

# EUROPEAN LABEL OF GOVERNANCE EXCELLENCE



# Report LATVIA 2022



Report prepared by Centre For Public Policy PROVIDUS

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## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Implementation of ELoGE in Latvia.....	3
3. Results.....	13
4. Conclusions .....	18
5. International Conference and Awarding Ceremony.....	20

# 1. Introduction



The European Label of Governance Excellence (hereafter ELoGE) benchmark in Latvia was implemented for the first time (from mid-2022 to mid-2023) and was managed by the Centre for Public Policy - PROVIDUS (hereafter PROVIDUS), an accredited organization to award the ELoGE label in Latvia.

The implementation process started in the spring of 2022 and ended in May 2023 with the awarding ceremony as one of the official events of Latvia's Presidency within the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

This Report is prepared to provide information on the implementation of the ELoGE benchmark as well as the results. It describes all the most important steps taken during the implementation process (project team, an adaptation of the methodology, the work with the Advisory Committee, etc.) as well as brief conclusions on the results of the ELoGE activity that might be important for the other countries planning to implement it in the nearest future.

Full Report on the implementation of ELoGE and the analyses of the results in detail are available here (in Latvian): [https://ej.uz/ELoGE\\_Latvia\\_2022](https://ej.uz/ELoGE_Latvia_2022)

## **About the accredited institution - PROVIDUS**

PROVIDUS is the leading public policy think-tank in Latvia, established in 2002. Its mission is to promote evidence-based policy and the development of open society values.

PROVIDUS' main areas of work are good governance, anti-corruption, and migration, with citizen participation and the EU dimension as a horizontal component throughout all activities. Methods of the organization include policy research and analyses, drafting and review of legislation, advocacy, monitoring, and organization of public events and discussions.

Providus is a non-partisan, non-profit civil society organization enjoying the public benefit status under Latvian law.

In March 2022, Providus was accredited by the Council of Europe to implement ELoGE platform in Latvia and the active work to implement the ELoGE activity started in April 2022.

## 2. The implementation of ELoGE in Latvia



**The aim of implementing ELoGE in Latvia was twofold:**

- to identify and certify municipalities, which achieve a certain standard of governance according to the 12 European Principles of Good Democratic Governance;
- to promote good governance standards in municipal governance.

***Implementation of ELoGE benchmark in Latvia (2022-2023)***

**2022:**

- Adaptation of the methodology in Latvia;
- Training for the municipalities;
- Self-assessment of the municipalities performance against good governance principles;
- Surveys.

**2023:**

- Analyses of the results of the self-assessment, and review of the evidence.
- Advisory Committee meeting on the results.
- An international Conference on Good Local Governance;
- Awarding the ELoGE label.

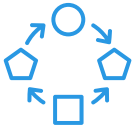
**12 European Principles of Good Governance:**

- 1. Participation, Representation, and Fair Conduct of the Elections**
- 2. Responsiveness**
- 3. Efficiency and Effectiveness**
- 4. Openness and Transparency**
- 5. Rule of Law**
- 6. Ethical Conduct**
- 7. Competency and Capacity**
- 8. Innovation and Openness to Change**
- 9. Sustainability and Long-term Orientation**
- 10. Sound Financial Management**
- 11. Human Rights, Cultural Diversity, and Social Cohesion**
- 12. Accountability**

## The activities for implementing the ELoGE program included the following steps:



**Training for local experts.** Implementation of the activity started with the training of local experts on April 2022 held by a Council of Europe expert – Mr. Jon Barber and Mr. Boris Lazov.



**Adaptation of the benchmark.** The self-assessment Benchmark and the questionnaires were translated into Latvian and adapted according to the local situation.



**Launch of the ELoGE benchmark.** The call for municipalities to participate was announced on April 29, and in May 2022 online Launch Event was held. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development endorsed the municipalities to participate in the project by sending invitation letters to all 43 municipalities of Latvia. Lithuania's experience was also provided by inviting the Centre Dainava to share their experience.



**Monthly meetings with the municipalities.** Providus experts organized regular monthly meetings with the involved municipalities to provide support and supervise the progress of the self-assessment process. Besides that, Providus experts organized special individual meetings with each of the municipalities separately.



**Preparing questionnaires for the surveys, and surveying.** Three target groups were surveyed: 1) the local public; 2) the staff of municipal administration; 3) the local politicians – members of municipal councils. The surveying process was executed both – online and on paper.



**Meetings with the Advisory Committee.** Three meetings were held: 1) to introduce the very idea of the project as well as the ELoGE Benchmark approach; 2) to discuss the adapted version of the Benchmark in order to provide a clear and easy-to-read methodology for the use of municipalities; 3) to discuss the self-evaluation reports submitted by all municipalities and to take a decision on which municipalities receive the award.



**The assessment process.** Providus experts had individual meetings with all the participating municipalities to discuss the results of the activity - the self-evaluation results and the results of the surveys.



**Announcement of the results.** The awarding ceremony was part of the international conference held on May 26, 2023, in Rīga since Latvia overtook the Presidency of the Council of Europe. Five municipalities out of 7 that participated in the activity, qualified for the European Governance Excellence Label and received an award.

## 2.1. Project team



The implementation of the ELOGE Benchmark was provided by the Expert Panel and the Advisory Committee.

**The Expert Panel** provided support for the municipalities in all stages of the implementation of the ELOGE program:

- training and explanation of the methodology;
- organizing self-assessment according to the methodology;
- organizing questionnaires;
- providing permanent support in each individual case if needed;
- providing feedback on the results of the assessment and discussing the necessary steps for improvements.

The Expert Panel was made of three experts: Līga StafECKa, senior policy analyst (PROVIDUS), Agnese Frīdenberga, senior legal analyst (PROVIDUS), and Diāna Rasuma, Director of Spatial Planning and Land Management Department (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development).

**The Advisory Committee** served as a national platform during the implementation of the ELOGE and was involved to approve the adapted ELOGE benchmark and overview of the progress of the work in Latvia. In 2023, the Advisory Committee assessed the self-evaluation reports submitted by all municipalities and made the decision on which municipalities would receive the award according to the ELOGE rules.

The Advisory Committee gathered high-level experts from seven different institutions such as the Ministry of the Environment Protection and Regional Development, The State Audit Office, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Development, The Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau, The Baltic Institute of Corporate Governance, the European Association for Information on local development and the University of Latvia.

The administration of the project was provided by the project director, policy analyst - Sintija Tarasova – Dubkeviča (PROVIDUS).



## 2.2. Adaptation of the ELoGE benchmark

The ELoGE benchmark is a base for the methodology to be used for the self-assessment process. While translating into Latvian and adapting the Benchmark to Latvia's legal and institutional regulations, the expert panel proposed several amendments that were accepted by the Advisory Committee and submitted to the Council of Europe ELoGE platform.

*Table 1: The amendments made to the Benchmark of the ELoGE*

Principle	Indicator	Changes
<b>No 1. "Citizen Participation, Fair Conduct of Elections, and Representation"</b>	1. The municipality conducts elections according to laws which match international standards of best practice	The sub-indicator was added 1A. "Municipal election commissions and polling station commissions are established by law". The change was made in order to shed light on those responsibilities were the municipality is in charge in overall centralized election administration.
<b>No 10. "Sound Financial Management"</b>	8. "Annual and multi-year budgets are adopted before the start of the relevant period. The budgets should outline key provisions of resources and its commitments".	The explanation of indicator 8 was changed to the one that is more relevant for Latvia: 8. "The municipal budget is planned in a way that ensures coherence with strategic and operational documents and the municipality's autonomous functions".
	13. "The inter-municipal approach is a factor of progress in the management of the local authority".	The indicator was excluded from the scoring due to the fact that it is not relevant for Latvia.

<sup>1</sup> Record of the meeting is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpv6lueOE7g&t=3936s>

## 2.3. Participating municipalities



The current administrative division of municipalities in Latvia came into force on 1 July 2021.

After implementing the administrative-territorial reform, the number of municipalities has decreased from 119 to 43. The administrative territories are divided into 38 territories of municipality governments (municipalities) and 7 territories of local governments of State cities (further on the term “municipalities” will be used to describe both administrative divisions unless it is important to distinguish).

The reform affected the majority of the territory of Latvia, in particular, 104 out of 119 municipalities were reorganized, and 28 of the current 43 municipalities were newly established (their borders were changed). The aim of the reform was to create economically viable administrative territories with municipalities that are able to ensure the fulfillment of their statutory autonomous functions in comparable quality and accessibility and provide quality services to the population at reasonable costs.

The implementation of the ELoGE benchmark coincides with the changes that municipalities experienced due to the reform – the reforming of the administrative setting of the institutions, the changes in the service provision, and many others.

The open call for municipalities to apply for the ELoGE activity was published on April 2022 and followed by the Project Launch Event (online). In total, 58 participants were present at the Launching Event.

Out of 43 municipalities, 11 municipalities expressed their readiness to participate in the project while at the later stages, 4 municipalities withdrew their applications mostly due to their capacities against the workload required to be executed in good quality.

The seven participating municipalities cover almost all the large regions of Latvia and represent both types of municipalities – the state cities and municipalities. The participating municipalities were:



**1. Liepāja City Municipality.** Liepāja is the largest municipality participating in the Project, the largest city in the Kurzeme region. Liepāja is a port city on Latvia’s west coast, in Kurzeme. The City has a population of 67 360 inhabitants (2021).[2]



**2. Preiļi municipality** - is the smallest participating municipality in the Project, located in the Latgale region (the economically poorest region in Latvia), with a population of 17 279 inhabitants (2022).[3]



**3. Valmiera municipality** - the municipality that consists of the state city - Valmiera (the largest city in Vidzeme) and smaller towns and rural territories. There are 54 642 inhabitants (2021) in the municipality.[4]



**4. Cēsis municipality** - is the second largest municipality in the Vidzeme region with a population of 44 842 inhabitants (2022).[5]



**5. Bauska municipality** - is the second largest municipality in the Zemgale region with a population of 44 252 (2021).[6]



**6. Jēkabpils municipality** - is the municipality in Zemgale with a population of 40 790 inhabitants (2020). [7]



**7. Jelgava district municipality** - is a municipality in Zemgale, with a population of 33 686 (2022). [8]

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2 <https://www.liepaja.lv/pilsetas-statistika/salidzinosa-statistika/>

3 <https://preili.lv/par-novadu/>

4 <https://www.valmierasnovads.lv/novads/valmieras-novads/>

5 <https://www.cesis.lv/lv/novads/cesu-novads/par-novadu/>

6 <https://www.bauska.lv/print.php?url=lv/novads/novads-skaitlos-un-faktos>

7 [https://www.varam.gov.lv/siv/siv/valm/files/content/files/ATR%20referencma/linfo%20par%20novadiem/jekabpils\\_novads\\_2020.pdf](https://www.varam.gov.lv/siv/siv/valm/files/content/files/ATR%20referencma/linfo%20par%20novadiem/jekabpils_novads_2020.pdf)

## 2.4. Surveys

The municipalities participating in the activity carried out surveys for three target groups:

1. the municipal residents;
2. the employees of the municipality;
3. the elected members of the municipal councils (local politicians).

In order to reach a remarkable scope of employees, the municipalities were required to reach at least 25% of the employees of the municipality's administration and at least 50% of the members of the council.

Surveys were prepared by the Expert Panel and municipalities were responsible for distributing them. In order to reach a remarkable sample (albeit not statistically precise representation) the municipalities were required to collect feedback from a pre-determined number of local residents (encouraged to reach a geographically dispersed group) in order to receive an opinion that is close to the representative opinion. The number of residents to be reached was decided by applying the same principle as the Local Government Law (in force from 1 January 2023) which prescribes for collective petitions in municipalities to be considered. The data were collected both – online and on paper. The municipalities shared the link to the survey for their employees and elected members of councils, mostly through emails. The online data were aggregated by PROVIDUS.

**Table 2: The number of the local population the municipalities were required to reach by the public survey\*:**

The size of population in the municipality	The number of residents to be surveyed (no less than):
≥ 15 000	100
15 000 – 30 000	200
≤ 30 000	300
A State City	300

The link to the survey for residents was shared on social media (for example Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and the official home page of the municipalities. The questionnaires in the paper were distributed in the most attended places by local residents such as local libraries, municipal agencies, etc.

It was very important to involve in the survey not only those respondents who live in the center of the municipality (city or town) but those, who live in the suburbs. The data shows that 44% of all respondents are from rural areas.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.jelgavasnovads.lv/lv/novads/par-novadu/skaitli-un-fakti/>

## 2.5. Self-assessment process



### ***Benchmark and Guidelines***

To support municipalities while they implement ELoGE, Providus experts translated all the materials provided by the Council of Europe into Latvian and prepared the Latvian version of the Benchmark that was supplemented with a special section with explanatory examples of evidence.

Besides that, local experts created the **Guidelines** where the self-assessment process was explained in detail, including suggestions on how to organize the self-assessment process, what can be used as evidence, as well as suggestions for the surveying process, etc.

### ***Meetings***

In June 2022 Providus experts held a whole-day training for the experts from the municipalities, explaining not only the aim and tasks of the assessment of compliance with the good governance principles but also providing a broader explanation of the 12 principles and indicators and organizing practical work in groups to discuss the selected principle, indicators and possible examples of evidence. Later, throughout the self-assessment monthly meetings with the municipalities were held. Local experts answered all the unclear questions and mentored the self-assessment process.

Through monthly meetings, local experts and the project team monitored the dynamics and pace of the self-assessment process in order to reach the results on time. All meetings were held online due to the fact that a lot of employees in municipalities keep working remotely and online meetings were more convenient for them. Local experts had at least one individual meeting with each of the participating municipalities, to discuss the problems, and to provide support if it was necessary.

To ensure that the self-assessment is done in good quality, the municipalities were advised to set up a special internal team in which different specialists of the municipality participate. Almost all of the municipalities established such a team (formed by different experts - legal advisors, executive directors, public relationship officers, planning and development experts, and others). In one of the municipalities, the Mayor (the highest official of the municipality, head of the council of the municipality) joined the team which demonstrates that municipalities paid serious attention to such evaluation.

After receiving the self-assessment results and the evidence, the Expert Panel revised all the provided evidence, provided electronically, together with the results of the self-assessment, using Google Docs. Each of the municipalities had a separate folder where to upload the self-assessment results and the evidence.

Collected results of the surveys were also summarised and provided to the municipalities by Providus inviting them to return to their scores and to discuss the principles where the public evaluation scores differed remarkably from their self-assessment. Two of the municipalities revised their scores but the rest of the municipalities didn't, providing their arguments for that.

The work of self-assessment was done in two main stages: in the first stage the municipalities collected all the evidence and provided the scores (June-December 2022); in the second stage where the municipalities returned to their evaluation results after receiving additional questions from the Expert panel, and the results of the surveys (February - April 2023).

After the results were announced the Expert panel provided individual meetings with all the participating municipalities to discuss the self-assessment results, and the surveys, and most importantly, to invite the municipalities to work on a program of improvements to maximize the ELoGE results.

Apbalvošanas ceremonija

Awards ceremony



*Awarded municipalities, Rīga 26 May, 2023*

## 3. Results

In total, 11 municipalities (out of 43 municipalities) applied to participate in the activity, 7 municipalities finished the self-assessment process and 5 municipalities qualified for the European Governance Excellence Label and received the award:

- Bauska Municipality,
- Cēsis Municipality,
- Jelgava Municipality,
- Liepāja State City,
- Valmiera Municipality.

Two municipalities did not qualify for the European Governance Excellence Label and did not receive the award - Preiļi municipality and Jēkabpils municipality while 4 other municipalities dropped out of the self-assessment process due to various reasons.

**The results showed that the municipalities scored high on their compliance with the principles of good governance. The average score for the implementation of all 12 principles was 3.38 on a 4-point scale.**

Figure 1 summarizes the self-assessment scores for all six municipalities together. As can be seen, the comparatively lower-scored principles are also scored above 3, which means that the municipality's overall compliance with these principles is also rated as fairly good.

**Figure 1: Combined together, the self-assessment results of 6 municipalities\* on implementing 12 Good governance principles**



\* The self-assessment results of the Jēkabpils municipality were not used in the data analysis as the evidence provided did not meet the requirements of the methodology.



The results of the municipal assessment can be seen in *Table 3*. According to the data, there are municipalities that have rated their performance in some principles with the maximum marks.

**Table 3 “The results of self-evaluation. 6 municipalities, average scores”**

12 principles	Bauska municipality	Cēsis municipality	Liepāja City municipaliy	Valmiera municipality	Jelgava district municipality	Preiļi municipality
1.Participation, Representation, Fair Conduct of the Elections	2.76	3.42	3.50	3.58	2.42	3.00
2. Responsiveness	3.29	3.67	3.67	3.50	3.67	2.83
3. Efficiency and Effectiveness	3.39	3.44	3.94	3.67	3.22	2.89
4. Openness and Transparency	3.58	3.90	3.95	4.00	2.50	3.00
5. Rule of Law	3.08	3.00	3.88	4.00	2.75	2.75
6. Ethical Conduct	3.39	3.44	3.67	3.78	3.00	2.78
7. Competency and Capacity	3.13	3.00	3.44	3.63	2.88	2.75
8. Innovation and Openness to Change	3.38	4.00	3.75	3.50	2.25	2.50
9. Sustainability and Long-term Orientation	3.33	3.67	3.89	3.78	3.56	2.78
10. Sound Financial Management	3.71	3.85	3.81	4.00	3.46	2.77
11. Human Rights, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion	2.81	4.00	3.92	4.00	3.50	3.00
12. Accountability	3.93	3.71	3.86	4.00	3.14	2.43

Municipalities were required to carry out three types of surveys - citizen's survey, survey for elected members, and survey for the staff of the municipality.

The results of the surveys did not directly influence the final assessment of the municipality but served as a reference point for both the municipality and the experts to identify cases where the self-assessment results were significantly different from those of the surveyed groups.

As can be noticed from Figures 2, 3, and 4, the citizens' assessment of the municipality's compliance with the good governance principles is remarkably lower compared to the assessment by the staff of local administration and local politicians (elected representatives). Especially low evaluated were Principle nr.5 (Rule of Law) and Principle nr.6 (Ethical Conduct) while comparatively higher evaluated Principle nr.11 (Human Rights, Cultural Diversity and Social Inclusion).

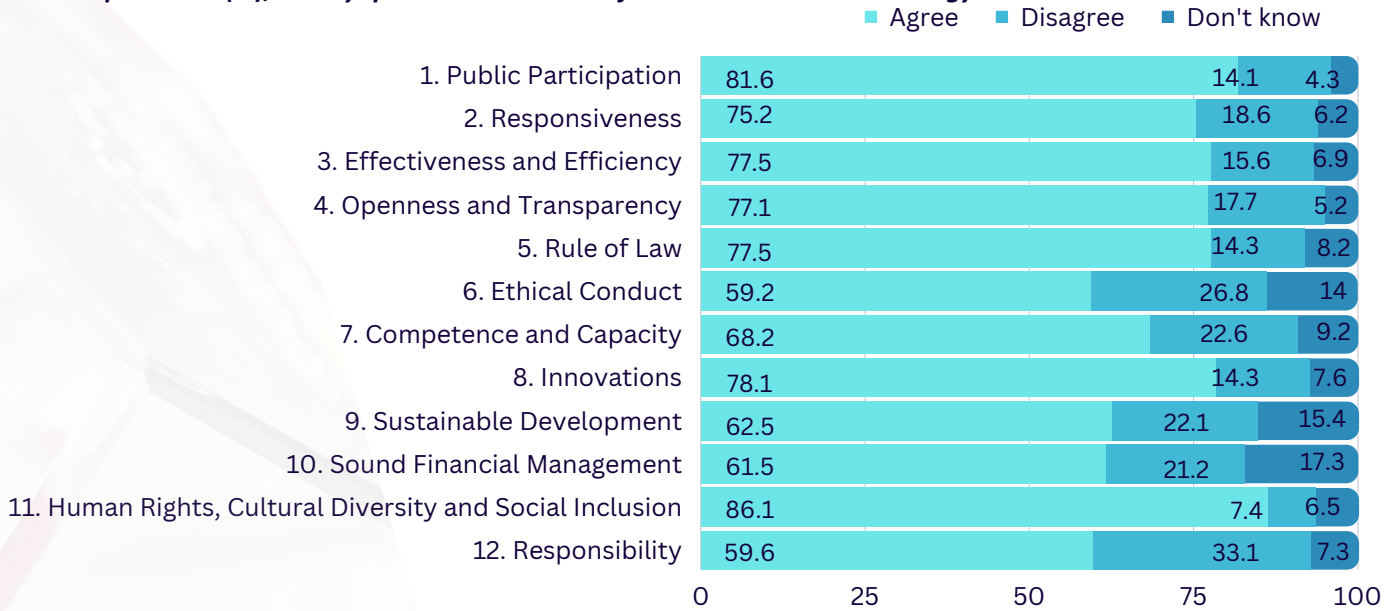
The local elected representatives (Figure 4) scored remarkably higher on all the 12 principles compared to the results of the Citizens' surveys.

The expert panel held individual meetings with all participating municipalities to discuss the survey results in detail. The municipalities were encouraged to develop a program of improvements in order to maximize the outcome of the self-evaluation, to encourage change.

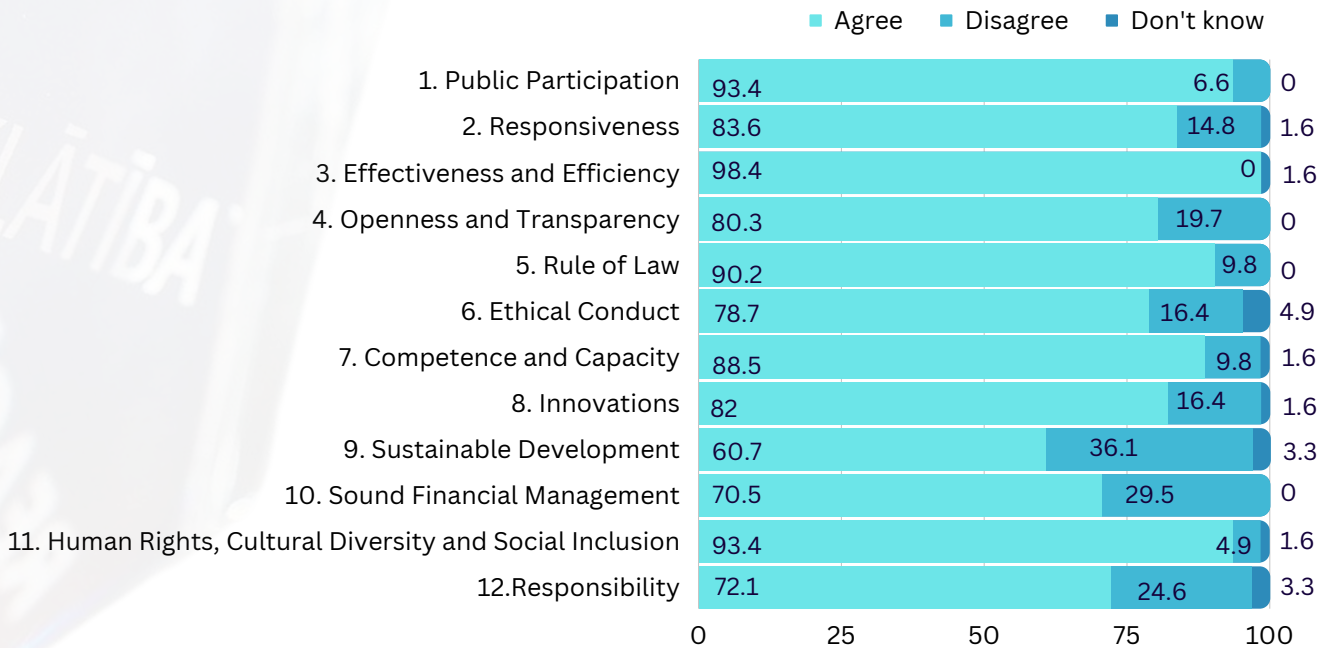
**Figure 2: Combined together, results from CITIZENS' Surveys', 6 municipalities, n=1545 respondents (%)**  
**Survey questions were used from the ELoGE methodology.**



**Figure 3: Combined together, the results from the EMPLOYEES' Surveys, 6 municipalities, n= 925 respondents (%), survey questions were used from the ELoGE methodology.**



**Figure 4: Combined together, the results from the ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES' Surveys, 6 municipalities, n=61 respondents (%), survey questions were used from the ELoGE methodology.**



# 4. Conclusions



## Main conclusions

The implementation of the activity has provided a number of conclusions that can be drawn:

- Participation in the activity is a great opportunity for municipalities to get deeper knowledge and understanding of good governance principles.
- The self-evaluation process helped municipalities to assess the quality of established procedures and services they deliver, identify challenges and things that can be improved;
- The municipalities have admitted that have managed to take the necessary steps for the improvements of the loopholes that were discovered through the self-assessment process.
- The self-assessment process is a time-consuming process and should be done as a team-based work where experts from different municipal areas are present.
- To ensure good results and a valuable process, it is of high importance that the highest public officials of the municipality are involved in the project. The value of the self-assessment process will be higher in the municipalities where the head of the municipal administration and/or the Mayor is involved in it and where the Council of the municipality is aware of it and are ready to use the results for the improvements.
- The self-assessment process disclosed the areas where improvements are needed and some of the municipalities have managed to work on these improvements already during the self-assessment process or to plan them in the nearest future.
- To raise awareness about good governance principles amongst participating municipalities it is very important to train the municipalities on the methodology, prior they start to do the self-evaluation activities (for example - more deeply explain what can be the evidence; how to evaluate the implementation of the indicators, etc).
- To raise awareness about good governance principles amongst participating municipalities it is very important to train the municipalities on the methodology, prior they start to do the self-evaluation activities (for example - more deeply explain what can be the evidence; how to evaluate the implementation of the indicators, etc).
- The survey of the local staff was a very important source of information - it highlighted things that should be improved and showed the weakness and strengths as regards the implementation of the good governance principles in participating municipalities.
- To ensure that the results of the survey can be used to improve the work of the municipality, point out weaknesses and areas of strength, it is very important to synchronize the questions of the survey to the principles - so that the respondents measure/evaluate similar topics.
- The results of ELoGE should be shared with and analyzed by the governmental institutions which should take steps to support the municipalities in developing their capacities, especially regarding their weakest points. The implementation of ELoGE disclosed the need for a bigger project with the Council of Europe where the scope of the municipalities covers a larger number of the municipalities to diagnose the overall situation in Latvia and to address the needs of the municipalities in strengthening their work according to the good governance principles, especially after the implementation of the administrative-territorial reform is finished

# 6. International Conference and Awarding Ceremony



Latvia was presiding with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from mid-May 2023 to mid-November 2023. One of the priorities of the Presidency was good governance in local municipalities. Taking it into account, it was decided to organize an international conference - to create a platform where one of the Presidency's priorities - good local governance - is discussed. Implementation of ELoGE provided not only assessment data but also highlighted very many important issues to discuss among experts and practitioners, representatives of the municipalities. The awarding ceremony was a part of this international conference held on May 26, 2023, in Rīga.

The conference was organized together with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia and in cooperation with the Council of Europe. During the conference, various aspects of good governance in local governments were discussed with a focus on the rule of law, public participation, sound financial management, and sustainable development planning.

During the conference, a special panel discussion was dedicated to the municipalities, that implemented ELoGE. These municipalities shared their experience with the self-assessment process, its main challenges, value, and impact that this process caused.

The participants of the conference were representatives of Latvian municipalities, representatives of state institutions, experts from the Council of Europe, members of the CDDG (European Committee on Democracy and Governance), representatives of other ELoGE accredited institutions, and representatives of non-governmental organizations [10].

The conference gathered more than 100 participants at the Concert hall "Spīķeri" and it was live-streamed on Youtube, altogether reaching more than 200 participants. The Conference was organized in a socially responsible manner - the catering company was the social enterprise "RB Cafe", a company that provides employment opportunities for disabled persons.



10 More about the conference here - <https://providus.lv/en/raksti/providus-invites-to-the-conference-ens-ur-ing-good-gover-na-nc-e-i-n-l-oc-a-l-gover-nments-a-ba-s-is-for-sus-ta-inable-devel-opment-a-nd-a-ppr-opr-i-a-eu-investments/>

The Awarding ceremony gathered all the participating municipalities and conference guests. All the municipalities that finished the ELoGe program were invited to the stage to receive the award. Those, which did not qualify for the award, received a Diploma of Gratitude for participating.







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