



# Introducing Digital Advocacy Tool for Civil Society Organisations in Latvia

Pilot study

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**Organisation MyVoice** (Foundation of Public Participation), founded in 2011, works in the field of digital democracy and public engagement. MyVoice mission is to develop and promote digital tools for better civic participation in decision making processes. Under the MyVoice brand, the globally recognised platform ManaBalss.lv, as well as other civic engagement tools like ParvaiPret.lv and Lemejs.lv are being developed and maintained.

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# 1. Background

By now it has been widely recognized that information and communication technologies (ICTs), have the potential to enhance and support public participation in government decision-making and public policy-making (OECD, [2001a](#), [2001b](#), [2004](#), [Macintosh et. al., 2002](#); [Whyte & Macintosh, 2003](#)).

Governments all over the world have made significant efforts for supporting the implementation of ICTs in public and private sector (OECD, [2001a](#), [2001b](#), [2004](#)). Most of these efforts have been focused in providing the information and the “top-down” engagement of citizens, e.g. via initiatives promoted by the government. There has been less emphasis on “bottom-up” participative processes in which citizens, organizations of civil society including NGOs and other formal and informal groups convey their needs and opinions to elected representatives so that they can act as co-creators, rather than just consumers, of policy ([Macintosh and Whyte, 2006](#)).

The interest about the potential of ICTs in facilitating different forms of citizen participation (informative, consultative and participative) goes hand in hand with a solution to the so called “deficit of democracy” and the abstention and disengagement of citizens from politics. Given the importance bringing citizens closer to government, the strategies of electronic government (or e-government), defined by OECD as “The use of information and communication technologies, and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government” ([OECD, 2003](#)), has been extended in order to include the electronic support of democratic processes (electronic democracy or e-democracy) including public participation (electronic participation or e-participation).

With the renewed attention to the role of the citizens in decision making in times when traditional national institutions are struggling to provide solutions to global challenges this report is dedicated to the role of the legislatures in enhancing participatory processes. As arenas for collecting and articulating the interests of the nation as a whole, parliaments today face significant public expectations and public pressure on the parliaments is growing. The growth in the size of government has increased the responsibilities of parliaments to scrutinize the government and call to account with various levels of success. The development of communication technology and saturation media coverage of politics has also increased the visibility of parliaments and politicians. According to Global Parliamentary Report common themes for parliaments are information and influence in parliamentary work, accountability and responsiveness to public concerns, service and delivery to meet citizens’ needs ([Power, 2012](#)). In democracy the parliament has always been central arena for competing political interests carried by individual politicians, factions and political parties. Yet, the representative role of political parties – once central to parliamentary functioning – is declining. In many countries political parties enjoy low public trust, are organizationally weak and are poorly rooted in society.

With the flourishing of civil society and new forms of participation, citizens now have many alternative routes of representation, such as collective addresses, referendums, large scale public deliberations etc. Thus, the parliament which was once the single most important arena to articulate public concern, is now competing with a variety of civil participation avenues.

## Latvian Context

Latvia is a country with a population of 1,9 million and low average population density (31 people per square km). More than 1 million of population is concentrated in the capital city Riga and its agglomeration. It's main strengths related to e-government and e-participation are well advanced coverage of ultrafast broadband. 4G in Latvia covers nearly 100 % of households. According to the annual Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) the broadband was available to 90 % of households against 60 % in the EU as a whole, coupled with the relatively good take-up of such connections (32 % of households, against 20 % in the EU as a whole) ([EC, 2019](#)).

Latvian government has made an impressive progress in the development of e-government and e-services, and opening up of the public data, there has been less emphasis on the development of participative solutions than developing user friendly one-way e-information portals. Without active state policies promoting e-participation, most projects, such as the platform of collective addresses *MyVoice* (*Manabalss.lv*). Since its establishment in 2011 when citizens' rights to directly petition the parliament were introduced, the citizen initiatives coming through *MyVoice* have changed several laws and even lead to one constitutional amendment.

The Constitution of Latvia (*Satversme*) grants broad powers to the Parliament (*Saeima*) which decides on the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers, and the President. The Constitution does not limit the spheres, in which parliamentary legislative initiatives can be passed. Despite small scale of parliamentary democracy of Latvia, open institutions and high level of digitalization according to Eurobarometer data in Latvia less than 20% of the population trust the parliament and less than 7% trust political parties ([EK, 2021](#)).

According to the national survey carried out in December of 2020, 80% respondents considered that in general their interests were not taken into account by ministers, deputies and others when passing laws. On the other hand, 61% of the respondents considered that the involvement of society would improve the quality of decision-making ([SKDS, 2020](#)). This shows that Latvian society is largely critical of representative institutions and is ready to give more voice and impact to organized civil society. Currently lobbying practices are not transparent in Latvia and there is no legal act that regulates lobbying activities. At the time of writing this report the draft Law of Interest Representation which is intended to regulate lobbying is being discussed in the parliament.

Until now, there has not been any integrated digital platform in Latvia that would compile all publicly available information on the parliamentary and governmental work, as well as enable citizens to comment on proposals and bills or make a direct contact with politicians and officials. At the moment the main source for obtaining information on the parliamentary work was the website of the Saeima which has mainly informative function but somewhat complicated for an ordinary user. The launch of new Law Portal of the Cabinet of Ministers is expected later in 2021. In order to ensure that the whole legislative process becomes more publicly open, with options for citizens' involvement into law-making *MyVoice* launched a project with the aim to create an enabling infrastructure and environment for the involvement of Latvian small and

medium-sized civil society organizations (CSOs) in decision-making processes in the Saeima.

**This pilot study is part of this project and it aims to examine the background conditions and requirements for the design and the implementation of digital advocacy tool for civil society organizations in Latvia.**

The report is structured according several objectives.

1. Examine parliamentary practices about the involvement of citizens into legislative processes in European Union member states and beyond.
2. Provide the best practices of the digital tools that could be relevant in the design of the digital advocacy tool for civil society organizations in Latvia.
3. Gather background information about the interest representation in Latvian parliament.
4. Review the experience and expectations of the potential users of digital advocacy tool.

The report is structured according these objectives and builds on:

- Literature review of the existing studies and the information requests of European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD).
- 13 Semi-structured expert interviews with non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives conducted from January -Feb, 2021
- Expert survey with 25 respondents representing various civic society organisations in Latvia
- Analysis of parliamentary records about the submissions and consultations undertaken by parliamentary committees.



## 2. Review of the Parliamentary Practices about the Involvement of Citizens Into Legislative Processes

### 2.1. Key Findings

1. Despite technological developments the majority of legislative bodies in Europe do not offer specific approaches to segment the population in order to improve its engagement. The young people and in some instances groups of specific ethnicity and nationality are singled out as specific group to be targeted by information.
2. Social media profiles of parliaments mostly serve as channels of one-way communication. The activity of parliaments on social media varies, but most mostly stick to neutral communication style.
3. Countries have different thresholds and rules for submitting and signing petitions. Petitions are usually gathered and sent to parliamentary petitions committee for examining.
4. In many countries cases parliaments are not legally bound to discuss or make actions after receiving petitions. However, the more signatures are gathered, the larger the possibility that the petition will be reviewed in the legislative bodies.
5. In case of collective addresses or citizens' initiatives, the legislation determines the minimum threshold of signatures which should be gathered for submitting an initiative to parliament.
6. E-platforms for collecting signatures for petitions and collective addresses are usually set up by the state institutions, or by independent/quasi-independent civil society organizations. Parliamentary websites usually provide summarized and general information on petitions, but the scope and the quality of the information about petitions and collective addresses varies greatly.
7. Many parliaments are consulting with citizens during law-making process, even if there is no special procedures or rules for public consultation. Consultations are mainly carried out in parliamentary committees who decide who will be invited and what methods for submitting comments and questions will be chosen. Parliament's consulting with citizens and stakeholders in assessing implementation and enforcement of a law happens less often.
8. Besides the petitions, citizens' initiatives, referenda and consultations, there are many other forms of citizens' involvement into parliamentary work, such as public hearings, participation in parliamentary committees etc. Parliament's consulting with citizens and stakeholders in assessing implementation and enforcement of a law occurs less often.
9. E-consultations in legislatures is less widespread than in the executive branch. However, lately some e-consultation opportunities have emerged also in parliamentary level.

### 2.2. Methodology

**Sources:** The review of the parliamentary practises about the citizens' involvement into legislative processes is prepared by analysing 14

requests of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD). ECPRD requests is a tool for inter-parliamentary cooperation and information exchange among European parliamentary chambers and non-European parliamentary chambers which co-operate with ECPRD.

Every ECPRDs request contains a questionnaire that one parliament addresses to others in order to compare the legislative activities and parliamentary practice across different countries and in different institutions on the specific matter.

**Sample:** Only replies of EU and OECD member states were included for comparative analyses. The replies were gathered from the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA.

In some countries there are two chambers of parliament, e.g., the Bundesrat and the Bundestag from Germany, the Senate and the Parliament in Poland, the National Council and the National Assembly from Slovenia etc.

**Database:** The database consists of summarized answers from 7 requests (ECPRD Requests No 4022, 3949, 3539, 3466, 3326, 2160, 1210) and the summaries of 7 already finalized requests (ECPRD Requests No 2726, 2628, 2558, 2514, 2394, 1420).

**Period:** Requests were carried out from 2009 to 2019.

**Number of replies:** Number of parliamentary chambers that have replied to requests varies. The list of requests included in the report and their details are compiled in the table below:

No of Request	Title	Year	Number of Parliamentary Chambers replied
1210	Consultation of citizens and of their organizations by parliament; requested by France	2009	23
1420	Parliaments engagement with the public targeting specific population groups, segments; UK	2010	5
2160	Public initiatives in legislative process; Slovakia	2012	23
2394	Electronic system for management of legislative procedure and amendments by MPs; Czechia	2013	27
2514	MPs use of technical devices and social media: comparison of individual country experiences; Austria	2014	33
2558	The relationship and communication between citizens and MPs; Serbia	2014	35

2628	Rules regarding contacts between parliaments' staff and lobbyists/interest representatives; European Parliament	2014	25
2726	Public involvement in the procedure of the drafting and enactment of laws; Croatia	2015	39
3326	How parliaments consult with citizens and stakeholders; Italy	2017	31
3466	Legislative footprints; Germany	2017	9
3500	E-services in the legislative processes; Georgia	2017	36
3539	Improving citizen participation in the law making process and in the evaluation of the implementation of laws; France	2017	9
3949	Participation and involvement of citizens with parliaments; Portugal	2018	28
4022	Parliaments on the Net; Slovenia	2019	25

### 2.3. Approaches of the Parliaments in Segmenting the Population to Improve Citizen Engagement

According to ECPRD requests **majority of replying legislative bodies admitted that they did not have any special approaches to segment the population in order to target efforts to improve its engagement.** Most parliaments did not have any specific outreach strategy or official written approach, or policy regarding empowering the public to play a part in the democratic process (in case of Germany, Netherlands, USA, Italy, Spain. Communication with citizens were mainly performed by the press offices, visitors centers, the Communication Department and the Department for Press, Media and Public Relations units. The main objective of the parliaments' public relations is generally to make the political processes more transparent.

**All surveyed parliamentary bodies singled out the young people as specific group to be targeted by information.** The guided tours for schools through the parliament always include the possibility of a role play (Germany, Italy). There are also specific websites for kids and youth (in Netherlands, <http://www.derdekamer.nl> for kids, <http://www.jongerenkamer.nl> for schools and students; "il Parlamento dei bambini" Home Page in Italy, "Kids in the House" website for children at <http://kids.clerk.house.gov/> in the USA). Cultural and artistic events, and training projects like Youth Parliament (The Chamber for the Youth, the Chamber for Children in Italy).

**Apart from the "young" another targeted group is that of specific ethnicity and nationality.** The parliaments produce information material in different languages (e.g., in English, French, Spanish, Russian in Germany).

#### External Communication Target Groups of Dutch Parliament

In Netherlands, the Communication Department and the Department for Press, Media and Public Relations define three different groups of external clients:

- members of the Press and Media with an accreditation to the premises of the House;
- professional users (departments, universities, companies, etc.);
- members of the public who contact the House for personal interest.

### 2.4. The Use of Social Media in Communication with Citizens in Parliaments

**Social media profiles of parliaments mostly consists in a one-way communication** with the aim:

- to raise awareness of parliament and its legislative work;
- to make announcements;
- to promote the activities of the parliament;
- to broaden access of society to the public activities of the parliament.

**The majority of surveyed parliaments used social media to communicate with citizens** The channels that were used most often were: Facebook (video live broadcasts of plenary sessions as well), Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Youtube, Flickr.

There are a few innovative examples of a two-way communication with citizens via social media:

- In France the Senate on occasions organizes some real-life chats between senators and citizens;
- The comments of the people in social media profiles of the parliament are monitored and frequently the answers to a response is given (Estonia);
- People may add some comments or send a message via Messenger (Poland).

### **Social Media Communication in Knesset**

In Israel the social media accounts of the *Knesset* (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube channel) are used to communicate the Knesset's parliamentary business, and not for political purposes. Members of Knesset have their own social media accounts which are used for their political and other activities. Usually, posts include information on the agenda in the plenary and the committees, special events in the Knesset, information about visiting dignitaries, etc., including links to further information on the website, tags of relevant pages, organizations and persons etc. Members' profiles are used more frequently for a two-way communication. Similar style of communication is observed also in Canada and Germany.

In some countries like Portugal, Germany (Bundestag), Greece, Ireland, Slovakia, parliaments are less active on social media.

### **Neutral communication style on German Bundestag's website**

Bundestag of Germany is not active on social media; members of Parliament have their own social media profiles. The reporting on the German Bundestag's website, [www.bundestag.de](http://www.bundestag.de) is non-partisan. It tracks parliamentary processes and documents events in Parliament in politically neutral way. The articles and videos published are available for all users to download, share and embed in third parties' pages. Commenting is not enabled. A dialogue with the public does not take place; as Parliament is unable speak on behalf of individual parliamentary groups. The website's reporting serves to provide a transparent overview of Parliament's work and make documents and materials available. Taking a stance on political and parliamentary decisions is a matter for Members of Parliament alone.

In Germany, it has still to be decided whether the Parliament as a constitutional body should be active on platforms of private providers. This question is relevant in the context of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## **2.5. Petitions and Collective Addresses**

According the *ECPRD* information request "Participation and involvement of citizens with parliaments" (No 3949 in 2018) **the citizens of almost all member countries of EU and OECD have a right of petition to parliament.**

**Scandinavian countries – Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland stand as exceptions because in these countries the possibility of filing petitions directly from citizens is not regarded as formal instrument within the the system of parliamentary democracy at the national level.** However, the citizens of

Scandinavian countries and Iceland have the right and the possibility to write to the parliament, individual member of the parliament or Standing Committees on any matter, but there is not any formal process for responses to these requests. In Sweden, residents can initiate legislation at regional and local level: residents can put forward a citizen's proposal to the municipal council. Residents can also initiate local "citizen initiative", which requires to be signed by at least 10 percent of the residents of a municipality or county. In this case the local referendum can be held (Local Government Act 2017:725, Chap. 8, sec. 1–2).

**A petition may be defined differently in each country. It may be submitted in the form of a request, proposal, complaint, objection or other application.** In some countries petitions should be in a matter of public or other common interest (Czech Republic, France, Estonia), while in the rest countries petitions may be on matters of personal interest too. In Poland, the petitions may also be submitted in the interest of third party with his or her consent.

Petitions may be submitted in both paper format (filed by postal mail) and electronically (sent by email). In addition, some countries have introduced electronic petition systems (Canada, Slovakia, Estonia Portugal, Austria, Germany etc.). They may be launched by parliaments in their webpages or be created by foundations as independent web platforms. The implementation of e-solutions for signing and/ or submitting petitions and popular initiatives significantly increase their numbers.

### **E-petitions in Canadian Parliament**

Canadian Parliament has one of the most advanced e-petition systems. The Parliament has launched electronic system for e-petition submission in December 2015 (<https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Home/Index>). On the E-petitions website it is possible to sign petitions (if open for signatures) and to view their status of e-petitions. E-petitions may be searched by keyword, sponsoring Member of Parliament or by status. For example, using petition E-482 (Women's Rights), one can view the details of the petition, including the initiator of the petition, the sponsor, the history (when opened and closed for signatures), and a breakdown of which provinces those signing were from. Additionally, one can see that this petition received a government response and a PDF copy of the response is also provided.

In Canada, petitions are usually initiated by one individual. E-petitions must be supported by at least 5, paper petitions by at least 25 signing supporters.

E-petition supporter may be a resident of Canada or a citizen of Canada living either in Canada or abroad. A paper petition must contain a minimum of 25 valid signatures with addresses. This is why the signatures of non-citizens who do not reside in Canada are not counted. No threshold defined as such.

Petitioners cannot directly petition the House of Commons. Only a Member of Parliament can present a petition to the House. The petitioners must send their petition to a Member with a request to present it to the parliament.

Basic information of petitioners (name, city, province or territory, and country) is permanently published along with the text of each e-petition on the website. Other contact information (e-mail address and phone number) is shared with potential MP sponsors identified by petitioners when they create and submit an e-petition and with the Clerk of Petitions for the purpose of validating the petitioner’s identity.

In the event if a petition becomes the subject of a committee proceeding, the Clerk of Petitions may share the petitioner’s contact information with the clerk of the relevant committee, should the committee wish to invite the petitioner to appear before it. Personal information regarding supporters and signatories collected through the e-petition website, will be destroyed at regular intervals and only made available to the House of Commons Administration for the purposes set out in the Terms of Use.

In some countries there is no threshold to submit a petition. If a petition contains a memorandum and request for explanation, then there is usually no threshold fixed, as everyone has the right to address submissions to state or local government institutions and to receive a reply on the essence of the question (Hungary, Israel, and Luxembourg). If a petition involves a collective address aiming to improve the public life or changing the law, there is higher threshold for submitting a petition.

Country	Threshold
<b>Austria:</b>	A petition is understood as “citizen initiative”; 500 signatures is defined as a threshold.
<b>Canada:</b>	E-petitions must be supported by at least 5, paper petitions by at least 25 signing supporters.
<b>Czech Republic:</b>	If a petition has been supported by at least 10 000 petitioners, the Committee on Petitions usually takes some actions;
<b>Estonia:</b>	"Petition" means a collective address- a proposal made by public initiative and submitted to the <i>Riigikogu</i> (the parliament of Estonia) to amend the current regulation or improve the public life. If at least 1000 signatures in support have been collected for submission of a collective address, and the requirements of collective address are fulfilled, the parliament is obligated to conduct the legislative proceeding. A single person has the right to submit a memorandum and request for explanation.
<b>Portugal:</b>	Threshold for petitions is defined 1000 signatures (if 4000 signatures and more are gathered, petitions shall also be considered in Plenary).
<b>Slovakia:</b>	Any petition signed by at least 100 000 citizens will be discussed in the plenary session of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

**In some countries online systems are used for collecting signatures and submitting collective addresses also allow to add comments for each initiative (Austria, Estonia).**

**Petitions usually can be signed by citizens. Canada and Estonia stand out with the procedure that allows to sign petition by general public.** In Canada it refers only to e-petitions, in Estonia a collective address may be signed by a permanent resident of Estonia who is at least 16 years of age. “A permanent resident is a citizen

of Estonia who resides in Estonia, and a citizen of a member state of the European Union, the European Economic Community and the Swiss Confederation who resides in Estonia and who has a permanent right of residence, and an alien who resides in Estonia and who has a long-term residence permit or permanent right of residence.” (ECPRD,3949, 2018).

**Petitions are usually gathered and sent to parliamentary petitions committee for examining.** The Committee then discuss petitions and forward them to another committees, Government or submit to the Parliament or simply take no further action on them. In some cases when there are many petitions on the same subject or when an important or fundamental topic arises from a petition Petitions Committee may hold a hearing (Israel). In Luxembourg, if minimum 4,500 signatures are gathered in 42 days, debates are held. These debates are open to the public and broadcasted on the Chamber TV. After that transfer (before or after a debate) of the request is made to the competent Ministry and the corresponding parliament’s committee. However, no legislative initiatives usually follow. In Switzerland the outcome of the petition is usually a petition report and a letter written to the petitioner. It is similar in Spain where only a petitioner receives the final decision on petition, but hearings and debates carried out by the parliamentary commission are available in the Parliamentary Records of the Committee that are not published online.

**In many countries cases parliaments are not legally bound to discuss or make actions after receiving petitions. However, the more signatures are gathered, the larger possibility that the petition will be reviewed in the legislative bodies.** According to parliamentary responses petitions influence the legislation only “sometimes” in Portugal, Estonia, Germany (Bundestag), Israel, Lithuania, Poland (Sejm), Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, “almost never” in France, and “never” in Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia. Online public forums are open “rarely” in Portugal, “always” in Luxembourg.

**Collective addresses or citizens’ initiatives are rather new form of society’s involvement in the legislative process.** Historically, the right to initiate a bill or act rests with the following: 1) a member of a parliament; 2) a political group of the parliament; 3) any parliamentary committee; 4) the Government; 5) the President.

**In many countries citizens still cannot directly present legislative initiatives to Parliament.**

<b>Countries in which citizens cannot present legislative initiatives to Parliament:</b>	<b>Countries in which citizens can present legislative initiatives to Parliament:</b>
<p>Czech Republic, Germany (The German Basic Law contains no provisions for citizens' initiatives at federal level), France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovakia.</p> <p>In Sweden, citizens’ initiatives are not provided on national level, but only on regional and local level.</p>	<p>Latvia, Austria, Portugal, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia (at National Assembly), Switzerland, Spain.</p>



### Citizen initiatives in Switzerland

So called a federal popular initiative is one of the main instruments of Swiss direct democracy. The Confederation, cantons and communes have created joint network “ch.ch” as part of the e-government strategy of providing access to electronic government services. This gateway provides information and access to all government e-services, including popular initiatives. For more information see: <https://www.ch.ch/en/demokratie/political-rights/popular-initiative/>.

**National legislation determines the minimum threshold of signatures which should be gathered for submitting an initiative to parliament.**

Country	Threshold
<b>Austria:</b>	100 000 signatures
<b>Finland:</b>	50 000 signatures
<b>Latvia:</b>	10 000 signatures
<b>Lithuania:</b>	50 000 signatures
<b>Portugal:</b>	20 000 signatures
<b>Poland:</b>	100 000 signatures
<b>Slovenia:</b>	30 000 signatures for the amending of the Constitution and 5 000 - for proposal of a law
<b>Spain:</b>	500 000 signatures
<b>Switzerland:</b>	100 000 signatures

The main population groups that can submit citizens' initiatives are:

- Citizens including underage citizens (from the age of 16 in Latvia);
- Citizens who have the right to vote in parliamentary elections (Finland, Lithuania, Poland);
- Electors (Portugal, Austria, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland).

Parliament can take different actions regarding the incoming initiatives.

- Hearing of the authors of the initiative in the parliament (Portugal, Austria, Poland, Slovenia),
- Hearing of a person in the relevant Committee of the Congress of Deputies, prior to the debate at the Plenary in order to explain the reasons justifying the presentation of the popular legislative initiative (Spain).
- Consideration of the citizen initiative in Parliament or inclusion of the initiative into agenda of plenary, if the required number of signatures is reached,

Some actions may be optional:

- Starting public consultations (Portugal, Austria, Poland);
- Organizing further expert hearings (Austria, Poland);
- In Switzerland, also a counter-proposal may be proposed. In that case public consultation, hearings of the authors of the initiative, recommendation for the popular vote (in favour or against the initiative) may be gathered.

## 2.6. Initiating Referenda

**In most countries mainly a parliament and a president have the right to initiate referenda.** In addition, in some countries national or federal referenda may only be held on constitutional issues (Canada, Sweden).

If the citizens are able to propose organizing a national referendum (or referendum on federal level), the conditions and the issues on which referendum may be held or may not be held usually are defined in the constitution or the law on referendum.

Country	Conditions
<b>Germany:</b>	Referenda at federal level are only provided for the purposes of revising the delimitation of the <i>Länder</i> , and also for establishing a new constitution.
<b>Hungary:</b>	The National Assembly shall order a national referendum at the initiative of at least 200 000 voters.
<b>Slovenia:</b>	According to the Constitution the National Assembly calls a referendum on the entry into force of a law adopted if so required by at least 40 000 voters (legislative referendum).
<b>Poland:</b>	The <i>Sejm</i> initiates referendum at the request of a group of at least 500 000 citizens.
<b>France:</b>	Since constitutional reform in 2008, there is a new slight possibility for shared initiative between deputies/senators and citizens. 1/5 of Members of Parliament (185 deputies or senators) can ask for a referendum. It will be organized if the initiative receives the support of 1/10 of all electors. This threshold is actually considered as unattainable: it would require 4.5 million people supporting the initiative. Furthermore, the proposition must be reviewed by the Constitutional Court before collecting any signature. Finally, if both houses (National Assembly and Senate) examine the proposition within 6 months after tabling, there cannot be a referendum on it.
<b>Switzerland:</b>	50 000 citizens have the right to request a popular vote on a bill passed by parliament. This takes place after the debates in parliament.

## 2.7. Electronic Platforms for Collecting Signatures

**Electronic platforms for collecting signatures are usually set up by the state institutions, or by independent/quasi-independent civil society organizations.**

State supported platforms have been central in Portugal, Austria (petitions may be signed via parliament's webpage, citizens' initiatives via government's webpage), Canada, Germany (webpage of Bundestag), Luxembourg, Turkey. It is typical that these platforms contain a detailed information on petitions and some of them provide a possibility for parliament to communicate with supporters of petitions.

- In **Portugal** all the information about the process, as well as the main documents is published on the website (the text of the petition, the questions and the government's response, the final report, hearings, debates, etc.),
- In **Germany**, when a petition (*Bürgerinitiative*) has collected the necessary 500 signatures and is submitted to parliament it can be supported (informally) by additional persons via the website of the parliament. The text of the petitions are published in accordance with the Guidelines on the Treatment of Public Petitions. Petitions can be signed and discussed over a four week period. Following completion of the petition procedure, the recommendation for a

decision and the corresponding statement of reasons are published. Information on the procedure and broadcasts of public hearings are also available.

- In **Canada**, on the House of Commons public site “About Petitions and how they work”, a number of resources and reference documents are provided for both the use of the public as well as Members of Parliament regarding the submission of petitions. On the E-petitions website it is possible to sign petitions (if open for signatures) and to view the status of e-petitions. E-petitions may be searched by keyword, sponsoring Member of Parliament or by status. One can view the details of the concrete petition, including the initiator of the petition, the sponsor, the history (when opened and closed for signatures), and a breakdown of which provinces those signing were from. Additionally, one can see if this petition received a government response and a PDF copy of the response is also provided.
- In **Luxembourg**, information about the petition procedure, the date of the public debates (when happening) and the list of the ongoing public petitions are available on the website of the Chamber of Deputies. The platform automatically opens a public forum for each submitted public petition. This allows petitioners to collect the ideas from the public and participate in discussion.

One of the reasons why majority of websites of parliaments does not have such e-solutions for signing and submitting petitions and citizen initiatives is that parliaments do not have an obligation to organize the collection of signatures. Furthermore, in some countries like Hungary petitions are not even part of the legislative and parliamentary system, so there is no such a direct connection between petitions and the parliamentary activity.

As a consequence, **parliamentary websites usually provide only summarized and general information on petitions**. This information may include:

- the main legislative documents regarding petitions and citizens' initiatives, there may be published direct web links to relevant acts;
- the procedure and possible decisions taken by a responsible committee are described;
- forms that allow submission of petitions in electronic form;
- list of petitions,
- monthly overview on petitions;
- in some countries, the webpage contains also the text of the petition, the questions and the government's response, the final report, hearings, debates, the minutes of the discussion if an unanswered petition is discussed (**Greece, Lithuania**);
- information on the Special Committee for Public Petitions may be published, including the agenda, reports of previous sittings and contact information (Israel);
- In **Spain**, final decisions on petitions are provided to the petitioner, but they are not published online on the website of the Congress, while the text and promoter of Popular legislative initiative (PLI) is publicly available on the website of the Congress. The debate on the initiative is available in Parliamentary Records both of the competent Committee and the Plenary. The

final decision of the Plenary on the PLI is also published on the website with all the information related to it.

- In **Estonia**, a webpage of the parliament does not have its own platform for submitting the collective initiatives, however it has a direct web link to a web platform that has been created by Estonian Cooperation Assembly (which cooperates with the Parliament). It enables to write proposals, hold discussions, compose and send digitally signed collective addresses to the *Riigikogu*. It is possible to initiate a proposal, discuss and sign proposals digitally, also follow the progress (the number of signatures) in the webpage and eventually submit them to Parliament. The information and video about the process is also available on the web platform.

**In all surveyed countries the legislative acts regarding the citizens' rights to petitions, citizens' initiatives and referenda are available in the Internet** (in webpages of parliaments, e-platforms for gathering signatures, state official gazettes). The materials that advertise these citizens' rights on the parliamentary webpages are leaflets, annual reports of the committee, factsheets, *FAQs*, special sections devoted to the citizens' rights. In some countries information regarding referendum is published on the Central Election Commission's web page (Latvia, Lithuania).

## **2.8. Consultations with Citizens in Parliaments**

Consultation is primarily viewed as a means to involve stakeholders in the legislative process, both as technical experts and representatives of interest groups. **Although consultative processes usually begin in the executive level, in several countries consultations are also conducted about the bills in the parliament. In addition, many parliaments are consulting with citizens during law-making process, even if there is no special procedures or rules for public consultation** with citizens and stakeholders (Belgium, Canada, Austria, Germany, Portugal, Scandinavian countries and others). Non-formal consultation culture determines that the possible effects of laws are often discussed in public or in associations and then brought into the political process via the parties, the members or citizens.

While some countries do not have special rules or laws on the public consultations, other countries have legislation that governs consultations, such as the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament (Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Belgium, etc.), Guidelines for Governments (Canada), Standing Orders for Public Hearing (Poland), or even Constitution (Sweden). In Finland specific rules and instructions for expert hearings are compiled in Committee Handbook. In Slovenia the Local Self-Government Act and the Rules of Procedure provide for cooperation with local communities (municipalities) in the adoption of laws relating to local self-government. In Germany, the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Federal Ministries comprise a regulation on the involvement of the *Länder* (federal states), national associations of local authorities, the expert community and associations in the drafting of legislation. In Portugal, The Constitution and the ordinary law establish the mandatory consultation of certain entities in matters of their interest, such as, for example, the Autonomous Regions of Madeira and the Azores, the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities etc.

### **Consulting with Local Governments in Germany**

In Germany, municipalities and associations of municipalities are often involved in parliamentary consultation processes. The views of the local authority associations expressed at hearings are to be recorded in the report given by the lead committee to the plenary (cf. Rule 66 (2) sentence 2 of the Rules of Procedure).

### **Obligation of the National Assembly to Obtain Various Opinions in Slovenia**

In Slovenia, the National Assembly is obliged to obtain various opinions from stakeholder organizations. A working body may organize public presentations of opinions and invite experts and other persons who might provide useful information. The calling of a public presentation of opinions, together with issues on which information needs to be gathered, is announced in the media (e.g. daily newspapers). The working body may request deliver their opinions also in writing (Art. 46)

**Consultations in parliaments mainly are carried out in parliamentary committees that play a central role in the legislative process, as they may be mandated to prepare bills on specific topics and most bills are referred to committee for detailed review.** Committees may invite other MPs and municipal councillors, representatives of ministries, other state institutions, parties, public organisations, and educational institutions, specialists, scientists and other persons deemed necessary. Consultations with the experts and stakeholders are organised by the Government as well. **Parliamentary committees mainly decide themselves who will be invited and what methods for submitting comments and questions will be chosen.** Citizens and stakeholders are either invited to attend committee meetings as (expert) witnesses and give oral presentations at committee meetings or submit written contributions answering questionnaires (Austria, Finland). The parliamentary committees may seek written submissions on the matter from the wider public, through its website, or from a list of identified stakeholders (Ireland).

**Public hearings also are popular procedure for obtaining public opinion especially in Scandinavian countries and Switzerland.** In Norway public hearings is the most important formalized procedure for public input before the deliberation in the committees. There are additional rules for public scrutiny hearings (hearings which can ultimately lead to impeachment proceedings). The hearings in Norway are usually public, and streamed to the public on the *Storting's* website. Anyone can request access to any written contributions submitted during the hearings, and to the committees in general.

### **Government commissions – the central arena for policy making in Sweden**

In Sweden, the most traditional arena for policy making are the government commissions where policies are usually formulated and new legislation is prepared. The government commissions are appointed by the government, but they are considered as freestanding authorities. Before the government takes up a position on the recommendations of a commission, the commission report is referred for consideration to large number of organizations that are considered to have a stake in the policy according to a list created by the government, although anyone is free to send written comments. These submissions help the government to prepare the bill for parliament. The so called “remiss procedure” is

formally ascribed in the Constitution of Sweden and traditionally acknowledged by voluntary organizations, government agencies, municipalities and decision makers as an important arena for participation. According to the response of the Swedish Parliament to the information request No. 3326 (2009) the government commissions have come to play a less prominent role as arenas for policy making in recent years and that the share of participating voluntary organisations has declined while the levels of organizations abstaining from the referral process have increased. The number of active government commissions has decreased and public policies are, to a great extent, formulated by public authorities without the direct participation of voluntary organizations.

**Parliament's consulting with citizens and stakeholders in assessing implementation and enforcement of a law happens less often.** Assessment of the laws mainly is carried out by parliamentary committees.

- In examining the law the committees may ask experts or stakeholders for the submission of briefs. For example, in **Italy**, the Health Committee sent out a questionnaire to 461 persons through an IT platform, to gather knowledge and comments on a fact-finding enquiry on patient handling and emergency networks; the Labour Committee of Italy requested selected persons to provide online comments and responses to a questionnaire developed by members on the enforcement of a law and on Government measures.
- In **Norway**, assessing implementation and enforcement of a law is normally left to the Government, which may then report to the *Storting* (parliament). Anyone can however approach individual or groups of Members of the Storting in order to provide views on any matter. One should also note that the Office of the Auditor General, which reports to the Storting, monitors that the Government and its administration implement the Storting's decisions.
- In several countries, such as **Canada and Portugal**, there are some laws that include clauses stating that they must be reviewed periodically and the Parliament should be informed about their evaluation. In Portugal, it is the Government and the autonomous regulatory bodies that send the evaluation, which is then discussed in Parliament.
- In **Sweden**, a follow-up can also be done by a committee organising a public hearing on its own initiative or by way of study visits to clarify current issues within its policy area, thereby obtaining knowledge which can be used in the committee's deliberations. Some committees have special follow-up and evaluation groups comprising members of the *Riksdag* from the different parties. They may carry out follow-ups and submit a follow-up report to the committee with assessments and conclusions. The *Riksdag* Administration has allocated resources to support follow-up and evaluation work by the *Riksdag*'s committees. This support is provided by officials of the committee secretariats and by the evaluation and research unit at the Committee Services Division. Special secretariats have been established. The secretariats are staffed by non-party political officials. Together, the secretariats and the Parliamentary Evaluation and Research Unit make up the Committee Services Division. The

Secretariat) provides support for the committees in their work to follow up and evaluate the *Riksdag's* decisions and with issues relating to research and the future.

- In the **United Kingdom**, if a select committee undertakes post-legislative scrutiny of an Act of Parliament, it would decide how to do so. It has the power to invite individuals or stakeholders to submit written and/or oral evidence; and can then report its findings to the House of Commons.
- Usually, legislative evaluation results in publishing evaluation and annual reports that are publicly available in the parliament's webpage (**Belgium, United Kingdom**, etc.).
- In **Austria**, several questions are sent out by the legislative committee. Such forms of citizen involvement are seen as new means to engage with citizens as they provide informal, flexible and fast ways to show support or criticism. However, the feedback is only collected on the website and not structured or evaluated in any specific way. Further on, a Commission on the Future of democracy in Austria in 2014/15 tried to integrate randomly drawn citizens in its proceedings. For a (short) analysis of this experiment see the attached file.

## 2.9. Other Forms of Citizens' Involvement into Parliamentary Work

**Besides the petitions, citizens' initiatives, referenda and consultations, there are many other forms of citizens' involvement into parliamentary work:**

- citizens may attend plenary sessions;
- citizens may appear as witnesses during parliamentary committee proceedings;
- citizens may submit a brief to committees that are seeking public input;
- representatives from NGOs and state agencies do sometimes attend committee meetings on their own request or by the invitation from the committees;
- the Parliament's standing committee may hold hearings. The hearing is a meeting of the committee where oral statements are made by persons whom the committee requests to attend or who request to submit information to the committee. However, it is most common that organizations and NGOs are invited to attend such hearings;
- in **Austria**, crowdsourcing for ideas (a pilot project) (<https://www.parlament.gv.at/PERK/BET/CROWD/>). The crowdsourcing were primarily used at the local and regional level for getting citizens and social partners' input in various projects: creation of the digital roadmap, the development of the OPSI Toolkit Navigator, a unique meta toolkit for people "to find the right tools for their projects and organization", administration of the work of a new youth center in Feldkirch etc. In the context of the parliament, on October 26, 2018, the Austrian Parliament started a crowdsourcing project for the first time on a national political level. Citizens were asked to submit their ideas and suggestions for the design of the new visitor center in the historic parliament building. With 227 suggestions on the crowdsourcing platform, 3,468 users contributed a total of six findings for analysis and decision-making.

More information on crowdsourcing projects available on the parliament website.

- in **Portugal**, citizens may send recommendations to Suggestion box (parliamentary online platform that provides a space to various contributions from citizens on a variety of topics - suggesting for political action on oversight function; <https://www.parlamento.pt/Cidadania/Paginas/Bolsa-de-sugestoes.aspx>; <https://bolsasugestoes.parlamento.pt/new>) ;
- in **Finland**, there are broadcasts of televised question hours and other plenary sessions of special interest;
- in **Scandinavian countries**, the standing committees regularly arrange Committee travels to different locations. Such travels create contact between the citizens and the MPs and may lead to increased citizen involvement in political decisions;
- In **Scandinavian countries**, citizens who wish to raise a question or promote a case are welcome to write to the MP/MPs representing their county and ask them to engage in the matter;
- Instead of using petitions, the residents of Scandinavian countries focus on addressing the institution of ombudsmen.
- 

### The Role of the Ombudsman

In Sweden the institution of ombudsmen handles complaints from citizens concerning government agencies. Complaints can concern decisions and acts by the courts of law and administrative courts, local government agencies, officials employed by the state or by a local government and others who are entrusted to exercise public authority. Exercising public authority involves the use of official powers to decide about a benefit, a right, an obligation, disciplinary punishment or some other comparable situation. In Sweden, the complaints are examined by the Parliamentary Ombudsmen (*Riksdagens ombudsmän, JO*). In addition to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO), Sweden has a number of other ombudsmen who review specific fields. Examples include the Equality Ombudsman, the Ombudsman for Children, the Press Ombudsman and the Consumer Ombudsman.

**E-consultations in legislatures is less widespread than in the executive branch. However, lately some e-consultation opportunities have emerged also in parliamentary level.**

- The draft laws usually are usually published on the parliaments' website (Parliament of **Croatia** - <https://edoc.sabor.hr/>, Parliament of **Ireland** - <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/>), experts' written statements can be found in the website of the parliament too (**Parliament of Finland** - [https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/HallituksenEsitys/Sivut/HE\\_87+2020.aspx](https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/HallituksenEsitys/Sivut/HE_87+2020.aspx))
- In **Poland**, before the first reading, within the deadline set by the chairman of the Legislative Committee, everyone can submit their comments to the bill using the form posted on the website (<https://legislacja.rcl.gov.pl/projekt/12321578/komentarz>). The content of these comments is available on the Senate website as public information (<https://www.senat.gov.pl/prace/opinie-i-ekspertyzy/>);



- In 2010 in **Greece**, a procedure was introduced in the form of e-deliberation of draft legislation, prior to its submission to the parliament. Since then, every piece of draft legislation or even policy initiative by the government, are posted in a blog like form and remain published for a set deadline before their submission to the parliament, during which citizens and organizations can post their comments, suggestions and criticisms article-by-article (<http://www.opengov.gr/home/category/consultations>).
- In **Portugal**, Parliament also has a System for Managing Public Contributions to Legislative Initiatives, to collect online contributions, which are inserted by the entities / citizens themselves and are publicly available immediately, and the entities / citizens can receive an alert whenever new contributions are introduced (<https://participacao.parlamento.pt/initiatives/?type=initiatives>).
- In 2015 **France** has launched the Internet platform for communication with citizens about bills. The procedure is called “*Consultations citoyennes*.” When the Government makes draft bills, it has to provide an impact study for each of them. Once the draft bill has been tabled, the whole legislative dossier is available on the website of National Assembly, included the impact study. Citizens have the right to write down on the site their remarks about the documents of this impact study.

## 3. Review of Relevant Digital Tools

### 3.1. Methodology

In order to identify the most relevant digital tools for the purposes of developing interest advocacy platform for NGOs, desk research was carried out. Twelve solutions developed over last 10 years were reviewed. These solutions were developed in the areas of parliamentary transparency, deliberation processes, co-designing of laws, representative record tracking, lobbying, and e-voting developed in the USA and the European Union were selected for more detailed review. All of these tools referred to good practice of civic society's e-participation in democratic decision making, establishing an alternative democratic process or increasing transparency of political processes.

### 3.2. Key Findings

1. The model solutions for designing a digital interest advocacy tool that could be used by NGOs can be derived from several areas of digital democracy solutions, such as:
  - parliamentary transparency, including the record tracking of parliamentary representatives
  - deliberation processes
  - co-designing of laws
  - lobbying
  - e-voting
2. The target groups for whom these e-solutions were created ranged from such groups as journalists, NGOs and others who analysed the parliamentary processes.
3. Contemporary e-participation solutions move towards increasing professionalization by capturing innovative ideas and developing them into a more structured form or organisation.
4. The main reasons for launching e-participation projects are mostly social in nature - some specific event, or certain political momentum, e.g., parliamentary elections).
5. In most cases reviewed digital tools operated on the national level, however they were flexible for further development (could be adopted for another country or upscaled for international level, e.g., the European Union).

#### **Challenges:**

1. The key concern for most e-solutions developed by civil society organisations has been the level of cooperation with formal authorities.
2. The cooperation issues with formal authorities included
  - a lack of willingness to provide data
  - the low degree of digitalisation of governments,
  - General sceptical approach to new tools and digital solutions.
3. Other common platform related challenges were:
  - the difficulty to create a user base,

- raise awareness of the tool in the society,
- adequate funding for the projects.

**Success factors:**

1. The two key success factors in developing civic-driven e-solutions were:

- user friendly interface of the tool and
- public trust to the tool.

Other factors that ensured good outcome were:

- professionals with profound knowledge of IT who could be considered as key persons for the successful implementation of the digital tools,
- innovation or an innovative idea that was brought into the political and societal life,
- reliability of internal structures within organisation and on the volunteers (good team spirit, functioning process-structures and passion about the issue),
- successful (social) media strategies raising awareness of the tool in society, increasing number of users and making the solution credible.

### 3.3. GovTrack.us

**Webpage:** <https://www.govtrack.us/>

**Solution:** GovTrack.us publishes various information about the members of Congress; Bill status; Bill Summaries; Roll call votes etc. GovTrack gets its information from a variety of sources, including official government data as well as community data repositories. They also do their own original research. The aim of this tool, making government’s activities more transparent, is accomplished by putting the available information in context and tracking new developments on issues their users care about. The source code for the various tools found on the site is accessible for everyone and for free.

**Functionality:**

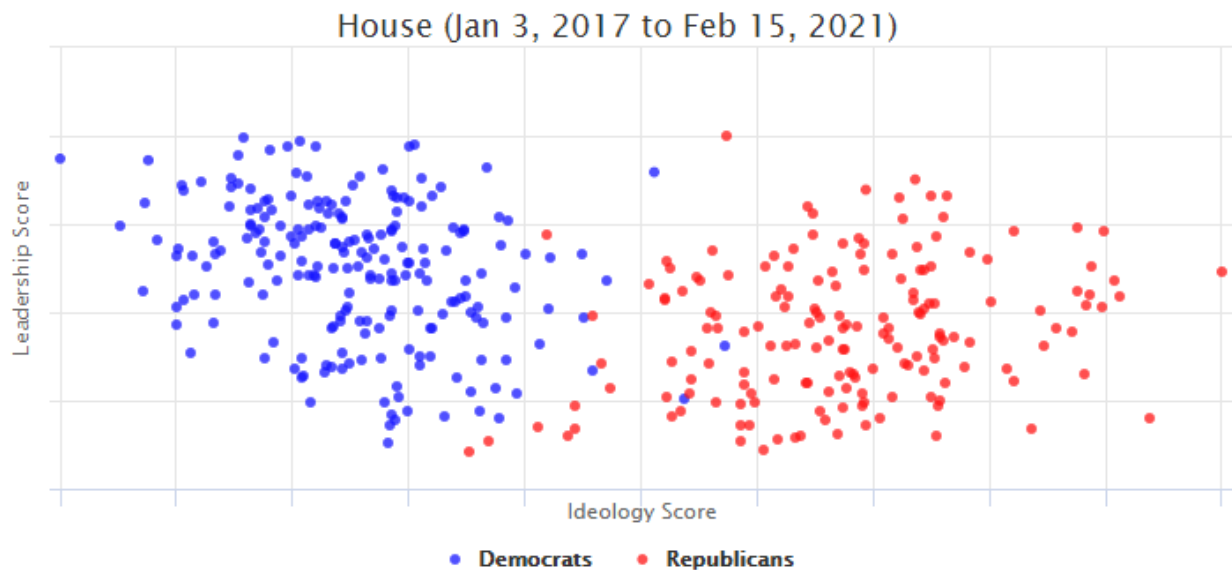
- Sending e-mail alerts about the status of certain bills to users that have signed up for this feature.
- Various types of analyses:
  - Ideology analysis that compares the sponsorship and cosponsorship patterns of Members of Congress.
  - Prognosis analysis that looks at the factors that help or hurt a bill’s chance of getting out of committee and being enacted.
  - Leadership analysis that looks at who is cosponsoring whose bills to see who the legislative leaders are. It’s a little like if you scratch my back will I scratch yours? The analysis is based on Google PageRank, the algorithm Google uses to order search results.
  - Text Incorporation analysis that reveals when provisions of bills are incorporated into other bills.
- Paragraph-level bill permalinks – Bills can be thousands of pages long; this tool brings its users directly to the part of the bill they care about.
- Advanced search feature that allows to search by stage of the legislative process, or sponsor, or Congress, or a variety of other factors.

- Site is available both in English and Spanish.

**Use:** The site can be used for educational purposes, providing various information about how the Congress works, how bills become laws etc. It can also be used by advocates for certain issues by providing various analyses, by congressional staff and journalists.

**Example:** <https://govtrackinsider.com/rule-change-would-fine-house-members-1-000-for-each-day-they-dont-wear-a-mask-inside-the-capitol-4201a16d3aaa>

**Figure 1** Snapshot from the ideology vs. leadership analysis of GovTrack.us



### 3.4. FiscalNote

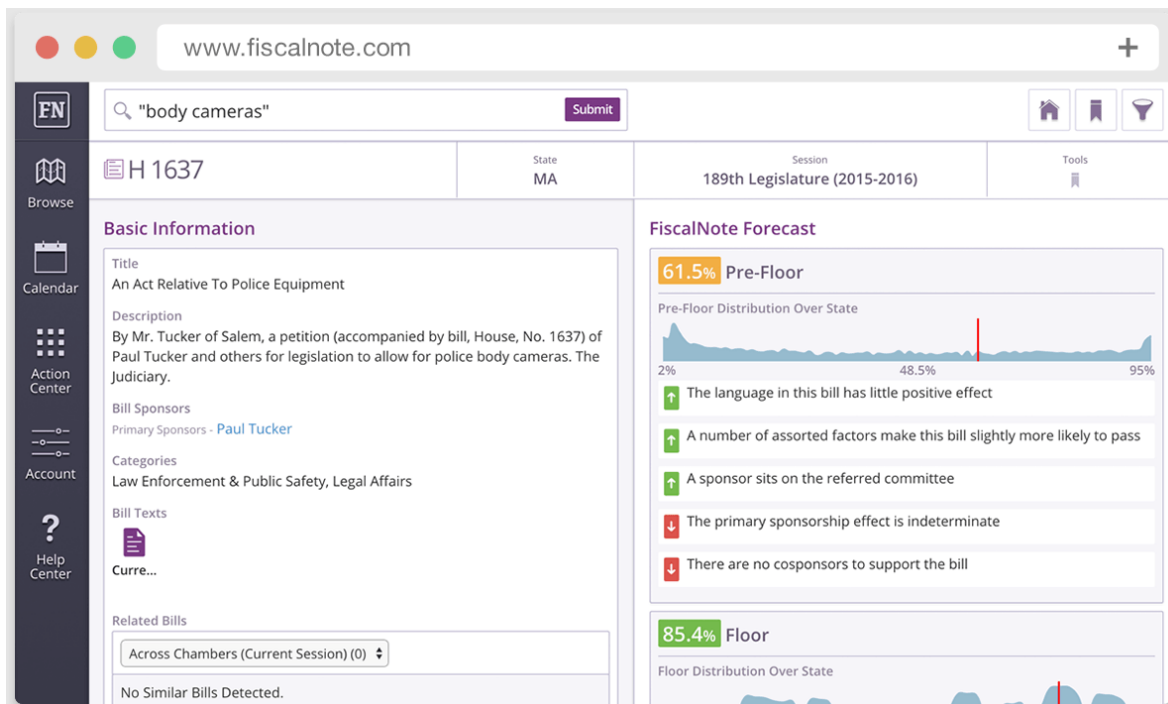
**Webpage:** <https://fiscalnote.com/>

**Solution:** An issues management app that alerts your team when new bills are proposed, allows PR team to post current talking points, legal team to assess the risks, and lets the entire team keep their contacts, meetings, and notes in one place.

#### Functionality:

- Consolidation of every piece of information that relates to an issue you are working on in one place. Allows for addition of talking points and strategies, uploading of files and web links, tracking of legislation and regulation, keeping logs of actions (like meetings, campaigns, or press releases).
- Allows to include elected officials and their staff or any other stakeholders. Allows to create your own contacts, add them to Issues, and manage your relationships with them.
- Allows to demonstrate your progress on bills with a virtual table that shows the entire team how the likelihood of passage of a bill is changing based on your work.
- Graphically displays how many commenters support or oppose the regulation.

**Figure 2** Legal a to key word in Fiscal Note



**Use:** Intended for both small nonprofits, government agencies and large corporations (including half of the Fortune 100)

**Example:** <https://fiscalnote.com/case-studies/ united-way-worldwide-experiences-a-265-increase-in-engaged-advocates-with-fiscalnote>

### 3.5. Voteview

**Webpage:** <https://www.voteview.com/>

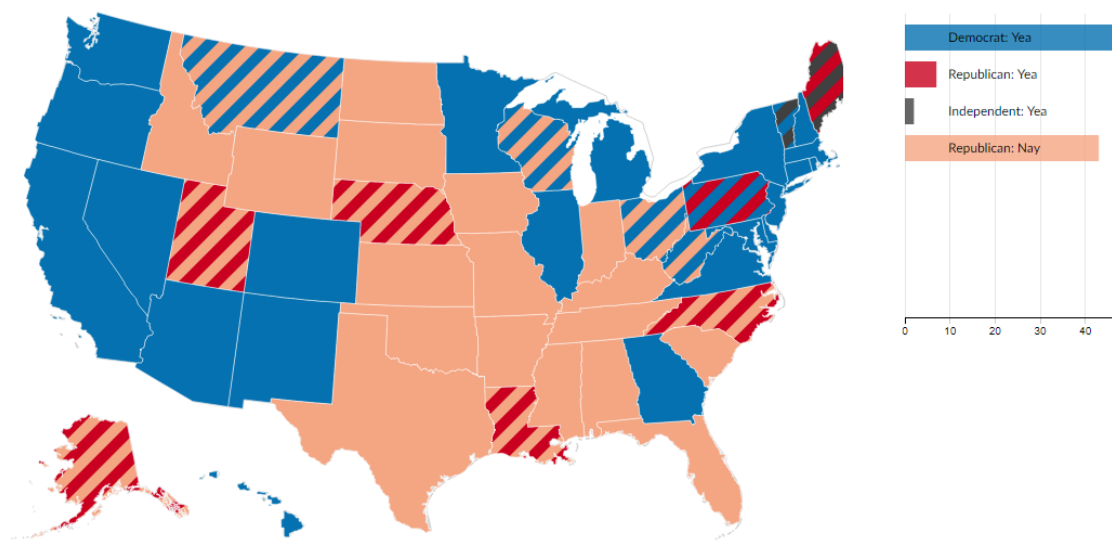
**Solution:** Allows users to view every congressional roll call vote in American history on a map of the United States and on a liberal-conservative ideological map including information about the ideological positions of voting Senators and Representatives.

**Functionality:**

- Visually shows the ideological leanings of members of congress, depending on their party affiliation or geographical location.
- Shows the historical progression of the ideological position of government parties.
- Search function that allows to find the visual data for certain bills, members of congress, states.

**Use:** Visual representation allows users to quickly determine the current and historical political climate. They can be easily understood by people without in-depth political knowledge.

**Figure 3.** Geographical breakdown of voting patterns in Voteview



**Example:**

<https://www.voteview.com/rollcall/RS1170059>

### 3.6. TrackBill

**Webpage:** <https://trackbill.com/>

**Solution:** App that allows you to know what state and federal legislation is being considered on your key issues by identifying and tracking state and federal legislation in collaboration with your team, automatically sending professional legislative reports to your stakeholders and displaying legislation on your website with an auto-updating, embeddable feed.

**Functionality:**

- Legislative Alerts – Receive alerts on introduced and amended bills that match your keywords. Then track the relevant ones to continue receiving alerts as those bills advance through the legislature.
- Automated Reports – Create custom Word, Excel, and PDF report template, schedule them to send automatically with the latest information from that day, week, or month.
- Embeddable Widget – Share legislative information with an automatically updating feed that can be placed directly on your website.
- Team Collaboration – Add a colleague to a bill with team tracking, then post a message in the group discussion for that bill. Conversation participants receive an alert anytime a new comment is added.
- Hearing Schedule – Receive an alert when one of your tracked bills has a hearing scheduled. View a personalized calendar of all your upcoming hearings and optionally save them to your phone.

**Use:** PolicyEngage, the developer of TrackBill, has over 270 clients nationwide, including Fortune 500 companies, trade associations, nonprofit organizations, and governmental consulting firms.

### 3.7. VoteSmart

**Webpage:** <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>

**Solution:** Provides free, factual, unbiased information on candidates and elected officials. Compiles every fact, every spoken word, every position, every vote, every funder, every biographical detail amassed in easy-to-use, interactive tools.

**Functionality:**

- PoliticalGalaxy: A tool that lets you search for a federal politician and find their key votes, speeches, issue positions and amount of money received in donations.
- VoteEasy: Provides users with election candidates' issue positions – if they refuse to provide information, their positions are inferred from information found in public records.
- OnPoint: App that lets you see various information about members of congress: Their statements and ratings from interest groups. Allows you to search for upcoming ballot measures and the most recent votes in congress.
- Bull: Cross-references statements made by politicians, checks if any of them contradict each other – marks these statements as falsehoods.

**Use:** Visually appealing site and apps that focus on the ease of use.

**Example:**

[https://votesmart.org/galaxy/?utm\\_source=header&utm\\_medium=galaxy%20button&utm\\_campaign=galaxy#/Mitt-Romney-21942/Abortion-2/ratings](https://votesmart.org/galaxy/?utm_source=header&utm_medium=galaxy%20button&utm_campaign=galaxy#/Mitt-Romney-21942/Abortion-2/ratings)

### 3.8. OpenSecrets

**Webpage:** <http://www.opensecrets.org/>

**Solution:** OpenSecrets.org is a website tracking the influence of money on U.S. politics, and how that money affects policy and citizens' lives. By shining a light on the campaign contributions bankrolling federal politicians, the lobbying expenditures of thousands of special interest groups and the massive sums spent on political advertising, they work to hold lawmakers accountable.

**Functionality:**

- Provides information about politicians and elections, displaying where the money for their campaigns comes from.
- Tracks various lobbies and organizations that influence the U.S. politics.
- Writes and posts news articles and analyses about campaign financing.
- Gives users access to bulk data that can be used to create their own tools.

**Use:** Non-government organizations, those who are making decisions about the candidates running for federal office and the policy issues they care about.

**Example:** <http://www.opensecrets.org/news/issues/covid-19>

### 3.9. Polco

**Webpage:** <http://www.polco.us>

**Solution:** a full-fledged civic engagement platform with particular focus on local government and community activation. Promotes civil and constructive policy participation through online surveys and polls. Decision-makers get input on important items from registered voters.

**Functionality:**

- Allow local governments to poll and survey residents on important community topics.
- Local leaders get organized data, dashboards, and maps in real-time.
- Polco Live: gets real-time feedback at live events e.g. online streamed events, webinars, video calls, in-person meetings and conferences.
- Allows budgeting decisions.
- Measures and visualises geographic distribution of voter sentiment e.g. by electoral district.
- Compares user groups voting on the platform with publicly available voter lists or other lists provided by the client, creating politically actionable datasets for every decision.
- Freemium business model (some functionality free of charge to local communities).

**Use:** Planners and politicians who want to measure voter attitude toward straight-forward questions; politicians who want to ensure they are listening to registered voters.



**Figure 4.** Online polling with geolocation possibility in Polco



**Example:** <https://blog.polco.us/ashland-ma-breaks-down-barriers-engagement-doubling-town-hall-attendance>

### 3.10. Civocracy

**Webpage:** <http://www.civocracy.org>

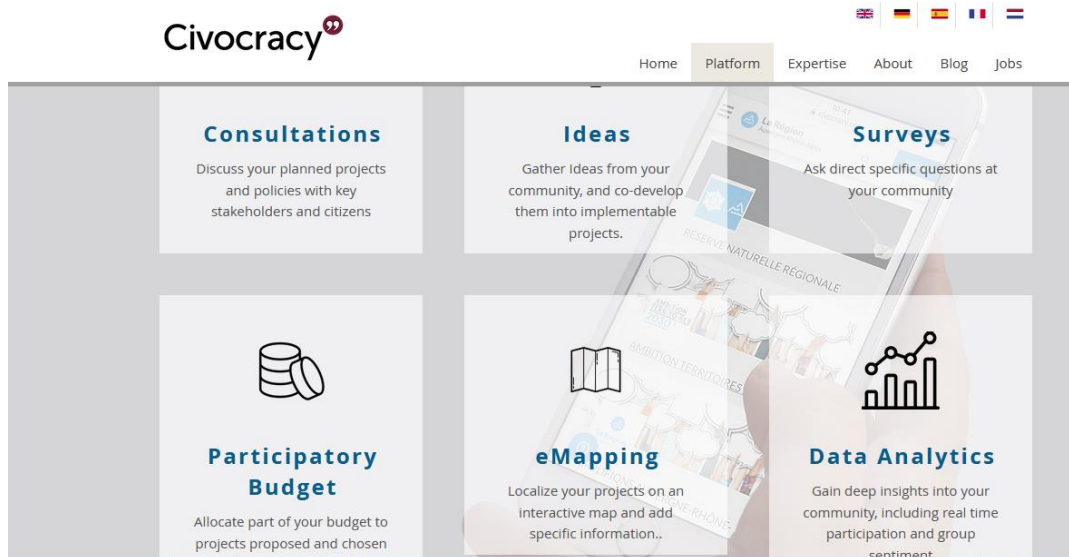
**Solution:** Provides digitalisation tools for the public sector, primarily, local governments who want to consult residents about planned projects and invite suggestions for local policy improvement.

#### **Functionality:**

- The Civocracy platform is structured like a social network: organisers upload information (text, images and video) and add surveys and discussions. Users follow discussions, comment and like contributions from others. Comments that get the most likes are highlighted to organisers.
- Extensive consultancy as part of Civocracy services to educate local decision-makers on how to maximise citizen engagement and integrate their feedback into the process.
- Generates notifications to organisers every time a user submits a contribution, thus helping them to engage actively in the process.
- Full life cycle implementation and consulting services.

**Use:** Clients who want to streamline public consultation processes and improve responsiveness; clients who benefit from a wraparound consultation and implementation service.

**Figure 5.** Main dashboard of online consulting tool Civocracy



### 3.11. Discuto

**Webpage:** <http://www.discuto.io>

**Solution:** The Discuto Ideation & Discussion platform allows users to co-create and co-discuss ideas, co-design policy documents.

#### **Functionality:**

- The right tool for the right phase in the co-designing process: *Ideation* to start the process, *Discussion* to interactively co-create a document and *Polling* to resolve divisive points or impasses in the process.
- Allows very detailed collaboration on policy documents by splitting uploaded documents into headlines and paragraphs for discussion and decision.
- A system of up/down voting identifies divisive or complex aspects or sections of a document.
- Polls can be set up while a discussion is ongoing to resolve challenging areas by getting more users to express their opinion.
- Administrators can send notification emails to users to increase participation.
- An impressive list of customers, including the European Union, the German Bundestag and the Ukrainian Government, alongside private clients such as Telekom Austria.

**Use:** Clients needing to create an end-to-end process, from ideation to decision; projects that involve a highly technical discussion where the devil is in the detail.

**Example:** <https://www.discuto.io/en/blog-entry/how-we-helped-european-commission-create-10-businesses-cases-smart-silver-economy> Parlameter

### 3.12. Parlamenter

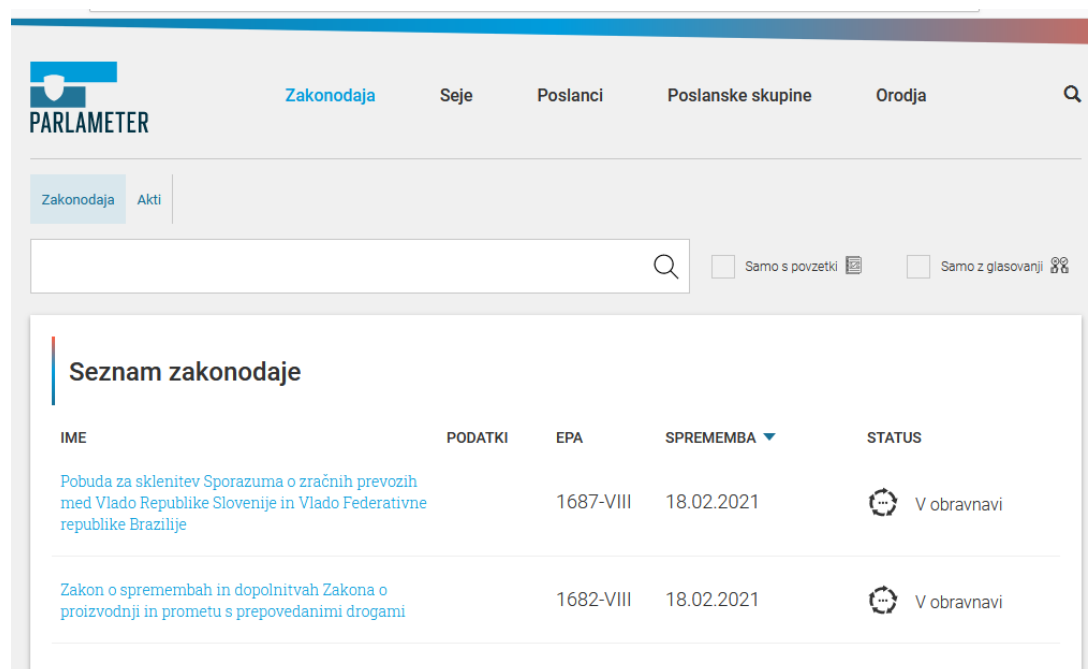
**Webpage:** [www.parlameter.si](http://www.parlameter.si)

**Solution:** Parlameter – interactive and user-friendly platform, enables journalists and CSOs to monitor the parliamentary process in Slovenia.

**Functionality:**

- Tracks the voting behaviour of Members of Parliament (MPs) and parliamentary groups.
- Creates individual ‘information cards’ with complete records and automatic statistical data processing of MPs’ speeches.
- The information is collected, processed, and analysed through algorithms and visualised on the web platform.

**Figure 6.** Vote tracking screen in Parlamenter



**Use:** Give watchdog organisations and journalists tools to facilitate data-driven analysis and initiatives, monitor the parliamentary process.

### 3.13. VouliWatch

**Webpage:** [www.vouliwatch.gr](http://www.vouliwatch.gr)

**Solution:** VouliWatch is a website, uses innovative technology applications to facilitate the monitoring of Greek parliamentary activities.

### Functionality:

- Monitors finances, the transparency of communication between Members of Parliament (MPs) and their constituents, and recordings of legislative activity.
- Provides users with information on the number of bills voted upon in Parliament, the most active MPs, political groups, and the topics of the questions/petitions tabled.
- Users can track the results of votes, ask questions to MPs or compare the positions of main political parties on specific issues with the possibility to comment and suggest different solutions.

**Use:** Citizens who gain information, data, and tools to hold their MPs accountable, and thus can increase their participation in political processes.

### 3.14. Parlement & Citoyens

**Webpage:** [www.parlement-et-citoyens.fr](http://www.parlement-et-citoyens.fr)

**Solution:** *Parlement & Citoyens* - the non-partisan platform, enables French citizens to contribute to the law-drafting process together with Members of Parliament (MPs) online.

### Functionality:

- The platform has the 6-step methodology: presentation, crowdsourcing, mapping of opinions, responses from the decision-maker, a deliberative-day and the presentation of the decision that allows for transparency in the policy making process.
- Online activities are combined with offline events.
- Received a grant from the European Commission to organise a consultation on environmental issues at the European level.

**Use:** MPs together with citizens participating in the law-drafting process.

### 3.15. Citizen-driven E-democracy Tools: Some Common Trends

In accordance with the research “Next level participation: Citizen-driven e-democracy tools” carried out by Flavio Grazian and Hendrik Nahr in 2020, a number of general trends, potentials and challenges could be identified for citizen-driven e-democracy tools:

#### *Movement towards Increasing Professionalism*

One of the common tendencies was that almost all project managers of explored e-tools (15 in total) shifted from voluntary work to professionalization during the project development phase. Projects became increasingly professional over time. A great majority of tools were created with no initial funding from standing organizations. During the next stage when innovative ideas developed into a more structured framework or organisation its creators became professionals working on their projects.

### ***Main reasons for launching the projects***

Reasons why the projects were setting up were usually a specific event, finding or political momentum. Remarkably that elections or parliamentary processes was one of such events that promoted launch of e-tools in order to establish a completely new ways of citizen participation in representative democracy.

### ***Use of Different Software Solutions***

Browser versions prevailed by far over mobile applications. This could be explained by rather complex interfaces which were difficult to be translated into a mobile application.

### ***National Applications of Civic Tech Tools***

Most of e-tools operated at the national level.

The tools were flexible for further development, e.g., some of them had local level as original scope of application, but later were upscaled to the national level. Some of them were applied to other countries, and one e-tool was shifted to the European level ([Grazian, Nahr, 2020](#))

### ***Key Challenges***

Investigating the e-tools several types of challenges were identified.

- **Cooperation with Authorities.** The different problems appeared in cooperating with local or national authorities starting from a lack of willingness to provide data and the low degree of digitalisation of governments, to a general sceptical approach to new tools and digital solutions. General conclusion of the research was that the cooperation and the support (direct and indirect) of authorities were essential factors to the digital tools effectiveness and, ultimately, their success, even if the tools were citizen-driven. Without a commitment from public administrations, participatory tools could not always develop their full potential ([Grazian, Nahr, 2020](#)).
- **Difficulty in Creating a User Base.** Another common difficulty for citizen-driven e-democracy tools was to create a user base and to raise awareness about them to further increase of their usage. Motivating citizens to use the tool did not come naturally.
- **Adequate Funding for the Projects.** One of essential problems was ensuring of adequate funding for the project, especially for tools that shifted from a volunteer-based organisation to a professional one and were not launched by already established entities ([Grazian, Nahr, 2020](#)). Once the tools experienced a certain degree of success, the demand for funding increased along with the activities grown in parallel. Funding remained to be a challenge to citizen-driven e-democracy tools despite of the fact that most of investigated e-tools managed to establish a stable funding model.
- **Lack of Knowledge of IT.** The staff of two projects investigated in this research had insufficient knowledge of IT to create their tool. Regarding the rest tools it

was not clear if the project developers had sufficient personal knowledge in software engineering or if they involved additional IT experts. People with profound knowledge of IT could be considered key persons for the successful implementation of such digital tools.

### **Success Factors**

In this research, the two most common success factors were identified: good IT infrastructure / user-friendliness and trust from the public. Another success factors that were less often admitted by the digital tool developers were: reliability of internal structures within their organisation and on the volunteers, (social) media strategies, funding model, and innovation.

- **User Friendliness.** The e-democracy tools were successful only if they were intuitive to use. Being as simple as possible the tools could not be reduced in their functionality. The good balance of both simplicity and functionality was one of the key factors of success.
- **Trust from the Public.** Public trust to the tool was another crucial success factor of the citizen-driven digital tools. All groups – public sphere, political actors and citizens - had to get to know the tools and to understand that they were trustworthy. It was especially important when it came to collaboration with authorities.
- **Reliability of Internal Structures within Organisation and on the Volunteers.** “Good team spirit, functioning process-structures and passion about the issue at hand were all of critical importance for organisations”, and especially for volunteers that supported the project ([Grazian, Nahr, 2020](#)).
- **(Social) Media Strategies.** For some digital tools, (social) media strategies was a key factor to become successful. This was due to the fact that the digital tools needed citizens who would use them and be engaged with, and this was possible only if society was aware of existence of such solutions. The increase of number of users very often was related to credibility to the tool especially in cases when the projects started from nothing.
- **Funding Model.** For some project developers a funding model became a success factor, although this was mentioned as a challenge too. Those who considered their funding system was successful mostly gained support from public funds.
- **Innovation.** Although only four digital tool developers named innovation as success factor, it could be referred to all e-democracy tools as they all brought new innovative element into the political and societal life of their societies ([Grazian, Nahr, 2020](#)).

### **Recommendations**

Based on the experiences of citizen-driven e-democracy tool developers, recommendations were made for the future organizers of the citizen-driven digital tools.

1. It would be of crucial importance to **gain trust** from the public in relation to a specific project. This trust should be obtained from all – decision-makers, administrations and citizens.
2. It would be helpful if the launch of a project would be **linked to a particular event or would try to address a problem that is important in political discourse**. Using a specific event could be a good way how to enlarge the user

base of a tool, stress the necessity of the project and highlight the aims that the tool are addressing.

3. The tool should have **easy-to-use technical interface**. A great idea may not reach people if the technical interface is not up-to-date and does not catch people's attention.
4. When starting a project, it would be advisable to **explore different sources of funding** (e.g. public funding or donations). Later it could help developers to professionalise the initial idea and the team efforts.

The developers should be aware that - even if the idea will help to make politics better - there could be initial skepticism from authorities, politicians or administrations towards the tool ([Grazian, Nahr, 2020](#)).

## 4. Interest Representation in Latvian Parliament

### 4.1. Key findings

1. Political efficacy remains generally low in Latvia. According to the national social survey in December of 2020 about 80% of the respondents considered that in general their interests were not taken into account by ministers, deputies and others when passing laws, whereas 74% of the survey participants considered that in general it would be necessary to pass a bill which would define the way in which representatives of society might influence law makers.
2. While trust in formal institutions of representative democracy remains low 44% of the respondents rather agreed and 17% fully agreed with the statement that representatives of society forming up interest groups could offer better solutions for topical issues than lawmakers.
3. There is social support for more regulation on lobbying activities. 74% of the survey participants considered that in general it would be necessary to pass a bill which would define the way in which representatives of society might influence law makers. Currently the draft law of interest representation is being elaborated in the Parliament.
4. During the last two convocations of the Parliament the citizens' activity in terms of the number of submissions has slightly decreased. The content of most submissions were legislative proposals. The next largest group of submissions contained citizens' opinion on some issue. Over 80% of submissions were addressed to the Members of Parliament.
5. Although total number of submissions forwarded to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee had decreased in 2020 comparing to 2019, the number of provided responses by the Committee increased from 20% in 2019 to 39% of 2020. The number of submissions forwarded to the relevant institution by the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee remained low: on average these were 3 cases per month or 1% of total submissions during last two years
6. The NGOs that are most active in participating in the meetings of Parliamentary Committees represented local and regional governments, large cities, employers and entrepreneurs, financial institutions, educators or science employees, trade unions, doctors, students, sworn notaries, and house managers and administrators.
7. Leading committee in terms of number of organizations and their representatives' visits was the Education, Culture and Science Committee. Parliamentary committees that consulted with society more rarely (only once during six and a half months) were Foreign Affairs Committee, Baltic Matters Subcommittee of Foreign Affairs Committee, National Security Committee, and Parliamentary Inquiry Committee.

### 4.2. Methodology



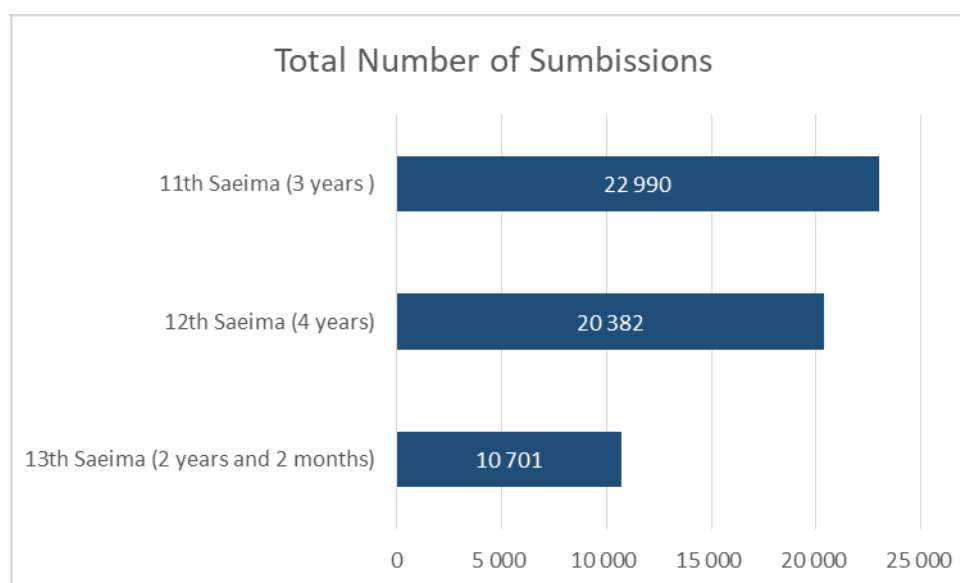
In order to analyse submissions received by the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima (the Latvian Parliament) the different tenure of each convocation of the parliament should be taken into account. The 11<sup>th</sup> Saeima worked incomplete term, only 3 years of 4 years long term because of dissolution of the previous convocation, the 12<sup>th</sup> Saeima worked the whole term which was 4 years long, while the current 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima has completed a half of the 4 year long term (2 years and 2 months).

To understand how actively the society is involved in the parliamentary work in Latvia the work of 34 parliamentary committees and their subcommittees was reviewed in the time frame from 1 September 2019 until 15 March 2020, when the emergency situation was introduced in the state due to Covid – 19. In total, 34 parliamentary committees and subcommittees consulted with the representatives of 646 NGO and 1011 individuals in their meetings during six and a half months.

### 4.3. Overview on Received Submissions by the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima

**Citizens' Activity Level in terms of submissions received by the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima.** The highest level of citizens' activity in terms of submissions was in the period of the 11<sup>th</sup> Saeima. During the last two convocations the citizens' activity had slightly decreased (**Figure 7** **Figure 7**. Total number of citizens' submissions in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima).

**Figure 7.** Total number of citizens' submissions in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima



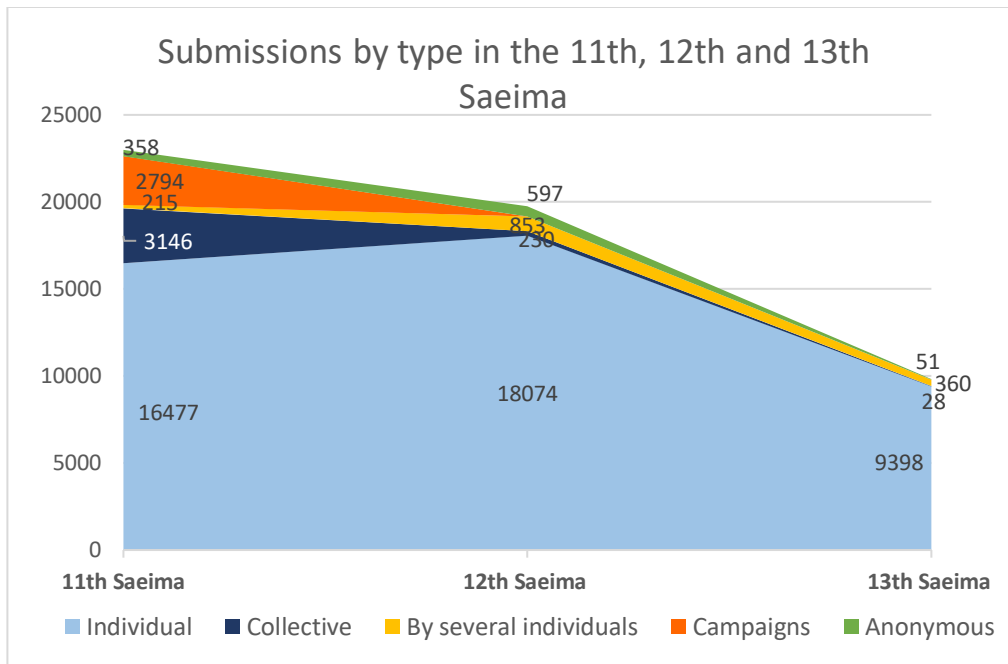
Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima

#### **Submissions by Type**

The structure of submissions has changed during the last three convocations of the Saeima.

The submissions predominantly were submitted by individuals. **The individuals remained the leading type and had increased against the total number of submissions:** from 72% in the 11<sup>th</sup> Saeima to 88% in the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima (**Figure 8**).

**Figure 8.** Submissions by type in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima

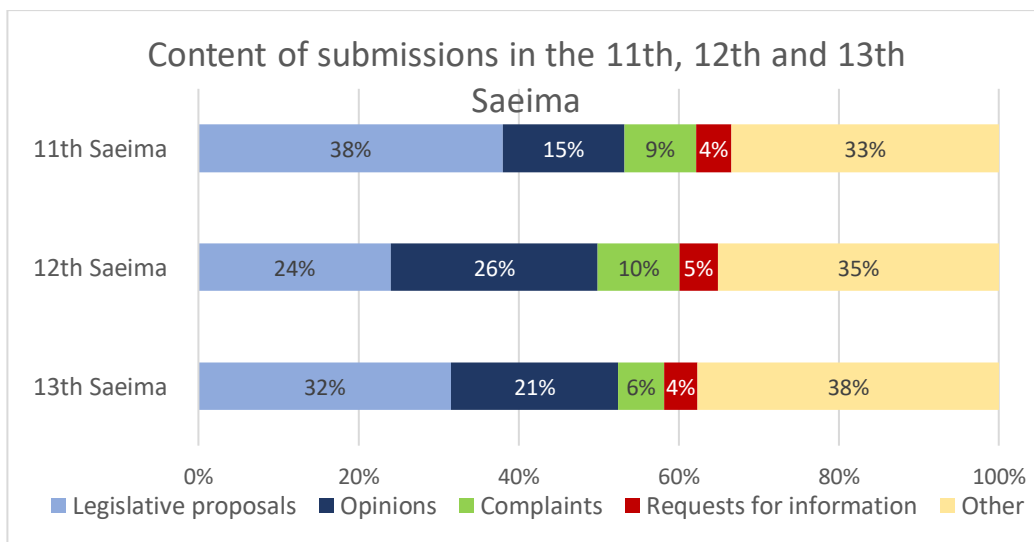


Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima

### Structure of Submissions by Content

The content of submissions had not changed substantially during the last three convocations of the Saeima. **The content of most submissions were legislative proposals. The next largest group of submissions contained citizens' opinion on some issue (Figure 9).**

**Figure 9.** Submissions by content in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima



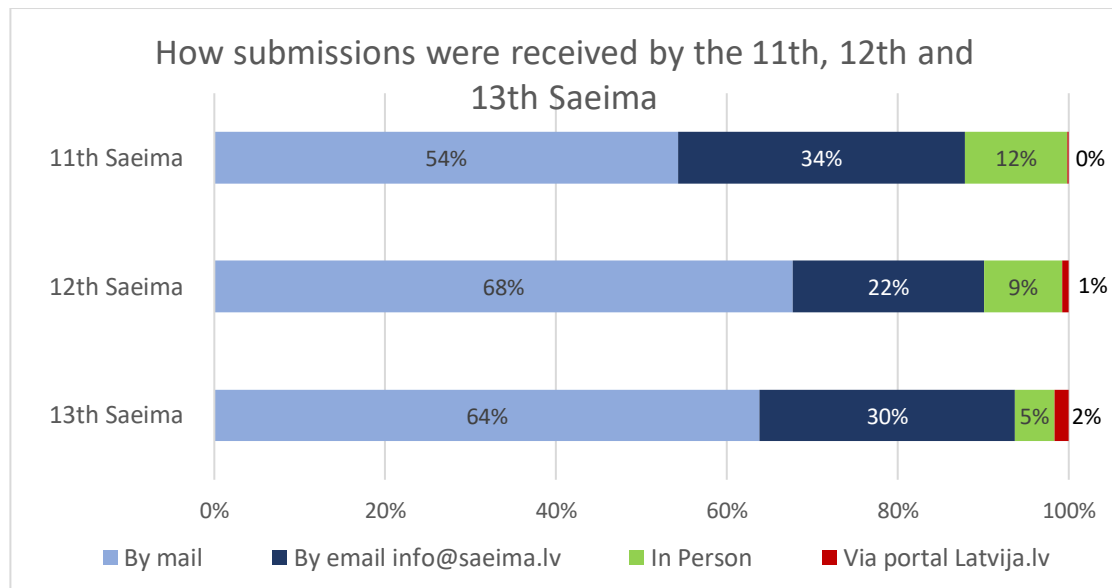
Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima

### How Submissions were received?

**The mail was the most popular way how submissions were received by the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima.** During the 13<sup>th</sup> convocation the number of submissions

submitted in person decreased. Only 2% of submissions were received via digital state online platform *Latvija.lv* (**Figure 10**).

**Figure 10.** How submissions were received in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima?

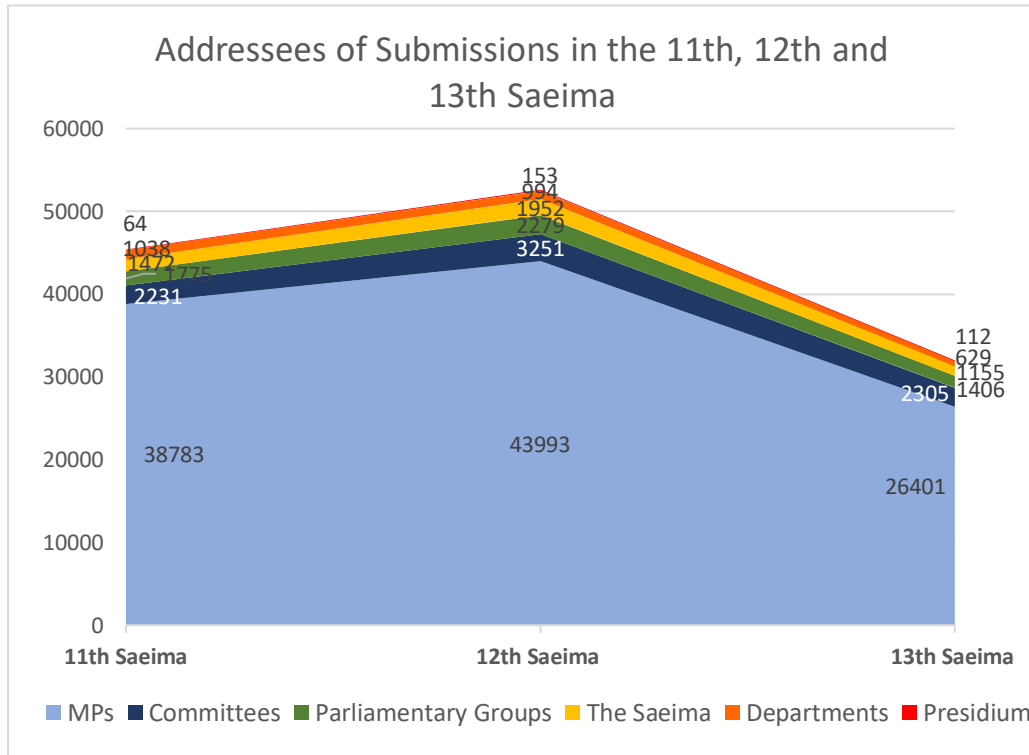


*Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima*

### **Addressees of Submissions**

**Over 80% of submissions were addressed to the Members of Parliament.** This number exceeded 80% of total submissions registered in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima. The next most popular addressee was the parliamentary committees.

**Figure 11.** Addressees of Submissions in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Saeima



Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima

### Review of Received Submissions

In accordance with the procedure of reviewing submissions the Saeima has three ways how to respond to submissions. The parliament:

- has to provide a response on the essence of the question;
- if the content of the submission does not require an answer, the Saeima just informs the citizen that the submission has been received;
- if the submission is intended for another institution, the Saeima forwards the submission to the relevant institution and informs the submitter thereof.

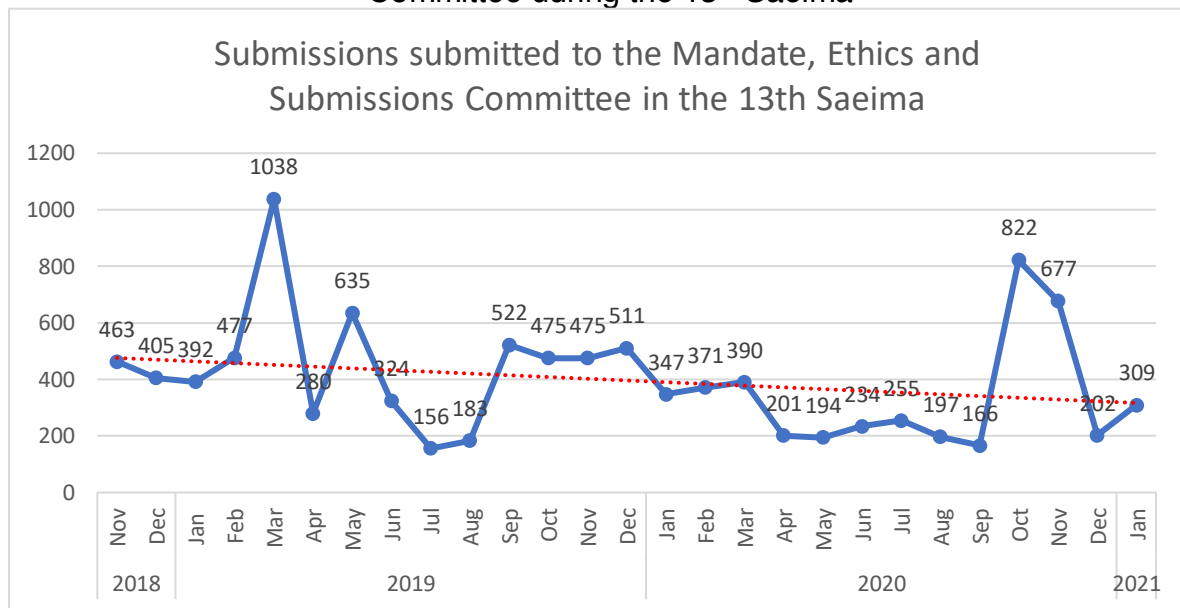
The Saeima had provided citizens with a response in writing in approximately 15% of total cases during the 11<sup>th</sup> convocation. By each year the proportion of provided responses had increased and in the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima it reached 25% of total submissions.

### Submissions submitted to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee in the 13th Saeima

In accordance with the procedure, once a month, the Public Relations Department gathered information, prepared a monthly overview on submissions and submitted it to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee for consideration. **During the 13th Saeima the total number of citizens' submissions forwarded to the Committee decreased compared with 2019.** In 2019 total number of submissions was 5468, while in 2020 it was 4056 (

**Figure 12).**

**Figure 12.** Submissions submitted to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee during the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima

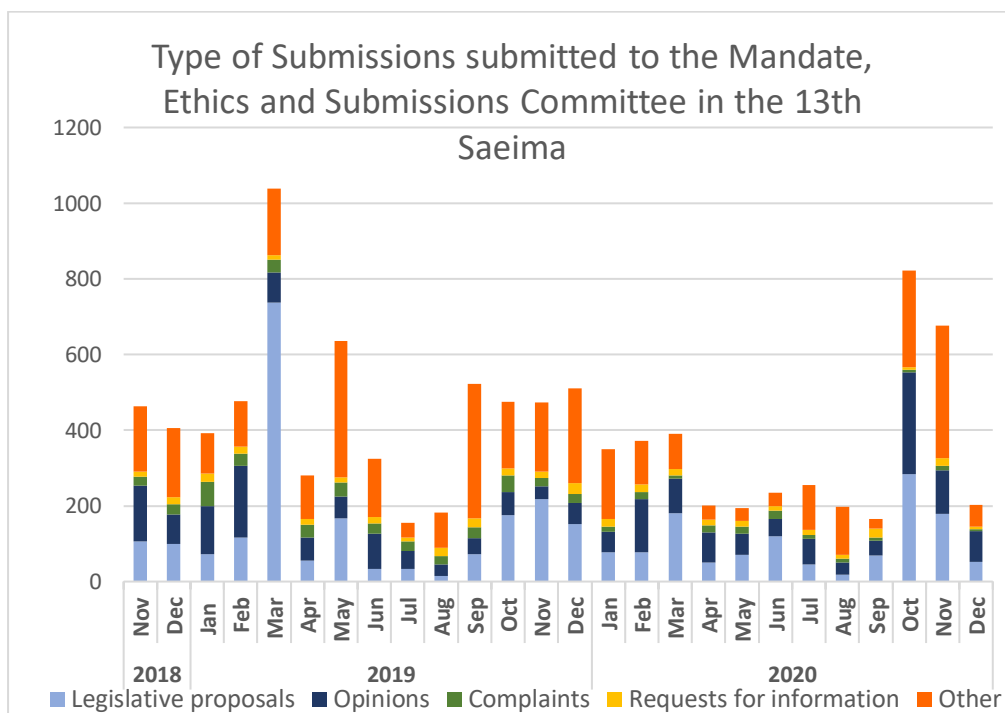


Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima

**Content of Submissions forwarded to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee in the 13th Saeima**

Submissions forwarded to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee by content was similar to the overall breakdown of submissions to the parliament. Legislative proposals was the largest group of categorized submissions (**Figure 13**).

**Figure 13.** Type of Submissions forwarded to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee in the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima

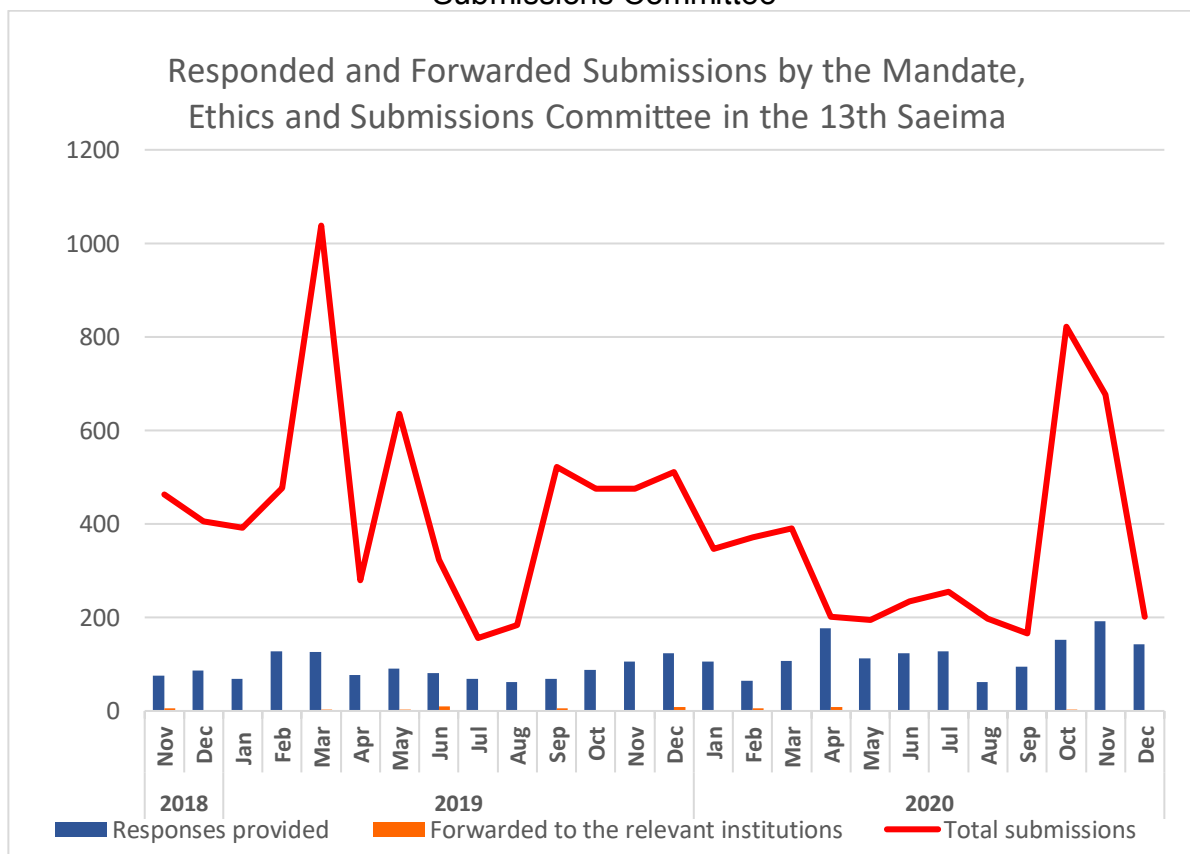


Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima

### Outcome of Reviewed Submissions by the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee in the 13th Saeima

Although total number of submissions forwarded to the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee had decreased in 2020 comparing to 2019, the number of provided responses by the Committee increased from 20% in 2019 to 39% of 2020. The number of submissions forwarded to the relevant institution by the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee remained low: on average these were 3 cases per month or 1% of total submissions during last two years (**Figure 14**)

**Figure 14.** Responded and Forwarded Submissions by the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee



Source: the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima

#### 4.4. Review of the Participation of NGOs and Experts in Latvian Parliamentary Committees and Subcommittees

##### Most Active NGO and Associations

NGO and associations which took part most frequently in the work of parliamentary committees were the associations that represent large number of members and/or are the leading organizations in their fields. These **most active NGO represented local and regional governments, large cities, employers and entrepreneurs, financial institutions, educators or science employees, trade unions, doctors, students, sworn notaries, and house managers and administrators** (**Figure 15**).

**Figure 15.** Most Active Organizations by Number of Attended Meetings of Parliamentary Committees and Subcommittees

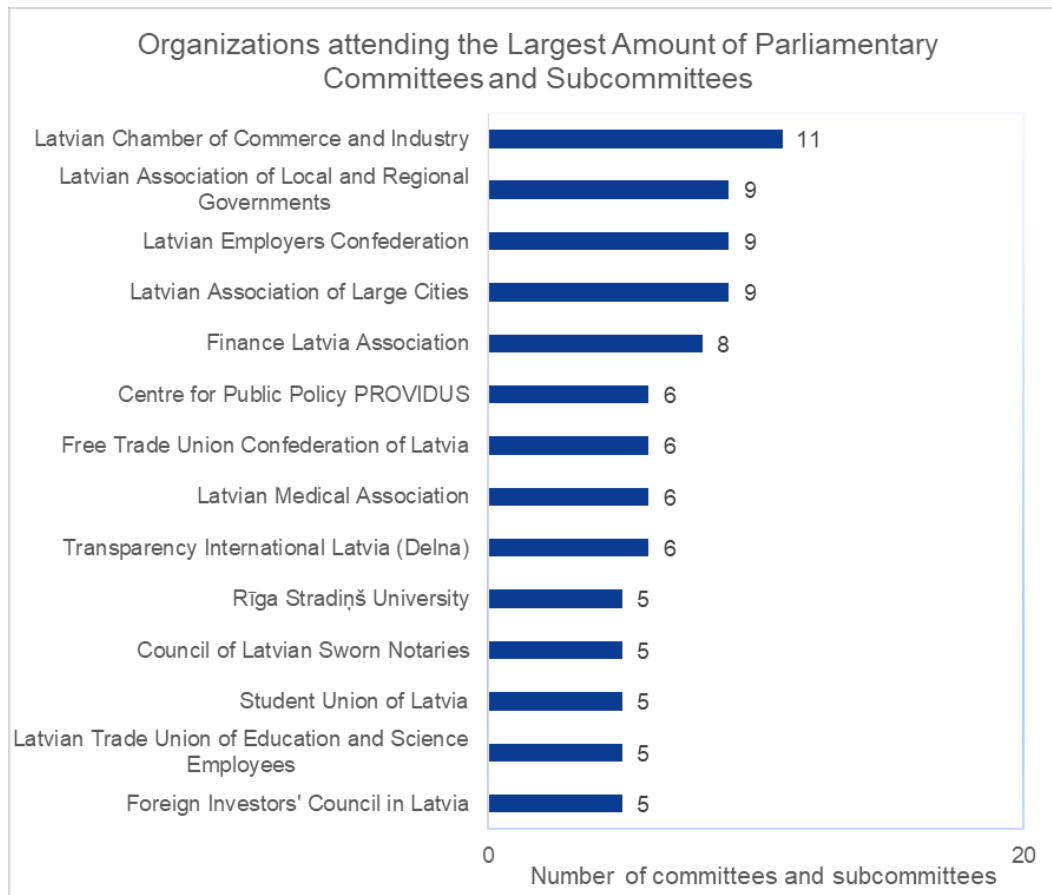


Source: publicly available data in the Saeima's website  
<http://titania.saeima.lv/livs/saeimasnotikumi.nsf/ComissionsList?readform>

These NGO and associations could be considered the permanent partners of the parliament as they consulted several committees and subcommittees at the same time (5 and more). In addition, two NGOs - Transparency International Latvia ("Delna") fighting corruption and a center for public policy "PROVIDUS" promoting evidence-based policy and open society values - had become regular participants in 6 committees and subcommittees (

**Figure 16).**

**Figure 16.** Organizations attending most parliamentary committees and subcommittees



*Source: publicly available data in the Saeima's website  
<http://titania.saeima.lv/livs/saeimasnotikumi.nsf/ComissionsList?readform>*

### **Most Active Parliamentary Committees**

The Activity of Parliamentary Committees was assessed in terms of the number of organizations that were involved in consultations and according to the number of NGO visits to that Committee.

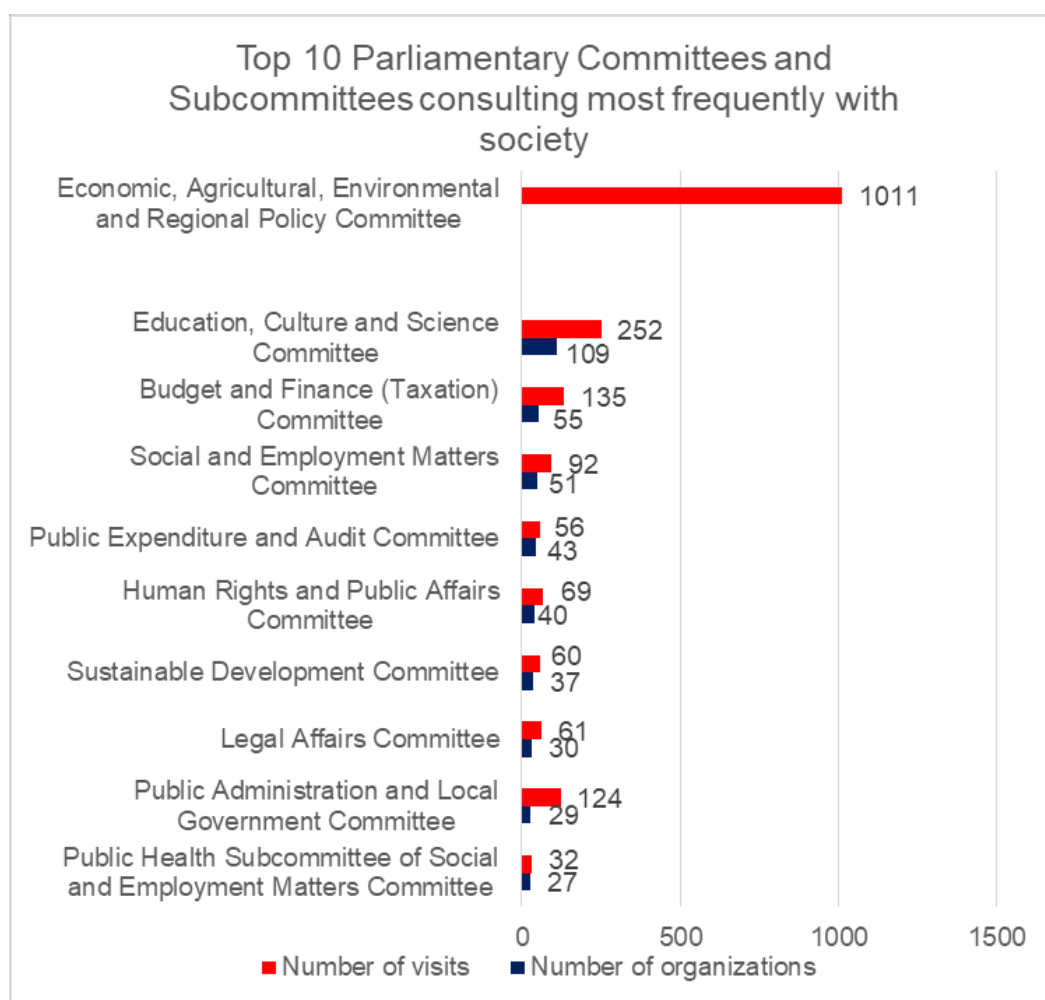
From 1 September 2019 until 15 March 2020 the **leading committee in terms of number of organizations and their representatives' visits was the Education, Culture and Science Committee**. It consulted with 109 organizations whose representatives attended committee's meetings 252 times. Among these organizations there was a wide range of educational institutions, Latvian Trade Union of Educators and Science Employees, Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, Student Union of Latvia and others. Another committee that was remarkably active in consulting with the interest groups was the Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee. It handled meetings with 55 NGOs who visited the committee 135 times in total. The organizations represented most frequently were Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, Finance Latvia Association, Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, IPAS "Indexo", and Latvian Brewers' Union. It should be noted that the Budget and Finance (Taxation) Committee is obliged by law to consult with stakeholders during the budget approval process. Social and Employment Matters Committee held meetings with 51 NGOs who visited the committee 92 times in total. This committee mainly consulted with trade unions (Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Latvian Aviation Union, Latvian Railway and



Transport Industry Trade Union), employers (Latvian Employers Confederation), the leading hospitals (Children’s Clinical University Hospital, Riga East University Hospital, Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital), medical staff (Latvian Medical Association, Latvian Association of Rural General Practitioners, Latvian Nurse Association), less protected social groups like people with rare diseases, disabilities and different illnesses (Latvian Alliance of Rare Diseases, Parental Board of Children’s Clinical University Hospital, Latvian Union of the Deaf, Latvian Blind Union, Sustento etc.), pharmaceutical companies and pharmacists, pensioners, students etc.

The parliamentary committees consulting most frequently with society are listed in society’s in **Figure 17**. The Economic, Agricultural, Environmental and Regional Policy Committee differed significantly from other committees due to a different approach in counting the number of visits.

**Figure 17.** Top 10 Parliamentary Committees Most Open to Society’s Involvement



Source: publicly available data in the Saeima’s website  
<http://titania.saeima.lv/livs/saeimasnotikumi.nsf/ComissionsList?readform>

This data for this committee show the number of individual persons’ visits in total without identifying organizations they represented. The records of this Committee’s meetings make no mention of the affiliation of the individual.

### ***Parliamentary Committees with Lower Degree of Stakeholder Participation***

Parliamentary committees that consulted with society more rarely (only once during six and a half months) were Foreign Affairs Committee, Baltic Matters Subcommittee of Foreign Affairs Committee, National Security Committee, and Parliamentary Inquiry Committee. This was due to the specifics of the issues they worked with. The full statistics on all committees and subcommittees are available in ***Annex 1***.

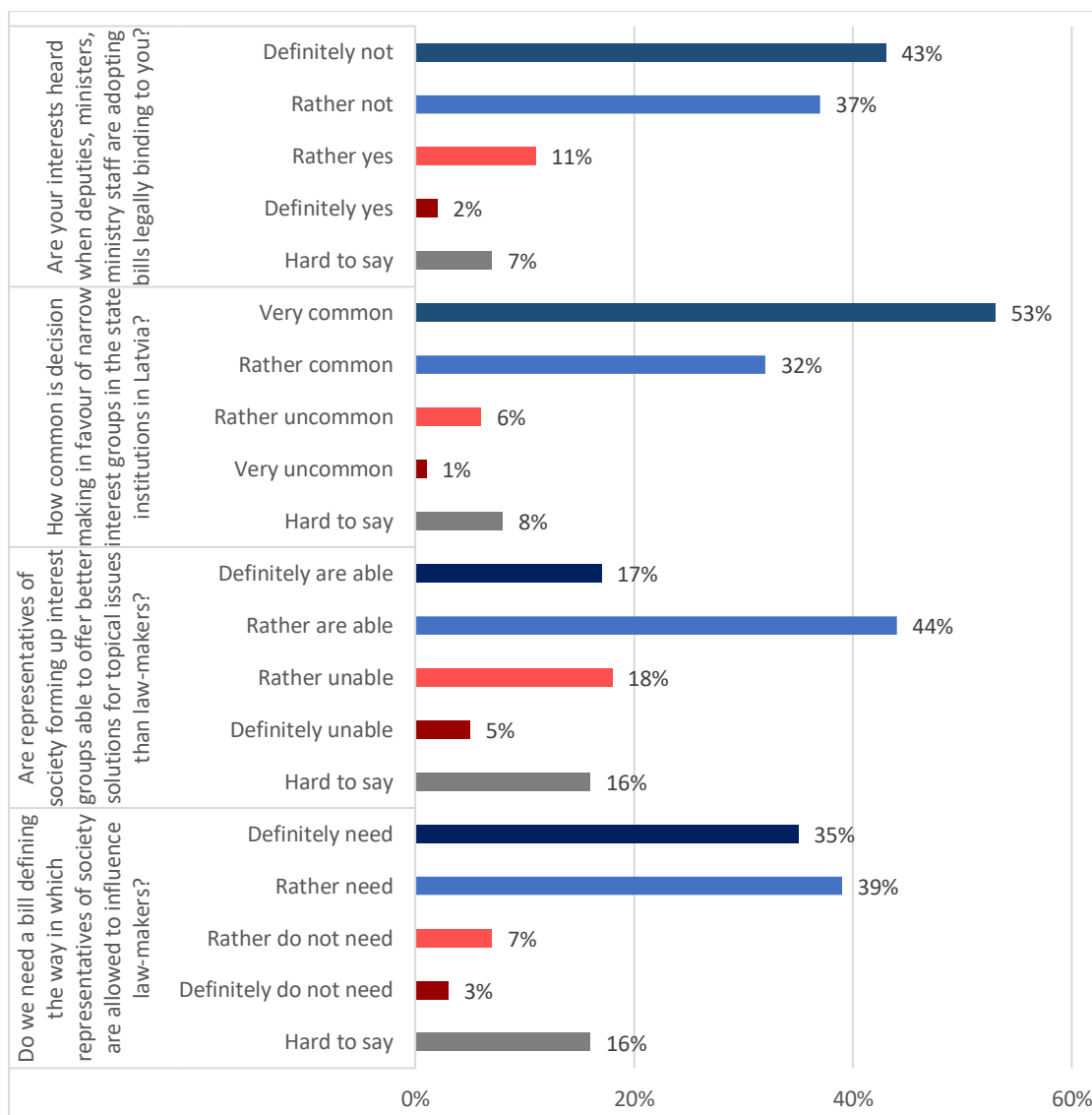
## **4.5. Society's Attitudes Towards Organised Representation of Interests and Lobbying Regulation**

The survey "Society's Interests in the Corridors of Power. Evaluation of the Lobbying Regulation" was carried out on 17 - 21 December 2020 by the research centre SKDS on the request of a communication management agency "Deep White." The research sample included 1005 citizens representing all Latvian inhabitants aged from 15 to 75 years.

The results of the survey showed that:

- 80% of respondents considered that in general their interests were not taken into account by ministers, deputies and others when passing laws. 85% of the respondents considered that in general the decisions were made in favour of narrow interest groups in the state institutions of Latvia.
- 44% of the respondents rather agreed and 17% fully agreed with the statement that representatives of society forming up interest groups could offer better solutions for topical issues than lawmakers. In other words, 61% of the respondents considered that the involvement of society would improve the quality of decision-making. There were no significant differences among different demographic groups in response to this statement.
- 74% of the survey participants considered that in general it would be necessary to pass a law which would define the way in which representatives of society might influence law makers. Thus respondents expressed strong support and legitimacy for the adoption of the Lobbying Regulation. The answers broken down by cohort groups did not reveal that any particular social group would oppose the introduction of such a legislation. Thus, in general, Latvian society supported the introduction of the regulation for lobbying.

**Figure 18.** Public Assessment of the Lobbying and Possible Introduction of the Lobbying Regulation



Source: SKDS research "Society's Interests in the Corridors of Power. Evaluation of the Lobbying Regulation", December 2020. Presented in the Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee of the Saeima on 26.01.2021. Available at: <https://titania.saeima.lv/livs/saeimasnotikumi.nsf/0/9E51B7DC7AB82BE0C2258664002FA841?OpenDocument&prevCat=13|Aizsardz%C4%ABbas.%20iek%C5%A1lietu%20un%20korupcijas%20nov%C4%93r%C5%A1anas%20komisija>

## 5. The Experience and Expectations of the Potential Users of the Digital Advocacy Tool for Civil Society Organizations

### 5.1. Key Findings

1. In experts' opinion, an overall activity level of NGOs which represented public interests in the parliamentary legislation was evaluated as rather low by NGO experts despite of remarkable total numbers of NGOs involvement into the parliamentary committee work.
2. Experts concluded that the majority of NGOs could be considered with rather poor knowledge about the legislative process and absence of skills how and when to involve in law-making. This was due to the periodic and short-term interest in lobbying, usually for a period of a project duration or a specific law adoption.
3. The most significant part of NGOs in lobbying were formed by the large, leading NGOs like trade unions, employers' federations, pharmaceutical associations etc., which were powerful commercial lobbyists having financial and legal resources for a permanent presentation of their interests in law-making. The largest NGOs representing public interests for many years in the parliamentary work were regarded as more proactive and having more resources and skills than the smaller organizations.
4. The unified procedure of cooperation between NGOs and the parliamentary committees of Saeima does not exist. Each parliamentary committee has its own work style. For the NGOs, it meant to spend an extra time and resources to find out an individual approach for each committee.
5. Personal connection with MPs were regarded as very important in getting an information and to be involved in debates or get some issue into the committee agenda. It was possible to form relationship with MPs if a representative of NGO was proactive and showed his or her interest.
6. The chair of a committee was mentioned as a key person that decided whether a committee would involve NGOs in its work or not and what human resources a committee would spend for this purpose. The chair also influenced an overall committee culture and ethical integrity.
7. Several interviewed experts highlighted the European Affairs Committee as an example of a good practice of NGO's involvement into the committee work.
8. Parliamentary committees usually did not have an official list of experts, interest groups or organisations which to invite to meetings. NGOs themselves needed to regularly monitor agendas, and this required organization's own capacity and an initiative.
9. Overall, the process of adopting laws in the Saeima was described as unpredictable that required constant monitoring by the NGOs and interest groups. The initial draft laws could differ significantly from the adopted laws. Amendments could be made in the last moment. This was the reason why the need for the involvement of the NGOs was seen as permanent.

10. Several experts considered that the main problem in the parliamentary law-making was the lack of transparency regarding amendments in draft laws. According to them MPs were not morally, ethically or legally bound to declare the source of proposals.

11. Almost all interviewed experts provided support to the digital tool that would automatically notify NGOs about the parliamentary work and legislative processes.

### **Core purpose and functionality**

- Clear purpose and functionality of the system having a very clear definition for what purposes it was created;
- Clearness and simplicity of the system, as well as “intuitive interface” meaning with that intuitive perception of the published information and the system itself;

### **Collaboration with the Parliament**

The experts suggested that the Saeima should become the collaborative partner in developing the digital tool. The possible areas of collaboration involve:

- The coding of laws. The main input needed from the Saeima staff would be meaningful coding of the draft laws by keywords, items, fields etc.;
- Ensuring the integration of the digital tool with other information systems of the Saeima;
- Involvement of the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima as informative partner who would provide information on conferences and other events relevant to NGOs

### **Meaningful content**

- Information selected by key words and checked by a human having good knowledge on laws, not an artificial intelligence based algorithm that could not grasp the context of laws;
- Explanatory notes, accompanying documents or annotations added to the system in order to understand the importance of the draft laws or meetings;
- Timely information giving NGOs enough time to prepare for meetings, make proposals etc.;
- Educational content. The tool could contain educational information for beginners in lobbying, e.g., manuals, maps or flowcharts of legislative processes, templates for submissions etc.

### **Interactivity and networking**

- need for e-mail notifications;
- inclusiveness and exchange of information among NGOs being the tool for debates in the NGOs sector;
- online discussions on NGO and citizens' proposals having an opportunity to see and vote 'for or against' these proposals;
- social networking among NGOs encouraging collaborative partnership, sharing resources such as knowledge and people for obtaining mutual goals;
- gaming elements;

- geolocation technologies for integrating citizens' opinions with their geographical location;
- direct communication functionality with MPs and the parliamentary committees;
- online application feature for the parliamentary committee meetings;
- online application feature for the position of the committee consultative expert in a specific field or issue;
- functionality of working remotely via the digital tool doing some basic lobbying activities that did not require presence of NGO representatives in person;
- capacity to launch public deliberative debates on some "big" and essential issues for the society;

### **Privacy**

- compliance with the EU directives and other rules;
- security mechanism in place that would filter an abusive language and indicate aggressive users;

### **Sustainability**

Experts mentioned several preconditions for achieving greater sustainability of the digital tool:

- accurate information - if some information were missing, users would distrust the system;
- funding and human resources – the maintenance of the tool requires enough financial and human resources after the funding of the project expires;
- integration with other governmental and parliamentary information systems – the digital tool should not be isolated or duplicate some functions of other systems;
- targeted user base – in order to maintain considerable user base, the tool should be promoted to attract such social groups as journalists, socially active citizens who could become members of NGOs in future, large associations, trade unions, employers' federations, pharmaceutical associations who have financial resources for possibly funding the system in future.

## **5.2. Methodology**

### **Expert interviews**

In order to acquire in-depth understanding about the process of interest representation in the parliament, and find out about the needs and expectations of the potential users of the digital tool, 13 semi-structured interviews were carried out with 16 respondents representing civil society organisations with considerable experience in lobbying and interest representation. The interviews were conducted via Zoom from 18.01-10.02, 2021. The list of informants is found in the **Annex 2**.

### **Expert survey**

In addition to expert interviews 25 respondents representing civic society organisations in Latvia participated in the expert survey that was carried out after the open discussion "Do only the big companies have the power to influence?" on 25 Feb,

2021. The discussion was devoted to the issue how small NGOs can influence the parliamentary work.

### 5.3. Results

#### **Digital Solutions for Citizen's Involvement in the Parliamentary and Governmental Work**

Until now, there was no any joint digital tool nor a platform in Latvia that would compile all publicly available information on draft laws, proposals, agendas, reports, meetings etc. of the parliamentary and governmental work, as well as would enable citizens to comment on proposals and bills or make a direct contact with politicians. The State Chancellery is developing a new joint Law Portal that would facilitate citizen's access to documentation of the Cabinet of Ministers and Secretaries of State and would allow public input in discussing draft laws. The portal was planned to launch in 2021.

#### **The Website of the Saeima**

At the moment the main source for obtaining information on the parliamentary work is the website of the Saeima which mainly informed society on the parliamentary activities, without offering direct citizens' involvement in legislation, like commenting draft laws or sending a message to politicians. NGO experts described the website of the Saeima as very complicated to navigate for an ordinary person:

*"An ordinary mortal man cannot perceive an interface [of the website of the Saeima]. A person just gets lost in all that." (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

The current structure of the parliamentary website allowed things to hide and make invisible for an ordinary user if there was such intension. This is why the website should be improved:

*"From a user view, it is clear if you do not want anything to be found and do not want anybody to participate, you can hide it so that it will not be found. It happens rather often." (I. Tauriņa, 25.01.2021.)*

An expert having professional interest in politics considered the information system of the Saeima being handy for professionals, but a nightmare for an ordinary user. Currently the system was better than the one of the Cabinet of Ministers, but soon this could change when the new Law Portal will be launched:

*"Actually, at the moment the system of the Saeima is better than the system of Cabinet of Ministers. For a person who knows [the system] it is handy, he or she can find all proposals which are prepared by all organizations in each stage of law-making, can find all voting results, transcripts, protocols... For an inexperienced person it is a nightmare, he or she will be lost in a minute." (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

#### **Alternative Solutions for Obtaining Information on the Saeima's Work.**

To facilitate an access to the information and thus promote NGOs involvement into the parliamentary work, the NGO "Civic Alliance – Latvia" was compiling and sending its member organizations and followers the information that was gathered manually by reviewing all official websites of the state and municipal institutions – the State

Chancellery, the Cabinet of Ministers, Secretaries of State, the Saeima, Municipality of Riga, The State Revenue Service. The compiled information on upcoming events was spread on a weekly basis through closed Facebook group, Twitter, as well as published on the website of “Civic Alliance – Latvia”:

*“We, Alliance, are checking all solutions – Municipality of Riga, the Saeima, the State Chancellery ... and publishing on Facebook an information that could be interesting primarily for us and our members and secondary for anybody at all. It means that we have to constantly check something and follow the flow [of information] all the time.” (A. Zaļūksnis, 18.01.2021.)*

This solution of “Civic Alliance – Latvia” had received a positive feedback from users. However some issues were missed because of a human factor and the complexity of legislation:

*“Recently there is [available] such a good resource as Facebook group of “Civic Alliance – Latvia” which is meant for publishing the Saeima’s agenda, the parliamentary committee agendas and issues that would be of NGOs’ interest. At the same time, naturally, Alliance also cannot know if some important item for a concrete NGO is hiding under seemingly technical bill.” (I. Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

### **Activity of NGOs**

An overall activity level of NGOs in representing their interests in legislation could be described “as rather sluggish” or inert, especially among smaller NGOs. The largest ones were proactive and had more resources and skills:

*“The largest NGOs are sending their reviews and briefs. They have such competencies.” (A. Zaļūksnis, 18.01.2021.)*

*“Parliamentary committees like if you are consistent. And it is a problem of small NGOs, because they do not run to the Saeima every time.” (A. Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

*“Many NGOs apply for [reviews], but they have neither resources, nor skills to express an opinion in the legal form.” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

An expert who had organized NGOs trainings on lobbying considered that one of the reasons of a low NGOs activity was rather poor knowledge about the legislative process and absence of skills how and when to involve in law-making. This was due to their periodic and short-term interest in lobbying, usually for a period of a project duration:

*“NGOs knowledge are not very good about at what moment to involve into law-making process... It is related to a periodic involvement. While NGO participates in a project, it is [politically] active, but then it is suddenly inactive... But if you want to participate in the work of the Saeima, most important is to know how laws are adopted and have some lobbying skills.” (L. Stafacka, 19.01.2021.)*

*“I have to define very clearly the proposal of a paragraph which undergoes amendments. I cannot just tell the committee my problem and ask them to solve it. MPs also do not know how to solve it, they are not lawyers, only if they have*



*a very qualified lawyer or chairman's assistant... And this is a big competence problem, typically for small NGOs." (A. Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

### **Dual role of the NGO Sector**

An expert being over 20 years in lobbying considered splitting of the NGOs into the small and the large ones as incorrect. More essential division was by their quality: the commercial lobbying organizations versus the NGOs representing public interests and civil society. The first ones were financially and legally powerful and skilled to constantly present their interests in the parliamentary work, while the second group was small and very weak. At the same time total numbers of NGOs involvement in the parliamentary legislation were remarkable although did not reflect the actual activity level of civil society:

*"The large commercial lobbying organizations having financial and legal resources of the member companies will never be equal with those which are civil society and presenting public interests in this dialogue. The latter are much, much weaker. I am always laughing when reading how actively the NGOs have involved in the legislative process. I see only a few NGOs in the committee meetings for years." (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

### **Saeima's attitude towards the NGOs Sector**

Some experts had experienced a large mistrust from state institutions, which perceived NGOs as being tended to criticise, argue, and hinder their work:

*"We have to break this ice. The state institutions have large mistrust [against NGOs]. The state institutions very often have a feeling that they cannot send [documentation] to the NGO sector as we will be critical, tear everything down, will not offer any constructive proposal... Associations understand that they have to participate and speak in a constructive way so that the state institutions would see that we are cool people. It changes slowly."(A. Zaļūksnis, 18.01.2021.)*

Another NGO expert doing lobbying for many years had a sense that all the most important issues were solved in collaboration with other interest groups outside parliamentary committees and an inclusive democracy in its traditional meaning did not exist in Latvia:

*"After all these years [in lobbying] I think they [MPs] have a very clear idea what they want to achieve, they are managing things somewhere else, but invitation to a meeting is like a big boss's call on the carpet for rebuke or reporting about plans and further actions. To name this as super constructive cooperation or inclusive democracy or by another nice word would be wrong. There is still long way to go." (B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)*

At the same time an expert from a well-known NGO expressed an opposite view describing MPs as responsive and ready to cooperate:

*"In general, MPs are responsive, the parliamentary committees also are responsive with some rare exceptions. Sometimes they cannot imagine that*

*NGO could be interested in an issue, thereby we need to monitor agendas ourselves.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

In general, the type of NGO (small vs large, well-known vs unknown, highly skilled vs unskilled, commercial vs protecting public interests) determined the perception and cooperation with the MPs.

### ***Procedures of Cooperation between NGOs and the Saeima***

The unified procedure of cooperation between NGOs and the Saeima did not exist. Experts admitted that cooperation between their organization and the parliament differed significantly depending on the work style of each parliamentary committee and MPs' individual character in each new convocation of the Saeima:

*“We are creating new participatory forms with each new convocation of the Saeima. If MPs have not changed, then everything remains the same, if the deputies have changed, then everything starts from the beginning. Which question is addressed to which MP? How to make an issue topical? How to create relationship with a deputy again?” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

*“We have a direct contact with some MPs. We are asking managing deputies about the readings of draft laws, an opportunity to involve us in discussions, a general mood regarding some issue...If a team or people changed, we have to form these contacts again.” (I. Tauriņa, 25.01.2021.)*

Some parliamentary committees had been open to the involvement of NGO sector by sending their agenda, invitations to the meetings and listening to their opinion while other committees were rather closed. In the latter cases NGOs had to be proactive and insistent to be able to follow a committee's work:

*“Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee usually has closed meetings, this is why it is more complicated...” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

Some NGOs had been avoiding of participation in the parliamentary meetings because of bad experience when the name of their organization was used for declaring a cooperation with the NGOs sector although laws were actually developed in other groups' interests. The Saeima had not always been an honest partner:

*“There are organizations which told me that do not participate in debates anymore, because they do not want their names to be used saying that consulting with them was organized and therefore their names were included in the annotation of the documents. Yes, the organization was involved, but its opinion was completely opposite and was not taken into account.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

In an expert's opinion, the absence of a unified procedure for committee work with NGOs had caused difficulties for the latter part, as it took extra time and resources to find out an individual approach for each specific committee:

*“The missing thing is that the parliamentary committees do not have a unified approach for involving the NGO or any other sector... It would help us to do our work a lot because we do not have many employees.” (I. Tauriņa, 25.01.2021.)*

*“We are added to the email list, but after several weeks we are out of it. I do not know how it works.” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

Personal connection with MPs were very welcome to get an information, be involved in debates or get some issue into agenda, otherwise proposals and letters might be ignored:

*“If you do not have any personal connection with these people then most likely our emails “are lost in translation”, nobody pays attention to what we are saying.” (B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)”*

*“There are cases when some MP has called me and asked my advice if this issue should be put into agenda of subcommission for people with special needs or Economic, Agricultural, Environmental and Regional Policy Committee. There are cases when committee coordinators have informed me... And there are many cases when we did not know about debates on some important items.” (L. Bērziņa, 09.02.2021.)*

In general, the Saeima had a tradition to involve NGOs in its work although it means longer debates and longer process of adopting a law, as well as more work and more inconveniences. To make any changes in the procedures between NGOs and the parliament an overall agreement with the Presidium of the Saeima or chairmen of committees should be achieved:

*“Of course, they [politicians] declare their interest in cooperation with NGOs. In reality, it means longer debates on issues. However overall parliamentary tradition is to invite NGOs. But, of course, it is difficult for them if NGOs are many and they have to decide which organization to give an opportunity to speak and which not. But it is obvious that nobody wants to overwork... There should be some agreement with the Presidium of the Saeima or Chairmen of committees that from now on we will write more detailed agendas and will make some lists of NGOs for sending out an information on our documentation.” (I. Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

### **Good Practice of NGO's Involvement into the Parliamentary Committee Work**

Several experts highlighted European Affairs Committee as an example of a good practice of NGO's involvement into the committee work:

*“Among all committees of the Saeima I would emphasize European Affairs Committee as a fantastic example. They are proactively sending all questions. They understand that they can gain a lot from involving the NGO sector, as a society may have a different view on a problem.” (A. Zaļūksnis, 18.01.2021.)*

*“European Affairs Committee sends invitations to our main office email to all or almost all meetings. I just need to decide if this item is interesting for my organization and if I have enough time [to participate].” (I. Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

The experts complimented this committee for continuity of procedural traditions and established patterns of cooperation with NGOs despite of elections and new convocations. One of the reasons for successful succession was well-formed system and well-educated committee consultants:

*“European Affairs Committee is the only good practice. [In its work] there is a continuity, a purposefulness despite of parliamentary changes. It has very well-educated consultants and well – established procedure how to inform and how to involve [NGOs].” (I.Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

### **“Monopolized Participation”**

Sometimes committees and ministries had traditional partners they contacted and asked for the opinions on draft bills. However state institutions themselves might be tired of the permanent partners who had their traditional view and usual argumentation. It could be named “a monopolized participation”. This is an additional reason why to attract and educate new generation in lobbying:

*“I have heard that Cabinet of Ministers are tired of the same persons and the same organisations. It is typical for Latvia... This participation [of the NGO sector] is slightly monopolized.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

### **Involvement into the Parliamentary Committees Work**

Parliamentary committees usually did not have an official list of experts, interest groups or organisations which to invite to meetings. NGOs themselves needed to regularly monitor agendas, and this required organization’s own capacity and an initiative:

*“I doubt if there are any lists... In my opinion, no one of NGOs has reached such a level. However NGOs themselves have to monitor agendas and find out if there are issues interesting for them... Mostly it depends on capacity and initiative of an organization itself how many issues it grasps and if it has time [to participate] in that moment...In general, I have not noticed any lists of organizations which are usually invited only if you are not Association of Local and Regional Governments. You cannot rely that somebody will inform you, you should constantly follow what happens in the Saeima.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

An expert of politically active NGO admitted that she applied for committee meetings mostly via consultants of parliamentary committees, more rarely she had communicated with chairmen of committees on their request:

*“Mostly we speak with consultants. We are well-known organization [Providus], they know us. Sometimes we ask them about the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of a law, sometimes we apply for a meeting through them. Sometimes chairmen of committees contact us asking for our opinion, but mostly we are applying ourselves.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

### **Relationship with MPs**

An expert doing lobbying for many years considered that personal relationship with MPs or chairmen of committees was one of the main preconditions to be involved into the work of committees. At the same time she agreed that it was rather possible to form relationship with MPs if a person was proactive:

*“It is very interesting – you may receive a pass to the Saeima, if you are invited. This means that a MP decides whether to involve you into a committee or not. And if you are not a friend of a MP or chairman of a committee, then most likely you do not participate in it... In general, it is possible [to form relationship]. If you show proactively your interest, it is possible to get inside.” (A.Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

Relationship with MPs were important due to the fact that they were persons who formed the committee agendas and selected partners based on their understanding of what issues were topical for a society at that moment and who they had noticed as possible partners:

*“It is the question about MPs: what is important for their agenda and which [people or organizations] they see as the collaborative partners.” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

### **Lack of Ethical Integrity in the Work of Committees**

The reason why NGOs had so diverse experience in being involved into the work of committees was the lack of the unified procedure and absence of the ethical integrity:

*“The criteria by which people are invited to committees are not clear... When you are sitting in a meeting as an NGO representative, you may see a line of people who do not introduce themselves and do not say what organisation they represent. It is so called culture of a committee meeting... And it mostly depends on a chairman.” (A.Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

### **Agendas of the Parliamentary Committees**

The interviewed expert expressed an opinion that the parliamentary committee agendas were rather unclear and general. Sometimes it required NGOs to be highly competent to intuitively guess from the context what kind of issues would be discussed in the upcoming committee meeting:

*“The committee agendas do not describe in detail what kind of debates will be hold. You just have to sense it...All depends on the context...You should sense from the titles of the draft laws if they relate to the issues you are fighting for. You have to apply for the meetings, wait, listen to the debates, and ask the consultants what this question is about. Of course, the committee consultants know best and theoretically they could write these agenda more detailed. “Providus” together with “Delna” have achieved that the agendas are more complete, but still they could be more detailed.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

### **The Role of the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee**

A chair of a committee was named as a key person that decided whether a committee would involve NGOs in its work or not and what human resources a committee would spend for this purpose:

*“A key word is a chairman and if he or she wants to cooperate with NGOs or not. And what subordinates he or she is ready to give. If a chairman is ready [to cooperate] then a consultant can code draft laws by adding keywords and write more complete agendas describing an essence of items, not just titles of the draft laws or meetings.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

### **Transparency of the Parliamentary Committee Work**

The main things that would ensure transparency of the work of the parliamentary committees would be timely schedules and agendas, as well as publicly available minutes of the meetings:

*“The main thing is a timely schedule and a timely agenda. The protocols after meetings should be publicly available.” (I. Tauriņa, 25.01.2021.)*

An expert with a great deal of experience in lobbying considered that the main problem in the parliamentary law-making was the lack of transparency regarding amendments in draft laws. MPs were not morally, ethically or legally bound to declare the source of proposals:

*“The most critical problem is that we cannot track where the proposals come from. In the stage of Cabinet of Ministers you are sending your proposals, they are put in annotations, and you are able to track each specific proposal and understand why it is amended there... When all this documentation is forwarded to the Saeima, completely different situation appears. In general, all work that was done previously is ignored and everything starts from the beginning. In general, the largest problem is that MPs do not have such professional, ethical obligation to show proposals and explain where they are coming from.” (A.Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

### **The Work Outside the Parliamentary Committees**

In some expert's opinion, the main deals with members of committees were made in individual discussions before the committee meetings. To present NGO's position in a meeting was too late for getting substantial results in terms of systemic or procedural changes. Open meetings was mostly for gaining publicity in mass media:

*“The work in committee meetings is too late for obtaining substantial amendments. There are journalists and it is like a parade for presenting opinions. The work is more meaningful if you try to be in touch with each committee member individually and find out his or her position before the meeting... Because each your proposal often means huge changes in several ministries... Sometimes it is easier to influence things working together with officials, when the new law is just open, sometimes it is more effective to work*

*in the parliamentary committees, but this is rather brutal approach.” (L. Bērziņa, 09.02.2021.)*

### **The Process of Lawmaking**

The process of adopting laws in the Saeima was described as unpredictable that required constant monitoring by the NGOs and interest groups. The initial draft laws could differ significantly from the adopted laws. Amendments could be made in the last moment. This was the reason why involvement of NGOs should be permanent:

*“Yes, laws may differ very significantly - the initial version that was reported to the Saeima may vary from the last reading version. If an issue is very important for the society... we cannot relax, we are trying to join a draft law constantly, even the deadline has passed and proposals cannot be submitted any more that does not mean that MPs in a parliamentary committee can come to an agreement to make amendments on behalf of a committee... If we speak about laws, then yes, we cannot relax.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

More professional and experienced organizations sometimes skipped law-making in the government and focused their attention on the parliamentary legislation. This was done because many NGOs proposals amended into draft laws in the government commissions later were taken out before or between the parliamentary readings:

*“Sometimes associations make large efforts during law-making in Ministries and think their problems are solved, but actually it does mean that. Some professionals tactically leave the largest debates for the Saeima.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

Another expert considered oppositely. She believed in “bottom – up” changes and thus worked mostly with officials of ministries and other municipal and governmental institutions. Collaboration with the Saeima and formation of “top – down” changes in legislation could be too exhausting for an organization and could end in burnout of the NGO staff:

*“We are in close relationship with officials who know reality. This is so called bottom-up procedure. In my opinion, it is more effective way and I believe in it in a larger extent. Being in the NGOs sector for seven years I have seen many NGOs blossoming and then burning out. It is just my hypothesis that it is very difficult for NGO to involve into the political, legislative system with such power. In doing so you can make changes only to a certain level.” (L. Bērziņa, 09.02.2021.)*

An expert admitted that the laws adopted in the parliament very often were technical and hardly understandable for a wider society. When adding a bill to the system it should contain some comments or explanatory notes making the context of a bill:

*“In fact, the laws are not very interesting. Usually they are technical and understandable by experts, not by a wider society. This is why it would be correct to give the context of a law.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

Another problem that came up in the work with draft laws in the parliamentary committees was the absence of track changes which would allow to identify the revised text and notice any changes:

*“Every time you get the draft law in the committee meeting, you do not know what is changed because they [deputies] do not use track changes or other ways how to highlight the amended text. In result, you have to be highly focused.” (A.Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

Some expert identified the problem of so called “flying documents”. These were the documents included in the committee agenda in the last moment:

*“There are so called “flying documents” which come into sight in the last moment. If you have not checked an agenda of a committee meeting half an hour before the start, you probably will miss it.” (A.Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

Another problem concerning the procedure of adopting laws in the Saeima was so called “classics of the 3rd reading” when relevant and meaningful amendments were made as “editorial corrections”. Thus the procedure was used in an abusive way for lobbying:

*“There is so called “classics of the 3rd reading” when “editorial corrections” are pushed in, although they are relevant and should be classified as “technical amendments”. This system sometimes is used in an abusive way and wherewith we have to spend double time for reviewing both types of amendments. Those who want to unethically lobby, will never point out the type of amendments because sometimes a comma may change everything.” (A.Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

### **Decision-making in NGOs**

An expert from an NGO alliance admitted that their organization had very good representative democracy inside organization. As Chair of the Board she had the right for the final statement, but usually she involved all team members in decision-making:

*“I think we have very good representative democracy. I do not decide alone what and how to write. Of course, I have the right for final word, but I am trying very much to involve all team members and obtain opinion from all... During all these years we had only two or three cases when we had completely opposite opinions. In general, we are able to define our position and stand for it.” (B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)*

Another NGO alliance had held general meetings once a year and organized debates in the working groups in order to come to an agreement on “big” questions. The topical, urgent issues were reviewed by members of the board due to lack of time. In some cases when the alliance could not agree on the joint decision the partners of discussions used these disagreements in their favour:

*“We have discussions among organizations, in the working groups regarding “big” issues like education, employment - what we are concerned about, what we would like to achieve...Once a year we have representative or general*



*meeting in which we work on strategic issues... Urgent issues are coordinated among members of the board, as we do not have enough time for overall debates... We are trying a lot to educate our members and reach as common view as possible, however there are several issues in which we have different opinions and ministries often use this [situation] legitimizing their position by the smallest group's view." (I. Neimane, 03.02.2021.)*

Another expert being chair of an NGO which functioned mainly virtually and online via Facebook group defined the general position of the organization on some issue by herself after intense consulting online with the group members:

*"We have such closed Facebook group autisms.lv and there are a lot of people, over 2300... We are a platform where people with very different life stories and experience have come together... If I have to go to the meeting and present our NGO's view on a particular issue, I will put this question in to our Facebook page autisms.lv asking people what is their opinion, what is their experience. Usually the parents are publishing a lot of emotional and angry answers there... and then I am trying to calculate an average statistical [answer]." (L. Bērziņa, 09.02.2021.)*

## 5.4. Preferences of Potential Users of the Digital Interest Advocacy Tool

### **Compliance with the EU Directives and Other Rules**

The system should meet requirements of the European Union directive on accessibility of information on websites and other legislation:

*“First of all, the tool has to be in line with the EU directive on accessibility of an information on the websites, e.g., the letters may be enlarged, background is coloured etc., but technical staff will know this.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

### **Clearness, Simplicity, and “Intuitive Interface”**

The main suggestion given by the interviewed experts was that the system should be simple and clear for a user:

*“I think it should be as simple as possible, so that an ordinary person understands it. I am interested in forests. I log [into the system] and understand what is happening with forests.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

The system should have “intuitive interface” meaning intuitive perception of the published information and the system itself:

*“Probably the tool should be extremely simple, because we are already receiving large amount of emails daily...We have to think about simplicity of the tool in terms of colours, design, perception of the text etc., so called “intuitive interface”. ” (G. Anča, 03.02.2021.)*

### **Convenience**

The system should be user friendly in all aspects: in the way how to select an item or an issue, how to login into the system, how to send a message to politician, how to apply for participation in a committee meeting, how to deliver an organisation’s opinion etc.

### **Security**

The tool should have a mechanism how to filter an abusive language and indicate aggressive or inadequate users:

*“There should definitely be some filters and security [protocols] in place, so that abusive language would not be there.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

### **Clear Purpose and Functionality of the System**

The digital tool should have a very clear applicability for what purposes it was created:

*“It [the tool] has to solve some real problem. It cannot be just a cool thing. It cannot be a burden, then nobody will use it.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

One of such purposes could be “safety and protection NGOs of missing anything important”:

*“It would be great if this tool would help not to miss things, if it would notify about the 1<sup>st</sup> reading [of draft law] and what the 1<sup>st</sup> reading means, about the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading and what you as an individual can influence, or the 3<sup>rd</sup> reading and perhaps it is too late for any significant amendments.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

### **Well-sorted and Meaningful Information**

At the same time experts wanted an information to be well - sorted in terms of importance of the issue or significance of the law. Too much information would have a spam effect:

*“The system has to have a good capacity to filter which issues are strategically important and which are just tactical, because it is a good way how to burn down NGOs capacity – just by involving them in extremely large amount of useless meetings and working groups in which nothing is decided and your influence is really small.” (L. Bērziņa, 09.02.2021.)*

*“Laws also can be structured in a hierarchy. We definitely would like to be informed on amendments in the top level laws like Civil Law, Criminal Law, Labour Law which later may cause changes in many other related issues. And there are some irrelevant laws.” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

Keywords would also be needed for ensuring selection function:

*“The tool needs some selection function by keywords that will give some feeling what this draft law or the parliamentary meeting is about, otherwise if all information comes in one piece, the tool does not make any sense.” (G. Anča, 03.02.2021.)*

Some experts pointed out that the selection of information should be meaningful and this is why a robot or algorithm could not do it. Only highly competent person could do it in the meaningful way:

*“If you are creating the automated system where a robot is doing selection, then I do not need anything like that, because algorithm cannot calculate influence of the law on the patients’ organizations. I need meaningful system, with a thought or sense behind it... It could be done by a human, besides a human with brains who understands what he or she is doing.” (O. Valciņa, 02.02.2021.)*

### **Explanatory Notes or Accompanying Documents**

For some experts, it would be easier to assess importance of draft laws or meetings if the accompanying documents or annotations would be added into the system:

*“It would be easier to work if the fields were marked and the accompanying documents added, if not all, then at least part of them for insight.” (I. Neimane, 03.02.2021.)*

*“There should be added links to both the draft law and amendments, so you could read and prepare [for a meeting], could perceive the meaning in easy way.” (G. Anča, 03.02.2021.)*

### **Timely Information**

It would be of crucial importance to send out information in a timely manner. NGOs needed time for making opinions and preparing submissions, reviews etc. and notification about a meeting two days in advance would be too late for a qualitative and constructive participation:

*“The main thing is to inform people so that they would have enough time [to prepare] because very often people are working in their jobs and participate in an organization in their spare time. This is why it is very important to do it timely, not in the last moment or two days before a meeting...It is not a good practise to go to the meeting being not prepared although it has happened to us often.”*  
(B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)

For NGO work and resource planning it would be very useful to see the weekly plenary and committee schedules:

*“It would be helpful for me if I could see what will happen in the Saeima this week or the next one.”* (I. Neimane, 03.02.2021.)

### **Notifications**

An expert expressed a wish to receive two types of information from the system:

- regular updates about the work of specific committee in the form of newsletters
- notifications about specific draft laws, concepts or items which she would sign up for:

*“Newsletters could regularly inform me about what happens in a committee which is interesting for me, and notifications could inform me about what currently happens concerning specific laws or items: is the procedure stopped, are proposals for the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading expected, or can experts apply for a meeting?”*  
(A. Alksne, 26.01.2021.)

### **Inclusiveness and Exchange of Information among NGOs**

It would be good if the system included as many NGOs as possible and promoted exchange of opinions among NGOs themselves:

*“It would be good if this tool made a cooperation comprehensive and involved not only those [organizations] which are known but all the rest as well. Because each has something to say and opinions can be diverse...”* (B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)

Some expert preferred the system to be the tool for debates in the NGOs sector rather than the automated notification system, as sometimes it was crucial to reach consensus:

*“It would be very good if this tool helped to exchange with opinions... It would be valuable if the tool helped to maintain discussions...if it brought us to consensus.”* (L. Bērziņa, 09.02.2021.)

### **Online Discussions on NGO and Individuals' Proposals**

Experts admitted that it would be useful to have an opportunity to see and vote ‘for or against’ proposals submitted by other NGOs or individuals:

*“Other organizations or people also submit proposals. It would be helpful if we could vote for or against them [in the system]. Thus debates which usually are made manually or in person could be automated.” (B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)*

### **Social Networking among the NGOs**

Another expert’s proposed idea was to make the system as a place for collaborative partnership for NGOs. Sharing resources such as knowledge and people NGOs with weaker legal skills would be able to participate in the parliamentary legislation more actively:

*“If we have organizations which can make argumentation and proposals of draft laws and organizations which should be allowed to express opinion or position, [perhaps we could join them].” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

An additional function of this tool could be making coalitions of NGOs for reaching mutual goals, e.g., changes in draft laws achieving greater impact together than any organization could generate on its own. To do so it would be handy to have some social networking functions within the system like sharing information, address to another NGO, invite another organization to vote or express opinion etc.:

*“Perhaps I am representing women’s interests, but I need input from rural women for this particular draft law, then I just push a button and invite a regional expert.” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

*“Such buttons as “invite your friend to vote” or “invite your partner organization to express opinion” would be extremely welcome...” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

### **Gaming Elements**

One of the topical tendencies in developing digital tools for citizens’ involvement in decision-making is gamification – incorporation of gaming elements into a non-gaming context to capture the attention of the audience, improve engagement levels, and encourage users to participate. An interviewed expert had researched that gamification was popular for asking people to plan a budget for local governments:

*“Digital solutions that are related to budgeting have gaming elements. You can play in Internet and help your municipality to make decision on a budget putting money in one basket and taking out from another one.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

### **Geolocation**

Another topical tendency was geolocation functionality built in the citizens’ involvement tools, which integrated citizens’ opinions with their geographical location. Such tools were popular for creating debates among citizens living in one specific location or planning territorial development of the municipality by analysing traffic and people’s movement:

*“For example, you want to replan some area. Based on a map you allow people to express their opinions and make debates, while others may evaluate ideas. I assume the digital discussions are made based on location data when you identify place where citizens’ involvement is needed.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

### **Becoming a National Platform**

An expert suggested to define an overall goal for this digital solution - to outcompete Twitter. Platforms of foreign private providers like Twitter and Facebook which were used by such national institutions as the Latvian parliament, the Latvian radio and television – might endanger continuity of the processes. This is why it would be sustainably to develop our own platform and include in the Rules of Procedure a commitment for MPs to use it:

*“Let’s set a goal for ourselves – to outcompete Twitter... Many people do not use Twitter... I was always worried that the tools which are very important for ourselves are based on the international platforms. For example, every time I hear that an information of the Latvian TV is available on its Facebook page, I am anxious. What if Zuckerberg closes Facebook and we all are left totally without any tool? It is sad.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

*“If this tool could be included into the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, a MP will have then an obligation to answer citizens’ questions about what is planned to be done with a particular question in a committee instead of tweeting on Twitter.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

### **Educational Function**

One of the main aims of the digital system could be defined a qualitative improvement of the lobbying environment. Besides the number of users another significant parameter could be an increasing number of NGOs activities (briefs, proposals, reviews etc.) following the launch of the system:

*“One thing is how many people read this tool, another thing is how many of them use the tool for writing submissions.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

The digital tool could contain educational information for beginners in lobbying. e.g., manuals, maps or flowcharts of legislative processes, templates for submissions, also databases of the EU legislation (Directives) to which to refer during lobbying. Sometimes individuals and newcomers felt the need to be educated what a good lobbying or good participation means, how to involve into legislation to protect their interests:

*“People think that they have written their complaint letter, have expressed their opinions, but a submission does not work that way. A submission is a construction containing some kind of actions.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

*“People think that participation means shouting in Facebook, but participation happens for real when you are in the [legislative] process and doing concrete things which are asked to do, and the outcome is logical.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

*“For me as a beginner [in lobbying] it would be helpful if the legislative processes in different institutions – municipality of Riga, Cabinet of Ministers, the Saeima – would be described and explained in order I could understand how to solve the current problem. I need something like a map describing how amendments are made in legislation in order I could understand in which point I should involve and work on an issue... in order I could understand the system in general.” (A.Avena, 10.02.2021.)*

Studying citizens' involvement in municipality work, an expert concluded that the more often debates with citizens were organized, the more constructive and effective outcomes were gained. Regularity of debates significantly improved a quality of participatory practise as such, however overall level of NGOs lobbying skills in regions were weak and needed to be improved:

*“The more often they [local municipality staff] communicated and involved in discussions, the more easily the participatory practices were emerging. People came [to discussions] more rarely to express their anger about things, but more often say constructive opinion on things they were asked about...” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

*“What I see is that organizations really do not know when a draft laws are reviewed, how they can get to the parliamentary committee meetings, will they be allowed to speak there... NGOs do not know such basic things.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

### **Functionality of Direct Communication with MPs and the Parliamentary Committees**

Many experts expressed a wish in this platform to have an information about coordinators of the committees and see names of all committee members, as well as to have a technical solution that would allow to send an email or a message via system directly to a particular committee member:

*“For example, if they [deputies] are gathering in committees, it would be great to see what people are there, which people are working with this particular issue...It would be really great if I could write immediately to this person, like in Facebook or draugiem.lv.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

### **Functionality of Applying for the Committee Meetings**

Another functionality suggested for making a system user friendly was sending an application for participation in a committee meeting directly to a coordinator via system:

*“If the system would have an information about a meeting, members of committee, a title of draft law etc., it would be very convenient for me to have an application button there. Otherwise I have to go to my email box and send an email explaining what organization I represent, why I am writing, where I want to participate...” (B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)*

### **Functionality of Applying for Position of the Committee Consultative Expert**

Some expert expressed an idea to make possible to apply for a consultative expert position in the parliamentary committee via system:

*“It would be good if the tool would allow to apply for a consultative expert position. Maybe you are not a lawyer, but you are offering a service or conducting group therapy for target groups and may offer an expertise.” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

### **Functionality of Working Remotely via the Digital Tool**

Some experts proposed to make the system usable for doing some basic lobbying activities that did not require presence of NGO representatives in person:

*“It would be helpful if I could send editorial corrections to the parliamentary working group [via system] which do not require my presence in person.” (I. Neimane, 03.02.2021.)*

### **Functionality of Deliberative Debates**

The expert who had a great deal of experience in analysing political processes in Latvia suggested that it would be very useful if the new digital system would have a capacity to make public deliberative debates on some “big” and essential issues for the society. At the moment such debates would be of large importance regarding the concept “family”:

*“In my opinion, it would be great for the Saeima to have a digital solution for organizing large, at least digital debates about important draft laws or big questions... It would be cool if the Saeima would have a possibility to ask citizens’ opinion on some high level questions like this recent verdict of the Constitutional Court.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

### **Involvement Across the Policy Levels**

Experts considered it would be helpful if this digital tool allowed users to participate in all levels of legislation – municipal, national and international as EU legislation had become a domestic policy. A platform for gaining feedback on EU questions could be an additional advantage of the system:

*“EU is not a foreign policy any more. People should be asked about EU issues too because many things depend on decisions in the EU.” (R. Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

Another benefit of covering all levels of legislation, from municipal to international (EU level), would be a strategic vision of the issue

The expert who studied citizens’ involvement in the Latvian municipalities admitted that participation was very weak in regions and did not exist in its traditional meaning. The new digital system involving regional municipalities could improve lobbying in the regions and motivate citizens to participate in the work of local and perhaps national institutions too:



*“Lobbying in its traditional meaning as we can see in the national level is done very rarely somewhere [in regions] and mostly concerning planning, to be specific, territorial planning...Our aim was to give rise to the process in municipalities, to motivate [local deputies] to involve inhabitants in their work...They [deputies] like to borrow successful examples, they like to stand out, and I saw how the process ran.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

### **The Saeima as the Collaborative Partner in the Development of the Digital Tool**

Several experts considered that input from the Saeima (parliamentary staff, MPs, coordinators of the parliamentary committees) would be needed in order the platform could function and offer accurate information on the legislation and the legislative processes.

**Coding of laws by keywords or thematically.** The main input needed from the Saeima would be meaningful coding of the draft laws by keywords, items, fields etc.:

*“The question is how to get these data. If you can make an agreement with the Saeima that parliamentary committees publishing their agenda would add 20 keywords then the process would be much more facilitated. But there is this question if anybody in the Saeima is ready to do such an extra work.” (I. Tauriņa, 25.01.2021.)*

Coding would be crucial for creating an automated notification system. Based on expert's own experience meaningful coding of a law could be done only by a human having good knowledge about a specific law. Artificial intelligence could not manage it as laws could relate to 20 and more fields and the list of keywords could change along with amendments of the law. Persons who would know draft laws best of all and could add keywords and fields are the parliamentary committee staff:

*“It is a huge manual work. I know it from my experience when one of my first tasks was to code all the most important draft laws before elections of the Saeima... An awful thing, because one law, e.g., “Energy Law” can refer to anticorruption policy, ecological issues etc., accordingly, the title of the law as such does mean anything. One should manually review all that stuff having rather good understanding of how laws are structured. A draft law passing from one reading to the next one and being amended can have a new keywords and can lost the old ones.” (I. Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

### **Commitment of the Saeima to use the Digital Tool**

The expert strongly recommended to conclude commitments with MPs and the Saeima staff regarding regular adding of a qualitative and timely information and use of the system for public consulting, otherwise the system would not be put to use:

*“In general, I think the digital tools can be made of good quality, but a precondition is some kind of commitments with those who will use and those who will add information and be responsible for the quality of information ... If the tool will exist in some parallel reality, nobody will use it... It was such a hard work to get more than a half of MPs to use our portal gudrasdalvas.lv and answer regularly the citizens' questions. It was an enormous work... You should have some commitment from the Speaker of the Saeima and Chairmen of*

*Committees that this is the tool where we will organize public debates on the committees work and via this system we will inform society about things we are doing. It is of crucial importance because people are not used to do more than it is required from them. If agreement is not made, they will not use it.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

If the Saeima agreed to use the system, the lists of NGOs could be made for each parliamentary committee and added to the system. Thus committees would have a list of organizations for consulting:

*“It would be super easy if I would be automatically included in a stakeholder list.” (B. Ziemele, 09.02.2021.)*

### **Involvement of the Information Systems of the Saeima into the Integrated System**

Some experts expressed an opinion that soon the Saeima will be pressured to improve their information system and integrate it into the unified system. It will happen when the Cabinet of Ministers will launch its new Law Portal. This portal will be technically more advanced than the current Saeima’s system by covering the whole legislation process and having citizens’ input in law-making. In addition, it would be logical to follow the whole legislation process up to an adoption of a law in the Saeima, not only partly until a law is delivered to the parliament.

### **Involvement of the Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima**

The Visitor and Information Centre of the Saeima should be involved as an informative partner that would register in the system an information on conferences, discussions and other events organised by the Saeima.

### **Feedback from the Saeima as Collaborative Partner**

For NGOs it was important to receive a feedback from the Saeima via system regarding their performed activities: whether the proposal was received, whether amendments were registered for review, whether application for participation in the committee meeting was accepted etc.:

*“For NGOs it is important to receive a notification that your initiative has forwarded to the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading that it was adopted or, on the contrary, it was rejected. The feedback is very important.” (I. Ielīte, 02.02.2021.)*

### **Sustainability of the Digital Tool**

**Several preconditions for sustainability of the digital platform were highlighted by interview participants:**

#### **Accurate Information**

In order the tool would work for a long time and remain operating for many years, it would have to include up –to-date and timely information and should work accurately. If some information were missing, users would distrust the system:

*“It should always have up-to-date information and work accurately. If some information will be missing or incomplete, people will not use it.” (A. Avena, 10.02.2021.)*

### **Funding and Human Resources**

The system would be long lasting solution if it had enough financial and human resources after the funding of the project would run out:

*“A realistic view is needed about what resources are required to keep it running. We did not have a realistic view about the portal gudrasgalvas.lv, as we did not know how much manual work will be needed to clean the information selected by algorithm. In reality, the portal needed one full time worker nonstop, and we did not have money for that at that moment. In such a way several portals have drowned not only in Latvia, but in other countries as well, because did not make calculations how much work will be needed to invest so it could function in a meaningful way.” (I.Kažoka, 29.01.2021.)*

Funding should be reserved for some additional technical solutions in case problems would show up.

### **Integration with Other Information Systems**

One of preconditions for successful functioning of the system would be its integrity with other governmental and parliamentary systems so it would not be separated and isolated nor would duplicate some functions of other systems.

### **Clearly Defined Target Groups**

Some expert expressed concerns whether the new digital solution would have enough users, as a total number of NGOs which actively participated in decision-making was small in Latvia. Besides, some NGOs were involved in lobbying for a certain period of time while a concrete bill was passed. This is why this tool should be promoted in a wider society attracting such social groups as journalists, as well as socially active individuals who could become members of NGOs in future:

*“My largest concern is about the market for this tool. Who will follow [political processes] longer than 10 years? For example, some organisation like oncological patients association will participate until they will get a certain service written in an act or a law. After that they have no need to follow legislation. It is campaign-like interest. But this does not mean that we do not need to inform [about the tool]. We always may attract more people who are not in the [NGO] sector yet.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

Another approach of expanding the number of users and gaining financing for the system would be involvement of the large NGOs: trade unions, employers’

federations, pharmaceutical associations etc. which are powerful commercial lobbyists having financial resources and a constant interest of representing their interests in legislation:

*“[You should] investigate their [large NGOs] needs too. They also need this tool. What a difference if a user is rich or of middle class. The needs are the same for all groups despite of how large you are. You need it quickly and you need an accurate information.” (R.Pīpiķe, 05.02.2021.)*

The number of users could be increased by those who were interested in the EU affairs. If they used this tool, it is likely that they would gain an interest in the national level issues too. Members of EU parliament, as well as European Affairs Committee could be attracted with a platform for a two-way discussions with the Latvian society.

### **Use and Impact**

Experts considered if the digital tool would operate quickly and accurately and would give some benefit for NGOs, e.g., quickly obtainable information organizations would be interested in using this system:

*“The system will be used if users will see practical, very positive benefit, for example, in terms of very quickly obtainable information. At the moment when the information is published on the website of the Saeima, it automatically reaches your organization...It would motivate to be in a system if the information gets you quickly. It cannot be like a burden – to search something additionally in other platforms or resources.” (L. Stafecka, 19.01.2021.)*

*“If it will be suitable for me, I will use it and maybe somewhere publicly will compliment you, but if it will not be suitable for me, then I will ignore it in the best case scenario.” (O. Valciņa, 02.02.2021.)*

### **Relationship with the Saeima**

Some expert suggested to make training for chairmen of committees and their assistants about collaboration with the NGO sector in order MPs would internalize the need to make legislation according to the public interests:

*“If MPs did not have this understanding that the laws should be in line with the society’s interests, none of the digital tools will help us.” (A. Alksne, 26.01.2021.)*

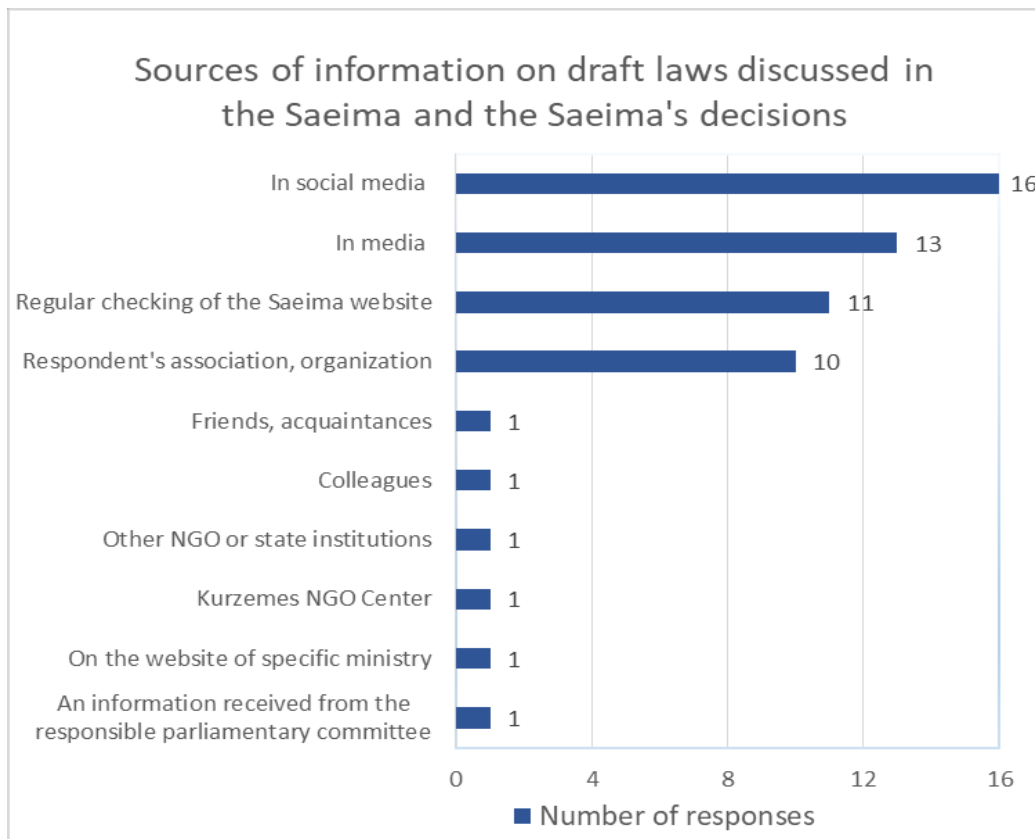
## **5.5. Suggestions for the Digital Platform of Interest Representation**

**Social and mass media are regarded as the most important sources of information about the news on draft laws.** Respondents of the expert survey were asked how they usually found out the news on draft laws reviewed in the Saeima and decisions made by the Saeima. Most popular sources of information were both social media (16 responses) and mass media (13 responses). Slightly less often the information on draft laws and the parliament’s decisions was gained checking the parliamentary website (11) or inside the respondent’s organization or association (10). “Other” sources were friends, acquaintances, colleagues, other NGOs, the websites of ministries and emails from the parliamentary committees (

**Figure 19).**

**NGOs generally gain the information on draft laws and the parliament's decisions indirectly, through social or mass media or social networks.** This strategy has rather incidental character having a large risk to miss any substantial information. Some respondents admitted that that the Saeima rather passively informed the NGO sector on their law making – only one respondent mentioned emails from the responsible parliamentary committee as the source of information.

**Figure 19.** Sources of information on draft laws discussed in the Saeima and the Saeima's decisions



Note: Multiple answer question.

Source: Survey of NGO representatives, 25.02.2021. N=25.

**There is high confidence in one's ability to express constructive and valuable opinion on draft laws and initiatives.** Respondents were asked how confident they felt about their ability to give constructive and valuable opinions on draft laws and initiatives relating to their sphere of activity. The majority or 14 respondents felt very or rather confident in their ability to provide law makers with constructive opinions, 7 evaluated their ability as average. Only 4 respondents were very or rather unconfident about their knowledge and skills.

**However, the confidence in one's ability to influence draft laws and initiatives among the NGO representatives was rather low.** Despite of the prevailing feeling among respondents that they could give their contribution to the decision making, an overall level of confidence in their ability to actually influence law making was rather low. Only 5 of 25 interviewed NGO representatives felt rather confident about their ability to influence decision making in the parliament. The rest did not have such confidence (10 respondents) or evaluated their ability to influence law making as rather average (10 respondents). One participant pointed out the relevance of the interest of political parties and politicians to advance the NGO interests:

*“If you represent a citizens’ initiative that does not correspond to politicians’ interests, you will be ignored and pushed out of the law making process. You will not be invited to the working groups, committee meetings.”* (Expert discussion, 25.02.2021).

**Participants agreed that NGO involvement should be as early as possible in law-making.** The Saeima committees could be too late for influencing the draft laws. A participant noted:

*“NGOs should be proactive, shameless when following amendments in the draft laws and presenting their interests. Cooperation is productive in the parliamentary working groups. NGOs were heard by MPs. And this is more productive than working in the parliamentary committees”* (Expert discussion, 25.02.2021).

In presenting their demands, NGOs should also be ready to offer coherent solutions:

*“NGOs should present not only their story or a problem, but also a solution for it... We are not sure if our solution of the problem is defined in the way that is understandable by the Saeima or other decision – making institutions.”*

One participant noted that framing of a solution in policy terms may be problematic, therefore NGOs frequently need assistance in preparing sound legislative proposals:

*“We miss the “translator” who would translate our story or a problem into an accurate legislative proposal”* (Expert discussion, 25.02.2021).

**Receiving e-mail notifications and the importance of ensuring the follow up in the parliamentary committee are relevant requirements for the e-participation system.** The representatives of NGO were asked to identify the most important requirements for the future electronic system which would allow to represent civic interests in law making.

#### **Key requirements for the electronic system of civic interest representation according to NGO representatives:**

The principle requirements assessed by the majority of surveyed NGO representatives as **“very important”** were the following:

1. To receive a notification email on the status of a specific draft law;
2. To have confidence that someone will forward my opinion to the responsible Saeima committee;
3. Easy to involve/ participate;
4. An opportunity to receive a reply from the responsible Saeima committee;
5. An opportunity to be involved without having any knowledge about legal matters;
6. To have various formats of involvement;
7. An opportunity to be involved having no previous experience.

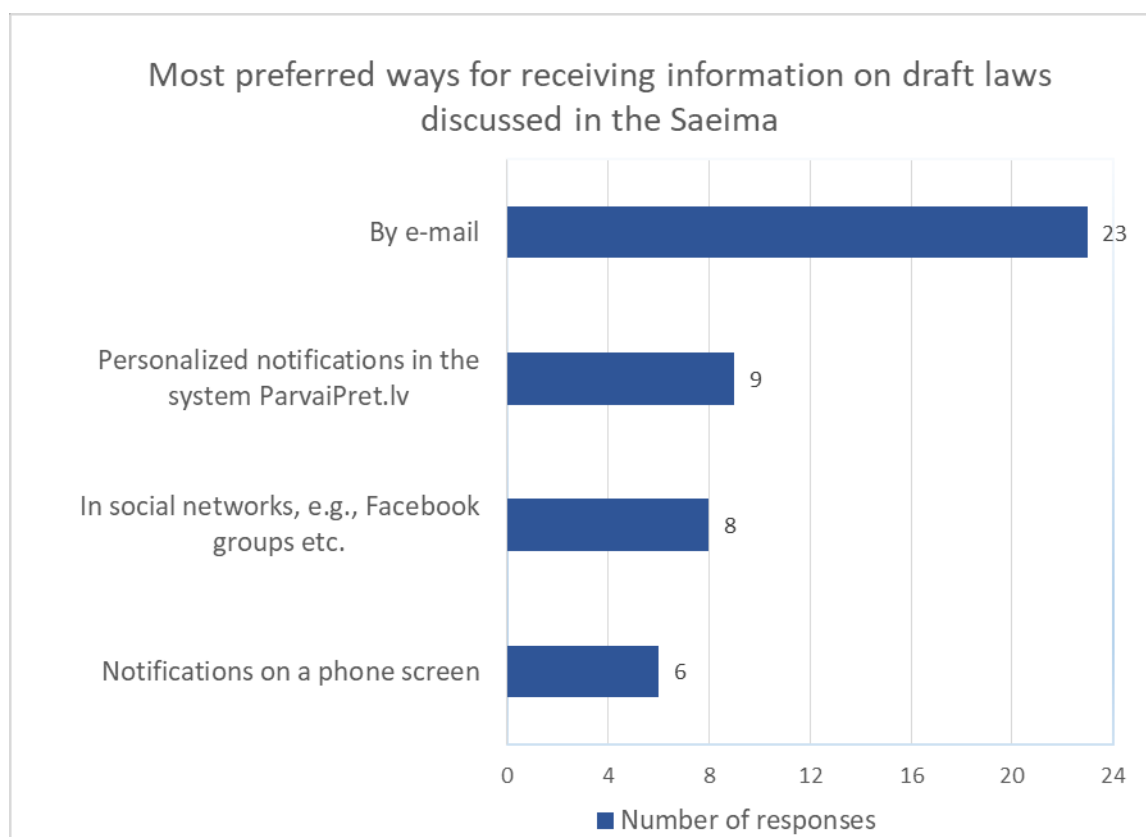
The requirements evaluated as slightly **“less important yet still essential”** were the following:

1. “To give colleagues an option to amend, confirm or reject my comments”;
2. Easy to involve the colleagues;
3. Using the system is not time consuming.

Source: Survey of NGO representatives, 25.02.2021. N=25.

**E-mail is regarded the most convenient way to receive the information on draft laws reviewed in the parliament.** Respondents were asked what would be the most convenient way for them to receive the information on the draft laws reviewed by the Saeima. The majority (23 of 25 respondents) would prefer to receive emails. Other less popular ways were personalized notifications in the system “ParvaiPret.lv” (9 responses), via social networks like Facebook groups (8 responses) and notifications on a phone screen (6 responses) (**Figure 20**).

**Figure 20.** Most preferred ways to receive the information on draft laws reviewed in the Saeima



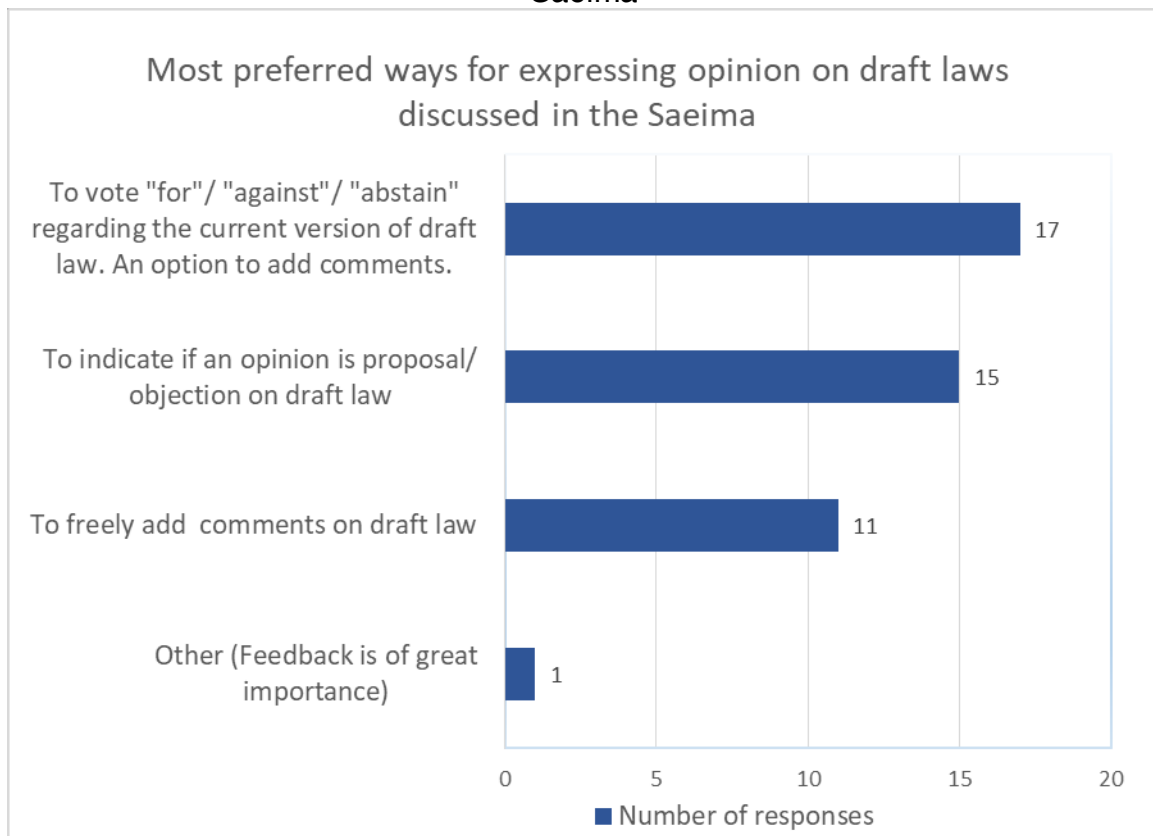
Note: Multiple answer question.

Source: Survey of NGO representatives, 25.02.2021. N=25.

**Online voting is the most preferred way for expressing opinion on draft laws discussed in the Saeima.** The participants of the survey preferred two formats how to express their opinion on the draft laws discussed in the Saeima. The leading format was an option to vote “for”, “against” or “abstain” regarding the current version of the draft law and add an additional comment (17 responses). Another popular format among respondents was the possibility to categorize his or her added opinion whether it was a proposal or objection on a draft law (15 responses). A possibility to freely add comments on draft law was less popular (11 responses) (**Figure 21**).



**Figure 21.** Most preferred ways for expressing opinion on draft laws discussed in the Saeima



*Note: Multiple answer question.  
Source: Survey of NGO representatives, 25.02.2021. N=25.*

**Feedback regarding expressed proposal on a draft law or legislative initiative is considered very important by NGO representatives.** For the surveyed NGO representatives it was very important to receive the feedback on their proposals and opinions concerning draft laws or legislative initiatives. 22 of 25 respondents wished to receive the feedback. Respondents' opinion regarding the regularity of feedback were equally divided. One part of the respondents would prefer to receive the feedback as soon as it was available, another part would prefer to receive it once a week, as a weekly summary. Other options like a monthly summary or a daily summary were not popular among the respondents.

**Other suggestions and recommendations concerning the electronic system of civic interest representation included suggestions for the interface, general architecture, communicative function, and educational function of the system.**

## Suggestions and recommendations for electronic system of civic interest representation

A part of suggestions referred to the **intuitive interface** of the system:

- the system should be easy to use thus encouraging citizens to involve and use it;
- to provide users with a weekly schedule of upcoming meetings and new legislation.

Another part of suggestions referred to the **general architecture of the system**.

Respondents wished that the structure could be easy to perceive and would include:

- municipal and national level of legislation;
- the whole legislative process – from the draft law to the adopted version of the law;
- “vertically the field issues and horizontally the issues concerning each NGO”. The function to subscribe to a specific field or specific laws would help to follow amendments from the very early stage, while the possibility to select items by keywords and then receive regular updates/ summaries on these items would facilitate an access to the needful information;
- interlinking – joining or connecting together different fields and topics.

Other suggestions referred to the **communicative function** of the system allowing:

- To communicate with the members of the responsible Saeima committee or send submissions to specific committees;
- To communicate among NGOs – like-minded citizens which are not in the same organization, but share the same opinions, ideas, or interests. It would also promote mutual support of NGOs’ proposals and submissions.

One suggestion was related to the **educational function** of the system:

- To provide newcomers in lobbying with the general flowchart or scheme on the possible ways how to propose a bill or amendments in a bill and how to involve in legislative process.

One suggestion referred to the **continuous improvement** of the system itself:

- To carry out regular user surveys to make sure if the system works well and how to improve it for more friendly and clear use.

In conclusion the analysis of experience and expectations of the potential users of the digital advocacy tool reveals three evaluation perspectives that could guide the design and the implementation of the digital advocacy tool:

- **The process dimension** consists of various aspects of the process that has been followed in a particular e-participation project, such the timing of vote, adequacy of time, feedback, explanatory notes etc.
- **System dimension** emphasizes usability, technical quality of the ICT solution, including also the system of notifications, user control etc.
- **Outcomes dimension** is concerned with the extent of participation, contributions, interaction and satisfaction, and also impacts on the quality, the

acceptance and the applicability of the legislation under development. Perhaps the most important measure of the outcomes dimension is the impact of participants contributions on the legislation under development. The extent of stakeholder participation is also relevant.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1 Parliamentary Committees and Subcommittees and Frequency of Consulting with Society, 1 September 2019 – 15 March 2020

Name of Committee or Subcommittee	Number of NGO and experts	Number of visits
Izglītības, kultūras un zinātnes komisija	109	252
Budžeta un finanšu (nodokļu) komisija	55	135
Sociālo un darba lietu komisija	51	92
Publisko izdevumu un revīzijas komisija	43	56
Cilvēktiesību un sabiedrisko lietu komisija	40	69
Ilgspējīgas attīstības komisija	37	60
Juridiskā komisija	30	61
Valsts pārvaldes un pašvaldības komisija	29	124
Sociālo un darba lietu komisijas Sabiedrības veselības apakškomisija	27	32
Budžeta un finanšu (nodokļu) komisijas Nodokļu politikas apakškomisija	24	53
Izglītības, kultūras un zinātnes komisijas Augstākās izglītības, zinātnes un inovāciju apakškomisija	24	45
Aizsardzības, iekšlietu un korupcijas novēršanas komisija	23	47
Administratīvi teritoriālās reformas komisija	22	43
Eiropas lietu komisija	22	38
Mandātu, ētikas un iesniegumu komisija	22	30
Pilsonības, migrācijas un sabiedrības saliedētības komisija	18	25
Ilgspējīgas attīstības komisijas E-pārvaldības apakškomisija	9	10
Juridiskās komisijas Krimināltiesību politikas apakškomisija	9	16
Ilgspējīgas attīstības komisijas Informācijas tehnoloģiju un inovatīvas uzņēmējdarbības apakškomisija	7	7
Juridiskās komisijas Tiesu politikas apakškomisija	7	8
Valsts pārvaldes un pašvaldības komisijas Mājokļa jautājumu apakškomisija	7	17
Izglītības, kultūras un zinātnes komisijas Sporta apakškomisija	6	6
Budžeta un finanšu (nodokļu) komisijas Finanšu sektora uzraudzības apakškomisija	5	12
Cilvēktiesību un sabiedrisko lietu komisijas Mediju politikas apakškomisija	4	8
Aizsardzības, iekšlietu un korupcijas novēršanas komisijas Stratēģiskās komunikācijas apakškomisija	3	3
Valsts pārvaldes un pašvaldības komisijas Pašvaldību sistēmas pilnveidošanas apakškomisija	3	9

Aizsardzības, iekšlietu un korupcijas novēršanas komisijas Visaptverošas valsts aizsardzības apakškomisija	2	2
Tautsaimniecības, agrārās, vides un reģionālās politikas komisijas Amatniecības un mazās uzņēmējdarbības apakškomisija	2	2
Tautsaimniecības, agrārās, vides un reģionālās politikas komisijas Vides un klimata apakškomisija	2	2
Ārlietu komisija	1	1
Ārlietu komisijas Baltijas lietu apakškomisija	1	1
Nacionālās drošības komisija	1	1
Pieprasījumu komisija	1	1
Tautsaimniecības, agrārās, vides un reģionālās politikas komisija		1011
<b>Total</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>2279</b>

Source: publicly available data in the Saeima's website  
<http://titania.saeima.lv/livs/saeimasnotikumi.nsf/ComissionsList?readform>

## Annex 2 List of Interviewed Experts

No	Experts	NGO	Time and Date of Interview
1.	Artis Zaļūksnis, Zane Popova	Civic Alliance - Latvia, Policy Coordinator, Project Assistant	11:00, 18.01.2021.
2.	Līga Stafecka	“Providus”, Senior Policy Analyst	11:00, 19.01.2021.
3.	Inese Tauriņa	Transparency International Latvia “Delna”, Director	15:00, 25.01.2021.
4.	Agnese Alksne	Corporate Social Responsibility Latvia, CEO	16:00, 26.01.2021.
5.	Iveta Kažoka	“Providus”, Director/Researcher	14:00, 29.01.2021.
6.	Inete Ielīte	Women’s NGOs Cooperation Network, Board Member	11:00, 02.02.2021.
7.	Olga Valciņa	Oncoalliance “Step Ahead of Melanoma”, Chair of the Board	14:00, 02.02.2021.
8.	Gunta Anča, Iveta Neimane	“Sustento”, Chair of the Board, Board Member	13:30, 03.02.2021.
9.	Irīna Januma	Latvian Women’s Volunteer Association “Vita”, Chair of the Board	9:30, 04.02.2021.
10.	Rasma Pīpiķe	RA.DU, knowledge transfer movement	13:45, 05.02.2021.
11.	Līga Bērziņa	The Autism Society of Latvia, Chair of the Board	10:30, 09.02.2021.
12.	Baiba Ziemele	Rare Diseases Alliance, Chair of the Board	12:00, 09.02.2021.
13.	Anda Avena	Centre “Dardedze”, Public Relations	10:00, 10.02.2021.



Iceland  \_\_\_\_\_  
Liechtenstein **Active**  
Norway **citizens fund**

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