REPORT

"Assessing the Opening of Public Government Data in 2012"

Chişinău 2013

Independent Journalism Center

Author: Dumitru LAZUR

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In April 2011, the Government decided to create a public government data portal, *date.gov.md*, which aimed to become a single catalog of the open data held by government institutions. A year later, following consultations with the civil society, the Government approved, by Decision no.195, the Open Government Action Plan for the years 2012-2013, and the ministries, among other activities, were required to open 29 datasets by the end of last year.

The report "Assessing the Opening of Public Government Data in 2012" is a first attempt to analyze the ways of distributing/opening public data in Moldova, including the accessibility and usefulness of the data for civil society and the media when addressing issues of public interest. The report also aimed to assess the extent to which ministries and other central administrative authorities opened the 29 datasets listed in Government Decision no. 195 and whether the data opened by authorities are of the type, quantity and quality required for their use by civil society and the media.

In producing the report, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the process of opening public government data:
- Content analysis of the datasets placed on the portal *date.gov.md* in terms of their usefulness, currency and relevance for the media and civil society based on some performance criteria.
- Questionnaires for journalists and civil society representatives regarding the accessibility and usefulness of open data, with 44 persons responding to a model questionnaire (30 representatives of media outlets and 14 civil society representatives). Respondents are mostly experienced journalists, skilled in producing analyses and investigations, among other things, and activists in human rights, transparency of the decision making, etc.
- Interviews with the representatives of the Electronic Governance Center, especially with the persons responsible for the coordination of open data, including the portal *date.gov.md*.
- Analysis of the current national legislation, international standards regarding open data, specialized studies, etc.

The report has identified a number of problems in opening public government data, and it ends with recommendations to overcome them.

CHAPTER 1. METHODS OF DISTRIBUTING/OPENING PUBLIC DATA

1.1. Official websites of public authorities

The right of citizens to request and receive public information is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova ("The right of a person to have access to any information of public interest cannot be restricted"[1]). In May 2000, the Law on Access to Information, which provides the legal tools necessary for exercising the right to information, entered into force.

The Law on Access to Information sets out the principles of access to official information in order to ensure non-discriminatory, proportionate and fair conditions for the reuse of official information. The law defines the term *official information* as "all the information that is in the possession and at the disposal of information providers and that has been developed, selected, processed, systematized and/or adopted by official bodies or persons or made available to them under law by other subjects of law."[2]

Neither the Law on Access to Information nor any other law of the Republic of Moldova explicitly explains the concepts of *information of public interest* or *public data*. The term *information of public interest* was defined in 2011 in the text of Government Decision no. 471 of 28 June 2011 approving the National Action Plan for implementing in Moldova the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (2011-2015). "Information of public interest is deemed to be the one related to or resulting from the activities of a public authority or public institution, regardless of the medium, form or way of expressing information."[3]

The implementation of the Law on Access to Information was especially difficult in the first decade after its adoption. Journalists had to wait at least 15 days for responses to their official requests for access to the public data held by officials, such as, for example, the activity report of the ministry of X or the official statistics in the field of Y.

The rapid development of the Internet in the 2000s in Moldova fostered the emergence of a large number of web pages. Public authorities were not avoided by this process. In the first half of the 2000s, the first official websites of ministries and public institutions appeared in the Internet.

The study "Presence and Content of Websites in Moldova"[4], prepared in 2005 by the Center of Sociological, Political and Psychological Analysis and Investigations CIVIS, reveals that 61% of government institutions had a website at the end of 2005, and 9.5% had created their websites in late 2004 and throughout 2005. The study shows that 82% of official websites contained current information about the activities of those institutions, and to a lesser extent – public datasets. Three institutions made an exception. The Ministry of Information Development had on his website an online service allowing verification of the status of documents issued by authorities. The Licensing Chamber published the database of licenses that were suspended or revoked for certain types of activity. The National Bureau of Statistics regularly updated statistics on different fields of activity. One can say that the three institutions were the first in the history of

---

[1] Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, Article 34, para (1).
[2] Law no. 982-XIV of 11 May 2000 on Access to Information, Art. 6.
[3] Government Decision no. 471 of 28 June 2011 approving the National Action Plan for implementing in Moldova the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (2011-2015), Art. 4.
[4] "Presence and Content of Websites in Moldova", Center of Sociological, Political and Psychological Analysis and Investigations CIVIS, 2005.

the Republic of Moldova to open to the public, on their own initiative, datasets through their websites.

A year later, on 19 June 2006, the Government, by Decision no. 668, approved the Regulations on the Publication of Information on the Official Websites of Public Authorities in the Internet, which expressly provided that "public authorities are obliged to have their own official websites in the Internet, in order to publish information about their work."[5] Ministries, central administrative authorities and other public authorities and institutions were instructed to publish on their websites, among other things: analytical reports on their work; data on programs and projects, including those of technical assistance, whose beneficiaries or performers are public authorities; data on budget planning and execution by public authorities; data on the results of checks carried out by/in the public authorities; official statistics and basic indicators in the field of activity of public authorities; etc. In addition, public institutions were required to open the information systems of public use, databases, existing registers and lists of resources and information services provided to individuals and businesses.

In the years following the adoption of the decision, ministries, central administrative authorities and other public authorities and institutions used their websites to open and distribute public data, thus saving citizens, especially journalists, from the burden of requesting, through official letters, statistics or other information that by definition must be public. Today, most official websites contain activity reports, statistics, etc., and some contain online databases or registers allowing free access to all citizens.

1.1.1 The functionality of official websites from the point of view of mass media and civil society
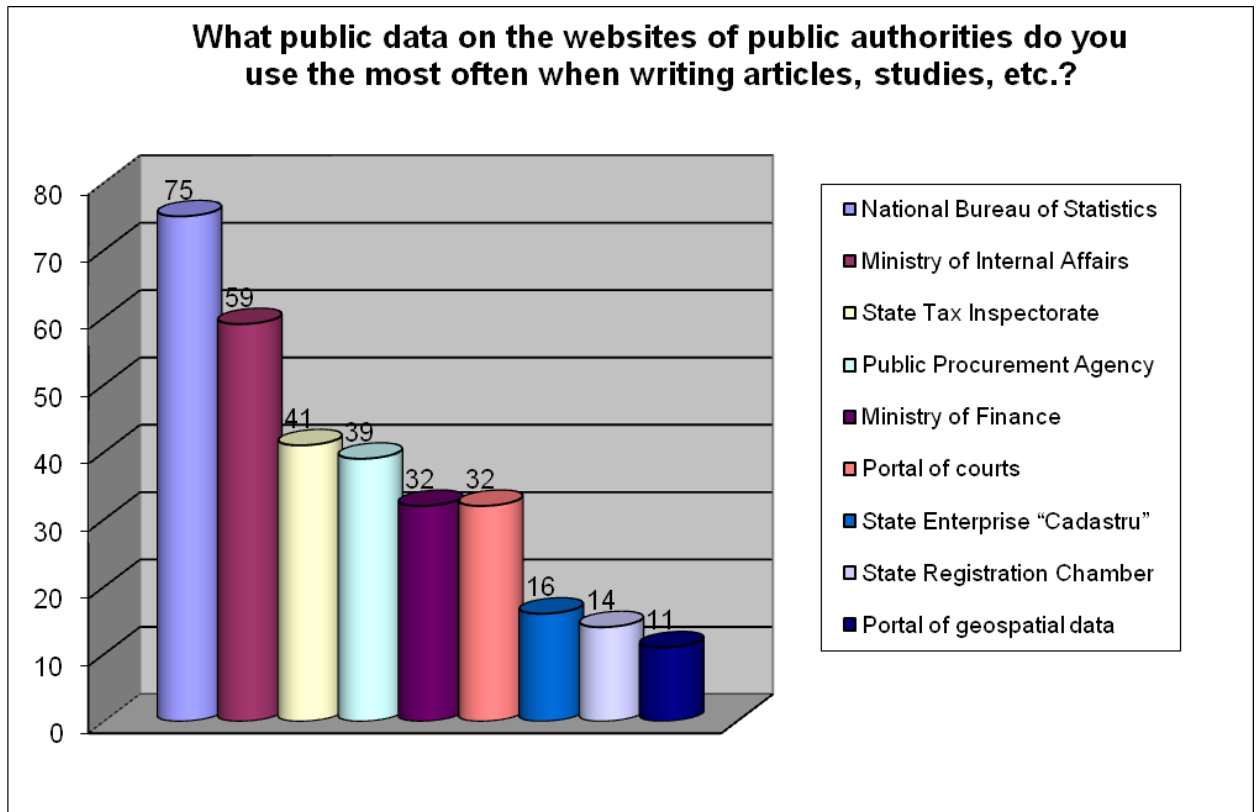
The questioning of journalists and civil society representatives for this report was aimed at identifying what public data on the websites of public authorities are accessed the most often when writing articles, studies, etc. Respondents were asked to select from a list of eight databases, online registers, datasets etc. In addition, they could indicate whether they use in their work other datasets from official websites, too.

The survey results show that 75% of journalists and activists most often use information from the statistics database (Statbank) of the National Bureau of Statistics, while 59% − data on crime, crime analyses, etc. from the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*see Figure 1.1*). The third in the top is the State Tax Inspectorate, with 41% using public information about contributors, followed by the Public Procurement Agency, with 39% using public data on public/assigned tenders. 32% of respondents write articles, studies, etc. by using the database of public expenditure on the website of the Ministry of Finance and the portal *courts.justice.md*. The State Enterprise "Cadastru", with statistics on the registration of real estate (16%), the State Registration Chamber, with its own statistics (14%), and the geospatial data portal *geoportal.md* (11%) are at the bottom of the ranking.

Some respondents mentioned that when they write articles, studies, etc. they also use the public data from the web pages of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economy, National Anti-Corruption Center, Chisinau and Balti City Halls.

---

[5] Government Decision no. 668 of 19 June 2006 on Official Websites of Public Authorities in the Internet, Article 3 of the Regulations on the Publication of Information on the Official Websites of Public Authorities in the Internet.

Figure 1.1

What public data on the websites of public authorities do you use the most often when writing articles, studies, etc.?

Legend:
- National Bureau of Statistics
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- State Tax Inspectorate
- Public Procurement Agency
- Ministry of Finance
- Portal of courts
- State Enterprise "Cadastru"
- State Registration Chamber
- Portal of geospatial data

Values: 75, 59, 41, 39, 32, 32, 16, 14, 11

Another purpose of questioning journalists and civil society representatives was to establish the usefulness of official information published on the websites of public authorities. When asked how useful they find the public data on the web pages of public authorities when covering issues of public interest, 14% said they were very useful, 61% – useful and only 25% – little useful (*see Figure 1.2*). The survey, therefore, reveals that public authorities and institutions mostly manage to publish on their official websites datasets containing relevant and useful information for journalists and activists.

Figure 1.2
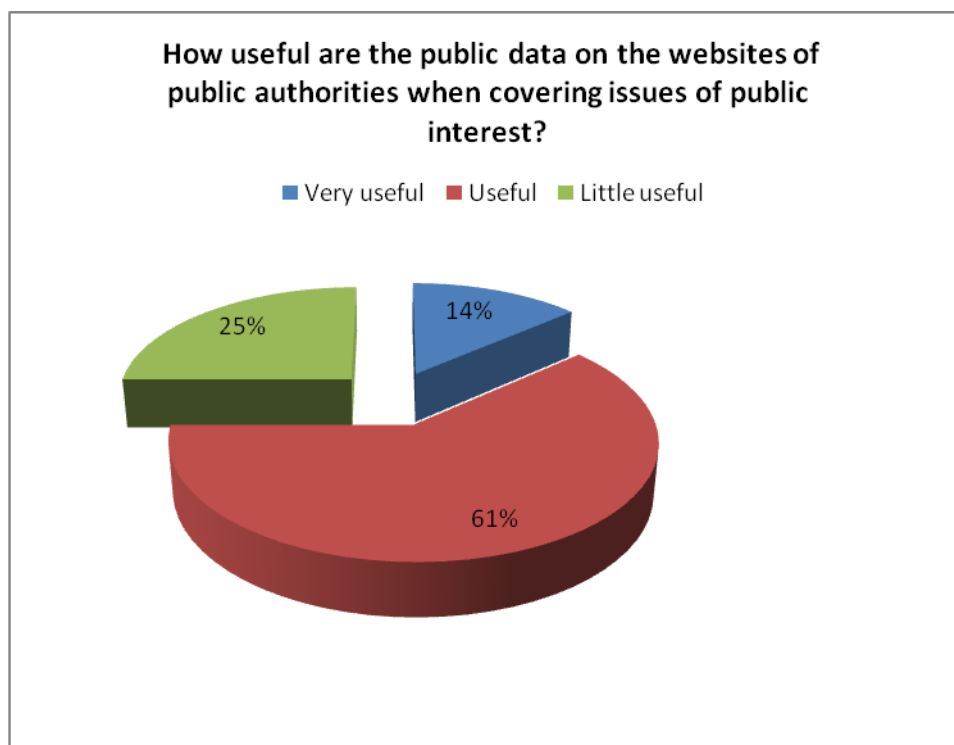
Although 75% of respondents believe that the data published on official websites are *very useful* or *useful*, 57% say they do not find public data on the websites of public authorities easily (*see Figure 1.3*). Journalists and activists believe that some official websites have a sophisticated organization and find the search for public information difficult. To simplify visitor access to public data, it is recommended that data be published in a single section, which could be named, for example, "public data" or "public information" or "open data". In addition, in the case of complex databases or registers, it is necessary to publish a user's guide with tips on how to use the database step by step, the so-called tutorials or video tutorials.

A good example is the statistics data bank (Statbank) of the National Bureau of Statistics, which was launched in May 2010. Since it is a complex database with many fields and subfields, the authors were careful to include a special section with tips on how to use the data bank, including some video tutorials. In addition, the data bank allows visitors to create data tables by year and area they are interested in and to generate graphs. Information is available in Romanian and English.

A less successful example of online database or register is the automated information system State Public Procurement Register, launched in February 2013. First, the portal's authors do not explain visitors the operating principles of the online register, and the "Help" section does not contain tips on using the database, which impedes users to quickly find the information they need. Second, although the register's search system has some data sorting filters, visitors find it difficult to search for information of public interest: sometimes the search results are not displayed or the visitor is automatically redirected to the "Help" page that contains no data. Third, data on the portal cannot be reused because of the impossibility to copy or download data (unlike the Statbank). In its current version, the register is of little use for journalists, activists and other citizens.

Figure 1.3
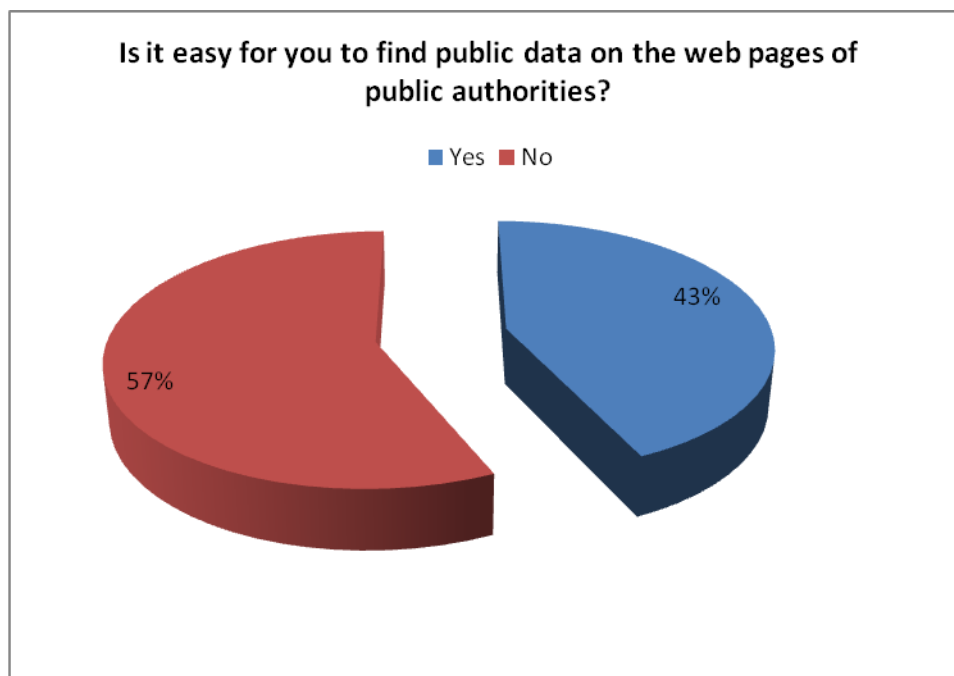
On 3 April 2012 the Government issued Decision no. 188, requiring that official websites of public authorities in the Internet function according to single rules. Ministries had to adjust their official websites to the new provisions within 12 months, i.e. before April 2013. The Regulations on the official websites of public authorities in the Internet include a list of information that public authorities, depending on the specifics of their work, are required to publish on their websites[6] to increase the transparency of public authorities and access to the information of public interest.

Until today, from the long list of ministries, only the Ministry of Health has made a new version of its website, adjusted to the standards established by Government Decision no. 188. Public data are not visible on the first page, but two clicks away, on the subpage "Reports" of the page "Activity". Visitors can sort data by "type of document" (statistics or activity reports) and "year of publication", which helps them to more easily find information of public interest. Statistics are sorted by area, while reports are not.

The new design and structure of the official websites of public authorities, if the website of the Ministry of Health is taken as a reference, simplifies public access to open data due to the options of sorting the published datasets. However, to increase the accessibility of open data, it is recommended that they be published under the heading "Public data" or "Public information" or "Open data" on the first page, one click away.

1.2 The portal of public government data *date.gov.md*

On 29 April 2011, by Directive no. 43, the Government of the Republic of Moldova launched a public government data portal, www.date.gov.md, "to ensure the transparency of decision making, citizen participation in governance and access of citizens and businesses to public government data."[7] The Electronic Governance Center (EGC) was appointed to coordinate the development and maintenance of the portal.

---

[6] Regulations on the official websites of public authorities in the Internet, Article 15
[7] Directive of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova no. 43 of 29 April 2011.

The government required that ministries and other central administrative authorities and other public authorities and institutions identify, monthly, three datasets of interest to citizens and businesses, publish them on *date.gov.md* and ensure regular updating of public government data depending on the frequency of their collection. The Directive does not, however, expressly establish penalties for non-compliance with these provisions.

By launching the portal *date.gov.md*, Moldova joined the global movement Access to Open Government Data, being the 16th country in the world to open a single information desk of open data held by government institutions. The EGC aims to gather on one web platform open datasets that public institutions publish, regularly or not, on their websites.

On 15 April 2011, the EGC launched the first version of the open data portal *date.gov.md* by publishing 67 datasets from five state and public institutions[8]. In June 2011, the EGC developed the methodology for publishing open data, explaining to institutions, step by step, how to use the portal *date.gov.md*, how to fill their websites with new datasets, etc. According to the EGC, every institution has appointed a person responsible for open government data, who has been trained in placing open datasets on the portal.

According to the methodology for publishing open data, the participation of government institutions shall be evaluated based on the amount of data that they make available through the portal *date.gov.md* in relation to the total amount of eligible data (whose publication would not compromise privacy, confidentiality, security and other issues). The document does not establish clearly who and how decides within public authorities the total amount of open data eligible to be published on *date.gov.md*.

On 14 December 2011, the EGC launched a new version of *date.gov.md*, which is used to date. The published datasets are structured in terms of the opening institution. *Date.gov.md* has a basic search engine by keyword and an advanced search engine by institution, period, recommended dataset and keyword. In addition, if the user fails to find on the portal the dataset that they seek, then they can suggest a dataset. The visitors of *date.gov.md* are also encouraged to get involved in improving the portal in general and the search engine in particular. Currently, 41 ministries and central administrative authorities are present on the website (so far, not all subordinated institutions and state enterprises in Moldova have accounts on *date.gov.md*), and as of 1 June 2013 the portal held 629 datasets.

The Government Directive issued in April 2011 stipulates that ministries, central administrative authorities and other public authorities and institutions shall identify and publish three datasets monthly. In the absence of disciplinary or other sanctions, some ministries and public institutions simply ignored the Government Directive no. 43. If every institution published three datasets monthly, the website would currently contain over 2,000 datasets, and not 629. For example, the Customs Service, the Medicines Agency and three other public institutions have accounts on the portal, but so far published no datasets.

On 4 April 2012, by Decision no. 195[9], the Government approved the Open Government Action Plan for 2012-2013, which includes, in Annex 2, the **List of Public Government Data to be Open in 2012**. Ministries and other central administrative authorities were required to undertake the measures necessary to fulfill the actions set in the plan fully and within the deadlines.

---

[8] The Journey of Open Government & Open Data Moldova, World Bank, 2012.
[9] Government Decision no. 195 of 4 April 2012 on approval of the Open Government Action Plan for 2012-2013.

Control over the implementation of the action plan was given to the State Chancellery and central administrative authorities with the support of e-Transformation coordinators or persons responsible for open government data. For the implementation of the Action Plan, the Government recommended the National Council for Participation (NCP) to establish a working group to monitor its implementation. In May 2012, the NCP created the group "Open Government/e-Governance".

The list of public government data that were to be opened in 2012[10] included 29 datasets held by ministries and other central administrative authorities. According to the EGC, the list was produced following discussions and public consultations with civil society representatives and subsequently accepted by ministries and public institutions, as confirmed by civil society representatives[11]. The list, at the initiative of ministries, included new datasets. In some cases, the phrases defining the datasets to be opened were vague (e.g. "data in the field of culture" or "data about the de facto state of transportation"), which from the very start gave public authorities opportunities to maneuver.

In April 2012, immediately after the adoption of Decision no. 195, a record number of datasets (130) was published on the portal, and in May – 64 sets. Over the following months an average of 20 new datasets were published monthly, with the exception of November, when 70 new datasets were published. One aim of this report is to evaluate the extent to which ministries and other central administrative authorities executed Government Decision no. 195, in particular Annex 2. This aspect will be analyzed in Chapter 2 of this report.

As of 1 June of the current year, 36 public authorities had 629 datasets on *date.gov.md*, and most of them (about 70%) have been there since last year. The first five positions in the top of the most open ministries and central administrative authorities on *date.gov.md* are held by the Ministry of Health (112 datasets), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (90 datasets), the National Bureau of Statistics (86 datasets), the Ministry of Economy (50 datasets) and the Ministry of Education (31 datasets). Other eight ministries and institutions published between 11 and 19 datasets (*see Figure 1.4*), while 23 – between two and nine datasets. Five central administrative authorities have accounts on *date.gov.md*, but published no datasets. They are the Medicines Agency, the Customs Service, the Center of Accreditation in the Field of Products Conformity Assessment, the National Center of Public Health and the National Center of Blood Transfusion (the last three have only recently registered at the portal). Both the Medicines Agency and the Customs Service regularly publish open datasets on their websites. For example, the Medicines Agency regularly updates the online database of medicines in Moldova, and the Customs Service provides live information about the international traffic at border entry points.
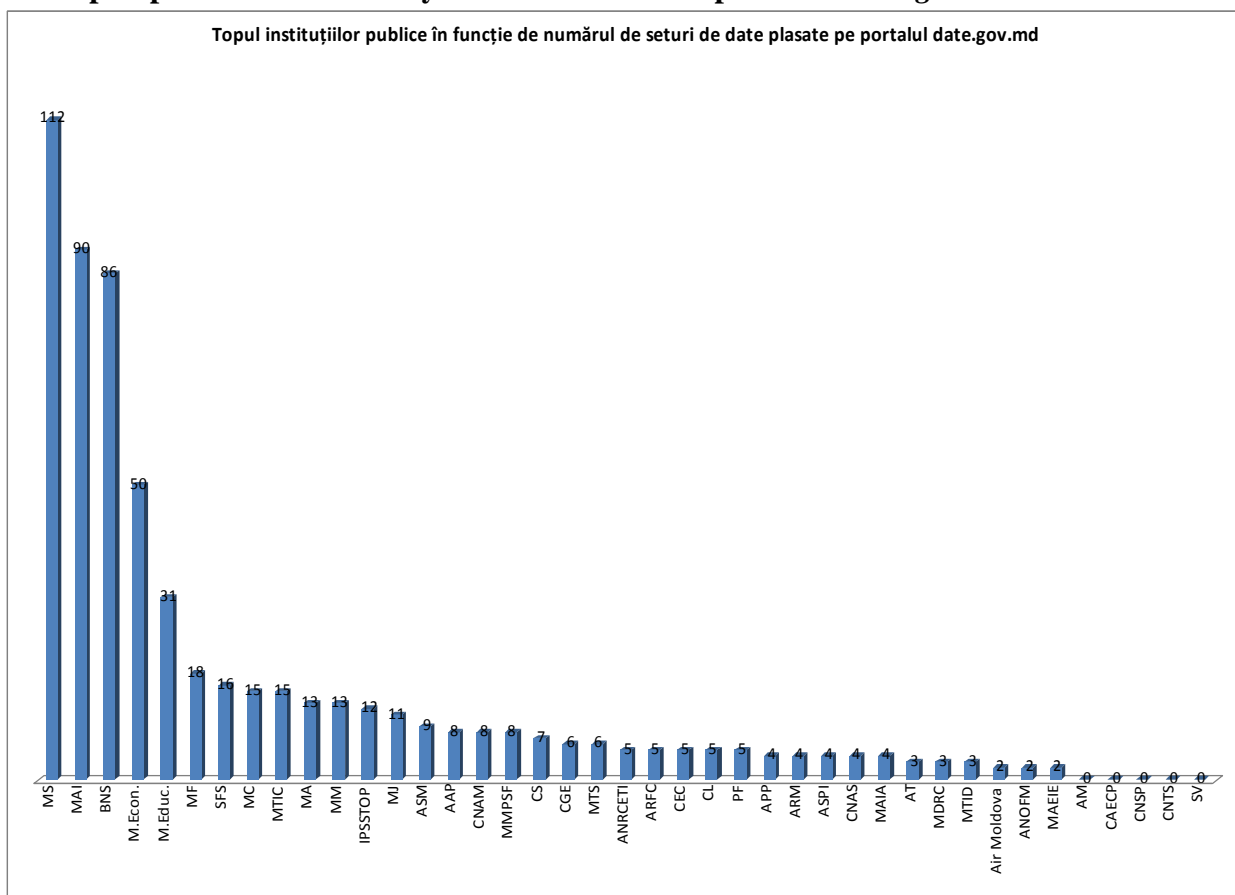
The Open Government Action Plan for 2012-2013 provides, inter alia, that each public authority should develop its own Catalog of Public Government Data, containing a list of all raw/primary data that the authority operates with and that can be published on the portal *date.gov.md*. The catalog was to be published on the website of the public authority. So far, only the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health, which are leaders on *date.gov.md*, published on their websites public data catalogs.

---

[10] Annex II to Government Decision no. 195 of 4 April 2012 on approval of the Open Government Action Plan for 2012-2013.
[11] Moldova Open Government Action Plan - process, content and future opportunities, Transparency International, 2012.

Figure 1.4

The top of public institutions by number of datasets placed on *date.gov.md*

Topul instituțiilor publice în funcție de numărul de seturi de date plasate pe portalul date.gov.md

List of institution from top:
Ministry of Health; Ministry of Internal Affairs; National Bureau of Statistics; Ministry of Economy; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Finance; State Tax Service; Ministry of Trade; Ministry of Transportation, Information and Communications; Ministry of Defense; Ministry of the Environment; State Inspectorate for the Technical Supervision of Hazardous Industrial Facilities; Ministry of Justice; Academy of Sciences of Moldova; Academy of Public Administration; National Health Insurance Company; Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family; State Chancellery ; Electronic Governance Center; Ministry of Youth and Sport; National Agency of Regulation in the Field of Electronic Communications and Information Technology; Cadastre Agency; Central Election Commission; Licensing chamber; Border Policy; Public Property Agency; Material Reserves Agency; State Agency on Intellectual Property; National Social Insurance Fund; Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry; Tourism Agency; Ministry of Regional Development and Constructions; Ministry of Transport and Road Infrastructure; Air Moldova; National Employment Agency; Ministry of External Affairs and European Integration; Medicines Agency; Center of Accreditation in the Field of Products Conformity Assessment; National Public Health Center; National Blood Transfusion Center; Customs Service.

Why do some ministries and institutions publish datasets on *date.gov.md* regularly and others do not? In theory, preconditions for a good functioning of the single information desk of open data held by government institutions have been created:
- Every institution has an appointed person responsible for open government data;
- The methodology for publishing open data has been developed;

- Persons responsible for open data have been informed on how to fill the portal with datasets.

In fact, only a limited number of ministries and central administrative authorities publish datasets on the portal. Reasons for non-participation in opening data through the portal are as follows:
- Reluctance of open government data coordinators who, since the launch of *date.gov.md*, are responsible for placing public information both on the official websites of institutions and on the portal, which requires a double workload, old remuneration, therefore zero motivation;
- Lack of clear criteria for determining the full spectrum of government data to be open by each institution. The EGC recommends institutions to choose the data to be published (i) based on their importance to citizens, (ii) based on their importance of the government and (iii) in accordance with relevant laws and regulations. These criteria can be differently interpreted by authorities and can, respectively, result in failure to open some datasets relevant to the public;
- Bureaucracy in ministries and public institutions, which complicates the task of the coordinator of open government data to collect information from their colleagues in other divisions and subdivisions.

The study "The Journey of Open Government & Open Data Moldova", prepared by the World Bank in May 2012, identified several obstacles that hamper the implementation of the open data initiative in Moldova, which, according to the authors, are similar to those of countries with democratic traditions, such as Australia, Denmark, Spain, the UK and the USA[12]. These are:
- Active or passive refusal of authorities to cooperate in the process of changing policies on opening data;
- Marginalization of good management and data control practices;
- Legal barriers or confusion regarding the legal status of data;
- Concerns regarding wrong interpretation of data by the public;
- Embarrassment for publishing materials of poor quality;
- Refusal to open data for the fear of losing a source of income or because of fixation on secrecy.

1.2.1 The functionality of *date.gov.md* from the point of view of mass media and civil society

Most of the interviewed journalists and civil society representatives (82%) said they were aware of the existence of the portal *date.gov.md* (*see Figure 1.5*). The Electronic Governance Centre (EGC) actively promoted the website through social networks, electronic newsletters and video clips broadcast on television, at seminars and trainings etc., which provided reputation to the portal.

---

[12] The Journey of Open Government & Open Data Moldova, World Bank, 2012.

Figure 1.5

Do you know about the existence of the open public data portal date.gov.md?

■ Yes ■ No

18%

82%
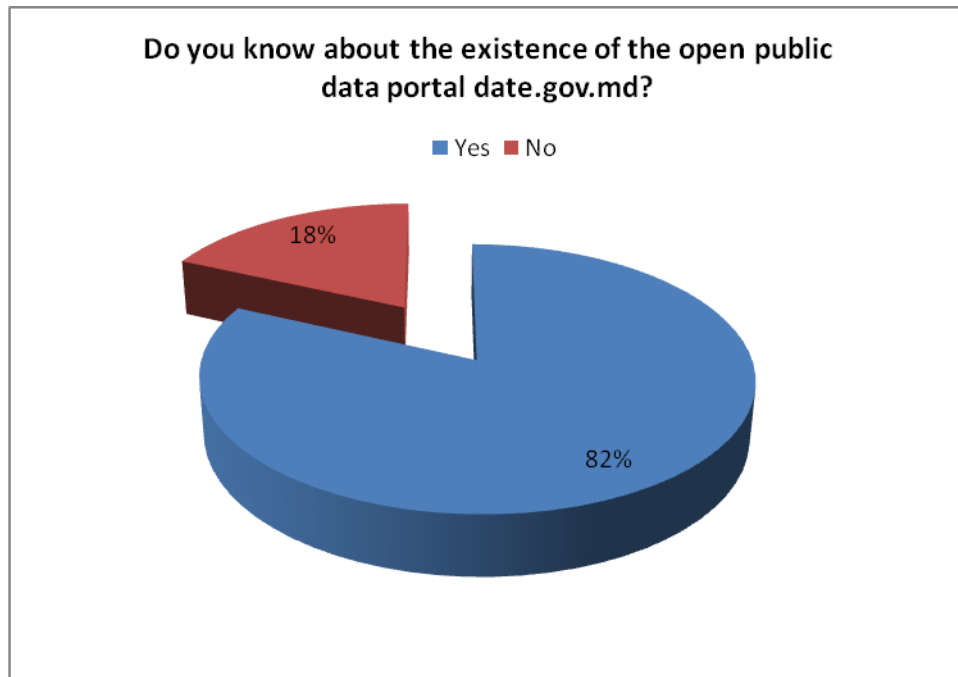
Neither journalists nor civil society representatives use the datasets published on *date.gov.md* regularly. Only 28% of respondents said that they consult the information on the portal daily or weekly. Most respondents (61%) say they access the portal once a month or more rarely, while 11% have never accessed the datasets on *date.gov.md* (*see Figure 1.6*). According to the EGC, the monthly average number of visitors of *date.gov.md* is about 3,000 (*see Figure 1.7*). There has been a growth in the number of visitors over the years: in 2011 there were about 2,000 visitors, in 2012 – about 3,100, and it grew significantly in the first three months of 2013 (about 3,300). Compared to other government portals (*servicii.gov.md*, *particip.gov.md* and *egov.md*), *date.gov.md* has a larger and relatively stable number of unique visitors.
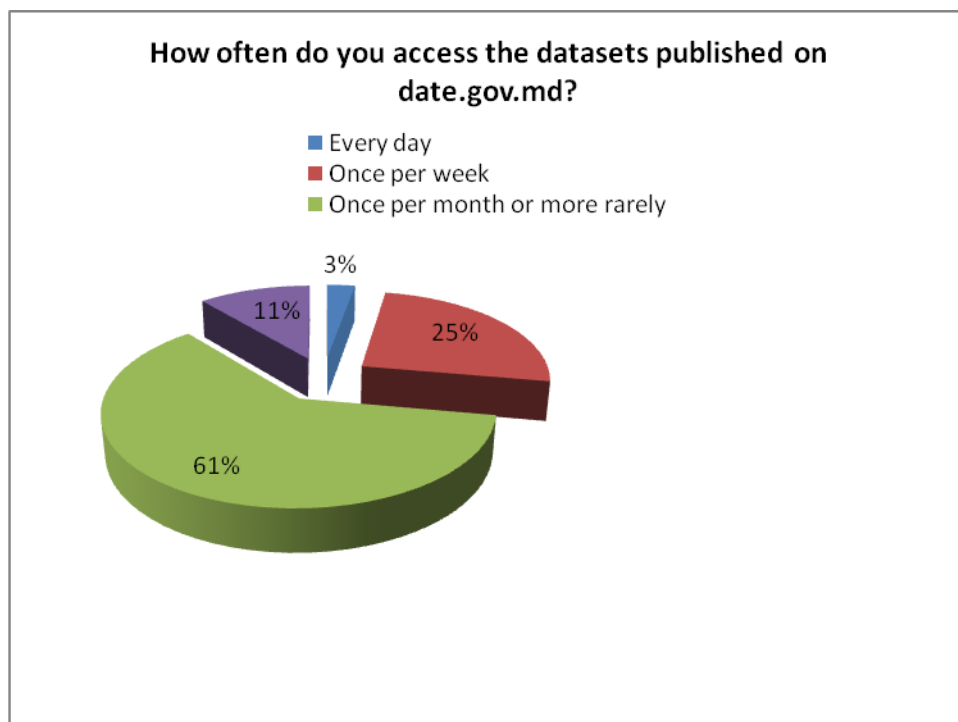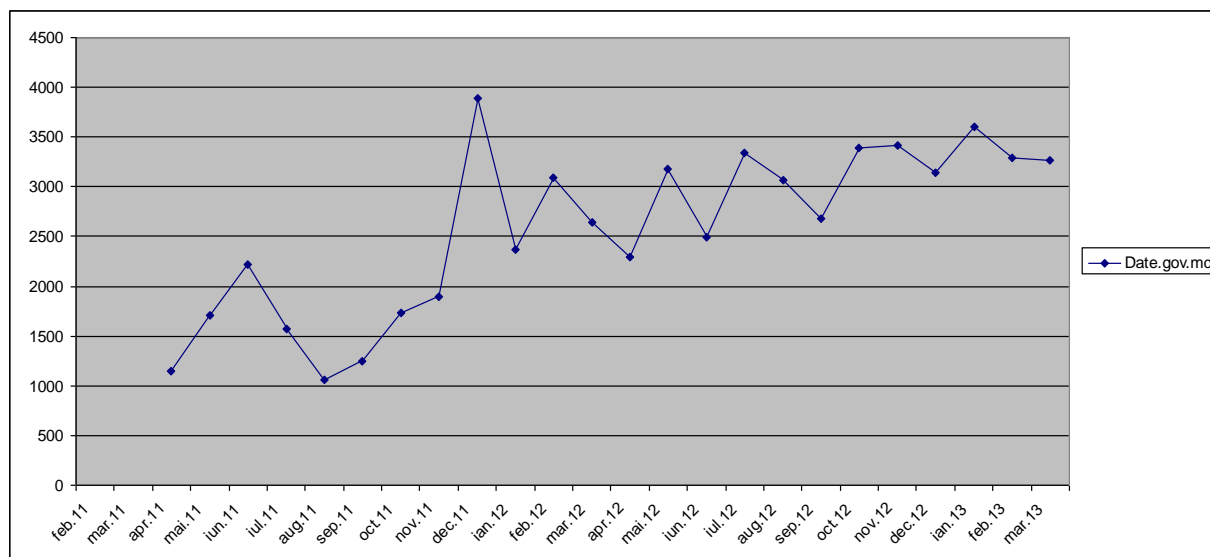
Figure 1.6

How often do you access the datasets published on date.gov.md?

■ Every day
■ Once per week
■ Once per month or more rarely

3%

11%

25%

61%

Figure 1.7
February 2011; March 2011; April 2011; May 2011; June 2011; July 2011; August 2011:
September 2011; October 2011; November 2011; December 2011; January 2012; February 2012;
March 2012; April 2012; May 2012; June 2012; July 2012; August 2012; September 2012;
October 2012; November 2012; December 2012; January 2013; February 2013; March 2013


38% of the respondents who used *date.gov.md* at least once say that they could not find easily public data on the portal (*see Figure 1.8*). At first glance, the website is easy to use: *date.gov.md* has a search engine based on keywords and an advanced search engine based on the institution, relevant period, recommended dataset and keyword. Users can also sort the datasets published by each institution according to the posting date, rating and downloads. Journalists and civil society representatives face the following problems when accessing the open data published on *date.gov.md*: impossibility to sort datasets by type of document (for example, activity report, statistics etc.), year of reference and areas of activity of the institution; lack of a single format for publishing open data; lack of systematized data on previous years. Some respondents noted that *date.gov.md* does not have a user's guide with tips on how to use the portal step by step, especially the advanced search engine.

Journalists and activists believe that *date.gov.md* has not yet managed to become a single information desk of open data held by public institutions. The reason is that most ministries and central authorities continue to publish open datasets on their websites, as they used to do for years, and do not also publish them on *date.gov.md*. Quite a few respondents said that they find easier and a larger number of datasets on the websites of institutions than on the open data portal.

To facilitate access to data on the portal, it is recommended to enable the data published by ministries and central authorities to be sorted by type of published information (e.g., activity report, statistics etc.), year of the information (currently, users can sort datasets by the reference period by using the advanced search engine, but not on the institution's subpage), etc. In addition, public institutions should publish systematized data that are available for each category of public data for past years in a single format.

Figure 1.8

Is it easy for you to find pulic data on date.gov.md?

Yes   No

38%

62%
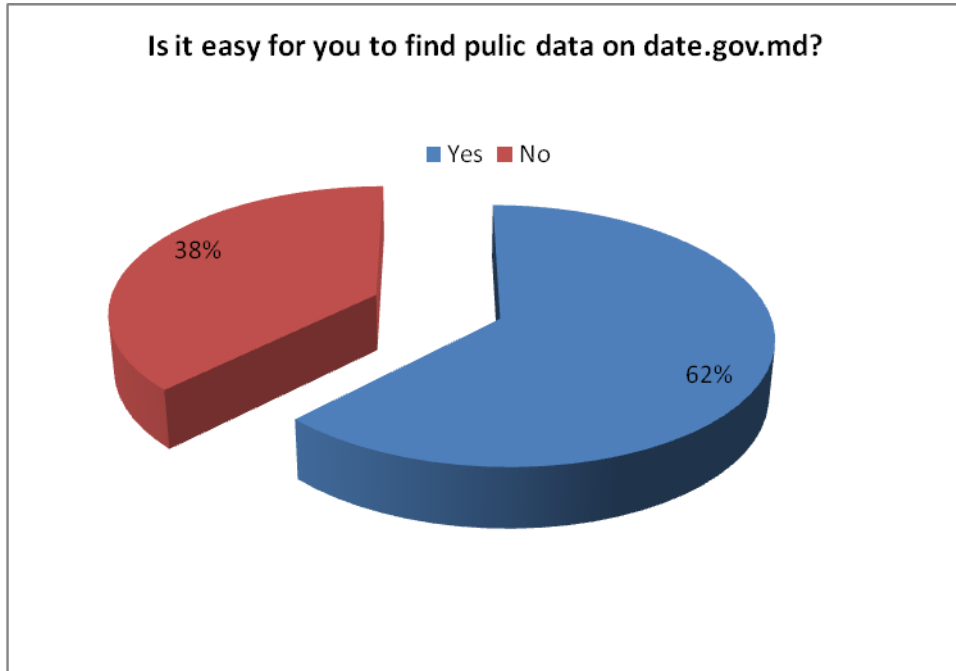
When asked about how useful public data on *date.gov.md* are when covering issues of public interest, 9% of journalists and civil society representatives said they were very useful, 47% – useful, 41% – little useful, and 3% – useless (*see Figure 1.9*). Therefore, respondents believe that the public information on *date.gov.md* is less useful than on the websites of ministries and public institutions (44% compared with 25%). Up to this day, despite the good intentions of the Government to open government data, the portal has not managed to become more useful to citizens than the websites of ministries.

Figure 1.9

How useful are the data published on date.gov.md when covering issues of public interest?

Very useful   Useful   Little useful   Useless

3%
9%
41%
47%
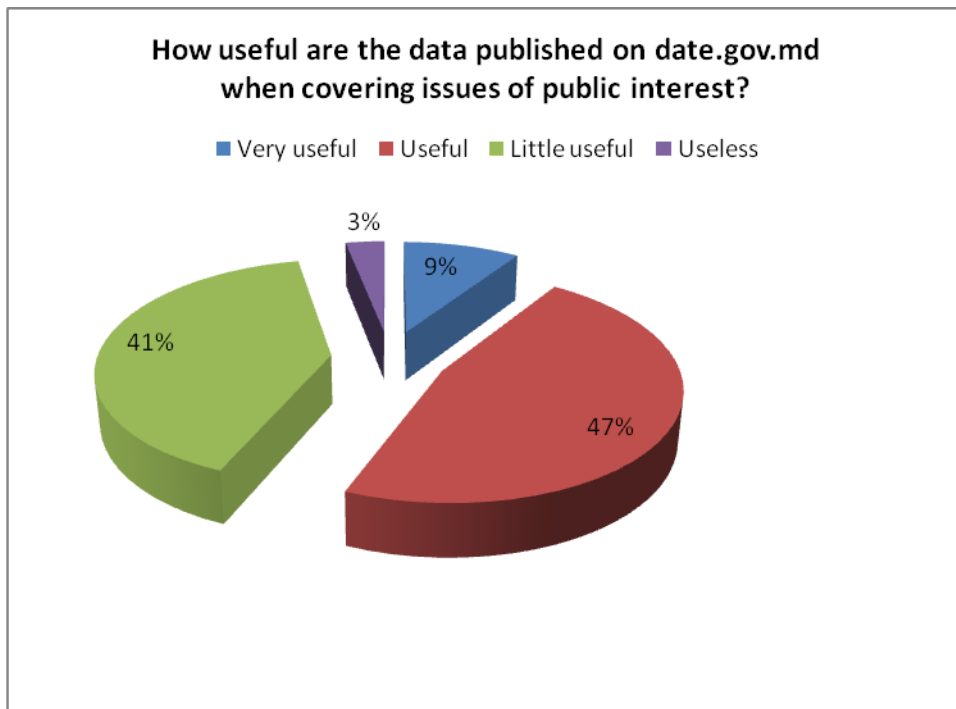
Asked if they had ever used the data published on *date.gov.md* when writing articles, studies, etc., most journalists and activists (72%) answered negatively (*see Figure 1.10*). The causes of this situation are as follows:

- Some ministries and public institutions (for example, the Customs Service, the Medicines Agency, etc.) open their public data on *date.gov.md* never or occasionally. The principle of a single information desk is not observed and the website becomes less useful for those interested in the work of the institutions that remain behind in terms of opening data via the portal;
- Impossibility to sort the datasets published by an institution based on the type of document, areas of the institution's activity or year of reference and lack of systematized data on previous years force users to visit the website of the relevant ministry and not *data.gov.md*. For example, *date.gov.md* has published the datasets of the Public Procurement Agency up to the year 2011, while the Agency's website has updated data for 2012 and 2013;
- Some datasets are not complete, do not contain all relevant public government data, or the data they contain are not current;
- There is no single format for publishing data (some are in Microsoft Office Excel 2003, others in Microsoft Office Excel 2010 or Microsoft Office Word 2003 or 2010), which creates difficulties in accessing them.

Figure 1.10
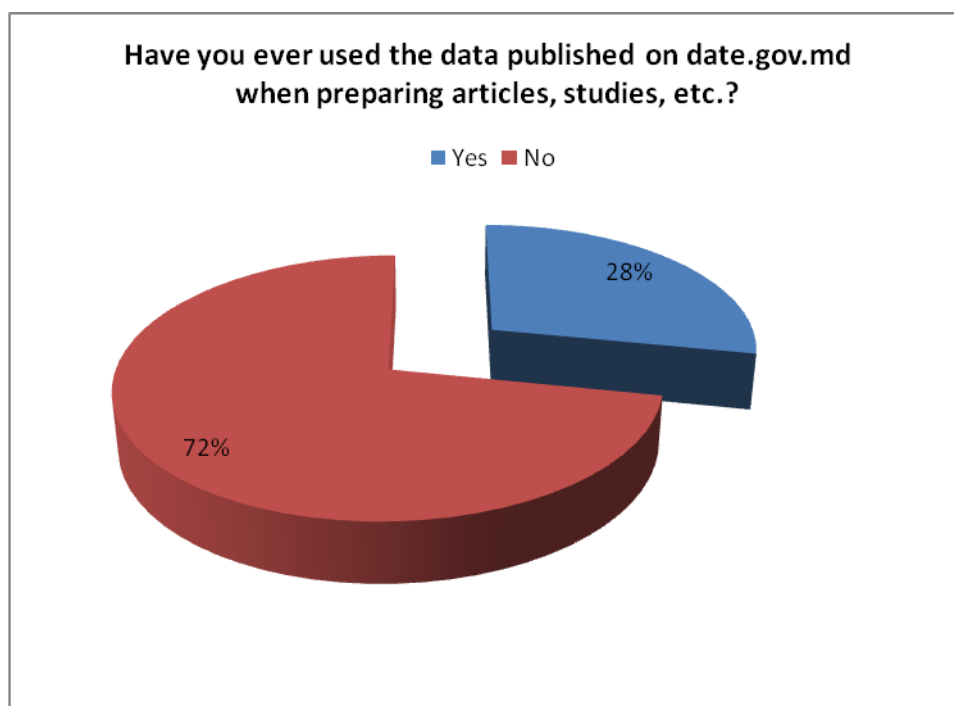
The EGC says that by the end of 2013, the third version of the portal *date.gov.md* will be released and that it will work according to new principles, with the currently existing problems being removed. The most important change will address the methods in which authorities fill the website with datasets. Official websites and *date.gov.md* will be interconnected, so that when the open government data coordinator places a dataset on the institution's website, it is automatically published on *date.gov.md*, too. At the moment, this principle governs the operation of the portal *particip.gov.md*.

On 26 December 2012, the Parliament adopted Law no. 305 on the Reuse of Public Sector Information (published in the Official Monitor on 29 March 2013). The law aims to facilitate the

reuse of the documents held by public authorities and institutions that were created in the course of their public work and that can be subsequently used for commercial or noncommercial purposes. The law requires all public authorities and institutions to prepare lists of documents for electronic reuse, produced in a processable format, and to appoint a person responsible for drawing up the lists and folders of documents for reuse and for placing them on the website of the public authority or institution and on the single government portal of open data. Therefore, public authorities and institutions are required by law to open public data on the portal *date.gov.md* and on their own web pages, which could in the nearest future boost the process of opening public information.

CHAPTER 2. ACCESSIBILITY AND USEFULNESS OF THE PUBLIC DATA OPENED IN 2012

On 4 April 2012, the Government approved the Open Government Action Plan for 2012-2013, which contains the list of public government data to be opened in 2012. Ministries and other central administrative authorities were required to undertake the measures necessary to fulfill the actions set in the plan fully and within the deadlines. The list of public government data to be opened in 2012 included 29 datasets held by public authorities.

To determine whether the public government data that were opened in 2012 in accordance with Government Decision of 4 April 2012 are of the type, amount and quality that meet the needs of civil society and the media, three criteria for analysis have been established:
- Openness of the datasets specified in Government Decision no. 195 of 4 April 2012, which was graded as *open data*, *partially open data* and *closed data*;
- Quality of the public data opened by ministries and public institutions (the extent to which the information disclosed by authorities is complete, comprehensive and timely), which was graded as *complete data* and *incomplete data*;
- Relevance and usefulness of the data available to the media and civil society in the process of addressing issues of public interest, which was graded as *useful data*, *little useful data* and *useless data*.

We shall next analyze the 29 datasets based on the above criteria, indicating for each its status and the decisive arguments behind assigning the status in question.

Set no. 1: Data about the projects financed from the National Environmental Fund (publication of financing criteria)

Status: **open, complete and useful data**

The Ministry of Environment has published the list of projects approved for funding from the National Environmental Fund in 2012, including project title, applicant, contract number, period of implementation and the amount approved. The 13 pages include complete information that is useful to civil society and journalists when addressing issues of public interest. Only the funding criteria are not published, but they and the list of projects approved for funding from the National Environmental Fund in 2011 can be found on the ministry's website.

Set no. 2: Data about projects financed from the Road Fund (publication of funding criteria)

Status: **open, incomplete and little useful data**

On 26 November 2012, the Ministry of Transport and Road Infrastructure opened the dataset entitled *Data on the Distribution Schedule of Means from the Road Fund for 2012*. The document contains information about the categories of works planned to be carried out for the MDL 1,024,815 collected in the Road Fund in 2012. The published data are incomplete and of little use for civil society and the media in the process of addressing issues of public interest for the following reasons:

- They contain no information about the specific projects financed from the Road Fund and the amount allocated for each project;
- They contain no information about the companies that performed the works financed from the Road Fund;
- They do not explain the criteria for project funding;
- They do not present the de facto situation in 2012, but only an estimate of expenses.

Set no. 3: Data about the use of resources from the Energy Efficiency Fund

Status: **open, incomplete and little useful data**

On 20 July 2012, the Ministry of Economy released statistics on the use of resources from the Energy Efficiency Fund in 2011 on the account of the state budget, noting that MDL 25 million were allocated for this purpose, and MDL 23,536,538 were actually used. The document specifies five types of projects funded and the total expenditure for each type of project. The published data are incomplete and little useful when addressing issues of public interest because:

- They contain no information about the specific projects financed from the Energy Efficiency Fund, but only the number of projects;
- They present no information about the companies or persons implementing projects, nor about the purpose and budget of each project;
- Information is outdated. So far, the Ministry of Economy published no information about the use of resources from the Energy Efficiency Fund in 2012.

Set no.4: Data about the de facto situation in transportation

Status: **open, incomplete and little useful data**

The authors used a general and vague wording to define this dataset. In the end, the Ministry of Transport and Road Infrastructure reported that it opened that information by publishing three datasets: data on the number of car authorizations issued (published on 19 November 2012), data on air transport reporting, especially passengers (published on 20 August 2012) and data on air transport reporting, including passengers, mail, cargo (published on 20 August 2012). The published data are incomplete and little useful because:

- They contain no information on the companies that received authorizations, the validity of authorizations, etc.;
- The data are not current, but cover the first seven months of 2012. The Ministry failed to subsequently publish data for the entire year;
- Specialized terms are used, such as *CEMT certificate* or *INTERBUS trip ticket*, which are not explained for the visitors that are unfamiliar with them;
- Information from the state-owned enterprise "Air Moldova" is published in English, thus being useless or of little use to those who do not speak English.

Set no. 5: Data on the list of schools, number of students by class, addresses of educational institutions and the budgets they receive

Status: **partially open, complete and useful data**

During 2012, the Ministry of Education opened three datasets in the context of Government Decision no. 195: the list of educational institutions, distribution of students by class (published on 27 July 2012), the educational institutions address list (published on 24 July 2012) and the list of educational institutions, distribution of teachers by class (published on 18 July 2012). Overall, the dataset was partially open, since the Ministry failed to open the information about the budgets of educational institutions for 2012. In April 2011, the Ministry of Education published the planned and executed expenses of public educational institutions financed from the budgets of administrative-territorial units and from the state budget for 2010. It is not clear why the Ministry did not publish data for 2011 last year and data for 2012 this year.

Information from the three lists opened by the Ministry is complete and comprehensive and can be used by civil society and the media, for example, to develop an online map of educational institutions in Moldova. In addition, data on the number of students and teachers are useful to illustrate the teacher/student ratio in each district, educational institution, etc.

Set no. 6: Data on academic performance by educational institution and school year

Status: **closed data**

As of 1 June 2013, the Ministry of Education did not publish this dataset for 2012 on *date.gov.md*.

Set no. 7: Data on the activity of public health institutions (PHI), the natural movement of population, morbidity and national health accounts

Status: **partially open, complete and useful data**

On 21 November 2012, the Ministry of Health made public the activity reports of the inpatient units of medical institutions for the first six months of 2012. Statistics were published for each medical institution in part and for the republic in general. People can find, for example, how many persons were hospitalized and how many died in medical institutions. The data are useful both for the civil society and for journalists interested in health issues, but they are incomplete, since the Ministry of Health has not yet presented updated data for 2012.

The Ministry did not open data about the natural movement of the population, morbidity and national health accounts.

Set no. 8: Data on culture

Status: **open, complete and useful data**

The Government Decision defines this dataset in a general and vague wording. The Ministry of Culture reported that it opened this information by publishing six datasets: the register of monuments protected by the State (published on 4 January 2013), the list of arts education institutions (published on 14 December 2012), the list of concert, theater, circus and cinema institutions (published on 13 December 2012), the list of libraries (published on 12 December 2012), the register of museums (published on 10 December 2012) and data on the activity of arts schools (published on 10 April 2012). The Ministry made public a large and complete amount of data useful both for journalists and for civil society representatives.

Set no. 9: Data on subsidies in agriculture

Status: **partially open, incomplete and little useful data**

On 11 July 2012, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry published operative information on the consumption of means provided from the Agricultural Subsidies Fund as of 9 July 2012. The dataset includes information about the number of applications received in 2012, the amount requested, the number of contracts concluded, the amount authorized for subsidies, etc. Data are partially open, incomplete and little useful because:

- They do not contain the list of agricultural producers with whom subsidies contracts were signed and the amount of each contract;
- They do not explain the criteria used to grant subsidies;
- Data are not presented in a timely manner.

Set no. 10: Data on the social assistance offered to various social categories

Status: **open, complete and useful data**

The Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family opened during the year seven sets of public data on the social assistance offered to various social categories: data on average benefits and the number of social benefit recipients in 2011 (published on 10 February 2012), data on the number of social benefit applications by type of benefit (published on 29 November 2012), data on the number of social benefit applications by type of household (published on 29 November 2012), data on the number of social benefit applications by household size (published on 29 November 2012), data on the average size of family benefit by type of family and living conditions (published on 29 November 2012), data on the distribution of material aid by social categories (published on 11 November 2012) and data on the distribution of material aid by purpose of request (published on 11 November 2012). The statistics opened by the Ministry are sufficiently detailed and relevant and could be useful when addressing issues of public interest. The only drawback is that the data present the situation for the first nine months of the year, and have not been subsequently updated.

Set no. 11: Data on human resource management in the public service

Status: **closed data**

As of 1 June 2013, the relevant institutions have not published this dataset on *date.gov.md*.

Set no. 12: Data about subsidies to citizens and businesses
Status: **closed data**

The Ministry of Economy has not published this dataset on *date.gov.md* for the reason of not having it.

Set no. 13: Disaggregated data on the share of certain sectors of economy (including volunteering) in the GDP and other key economic indicators

Status: **closed data**

The Ministry of Economy has not published this dataset on *date.gov.md* for the reason of not having it.

Set no. 14: Data on the financial and economic activity of state enterprises and joint stock companies with the majority share held by the state

Status: **open, incomplete and useful data**

The Public Property Agency opened two datasets in the context of Government Decision no. 195: data on the net profit margin, return on equity and return on assets based on the results of the financial and economic activity of the joint stock companies with the state share exceeding 50% in 2011 (published on 24 October 2012) and data on the net profit margin, return on equity and return on assets based on the results of the financial and economic activity of state enterprises in 2011 (published on 24 October 2012). The information opened by the Agency is sufficiently detailed and relevant, and as such it can be useful when addressing issues of public interest. The data are useful for the journalists specializing in economic issues and for economic analysts, but they are *incomplete* because so far the Public Property Agency has not published data for 2012.

Set no. 15: Statistics regarding the necessary funding for enterprises

Status: **closed data**

The Ministry of Economy has not published this dataset on *date.gov.md* for the reason of not having it.

Set no. 16: Data on the economic activity of small and medium enterprises; data on the newly established enterprises

Status: **partially open, incomplete and little useful data**

During the year, the Ministry of Economy opened three sets of public data on the newly established enterprises: the results of implementation of the pilot Program for Attracting Remittances into the Economy "PARE 1+1" in 2010-2011 (published on 17 April 2012) and results of implementation of the National Program of Economic Empowerment of Youth (published on 17 April 2012). These data are partially open, incomplete and little useful for journalists and analysts, since:

- They contain statistics only about the newly established enterprises within "PARE 1+1" and NPEEY;
- They contain no information about the persons and/or enterprises that concluded contracts on non-reimbursable funding;
- They do not explain the criteria for non-reimbursable funding;
- Data are not presented in a timely manner.

Set no. 17: Data on the financial transparency in the public sector (public expenditure at the level of ministry/central public authority, department, governmental agency, etc.)

Status: **partially open, complete and useful data**

The Ministry of Finance published, on 4 July 2012, a set of data on the execution of the budgets of administrative-territorial units. The document includes statistics on budget execution by districts and municipalities, but not by ministries/central public authorities, departments, government agencies, etc. Therefore, the dataset is partially open and incomplete.

Set no. 18: Public data on tax activity

Status: **open, complete and useful data**

On 4 July 2012, the Ministry of Finance published on *date.gov.md* the dataset called Monthly Data on State Budget Execution (since April 2012). The data are complete and useful for the civil society and journalists, as they offer a huge variety of statistics. The datasets opened by the Ministry of Finance are used to run the portal *BudgetStories.md*, which analyzes and visualizes open datasets to bring clarity on public expenditure in various sectors.

Set no. 19: Data on the licenses issued by the Licensing Chamber

Status: **open, incomplete and little useful data**

In the context of Government Decision no. 195, the Licensing Chamber opened two datasets: statistics on the number of valid licenses managed by the Licensing Chamber in the period 2002 – April 2013 and data on the number of import/export permits in the period 2010 – October 2012. The two tables include general statistics, unsorted by type of activity, name of the license holder, etc. The datasets are incomplete and little useful for the media and civil society since they are too general.

Full data on the issued licenses are available online on the website of the Licensing Chamber. The online licensing register allows verification of licenses by four criteria: name of the license holder, IDNO, type of activity and number of license. This register is useful for journalists, analysts and ordinary citizens.

Set no. 20: Data on road safety and localization of accidents

Status: **closed data**

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has not published this dataset on *date.gov.md*.

Set no. 21: Data on misdemeanor sanctions applied by the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Status: **open, complete and little useful data**

During 2012, the Ministry of Internal Affairs opened seven sets of statistics on misdemeanor sanctions: general information on the country, data in the area of public order police, data in the area of migration and asylum; data on the misdemeanor sanctions applied in operative services; data in the area of fraud investigation; data in the area of the Civil Protection and Emergency Situations Service and data in the area of the transport police. The Ministry published a great amount of detailed and aggregated statistics for 2012, but this information is of little use to journalists and activists when addressing issues of public interest because of the nature of the data.

Set no. 22: Data on job offers and job requests

Status: **open, complete and little useful data**

The Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family published, during 2012, statistics on the job vacancies registered at the National Employment Agency and statistics on the number of unemployed persons registered with the NEA and their professions. The Ministry published detailed statistics that are updated quarterly, but as with the previous dataset, this information is

of little use for journalists and activists when addressing issues of public interest because of the nature of the data.

Set no. 23: Data on the number of host institutions fulfilling the minimum quality standards required for volunteering

Status: **closed data**

The Ministry of Youth and Sport has not published this dataset on *date.gov.md*.

Set no. 24: Data on the volunteering in Moldova

Status: **closed data**

The Ministry of Youth and Sport has not published this dataset on *date.gov.md*.

Set no. 25: Data on the activity of sports schools subordinated to the Ministry of Youth and Sport

Status: **open, incomplete and useful data**

On 22 March 2012, the Ministry of Youth and Sport opened a dataset containing the list of sports schools in Moldova, the sports they practice and the contact data of the institutions' management. The data are incomplete, since they do not refer directly to the activity of the sports schools, lacking information on students' performances, results of participation in national and international competitions, the institutions' budgets, etc.

Set no. 26: Data about the projects of the Ministry of Defense whose direct beneficiaries are citizens of Moldova (projects referring to the destruction of hazardous pesticides and chemicals, informing people of the dangers of unexploded ordnance, etc.)

Status: **open, complete and little useful data**

The Ministry of Defense published statistics regarding the records on demining in 2012 and in the first four months of 2013. Documents contain information about the location and date of demining and the name of the explosive. Information is of little use to journalists and activists when addressing issues of public interest due to the nature of these data.

The Ministry has also published information about the destruction of hazardous pesticides and chemicals. It is a summary report on the implementation of an action plan in this area. The authors do not indicate the reporting period, but it appears from the document that the Ministry of Defense undertook these actions before 2011.

Set no. 27: Data on the environment, namely a) acts of control/inspection regarding compliance with environmental legislation, b) information on the quality of environmental components

Status: **partially open, incomplete and little useful data**

The Ministry of the Environment has not opened the data in item a). As for the information in item b), during 2012 it opened three datasets: data on the volume of pollutants emitted into the atmosphere from stationary sources; statistics on waste, air quality, protected and endangered species and statistics on freshwater (rivers), soils, ozone depleting substances. The information

thus presented is incomplete and little useful, since it does not cover the current situation, but only the situation up to 2010-2011.

Set no. 28: Information on notes and authorizations issued to businesses

Status: **open, complete and useful data**
During 2012, the Ministry of Economy published the list of technical authorizations for exploitation of petroleum products warehouses, fueling stations, the list of single technical authorizations for hazardous industrial facilities, for works of fixing the equipment used in a certain facility and for examining reports on works of technical supervision of gas supply in Chisinau and Balti. The datasets contain detailed and complete information that might be useful both for journalists and for analysts.

Set no.29: Data on using funds to ensure environment quality

Status: **closed data**

The Ministry of Environment published on *date.gov.md* the list of environmental projects financed from external sources, including the name, objective, implementation period, budget, project manager and their contact details, etc. The problem is that the data cannot be downloaded from the portal, with "Error 404 - Not Found" being shown at every try. Website administrators were alerted to the problem by two visitors last spring, but nothing has changed as of the date of this report. Since the dataset could not be visualized, it was noted as *closed data*.

The analysis of the datasets that were to be opened in 2012 according to Government Decision no. 195 led to the following conclusions:
- Ministries failed to open 31% of the datasets, while 21% are currently partially open (*see Figure 2.1*). One third of the datasets have not been opened by the Ministry of Economy for the reason of not having them, in conditions when the list of the datasets included into Government Decision no. 195 was drawn after consulting with ministries.
- 45% of the data opened or partially opened by ministries are incomplete (*see Figure 2.2*). In most cases, data are not current or detailed, with ministries only publishing general statistics.
- 50% of the open datasets are truly relevant and useful for the media and the civil society when addressing issues of public interest (*see Figure 2.3*). All other information published by ministries is incomplete, not current and too general to be used by journalists and analysts when producing articles, studies, etc.
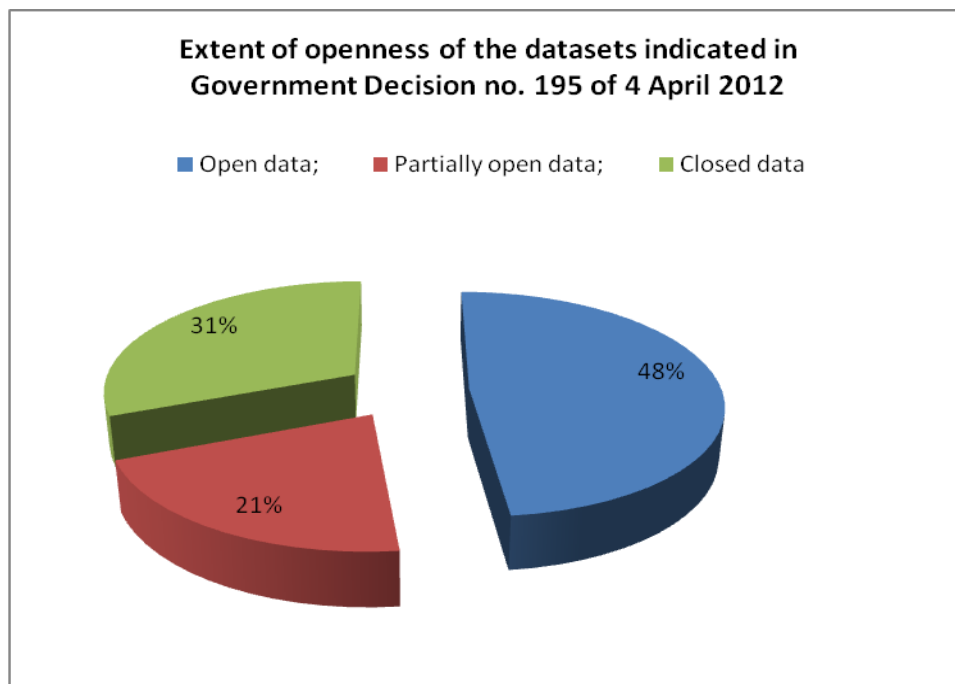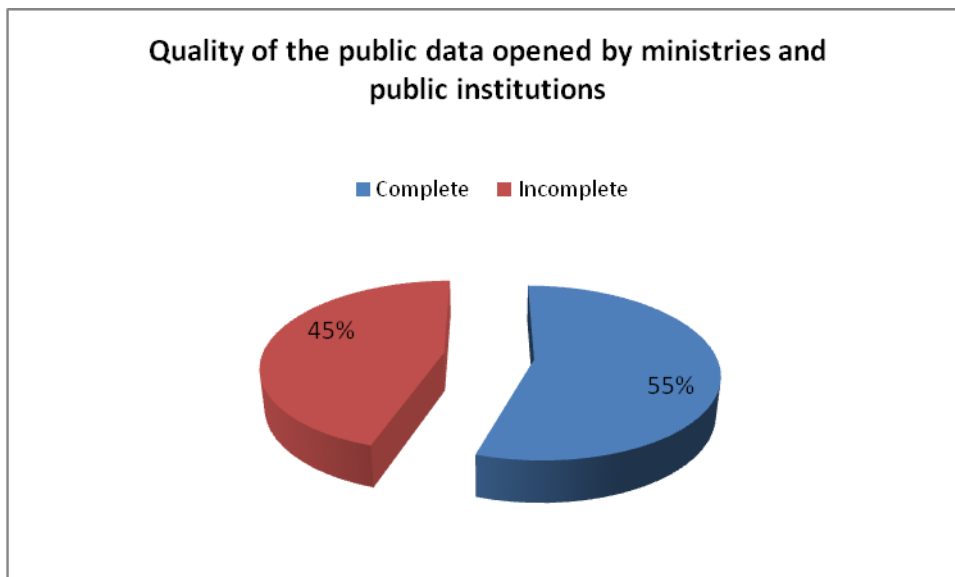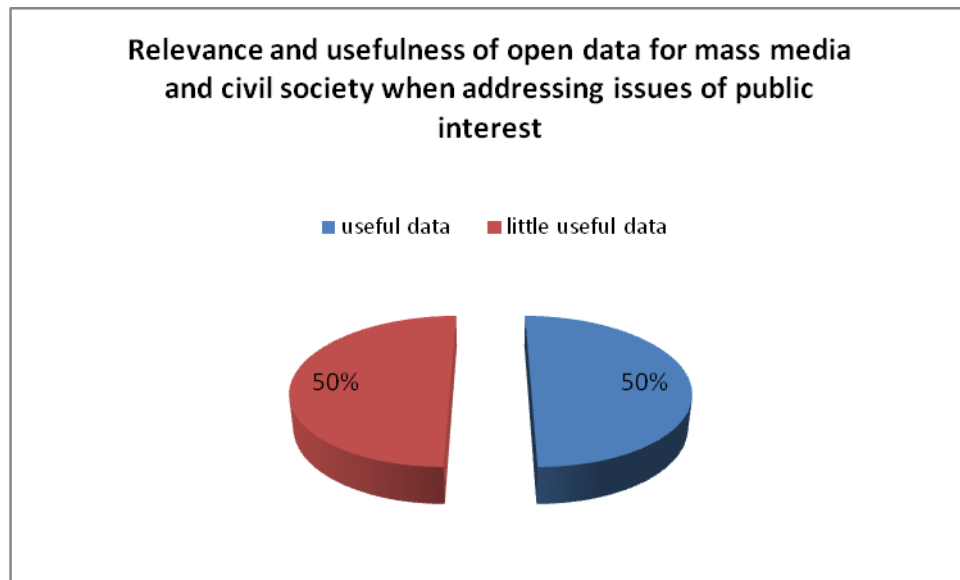
Figure 2.2

Figure 2.2

Figure 2.3

Relevance and usefulness of open data for mass media and civil society when addressing issues of public interest

useful data   little useful data

50%   50%

CONCLUSIONS

Journalists and civil society representatives (57%) cannot find public data easily on the websites of ministries and central administrative authorities. Public information sets are not usually visible on the front pages of websites, but are placed on various subpages, thus complicating citizens' access to public data.

Ministries and central administrative authorities are late to adjust their official websites according to Government Decision no. 188 of 3 April 2012. The deadline expired in April 2013, but so far, from the long list of ministries only the Ministry of Health has a new website.

The new design and structure of the official websites of public authorities and institutions, if the page of the Ministry of Health is taken as a reference, simplifies public access to open data due to the options of sorting the published datasets. Further, public information is not published on the front page of the websites, but on one of the subpages, two clicks away.

Journalists and activists experience some difficulties in accessing open data on *date.gov.md*, considering that the website has not yet managed to become a single information desk of open data held by government institutions. Most ministries and central administrative authorities continue to publish open datasets on their websites, as they have been used to do for years, and not on *date.gov.md*.

Of the 41 ministries and central administrative authorities present on the portal *date.gov.md*, only 13 published at least ten datasets over more than two years after the launch of the portal. Five institutions did not open any set of information on *date.gov.md*, preferring to use their own websites for this purpose.

Reasons for non-participation of some ministries and central public authorities in the process of opening data through the portal *date.gov.md* are as follows: i) reluctance of open government data coordinators who, since the launch of *date.gov.md*, are responsible for placing public information both on the official websites of institutions and on the portal, which requires double workload, old remuneration, therefore zero motivation; ii) lack of clear criteria for determining the full spectrum of government data to be opened by each institution; iii) bureaucracy in ministries and public institutions, which complicates the task of the open government data coordinators to collect information from their colleagues in other divisions and subdivisions.

Datasets published on the portal *date.gov.md* are rarely used by journalists and civil society representatives when writing articles, studies, etc., since 44% consider them of little or no use when addressing issues of public interest. The identified reasons are as follows: i) non-observance of the single information desk principle by a significant number of ministries and central public authorities in the process of opening data, so that the portal becomes useless for those interested in the activity of the institutions that are underperforming in terms of opening data through the portal; ii) limited possibilities of sorting open data by document type, institution's field of activity or year; iii) lack of data for previous years and of updated and complete information; iv) failure to observe a single data publication format, which creates difficulties in accessing information.

More than half of the datasets that were to become public in 2012 according to Government Decision no. 195 (52%) have not been opened or have been opened partially. 55% of the data that have been opened or partially opened by ministries are incomplete. Most often, data are not current or detailed, as ministries only publish general statistics. 50% of the open datasets

published by ministries are of little use to journalists and civil society representatives when addressing issues of public interest, since they are incomplete, not current and too general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To simplify the access of mass media, civil society, etc. to the open datasets published on the official websites of ministries and central administrative authorities, it is recommended that they be published in the section "Public data", "Public information" or "Open data" on the first page, one click away. In addition, the website should offer more options of sorting the published datasets, especially by field of activity, year, etc.

The ministries and public institutions that have online databases or complex data registers are recommended to publish a user's guide with step-by-step tips on how to use the database, the so-called tutorials or video tutorials. Moldova has good practices in this regard, and it is recommended that they be applied by other institutions, too.

It is recommended to improve the principles of operation of *date.gov.md* according to the needs of journalists, the civil society, etc. The interconnection of the official websites of ministries and public institutions with *date.gov.md* could solve the problem of participation of central public authorities in the open data initiative, but not the problem of accessibility and relevance of the published data for users.

To ensure greater accessibility of the data published on *date.gov.md*, it is recommended to improve the data sorting and data searching engines on the portal. The Electronic Governance Center is recommended to organize online public debates or focus groups with the representatives of mass media, the civil society, etc. regarding the structure of the new website.

To ensure that open data are relevant and useful for mass media and the civil society, it is recommended: i) to identify clear criteria for determining the full range of government data that need to be opened by each institution, which should be done by each institution in collaboration with the civil society; ii) to establish well-defined criteria for publishing open datasets, so that they be complete, comprehensive and current.

Training the open government data coordinators in the techniques and criteria of collection, systematization and publication of open datasets is a precondition for ensuring the success of *date.gov.md* and of the initiative *Access to Open Government Data*. The Electronic Governance Center is recommended to channel its efforts in this regard.

Open datasets are useless unless the public knows about their existence. It is recommended to develop a government strategy for promoting open datasets in mass media, among the civil society, etc. and to subsequently implement it by using low-cost techniques, such as social networks, electronic informative newsletters, etc.

It is recommended to clearly define the datasets that are to be opened by ministries and public institutions in 2013 and to avoid vague and general wording. Before the list of the datasets that are to be opened is approved, it is advisable that each institution verify whether it has the indicated information.