

Independent Reporting Mechanism

Action Plan Review:
Tunisia 2021-2023

Open
Government
Partnership



Independent
Reporting
Mechanism

Introduction

Starting in January 2021 the IRM began rolling out the new products that resulted from the IRM Refresh process.¹ The new approach builds on the lessons after more than 350 independent, evidence-based and robust assessments conducted by the IRM and the inputs from the OGP community. The IRM seeks to put forth simple, timely, fit for purpose and results-oriented products that contribute to learning and accountability in key moments of the OGP action plan cycle.

The new IRM products are:

1. **Co-Creation Brief** - brings in lessons from previous action plans, serves a learning purpose, and informs co-creation planning and design. This product is scheduled to roll out in late 2021, beginning with countries co-creating 2022-2024 action plans.
2. **Action Plan Review** - an independent, quick, technical review of the characteristics of the action plan and the strengths and challenges the IRM identifies to inform a stronger implementation process. This product is scheduled to roll out in early 2021 beginning with 2020-2022 action plans. Action Plan Reviews are delivered 3-4 months after the action plan is submitted.
3. **Results Report** - an overall implementation assessment that focuses on policy-level results and how changes happen. It also checks compliance with OGP rules and informs accountability and longer-term learning. This product is scheduled to roll out in a transition phase in early 2022, beginning with 2019-2021 Action Plans ending implementation on August 31, 2021. Results Report are delivered up to four months after the end of the implementation cycle.

This product consists of an IRM review of Tunisia's 2021-2023 action plan. The action plan is made up of 13 of commitments. This review emphasizes its analysis on the strength of the action plan to contribute to implementation and results. For the commitment-by-commitment data see Annex 1. For details regarding the methodology and indicators used by the IRM for this Action Plan Review, see section IV. Methodology and IRM Indicators.

¹ For more details regarding the IRM Refresh, visit <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/process/accountability/about-the-irm/irm-refresh/>

Table of Contents

Section I: Overview of the 2021-2023 Action Plan	4
Section II: Promising Commitments in Tunisia's 2021-2023 Action Plan	6
Section III: Methodology and IRM Indicators	22
Annex 1: Commitment by Commitment Data	25
Annex 2: Minimum Requirements for Acting According to OGP Process	27

Section I: Overview of the 2021-2023 Action Plan

Most commitments in Tunisia's fourth action plan are incremental steps of modest ambition that aim to consolidate long-term open government reforms. Tunisia continues to prioritize government transparency, while public accountability remains an area of opportunity. Opening up Tunisia's audit system is one such opportunity that may yield ambitious results. However, political instability and incapacitated democratic institutions will require strategic reconsideration on how to achieve open government objectives.

Tunisia benefits from an engaged OGP team in government, as well as an active civil society and international partners. As a result, Tunisia has worked towards broader open government reforms through successive action plans. For the fourth action plan, Tunisia undertook a co-creation process with online public consultations to gather proposed themes and then draft the action plan. Coordinators also held webinars and regional consultations and reached out to relevant ministries.

The action plan contains achievable commitments that reflect government and civil society priorities. Key areas include fiscal and resource transparency, public participation, open government at the local level, and digitizing public services. Two new areas include transparency of public officials' assets and developing a national open government strategy. The temporary suspension of the main national anti-corruption body's activities (INLUCC) may complicate the implementation of Commitment 3 (public sector asset transparency). However, commitment 8 (develop a national open government strategy) promises to identify indicators, set priorities, and align national open government efforts.

Most commitments in this action plan represent an incremental step in pursuit of ambitious reforms started under previous plans. Therefore, most commitments are evaluated as having modest ambitions. The IRM acknowledges that reinforcing ongoing open government reforms is valuable for sustainability beyond the

AT A GLANCE

Participating since: 2014

Action Plan under review: Fourth

IRM product: Action Plan Review

Number of commitments: 13

Overview of commitments:

- Commitments with an open gov lens: 12 (92%)
- Commitments with substantial potential for results: 1 (8%)
- Promising commitments: 4

Policy areas carried over from previous action plans:

- Access to information
- Open data
- Budget transparency
- Audit transparency
- Extractive transparency
- Local-level open government
- Online civic participation
- Youth participation

Emerging in this action plan:

- Asset transparency
- Open government strategy

Compliance with OGP minimum requirements for co-creation:

- Acted according to OGP process: Yes

implementation period. To raise the level of ambition in future action plans, the IRM recommends that stakeholders strategically design commitments to address obstacles that previously inhibited implementation. The IRM also recommends identifying windows of opportunity for commitments to change the “rules of the game,” thereby institutionalizing open government practices.

Additionally, most commitments in this action plan focus on government transparency. Citizen access to information is vital, but should be viewed as a step towards more ambitious reforms that increase opportunities for civic participation and public accountability. Creating channels for citizens to better hold their government accountable remains an area for opportunity for open government reform in Tunisia. On a positive note, this action plan includes various activities to strengthen opportunities for citizens to participate in policymaking as recommended in the 2018-2020 IRM Design Report.¹

Open government reformers often face difficulties implementing commitments when faced with Tunisia’s political and economic instability. Moreover, the political events in the summer of 2021 – such as the dissolution of the parliament,² replacement of the Prime Minister,³ and closure of the central anti-corruption body⁴ – will likely present implementation challenges and require a reevaluation of how to pursue the open government policy objectives identified in the plan. The absence of a high-level OGP point of contact from the Government of Tunisia also presents a challenge to OGP processes in the country. The IRM analyzes four promising commitments (2, 8, 10, and 11), based not only on their potential for results, but also the possibility of implementation within the current political context. The following section provides further information on the selection and analysis of the promising commitments.

Section II: Promising Commitments in Tunisia's 2021-2023 Action Plan

The following review looks at the four commitments that the IRM identified as having the potential to realize the most promising results within the current national context. This review will inform the IRM's research approach to assess implementation in the Results Report. The IRM Results Report will build on the early identification of potential results from this review and contrast them with the outcomes at the end of the implementation period of the action plan. This review also provides an analysis of challenges, opportunities, and recommendations to help support the implementation process of this action plan.

IRM evaluation of the promising commitments considers their ambition as stated in the action plan, along with their potential to achieve results within the current political context. Around one-third of the commitments in this action plan represent important activities of modest ambition to continue existing open government reforms. Most of these commitments seek to further consolidate government transparency by strengthening access to information institutions (Commitment 1), simplifying budget information (Commitment 4), and continuing open data efforts (Commitments 5 and 6). Commitment 9 aims to increase civic participation through the e-participation website. These commitments are important to consolidate open government efforts. However, they are not evaluated as promising, as they do not represent significant changes in government practice. Commitment 13 lacks a clear open government lens as written in the action plan and is therefore evaluated to have an unclear potential for results.

Commitment 12 on increasing fiscal transparency at the local level is evaluated to be modest, as it would require voluntary participation by municipalities. Ms. Mouna Mathari of the Federation of Tunisian Municipalities adds that more foundational work is required to review policies around municipal fiscal and asset management and autonomy before pursuing fiscal transparency.⁵ The government expects a sufficient number of municipalities to voluntarily participate in the reform to improve fiscal transparency across Tunisia.⁶

The Government of Tunisia intends to modify Commitment 4 to include milestones for publishing the executive budget audit report, as required by OGP eligibility criteria.⁷ Tunisia is currently under procedural review due to its failure to publish the executive budget audit report in a timely manner for two consecutive years.⁸ Tunisia's status within OGP is dependent on timely publication of the audit report next year.

Implementation of Commitments 3 and 7 faces particular uncertainty under the current political context. Commitment 3 on public sector asset transparency contains ambitious milestones and addresses an important domestic issue. However, at the time of writing, the temporary suspension of Tunisia's main anti-corruption institution (INLUCC) responsible for this commitment makes the path forward for implementation unclear. Should the Asset and Interest Declaration Unit within INLUCC resume operations, Commitment 3 could institutionalize important open government reforms. Moreover, the dissolution of parliament and reforming of the Cabinet of Ministers could impact milestones requiring decree laws and government decrees in both commitments. As a result, neither commitment is evaluated as promising at this time. Tunisia's OGP multi-stakeholder forum will need to consider what activities are possible and what changes need to be made to work towards open government objectives in the current context.

The IRM evaluated four commitments of modest or substantial ambition that are least impacted by the current political context as promising (Commitments 2, 8, 10, and 11). Three of these commitments promise to create new opportunities for civic participation in government decision-making. These include Commitment 2 on public audits, Commitment 8 on a national open government strategy, and Commitment 10 on municipal level youth action plans. Commitment 11 promises to increase citizens' access to open data and information on municipal action plans and projects. Commitment 2 is evaluated to have a substantial potential to increase transparency and participation in audit reports and recommendations. The remaining three promising commitments are evaluated to have a modest potential for results; although important, they are merely an incremental expansion of ongoing open government reforms.

A common characteristic of the promising commitments is strong support from domestic and international partners and implementing agencies. Three of the promising commitments (8, 10, 11) are supported by technical and financial resources from OECD and GIZ. The E-Government Unit, which is at the center of open government work in Tunisia, is overseeing the implementation of two promising commitments (8 and 11). Three of the commitments (2, 10 and 11) are supported by engaged civil society organizations: the Tunisian Association for Public Auditors, ONSHOR, and the National Federation for Tunisian Municipalities among them. Table 1 below summarizes the commitments evaluated to be promising.

Table 1. Promising commitments

Promising Commitments
<p>Commitment 2: Enhancing transparency and accountability regarding audit reports: Increased civilian access and monitoring of public audit reports and recommendations promises to strengthen citizens' ability to hold their government accountable overspending.</p>
<p>Commitment 8: Defining the Open Government strategic priorities in Tunisia: Collaborative development of a national open government strategy promises to identify indicators, set priorities, and align efforts for long-term open government reforms.</p>
<p>Commitment 10: Enhancing the role of youth in designing and monitoring public projects at the local level: The development of youth action plans in 12 municipalities promises to continue to expand opportunities for youth participation in local government.</p>
<p>Commitment 11: Entrenching OGP principles at the local level: Opening up municipal level data and developing communication plans promises to increase citizens' access to information in the 8 municipalities implementing open government action plans.</p>

Commitment 2: Enhancing transparency and accountability regarding audit reports [High Administrative and Financial Audit Authority, Tunisian Association of Public Auditors]

For a complete description of the commitment, see Commitment 2 in:

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Tunisia_Action-Plan_2021-2023_EN.pdf

Context and objectives:

Timely publication of audit reports has been a long-running aim of the Government of Tunisia. This commitment was proposed by civil society, particularly the Tunisian Association of Public Auditors.⁹ In Tunisia's 2014 OGP action plan, the government sought to publish audit reports from several government auditing bodies, but failed to do so within the implementation period.¹⁰ Strengthening audit processes also featured in the government's national anti-corruption strategies is a priority area in the 2019-2020 National Anticorruption Action Plan.¹¹ Recent civil unrest over economic troubles, government corruption, and other concerns further underscore the urgent need to strengthen financial oversight institutions and build public trust in the government.¹²

A lack of publicly available audit information is a major obstacle to public accountability over government spending. Government bodies often fail to react to audit recommendations due to limited oversight over the recommendations' implementation.¹³ This commitment aims to increase public access to audit reports, facilitate follow-up of audit recommendations, and create opportunities for civic participation in audit processes. Specifically, this commitment aims to implement Government Decree No. 375, passed in June 2020, on the publication and follow-up of audit reports.¹⁴ If fully implemented, this commitment will be relevant to the OGP values of access to information and civic participation.

Potential for results: Substantial

The High Administrative and Financial Control Authority (*Haut Comité du Contrôle Administratif et Financier* or HCCAF) is responsible for coordinating Tunisia's various audit institutions and the publication of audit reports and recommendations.¹⁵ HCCAF promotes the effective and responsible use of government resources through oversight of government programs and spending.

There is limited public information on audit findings and recommendations and no opportunities for civic participation in the audit process in Tunisia. According to the 2019 Open Budget Survey, Tunisia scored 28 out of 100 possible points for audit oversight, which is considered "weak." This is due in part to the fact that the government did not publish the 2017 and 2019 audit reports online in a timely manner.¹⁶ Currently, HCCAF's website only includes the agency's annual activity reports for 2011 through 2018.¹⁷ Tunisia also currently does not provide opportunities for the public to participate in audit processes, scoring 0 out of 100 points in the survey.¹⁸

The government has sought to strengthen audit processes and transparency in partnership with OECD over the last several years. HCCAF and OECD developed guides for risk assessment and conducting audit inspections.¹⁹ In June 2021, HCCAF hosted its annual conference, which focused on the publication of audit reports as a cornerstone for transparency and accountability.

The conference highlighted international best practices, Tunisia's experience, procedures, and compliance with legal requirements with regard to publishing audit reports.²⁰

Through this commitment, HCCAF, in partnership with other control bodies and the Tunisian Association of Public Auditors (ATCP), aims to update the website, create an interactive online platform, and a procedures manual on the publication of audit reports. At the time of writing, HCCAF and ATCP had already developed the best practices manual.²¹ ATCP will hold a session to share the content of the guide with public auditors and officials. A simplified version of the guide will also be prepared for journalists and civil society.²²

According to Mr. Bouaziz Mohamed, a financial judge in HCCAF, the agency has three primary aims: i. increased publication of audit reports; ii. increased dissemination of audit findings and recommendations; and iii. to highlight and monitor government institutions' response to audit recommendations. Mr. Bouaziz stated that, in total, Tunisia's control bodies should publish three general audit reports, three sector-specific audit reports, and around 20 ministerial department audit reports. The platform will allow for the public to provide comments on these reports, although the mechanism for public input had not yet been decided at the time of writing in September 2021.²³ By September 2021, HCCAF had launched a call for applications seeking assistance to design the platform.²⁴ The president of HCCAF was also contacting partners and donors to seek funding for the portal.

Mr. Bouaziz stated that there are two main obstacles facing the implementation of Government Decree No. 375 on the publication of audit reports. First, he states that government bodies required to publish audit reports often lack the resources and expertise to synthesize and publish audit findings. Second, institutions are unaccustomed to publishing audit reports and are unaware of the benefits of audit transparency. Rather, some institutions are concerned over how the information in the reports will be used.²⁵ An attendee at HCCAF's annual conference underscored officials' concerns that information released in the audit reports could be used to criticize the current government. Another attendee added that Tunisia's control bodies are insulated from political interference on paper, but not in practice. He recommended utilizing the current legal framework to strengthen the audit system's autonomy.²⁶

Moreover, the Decree notes that report publications should consider protecting information related to national security and personally identifying information. Government institutions' concerns around violating these specifications add to their hesitancy in publishing audit reports.²⁷ This commitment is designed to ease the transition to greater transparency in compliance with the law. HCCAF aims to alleviate government institutions' concerns with the procedures manual, awareness-raising sessions, and an interactive online platform for publishing audit reports.

Ms. Mouna Mekki of the Tunisian Association of Public Auditors believes that this commitment will facilitate greater access to audit information and civic participation in the audit process. She stated that this commitment will enable HCCAF and ATAP to accompany ministries in their process to publish audit reports by addressing obstacles, providing technical assistance, and facilitating an environment to implement the Government Decree.²⁸

This commitment is considered to have a substantial potential to increase transparency and civic participation in audit processes across government. This potential stems from the commitment's strategic design to address the underlying technical and cultural obstacles to implementing

Government Decree No. 375. Full implementation of this Decree promises to change the “rules of the game” and would represent a significant improvement from the status quo, in which there is very limited audit transparency and no channels for civic participation. While not explicitly stated in the milestones, interviewees noted that implementation will also include awareness-raising sessions and technical assistance to address officials’ questions and concerns surrounding audit information transparency.²⁹

To achieve substantial open government results, implementation would need to lead to permanent changes to government practice, thereby resulting in greater publication of audit findings and recommendations. In addition to greater audit transparency, evidence of substantial results would also include the creation and use of mechanisms for public input on audit processes, findings, and/or the progress of the recommendations’ implementation.

Opportunities, challenges, and recommendations during implementation

This commitment is evaluated as having a promising potential for open government results due to its potential to introduce public accountability over government spending. On the flip side, perhaps this reform’s greatest obstacle is public officials’ concerns over how greater public accountability will impact the current government. Therefore, building and communicating a strong case on the value of public accountability to government officials will be of the utmost importance. Additionally, the effects of the tumultuous political context on HCCAF’s ability to function will require careful consideration of how to navigate the implementation. The 2019 Open Budget Survey includes the following recommendations to strengthen HCCAF’s independence and capacity:

- “Require legislative or judicial approval to appoint and remove the head of the supreme audit institution.
- Ensure the supreme audit institution has adequate funding to perform its duties, as determined by an independent body (e.g., the legislature or judiciary).
- Ensure audit processes are reviewed by an independent agency.”³⁰

The absence of funding for the portal could present an obstacle to implementation. Additionally, the creation of the portal and procedures manual towards the end of the implementation period will make it difficult to determine whether these tools will result in greater transparency and public accountability. Therefore, identifying sustainable funding and strategically building on this reform over consecutive action plans will be key to ultimately achieving open government results. Tunisia and other OGP members’ experiences have demonstrated that opening audit institutions is often a challenging, but vital, reform.

Another challenge will be to ensure that citizen input leads to a governmental response. Several OGP member countries have embarked on similar reforms to establish online and in-person opportunities for civic participation in audit processes. For example, Georgia’s online Budget Monitor includes opportunities for the public to submit comments on the annual audit plan, corruption risks, and prioritizing sectors to audit.³¹ Similarly, Argentina committed to work with civil society to develop an interactive online platform to monitor implementation of audit recommendations. However, this reform’s implementation was extended until 2022.³² Finally, the Philippines has gradually increased public participation in conducting audit investigations in

priority sectors over successive action plans, demonstrating offline opportunities to build public trust in audit institutions.³³

Commitment 8: Defining the open government strategic priorities in Tunisia [The E-Government Unit at the Presidency of Government]

For a complete description of the commitment, see Commitment 8 in:

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Tunisia_Action-Plan_2021-2023_EN.pdf

Context and objectives:

Tunisia has embarked on a notable open government process since joining OGP in 2011, particularly regarding open data and access to information. Tunisia has also sought to disseminate open government values through various efforts, such as training civil servants on open government and facilitating the creation of action plans at the municipal level.³⁴

However, the institutionalization of open government values across government bodies is uneven, as underscored by the current political crisis. The temporary suspension of activity of both the parliament and the central anti-corruption authority (INLUCC) in 2021 presents a particularly important juncture for normalizing open government values at the highest levels of government and prioritizing coordinated and measurable open government reforms.

This commitment aims to develop a national open government strategy with the participation of civil society and the public. The strategy will be informed by a diagnostic of the current open government landscape and consultations with national and international partners. According to Khaled Sellami, General Director of the E-Government Unit, the strategy will identify priorities and coordinate open government efforts across government. The strategy will also identify open government indicators to better measure the impact of reforms over time and across OGP action plans.³⁵ The participatory approach to design the strategy makes this commitment relevant to the OGP value of civic participation.

Potential for results: Modest

Tunisia has designed 61 commitments across four action plans since joining OGP in 2011. Due to the two-year action plan cycle, reforms are often designed and measured based on their short-term results. Additionally, an increasing number of government agencies and civil society partners have become involved in Tunisia's OGP process. The development of an open government strategy aims to provide an overarching framework to design and measure open government reforms over a greater period of time and among various stakeholders.

At the time of writing in October 2021, some activities towards developing the open government strategy were underway. The government launched a public consultation from October 1 to November 1, 2021 and received 23 responses on open government priorities and suggestions for reform at both the national and local level.³⁶ Respondents represented government, civil society, the private sector, and academia. The survey highlighted transparency and participation as open government priorities and “digital platforms and portals” as the most “useful and accessible” open government tool for respondents. Respondents indicated priority policy areas for open

government reform to be health (71%), transportation (71%), and education, justice, and social affairs (57% each).³⁷

The OECD is supporting the government throughout the strategy consultation and drafting process. The E-Government Unit and OECD will organize several thematic roundtables to discuss the priorities, guidelines, and areas of intervention to be included in the strategy. According to Rim Garnaoui, the Government of Tunisia has also held a webinar with Canada and other countries to gather comparative experiences.³⁸

The strategy is expected to be published in early 2022 and accompanied by awareness-raising efforts to disseminate it among those not already involved.³⁹ The finalized strategy will be presented to the Council of Ministers for validation, which would institutionalize the unified open government strategy across government. The governance framework for the strategy will be determined as the strategy is prepared. The strategy will offer a set of priorities and indicators to coordinate open government efforts throughout government and provide a tool to measure their impact. The government will periodically revisit the strategy in a participatory method to ensure that the priorities and objectives remain relevant and will use OGP Action Plans to pursue the identified priorities.⁴⁰ At the time of writing in October 2021, the newly appointed Prime Minister had just formed a new Council of Ministers after three months without a cabinet.⁴¹

This commitment is evaluated to have a modest potential for open government results. The strategy has the potential to raise greater awareness around the meaning and importance of open government at the higher levels of government. This could broaden the scope of stakeholders involved in open government efforts and better coordinate reforms across bodies and levels of government.⁴² The temporary suspension of parliamentary and INLUCC activities will complicate commitments in this action plan that rely on these bodies to proceed. However, this commitment presents a window of opportunity to continue collaborative efforts to further government transparency, accountability, and civic participation, despite the ongoing political crisis. The strategy also presents an opportunity to invest government attention and resources in independent transparency and accountability institutions. Oversight of this commitment by Khaled Sellami, OGP Point of Contact and Director of the E-Government Unit at the Presidency of Government, contributes in part to this commitment's potential for results. The placement of this reform within Tunisia's OGP structure and the executive branch indicates the necessary political will and experienced management to facilitate its completion.

Notable early results of this commitment would include not only the co-creation of an open government strategy, but also evidence that the strategy facilitates an increasingly coordinated open government approach across government. Early results would also include civil society stakeholders' confidence in the process and inclusion in setting priorities and designing reforms. Such evidence could include intra-governmental communication and projects, participation by agencies and institutions new to open government work, and reforms aligned with short-, mid-, and long-term open government indicators. Evidence could also include statements and actions from the highest levels of government indicating a commitment to government transparency, accountability, and civic participation.

Opportunities, challenges and recommendations during implementation

In the summer of 2021, the President of Tunisia dissolved the parliament, dismissed the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, and froze the work of INLUCC in response to citizen protests around economic stagnation and government corruption, among other issues.⁴³ In October, the President appointed a new Prime Minister, who formed a new Council of Ministers. However, the continued closure of the legislative branch and the anti-corruption body will complicate the design and implementation of a whole-of-government open government strategy. The Prime Minister stated that anti-corruption will be the priority for the government.⁴⁴ The reestablishment of parliament and resumption of INLUCC's work are critical for the mutually supportive aims of open government and anti-corruption. Comprehensive implementation of this commitment will require the full functioning of Tunisia's democratic and anti-corruption bodies.

In 2019, Argentina committed to design a national Open Government Strategy based on the findings of an OECD open government survey. The strategy specifically aims to align national and local open government reforms and broaden the community of reformers.⁴⁵ Other OGP members that have undertaken an open government strategy include Finland, Cali (city in Colombia), and Canada.⁴⁶

To realize the full potential of this commitment, the IRM recommends that implementors take the following into consideration:

- Use the co-creation process to broaden municipal participation in open government reform and create spaces for municipalities already engaged to share their experiences, progress, and lessons.
- Facilitate civil society participation beyond the “usual suspects” and involve civil society, not only in identifying key priorities, but also in designing the strategy.
- Use the co-creation process as an opportunity to communicate open government's value proposition to new government and non-government partners by highlighting progress made thus far and engaging ministries and agencies not yet involved, such as the Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Health.
- Align the strategy with Tunisia's 2023 OGP Action Plan in terms of both content and logistics, while considering the likely changes to OGP processes that will allow for more flexibility regarding the length and timing of submission for future OGP action plans.⁴⁷
- Identify opportunities to align the open government strategy with the government's anti-corruption priorities for mutually supportive reforms and increased political will.

Commitment 10: Enhancing the role of youth in designing and monitoring public projects at the local level [Municipalities cooperating with the National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities and the E-Government Unit at the Presidency of Government]

For a complete description of the commitment, see Commitment 10 in: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Tunisia_Action-Plan_2021-2023_EN.pdf

Context and objectives:

This commitment is the first from Tunisia, and among OGP member countries, to implement youth action plans at the municipal level. However, this reform builds on previous Tunisian OGP commitments to engage youth in policymaking and increase open government at the municipal level. In Commitment 10 of Tunisia's previous action plan, the government sought to establish local councils and an online platform to increase youth participation in local government with limited success.⁴⁸ Commitment 11 in the previous plan resulted in the development of 8 municipal open government action plans that are currently being implemented.⁴⁹

Beyond OGP, this initiative is part of a larger long-term package of municipal reforms implemented in partnership with GIZ from 2015-2023. Up until now, 29 municipalities have started implementing youth action plans developed in collaboration with youth and CSOs.⁵⁰ Municipalities and local stakeholders are currently implementing activities such as youth internet radio stations, citizen labs, and digital applications.⁵¹ Under this commitment, the government commits to selecting, training, and supporting 12 additional municipalities to develop and implement youth action plans. The action plans will be oriented towards open government reform, but the content will ultimately be determined by projects proposed by youth participants.⁵²

Potential for results: Modest

The exclusion of youth from the policymaking process is an ongoing issue in Tunisia. An absence of opportunities to participate on the part of the government and disillusionment among the youth both contribute to the problem. As of 2021, the youth make up nearly a quarter of Tunisia's population, with 20.8% between the ages of 10 and 24 years old.⁵³ However, a 2018 UNDP survey found low levels of youth participation in elections, with only 6.11% of the 18-25-year-old age group participating in the second round of presidential elections.⁵⁴

Youth dominated protests from 2011 until now underscore an ongoing sense of economic and political exclusion and low trust in government.⁵⁵ Tunisian youth were a dominant force in the 2011 revolution and remain engaged in civil society, particularly online.⁵⁶ However, this engagement outside the state has not translated into youth representation in government or participation in formal decision-making processes. Moreover, young Tunisians without formal education and employment face particular barriers to participation.⁵⁷

Prior to this commitment, GIZ supported 29 municipalities to develop youth action plans, of which 17 have been implemented. The focus has been on developing a framework, culture, and environment conducive to youth participation in governance. Some pilot projects from youth action plans have been realized. The Commune of Manzil Assalem maintains an internet youth

radio station. The Municipality of Agareb has continued to work with non-government partners beyond the action plan on additional projects, such as public lighting.⁵⁸

To expand these efforts under this commitment, the government published a call for new municipalities to apply to participate in the development of youth action plans in August 2021. A selection committee of government and GIZ representatives chose 12 municipalities out of the 25 applicants based on predetermined selection criteria.⁵⁹ Six of the municipalities are also a part of Commitment 11 in the previous action plan, where they committed to co-create a municipal Open Government Action Plan.⁶⁰

The commitment will be undertaken in several phases. In the first phase, GIZ will facilitate an “Open Day” in each municipality with discussions to identify obstacles to youth participation, current opportunities and communication oriented towards youth, and the importance of youth engagement in local decision-making. Building upon the Open Day, GIZ will encourage municipalities to publish a call for participation in a working group to design the youth action plan. A working group of eight members will be established in each participating municipality. Members will include representatives from the Youth House (*la maison des jeunes*), Cultural House, and youth associations.

In the second phase, hired consultants will facilitate two capacity-building sessions for the working groups on i. crisis and leadership communication management; and ii. local governance, participation, and the legal context. In the third phase, the working groups will gather in four regions of Tunisia to develop the action plans over a three-day workshop. GIZ will provide working groups with an action plan template and select 7 or 8 municipalities with “the best” action plans to receive implementation funding. Municipalities not selected to receive funding will be expected to find alternative sources, as done in previous iterations of this reform. Implementation of selected action plans is expected to begin in July or August 2022.⁶¹

This commitment is evaluated to have a modest potential to increase youth participation in government. While important, the reform falls short of substantial potential for results because it is an expansion of an existing project to a limited number of municipalities. Evidence of notable early results would include evidence that a greater number of youths participated in policymaking, and that their participation resulted in reforms important to young Tunisians. Soussan from the E-Government Unit expects this commitment to create spaces and a culture enabling youth participation in municipalities, particularly in disadvantaged regions.⁶²

The Municipality of Carthage, one of the participating municipalities, anticipates three benefits from developing and implementing a youth action plan. First, the municipality hopes to increase youth participation in elections. Second, they aim to increase interest among youth in entrepreneurship, volunteerism, and political participation. Third, the municipality intends to strengthen their programming to bring together different social classes through sports, by using the action plan process to identify youth ambassadors and bring together various associations working on this issue.⁶³

Opportunities, challenges and recommendations during implementation

As demonstrated by Commitment 10 in the previous action plan, the sustainability of this reform poses a potential challenge. In the short term, implementors will need to consider how to keep

the youth engaged throughout the implementation of the action plan. In the longer term, implementors will need to consider how the reform will continue when GIZ's support ends in 2023. One potential solution is to seek opportunities to align activities with other OGP commitments at the municipal level. For example, youth outreach about the action plans could be incorporated into the communication plans of relevant municipalities under development per Commitment 11.

Tunisia is the first OGP member to commit to youth action plans at the municipal level. However, Uruguay committed to enable rural youth and women to design a policy agenda with progress tracked on a public website.⁶⁴ At the national level, Germany committed to convening youth to develop a national youth strategy and engage the youth in drafting the national OGP Action Plan.⁶⁵ Throughout the development and implementation of youth action plans, the IRM recommends that the following be considered to facilitate youth participation:

- Working groups should be designed so that they enable a multi-stakeholder space for ongoing dialogue among representatives of different segments of society.
- Working groups should be transparent about their composition, meetings, decisions, and action plans so that the wider public can follow, and participate when appropriate, in the design and implementation process.
- Working groups should raise awareness and gather input on the draft youth action plan from youth and civil society outside of the working group.
- Working groups should continue to meet during implementation to monitor progress and collaborate in addressing obstacles.

Commitment 11: Entrenching OGP principles at the local level [Municipalities of Carthage, Hammam Al-Shatt, Dar Chaaben Fehri, Zaouiat Sousse, Zriba, Regueb, Souassi, Gabes]

For a complete description of the commitment, see Commitment 11 in: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Tunisia_Action-Plan_2021-2023_EN.pdf

Context and objectives:

This commitment is part of Tunisia's ongoing efforts to institutionalize open government at the municipal level. Commitment 11 in Tunisia's 2018-2020 action plan resulted in eight municipalities co-creating open government action plans.⁶⁶ This follow-up commitment aims to facilitate the implementation of these action plans by strengthening municipalities' communication with citizens and open data. In future OGP commitments, Tunisia intends to expand the number of municipalities developing local-level action plans.⁶⁷

Under this commitment, the E-Government Unit and civil society partners (such as ONSHOR and the Tunisian Association for Municipalities) will support the eight municipalities to conduct an inventory of open data and publish priority datasets, with a focus on spatial data (location of beaches, parks, monuments, etc.). This focus is similar to Commitment 3 in the previous plan, which sought to open up geospatial data at the national level.⁶⁸ GIZ will also support the municipalities through resources and technical assistance to develop communication plans. The communication plans will focus on progress related to open data, action plans, and opportunities

for youth participation. Developing communication plans corresponds directly with a recommendation made in the 2018-2020 IRM Design Report.⁶⁹

Potential for results: Modest

Citizens are currently able to access some municipal-level data through the BALADIATI portal managed by ONSHOR. The municipal open data portal hosted 754 datasets across 14 policy areas from 60 municipalities at the time of writing in October 2021.⁷⁰ However, available data is not consistent across policy areas or municipalities. According to Charefeddine El Yaakoubi of ONSHOR, a lack of technical skills among municipal officials to collect, process, and use open data presents an obstacle to more comprehensive disclosure. Additionally, municipalities do not yet appreciate the benefits of open data and therefore lack the motivation to sustain the reform.⁷¹ This commitment focuses on spatial data in response to civil society feedback during the co-creation of the commitment and citizen demand for applications based on geospatial data.⁷² Additionally, the civil society organization AGEOS is a willing partner to support open spatial data efforts.⁷³

ONSHOR and the E-Government Unit have already undertaken several activities to support municipalities opening their data at the time of writing. In September 2021, ONSHOR published a template for municipalities to take an inventory of the status of open data in various sectors (budget, public services, infrastructure, etc.). This template was posted online for public input on the format and content.⁷⁴ Municipalities will use the inventory template to identify priority open data to publish. The data will then be published on the BALADIATI portal. From September 27-29, 2021, the E-Government Unit and PAGOF hosted a training session for the eight municipalities on opening spatial data. The training focused on building officials' ability to produce, process, and publish open data to facilitate its use by the government and citizens. The training highlighted software for geospatial data with the aim of making data exploitable for websites and apps.⁷⁵

The E-Government Unit will work with municipalities to support open data efforts. ONSHOR is also providing ongoing technical support to the Municipality of Carthage. Like many municipalities, Carthage has limited capacity, with one IT specialist in the municipal government and one internal participatory democracy staff working group. However, ONSHOR is currently unable to support other municipalities in implementing activities under this commitment due to funding constraints.⁷⁶ The IRM recommends that the E-Government Unit and ONSHOR collaborate to support municipalities in opening data.

GIZ will support municipalities to strengthen their communication with citizens. This support will include assistance in developing a communication plan, capacity building training for three officials from each municipality, providing resources, and developing a logo. GIZ will provide this support until May 2022. The communication plans will focus on the progress and importance of open data efforts, open government action plans, and opportunities for youth engagement.⁷⁷ The Tunisian Association for Local Governance will provide capacity building on relevant legal training, governance, and civic participation to the eight municipalities.⁷⁸

This commitment is evaluated to have a modest potential for greater municipal transparency through open data and communication plans. This commitment is of modest ambition, as it aims to consolidate an ongoing reform among a handful of municipalities. However, it lays important groundwork, as government transparency is a prerequisite for future ambitious reforms focused

on civic participation and public accountability. This commitment is therefore an important, but incremental, step towards opening local government in Tunisia. In the long term, consolidating open government at the municipal level offers the opportunity to bring open government closer to citizens and improve public service delivery.⁷⁹

Evidence of early results would include sustainable changes to government practice that lead to more comprehensive and ongoing publication of municipal-level open data. These changes could include clear procedures, standards, and technical tools to facilitate the collection and publication of data. They could also include increased understanding and appreciation of the benefits of open data among municipal officials. Significant early results would include evidence that administrations and civil society have made use of the newly available data for the public benefit, such as improved public service provision or facilitating citizens' ability to participate in government decision making.

Opportunities, challenges and recommendations during implementation

Two possible challenges to implementation are sufficient funding for civil society to support municipalities in carrying out open data reform and sufficient capacity/resources at the municipal level to institutionalize open data and communication practices. Another potential challenge is coordinating among the various government, civil society, and international partner organizations involved. With these challenges in mind, the IRM recommends that implementors consider the following:

- The E-Government Unit should gather implementing stakeholders together, such as ONSHOR, AGEOS, the Tunisian Association for Local Governance, and GIZ, to communicate and coordinate activities to avoid a duplication of efforts and distribute technical knowledge and resources.
- Hold a meeting among municipalities participating in various open government commitments (such as open government and youth action plans) during the implementation period so that municipal administrators and civil society actors can share experiences, difficulties, and lessons learned.
- Align OGP commitments focused at the municipal level with the annual program of municipal projects and national/municipal budget opportunities.
- At the municipal level, establish data advisory councils with both government and non-government members to oversee the collection, standardization, and release of open data.
- Publish inter-operable municipal data that will allow for comparison across municipalities and levels of government.

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Section III. Methodology and IRM Indicators

The purpose of this review is not an evaluation, as former IRM reports. It is intended as an independent quick technical review of the characteristics of the action plan and the strengths and challenges the IRM identifies to inform a stronger implementation process. This approach allows the IRM to highlight the strongest and most promising commitments in the action plan based on an assessment of the commitment per the key IRM indicators, particularly commitments with the highest potential for results, the priority of the commitment for country stakeholders and the priorities in the national open government context. To determine which reforms or commitments the IRM identifies as promising the IRM follows a filtering and clustering process:

Step 1: determine what is reviewable and what is not based on the verifiability of the commitment as written in the action plan.

Step 2: determine if the commitment has an open government lens. Is it relevant to OGP values?

Step 3: Commitments that are verifiable and have an open government lens are reviewed to identify if certain commitment needs to be clustered. Commitments that have a common policy objective or commitments that contribute to the same reform or policy issue should be clustered and its “potential for results” should be reviewed as a whole.

The clustering process is conducted by IRM staff, following the steps below:

- a. Determine overarching themes. They may be as stated in the action plan or if the action plan is not already grouped by themes, IRM staff may use as reference the thematic tagging done by OGP.
- b. Review objectives of commitments to identify commitments that address the same policy issue or contribute to the same broader policy or government reform.
- c. Organize commitments by clusters as needed. Commitments may already be organized in the Action Plan under specific policy or government reforms or may be standalone and therefore not clustered.

Step 4: assess the potential for results of the cluster or standalone commitment.

The filtering process is an internal process and data for individual commitments is available in Annex I below. In addition, during the internal review process of this product the IRM verifies the accuracy of findings and collects further input through peer review, the OGP Support Unit feedback as needed, interviews and validation with country-stakeholders, and sign-off by the IRM’s International Experts Panel (IEP).

As described in the filtering process above, the IRM relies on **three key indicators** for this review:

I. Verifiability

- “Yes” Specific enough to review. As written in the action plan the objectives stated and actions proposed are sufficiently clear and includes objectively verifiable activities to assess implementation.
- “No”: Not specific enough to review. As written in the action plan the objectives stated and proposed actions lack clarity and do not include explicit verifiable activities to assess implementation.

*Commitments that are not verifiable will be considered “not reviewable”, and further assessment will not be carried out.

II. Does it have an open government lens? (Relevant)

This indicator determines if the commitment relates to open government values of transparency, civic participation or public accountability as defined by the Open Government Declaration, the OGP Articles of Governance and by responding to the guiding questions below.

Based on a close reading of the commitment text, the IRM first determines whether the commitment has an open government lens:

- **Yes/No:** Does the commitment set out to make a policy area, institutions or decision-making process more transparent, participatory or accountable to the public?

The IRM uses the OGP Values as defined in the Articles of Governance. In addition, the following questions for each OGP value may be used as a reference to identify the specific open government lens in commitment analysis:

- **Transparency:** Will the government disclose more information, improve the legal or institutional frameworks to guarantee the right to information, improve the quality of the information disclosed to the public, or improve the transparency of government decision-making processes or institutions?
- **Civic Participation:** Will government create or improve opportunities, processes or mechanisms for the public to inform or influence decisions? Will the government create, enable or improve participatory mechanisms for minorities or underrepresented groups? Will the government enable a legal environment to guarantee freedoms of assembly, association and peaceful protest?
- **Public Accountability:** Will the government create or improve opportunities to hold officials answerable for their actions? Will the government enable a legal, policy or institutional frameworks to foster accountability of public officials?

III. Potential for results

Formerly known as the “potential impact” indicator, it was adjusted taking into account the feedback from the IRM Refresh consultation process with the OGP community. With the new results-oriented strategic focus of IRM products, this indicator was modified so that in this first review it laid out the expected results and potential that would later be verified in the IRM Results Report, after implementation. Given the purpose of this Action Plan Review, the assessment of “potential for results” is only an early indication of the possibility the commitment has to yield meaningful results based on its articulation in the action plan in contrast with the state of play in the respective policy area.

The scale of the indicator is defined as:

- **Unclear:** the commitment is aimed at continuing ongoing practices in line with existing legislation, requirements or policies without indication of the added value or enhanced open government approach in contrast with existing practice.
- **Modest:** a positive but standalone initiative or changes to process, practice or policies. Commitments that do not generate binding or institutionalized changes across government or institutions that govern a policy area. For example, tools like websites, or data release, training, pilot projects

- **Substantial:** a possible game changer to the rules of the game (or the creation of new ones), practices, policies or institutions that govern a policy area, public sector and/or relationship between citizens and state. The commitment generates binding and institutionalized changes across government

This review was prepared by the IRM in collaboration with Sabrina Nassih and overseen by the IRM's International Experts Panel (IEP). The current IEP membership includes:

- César Cruz-Rubio
- Mary Francoli
- Brendan Halloran
- Jeff Lovitt
- Juanita Olaya

For more information about the IRM refer to the **“About IRM”** section of the **OGP website** available [here](#).

Annex 1. Commitment by Commitment Data¹

Commitment 1: Completing the regulatory framework to consecrate access to information right
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Modest
Commitment 2: Enhancing transparency and accountability regarding audit reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Substantial
Commitment 3: Strengthening integrity in the public sector through asset transparency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Unclear
Commitment 4: Entrenching financial transparency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Modest
Commitment 5: Enhancing the public data opening and promoting its reuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Modest
Commitment 6: Improving public data accessibility through defining common specifications and nomenclature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Modest
Commitment 7: Promoting transparency in the field of energy and mines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Modest
Commitment 8: Defining the Open Government strategic priorities in Tunisia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verifiable: Yes ● Does it have an open government lens? Yes ● Potential for results: Modest

<p>Commitment 9: Promoting the use of national portals for public participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifiable: Yes • Does it have an open government lens? Yes • Potential for results: Modest
<p>Commitment 10: Enhancing the role of youth in designing and monitoring public projects at the local level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifiable: Yes • Does it have an open government lens? Yes • Potential for results: Modest
<p>Commitment 11: Entrenching OGP principles at the local level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifiable: Yes • Does it have an open government lens? Yes • Potential for results: Modest
<p>Commitment 12: Supporting financial transparency at the local level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifiable: Yes • Does it have an open government lens? Yes • Potential for results: Modest
<p>Commitment 13: Developing a range of online administrative services at the sectoral level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifiable: Yes • Does it have an open government lens? No • Potential for results: Unclear

¹ **Editorial notes:**

1. For commitments that are clustered, the potential for results is assessed at the cluster level, rather than at the level of individual commitments.
2. Commitment short titles may have been edited for brevity. For the complete text of commitments, please see Tunisia's Action Plan: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/tunisia-action-plan-2021-2023/>

Annex 2: Minimum Requirements for Acting According to OGP Process

According to OGP’s Procedural Review Policy, during the development of an action plan, OGP participating countries must meet the “Involve” level of public influence per the IRM’s assessment of the co-creation process.

To determine whether a country falls within the category of “involve” on the spectrum, the IRM assesses different elements from OGP’s Participation & Co-creation Standards. The IRM will assess whether the country complied with the following aspects of the standards during the development of the action plan, which constitute the minimum threshold:

1. **A forum exists:** there is a forum to oversee the OGP process.
2. **The forum is multi-stakeholder:** Both government and civil society participate in it.
3. **Reasoned response:** The government or multi-stakeholder forum documents or is able to demonstrate how they provided feedback during the co-creation process. This may include a summary of major categories and/or themes proposed for inclusion, amendment or rejection.

The table below summarizes the IRM assessment of the three standards that apply for purposes of the procedural review. The purpose of this summary is to verify compliance with procedural review minimum requirements, and it is not a full assessment of performance under OGP’s Co-creation and Participation Standards. A full assessment of co-creation and participation throughout the OGP cycle will be provided in the Results Report.

Table 2. Summary of minimum requirements to act according to OGP Process

<i>OGP Standard</i>	<i>Was the standard met?</i>
A forum exists: A 20-member Steering Committee was established in January 2021 to oversee co-creation and implementation of the fourth action plan.	Green
The forum is multi-stakeholder: The Steering Committee is evenly split between government and civil society representatives. ¹	Green
The government provided a reasoned response on how the public’s feedback was used to shape the action plan. The government published a summary of commitment suggestions at various stages of the co-creation process and the list of criteria used to narrow down commitment suggestions. ²	Green

¹ « Comité mixte chargé du suivi de l'élaboration et de la mise en œuvre du 4ème Plan d'Action National du PGO (2021-2023). » 21 January 2021. OGP Tunisia website: <http://www.ogptunisie.gov.tn/fr/index.php/2021/01/22/comite-mixte-charge-du-suivi-de-lelaboration-et-de-la-mise-en-oeuvre-du-4eme-plan-daction-national-du-pgo-2021-2022/>

² "The stages of preparing the fourth national action plan for the Open Government Partnership (2021-2022) by the joint advisory committee in charge of following up the preparation and implementation of this plan." *OGP Tunisia*: <http://www.ogptunisie.gov.tn/?p=4718>