

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY PROVIDUS

Leading public policy think-tank in Latvia since 2002



PROVIDUS
CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

While 2018 was a year of change for PROVIDUS, 2019 saw us reinforcing our position, expanding our team and working on accomplishing our mission at full capacity by the end of the year.

The mission and five strategic objectives of PROVIDUS guide us in our work, helping us set priorities and decide on the causes worth fighting for.

2019 was a good year for us.

We were heard by decision-makers in 2019: the initiatives and analyses of PROVIDUS are to a significant extent the reason why courts get feedback from the visitors and process participants, why Latvia's political parties are becoming stronger and hopefully more responsible, why future municipal assemblies will be more motivated to involve the general public in their work, why Latvia's official institutions will try the socially responsible procurement model well proven in other EU countries very soon, and why more state and EU funding will be awarded to implement meaningful ideas to boost social cohesion.

We experimented a lot in 2019. It was the first year that we talked with our fellow citizens in supermarkets. It was the first year that we organised simultaneous events in multiple languages. We once again revamped the principles for making the pre-election voting advice application.

In 2019, PROVIDUS continued working on issues that take courage: from the problems of asylum-seekers, to cooperation with all kinds of political parties and also of disenfranchised social groups. We did not shy away from technically complex issues that are impossible or nearly impossible to explain to the general public: from attempts to improve building safety regulations to Latvia's capacity to project influence in the many institutions of the European Union.

We did not succeed in everything, obviously. The 17 years since the creation of PROVIDUS have amply shown that change often takes not only perseverance, but also time. The most important groundwork we made in 2019 concerns the things that affect everybody, such as promoting the availability of housing, reducing public apathy, working towards a more intelligent and robust migration policy.

Iveta Kažoka
Head of PROVIDUS
February 2020



PROMOTING BETTER GOVERNANCE PRACTICES AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

One of PROVIDUS' strategic goals is to help Latvia become one of the best-governed countries in the European Union. Every year, PROVIDUS sets up its priorities in promoting better governance in order to achieve this goal. The 2019 priority was the establishment of effective consultative mechanisms for cooperation between municipal governments, the national government, parliament and civil society.

1. More success in consultations with the public on the level of municipalities

In 2019, PROVIDUS enjoyed its first opportunity to conduct a detailed study of the ways the public can participate in the work of Latvian municipal governments, and to help them become more responsive to the needs of their local residents. PROVIDUS made municipal governments a priority because of analysis it conducted in 2016–2017, which showed that compared to the ministries or the national parliament, municipal council members are less active in involving public or civic organisations in their work.

In order to encourage the meaningful involvement of the public, PROVIDUS identified more than 30 examples of best practices implemented by Latvia's municipal governments, and asked representatives of those towns and municipalities to share the practices at an international conference organised for this purpose.

Additionally, PROVIDUS paid particular attention to promoting a mechanism for involving the general public that has become popular all over the world: participatory budgeting, which makes it possible for local residents to allocate a part of their municipality's budget. PROVIDUS arranged workshops on this topic for Latvia's municipal governments, particularly helping Riga and Gulbene: the cities that undertook to involve the public in the allocation of their budgets in 2020.

PROVIDUS also supported the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, helping it prepare a conceptual report on the development of uniform regulations in the field of participatory budgeting: the report drafted by the ministry was largely based on the analysis offered by PROVIDUS.

Furthermore, PROVIDUS participated in the hearings of the parliament's State and Municipal Government Committee, defending the idea of introducing municipal referendums in Latvia, and helping create reasonable regulations to manage them.

In 2020, PROVIDUS plans to continue working on helping Latvia's general public get a broader selection of tools for participation on the municipal level of government. In its research, PROVIDUS will particularly focus on developing a long-term strategy for involving the public in the work of municipal governments, as well as other planning documents; PROVIDUS will continue to support the idea that the residents of Latvia's municipalities can participate in local referendums, allocate a part of their municipal budget, and to encourage municipal council members to assess the advantages of quality advice.

2. More success consulting with the public on the national level

In addition to its work with municipalities, in 2019, PROVIDUS devoted much effort to improve public participation options on the national level. PROVIDUS set two objectives in relation to this, intending to: 1) Strengthen Latvia's most active public benefit NGOs that can and want to engage in civil dialogue with the government; 2) Support the national civil dialogue platforms.

In order to bolster Latvia's most active public benefit NGOs, PROVIDUS conducted an extensive series of courses in conjunction with the Latvian Civic Alliance (LPA, an umbrella organisation bringing together civic entities in Latvia); the courses included information on how to defend one's interests in parliament and the cabinet of ministers, and how to organise meaningful discussions and protests. PROVIDUS also arranged workshops for organisations representing the NGO sector on national civil dialogue platforms. The main topics of these workshops included: the image and problems of public benefit organisations, coordination of interests in the context of national development planning, NGO sector priorities for 2020. These workshops made it possible to join forces, and to define and protect the shared interests of the sector more effectively than if each organisation were to work on its own.

During 2019, PROVIDUS, joined by other organisations and representatives of government bodies, continued to support the 2018 plan for improving the current national civil dialogue platform, especially the Council for Implementation of the Memorandum of Cooperation between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet. Fulfilling this plan will let civic organisations maintain a much more effective dialogue with the government (by creating mechanisms that enable continuous work on the matters important for developing civic society as part of the Memorandum Council and strengthening the ability of umbrella NGO's in bringing together and coordinating the opinions of various NGO's). The new Memorandum Council model is likely to launch in 2020.

In 2020, PROVIDUS will continue supporting the idea of a better civic dialogue platform, with the priority on work with ministries, convincing them to improve their practices in public discussions. PROVIDUS wishes for ministries to consult the general public before they draft regulations more often, and that such consultations meet the world's best standards.

In 2019, PROVIDUS conducted a pilot study for expanding civil participation options in parliament, presenting its results to parliamentary committee NGO coordinators. In 2020, PROVIDUS plans to discuss the possibility of expanding the options for civic participation with the chairmen of the parliamentary committees, and to produce a series of video interviews with them covering the topics of how citizens can help parliament make better decisions.

3. Promoting better governance

Although this topic received less attention than the matters of public participation, in 2019, PROVIDUS was still able to handle other issues important for improving governance in Latvia.

PROVIDUS continued its work in the supervisory councils that help the School of Public Administration and the State Chancellery improve the curricula for training public officials, emphasizing that the courses must be as practical as possible and have lasting value, and that one should not shy away from experiments with completely new teaching methods. In 2019, PROVIDUS was invited to participate in the Public Council of the Latvian State Audit Office for the first time, where the think-tank consulted the State Audit Office on some of the audits it conducted. PROVIDUS plans to continue its collaboration with the State Audit Office in 2020, with more detailed research and discussions on the matters associated with the responsibility and liability of public officials.

PROVIDUS also continued its work on KNAB's Public Consultative Council, stressing the necessity to renew the agency's focus on the strategic aspects of the prevention of corruption, in addition to its investigative activities.

In 2020, PROVIDUS' priorities in the field of better governance will be as follows:

- 1) Supporting the development of a mid-term policy planning document for the prevention of corruption by KNAB: it is important for us that this document is both ambitious and realistic;
- 2) Supporting the national parliament in developing a reasonable law regulating lobbying;
- 3) Finding solutions for the most severe governance problems in Latvia: the lack of analytical capacity both in the government and in parliament, the poor coordination and communication of important reforms, and the lack of information.

Additionally, within the scope of its expertise, PROVIDUS will participate in the development of a new municipal government law, and will work hard to ensure the implementation of the ideas for opening publicly important data proposed by PROVIDUS in 2019 (the ideas were included in the fourth Latvian Open Governance Partnership Plan).



STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTIES

Supporting political parties has been a priority of PROVIDUS for a number of years. While vital for democracy, these organisations suffer from an extremely low level of trust in Latvia, about 6%.

As we were developing the 'Partiju šķirotava' (Party Sorter) survey for comparing political parties before the 2019 European Parliament elections, we were happy to find out that Latvia's political parties had finally become aware of the need to become members of the parties of the European Parliament. PROVIDUS has participated and still participates in the European-level discussion about the parties of the European Parliament and the ways of strengthening them, encouraging Latvia's parties to join other European parties closest to them.

In 2019, analysis previously prepared by PROVIDUS was used as the basis for the Ministry of Justice's proposal to significantly increase the state funding for Latvia's political parties, bringing it closer to the funding that parties receive in Estonia and Lithuania. Although in adopting the new party funding model, parliament largely followed the arguments previously cited by PROVIDUS, it unfortunately did not include two significant proposals for the new party funding model: 1) introduce basic funding (to cover administrative and research costs) not only for the parties already in parliament, but also for the parties that gained at least 2% of the votes; 2) the party funding model must include a mechanism to motivate parties to increase the number of their members. Currently, Latvia's biggest parties are several times smaller than their counterparts in neighboring countries.

In 2019, PROVIDUS helped elaborate the new party funding model in the aspects pertaining to the funding of party blocs and alliances, as well as the categories of expenses permissible for parties. PROVIDUS also urged the parliament to assess the effects of the new party funding model on political competition, especially in municipal elections. In 2020, PROVIDUS plans to announce a discussion about making it possible for active citizens to join municipal elections as part of a voter association, without founding a political party.

We will continue our work on bolstering political parties in 2020. PROVIDUS plans to collaborate with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Autumn 2020 in organising an international conference concerning the needs of modern parties, and we will try to make it so that the achievements of Latvian parties and politicians can be nominated for the international Innovation in Politics award.



MAKING LATVIA'S VOICE MORE POWERFUL IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

2019 was a year of elections into the European Parliament. One of PROVIDUS' strategic goals is to foster the influence of Latvia in the European Union and give reasons of Latvian citizens to believe in their and Latvian representatives' meaning on the scale of Europe.

With this purpose in mind, in 2019, PROVIDUS experimented with a new method for approaching the general public for the first time, by organising conversations at supermarkets in Latvia's regions (in Liepāja, Talsi, Rēzekne, Daugavpils). The Maxima supermarket chain provided its premises to PROVIDUS researchers, so that they could approach shoppers and find out their opinions about the European Union and the most important matters related to Europe. The answers to those questions given by the shoppers made it possible for PROVIDUS to formulate questions for 'Partiju šķirotava' (Party Sorter), a web-based testing tool for choosing political parties before the European Parliament election. The tool was published on the lsm.lv social media outlet in Latvian and Russian, allowing its users to compare their answers and opinions not only to those of specific parties, but to the parties' lists of candidates.

Furthermore, PROVIDUS conducted extensive analysis of the election programmes of the parties, arranging and managing courses providing important information for working at the European Parliament to party candidates, journalists and civil activists. The organisation set three 2020 priorities in bolstering the influence of Latvia in the European Union.

1) In 2019, PROVIDUS already started working on ensuring that the Latvian public would be extensively represented in the events of the Conference on the Future of Europe planned by the EU leaders for the coming years. Latvia has gained much experience and set good groundwork as part of the previous Future of Europe series of discussions, where the consultation format developed in conjunction with PROVIDUS was declared to be one of the OECD innovation in governance success stories. PROVIDUS still uses every opportunity to remind Latvian and European public officials about the conclusions made during those consultations.

2) In 2020, PROVIDUS intends to arrange a discussion with parliament for increasing its capacity in European matters. A book prepared by European think-tanks will be published in Spring 2020, and it will include PROVIDUS' comparative analysis on how to boost the strength of national parliaments in EU affairs, and PROVIDUS would like the Latvian parliament to introduce at least some of its recommendations.

3) In 2020, PROVIDUS also intends to collect and promote at least a few success stories of Latvian citizens managing to affect decisions taken on the level of the European Union.



INTELLIGENT MIGRATION POLICY

In recent years, one of PROVIDUS' key priorities has been the collection of data, the analysis of policies and the development of proposals in the field of migration processes.

The special expertise of PROVIDUS includes the field of integrating migrants and refugees. In relation to this, in 2019, PROVIDUS:

- Published comparative analysis of the integration of refugees in 14 European countries, including Latvia;
- Organised a conference about the lessons learnt in handling the European asylum system, with the most successful integration strategies;
- Presented guidelines and organised courses for including the principles of tolerance and mutual respect in integration support activities;
- Conducted an assessment of customer satisfaction with the early integration measures financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

Working on refugee-related matters, in 2019, PROVIDUS worked to prevent recipients of international aid from becoming homeless. Furthermore, as part of its activities intended to support various interests and to educate the public, PROVIDUS demonstrated what intelligent migration policy may look like, and cited the reasons for why it is not advisable to let foreign students work full-time.

In 2020, PROVIDUS will continue with the activities it has started, and will offer its advice based on earlier research to the official institutions that are involved in the provision of mandatory integration courses to third-country citizens.



INCLUSIVE, COHESIVE, POPULISM-RESISTANT SOCIETY

Building a cohesive and inclusive society has been one of PROVIDUS' priorities since its creation in 2002. A public opinion poll ordered by PROVIDUS in 2018, after the parliamentary elections, showed that a part of Latvia's population feel offended by the Latvian state, and the spread of populism and political apathy could be largely explained by the stratification of society.

In view of the fact that Latvia's most important documents in the field of social cohesion (the National Development Plan, and the new National Identity, Civic Society and Integration Policy Guidelines) would be drafted in 2019–2020, PROVIDUS conducted extensive consultations with the residents of Liepāja (in conjunction with the Latvian Civic Alliance) as early as in March 2019, in order to find out their experience and recommendations for making Latvia's society more cohesive.

Representatives of the institutions developing both the policy planning documents (the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre and the Ministry of Culture) were present at these discussions as observers. These discussions were conducted in three languages, Latvian, Russian and English, and were deliberately chosen to take place outside Riga. During the subsequent months, PROVIDUS participated in the development of both the policy planning documents, successfully convincing state institutions to introduce the experiences and recommendations of the general public in them. In the context of drafting the National Development Plan, PROVIDUS prioritised measures to make Latvia's society more cohesive, to promote mutual trust, and to support the civil society. PROVIDUS explained the reasons for why these issues are integral to Latvia's development in the future, not only to the creators of the plan, but also to parliament.

Even though most of the recommendations proposed by PROVIDUS have been taken into account, in 2020, PROVIDUS intends to continue helping improve new documents and to find new ways for decision-makers to find out about the opinions of those representatives of the general public in Latvia who, until relatively not long ago, did not know the Latvian language well enough, but who want to integrate in Latvia's society over time. In 2020, PROVIDUS will arrange discussions for newcomers in Latvia's society in Russian and English. PROVIDUS will also continue its efforts to combat ethnic stereotypes and discrimination, and will pay more attention to gender equality, especially to gender segregation in certain professions, and to possible ways of tackling it.

Whenever possible, PROVIDUS will also help strengthen Latvia's civil society, sharing its expertise in improving the public benefit company legislation, as well as in providing government support to associations and civil activism. PROVIDUS is a member of a network of international organisations that work to support the civil society in all of Europe, partially financed by EU funds.

In 2019, PROVIDUS shared its NGO experience in Latvia monitoring the 2018 parliamentary election (protecting it against disinformation, interference by other countries, and attempting to assess the impact of populism) with organisations and think-tanks in other countries, published a report covering the topic, and participated in an international conference.

In 2019, organisations from other countries approached PROVIDUS multiple times asking it to become their national partner in organising discussions about the issues of regulating the internet and its future; however, PROVIDUS still does not have sufficient capacity to cover this topic.



SOCIAL POLICY

In 2019, PROVIDUS significantly expanded its activities in the fields associated with social policy. The scope of topics covered by PROVIDUS has changed over time: for example, not too long ago, PROVIDUS worked in the fields of youth crime, probation, victim rights.

At the same time, PROVIDUS is very active in the regulation and support of social business practices, and the think-tank is one of key partners of national bodies and international organisations in evaluating Latvia's achievements or developing recommendations.

In 2019, PROVIDUS began to conduct its expert reviews in other fields of social policy, with a particular focus on reducing inequality, on the availability of housing, and on the matters of debt among private individuals. PROVIDUS organises brainstorming sessions for experts in social policy, as well as other events and conferences, and has developed policy proposals.

In 2020, PROVIDUS plans to make specific proposals for the availability of housing, to analyse the main health indicators in Latvia, and to help national institutions to introduce a new approach to public procurement: socially responsible tenders.



COURTS AND JUSTICE

In 2019, PROVIDUS expanded on its previous groundwork in the field of justice and improving the work of courts. The Ministry of Justice adopted the recommendations of PROVIDUS for the government’s plan of action pertaining to the availability of court rulings, and their partial deanonymisation. The work on completing the plan of action began in 2019, and will end in 2021.

In this regard, PROVIDUS drafted an informative report about the anonymisation of court rulings, submitting it to justice officials in charge, and developed recommendations for the types of court rulings that should be freely available on the internet. In 2020–2021, PROVIDUS will continue to promote the availability of these rulings and the prevention of anonymisation of some court rulings.

In 2019, PROVIDUS helped the Court Administration develop and pilot a survey for assessing the work of courts, to make it possible to understand the extent to which the participants of court proceedings are satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of the work performed by courts. In 2020, PROVIDUS will provide its support in assessing the results of this pilot survey, making such surveys a regular and normal component of managing courts; PROVIDUS will also conduct a pilot survey intended for solicitors and prosecutors, in order to discover and better understand the improvements that need to be introduced in the work of Latvia’s courts. Furthermore, PROVIDUS will endeavour to find resources to carefully analyse some of the data about the work of courts available to the Court Administration, making it possible to develop recommendations for speeding up court proceedings and to identify those national and municipal institutions that spend time on lawsuits even when it is evident that the ruling would not be in their favor.

In 2019, PROVIDUS began the groundwork for collaborating with law-enforcement agencies, helping the School of Public Administration organise a two-day international conference about the difficult situations that occur in communication between investigators, prosecutors and journalists. If PROVIDUS manages to find additional resources, improving the speed and quality of criminal proceedings will become another field of its activity in the coming years. In Latvia, this area still lacks the attention of think-tanks that analyse it and make policy proposals.



CONSTRUCTION REGULATIONS AND SAFETY IN CONSTRUCTION

In 2019, PROVIDUS also conducted its annual assessment about what Latvia's official authorities had learnt from the Zolitūde Disaster and whether they had corrected any deficiencies in the construction safety procedures.

PROVIDUS also renewed its interest-representation efforts to remind public officials of things not yet done when the Ministry of Economics or the parliament are working on the Construction Law. PROVIDUS intends to continue this work into 2020, also collaborating with top experts in construction to develop a concept of what a construction process should be like if it is to comply with the world's best quality standards.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Budget

The income of PROVIDUS comes from three main sources: 1) projects; 2) grants; 3) business activities (consulting). The projects awarded to PROVIDUS as part of tenders take up the biggest share, though the income the organisation gains from consulting brings in the money it can spend freely. The consulting involves preparing reports for the needs of international institutions, governmental bodies and private enterprises (e.g. European Commission, UNHCR, OECD), moderating and hosting events, and training courses. For more information about how PROVIDUS experts conduct training courses, please visit the website of PROVIDUS.

The total income of PROVIDUS in 2019 was EUR 305,725, while total costs were EUR 263,877. The income exceeding the costs can be mostly attributed to the several-year grant (approximately EUR 22,000) awarded by the Open Society Institute for expanding the international activities of the organisation.

In 2019, the biggest project providers and clients of PROVIDUS were:

- a. The embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Latvia. - EUR 120,000 for two major projects: a project to promote participation in Latvia's local governments, and an NGO training project (in conjunction with the Latvian Civil Alliance);
- b. The Institute of Public Affairs (funding by the European Commission) provided EUR 55,437 for an asylum-seeker and refugee integration research project;
- c. The European Parliament provided EUR 33,530 as part of a project/grant for discussions and courses about Europe and the European Parliament;
- d. The Open Society Institute awarded a two-year 'New Executives Fund' grant of EUR 22,460 to internationalise the activities of PROVIDUS;
- e. The Society Integration Foundation (NGO foundation) is a project supporting interests in the fields of activity of PROVIDUS. Amount: EUR 16,352.

Furthermore, in 2019, PROVIDUS had more than 20 smaller clients and project providers.

PROVIDUS' plans for 2020

For 2020, PROVIDUS intends to conduct a series of strategic planning events concerning the development and priorities of PROVIDUS in the future, inviting its key partners in government administration, NGOs and among the general public to join these discussions. Additionally, PROVIDUS intends to talk more about itself on an international level, in order to find new partners, long-term projects, and to expand its activities.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Team

By the end of 2018, the team of PROVIDUS included 7 full-time employees and 5 associated researchers. Its work was assessed and inspired by its 25 members and the four people in its council. Inna Šteinbuka took the position as council chairwoman.



Agnese Frīdenberga
senior policy analyst in
NGO policy, social
entrepreneurship and
social procurement



Gatis Litvins
associate policy analyst in
judicial policies



Līga Stafecka
senior policy analyst in
anti-corruption and good
governance



Agnese Lāce
senior policy analyst in
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Ilona Kronberga
associate policy analyst
in prisons and juvenile
justice



Raimonds Skuja
finance director



Andris Šuvajevs
policy analyst in migration
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Indra Mangule
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Iveta Kažoka
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Valts Kalniņš
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