

TRANSPARENCY INDEX OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Mapping the online information disclosure practices of municipalities
in Latvia and Norway

2021



Transparency International Latvia (Sabiedrība par atklātību – Delna is a national chapter of the international coalition against corruption Transparency International. It is the leading watchdog organization in Latvia with the main aim of contributing to the formation of an open, just and democratic society, free from corruption in private and public sectors and interpersonal relationships.



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Acknowledgements:

We thank senior policy analyst Līga Stafecka at the Centre for Public Policy “Providus” as well as our colleagues at TI Lithuania for their feedback and advice on earlier versions of this report.

Free download of this report is available at www.delna.lv and transparencyindex.lv



“Strengthening Integrity and Transparency in Local Municipalities and in Cooperation with Private Companies” receives grants of EUR 49 000 from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway within the framework of the EEA and Norwegian grants. The aim of the project is to strengthen the transparency of local governments in Latvia and Norway.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Transparency Index of Local Authorities” (TILA) is a pilot study that aims to assess the level of transparency among 41 municipalities in Latvia and 10 municipalities in Norway, by measuring the extent of information disclosure on their websites. The pilot study is part of the broader project “Strengthening Integrity and Transparency in Local Municipalities and in Cooperation with Private Companies”, and it receives funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway within the framework of the EEA and Norwegian grants. The aim of the project is to strengthen the transparency of local governments in Latvia and Norway, and it is conducted by the Transparency International chapters of Latvia and Norway.

This report and the evaluation of municipalities in Latvia and Norway is the result of a pilot initiative aimed at exploring the possibility of measuring and making cross-country comparisons with the help of the TILA. It is the intention of the authors to consider building upon the methodology developed in the course of this study in the future with the involvement of stakeholders from the private as well as the public sector.

The findings of this report, which have allowed us to identify weaknesses and best practices within and between the two countries, will be used for the development of a toolkit for local decision-makers to improve their data disclosure and level of cooperation with businesses as well as citizens, and to provide recommendations to national and local governments to improve legislation, policies and practices on the transparency of decision-making, use of public funds, citizen engagement and business integrity.

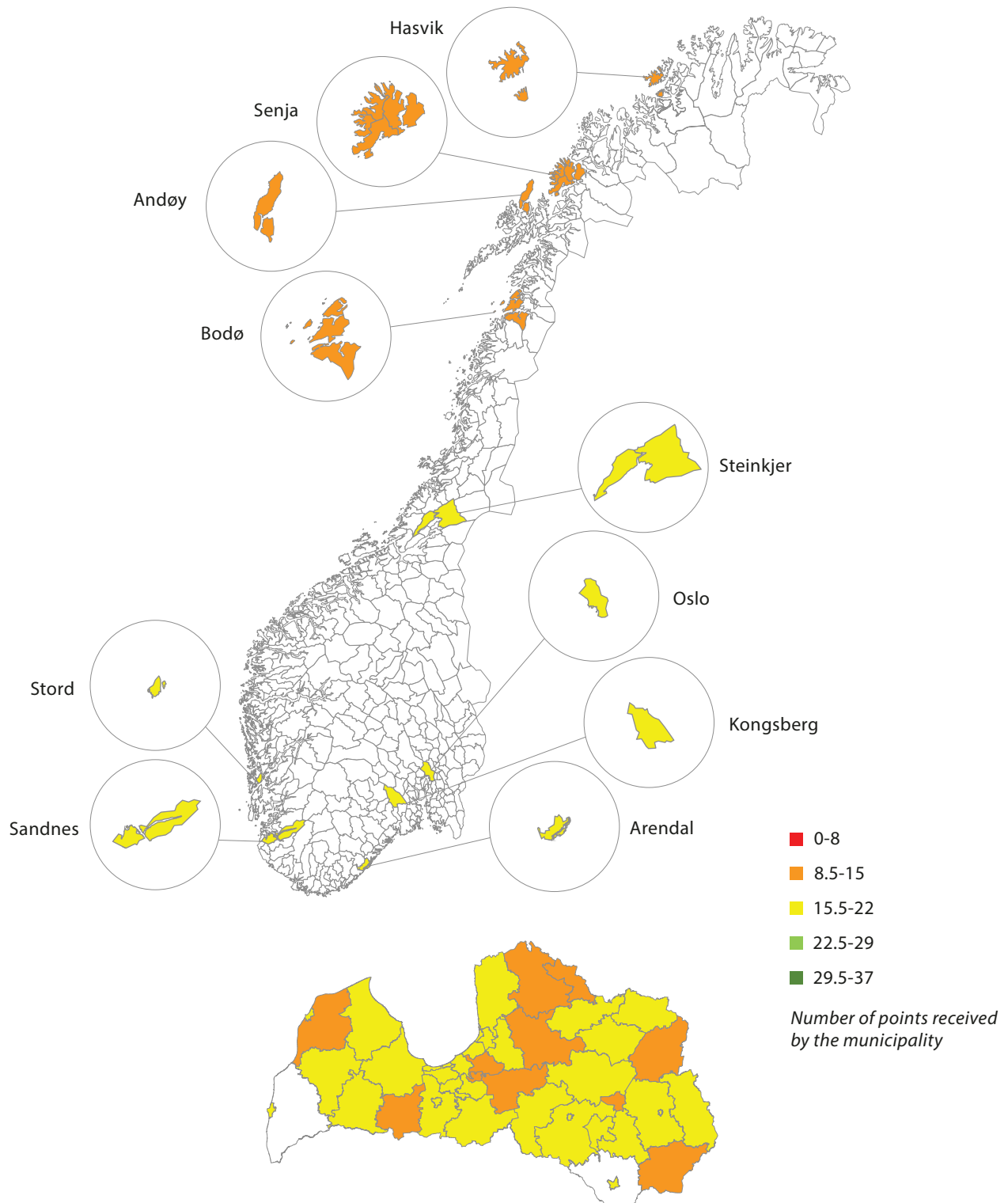
The study assesses the websites of 41 municipalities¹ in Latvia and a 10-municipality sample in Norway. The Latvian sample covers all post-reform municipalities that had web-pages at the time of initiating the evaluation. The Norwegian municipalities have been selected from different geographical parts of the country, representing different sizes in population. Similar studies regarding municipality information disclosure practices on their webpages conducted by TI Lithuania, TI Ireland, TI Ukraine and TI Netherlands were used as a basis to identify a set of indicators that would fit the context of both Latvia and Norway and that could be fulfilled by all local authorities regardless of budget, location and/or number of staff.

While this approach has allowed us to obtain a bird's-eye view of information availability and comprehensiveness across a large number of municipalities, the study does have some limitations to be considered and addressed in future work. First, the study mainly focuses on the existence of information rather than assessing the content of such information in detail. Secondly, while this study seeks to provide explanations for the observed trends and patterns in information availability and comprehensiveness, future qualitative assessments will be needed to better understand the underlying factors.

1 The two newly created municipalities (Augšdaugavas novads and Dienvidkurzemes novads) have not been included in the study as these did not have websites during the assessment. Kādi būs novadi, to centri un teritoriju iedalījums 2021. gadā <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/kadi-bus-novadi-to-centri-un-teritoriju-iedalijums-2021-gada.a362384>

Overall, a trend could be seen that the largest cities among which also happen to be capitals of their respective countries have scored fairly well when compared to other municipalities. However, marked differences can be seen in the performance of Latvian and Norwegian municipalities in several areas so generalized conclusions should be made with care.

Drawing on the insights of this pilot study, TI Latvia and TI Norway intend to create a toolkit with guidelines for municipalities on how their transparency scores could be improved, as well as general advice on how information could be presented to better serve both businesses and the citizenry.



1. INTRODUCTION

TILA Pilot for Latvia and Norway

“Transparency Index of Local Authorities” (TILA) is a pilot study that aims to assess the level of transparency among 41² municipalities in Latvia and 10 municipalities in Norway, by measuring the extent of information disclosure across seven key areas, namely:

- 1) Politics and decision-making processes;
- 2) Organisational structure;
- 3) Finances and use of public funds;
- 4) Public participation mechanisms;
- 5) Anti-corruption and ethics;
- 6) Public procurement;
- 7) Ownership and finances of Municipal-Owned Enterprises (MOEs).

This pilot study is based on the underlying assumption that the availability and comprehensiveness of online information across these areas will increase accountability, anti-corruption capacity and effective governance at the local level, as well as participation, as they allow media, civil society and the general public to better scrutinise political decision-making and the allocation of public resources, opportunities to engage in policymaking, and to prevent political corruption.

This resulting report is part of the broader project “Strengthening Integrity and Transparency in Local Municipalities and in Cooperation with Private Companies”, which receives grants from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway within the framework of the EEA and Norwegian grants. The goal of the project is to foster transparency, accountability and good governance among local governments in Latvia and Norway, while at the same time generating opportunities for cooperation and knowledge exchange between the two countries.

The study is conducted by the Transparency International chapters of Latvia and Norway. TI Latvia was established in 1998 and in recent years has increasingly focused on potential ways of increasing transparency and political integrity at the municipal level. TI Norway was established in 1999 and has engaged in anti-corruption work in the municipal sector for several years. 60 municipalities in Norway have joined TI Norway as members. TI Norway has also developed tools for municipal anti-corruption work in the past.

This report and evaluation of municipalities in Latvia and Norway is the result of a pilot initiative aimed at exploring the possibility of measuring and making cross-country comparisons with the help of TILA. It is the intention of the authors to build upon the

2 The two newly created municipalities (Augšdaugavas novads and Dienvidkurzemes novads) have not been included in the study as these did not have websites during the assessment. Kādi būs novadi, to centri un teritoriju iedalījums 2021. gadā
<https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/kadi-bus-novadi-to-centri-un-teritoriju-iedalijums-2021-gada.a362384>

methodology developed in the course of this study in the future with the involvement of stakeholders.

The findings of this report, which have allowed us to identify weaknesses and best practices within and between the two countries will be used for the development of a toolkit for local decision-makers to improve their data disclosure and level of cooperation with businesses and citizens, and to provide recommendations to national and local governments to improve legislation, policies and practices on the transparency of decision-making, use of public funds, business integrity and citizen engagement.

Context – why we are doing this

Both Latvia and Norway have undergone significant reforms in the local government system in the last couple of years. In Latvia, amendments to the Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas in June 2020 have seen the reduction of local administrative units from 119 to 43³ and a corresponding reduction of local elected representatives. In Norway, structural reform of municipalities in recent years has seen the reduction of the number of municipalities from 428 in 2014 to 356 in 2020 and a new Local Government Act passed Stortinget in 2018.

The reforms have resulted in a concentration of decision-making powers and resources in a smaller number of elected officials. While the rationale is to improve the effectiveness of local governments, this might also contribute to increased opportunities for corruption and abuse of power as well as political alienation due to citizens feeling more distant from local public institutions. The latter could be considered as one of the possible explanations for the historically low turnout in Latvia's local elections that took place in June 2021 – the first elections under the new system.⁴ In addition, it could also be argued that larger municipalities might have the capacity to sustain more professional employees as well as efficient anti-corruption efforts. Likewise, larger municipalities might lead to a reduced possibility of conflict-of-interest situations.

Thus, it is important to understand current trends and patterns with regard to information availability to identify the main gaps that should be closed as the new systems of local government are implemented. A comparison between Latvia and Norway has additional merits due to the fact that Norway has historically performed better in areas related to corruption prevention and transparency. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions index for example shows us that Norway was ranked number 7 and Latvia was ranked 42 in the year 2020.⁵

Each case has its own context, affecting the implementation and performance of integrity systems. However, the report also notes that diversity in systems does not mean that we

³ This includes 33 municipalities and 10 "State Cities": Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Jūrmala, Liepāja, Ogre, Rēzekne, Rīga, Valmiera, and Ventspils

⁴ NEPĀRTRAUKTĪBA PĀRMAIŅĀS? <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/baltikum/18088.pdf>

⁵ Corruption Perceptions index (2020) <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nor>

cannot learn general lessons from them. Rather it is the case that their unique characteristics can tell us a lot about the possibilities that different systems can offer in a variety of contexts.⁶

Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows:

section 2 outlines the methodology followed to carried out this study, including an explanation of the scoring system and of the sample under analysis, as well as considerations on the limitations of the assessment;

section 3 provides an overview of the results of the study for each area under assessment, identifying general trends with regard to information availability and best practices;

section 4 provides general conclusions and recommendations on further action that can be undertaken on the basis of this pilot study.

While it is the hope of TI Latvia and TI Norway that the TILA will help to increase the transparency and accountability of municipalities as institutions and of local politicians, as well as increase civic participation and improve civic education in the long term, it is clear that these results will largely rely on the ability to improve the current methodology of the evaluation, based on the lessons learnt in the course of this study.

⁶ Ibid.

2. METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the TILA is to assess the availability and comprehensiveness of information provided on the websites of Latvian and Norwegian municipalities across seven core areas related to public decision-making, the allocation and management of public resources, anti-corruption policies, and mechanisms for citizen participation (see table below). For each area, we have developed a set of indicators, each corresponding to relevant “information items” which should ideally be available in a comprehensive way on the municipality’s website.

AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Politics and decision-making	1	Basic information on council members (name, contact, political party)
	2	Minutes and agendas of council meetings
	3	Voting records of council sessions
	4	Composition of municipal committees
	5	Diary/calendar/agenda of the mayor
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Organisational structure and administration	6	Basic information on municipality’s employees (name, position, contact)
	7	Organisational structure
	8	Annual report
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Finances	9	Annual budget
	10	Amendments to the budget
	11	Annual financial statements (incomes, expenditures, debts)
	12	Information about grant funding decisions
	13	Information about monitoring and evaluation of grant-funded projects
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Public participation mechanisms	14	Information on planned public consultations and instructions for participation
	15	Instructions on how to submit suggestions or complaints to the Council, and how these are handled
	16	Information on participation opportunities for the public to attend Council meetings
	17	Participatory budgeting initiatives

AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Anti-corruption and ethics	18	Dedicated webpage section on anti-corruption and ethics
	19	Anti-corruption / corruption risk management plan
	20	Report on implementation of anti-corruption / risk management plan
	21	Code of conduct / ethics for municipal politicians and civil servants
	22	Interest and asset declarations of council members
	23	Internal procedure / control system for prevention, detection and settling of conflicts of interest
	24	Donations to council members / political parties
	25	Confidential or anonymous whistleblowing channel
	26	Information on whistleblowing channel
	27	Procedure for handling whistle-blowing reports
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Public procurement	28	List of procurements
	29	Information (and archive) on procurement tenders and awards
	30	Information on the execution of and amendments to procurement contracts
	31	Mechanism for the submission of procurement complaints
	32	Information on the handling of procurement complaints
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Municipal-owned enterprises	33	List of all MOEs
	34	Public officials appointed to the board of MOEs
	35	Proportion of shares owned by the municipality in each MOE
	36	Financial statements of MOEs
	37	Audits on financial statements of MOEs

The study assesses 41 municipalities⁷ in Latvia and 10 municipalities in Norway:

- In Latvia, they include the 10 state cities of Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Jūrmala, Liepāja, Ogre, Rēzekne, Rīga, Valmiera, and Ventspils, as well as the 31 municipal territories of Aizkraukle, Bauska, Cēsis, Krāslava, Saldus, Stopiņi, Talsi, Alūksne, Ādaži, Balvi, Dobeles, Gulbene, Kuldīga, Ķekava, Limbaži, Līvāni, Ludza, Madona, Mārupe, Olaine, Preiļi, Ropaži, Salaspils, Saulkrasti, Sigulda, Smiltene, Tukums, Valka, Ventspils novads, Rēzeknes novads, Varakļāni.

⁷ The two newly created municipalities (Augšdaugavas novads and Dienvidkurzemes novads) have not been included in the study as these did not have websites during the assessment. Kādi būs novadi, to centri un teritoriju iedalījums 2021. gadā <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/kadi-bus-novadi-to-centri-un-teritoriju-iedalijums-2021-gada.a362384/>

- In Norway, they include the 10 municipalities of Oslo, Kongsberg, Arendal, Sandnes, Stord, Steinkjer, Bodø, Andøy, Senja, Hasvik.

The Latvian sample covers all post-reform municipalities that had web-pages at the time of initiating the evaluation. This excludes the two newly formed municipalities (Augšdaugavas novads and Dienvidkurzemes novads). The Norwegian municipalities have been selected from different geographical parts of the country, representing different sizes in population, to achieve a greater representation of the large variety, present in the country.

Selected NOR municipalities	Population 2021	Municipal employees 2020	Members of municipal council	County
Kongsberg	27 694	1 922	35	Viken
Oslo	697 010	44 176	59	Oslo
Arendal	45 065	3 301	39	Agder
Sandnes	80 450	5 844	49	Rogaland
Stord	18 861	1 425	35	Vestland
Steinkjer	24 152	1 865	47	Trøndelag
Bodø	52 560	3 975	39	Nordland
Andøy	4 588	440	23	Nordland
Senja	14 725	1 612	45	Troms og Finnmark
Hasvik	983	138	14	Troms og Finnmark

Characteristics of Norwegian municipality sample. Source: Statistics Norway

With regard to the scoring of each indicator, if the informational item is available on the website in a comprehensive way, the municipality receives 1 point; if it is available in a partial manner, it receives 0.5 points; and if the information is not available it receives 0 points. For a detailed explanation of the scoring system and the criteria to be met for receiving full points see Annex I to this report.

The methodology used in this report draws significantly from that of similar studies on the topic carried out by TI Lithuania ("Jurgio Kepure"⁸), TI Ireland ("Integrity Index of Local Authorities"⁹), TI Ukraine ("Methodology for Assessing the Transparency of Cities"¹⁰), and TI Netherlands ("Integrity Close to Citizens"¹¹). These studies were used as a basis to identify a set of indicators that would fit the context of both Latvia and Norway and that could be fulfilled by all local authorities regardless of budget, location and/or number of staff.

The verification of most indicators has been carried out through web research (i.e., assessment of the municipalities' main webpages and those connected with specific indicators) and supplemented by analysis of relevant policy and legislative documents when necessary. Generally, if a regular citizen (represented by TI Norway and TI Latvia

8 <https://jurgiokepure.lt/tyrimas/2018/vilniaus-miestas>

9 TI Ireland National Integrity Index - Local Authorities 2019

<https://transparency.ie/resources/national-integrity-index-2019>

10 TI Ukraine METHODOLOGY FOR RATING THE TRANSPARENCY OF CITIES

<https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/product/methodology-for-rating-the-transparency-of-cities>

11 INTEGRITY CLOSE TO CITIZENS An exploratory study of integrity systems in European local authorities

<https://www.transparency.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IT-EB-digitaal2202-1.pdf> (2021)

representatives) cannot find the information of interest easily (by this meaning the person has not found the information despite best efforts), it is assumed that the information is not provided.

To reduce the possibility of errors in the scoring in the case of information that is apparently not available, we contacted the relevant municipality asking for confirmation about the effective lack of information or demonstration of its availability. This has also allowed us to gain a glimpse of how municipalities currently interpret the indicators. While in most cases municipalities agreed with the evaluation in some cases additional resources were provided, that had not been identified in the initial review. Nevertheless, municipalities often expressed gratitude for the interest in their webpages and welcomes the suggestions on missing articles of information, that could be added in the future.

While acknowledging that it might be too early to state with great confidence what precise threshold should be met by municipalities to be regarded as sufficiently transparent, comparisons that can be made between the scores received by various municipalities in the different categories can serve to point municipalities towards areas where improvements can be made. A clearer understanding could be attained of what this threshold might be after refining the methodology of the study and carrying out an evaluation spanning more than one year.

While this approach has allowed us to obtain a bird's-eye view of information availability and comprehensiveness across a large number of municipalities, the study does have some limitations to be considered and addressed in future work. First, the study mainly focuses on the existence of information rather than assessing the content of such information in detail. Secondly, while this study seeks to provide explanations for the observed trends and patterns in information availability and comprehensiveness, future qualitative assessments will be needed to better understand the underlying factors.

3. STUDY RESULTS

[3.1] Politics and decision-making

In the case of Latvia, the results in the area of politics and decision-making indicate that municipalities have mostly partially fulfilled the criteria. The problems in this area mostly arise from the fact that regulations do not currently specifically compel municipalities to publish such information on committee meetings and perhaps it is not common practice to publish anything in addition to what is mandatory. Conversely the Norwegian municipalities have achieved much better results in this area, performing especially well when it comes to providing information on municipal committee meetings.

Only one Latvian municipality has received the full score in regard to providing minutes, agendas and audio recordings for council as well as committee meetings. This municipality has proven that regulation is one thing, but good practice quite another, and provided information such as minutes and recorded council member votes for committees as well as the general council meetings. The municipality of Liepāja could be regarded as an excellent example of what municipalities should strive for when publishing minutes and recordings of council meetings, as it provides this information in a user-friendly way for both general meetings as well as those for committees.¹² As stated, the Norwegian municipalities performed well in providing minutes, agendas and audio recordings as well as voting records for both general and committee meetings.

In the Norwegian sample Oslo is a good example. The municipality has its own TV channel where the meetings of the city council and all committees can be followed directly through streaming and on recordings: Oslo kommune-TV (kommunetv.no). In addition, all documents and minutes, including an overview of votes, are easily accessible on the city's web-site.

Likewise, municipalities in Latvia have nearly never provided an archive of information about former councillors or previous compositions of committees. The information that is limited in this way does not allow citizens or entrepreneurs to easily track responsible decision-makers over time. A problem that is only compounded by the previously described absence of minutes for committee meetings. While citizens might be able to find information on previous council compositions by going through data from the Central election commission website or minutes from previous meeting archives – this is nearly impossible if said person wanted to learn which committees the specific councillors served on and thus took part in discussions carried out leading to the general council meeting and adoption. Here again, the sample of Norwegian municipalities indicates that while no more than half fulfil the complete criteria, a considerable number of municipalities do in fact provide information on the political affiliation and composition of the council and its committees as well as an archive of previous members.

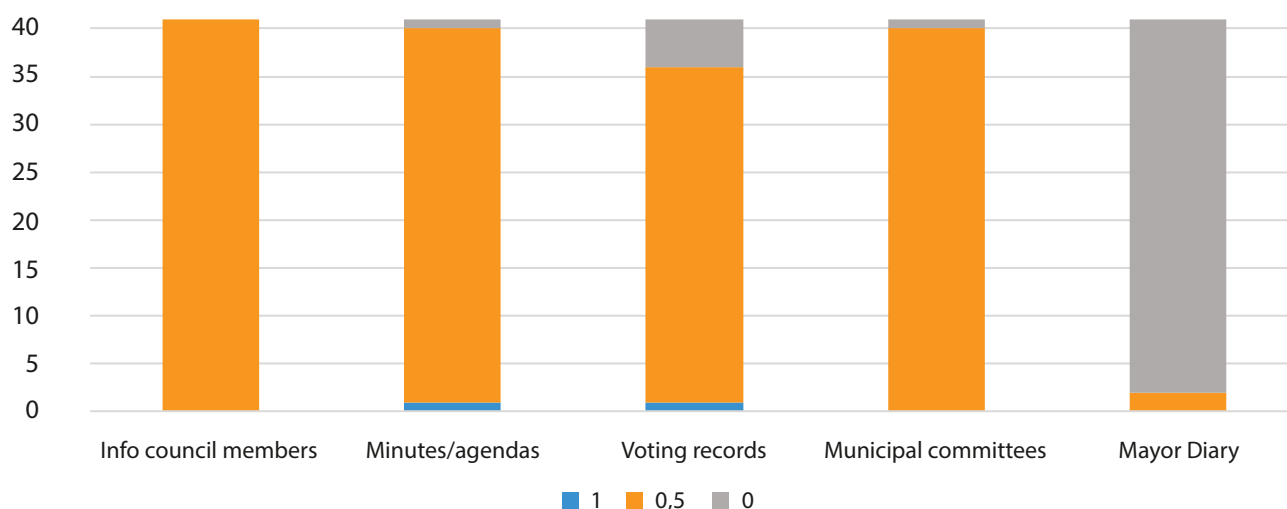
When it comes to diaries of Latvian mayors the picture is grimmer. As there is no lobbying

¹² Municipality of Liepāja: <https://www.liepaja.lv/komiteju-un-komisiju-sedes/finansu-komiteja/>

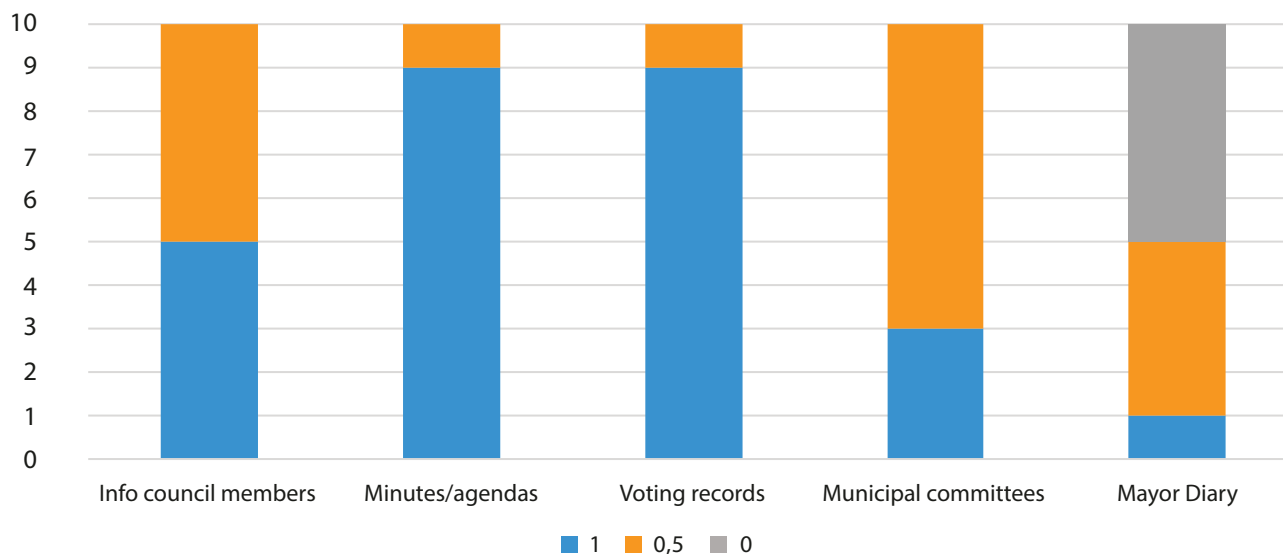
regulation in Latvia as of yet, officials are not required by law to publish information about contacts with interest groups. While most municipalities provide a section for publishing news articles, which often also include information of activities carried out by the mayor or other officials – this could not be regarded as sufficient for receiving the partial score. Only two Latvian municipalities have qualified for this. Namely, Riga, the mayor of which has a personal lobbying register¹³ and Ropaži Municipality that has provided a calendar of events with a filtering option that allows citizens to select specifically municipality decision-making or administration related events. While this tool is not seemingly used for providing information on mayoral activities at this time – it is designed in a way that could easily fill this function.¹⁴

The situation is less grim in the case of Norway, where mayoral activities are reported at least partially in half of the municipalities selected for evaluation. Only the municipality of Stord provided this information to a satisfying degree, also including information on future planned activities.

Politics & Decision-making - Latvia



Politics & Decision-making - Norway



13 Riga Municipality: <https://www.riga.lv/lv/rigas-domes-priekssedetaja-martina-staka-lobija-registrs>

14 Ropaži Municipality: <https://ropazi.lv/lv/sakums/pasakumi/>

[3.2] Organisational structure and administration

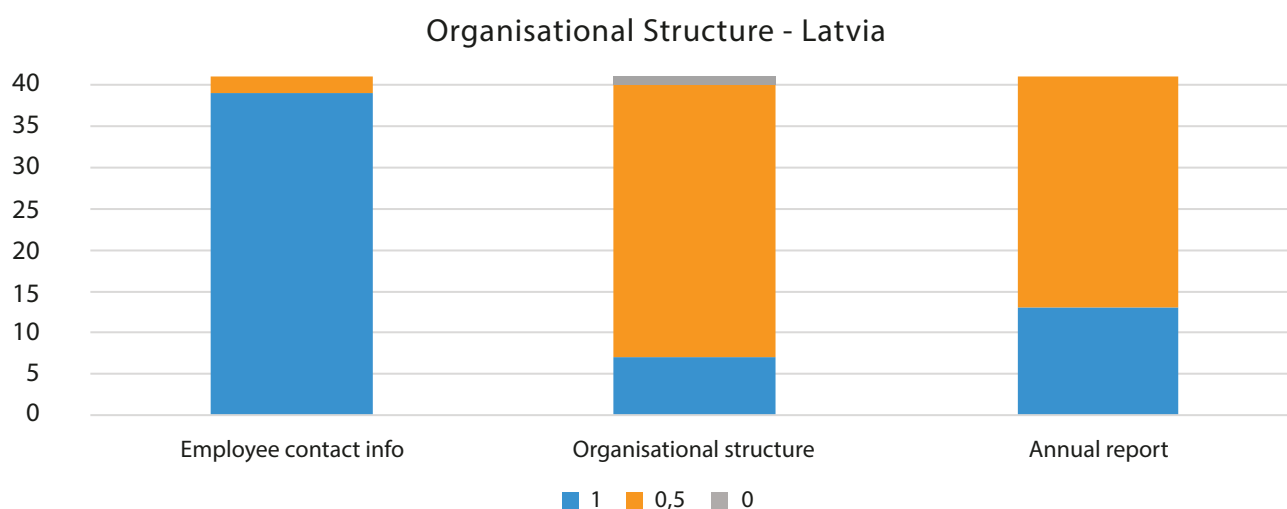
Overall, it could be said that both Latvian and Norwegian municipalities have performed well in the area of organisational structure and administration. It should be noted that here again the Norwegian sample of municipalities has performed better than Latvian municipalities.

This is not equally the case for each indicator in this area. Norwegian municipalities have not performed as consistently well as their Latvian counterparts when it comes to scores on central administration employee contact information.

More than half of the municipality sample in Norway has received the full score on information about organisational structure. Latvian municipalities have performed less well and, in many cases, offer very limited information on the structure of administration – usually as part of the page that contains employee contact information. Responsibilities of departments or units of the administration are explained in a small minority of cases only.

In the Norwegian case all sampled municipalities but one (Hasvik) have received the full score on the availability of information on the municipality's annual report. While performing well in this indicator overall, most Latvian municipalities have failed to fulfil one or more requirements to achieve the full score. However, good practice examples can be found even among the Latvian municipalities. The municipality of Gulbene has not only provided annual reports and their archive in an accessible way, but even provided audit reports.¹⁵

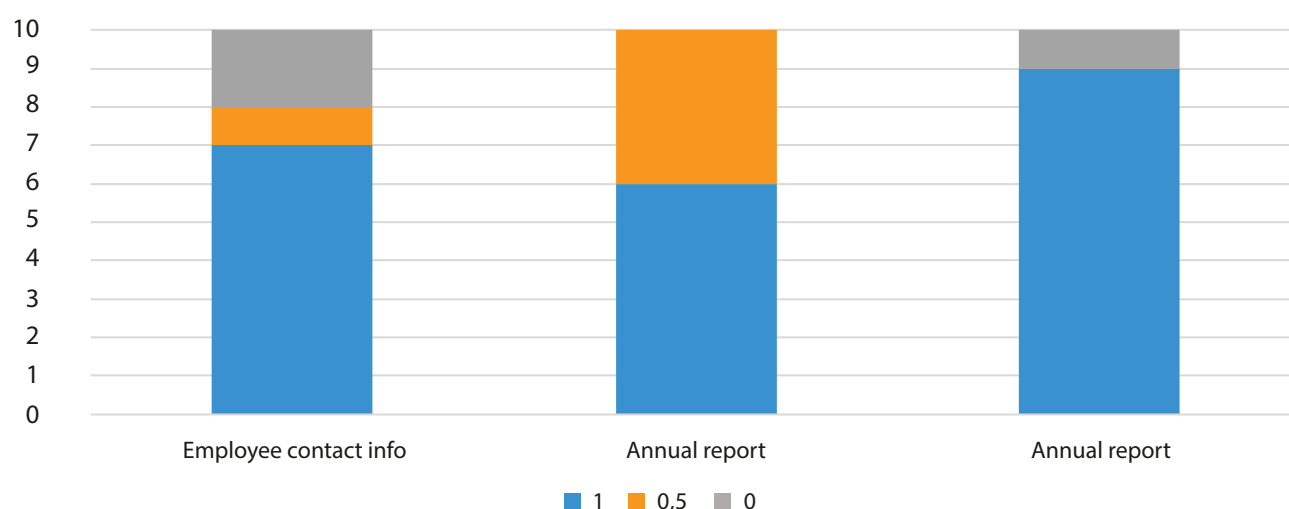
Nevertheless, it should be noted that setting clear goals and evaluating their progress towards these – is a weakness for most Latvian municipalities when it comes to their annual reports. A particularly good example of a municipality dealing with this issue is the municipality of Ludza. This municipality has provided an annex to the report explaining the completion of development targets.¹⁶



¹⁵ Gulbene Municipality: <https://www.gulbene.lv/lv/doks/pars/370-gada>

¹⁶ Ludza Municipality: <https://ludzasnovads.lv/pasvaldiba/publiskie-gada-parskati/>

Organisational Structure - Norway



[3.3.] Finances

When it comes to the area of finances Latvia has performed better, mostly due to the indicators related to grant funding decisions and municipality supported projects, as well as their monitoring and evaluation. The scores in indicators related to information on the municipality budget and finances are roughly similar in both the Latvian and Norwegian sample.

Oddly enough one Norwegian municipality (Hasvik) has published no information on the annual budget. The other municipalities from Norway have received the full score. Similarly, the Latvian municipalities have mostly also received the full score, but a small minority has received a partial score, mostly due to a non-existent archive or previous yearly budgets. A very good example of providing full budget related information in a user-friendly way is the municipality of Kuldīga.¹⁷ It should be noted, that while Kuldīga might be regarded as one of the best examples, other municipalities have also made efforts to present their budget in an accessible way.

Kuldīga, however, has not only provided full budget related information in an accessible way, but is one of the very small minority of Latvian municipalities to have provided a record of councillor votes in documents explaining amendments to the budget. Most municipalities in Latvia as well as the Norwegian sample have received a half score regarding budget amendments. This has in practice usually meant that information on amendments is provided, but the specifics on how the decision was made (voting records) are not included.

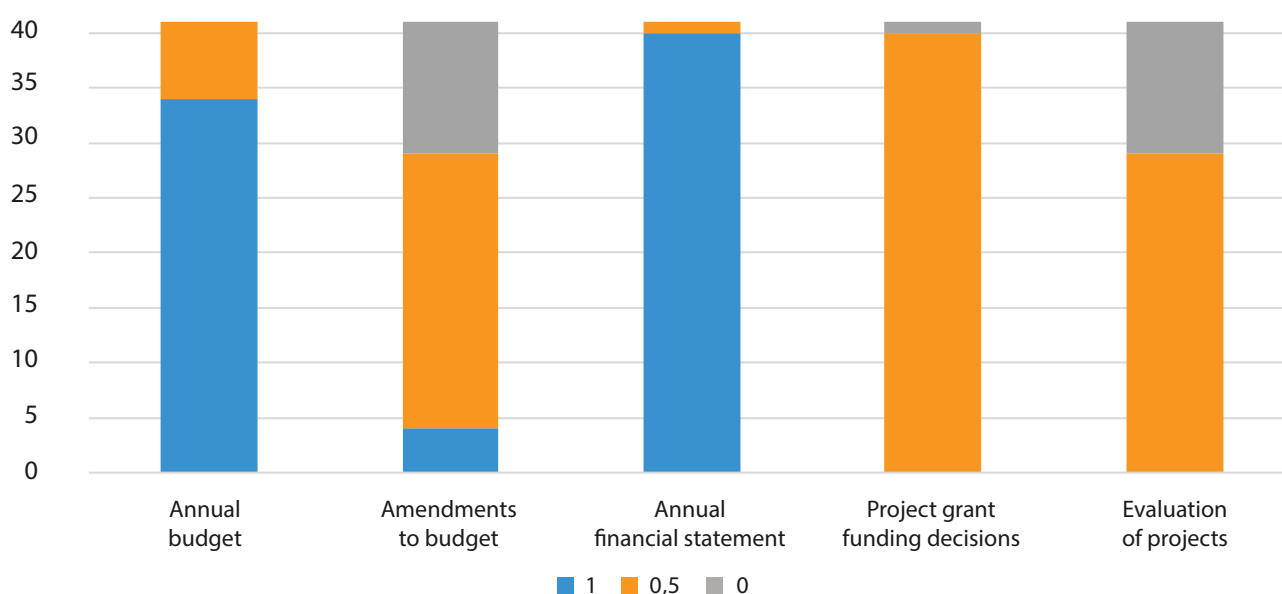
While annual financial statements have not always been published as separate documents on the municipality websites, most Latvian municipalities as well as the entire Norwegian sample have provided this information in their budget documentation. The only Latvian municipality that has not received a full score on this indicator is Rēzekne due to a lack of

¹⁷ Kuldīga Municipality: <https://www.kuldiga.lv/pasvaldiba/budzets#kuldigas-novada-pasvaldibas-2019-gada-budzets>

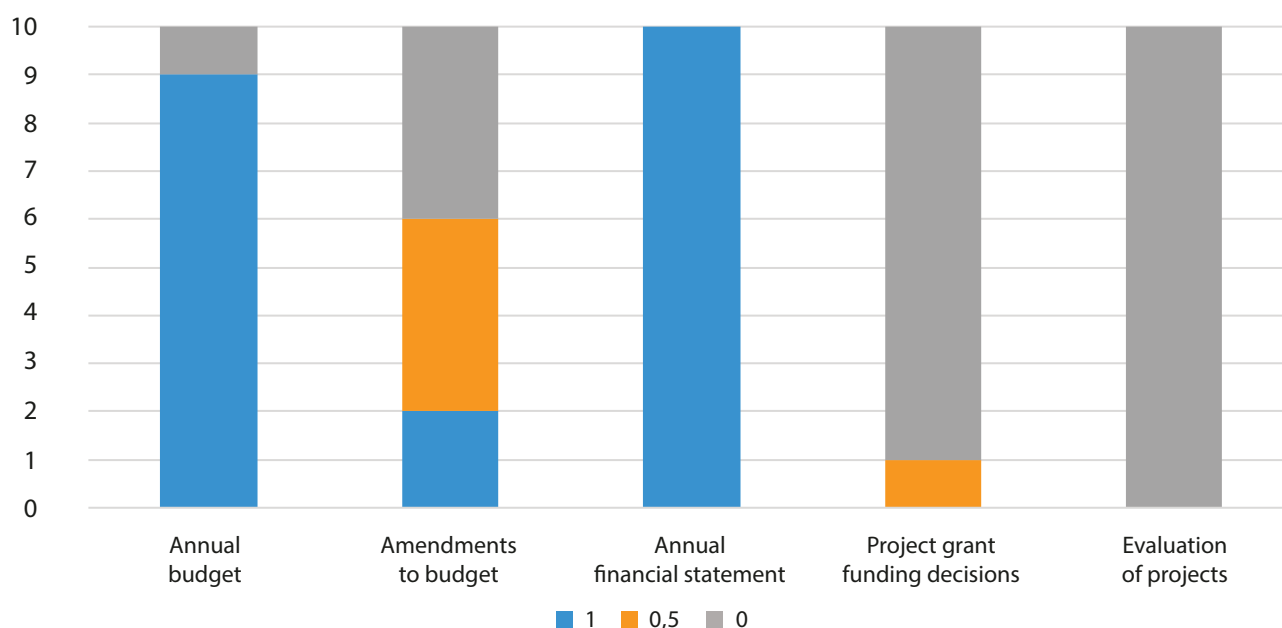
the previous year's archive of budget related documents. Nevertheless, the information relating to the current budget is presented very well on this website.¹⁸

When it comes to grant funding decisions and municipality supported projects neither the Latvian municipalities nor the Norwegian sample achieve full scores. Nevertheless, in the Latvian case we can see that most municipalities have provided at least some information regarding supported projects. What is usually lacking is monitoring and evaluation of the activities carried out and their results. In the Norwegian sample only the city of Oslo has provided limited information regarding these indicators.

Finances - Latvija



Finances - Norway



¹⁸ Rēzekne Municipality: <https://rezekne.lv/budzets/>

[3.4] Public participation mechanisms

In the area of public participation mechanisms, municipalities in both countries have performed similarly in indicators related to public consultations, complaint submission guidelines and participatory budgeting initiatives. A more pronounced difference can be seen when it comes to information on how the public can attend council meetings and on the procedure for providing relevant documentation to the public.

It can be said that roughly similar trends can be seen in both countries when it comes to information on public consultations. In very few cases has the relevant information not been published in a specific delineated section and instead put in the general news timeline, which makes it nigh impossible to find it without monitoring the news. Another very common problem for publishing information on public consultations is that municipalities quite often neglect to keep an archive of finished consultations. When information on a consultation is presented, it is usually accompanied with instructions on how views can be submitted.

When it comes to the submission of complaints, municipalities usually provide an online form that can be used to contact the municipalities. Such tools and other contact information are, however, usually general and not pertaining specifically to submitting complaints. One very good example that has received the full score is the website of the municipality of Rēzekne in Latvia. Not only is their contact form complaint specific, the website also provides a map where existing complaints are presented as well as their status.¹⁹

When it comes to council meetings, Latvia lags behind the Norwegian sample in providing adequate information on participation opportunities and the availability of documents. Most Latvian municipalities provide neither information on how the meetings can be accessed nor information regarding when documents for the specific meeting are to be presented to the public. It should be noted that the public should technically be permitted to attend council meetings regardless of information availability.

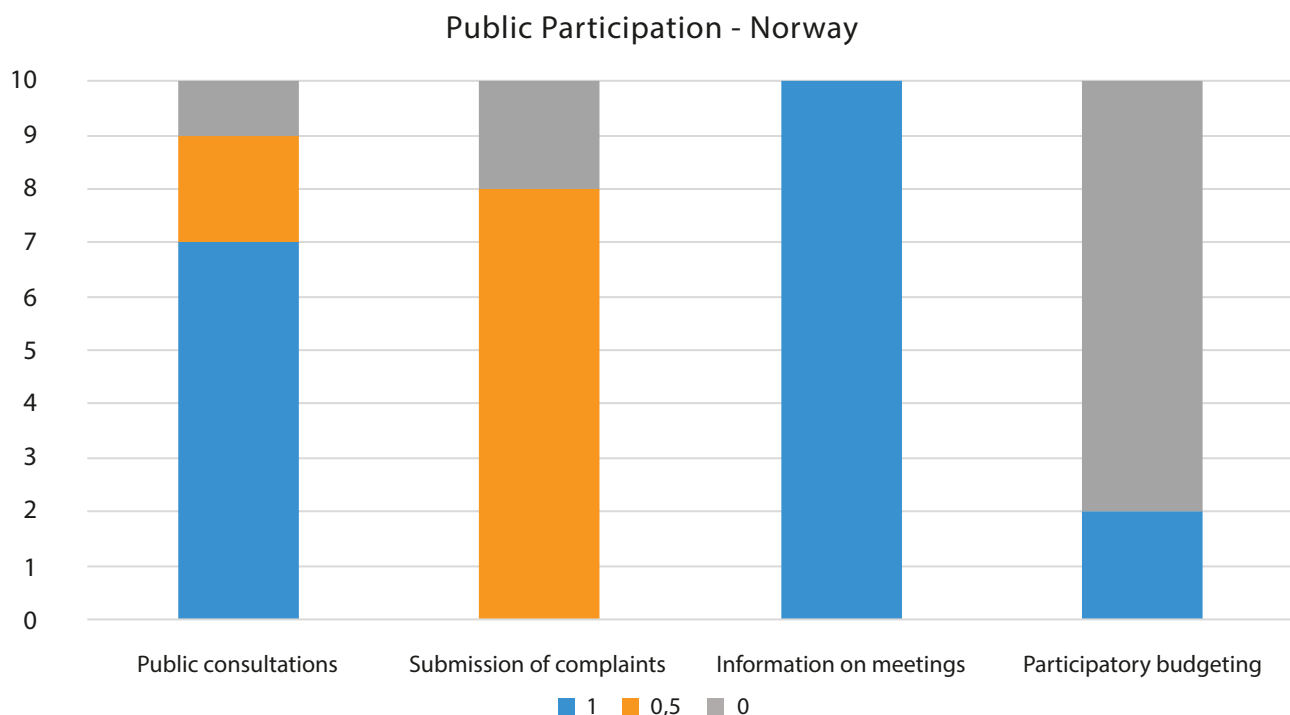
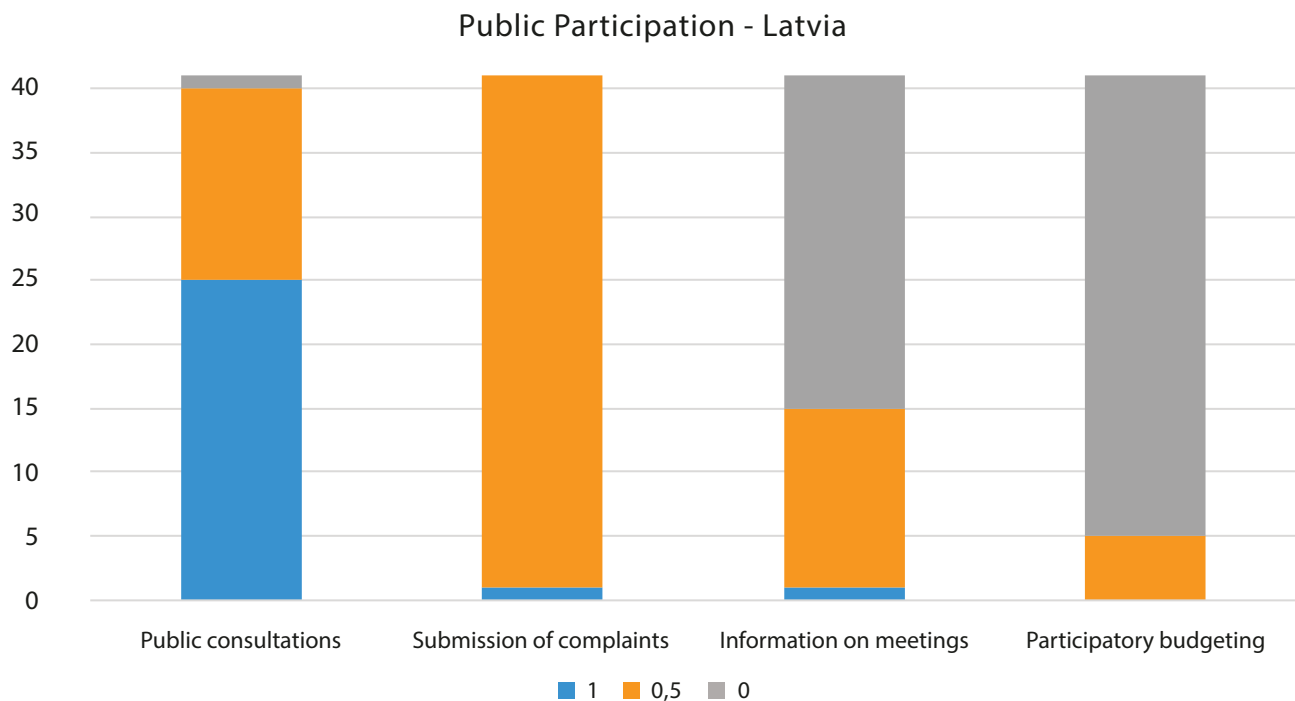
The city of Oslo may serve as a good model, where the time and place for meetings in the council as well as committees are published. In addition, the city administration also provides extensive information on the website, on how individuals and interest groups can present views and proposals for changes in the budget, before the final budget decision in the city council: "Do you have input for the budget proposal of 2022?".²⁰

When it comes to participatory budgeting initiatives a roughly similar proportion of municipalities have presented information on this in both countries. However, the initiatives are currently not reliably established as regular practice in Latvia, as it is a fairly novel idea in the Latvian context and these initiatives are only now being introduced. The Norwegian municipalities on the other hand have received full scores where the

19 Rēzekne Municipality: https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/f67a490ce80b4ff499b23b7e618b7c01/page/page_1/

20 Oslo Municipality: <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/politikk/bystyret/har-du-innspill-til-budsjettforlaget-2022>

participatory budgeting initiatives are implemented. However, participatory budgeting is not common practice in Norway.



[3.5] Anti-corruption and ethics

In the area of anti-corruption and ethics, which is also the largest area of indicators in this study, the results are more varied. Overall, it could be said that Latvian municipalities perform better when it comes to indicators related to whistleblowing, but have not dedicated as much attention to anti-corruption related information in general when compared to the Norwegian sample.

It could be said that most Latvian municipalities have presented information on the use and procedures related to whistleblowing reports. However, only a minority of municipalities have explained the procedures for providing feedback to whistleblowers. Municipalities in Latvia have also not provided real life practical examples of when the whistleblowing channel ought to be used. It is actually rather surprising that some municipalities have not published information related to whistleblowing as existing regulation requires them to do so. This is most likely due to the fact that information on these channels is extremely difficult to find in the minority of cases.

In the Norwegian case only six municipalities have information on a whistleblowing channel. Whistleblowing is regulated in The Working Environment Act, which regulates basic labour rights, the right and obligation to notify and the protection of whistle-blowers, and it would be good if municipalities provided information regarding this on their websites. It should also be noted that only two municipalities have provided any information on the procedures for handling submitted reports.

In contrast Norwegian municipalities have performed better in the indicators related to donations to political organisations or politicians and interest asset declarations. While it is true that in both countries this information is available on national level institution websites, in the case of Latvia not a single municipality offered any information on this or instructions on how relevant information could be found. In contrast, half of the Norwegian sample provided at least some information on interest and asset declarations, and the city of Oslo has even provided information on donations to political organisations.

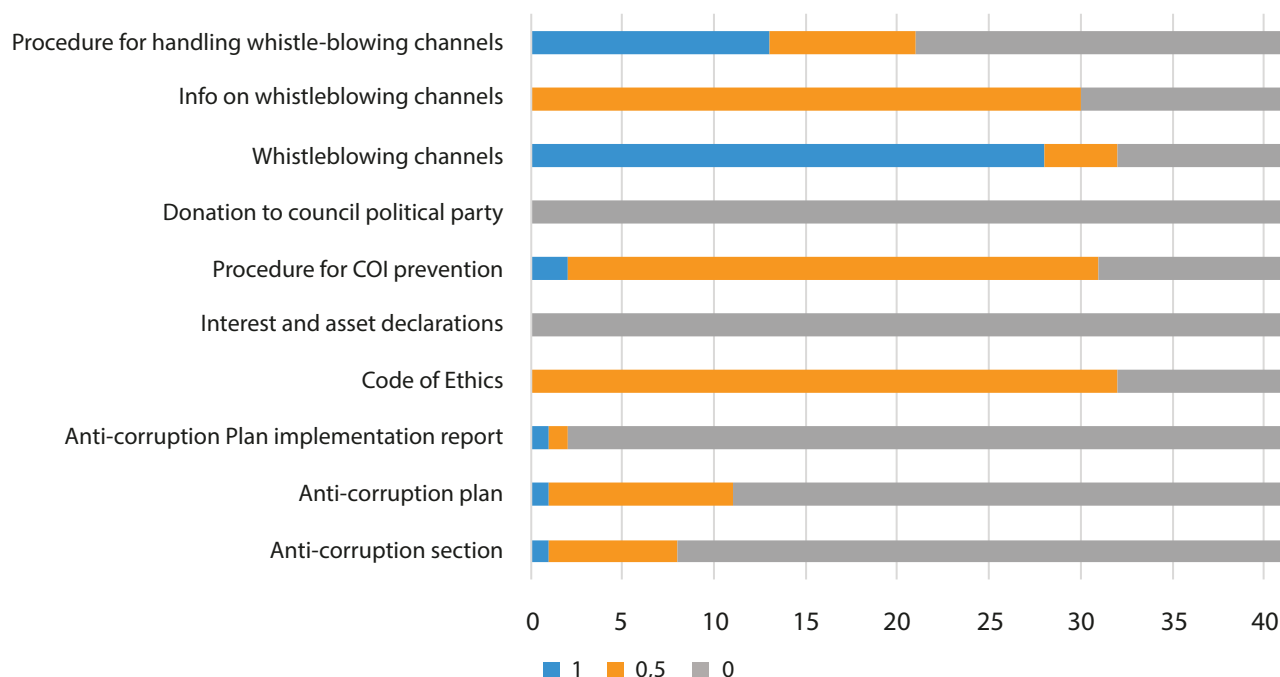
Regarding the indicators relating to codes of ethics and procedures of conflict-of-interest prevention it could be said that the situation is again mixed. While the Latvian municipalities have more often provided some information on a procedure for conflict-of-interest prevention (usually included in the code of ethics), this is less frequent in the Norwegian sample. A good practice example that should be mentioned here is the municipality of Līvāni, which published a document dealing specifically with conflict-of-interest prevention.²¹ On the other hand, when it comes to codes of ethics, two municipalities in Norway had codes that included information on consultation mechanisms that officials can use to gain advice on whether they were in a potential conflict-of-interest situation.

Publishing a general anti-corruption plan was fairly uncommon practice in the Norwegian sample and was also only done by a minority of Latvian municipalities. This does not of course mean that these plans do not exist, but rather indicates that municipalities do not feel obliged to share them with the public. Reports on the implementation of said plans were even rarer with only the city of Riga in Latvia publishing these documents, whilst also providing an archive of previous reports.²²

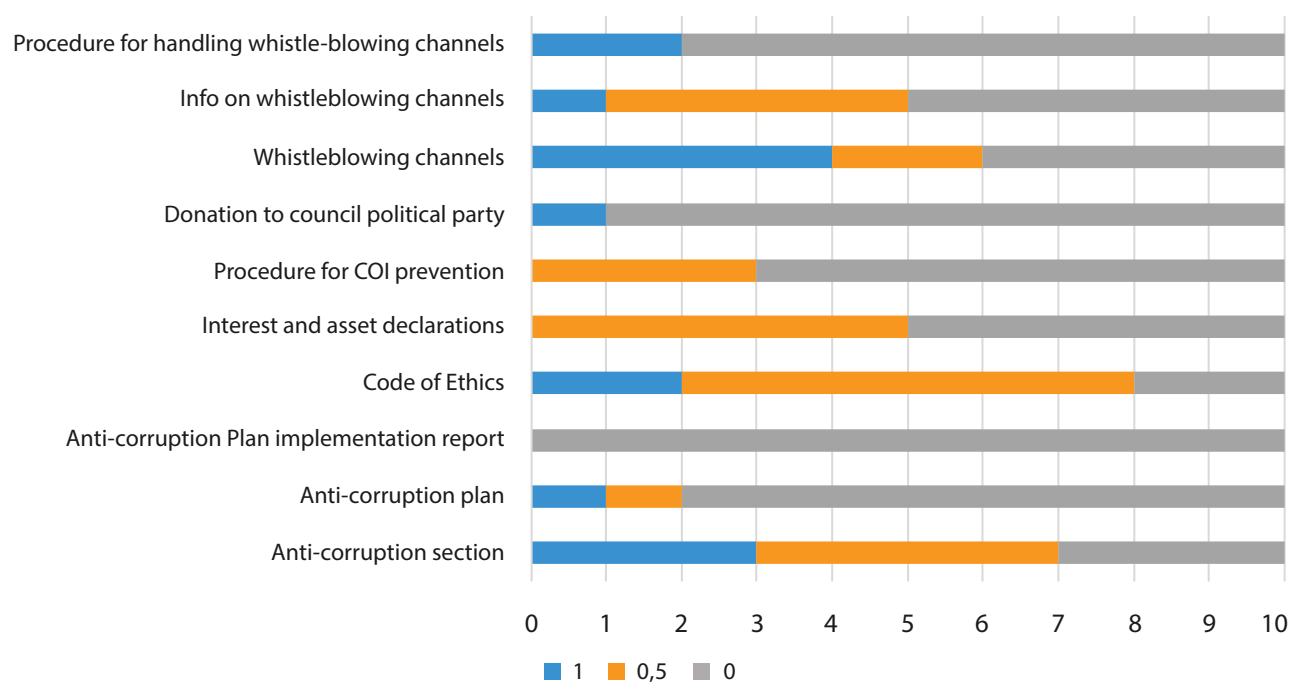
21 Līvāni Municipality, prevention of COI internal rules: <https://www.livani.lv/lv/media/12995/download>

22 Riga Municipality: <https://www.riga.lv/lv/korupcijas-noversana>

Anti-Corruption - Latvia



Anti-Corruption - Norway

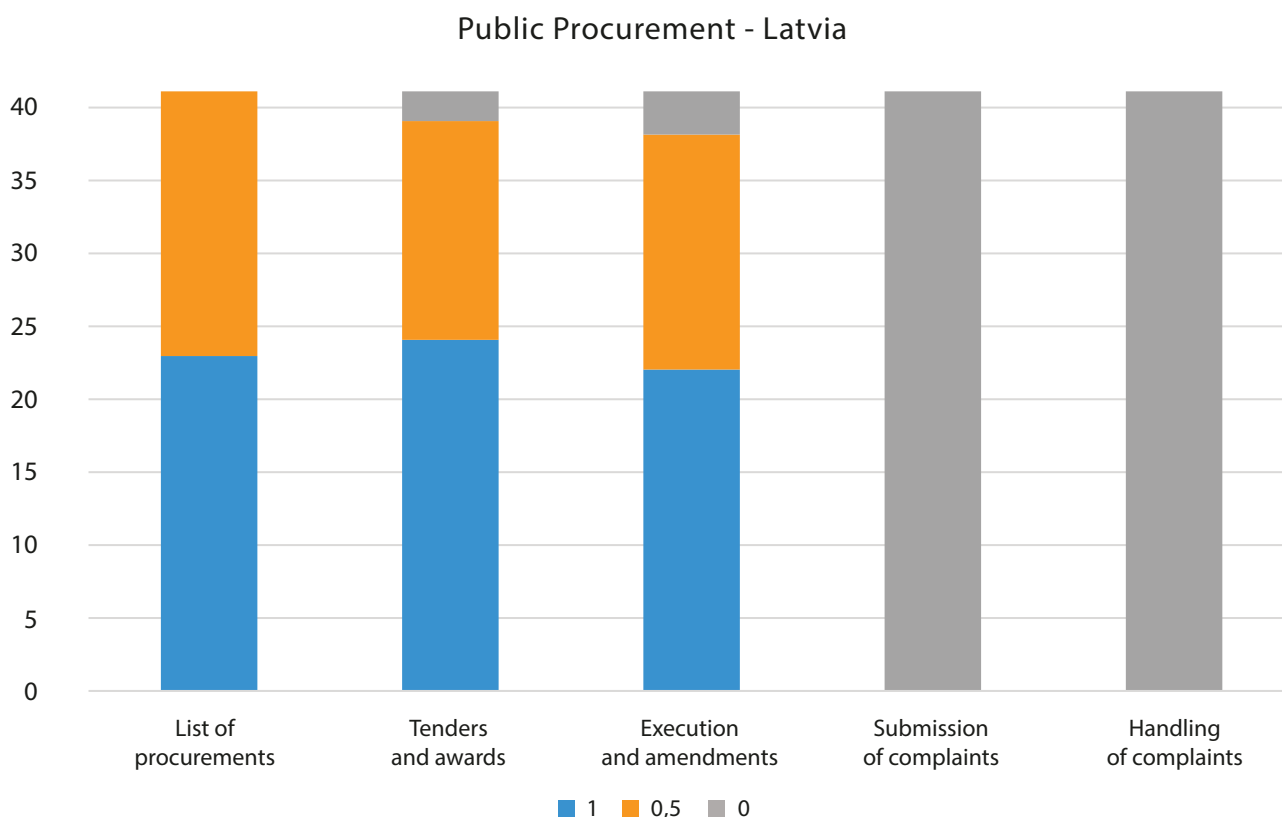


[3.6] Public procurement

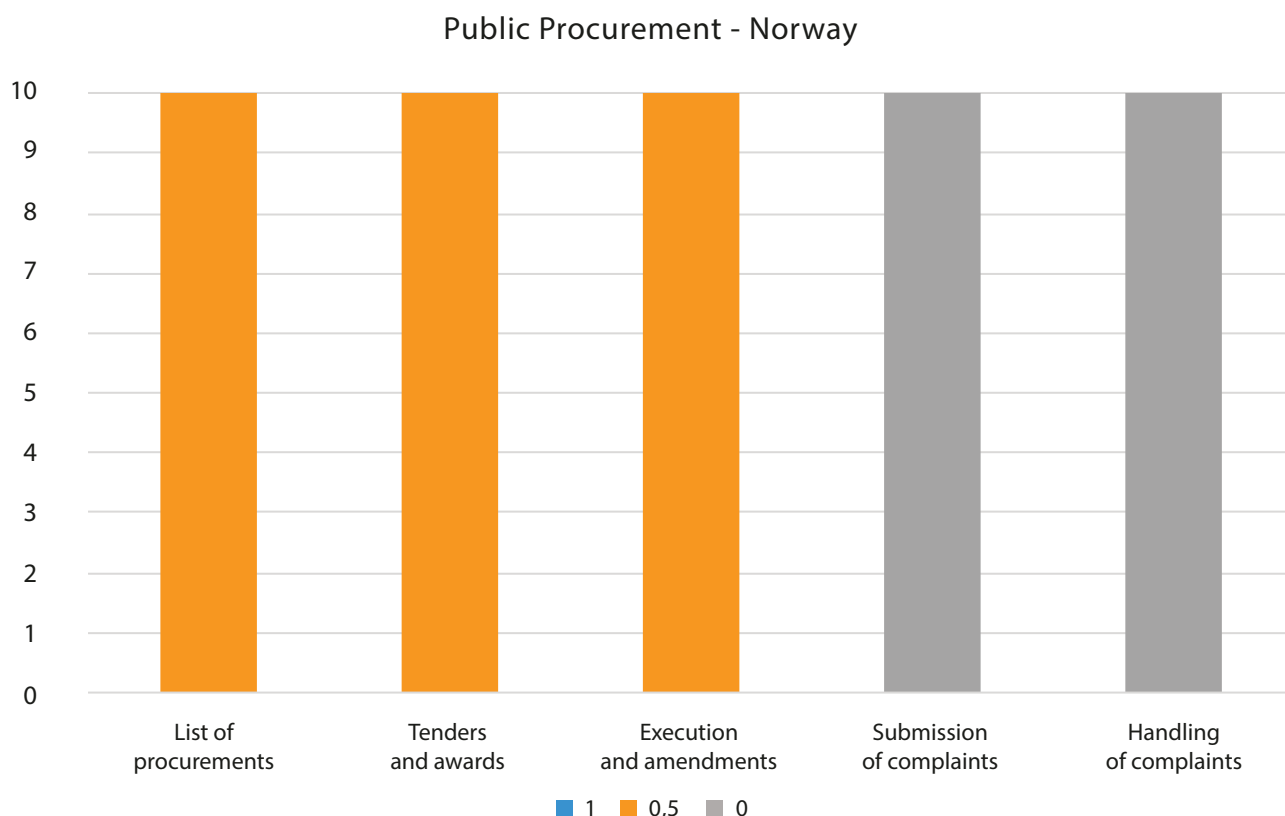
The situation in regard to the area of public procurement is roughly similar in both Latvian municipalities and the Norwegian sample. Both have provided information on the list of procurements, tenders and awards as well as the execution and amendments to procurements. However, in most cases this is done by providing a link and instructions for the use of a national level institution's webpage. Municipalities that provided links leading viewers directly to procurement information related to the specific municipality were awarded one point, while those that only offered a general link to the website were awarded half a point.

Regarding the list of procurements, tenders and awards as well as the execution of and amendments to procurements, it can be said that the Latvian municipalities tend to provide more specific guidance on reaching the information of interest. More than half of the municipalities not only provide a link to the national level website, but also lead directly to the procurements related to the municipality. In some cases, the municipality has published a listing of procurements on its own website while also providing a link leading directly to documentation on the national website. More often, however, municipalities provide an archive of procurements up to the year 2019 on their own website and in addition provide guidance on how more recent and current documentation can be found via a link. A good example of providing this information can be found on the webpage of the municipality of Olaine. Not only is a full listing of all procurements provided on the municipality webpage sorted into types of procurement, but these listings have specific links attached to them leading to the relevant documentation on the national level website.²³

Neither the Latvian nor the Norwegian municipalities provided any indications on their websites of how complaints related to procurements should be submitted or are handled. Nevertheless, in at least some cases contact information for municipal employees was provided. So even though it was not stated that these employees are to be contacted in the event of complaints, it could be considered a step in the right direction. While complaints are handled by national level institutions in both countries, it would be advisable to explain these procedures on the municipal website.



23 Olaine Municipality: https://www.olaine.lv/lv/pasvaldiba/iepirkumi_33#gsc.tab=0



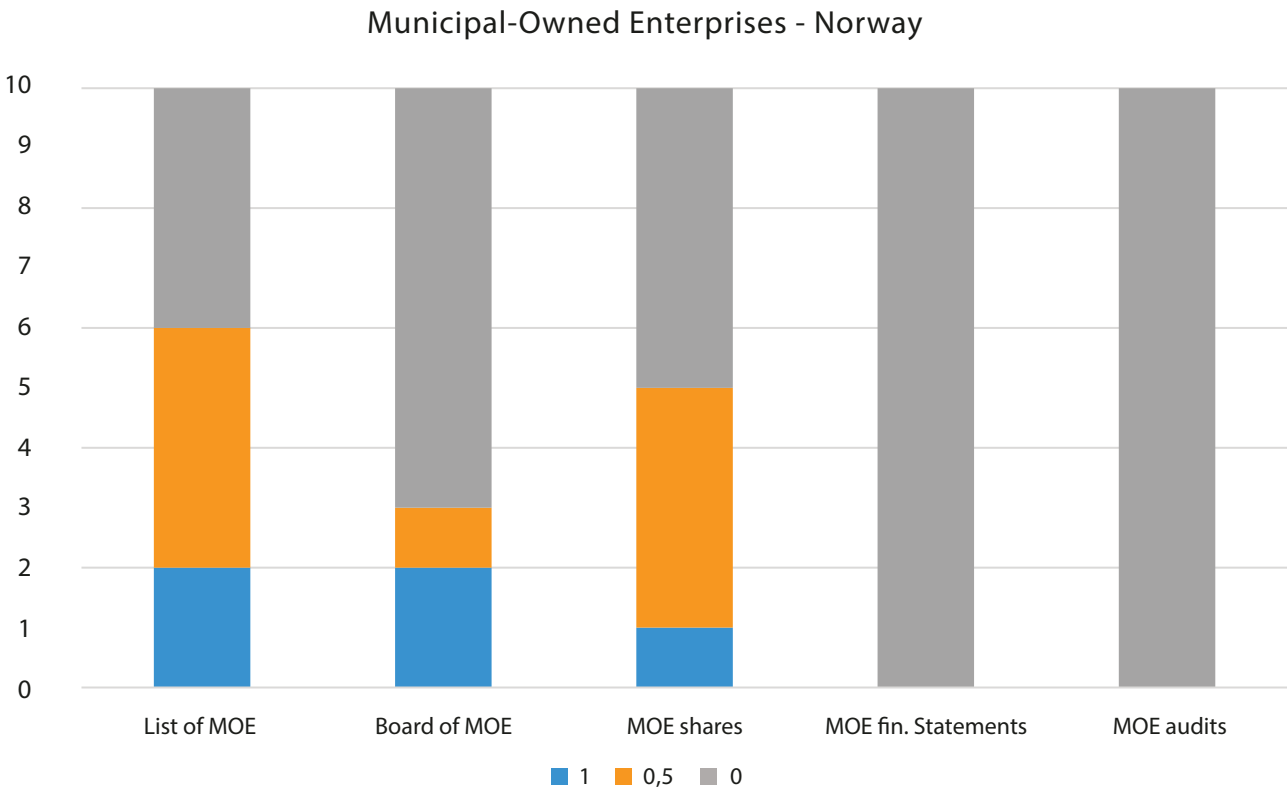
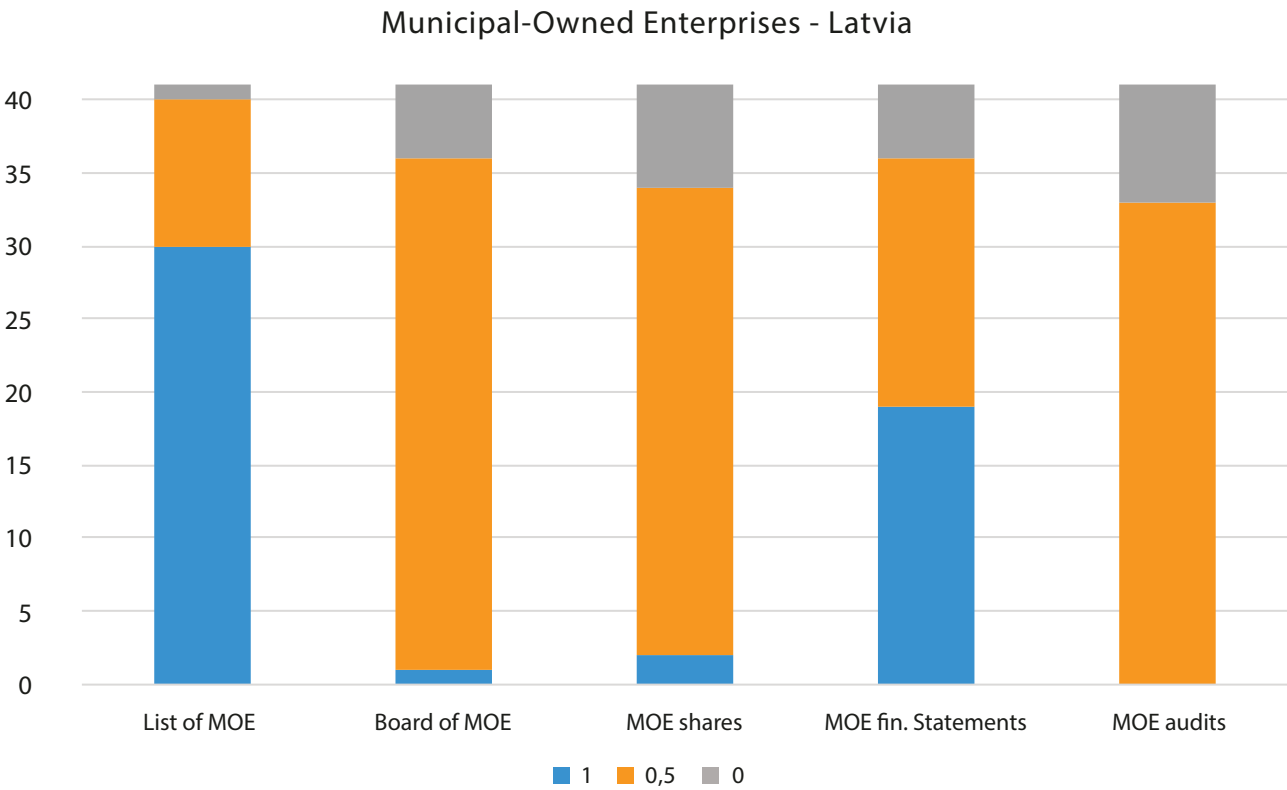
[3.7] Municipal-owned enterprises

The scores in the area of municipal-owned enterprises (MOE) are more straightforward in the sense that Latvian municipalities are consistently performing better. Nevertheless, most municipalities even in Latvia neglect to provide an archive with information other than that of the current year. Another important aspect to mention is that information on the MOEs is most often provided externally – either on webpages owned by the enterprise itself or other online recourses. In the Latvian case this information was usually partly presented on the municipality webpage in the form of an MOE list with some limited information on MOE functions and contact information, whilst also providing links leading to external webpages belonging to the individual MOEs.

This is the more frequent reason for why municipalities have only received half of the possible score regarding the board members of the MOE and the proportion of shares owned by the municipality. This information is usually provided, but with no archive. Interestingly enough, two of the ten evaluated Norwegian municipalities provided an archive of past board compositions. This might indicate a greater focus on providing such information in the Norwegian context.

The Latvian MOEs usually provide annual reports on their webpages that are indicated on the municipality webpage. These reports also usually include financial statements. However, the MOEs do not always provide an archive of previous reports, but only the current ones. Likewise, these reports usually (but not always) also include a section on audit results, but the audit summary is not presented independently of the report. Strangely enough some of the published reports did have the auditor report in their table

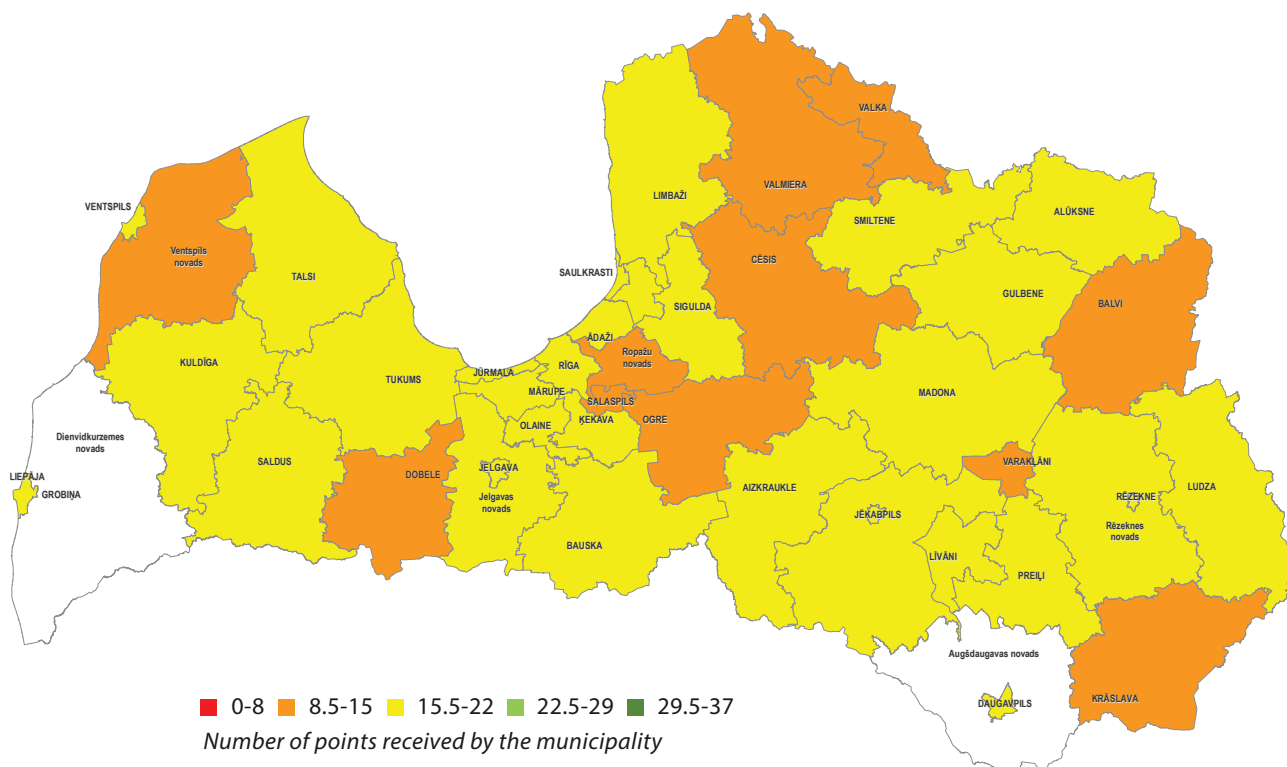
of contents, but it was cut from the document. In some cases, municipalities had also published information on anti-corruption plans for MOEs themselves, which could be regarded as good practice.



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Latvian results

During the time of research several trends have been discovered. The design of websites varies to a great extent and may play a significant role in whether or not a person will even try to look for information. Some of the sites took the form of an archive of information, with no easy access or overview features. Often in these cases, locating the information of interest required great investment of time resources, which raises doubts as to whether a regular citizen would even put in the necessary effort.

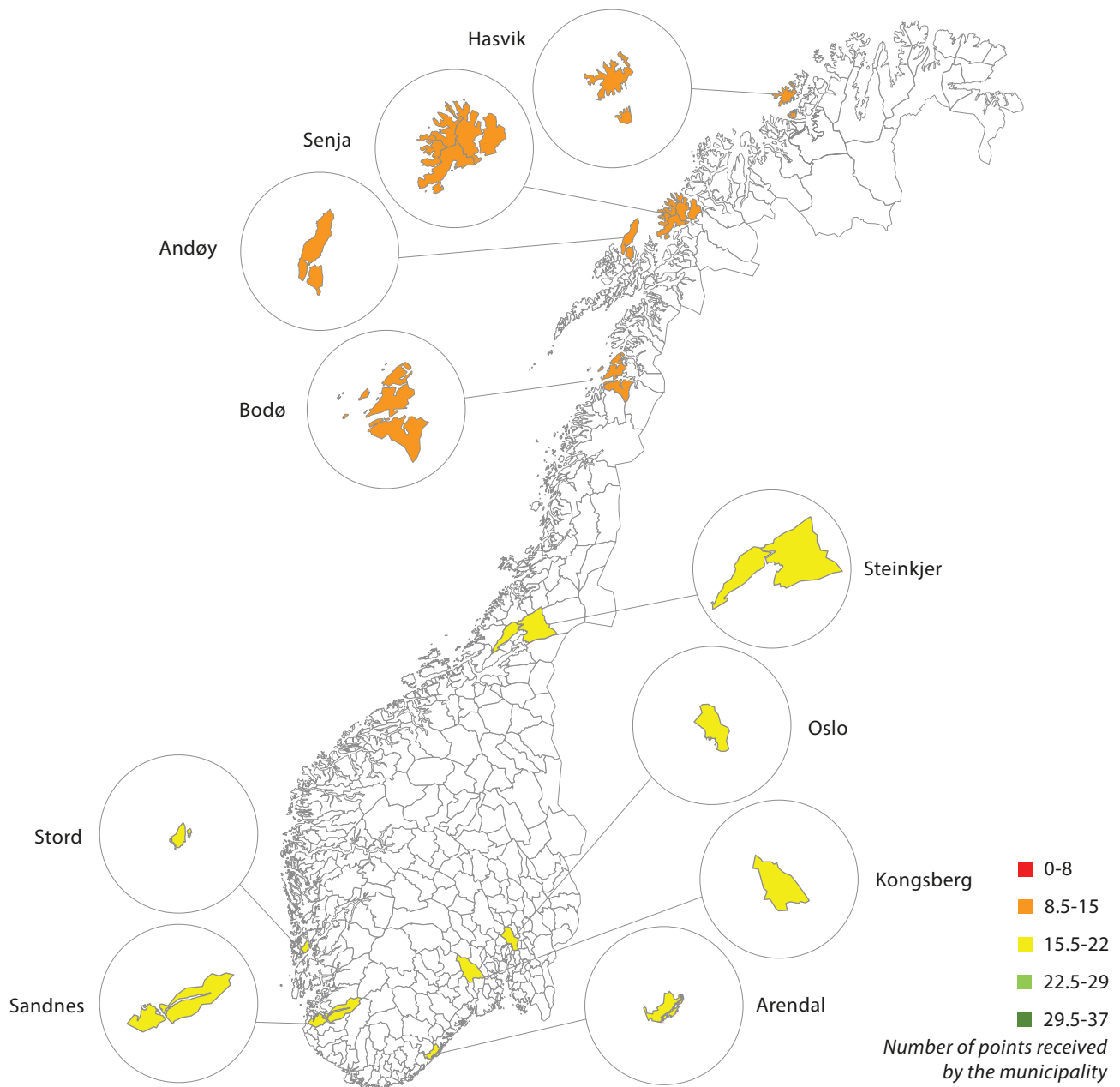


In regard to areas of indicators, it can be seen that municipalities have fairly consistently performed well in the area of organisational structure and administration, and relatively poorly in the area of anti-corruption and ethics.

The indicators with the overall least amount of presence across all of the municipalities are - the daily/weekly/monthly schedule of the mayor; participatory budgeting initiatives; reports on internal corruption and plans for its prevention; and donations to political parties or members accompanied by the interests and asset declarations of council members. Procurement complaint mechanisms, grant funding information and complaints to the council were also indicators with relatively low frequency.

Overview of Norwegian results

Overall, the ten municipalities seem to have better transparency performance regarding organisational structure and administration, politics and decision-making and public procurement, than regarding municipal-owned enterprises and anti-corruption. However, the scores vary substantially between the ten municipalities.



The city of Oslo has the highest overall transparency score among the ten municipalities, whereas the smallest municipality in the sample, Hasvik at the polar coast of Finnmark, scores lowest.

Among the ten municipalities surveyed, there is actually no one who has a website with easily accessible information about their efforts within anti-corruption and integrity work. Municipalities are generally good at informing users and residents about the basic municipal services and how users and residents can access them. Many municipalities also have user-friendly digital solutions for applying for services. The municipalities also provide good information about the agenda and time for meetings of political bodies. Many also stream the meetings so that they are available to the citizens, both in real time and afterwards.

We want to highlight the websites of two of the municipalities, not because they necessarily score well on the indicators in this survey, but because they have a fairly user-friendly structure and thus make it relatively easy to find the information in our

indicator sets that is actually posted. This applies to Stord Municipality in western Norway²⁴ and the capital, the city of Oslo.²⁵

Both municipalities can improve their information on procurement, anti-corruption, employees etc., which also applies to most of the municipalities. But Stord Municipality has a clear website that makes it easy for users to gain access to essential information about most parts of the municipality's activities. The city of Oslo excels at publishing a lot of information about the municipality's activities, and in a format that allows the mechanical processing of statistical material related to municipal budgets and accounts.

General conclusions

Overall, a trend could be seen that the largest cities among which also happen to be capitals of their respective countries have scored fairly well when compared to other municipalities. While the indicators in the study were chosen so as to be achievable by less well-resourced municipalities, there could be at least two reasons for this:

- Firstly, larger populations mean more active entrepreneurs and citizens that not only pressure their municipality to disclose more information, but also provide more extensive feedback on the user experience of accessing this information.
- The second reason, which is in part related to the first, would be that better resourced municipalities can find resources for improving the design and user friendliness of their webpages while others may not have this opportunity. While user friendliness was not measured in the course of this pilot study, it could nevertheless have had an impact on the attention specific municipalities can direct towards providing accessible information.

Another interesting finding is that Norwegian municipalities have on average performed worse than their Latvian counterparts in some parts of areas like anti-corruption. This could also be explained in various ways.

- The salience of some transparency related issues might be lower in Norway, as lower perceptions of corruption mean a citizenry that is also less interested in supervising their officials, leading to a lesser amount of published information as there is no demand for it. However, the relatively mixed results in the anti-corruption area of indicators might not support this thesis.
- As the current evaluation should be regarded as a pilot project, there is still plenty of room for improvement in its methodology. One of the potential issues identified whilst carrying out the study is that some indicators are relatively open to interpretation as to how points should be allocated. The evaluation has been

²⁴ Stord Municipality: www.stord.kommune.no

²⁵ Oslo Municipality: www.oslo.kommune.no

conducted by a representative of each respective country; therefore, it is within the realm of possibility that the discrepancy can at least to some extent be explained by a weakness of the current methodology, especially when considered along with the first aspect mentioned – salience of issues. Some indicators might also be either too broadly or too narrowly defined.

- Likewise, it should be noted that whilst in the case of Latvia nearly all municipalities have been covered by the study, in the case of Norway only a small sample has been evaluated, and perhaps is not fully representative in spite of covering a wide variance of different municipalities.

Recommendations

A potential drawback of the current methodology used by TI Latvia and TI Norway in the course of this pilot study is that in some instances it emphasises the formal availability of data. An example of this is information related to the budget of a municipality. More emphasis should be placed on the way this information is presented in specific cases as well as the overall design of the municipality webpages. This had led to some municipalities that offer an encyclopaedic vast array of information receiving higher scores than others that have sacrificed some information availability for achieving a user-friendly design.

As mentioned above, some limitations could also be linked to differences of cultural salience of some of the indicators – e.g., in the area of anti-corruption and ethics. An important question that merits attention is whether municipalities proactively publish information or only strive to provide the necessary minimum that national legislation compels them to follow. In the case of Norway, the law states that municipalities should provide the populace with specific information, but does not, however, specify that this should be done with the help of the webpage. This and other issues merit deeper discussion.

Thus, it could be said that the results of this pilot study could serve as a good starting point for future discussions, involving various stakeholders on how the methodology of such an evaluation could be refined and improved. Such a discussion in the context of Latvia would take place during the creation of legislation relating to the relevant topics in the national parliament and, therefore, could serve dual purposes.

In the case of Latvia, the legislature is currently not only working on new legislation relating to the operation of municipalities, but also on the regulation of lobbying. The former should take into account the transparency requirements related to the latter. Currently, the new legislation on the operation of municipalities concerns additional reforms in their responsibilities as well decision-making and public participation. These questions include municipality level referendums and participatory budgeting for example. Including new obligations for municipalities in the format in which data should

be published should also be considered. It should be noted that advisory referendums are already available in the case of Norway and are widely used.

It should be understood that due to the very recent administrative reform, some municipalities might not have had time to integrate all relevant information in a user-friendly way, and in fact might still be considering ways to integrate information from the previous administrative setup into a common webpage. **Drawing on the insights of this pilot study, TI Latvia and TI Norway intend to create a toolkit with guidelines for municipalities on how their transparency scores could be improved, as well as general advice on how information could be presented to better serve both businesses and the citizenry.**

AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Politics and decision-making	1	Basic information on council members (name, contact, political party)
	2	Minutes and agendas of council meetings
	3	Voting records of council sessions
	4	Composition of municipal committees
	5	Diary/calendar/agenda of the mayor
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Organisational structure and administration	6	Basic information on municipality's employees (name, position, contact)
	7	Organisational structure
	8	Annual report
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Finances	9	Annual budget
	10	Amendments to the budget
	11	Annual financial statements (incomes, expenditures, debts)
	12	Information about grant funding decisions
	13	Information about monitoring and evaluation of grant-funded projects
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Public participation mechanisms	14	Information on planned public consultations and instructions for participation
	15	Instructions on how to submit suggestions or complaints to the Council, and how these are handled
	16	Information on participation opportunities for the public to attend Council meetings
	17	Participatory budgeting initiatives
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Anti-corruption and ethics	18	Dedicated webpage section on anti-corruption and ethics
	19	Anti-corruption / corruption risk management plan
	20	Report on implementation of anti-corruption / risk management plan
	21	Code of conduct / ethics for municipal politicians and civil servants
	22	Interest and asset declarations of council members
	23	Internal procedure / control system for prevention, detection and settling of conflicts of interest
	24	Donations to council members / political parties
	25	Confidential or anonymous whistleblowing channel
	26	Information on whistleblowing channel
	27	Procedure for handling whistle-blowing reports

AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Public procurement	28	List of procurements
	29	Information (and archive) on procurement tenders and awards
	30	Information on the execution of and amendments to procurement contracts
	31	Mechanism for the submission of procurement complaints
	32	Information on the handling of procurement complaints
AREA	#	INDICATOR NAME
Municipal-owned enterprises	33	List of all MOEs
	34	Public officials appointed to the board of MOEs
	35	Proportion of shares owned by the municipality in each MOE
	36	Financial statements of MOEs
	37	Audits on financial statements of MOEs



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