

Civic Space Fact Sheet

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ As civic freedoms continue to [decline globally](#), protecting and expanding civic space is a bigger focus now than ever before for members of [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#).
- ✓ Commitment adoption in this area is at its highest point since 2016, with over one-third of active national action plans including a civic space commitment.
- ✓ OGP members must work to co-create and implement more ambitious commitments that can transform and strengthen civic space.

WHY CIVIC SPACE?

The freedoms of expression, association, and assembly are critical to the achievement of open government. For open government to work, citizens must be able to join together in collaboration, seek funding, and communicate to the public about government actions. Countries and local jurisdictions that commit to protecting these freedoms reap the benefits of higher levels of citizen engagement and stronger civil society organizations (CSOs). However, these freedoms are increasingly being threatened globally in the form of tightened restrictions on CSOs, digital surveillance, and violence targeting defenders and journalists.

STATUS QUO

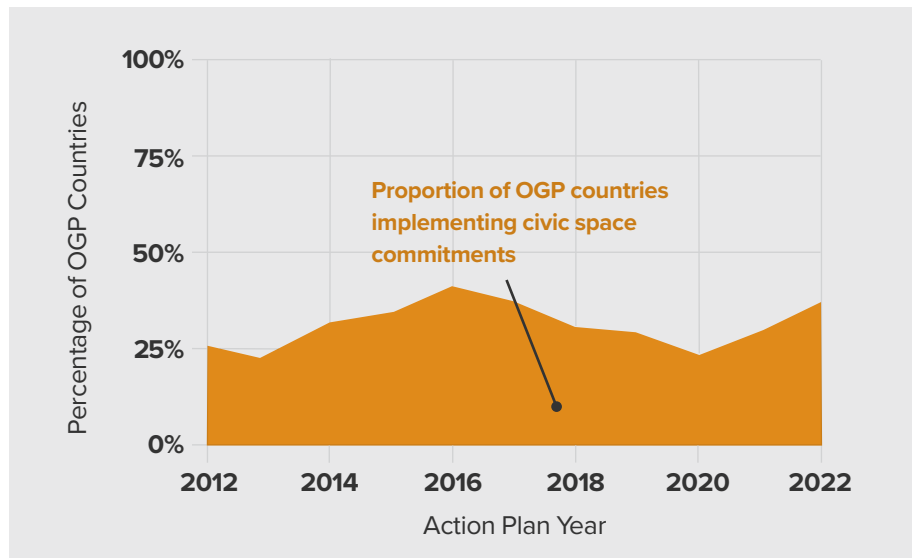
- **Media constraints:** Over two-thirds of OGP countries face severe to moderate constraints to a free and independent media, according to [Freedom House](#).
- **Low focus on freedom of assembly:** Despite many notable issues with freedom of assembly, such as excessive use of police during public protests, few OGP countries have undertaken commitments in this area.
- **Freedom of association challenges:** Nearly 40 percent of OGP countries experience challenges to freedom of association, including limited access to funding, difficult registration processes, and burdensome operational and reporting requirements for civil society organizations.

This fact sheet covers all commitments submitted as of June 30, 2023. As of this date, OGP consisted of 76 national and 104 local members.

COMMITMENT PROGRESS

The percentage of countries currently implementing a civic space commitment is at its highest point since 2016 (see figure below*). Over one-third of active national action plans currently include a civic space commitment. Altogether, 47 OGP countries and five local jurisdictions have made a total of 135 civic space commitments since OGP was established in 2011.

*Figure displays commitment trends at the national level due to recent growth in local members.



WHAT ARE OGP MEMBERS DOING?

- Protecting fundamental rights and liberties through the justice system
- Simplifying legal requirements and reducing restrictive measures for CSOs
- Facilitating CSO access to sustainable funds
- Increasing police oversight during assemblies
- Creating protections for activists and media

WHERE TO NEXT

The following recommendations summarize key actions for OGP members to implement:

Defending Activists and Journalists/Freedom of Expression

- Protect activists and journalists from attacks through access to justice initiatives, including police investigations, access to legal counsel, guaranteed due process, and witness protection.
- Establish rules and protections for press freedom, and involve civil society and media outlets in the development of laws around media ownership.
- Remove statute of limitations to investigate crimes against the freedom of expression, and provide sanctions against countries where there are cases of impunity for attacks.

Freedom of Assembly

- Prevent restrictions on peaceful assembly.
- Establish open, clear, and ethical protocols addressing police conduct prior to, during, and following protests.
- Train police officers in appropriate responses at assemblies, and ensure protections for independent monitors to provide oversight of both police and protestors.

Freedom of Association

- Limit legal restrictions on practices of CSOs, particularly for those working on sensitive issues.
- Ensure CSOs face low barriers to entry by making registration processes accessible, fair, and transparent.
- Promote mechanisms for organizations to access funding and resources to ensure better long-term planning and sustainability.
- Allow CSOs to self-regulate using accepted and sector-endorsed reporting and accountability mechanisms.

NOTABLE COMMITMENTS

Commitments to Watch



Jalisco, Mexico - Improving Accessibility of CSO Processes (2021)

Currently, many citizens feel that processes regarding the channeling of resources to CSOs in Jalisco are complex and lack transparency. As part of its 2021-2024 action plan, Jalisco aims to use feedback from civil society to improve the clarity of CSO application and verification processes.



Bosnia and Herzegovina - Making Media and CSO Funding Transparent (2022)

Bosnia and Herzegovina committed to establishing voluntary criteria encouraging state institutions to proactively publish the amount and purpose of public funding allocated to media and CSOs. The commitment also aims to introduce voluntary criteria for recipients to publish the expenditure of allocated funds, with a clear explanation of those funds' intended use. If voluntary uptake of these criteria is successful, these reforms could reduce misuse of funding and strengthen independence of CSO and media projects.



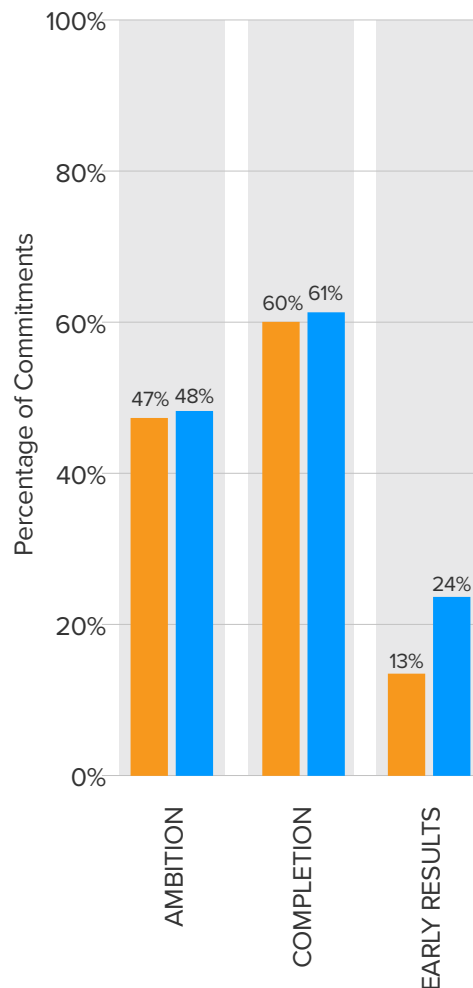
Nigeria - Strengthening Enabling Environment for Citizens and CSOs (2023)

Need for civic space reform in Nigeria has escalated in recent years, as evidenced by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) downgrading Nigeria's civic space rating from "obstructed" to "repressed" in 2019. Nigeria is currently implementing a commitment to protect the rights to free assembly, association, and expression. This includes setting clear registration requirements and processes for CSOs, holding citizen-police dialogues and developing guidelines for peaceful protests, and conducting multi-stakeholder dialogues on government surveillance.

IRM QUICK STATS

According to OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM), civic space commitments tend to show weaker early results than other OGP commitments.

Commitment Performance



Civic space commitments

All OGP commitments

Ambition - Ambitious commitments are those that have substantial potential for results, according to the IRM.

Completion - Completed commitments indicate that the commitment was substantially or fully implemented within the action plan period.

Early Results - Strong early results indicate the commitment made significant improvements to government openness.