

## Media freedom and the Open Government Partnership (OGP)

Media freedom and open government are underpinned by the shared belief in open and inclusive public dialogue as a mechanism for more accountable and thus better governance. A free, independent media can enable and facilitate informed public debate, serve as an outlet for citizen perspectives, and act as a check on government power and corruption. Open government reforms - like the ones OGP members have made - meanwhile help establish the foundations for a free press to thrive.

Open government reforms such as access to information and open data laws have long been critical for the work of journalists and demonstrate how journalists play a vital role in exposing and fighting corruption such as in the Panama Papers and Paradise Papers cases, and the more recent Green Blood investigations. Journalists are also increasingly involved in anti-corruption efforts such as reforms targeted at ending anonymous companies through the creation of open and public beneficial ownership registers, or advocating for accessible, open data on public procurement. Transparency International and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project's Global Anti-Corruption Consortium is one example of an effort to bring local journalists and anti-corruption activists together for policy advocacy on illicit financial flows. Within OGP, journalists have been a key ally and partner across key areas of our work. For instance,

- In the US, the government worked directly with investigative journalists to build a new federal spending data website. As a result of input from journalists, two parallel sites - one for the general public and one for investigators - were launched.
- In France, in an effort to improve citizens' access to public information on elected officials, the government committed to consulting journalists and researchers on how it can best meet user expectations for the presentation of data on public officials' asset and interest declarations.
- Indonesia committed to improving public procurement transparency and standardizing procurement data. Civil society organizations, including the Alliance of Independent Journalists, will support the government's efforts.

While digital platforms have provided a space for dialogue on policy and government business, they have created the need to develop new norms around access, safety and accountability. Without norms, digital platforms remain susceptible to misuse of data, unchecked online harassment, disinformation, and manipulation of democratic processes that may rely on these platforms. While still an emerging area of work, some OGP members have begun to tackle issues related to the changing digital environment and related adverse impacts. For instance,

- On data rights and privacy, Australia committed to "build and maintain public trust to address concerns about data sharing and release," including to "improve privacy and personal information protections in using and sharing data."
- On Internet access and control, Italy adopted a commitment on expanding its Charter of Internet Rights. These measures included efforts such as encouraging the public and officials to recognise the links between online and offline rights, including basic civil liberties such as assembly.

Stronger policy frameworks need to be developed to protect journalists and their work, upholding and supporting fundamental freedom of expression rights and creating frameworks for whistleblower protection laws. These frameworks must protect journalists from attacks or threats of attacks, as well as fully ensuring journalists' rights under the law (and in the courts) like the ones outlined in the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) and the European Court of Human Rights' [case law](#). Among OGP members, according to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, journalists face harassment in roughly four of every five countries. And over two-thirds of OGP countries face moderate to severe constraints to a free and independent media, according to Freedom House. Some OGP members have begun using their action plans to make commitments on strengthening the enabling environment for media freedom. While the record on implementation for each of these differs, they are examples of issues that countries have looked to address through the OGP platform. For instance,

- Croatia committed to strengthening protection mechanisms for journalists who speak out against censorship



- o Ireland, in line with international recommendations, included a commitment on the proper treatment and protection of whistleblowers in the workplace
- o Mexico committed to developing a web page that provides information about resources allocated for the protection of journalists and human rights defenders
- o Montenegro committed to establishing a task force to look into past and unresolved murders of journalists

Finally, open government reforms can push back against media capture by governments or economic interests that distort public debate and create barriers to reform. This includes reforming institutions and legal and regulatory frameworks that govern the media sector. To this end,

- o Mongolia committed to adopting a new media freedom law based on international standards to protect journalistic confidentiality, as well as amending the National Broadcasting Law to protect the media from political influence and promote its independence
- o Serbia committed to improving the legislative framework for the media

### How OGP can support efforts to advance national media reforms

- **OGP can translate global pledges to country action, providing accountability for implementation, and involving local civil society and journalists' groups in the co-creation process.** OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism provides an accountability framework to track progress on implementation. Further, the OGP action plan process provides a domestic platform to work with local civil society and journalists' groups to advance the global commitments on media freedom into concrete policy measures. Journalists have also been part of co-creation processes or have supported the implementation of commitments in Croatia, Argentina, Armenia, Nigeria, and the Philippines, among others, on issues of media freedom and other open government reforms.
- **OGP brings together a coalition of reformers - from countries across the G7, G20, and beyond** - creating a coalition for action on media freedom across diverse geographical communities and stakeholder groups. The reformers from across the 79 countries and 20 local members of OGP represent a dynamic community who can be mobilized around this critical set of issues.
- **OGP can help to effectively highlight media freedom as a cross-sector advocacy issue by linking to activists working on areas ranging from access to information and open data to other areas such as public services and gender equality.** The domestic OGP co-creation process in different countries brings together groups working across a diverse set of issues. The OGP platform serves as a silo-busting effort - spotlighting issues across communities working on other policy areas, who are also involved in the national OGP processes. This can help get broader buy-ins for the media freedom agenda from different policy communities.

