BROKEN LINKS

Open Data to Advance Accountability and Combat Corruption

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OGP Global Report 2022

Open Government Partnership

Former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš is currently facing charges of fraud in his country for pocketing millions of euros in EU agricultural subsidies. Details about his activities were revealed thanks to a collaboration between not-for-profit organizations, journalists, and other public officials. Photo by Krystian Maj.

Background

In March 2022, Czech prosecutors announced that former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš would face charges of fraud for allegedly pocketing millions of euros in EU agricultural subsidies. This marks another high-profile case of potential political corruption – and it adds to a growing global trend that threatens to skew resources and policies away from the common good, perpetuating inequality and undermining democracy. So what can be done? What will ensure that governments serve the public interest rather than the affluent or well-connected few?

The answer is that no single reform is enough. Several layers of accountability are needed, from independent oversight bodies to investigative journalists and an active civil society. However, one fundamental, underlying layer must always be present: making information public through open data. Open data on how decisions are made, what officials own, and whose interests they serve can shine a light on political corruption and help make political systems fairer and more inclusive.

This data is the focus of this report. Drawing on a new global study, the report provides the most complete picture yet of the state of open data against political corruption — across nine policy areas (see Table 1) in 67 countries participating in the Open Government Partnership (OGP).

This report identifies both where these countries are doing well and where they need to improve – examining, for example, which governments disclose who lobbies them; whether political parties and candidates reveal their donors; and whether the public is able to see who owns anonymous companies so often used to launder money. The report explores these critical areas and others, identifying trends at the country, regional, and global levels.

However, the report does not stop at what data needs to be made public. It looks at the measures needed to further link to people and other important data, creating a chain of accountability. The public and institutions working together give data its power.

That is why this report is called *Broken Links: Open Data to Advance Accountability and Combat Corruption*. As the case of Andre Babiš shows, no single dataset, actor, or sector can alone solve the problem of corruption. But linked together – across borders, levels of government, and parts of society – data becomes a powerful and a fundamental means for change.

TABLE 1. Policy areas covered in this report

Asset Disclosure: Data on assets, liabilities, and finances of elected and senior-appointed officials and associates.

Political Finance: Data on financial flows to and from political parties, candidates, and third parties, including income, expenses, and donations.

Company Beneficial Ownership: Data on people who own, control, or benefit from companies, including the nature and size of the interest they hold.

Land Ownership and Tenure: Data on who owns land and the type of tenure — including state, communal, and open access lands. Land is a subject of major policy decisions and a means of hiding illicit enrichment.

Public Procurement: Data on the purchase of goods, services, and public works, including names of suppliers, dates, costs, and details on each stage of the contracting cycle.

Lobbying: Data on who influences policies and decisions, including details of interactions with public officials such as dates and times, topics, and money spent.

Right to Information (RTI) Performance: Data on the implementation of RTI laws, including the number of requests, delays, denials, and appeals.

Rulemaking: Data on the process of drafting regulations, including proposed regulations, public comments, reasoned responses, final regulations and justifications, and challenges.

Interoperability: Data on the linkages between datasets, such as through common identifiers for companies, legislation and regulation, public officials, and lobbyists.

Global Findings

Five Key Gaps

In its most simple terms, this report shows that very few countries actually publish the most important data to counter political corruption. Where public datasets exist, they are isolated and disconnected from others that would reveal the flow of funds and influence. These global challenges can be summarized in the form of five key data gaps: collection, publication, high-value elements, usability, and interoperability:

- **Collection gaps:** Many countries do not have laws or regulations mandating the collection of data, most notably as it relates to lobbying, but in other areas as well. Many high-value pieces of information, in particular, are not collected. For example, although all OGP countries require public officials to submit asset declarations, fewer than half require the same for other politically exposed persons, like spouses and family members.

- **Publication gaps:** Many countries do not publish any data, even if data collection is legally required. For instance, only about one in three OGP countries publish any data on beneficial owners, despite most requiring it be collected. Across nearly all policy areas, the countries that mandate data collection far outnumber those that actually publish any data.

- **High-value data gaps:** Publishing data is not inherently useful; the data must include high-value elements that enable effective oversight. For example, although most OGP countries publish data on tenders and awards for public contracts, few publish information on contract implementation. Similarly, most OGP countries publish basic political finance data, but few clearly identify donors to political parties and candidates.

- **Usability gaps:** Few datasets meet open data standards. Although most datasets are available at no cost, most are not regularly updated or available in structured formats (as opposed to scanned forms and documents). This means that, even where available online, existing data is difficult to analyze.

- **Interoperability gaps:** Combining datasets across policy areas increases the effectiveness of any single dataset. In the Babiš case, a series of linked datasets were used to identify the alleged fraud, including data on company ownership, land tenure, subsidies, and public contracts. However, most datasets lack common identifiers for companies, legislation, politicians, or lobbyists that would more easily enable identifying networks of corruption or undue influence. It is also important for people and institutions to exchange information, especially across sectors. As the cases in this report also show, the links between journalists, accountability institutions, and civil society organizations make all the difference in combating corruption.

Many OGP members like Nigeria are using their action plans to publish company beneficial ownership information according to open data principles. Dr. Gloria Ahmed, National Coordinator of OGP Nigeria, speaks at the presentation of Nigeria's beneficial ownership register. Photo by OGP.

Policy Area Findings

Varying Levels of Maturity

The global data gaps exist to varying extents depending on the policy area. For example, most OGP countries (96 percent) publish at least some public procurement data online, and most of these datasets include high-value elements in open data formats (see Table 2). On the other end of the spectrum, only a quarter of OGP countries publish any lobbying data, with even fewer legally requiring its collection. Levels of maturity, therefore, vary significantly by policy area.

The table shows the percentage of OGP countries that meet key data metrics for each policy area. (n=67)

	Data Collection Required	Data Published	High-Value Data Published[†]	Open Data Published[††]
Asset Disclosure	100%	61%	37%	22%
Political Finance	94%	70%	39%	39%
Company Beneficial Ownership	73%	36%	19%	21%
Land Ownership And Tenure	Not reviewed	57%	19%	16%
Public Procurement		96%	69%	67%
Lobbying	22%	27%	7%	10%
Right to Information Performance	63%	46%	27%	25%
Rulemaking	72%	63%	22%	16%

[†] *A majority of high-value data elements are available online. See Annex for list of high-value data elements.*

[††] *Published data meets most of the following standards: free, timely, machine-readable, openly licensed, bulk downloadable.*

Few countries				Most countries
0%–20%	20%–40%	40%–60%	60%–80%	80%–100%

One exception is the publication of high-value data, as it is largely absent across all policy areas. These high-value elements are different for each policy area and critical for accountability. For example, most OGP countries publish which goods and services are being procured, but very few publish information on spending against contracts, which is essential for monitoring results. Table 3 summarizes which high-value elements are, and are not, generally available for each policy area.

TABLE 3. Availability of high-value elements by policy area

Policy Area	Summary of Findings
Asset Disclosure	Most datasets include income, assets, and liabilities of certain public officials, but few cover close family members or significant changes over time.
Political Finance	Two-thirds of datasets include income and spending of political parties and candidates, but few datasets cover assets and liabilities or clearly identify donors.
Company Beneficial Ownership	Most datasets include unique identifiers for companies and clearly identify owners, but few datasets specify the financial interests held.
Land Ownership and Tenure	About half of datasets cover different types of land tenure. Only one-third include information about beneficiaries of land tenure and their rights.
Public Procurement	Most datasets include contract descriptions, costs, and dates, but few countries publish data on contract implementation.
Lobbying	Half of available datasets include the topic and goals of interactions. Fewer than a quarter include dates or the amount of money spent.
RTI Performance	Most datasets specify the number of requests submitted, but fewer than half cover delays, materials withheld and reasons for withholding, or appeals.
Rulemaking	Fewer than half of datasets include proposed regulations, and fewer than a quarter cover final regulations, public comments, or supporting documentation.
Interoperability	Most assessed OGP countries do not have common identifiers for the simple reason that they do not publish the relevant datasets. Where datasets are available, some employ useful common indicators, most frequently around companies.

Data alone, however, is not enough to counter political corruption. Even data that includes high-value elements and is published online in reusable formats must be accompanied by other layers of accountability policies. For this reason, each policy area module in this report includes a "Beyond open data" section that outlines complementary steps needed to achieve impact. Among other reforms, these sections underscore the importance of citizen engagement and monitoring, robust regulatory environments, and independent oversight mechanisms for verification and enforcement.

Regional Findings

Innovating New Links

Just as the five global data gaps are found across all regions, so too are stories of innovative reforms. Each regional module in this report covers not only the state of open data against political corruption in the region, but also an overview of reforms advanced through the OGP platform and examples of regional innovations. These findings are summarized here.

AMERICAS

The median OGP country in the Americas publishes data for most of the policy areas reviewed. Challenges include improving the usability of data and publishing high-value information like common identifiers that enable linking datasets. Nearly every OGP country in the region has advanced procurement reforms through OGP — with many achieving significant results. More commitments are needed in other areas, like beneficial ownership transparency and asset disclosure.

EUROPE

European countries publish data in some form across most of the policy areas reviewed. Areas for improvement include publishing more high-value information, publishing data in usable formats, and making datasets interoperable through common identifiers. Several OGP commitments from the region have achieved transformative results, but more commitments are needed; with the exception of procurement, each policy area remains unaddressed in OGP by over half of countries in the region.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Many countries in the region lack publicly available data for multiple policy areas, particularly beneficial ownership and lobbying. OGP members are making commitments in their OGP action plans to address these challenges, but translating them into results through effective implementation has been difficult, especially around procurement and asset disclosure. Examples of regional innovations in these areas show the way forward.

AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

OGP members in the region are making some of the most ambitious commitments in OGP action plans, particularly around company beneficial ownership transparency and land ownership transparency. However, data publication remains an important challenge. Fewer than one-quarter of countries in the region publish data related to each policy area, with the exception of public procurement. Ensuring that legal frameworks mandate both data collection and publication is an important avenue for future reforms.

Country Findings

Areas for Action

Although political corruption is a global problem that requires solutions across borders, implementation of reforms begins at the domestic level. Therefore, this report includes country modules that visualize the state of open data against political corruption in each country. These modules enable reformers to compare themselves to other countries, identify actionable areas for improvement, and find specific datasets that can be improved.

Like the rest of the report, these modules also emphasize learning from the experiences of others. Specifically, the modules spotlight examples of promising initiatives to inspire the adaptation and adoption of high-impact reforms around the world. These spotlights mirror the longer-form Lessons from Reformers included throughout the report and showcase the diversity of efforts that countries are undertaking to counter political corruption (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. Lessons from reformers come from every corner of the world

Policy Area	Lessons from Reformers
Asset Disclosure	**Georgia** has implemented an independent monitoring system for public officials' asset declarations.
	Paraguayan civil society launched an online portal during the pandemic that enables citizens to flag government data irregularities to auditors.
	Ukraine has had a long journey of mandating, publishing, and prosecuting violations of asset disclosure data.
Political Finance	**Croatian** civil society developed a database that enables searching and comparing donors, campaign expenses, media discounts, and social media expenses.
	Panama, as part of its OGP action plan, created a public, user-friendly database to monitor the funding of political parties by the electoral authority.
Company Beneficial Ownership	**Kenya,** as part of its OGP action plan, passed a law requiring companies to keep a register of its members, including beneficial owners.
	Armenia amended existing legislation to require that beneficial ownership information be included in a public register.
	Portugal implemented its public beneficial ownership register in 2019, and by January 2021, nearly half a million companies had registered their beneficial owners.
	Ghana implemented an electronic beneficial ownership register in 2019 and is using its OGP action plan to improve the quality and accessibility of the data.
Land Ownership and Tenure	**Liberia** has improved the openness of land management through recent OGP action plans, including by making land information and data publicly available.
	Uruguay has improved the openness of its cadastre through its OGP action plans, such as by improving citizen engagement through an online portal.

Policy Area	Lessons from Reformers
Public Procurement	**Finland,** as part of its OGP action plan, published procurement data through an open access service that emphasizes accessibility and usability for citizens.
	Colombia is implementing open contracting reforms that improve competition and increase suppliers in the public procurement market.
Lobbying	**Chile** enacted legislation in 2014 to modernize its system of lobbying and used its second OGP action plan to implement and monitor the legislation.
	Madrid, Spain, as part of its OGP action plan, created a mandatory lobby registry to ensure traceability of public decision-making, and as of early 2021, over 500 lobbyists have successfully registered.
Right to Information Performance	**Nigeria** is using its OGP action plan to improve RTI compliance by proactively disclosing information, establishing an electronic portal for information requests, and mandating annual reports on request and response rates.
	Uruguay used its OGP action plan to set up an online system to track requests for information and more recently committed to implementing a system to evaluate websites of reporting entities to improve the quality of information.
Rulemaking	The **Slovak Republic,** as part of its OGP action plan, created rules outlining public involvement in the development of selected policies.
	Sunlight Labs tools Scout and Docket Wrench are examples of innovative tools that can be built using open regulatory data.
	Croatia, Kyrgyz Republic, Malta, Mexico, and **Norway** have used their OGP action plans to implement unified websites that enable the public to submit comments on regulations. **Italy** used its OGP action plan to reform impact assessments, ex-post evaluations, and stakeholder consultations during the rulemaking process.
Interoperability	**Kenya's** opportunities to standardize procurement data and track beneficial owners provide lessons on for addressing policy and technical aspects of interoperability.
	The **United States,** as part of its 2013 OGP action plan, committed to moving toward a more interoperable and public data system. By 2022, the US government has implemented a single, publicly owned, nonproprietary common identifier for all contracting companies.

Moving Forward

This *Broken Links* report is about more than data. It is about countries challenging one another to improve. This requires advocates and reformers inside and outside of government to continue to push to release data, reform institutions, and forge relationships that can help stem corruption. This can be supported through commitments in OGP action plans and in other international fora along with other reformers from around the world. It cannot, however, work in isolation. The links in the chain of accountability that are broken, have gone missing, or have never existed will need the cooperation of many — across borders, across parts and levels of government, across parts of society — to be mended and put into action.

About OGP

In 2011, government leaders and civil society advocates came together to create a unique partnership — one that combines these powerful forces to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive, and accountable governance.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) includes 77 countries and 106 local governments — representing more than two billion people — and thousands of civil society organizations.

OGP is based on the idea that an open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to citizens, and that improving the relationship between people and their government has long-term, exponential benefits for everyone.

Through the Partnership, governments and civil society work together to co-create action plans with concrete steps — commitments — across a broad range of issues. All OGP governments sign on to the Open Government Declaration and are required to work with civil society organizations to co-create reforms as part of an action plan that can deliver real benefits to citizens.

This is the Executive Summary of the OGP report, *Broken Links: Open Data to Advance Accountability and Combat Corruption* (2022). You can view the full report at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/broken-links/.

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