hold regular consultations with heads of regions and municipalities, with representatives of trade unions, businesses and the expert community.

*The Danish authorities, together with representatives of parties, industries, trade unions and relevant organisations, are developing guidelines for the step-by-step lifting of epidemic-related restrictions in each area of life. The government of Slovenia agrees on new steps to lift restrictions with union representatives every seven days depending on the needs of each industry and each profession.*

## 2. SAI Openness as Part of the Government Openness

The principle of government openness is applied through the activities of national supreme audit institutions (SAIs). To maintain their openness, SAIs are guided by both international standards and national legislation.

### 2.1 International Standards

The transparency and accountability principles are declared in the fundamental international documents of the SAI: the Lima Declaration of Guidelines on Auditing Precepts, the Mexico Declaration on SAI Independence and the Moscow Declaration. The [Lima Declaration](#) contains an article on the SAI's accountability to the parliament and to the general public; Principle 5 of the Mexican Declaration establishes the right and obligation to report on progress; Principle 5 of the [Mexican Declaration](#) establishes the right and obligation to provide follow-up reports; the [Moscow Declaration](#) encourages the SAI to contribute to more effective, transparent and informative accountability for outcomes and to promote the principle of availability and openness of data, source code and algorithms.

*The International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions (ISSAI)* set out the basic preconditions for ensuring the orderly operation and professional ethics of SAIs and provide guidelines for auditing public organisations. [ISSAI 20 – Principles of Transparency and Accountability](#) states that "the notion of transparency refers to the SAI's timely, reliable, clear and relevant public reporting on its status, mandate, strategy, activities, financial management, operations and performance." In addition, it includes the obligation of public reporting on audit findings and conclusions and public access to information about the SAI. Both accountability and transparency principles are hard to separate, as they imply the same actions.

[Strategic Plan 2017–2022](#) of the International organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) underlines the special role of transparency in achieving strategic goals.

In particular, "in the spirit of transparency, INTOSAI is committed to publicly reporting the results of its annual strategic objective reviews and its programmatic adjustments and improvement plans going forward" through its internal and external

communication.

On 21 April 2020, the report [Accountability in a time of crisis](#) was published under INTOSAI. The document presents several detailed approaches for how SAIs can contribute to the current crisis response. The importance of maintaining a dialogue with stakeholders in and outside of government on the potential role of the SAI, and risks to sound financial management and effective crisis management is particularly highlighted.

According to [INTOSAI statistics](#) for 2017,

- 50% of SAIs publish at least 80% of their audit reports (70% in 2014);
- at least 27% of SAIs do not publish any audit reports at all (15% in 2014);
- 10% of SAIs have no freedom to publish reports and 31% of SAIs face restrictions in publishing;
- 30% of SAIs are not in a position to obtain timely, unconstrained and free access to information;
- 48% of countries do not hold any public hearings to review their SAIs' audit reports.

## 2.2 National Level

The openness principles declared at the official government level are developed in the activities of national SAIs. A different combination of methods is used in each individual case to put the principles into practice.

The French Court of Auditors follows the approach of the French Government to the publication of open data in matters of openness. The approach complies with Articles 14 and 15 of the [Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen](#), which, inter alia, entitles society "to require of every public official an account of his/her administration." As part of this approach, the French SAI regularly publishes [the data](#) underlying the analysis of state budget execution, data from audits by the Court of Auditors, field financing data and other information.

The results of certain audits by the French SAI are also published on the [official website](#) of public data of the French Republic.

The Court of Audit of Italy had a [three-year SAI transparency programme from 2015 to 2017](#), which built on the previous transparency programme from 2011 to 2013. There is also a [section](#) on SAI management transparency on the website of the Court of Audit.

2018-2023 [Strategic Plan](#) of the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) outlines public expectations for a more transparent and accountable government. This will require federal agencies to improve performance and focus on efficient and effective governance. In this regard, one of the goals of the GAO to improve its efficiency is identifying ways to promote innovation, transparency and open government. The Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act) compliance also needs to be assessed.

The Strategy notes that SAI is constantly studying and identifying new ways to inform the U.S. Congress and American citizens about its findings. Another way to support SAI openness is to allow citizens to use the [Fraudnet](#) hot line to report fraud, waste, abuse of authority or misallocation of federal funds (including COVID-19 funds). In 2018, 10,898 applications were submitted through *Fraud net* (1,200 accepted for further consideration).

*U.S. GAO provides an opportunity for citizens to order published reports in printed form. The price includes printing the report copy and shipping. The price depends on the number of pages and ranges from \$10 to \$21.*

GAO communicates with citizens through an extensive network of channels. In addition to the website where the reports are regularly published, GAO operates on *Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube* and *LinkedIn*. There is a newsletter and e-mail notifications of new publications. GAO runs a blog and publishes podcasts (available on *iTunes*, among others). Citizens may also contact GAO by phone, email, or via *Fraudnet*.

The National Audit Office of the United Kingdom notes in its [Strategy 2019-2020 to 2021-2022](#) that external communications help them to be recognised as a trusted provider of high-quality audit. The SAI has focused on improving the mix and quality

of our digital communication channels, such as our website, our social media presence and other digital communications, such as our e-newsletter and blog. They have also worked to achieve higher brand awareness, communicate relevant findings from their audit work in the local government sector and keep a high-level of quality press coverage for all our audit work. The SAI takes part in external engagements, increasingly on digital topics, and speaks at conferences and contributes to publications.

There is a need to refresh the external communications strategy. Communication methods and channels are constantly changing, and so are the audience needs. Our new communications strategy will take account of these changes in order to respond to audience needs. This will bolster the positive reputation for NAO's audit work and brand.

The website of Spanish Court of Audit has a [section](#) on SAI transparency. The SAI also implements a data [request](#) mechanism through the website's capabilities within the [Decision on the Right of Access to Public Information 2014](#).

[Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#) of the SAI Turkey mentions the transparency and accountability principles in the context of both opportunities and threats. In terms of opportunities, growing public awareness of the transparency and accountability principles will increase the visibility and importance of the SAI. In terms of threats, untrue and misleading news about the Turkish SAI creates risks and threats to the SAI's success. In this regard, building effective communication with the public is of great importance. The SAI Turkey intends to take a number of steps to improve transparency in the future.

## 2.3 Request for information from citizens during the pandemic

In the context of the pandemic, all government institutions are joining efforts to counter the coronavirus spread, and there is a growing demand for greater openness of government institutions and their response to the current crisis. SAIs of many countries are also making efforts to establish a dialogue with the public in light of the

new challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Some SAIs limit their activities to the publication on official websites.

*SAI of Hungary [posts](#) on its website the actions taken by European SAIs with regard to the coronavirus outbreak, the need for the SAI to adapt to the new conditions and the need to include monitoring of government measures taken during the pandemic in their audit plans.*

*The SAI of Peru has launched a [portal](#) Monitoring Control and Openness during the pandemic, publishing aggregated information and individual reports on audits conducted during the state of emergency.*

*The website of the SAI of France [provides](#) relevant reports on the measures taken to address the most difficult public concerns in relation to COVID-19 on five major topics: public financial management, health, public administration, education, housing.*

*Social media and blogs remain a rather popular means of maintaining direct contact with citizens.*

*Gareth Davies, Head of the UK SAI, tells about the SAI's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on his [blog](#).*

*The SAI of Colombia regularly posts relevant information on countering COVID-19 on its [Twitter account @CGR\\_Colombia](#).*

*The Colombian blog is quite popular and has over 278,000 followers.*

Many SAIs have launched information platforms and portals for interaction with citizens during the pandemic.

*The SAI of Costa Rica has launched a [portal](#) "Transparency in Public Administration in an Emergencies Due to COVID-19."*

*Peru has an [online platform](#) for citizens to report offences. The SAI is developing an online service for local authorities to provide data on the food purchase and distribution within government funds, and has launched an online office to receive and register public documents during the state of emergency.*

*The U.S. SAI has provided the opportunity to contact officials for specific issues of combating coronavirus, a special portal ([FindanExperttool](#)) helps to find the right person on the website.*

*The SAI of the Philippines has several platforms for interaction with the population: [Citizens' Desk Reporting System](#), where citizens can leave reports on allegations of fraud, waste or misallocation of public funds, and [The Citizen Participatory Audit](#) for citizens and civil society involvement in other areas of the work as partners.*

Specialised mobile applications are becoming more and more popular.

*The SAI of Mexico has launched a free smartphone and tablet app for direct contact with the institution on its activities and has developed a game app for children that provides information about public administration, the public, gender equality, inclusion.*

## 2.4 How do SAIs adapt to the pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic is making adjustments to the SAIs, the vast majority of which have started to work remotely, but the scheduled work has undergone some changes, and the allocation of financial assistance packages by governments during the crisis creates additional challenges to control budget spending.

Many SAIs are still performing scheduled audits, despite the remote mode of operation.

*The SAI of Australia seeks to meet deadlines for its mandatory financial audits so that the government has accurate data for budgeting, and ministers can submit annual reports to Parliament within the statutory deadlines. However, audits were suspended and were not performed in April.*

*The French SAI keeps on performing staff audits, but in a way that does not hinder the core mission of the audited government agencies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and protect the health and safety of the SAI staff.*

Other SAIs are significantly lowering the requirements and postponing scheduled audits in order to reduce the burden on their governments.

*The Swiss Federal Audit Office has suspended a significant portion of its field audits and stopped issuing relevant publications. The SAI is reorienting its audit approach and using decentralised teams to monitor measures envisaged by the Federal Council. Depending on the case, subsequent audits of compensation programmes developed by the federal administration will be replaced by quick spot audits before expenditures are incurred.*

As public financial assistance packages are allocated to support and rehabilitate national economies, many SAIs have focused on checks to prevent misallocation of these funds.

*The SAI of Brazil has begun monitoring the measures taken by all federal administrations to combat the spread of COVID-19. The [special plan](#) for monitoring actions against COVID-19 extends the scope of control of public institutions beyond the Ministry of Health.*

*The SAI of UK [plans](#) to perform an actual review of the significant public expenditure commitments and programmes related to COVID-19 (to be ready for publication in May). This will then be used to prepare a series of risk-oriented assessment studies.*

*The National Audit Office of China has taken prompt action to conduct special audit of funds and donations to prevent and combat the COVID-19 pandemic by regional audit institutions throughout the country. The audit covers budget trust funds, cash and donated goods and subsidised loans for major producers of anti-epidemic supplies.*

*The SAI of Colombia is implementing [preventive controls](#) as part of its COVID-19 response, currently conducting two fiscal processes worth US\$2.2billion. The SAI has issued warnings to 26 local governments and 67 mayors on alleged cost overruns and ambiguities in contracts.*

*The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act requires the U.S. SAI to continuously monitor and report on the country's pandemic preparedness, response and recovery. The SAI will also [study](#) the impact of COVID-19 on health, national security, economy and more. The first report is due to be submitted to Congress late in June, and then every two months within a year after the law is passed.*

*SAI's activities are mostly focused on adaptation in terms of regular audits in accordance with current laws. However, some SAIs are delaying or conducting audits selectively because of the need to relieve extra burdens on government agencies during the crisis. When allocating sufficiently large amounts in a short period, there is a significant risk of misappropriation of funds, so there is a tendency for some SAIs to conduct special audits to minimise misallocation of budget funds. Other SAIs are conducting special studies to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on long-term system performance and to develop a universal response to the pandemic in the future.*

### 3. Openness in International Organisations

The principles of openness have long been in the focus of international organisations at the highest level. For example, UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 [sets out](#) the need to "promote peaceful, inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all and to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". One particular step in this direction should be providing public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms in accordance with national laws and international agreements.

In addition, the UN [highlights](#) the role of INTOSAI in verifying state readiness to implement SDG 16 and in promoting greater government accountability and transparency in public spending.

At the same time, the proactive stance and significant contribution of various multilateral mechanisms in the fight against the coronavirus spread and its consequences allowed drawing attention to the openness of the activities of international organisations.

As the situation evolves, there are increasing examples of both international organisations working with external open data sources and their adaptation to openness in the face of the pandemic.

The first group includes the publication of data by international organisations based on the collection of information on the actions of national governments in their areas of competence. For example, the International Labour Organisation [monitors](#) the measures taken by states to protect their economies, enterprises and workers, with a particular focus on labour relations, which is an option for accumulating qualitative descriptive information that cannot be quantified or statistically analysed.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) [publishes](#) fiscal, monetary and macro-financial stimulus measures taken by states to reduce the impact of the pandemic on economies and populations. The United Nations World Food Programme publishes a [database](#) on restricting movement between countries, and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) publishes [information](#) on the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on children.

Another area includes the disclosure by international organisations of detailed information about their activities in the current situation or official statistics within their competence. These include, but not limited to, the World Health Organisation (WHO) database of daily infection and spread statistics, [the IMF](#) information on the use of international financial assistance mechanisms for states affected by the pandemic, and a similar [World Bank](#) information resource.

The emergence of resources such as [Open Data Watch](#), which aggregates and systematizes information about other available sources of open data and makes their use much more convenient, should be noted.

[According to GitHub](#), one of the most commonly used data sets was created by Johns Hopkins University, which not only aggregates open data from different sources, but also cross-checks them with other databases such as WHO. This resource has proven to be a more rapid means of reporting first infections in countries than official WHO data.

Despite the diversity of sources, [Open Data Watch recalls](#) that there is still a lack of comprehensive coronavirus data, the presence of more distorted and biased information and a lack of common standards for data collection and reporting that would allow for comparisons between countries.

As the website of the International Open Data Charter [notes](#), the quality of data, the openness of sources and the level of international cooperation and trust among nations represent the life and death issues in the current pandemic.

In this regard, it is worth noting the efforts of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs to organise international cooperation on data handling in the context of the pandemic. The [website](#) of the department contains a platform for sharing experience, guidelines and best practices among national statistical offices in order to provide governments with all the necessary data to make managerial decisions and successfully respond to the crisis.

[The Humanitarian DataExchange](#), one of the largest sources, providing more than 18 thousand data sets from different sources in convenient for analysis formats, is made on the basis of the Centre for Humanitarian Data of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

However, international organisations do not stand aside from the openness principle of establishing feedback and maintaining dialogue. For example, the Digital Government and Data Unit of OECD [launched](#) a feedback repository to collect information and evidence on how open data published by governments in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak are being used by entrepreneurs, media, researchers and the public sector to support government responses to the outbreak.

One important consequence of involving international organisations in the fight against the pandemic's impact and in the assistance to particular states is the reasonable requirement for national governments to spend and monitor the use of aid effectively, resulting indirectly in a higher total openness of governments.

A related aspect is, for example, [outlined](#) in the address on government debt relief by a number of Kenyan civil society organisations to the IMF and the World Bank.

International cooperation in the field of open data does not leave aside the direct fight against COVID-19, making it possible to join efforts in search of a vaccine and development of effective treatment.

An interesting approach in this regard is [shown](#) by joint efforts of the U.S. government and a number of research organisations that have published *COVID-19 Open Research Dataset*, consisting of 59,000 scientific articles. This is international challenge involving artificial intelligence experts from around the world in development of automated text analysis tools, which cannot be quickly mastered and understood by medical professionals due to their size, in order to find innovative solutions and new approaches in the fight against coronavirus.

In addition, the European portal GEANT, which brings together more than 50 million users from 10,000 research organisations, [says](#) that the major "open science" areas in the response to the coronavirus outbreak are open data, open publications and open educational resources. In particular, international cooperation in this field allows bypassing a number of problems related to scientific developments.

For example, the viral genome sequencing by Chinese scientists and the publication of data in open access enabled scientists around the world to immediately begin

developing diagnostic tools, while cooperation between the world's largest publishers enabled free access to COVID-19 related scientific publications, which would have required expensive subscriptions under normal circumstances and remained completely unavailable even to leading research organisations.

The corporate sector also raises issues of international cooperation.

*Microsoft, collaborating with the Open Data Institute (ODI) and the Governance Lab of the New York University, has [joined](#) the Open Data Campaign and is committed to addressing data inequality among companies, countries and regions.*

*As noted in a recent [press release](#), Microsoft recognizes the role of global data sharing in understanding and tackling the world's most pressing challenges and highlights the high degree of the emerging digital divide and its detrimental impact on society. In this regard, Microsoft has developed a number of openness principles and intends to work towards global data disclosure and exchange and initiate a number of related projects by 2022. The openness principles already allow Microsoft to contribute to addressing the COVID-19 crisis. The results of research on the decoding of the immune system's response to COVID-19, performed in partnership with Adaptive Biotechnologies, have been made available via a special portal, and the data of the COVID-19 [tracker](#) in the Bing search engine are available to scientists and researchers around the world.*

### III. Conclusions

The world faced a sharp increase in citizens' demand for government openness during the novel coronavirus outbreak. Experience in providing information during a pandemic is invaluable for organisational and technical improvements in public management.

Open dialogue between the government and society is essential for an effective response to the COVID-19 epidemic and the crisis, as well as for the implementation of an elaborate step-by-step process of opening up society.

Open budgets and public procurement transparency are especially important in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic.

A special role belongs to supreme audit institutions. The importance of openness

principles implementation is set out in international standards and other international documents affecting the SAI activities. Nevertheless, statistics show that globally accepted standards for SAI activities are not applied in a significant number of cases.

Communication methods and channels are constantly changing, and so are the audience needs. However, most of the SAIs is limited to publishing information on their websites, which somewhat hinders direct contact with the people. Meanwhile, the percentage of SAIs developing special platforms to inform citizens about a wide range of activities is increasing. Some SAIs are launching their mobile applications, which shows an increase in public interest and a proportional response from control authorities. There is a common trend towards the development and implementation of special resources of SAIs to increase their openness and direct dialogue with citizens.

Furthermore, the benefits of open data and their applicability in the context of a pandemic are significantly enhanced as they move beyond national boundaries, both by the increased information transparency of international organisations and global processes and by their indirect impact on the increased openness of individual states.

Openness is one of the key characteristics of international organisations, which tend to aim at developing best practices to promote international development through the compilation of data from states. The most relevant is the justifiable requirement for national governments to exercise cost-effectiveness and control over the use of international assistance provided to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

The spread of public information about international organisations' activities and their use of financial assistance tools remains equally important. In this regard, there is a growing demand for data sets and the accuracy of the information they contain. For example, a lack of comprehensive coronavirus data, the presence of more distorted and biased information and a lack of common standards for data collection and reporting that would allow for comparable comparisons between countries are significant obstacles to a pandemic response based, inter alia, on low levels of trust between countries.

