egovernment

schweiz · suisse · svizzera

Open Government Data Strategy for Switzerland 2014 – 2018

Approved by the Federal Council on April 16, 2014

Overview

Data is the raw material of the knowledge society. Following the establishment of an information infrastructure which is used around the clock by the world of business, politics, academia, education and culture, the amount of data grows exponentially. In contrast to physical raw materials, there is no shortage of data in the production of information and knowledge; it leads only to new data, information, knowledge and services. There is thus the continued potential for the creation of added value.

Public administrations produce, process and collect high-quality data to fulfil their legal obligations. The provision and publication of official data has great potential which has only been partially exploited in Switzerland up to now. The aim is to publish official data in such a way that the public can find it and reuse it easily.

Official data can be designated as open if:

  – it is openly accessible and

  – its use is not restricted for reasons to do with data protection law, copyright law or information protection law and it can be freely reused by third parties (open government data, OGD).

Open official data offers a wide range of possibilities: citizens can gain a better understanding of action taken by the government and the administration on the basis of data. Administrations can use new opportunities for collaboration in the production and use of data. Academics and researchers can use data which is already available to achieve new research results. Consumers can take better decisions based on data when selecting products and services. Companies can design new products and services and thereby make a decisive contribution to the innovative capacity of a country.

Today there are technical, organisational and legal barriers standing in the way of secondary usage of the data. Some data is difficult to find, its description is unsatisfactory or it is provided in a format or with terms of use which render it unsuitable for further use. In the interests of enhancing the further use of the data, these barriers and restrictions have to be removed.

At an international level, this topic is gaining ground. In recent years, countries like the USA, the UK, Germany, Austria and France as well as the EU have taken corresponding measures to exploit this potential. OGD is also an issue in Switzerland. The Federal Council recognises the still underexploited economic, social and cultural potential held by official data which is non-personal and safe in security terms. It wants to create the prerequisites for exploiting this potential. In collaboration with the cantons and the communes and other institutions in the public sector, it wants to contribute to the creation of an open and prosperous national data sector and culture.

This report firstly clarifies what "open government data" (OGD) means. Then the Federal Council's vision on this topic and the individual objectives linked to this will be explained. The strategy will be set into its framework based on other Federal

Council strategies. Finally, principles and specific measures will be defined for the concrete implementation of the strategy.

Report

1   Purpose of the document

The Federal Council wants to improve access to official data and is committed to realising the potential of open government data (OGD) in Switzerland.

The Open Government Data Strategy for Switzerland 2014-2018 will create a common understanding on the use of OGD, sets the objectives which should be achieved with the provision of OGD and determines the thrust of activities in the Federal Administration in the area of OGD up until 2018.

The OGD Strategy for Switzerland is binding on the Federal Administration insofar as it is subject to the directives of the Federal Council. The OGD strategy will be implemented in the relevant departments and federal offices. For the remaining federal offices, the strategy is to be taken as a recommendation. In the interests of coordinated implementation of OGD at all federal levels, the Confederation is pursuing cooperation with the cantons and the communes on the basis of this strategy. Cooperation with other institutions in the public sector is being examined.

2   What is open government data?

Open government data (OGD) combines the concept of open government as a model for government action with the concepts of open data and government data. The latter focus on specific features of data gathering.

Table 1

Conceptual basis

Term	Description
Open government (open government and administrative action)	is a synonym for various public policy visions and concepts geared towards more transparency, participation and cooperation.
Government data	defines data and information in relation to authorities as

Term	Description
(Official data[1])	producers and owners.
	Features: data which has been drawn and prepared within the scope of a government mandate.
Open data	defines openness in relation to data and content.
	Features: free use, reuse and distribution of data.

What is Swiss government data?

Official data is data which is collected, drawn up, managed, processed and stored by all government authorities within the context of their statutory mandate. The focus is on data, for example, from areas to do with the weather, geographic information, statistics, traffic, crime, the environment and the energy system in Switzerland.

When is official data open?

Open government data (OGD) is a concept which is aimed at the accessibility and reuse of data produced within the scope of administrative activities[2].

In the case of official data, this can be data which is from general administrative activities or data which was drawn up or prepared at the specific request of an individual or company. The data should only be published as OGD in the first case[3]. In the second case, the public service should be paid for in the future by the requester.

The provision of data as OGD is only permissible if it does not violate existing law (in particular the provisions on data protection, copyright and information protection)[4].

Relationship with the Freedom of Information Act

It should be noted that although some of the objectives of the Federal Act of 17 December 2004 on Freedom of Information in the Administration[5] (FoIA) are in line

---

[1]   The term "data" is understood to mean a collection of characters and values which, for example,.are the result of observations, measurements and surveys. Data describes information in a form which is useful for further processing. Structured data is systematically recorded and is stored in files or databases. Data may be available in analog or digital form. For important categories of data, cf. for example the statistical topics at the Federal Statistical Office (www.bfs.admin.ch).

[2]   Cf. the Federal Council report of 13 September 2013 in response to the Wasserfallen postulate number 11.3884 "Open government data as the strategic focus in eGovernment" dated 29 September. 2011: www.news.admin.ch/NSBSubscriber/message/attachments/ 33498.pdf.

[3]   On the question of the publication of data, the current OGD strategy is based on internationally established principles: http://sunlightfoundation.com/policy/documents/ten-open-data-principles/(status as at 4.3.2014).

[4]   Open government data in this sense has been provided since September 2013 at the OGD pilot portal www.opendata.admin.ch. As a guide, data collections can be seen in various international OGD portals. Examples at the national level are data.gv.at (Austria) and data.gov.uk (UK) or at the communal level daten.berlin.de (Berlin) and data.stadt-zuerich (city of Zurich).

[5]   SR **152.3**

with those of the OGD, there are significant differences. Firstly, the FoIA primarily confers the right upon request to gain access to documents of the administration whereas the OGD is aiming at a self-service system. Secondly, the OGD also deals with the transparency of governmental bodies but not only this. Just as important is the desired value added based on the economic use of data.

Relationship with the general information mandate of the Federal Council and the administration.

The general task of the Federal Council and the administration to inform the public about their activities[6], concerns a section of OGD. In contrast to the FoIA, here actively providing information to the public is envisaged. In this respect, OGD has an additional focus, however, because not only is information on the activities of the authorities gathered but also data which is the main product of certain public authority tasks.

3   Vision

Public administration in Switzerland has valuable, high-quality data at its disposal. The Federal Council wants to make as much of this data as possible publicly accessible and freely reusable because:

OGD allows for innovation and economic growth

Data from areas of application such as energy, the environment, traffic, health and other administrative areas permit innovative companies to develop new information services and thereby to improve the quality of life in our society. Open official data also allows economic insights into the development of our nation.

OGD promotes transparency and participation

Thanks to OGD, the public, political parties and the media get a transparent insight into the activities of the government and the administration and can thereby fulfil their political role and societal responsibilities in a more competent way.

OGD increases the efficiency of the administration.

Authorities are better able to use their own data across political and organisational boundaries and the data quality can be gradually improved thanks to feedback from users.

---

[6]   Cf. in particular Article 180, paragraph 2 of the Federal Constitution (SR **101**) and Article 10 of the Federal Act of 21 March 1997 on the Organisation of the Government and the Administration (GAOA, SR **172.010**).

The Federal Council wants to promote the development of an information society in Switzerland through OGD and strengthen Switzerland's leading position in the global information economy.

With the implementation of the OGD Strategy for Switzerland, the systematic release and provision of official data as OGD is to be gradually integrated into the normal course of the administration's activities.

4   Objectives

In order to realise the vision described, the Federal Council wants to achieve the following goals:

Release of official data

The Confederation will make data which is suitable for OGD available to the public in machine-readable and open formats to be freely reused. The legal, organisational, financial and technical framework of data production in the individual administrative units will be adapted to the requirements of OGD and, where this is useful, will allow public provision of data without additional work (open data by default).

Coordinated publication and provision of official data

With the help of a central infrastructure, the Confederation will make its data sets easily locatable for the public (publication of metadata on an OGD portal) and will make the data available for free use. To this end, the responsible administrative units (data producers) will publish easy-to-understand descriptions of the content of their data stock on the OGD portal and will provide standardised, technical access functions for the open data.

Establishing an open-data culture

The Confederation will support the use of data through free, uniform and understandable terms of use and through additional information on the individual data sets to facilitate understanding of the data in terms of content and technicalities as well as other communication measures. With this in mind, the Confederation will pursue a continuous dialogue with the public with the aim of spreading the use of open data and to thereby contribute to establishing a participative and innovative open-data culture.

5   General conditions

5.1   Links to existing strategies

Switzerland's OGD strategy aims to achieve the overarching objectives which are formulated in the Strategy of the Federal Council for an Information Society in Switzerland[7]. Moreover, it is also to be found in the eGovernment Strategy Switzerland.

5.1.1   Strategy for an Information Society in Switzerland

With its Strategy for an Information Society in Switzerland, the Federal Council wants to seize the opportunities generated by information and communication technologies (ICT) for the economy and society. It is prioritising various areas of activity to tap into the innovative potential of ICT for Switzerland.[8] The goal of facilitating access to official data and information has strategically been allocated to the area of activity of eDemocracy and eGovernment[9] and is at the forefront for OGD.

Access to data created and processed by the administration serves to consistently implement freedom of information. Provided that no regulatory provisions prevent publication, access to official data can increase the transparency of the Federal Administration's activities. Moreover, economic added value can be achieved through reuse.

To this end, the Federal Council has defined the following priorities for action, among others:

–   facilitation of user-friendly access, tailored to requirements, to official Federal Administration data and documents

---

[7]   Federal Council (2012): Strategy of the Federal Council for an Information Society in Switzerland. Bern, March 2012: www.bakom.admin.ch > Topics > Information society > Federal Council's Strategy

[8]   These are as follows: 1) infrastructure , 2) security and trust, 3) the economy, 4) eDemocracy and eGovernment, 5) education, research and innovation, 6) culture, 7) health and the health-care system, 8) energy and resource efficiency.

[9]   However, OGD also points to other areas of activity in that data or the security thereof is highly relevant in various administrative areas (e.g. research and the health-care system).

– clarification on the data to be made available, data security and the necessary legal bases.[10]

5.1.2   E-Government Strategy Switzerland

OGD also has links to eGovernment as access to data of other administrative units and the forwarding of data is a prerequisite for fully electronic business transactions. Switzerland's OGD strategy was drawn up within the scope of a project in the e-Government Strategy Switzerland.

The aims and implementing principles in the area of eGovernment are defined in a strategy shared by the Confederation and the cantons. The aim of eGovernment is to develop the range of electronic services offered by the authorities at all federal levels. The focus of this strategy is on electronic business transactions with the private sector, the public and between the authorities[11].

Cooperation in eGovernment, not only between administrative units but also between the federal levels, is considered to be of strategic importance. Synergies should be utilised, thus achieving efficiency gains. The principle of "develop once, use many times" is not only applicable to ICT systems and applications but also to data.

With this aim in mind in the area of eGovernment, the Federal Council has defined the following priorities for action which are relevant to OGD:

– further development and implementation of the eGovernment Strategy Switzerland.
– provision of the Confederation's internal (and, where possible, external) processes on a fully electronic basis.

Open standards and the possibility of forwarding allow investments to be optimally exploited. In this context, OGD goes beyond the area of eGovernment in that the reuse of existing data is not linked to specific business processes.

5.2   Compliance with data protection

Switzerland's OGD strategy must fully take into account the regulations on the protection of personal data. Data-protection regulations must be observed in the planning and development phase of OGD projects. Even if typically in the case of OGD projects aggregated and anonymised data is made available for reuse, data

---

[10]   Strategy of the Federal Council for an Information Society in Switzerland. Bern, March 2012, p. 11.
[11]   Federal Council (2007): eGovernment Strategy Switzerland. Approved by the Federal Council on 24 January 2007. Bern, p. 6 (www.egovernment.ch > E-Government Switzerland > Basis)

protection principles must be taken into account. This includes the authorities checking the consequences this might have for data protection before they make data publicly available for reuse.

Technical and organisational measures must ensure that disclosure of personal data is prevented. Aggregated and anonymised data should not make it possible to work out the identity of natural or legal persons.

5.3 Cooperation

5.3.1 With cantons and communes

The Confederation's cooperation with the cantons and communes in releasing and providing official data is key to implementing OGD in Switzerland.

This strategy serves as the basis for the Confederation's cooperation with the cantons and the communes in the area of OGD. The cantons and the communes have been invited to implement this strategy in their area in coordination with the Confederation.

The required concepts, instruments and expertise should be developed and used jointly in collaboration with OGD users. The framework and rules for cooperation will be jointly agreed in a cooperation model.

5.3.2 With other institutions in the public sector

Cooperation with other bodies and organisations in the preparation of data is desired. In accordance with Directive 2013/37/EU[12], it will also be examined to what extent direct involvement of public institutions will be useful in the interests of the economic and sustainable use of their data. Agreements on cooperation will be drawn up jointly.

---

[12] Directive 2013/37/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 amending Directive 2003/98/EC on the reuse of public sector information, OJ L 175 of 27.6.2013, p. 1

6   Implementation

6.1   Principles

Implementation of Switzerland's OGD strategy is based on the following principles:

P1   OGD as a guiding principle

Official data is created and edited within the scope of a public mandate. In principle the public has a legitimate interest to know the context, to obtain access to the data and to be able to reuse it. Publication according to OGD should thus apply as a guiding principle for all appropriate official data so long as it can be published in line with existing legal bases. Where this is not the case, amending the legal bases will be examined. Provisions on data protection, copyright and information security should not be violated and should not in principle be changed.

P2   Open and reusable official data

Publication of official data should allow the public and the administration itself to obtain the greatest possible benefit from the reuse of data.

- *legally*: data use should occur under terms of use which are as free, consistent and understandable as possible.
- *financially*: in principle, exemption from fees. In particular, commercial reuse by the private sector should in future be exempt from charges.
- *technically*: data is provided in machine-readable form, the description is understandable and appropriate and it must be available on a permanent basis. Open formats should be used as much as possible.

P3   Easily accessible official data.

Official data should be published without undue delay and be findable and made accessible via a central directory. Very often the value of published data is to be found in its use above and beyond organisational limits. This requires the establishment and operation of a corresponding technical infrastructure and coordinated publication of data with the following elements:

- a central publication platform (OGD portal with metadata directory) which is jointly used by the authorities at all levels and decentralised organisations although the responsibility for providing the data rests with the competent authorities;
- a standardised procedure for the publication and provision of data;
- a metadata format which describes the main aspects of the data set (title, brief description, author, etc.) and is in line with international standards;
- a data inventory and a national data release plan.

Using and dealing with openly accessible official data is unusual for the authorities themselves as well as for companies, the media, non-governmental organisations and private individuals and poses challenges to all of those involved. For sustainable use of open official data, close cooperation is required with the users. To ensure that the potential is realised and risks are identified at an early stage, the following aspects should be promoted:

  – establishing an open-data culture in the Federal Administration (incentives through raising awareness and assistance for implementation)

  – strengthening skills in dealing with data (e. g. collection, analysis, administration, interpretation, interlinkage; data literacy)

  – cooperation with the open-data community at the national and international levels.

6.2   Measures

To achieve these objectives and based on these principles the following measures will be implemented in cooperation with the administrative units concerned and OGD users:

Release of official data

M1   Examination and amendment of the legal framework

The legal framework for releasing Federal Administration data as OGD will be examined with the competent authorities and will be recorded in a guide for the administration. A corresponding framework will be drawn up in particular on regulating the liability of the Confederation and protecting copyright. Where necessary, corresponding amendments to legislation will be prepared.

M2   Data release procedure

The publication of official data as OGD will occur gradually. Together with OGD users and the administrative authorities concerned, recommendations for releasing selected data sets will be drawn up periodically to develop the OGD offering.[13] The data owners will conduct an examination of the financial, legal and organisational framework. In doing so, they will receive direct advisory support and corresponding resources. Should the examination indicate that release is not possible under the

---

[13]   For example, the opendata.ch association has identified added value which is evident in the following data categories: procurement data, the business register, data on public and private transport, data on Switzerland's energy system, budgets and accounts of the administrative units, health data (e. g. quality indicators such as infection rates or operation successes, cost indicators, etc.), data from research, demographic data on migration and crime figures.

circumstances, solutions will be sought jointly. Finally it is the responsibility of the administrative units to decide whether or not and when their data sets will be published. In the initial phase, preference should be given to the publication of in principle unproblematic data sets[14].

M3   Data release plan

Based on the responses from the administrative units within the scope of the release procedure (cf. M2), a data release plan will be drawn up. This will indicate whether or not and by when the publication and provision of a specific data set will occur.

M4   Setting up an inventory of the Confederation's data sets

A central directory of Federal Administration data sets which are appropriate for OGD should gradually be drawn up and published. This inventory is a basis for further development and planning of the OGD offering.

M5   Examination of the fee-charging policy

Imposition of charges for the use of official data will gradually be abolished. The existing legal bases will be examined and where required modified to enable the free provision of OGD and the imposition of marginal costs for individual additional services in connection with freely accessible data. An overarching concept to compensate for the loss of revenue will be drawn up. On this basis, the administrative units concerned will prepare corresponding draft decrees.

To distinguish between OGD and customer-specific, individual services, general criteria will be drawn up for the Federal Administration. Based on this, the individual federal bodies will clarify which data of theirs will come under OGD and should thereby be available free of charge.

Coordinated publication and provision of official data

M6   Development of the OGD portal

An OGD portal which allows the joint, user-friendly publication of data from the Confederation, the cantons and the communes as well as other institutions from the public sector must be developed and be put into permanent operation. The Confederation's OGD portal has already proved itself in pilot operation. A national portal should thus build on the experience gathered in the pilot portal not just in terms of functions but also in relation to the data offering. The provision of data should, where appropriate, continue in the tried and tested structures of the individual specialist fields outside the OGD portal (e.g. geodata).

M7   Provision of tools and instruments for the provision and publication of data

The federal units should be provided with support in the publication and provision of their data as OGD. Standardised publication tools and instruments for quality control will be made available to the data owners.

---

[14]   Data considered as unproblematic is data which can clearly be published and requires no particular additional work.

M8   Selection and definition of the OGD standards

A standardised metadata format as well as data formats and access functions for the provision of OGD should be defined and implemented by involving OGD producers and users.

M9   Drawing up uniform terms of use

A usage model which is as standardised as possible for the Federal Administration's open official data is being drawn up (for any required modifications to legislation, please see M1). This model should be used by as many cantons and communes as possible.

M10   Drawing up an OGD cooperation model

For the cooperation of the Confederation, cantons and communes, an OGD cooperation model including a guide to the use of the OGD portal is being developed and implemented.[15] Participation of institutions from the public sector is being examined with the involvement of OGD users.

Establishing an open-data culture

M11   Dialogue with OGD users

Regular dialogue with the users (private sector, academia and civil society) is being fostered to optimise the data on offer, to develop standards and tools and to establish best practice.

M12   Acquainting the public with the data on offer

Measures are being taken to make the public aware of the data on offer and its purpose. Skills in using OGD including using the technical tools is being provided by the competent bodies in an appropriate manner to interested OGD users. The OGD community has a key role to play here.

M13   Evaluation of the impact of OGD

The authorities will evaluate the impact of OGD on political opinion, political participation, economic development and administrative processes.

6.3   Organisation

Central implementation organisation (OGD Switzerland project)

The initiatives in the area of OGD (throughout Switzerland) will be coordinated in the OGD Switzerland project[16] in consultation with the administrative units

---

[15] A good example of this is "Cooperation OGD Austria": www.data.gv.at > background information
[16] Cf. www.egovernment.ch > Implementation > Focal points > Open Government Data

concerned and the implementation of the support measures will be ensured and monitored.
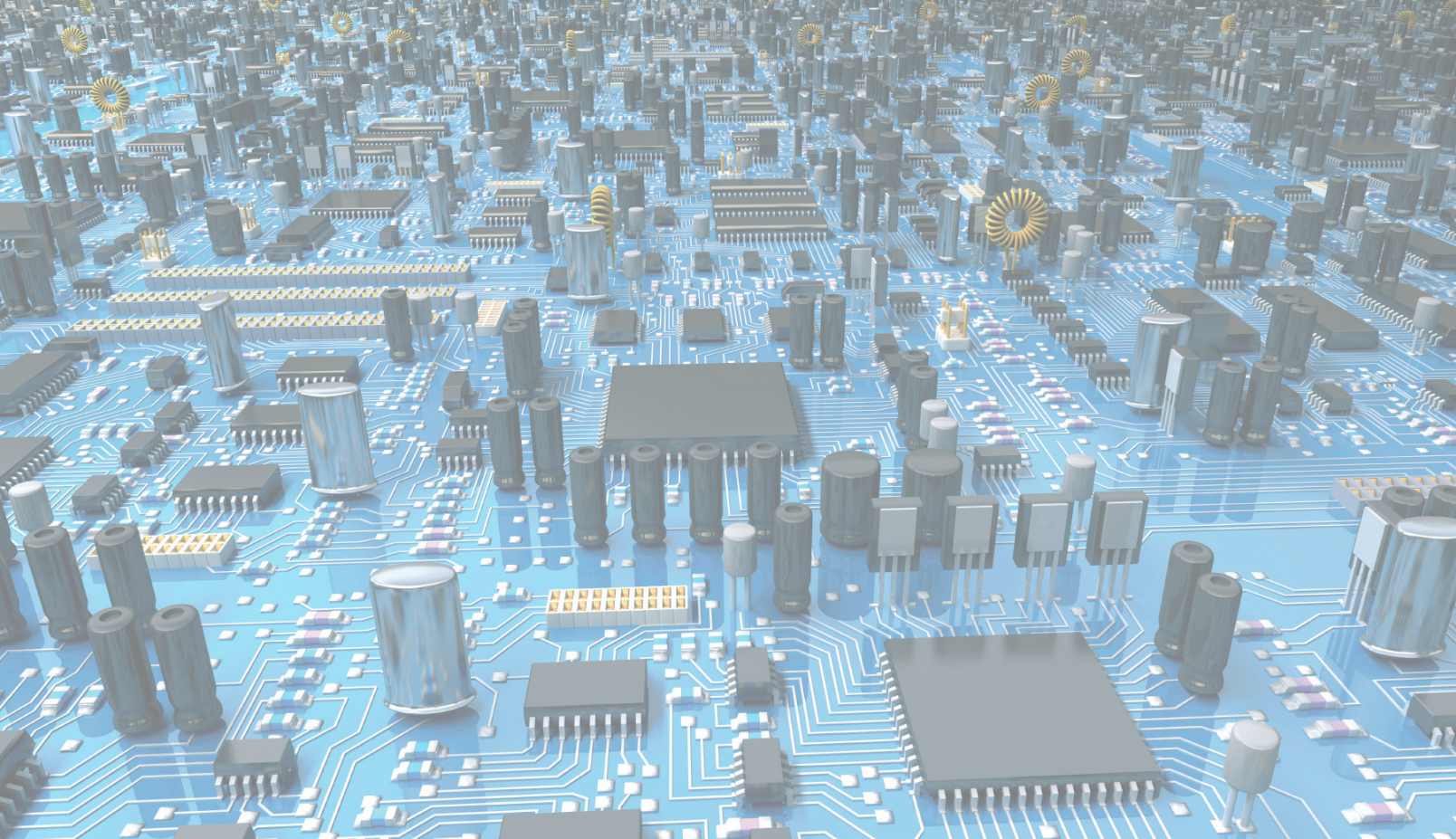
The project is also a platform for dialogue with OGD users.

The federal levels, civil society, the private sector and academia should be represented in the project organisation.

Decentralised implementation organisation (individual administrative units)

The individual administrative units are responsible for publication-related decision-making and planning and for the provision of OGD in their organisations. In doing so, they will be supported by the central project organisation, in particular:

 – in drawing up an inventory (clarifying the scope),
 – in dialogue with OGD users,
 – in publication and provision (OGD portal),
 – in the communication activities,
 – in the standardisation work,
 – in drawing up compensatory solutions, and

in examining the legislation (carrying out amendments if need be).