

# **4**

## **Open government in Arab States: An overview of good practices**

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This chapter focuses on the efforts that Arab countries have made to promote open government principles and the challenges they still face. With a comparative angle, it analyses the policy and legal frameworks, with a specific focus on access to information, the significant progress made on e-government and open data, as well as the limited initiatives to promote citizen participation. After providing a number of concrete examples of good practices from ESCWA member states, the chapter concludes by looking at the impact of COVID-19 on open government in the region and proposes some strategic directions for Arab countries.

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## Overview of open government in ESCWA countries

Many countries in the Arab region have become aware of the importance of moving towards consolidating the concepts of open government, as an element of good governance, developing transparent, effective and accountable institutions; especially as they all adhered to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and its goal SDG 16 (ESCWA, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>). The large penetration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the rapid development of e-government in many of them can facilitate open government by applying its principles. Efforts have been deployed in the domain of open government data (OGD) thus far in several Arab countries.

This chapter presents the status and efforts related to open government and its enablers in the Arab countries based on internationally recognised indexes and monitoring. It considers the GDP level of the Arab countries as one of the key indicators of how living standards relate to the implementation of open government principles. The analysis also discusses good practices based on the responses from the Arab countries to a specific ESCWA-OECD survey for the purpose of this study.

This chapter uses “e-government” and “digital government” interchangeably as do the UN (UN DESA in particular) and several Arab countries, while the OECD considers “digital government” as the next phase of e-government (see Introduction chapter, section 1.5).

### Policy framework for open government

In the Arab region, three countries, namely Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, have joined the global Open Government Partnership (OGP) and have therefore committed to applying policies and strategies to implement the commonly agreed recommendations. Other Arab countries do not have a specific policy/strategy or action plan for open government; however, some countries have initiated partial or comprehensive national plans that include the implementation of some dimensions of open government especially on open government data. In reality, it is observed that “*most of the initiatives and programs that have been approved were designed as part of standing e-government projects and were not in fact part of any government strategy towards open government*”<sup>1</sup>. ESCWA, as well as the OECD for some partner countries, is assisting the Arab countries in their efforts and has already established a dedicated framework to foster open government in the Arab countries (ESCWA, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>).

Jordan elaborated its fourth OGP action plan for the period 2018-2020. It is currently implementing the following five commitments of this last plan: 1) enhancing partnerships and dialogue between the public sector and civil society, 2) development and enhancement of the application of Government Open Data Policy, 3) fostering national dialogue to achieve political reform, 4) unification and development of the national complaints mechanism regarding human rights violations and 5) institutionalisation of the enforcement measures for the Access to Information Law<sup>2</sup>. The results of the third action plan were reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and three partial commitments were starred<sup>3</sup>.

For the case of Morocco, and following an initial OECD assessment in 2015<sup>4</sup>, the government elaborated its first action plan for the period 2018-2020<sup>5</sup>, with 24 commitments: 18 for the executive branch and six for the Parliament. These commitments focus on participation in law making, open regulations, right to information, transparency and participation in fiscal openness<sup>6</sup>. The progress in the achievement of these commitments can be followed on a specific platform<sup>7</sup>.

In Tunisia, the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) judged that Tunisia had substantially or completely implemented 6 of the 13 commitments of the second national action plan 2016-2018, with one initiative having a major contribution in opening government<sup>8</sup>. The ensuing 2018-2020 action plan continued the efforts with 13 new commitments<sup>9</sup> with four main focuses: 1) enhancing the right to access information and opening up public data, 2) promoting transparency in the natural resources management field,

3) encouraging integrity, participatory approaches and local governance, and 4) improving the administrative services equality.

In Lebanon, the Office of the Ministry of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR)<sup>10</sup> had observed that the Access To Information law was still not implemented<sup>11</sup>, even though the decree of its application rules was published by the Ministry of Justice in 2020<sup>12</sup> and the National Anti-Corruption Commission provided for by the law has not been established yet. An action plan was elaborated in partnership with the OECD for the period following 2020. A public information package<sup>13</sup> on RTI has been issued, clarifying that in case of non-compliance by the administration, a complaint can be filed to the State Council (administrative court) or to the National Body for Combatting Corruption<sup>14</sup>. The national anti-corruption strategy, Ombudsman Law and Whistle-Blower Protection laws have not been fully implemented either.

It is also worth noting that 56 local authorities<sup>15</sup> have joined the OGP, of which some are in Arab countries: Karak and Salt municipalities in Jordan, Tangier-Tatouan-Al Hoceima in Morocco, El Kef and Regueb municipalities in Tunisia. They are in the process of elaborating their own action plans.

#### Implementation framework of open government

The institutional framework encompassing activities related to e-government, open data and open government varies significantly among Arab countries<sup>16</sup>. In most countries, no differentiation is made between the institutional setting for e-government, focused on ICTs, and that for open government, focused on governance, except in the case of countries that joined OGP.

The institutional framework in Tunisia and Jordan for open government specifies specific entities/commission for its implementation. In the latter, a specialised commission was created to ensure implementation of the RTI law, and particularly to develop the ATI protocols, in line with the country commitments to OGP. Furthermore, as per article 3 of the ATI law, there is an Information Council headed by the Minister of Culture, assisted by the Director of the National Library and includes the Ministries of Justice, Interior and Defense, the High Council for Information, the Office of Statistics, the National ICT Center and the high Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>17</sup> In addition, several amendments, currently working their way through parliament, seek to include CSO representatives in the Council. The ATI law gives the Director of the National Library the authority of “information commissioner”, to whom the complaints should be filed. In addition, an Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission (JIACC)<sup>18</sup> was created in the country.

In Tunisia, in addition to the ATI commission, there is an official open government focal point who coordinates the OG agenda, the E-government unit at the Presidency of Government, and a Strategic Council of Digital Economy, reporting to the Council of Ministers, pilots Open data as well as E-Government activities. In Morocco, the Department for administrative reform at the Ministry of finance, economy and administrative reform coordinates the open government agenda and acts as the OG focal point, while an inter-ministerial committee (abbreviated CIGOV), headed by the Minister of Industry, Trade and New Technologies defines e-government policies and evaluates/monitors progress<sup>19</sup>. In addition, an ATI commission has been created by the law 13-13 of 2018<sup>20; 21</sup>.

These three Arab countries, members of the OGP, have established dedicated steering committees to coordinate and monitor commitments the countries make in their OGP national action plans. The OGP steering committees typically include members from both government and civil society.

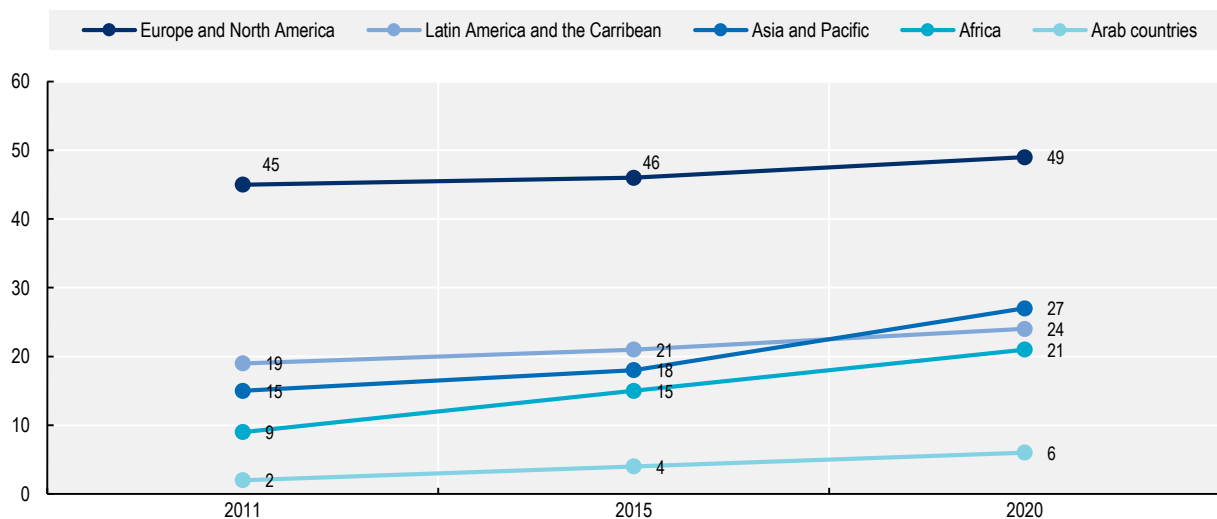
As it will be seen in the following sections, other Arab countries have adopted nearly the same institutional framework for e-government and open data initiatives. Moving towards open government will require the identification or establishment of specific entity/commission to lead and coordinate the open government agenda, like what was done for e-government, noting that coordination is crucial yet often a major challenge for countries in the region and beyond.

## Legal framework for open government

Several Arab countries have taken advanced steps to create the legal environment that is necessary for the principles of open government to develop fully. In line with this, ESCWA has accompanied these steps by laying the legal groundwork, especially the rights to access information, transparency and open data (ESCWA, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>).

The legal aspect concerning the right to access information is the key building block for good governance based on transparency and accountability, and forms the very foundation of openness. Having an ATI law is one of the eligibility criteria to join the Open Government Partnership. UNESCO has reported that as many as 127 countries in the world had enacted Access to Information (ATI) laws up to 2020, including all OECD countries but only six Arab countries (Figure 4.1)<sup>22</sup>.

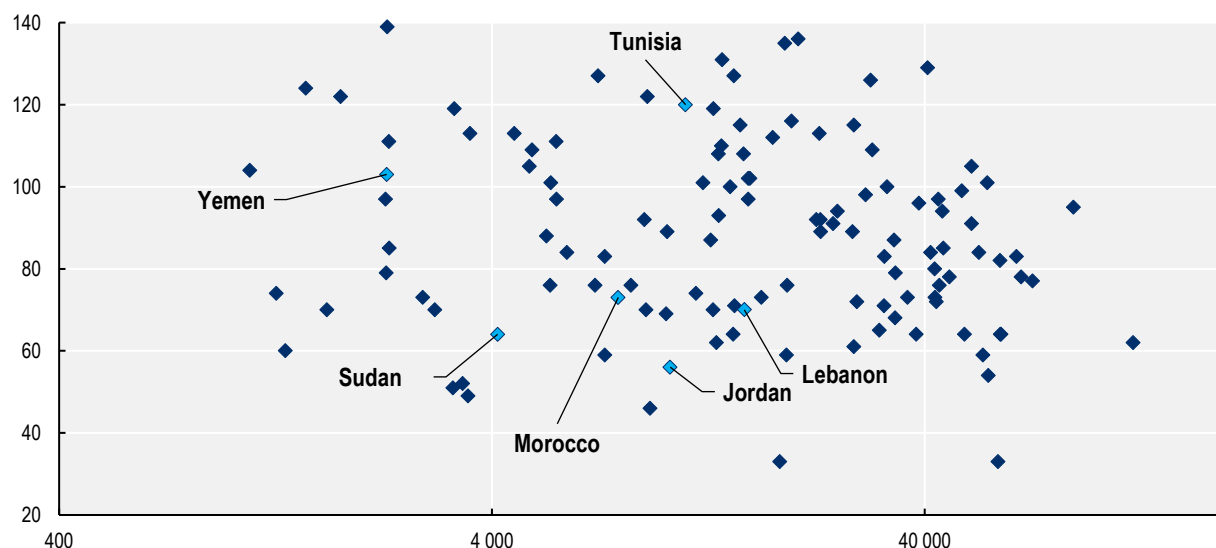
**Figure 4.1. UNESCO tracking of ATI laws by region**



Source: Adapted from UNESCO (2020<sup>[3]</sup>), From Promise to Practice: Access to Information for Sustainable Development, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375022>.

However, access to information involves many complex aspects. Countries should not only enshrine this right in law or in the constitution, but also clarify that it applies to the largest part of institutional information, and specify procedures for access, exceptions, and claims, as well as sanctioning actors who do not comply. Accordingly, the Center for Law and Democracy<sup>23</sup> has elaborated a worldwide Right To Information (RTI) rating<sup>24</sup> for ATI laws according to seven categories of indicators, namely: right of access, scope, requesting procedures, exceptions and refusals, appeals, sanctions and protections, and promotional measures. On a scale of 150, 25 countries obtained a score above 110, including Tunisia from the Arab region, and 25 countries a score below 65, including Jordan and Sudan from the Arab region. As it can be observed on Figure 4.2 (OECD countries are indicated and coloured orange for comparison), the scores seem independent of the level of economic development of the country, as some countries with high GDP per capita (PPP) have low scores<sup>25</sup>.

**Figure 4.2. Scoring of Arab countries on ATI Laws**



Source: ESCWA Compilation based on data from: <https://www.rti-rating.org/>

Note: Vertical axe shows the value of the index,

Horizontal axe shows the GDP per Capita based on PPP (2015), PPP = Purchasing Power Parity

In general, the ATI laws adopted in Tunisia and Yemen were deemed to be stronger than similar laws in more economically developed countries.<sup>26</sup> Jordan, however, scored low, including by local critics<sup>27</sup>. It should be noted, however, that the RTI ranking evaluates only the content of the ATI laws but not their enforcement or implementation in practice. Table 4.1 gives the situation of the ATI laws of the six Arab countries. Three Arab countries don't have yet the institutional structure for the enforcement of the ATI law namely Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen.

**Table 4.1. Access to information laws in the Arab States and RTI rating**

Country	Enshrined in Constitution	Enshrined in Law	Year of Law	Score by RTI ranking
Jordan	Yes	Yes	2007	56
Lebanon	No	Yes	2017	70
Morocco	Yes	Yes	2018	73
Sudan	No	Yes	2015	64
Tunisia	Yes	Yes	2016	120
Yemen	No	Yes	2012	103

Source: ESCWA compilation based on multiple sources.

**Tunisia's law** has obtained the best score and is ranked 13th in the world. But ATI is even enshrined in Tunisia's 2014 constitution, which "*guarantees the right to information and the right of access to information and communication networks*" (article 32). It guarantees and protects the "*freedom of opinion, thought, expression, information and publication*", which "*shall not be subject to prior censorship*" (article 31) and "*protects the right to privacy and the inviolability of the home, and the confidentiality of correspondence, communications, and personal information*" (article 24)<sup>28</sup>. The ATI law, an organic law, was enacted in 2016<sup>29</sup> and it created an independent ATI authority<sup>30</sup> to receive and decide on appeals concerning the implementation of the law (detailed below in best practices).

An RTI commission, linked to the Prime Minister's office, which includes several members of CSOs, has also been created in **Morocco**. It launched its platform<sup>31</sup>, developed by the Department of Administrative Reform with technical assistance by the OECD, in March 2020. At the end of 2020, 102 public institutions were involved, 2 500 requests had been filed and 1 130 answered within an average of 62 days.

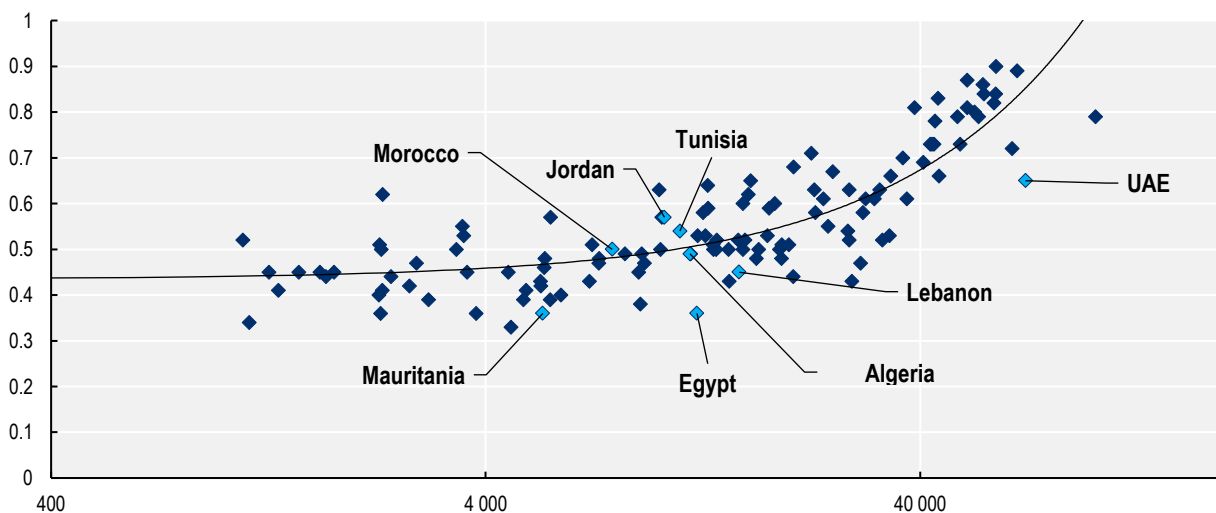
Four Arab countries collaborate with UNESCO to report on RTI guarantees and its implementation (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>) namely Algeria, Kuwait, Morocco and Tunisia. UNESCO is in fact responsible for reporting worldwide on the progress of SDG 16.10.2, which is related to the adoption and implementation by countries of constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information.

The legal framework for open government, as defined by ESCWA (2020<sup>[2]</sup>), also includes legal aspects related to the open by default principle that need to be embedded in RTI acts. Government must also specify the nature of potential restrictions and secret information, as well as other issues related to the protection of personal data and private life, to the freedom of opinion, expression and media, to the preservation and dissemination of archives, to statistics, to data classification and the enabling laws for public participation (public consultations and petitions) and to accountability (anti-corruption, protection of informants on corruption, dissemination of revenues and properties of civil servants). This is in addition to the legal issues related to Open Data in general and to intellectual property in particular.

The laws also need to be implemented in a general context of rule of law. Having a good law does not necessarily mean that it is implemented, as is the case of Yemen where there has been a longstanding conflict. Two major institutions assess the implementation of rule of law worldwide: The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UN DESA), precisely to assess progress on SDGs and open government, and the World Bank, in general.

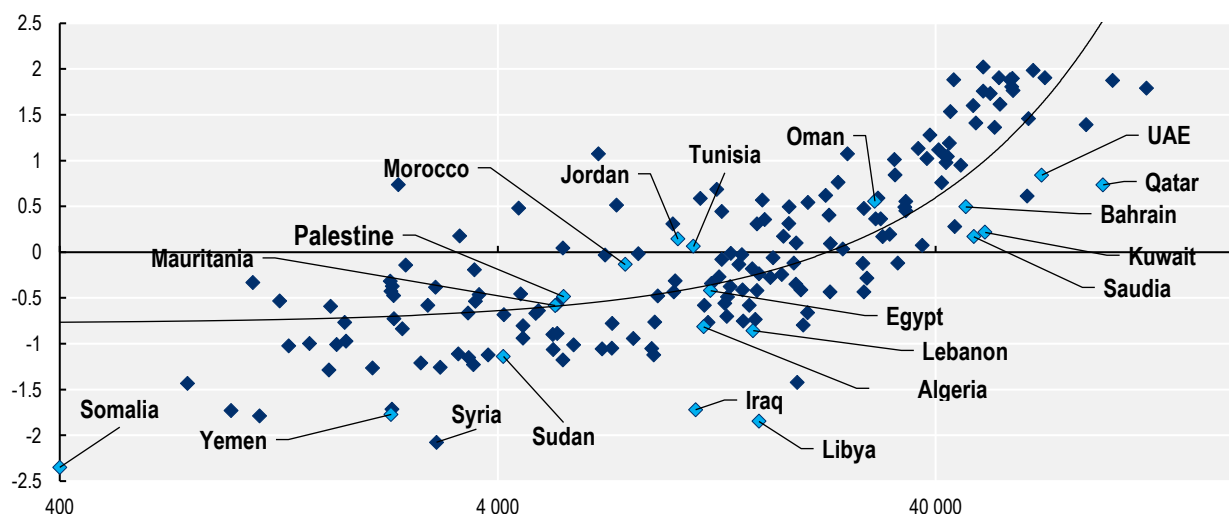
The UN DESA assessment for 2020 (see Figure 4.3), although still not covering all countries, shows a strong correlation between rule of law and GDP per capita. Some middle-income Arab countries namely Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, and to a certain extent Algeria are assessed in line with other countries with similar level of economic development. The World Bank rule of law (see Figure 4.4) indicator also confirms the worldwide trend of a strong correlation between rule of law and GDP per capita PPP. However, both low- and high-income Arab countries score generally lower than their global counterparts. Yet, some middle-income Arab countries obtained relatively good scores for rule of law. The two methods of assessment seem consistent.

**Figure 4.3. UN DESA Rule of Law assessment**



Source: ESCWA compilation based on UN DESA Rule of Law, and World Bank Rule of Law assessment.

Figure 4.4. World Bank Rule of assessment 2019



Source: ESCWA compilation based on UN DESA Rule of Law, and World Bank Rule of Law assessment.

#### Efforts on the legal frameworks for open government

Beside the ATI, there are many laws that facilitate the transition towards open government. The Arab countries continue their efforts to develop legal frameworks towards open government, whether or not they are OGP members. Below, the most important initiatives in this regard are described.

All Arab countries have signed and ratified the UN Convention against corruption adopted in 2003. Only Syria, in conflict, signed it but did not ratify it<sup>32</sup>. In Algeria, the law 06-01<sup>33</sup> was enacted in 2006 on the prevention and the fight against corruption sets out penalties of two to ten years' imprisonment in the case of corruption of public officials.

In 2018, Bahrain enacted Law No. 30 with respect to Personal Data Protection. Also, Bahrain has set up a legal anti-corruption framework and the Penal Code criminalises most corruption offenses in both the public and the private sector<sup>34</sup>. In Egypt, a right of information law had been discussed and drafted in 2008<sup>35</sup>, but not enacted yet. Recently, in 2020, Egypt adopted its first law to protect personal data, law No. 151 of 2020<sup>36</sup>. In Syria, several draft laws that are linked to open government exist but they have not been adopted yet. These laws pertain to access to information, personal data protection and a law on financial disclosure for government officials.

In Iraq, laws pertaining to the right to access information and freedom of expression and peaceful demonstration have been drafted and submitted to the Parliament<sup>37</sup>. A law from 2011 created an independent integrity and anti-corruption commission<sup>38</sup> and a law on human rights and accountability was adopted in 2019.

In Jordan, a law was enacted in 2014 that aims to prevent public officials from making illicit financial gains<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, a law on integrity and anti-corruption was passed in 2016<sup>40</sup>, and its revision is currently being discussed by the Parliament<sup>41</sup>. Also, the old law of 1952 on management and classification of official documents was amended successively in 2001, 2005 and 2017<sup>42</sup>. A new revision is currently presented for public consultation. The Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MoICT) is working on drafting a Personal Data Protection Law. In 2020, the Jordanian Government approved the Open Government Data Quality Framework. It also developed, in late 2020, three protocols on classifying, enforcing and managing information. Their overall objective is to provide clear procedures and standards for public bodies subject to the access to information law. The protocols were elaborated by a multi-

stakeholder committee composed of government officials, CSOs, academics, and international experts, and were subject to a public consultation. They were recently adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2020.

In Kuwait, a law establishing the Kuwait Anti-corruption Authority was enacted in 2016<sup>43</sup>. Lebanon passed in 2018 a new law on e-transactions and personal data (no. 81/2018). In April 2020, during the severe crisis that the country experienced, the parliament adopted an anti-corruption law, almost a decade after a first draft was introduced<sup>44</sup>, and a National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020-2025) was prepared, the first ever in the country. The strategy seeks to pave the way for the future establishment and activation of the National Anti-Corruption Institution, which will eventually be responsible for administering ATI requests and related disputes. In May 2020, a law on “*Fighting Corruption in the Public Sector and establishing the National Anti-corruption Institution*” was adopted<sup>45</sup>. In June, a law protected “whistleblowers” on corruption<sup>46</sup> and in October another law was passed on asset disclosure of public servants and punishment of illegal enrichment<sup>47</sup>.

Libya, presently in conflict, is living under an interim constitutional declaration while a new constitution was drafted by a constituent assembly in 2017. The draft is criticised in terms of right to information and public freedoms<sup>48</sup>. However, a national anti-corruption law was adopted in 2014 that still needs to be implemented. Otherwise, it is worth noting that the Libyan government signed in 2012 a memorandum of understanding with the United Kingdom to develop open government<sup>49</sup>.

The Mauritanian Constitution does not specifically provide for the right to access information or the freedom of the press, although the Freedom of the Press Law states that the access to information and freedom of the press “*are inalienable rights of the citizen*”. However, the law also notes these freedoms can be limited “by law and to the extent strictly necessary for the preservation of the democratic society”. Moreover, the legal framework for combating corruption includes the provisions set out in the Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the law No. 014-2016 of 15 April 2016 on combating corruption. However, the Act has yet to be enforced<sup>50</sup>.

In Morocco, a decree of one article (no. 2.14.267)<sup>51</sup> was issued on 4 November 2015 to set terms, conditions and rules to manage, sort and destroy current and intermediate archives, and deliver the final archives. In 2018, the parliament enacted law no. 31-13<sup>52</sup> to exclude from the right to information the data that could pose a national security risk, such as financial and monetary policies, foreign relations, industrial property rights and copyrights. Also, as part of the first Moroccan OGP action plan, the government is working on implementing the provisions of Organic Law No. 130-13 related to budget transparency and performance-oriented budgeting. Morocco has a law governing privacy and data protection since 2009, it is Law No. 09-08, dated 18 February 2009.

In Oman, a draft law on access to information was submitted to the Shura council in 2010 but has not been ratified. A Media Charter of Honor was signed in 2017, that stated “*the right to access to information and news, and access to non-prohibited official documents from their sources*”, and a Penal Code was enacted in 2018 (Decree 7/2018) containing provisions for corruption. In Palestine, an anticorruption law was enacted in 2005<sup>53</sup>. An administrative development plan was set in 2010. A draft law on right to information has been prepared with the support of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)<sup>54</sup> and submitted to the Parliament. Also, in 2018, a draft law on protection of personal data was prepared<sup>55</sup>.

In Qatar, a law No. 13 was enacted concerning privacy and protection of personal data in 2016; the first in GCC countries. And while there is no law for freedom of information, the Penal Code (law No. 11/2004) acts as an anti-corruption legislation<sup>56</sup>. In Saudi Arabia, the Shura Council drafted a “right to information” and a “personal data protection” laws in 2014, however they are not enacted yet. In Sudan, a law concerning access to information was promulgated in 2015. The Act established a High Commission for information to act as the sole information provider for the government of Sudan. However, Sudan has no



data protection authority and no data protection law regulating the collection, storage and use of personal data by governments and the private sector<sup>57</sup>. Also, it has no anti-corruption law<sup>58</sup>.

Besides its right to information law, Tunisia enacted the Organic Act 2004-63 of 2004 on the Protection of Personal Data<sup>59</sup>. In 2008, a law created an independent institution for the protection of personal data, the INPDP<sup>60</sup>. Several articles of the law were superseded by those of Convention 108 of the Council of Europe<sup>61</sup>, ratified by Tunisia in 2017. However, despite a recent law on whistleblower protection<sup>62</sup>, the efforts to combat corruption in Tunisia have been slow to materialise<sup>63</sup>.

The UAE has enacted several legislations to protect the data and the privacy of the persons and the companies, the Federal law 1/2006 on Electronic Commerce and Transactions and that 5/2012 on combatting cybercrimes that includes articles related to personal data protection. Access to information is regulated by a guide and Law 26/2015 on the Organization of Dubai Data Publication and Sharing<sup>64</sup>. This is while the Federal constitution provides for the “freedom of communication by means of post, telegraph or other means of communication and guarantees their confidentiality in accordance with the law”<sup>65</sup>. The UAE has no specific anti-corruption legislation. However, there are laws such as the Penal Code (Federal Law 3/1987) and the civil service law (Federal Law 21/2001), which provide sanctions related to corruption<sup>66</sup>.

In Yemen, despite the myriad challenges that the country is facing, the parliament passed Law 13/2012 regarding access to information in 2012, before the crisis. This came after the country’s first specific anti-corruption law was introduced in 2006, which replaced the more general law on bribery passed in 1994.

As this overview shows, many interesting OG-related laws and regulations have been passed in recent years in Arab countries, representing in some cases major steps forward. However, in most cases the legal framework is not yet comprehensive from an open government point of view and countries should consider addressing the loopholes.

## Overview of e-government in the Arab States

E-government can be an enabler/facilitator for the transformation towards open government (OG), as stated in the introduction. Based on the ESCWA framework for OG, openness is the first stage for the implementation of open government. E-government can contribute to more government openness but does not automatically lead to open government. As stated in the OECD recommendation “*For digital government to contribute to more open public sector, there should be a shift to use technology to shape public governance outcomes, and not simply to support government processes*” (OECD, 2017<sub>[41]</sub>).

In the following section, the analysis of e-Government in the Arab countries considers the GDP level as one of the key indicators to reflect how living standards relate to government development. The analysis will be complemented by good practices shared by Arab governments with ESCWA-OECD through the dedicated survey for this study.

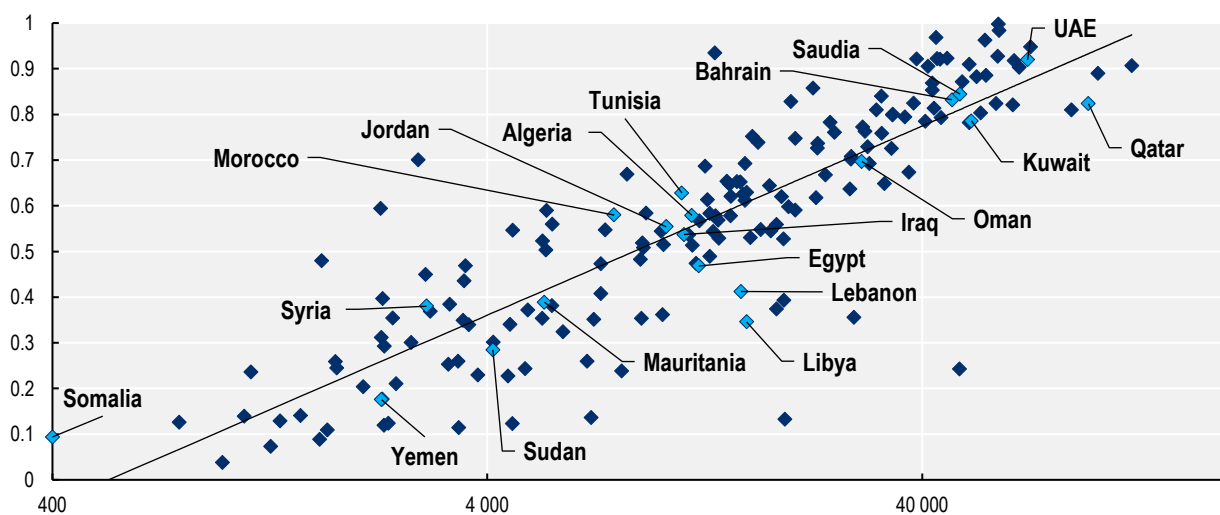
Many Arab governments have strongly engaged in e-government and made considerable efforts to move to openness, notably through the development of Open Government Data (OGD) portals and adopting participation at different levels. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UN DESA) has been commissioned to monitor e-government progress worldwide in line with the adoption of the sustainable development goals. The UN e-Government Survey provides a global view of the e-government development through various indices: the e-government development index (EGDI), open government data (OGD) index (OGDI) and e-participation Index.

A general assessment of e-government development in the Arab countries can be made through the EGDI index of UN DESA. This index combines three important dimensions to assess e-government scoring: the

status of the development of telecommunication infrastructure, the inherent human capital and the scope and quality of online services (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>).

In the Arab region, the development of telecommunications infrastructure has advanced significantly, and so has its penetration among the population, as well as human resources in information and communication technologies (ICTs). This resulted in the creation of a favourable enabling environment. The telecommunications infrastructure index of UN DESA (Figure 4.5) shows that Arab countries follow the international trend, with some under-achievers mostly due to conflict or crisis situations, such as Libya or Lebanon. The same applies to the human capital index, with a notable overachievement of Tunisia (Figure 4.6), and unfortunately with several countries underachieving such as Yemen, Mauritania and Iraq. The good level of ICT spread is an interesting factor as it can facilitate the access to inclusiveness to services and data.

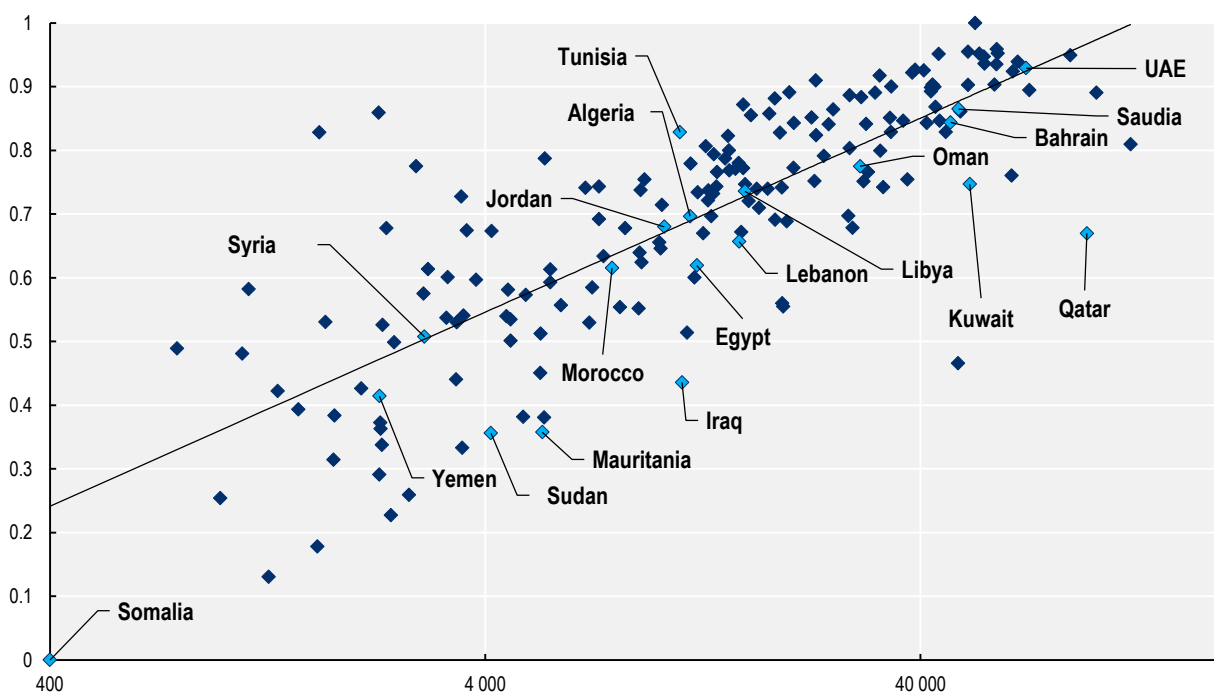
**Figure 4.5. UN DESA Telecom infrastructure index 2020**



Note: The horizontal axis shows GDP ppp and the vertical axis shows the value of the Index.

Source: Compilation by ESCWA based on UN e-Government Survey 2020

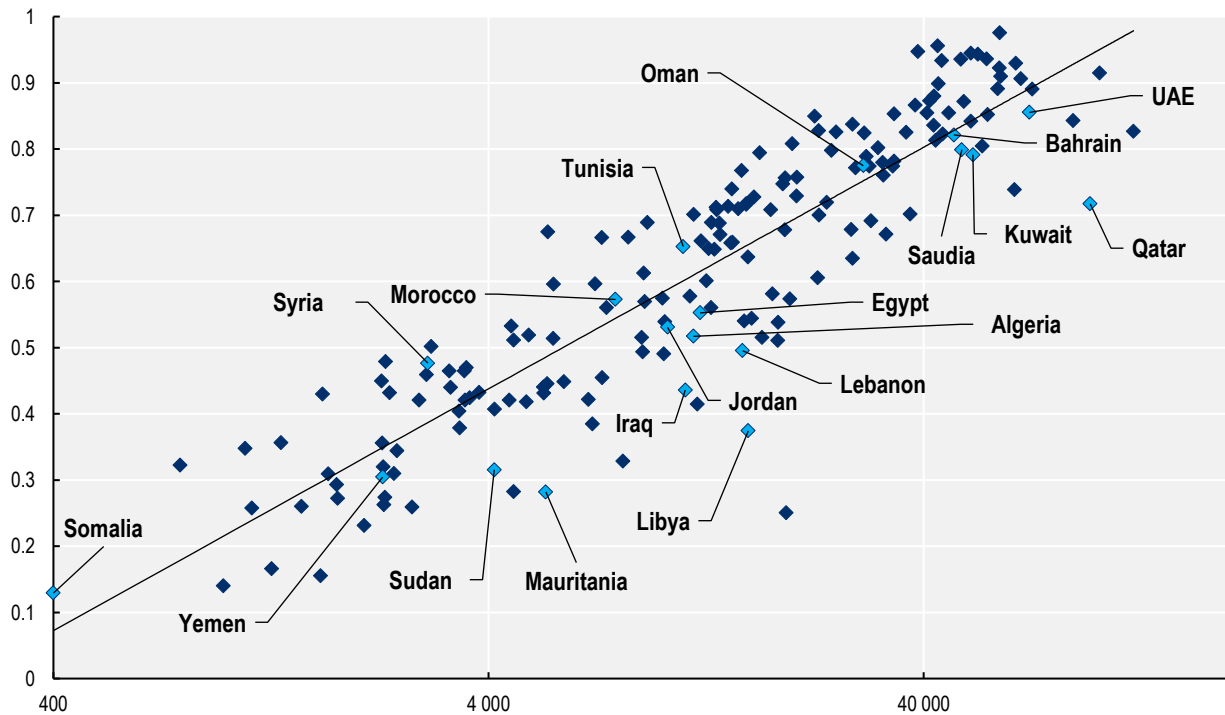
Figure 4.6. UN DESA Human capital index 2020



Note: The horizontal axe shows GDP ppp and the vertical axe show the value of the Index.  
Source: Compilation by ESCWA based on UN e-Government Survey 2020

Many of the Arab countries are under-achievers in terms of online services deployed and their quality such as Libya, Mauritania, Sudan, Algeria, Jordan, and Lebanon. However, certain countries such as UAE, Tunisia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Syria<sup>67</sup> were clear over-achievers when considering their GDP (Figure 4.7).

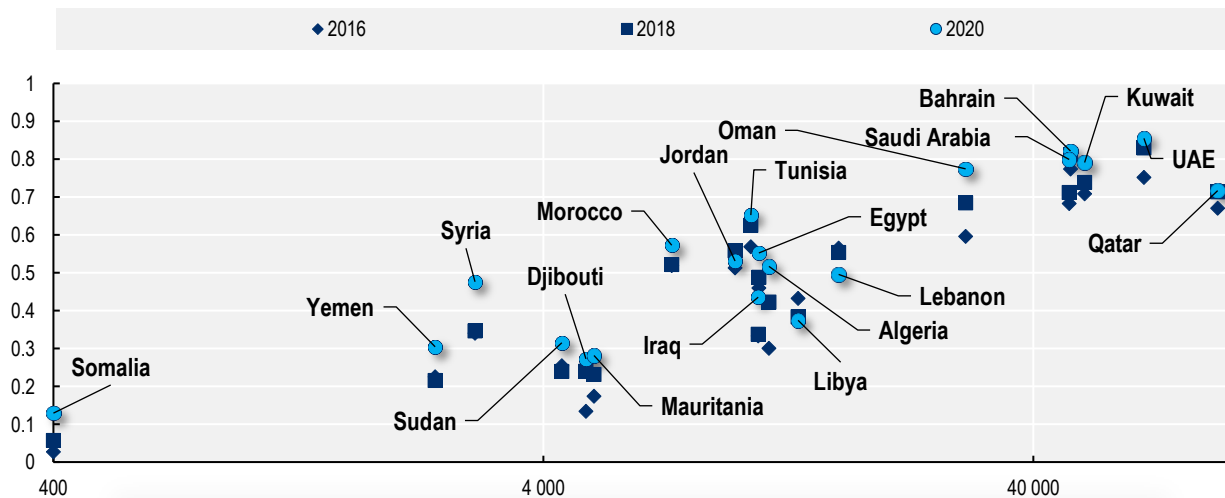
**Figure 4.7. UN DESA e-government online services index 2020**



Note: The horizontal axe shows GDP ppp and the vertical axe show the value of the Index.  
 Source: Compilation by ESCWA based on UN e-Government Survey 2020

This assessment in 2020 recognises that all Arab countries<sup>68</sup> have made considerable progress in their e-government (EGDI) index in the last five years (Figure 4.8). The OECD and ESCWA are assisting countries to further this progress. The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework (DGPF) has served to guide recent OECD work in the MENA region to support the digital transformation of the public sector, as done through the report to benchmark MENA countries’ digital government strategies (OECD, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>) and the dedicated study on Morocco (OECD, 2018<sup>[7]</sup>).

**Figure 4.8. Evolution of the EGDI index of the Arab countries**



Note: horizontal axe shows the GDP PPP, the vertical axis shows the EGDI value  
 Source: compiled by ESCWA considering UN e-Government Survey 2016, 2018, 2020.

Arab countries have progressed in recent decades towards the adoption of digital technologies and data to promote more efficient public sectors, which in turn increased transparency. The development of e-government policies has brought significant benefits in the digitalisation of public sector organisations yet it also introduced challenges to achieve a more integrated and cohesive public sector in order to enable a whole-of-government transformation of public services and operations.

Significant steps were made to create a digitally inclusive environment addressing digital divides and other forms of digital exclusion. Targeted interventions were made to improve access to ICT, and improve the comfort and familiarity of all population groups, including the disadvantaged, with using ICT to interact with government. Some of the existing initiatives to reduce digital divides in the MENA region include the establishment of kiosks in rural areas, and the collaboration of the private sector and post offices to improve access to ICT and promote digital literacy (Egypt), as well as government funded training and awareness campaigns (Jordan) (OECD, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). Despite these efforts, the digital divide and relatively high illiteracy rate still represent a challenge in some countries.

In line with this progress, all Arab countries have significantly developed online services, e-government applications and e-government portals (Table 4.2), which could help the move towards open government and participation. They simplified access to these services through the development of one-stop-shops for digital services, or centrally available lists that define all services provided by the public sector. However, fully developing such an approach requires governments of the region to achieve significant levels of interoperability of public sector information systems and, at times, cross-organisational service solutions (OECD, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). Table 4.2 shows the e-government portals in the Arab countries and the relevant responsible institutions of e-government development in each country. Based on the experience in e-Government implementation and its institutional structure, it is recommended to have a specific entity/committee responsible for the coordination and implementation of the open government agenda, including to prevent potential overlapping of similar initiatives such as online portals.

**Table 4.2. E-government portals in Arab countries**

Country	Relevant institutions	e-Government Portals
Bahrain	Information and eGovernment Authority	<a href="https://bahrian.bh/">https://bahrian.bh/</a>
Egypt	Ministry of Communications and Information Technology	<a href="http://www.egypt.gov.eg">www.egypt.gov.eg</a>
Jordan	Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship	<a href="https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/">https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/</a>
Kuwait	Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT)	<a href="https://www.e.gov.kw/">https://www.e.gov.kw/</a>
Lebanon	Office of the Minister State for Administrative Development (OMSAR)	<a href="http://www.dawlati.gov.lb/">http://www.dawlati.gov.lb/</a>
Mauritania	Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and ICT	<a href="http://www.servicepublic.gov.mr">http://www.servicepublic.gov.mr</a>
Morocco	Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Digital Economy	<a href="http://www.egov.ma/">http://www.egov.ma/</a>
Oman	Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology	<a href="https://www.oman.om/">https://www.oman.om/</a>
Palestine	Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology	---
Qatar	Ministry of Transport and Communications	<a href="https://hukoomi.gov.qa/">https://hukoomi.gov.qa/</a>
Saudi Arabia	National Committee for Digital Transformation, which includes the Saudi e-Government Program (Yesser) of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology	<a href="https://www.my.gov.sa/">https://www.my.gov.sa/</a>
Sudan	National Information Centre (NIC)	<a href="http://www.esudan.gov.sd">www.esudan.gov.sd</a>
Syrian Arab Republic	Ministry of Communication and Technology	<a href="http://e.sy">http://e.sy</a> or <a href="http://www.egov.sy/">http://www.egov.sy/</a>
Tunisia	Presidency of Government	<a href="http://fr.tunisie.gov.tn/">http://fr.tunisie.gov.tn/</a>
United Arab Emirates	Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA)	<a href="https://u.ae/">https://u.ae/</a>
Yemen	National Information Centre	<a href="http://www.yemen.gov.ye/portal/">http://www.yemen.gov.ye/portal/</a>

Note: "---" indicates having no information.

Source: Compiled by ESCWA.

Below are some examples of good practices in e-government extracted from the responses of member countries to the ESCWA-OECD survey and selected as most relevant on a path towards open government.

Oman has even developed an e-voting system for the elections of the Shura (Senate) and local councils (11 governorates), which take place every four years<sup>69</sup>. The system allows the candidates for the elections to submit their applications online. The electors can also register and vote, through on-line, polling stations or mobile applications. The system verifies the identities of candidates and voters through their national registration system (NRS) with biometric authentication. The system was fully enhanced and deployed for the municipal elections of 2020<sup>70</sup>, finally postponed due to COVID-19 confinement. The control of the election and the complaints are managed by a Committee nominated by the Minister of Interior without independent scrutiny by candidates or CSOs. The system profited from the deployment of the national public key infrastructure (PKI) in Oman, with digital identity (eID), mobile identity (mID) and digital signature, connected to 77 electronic e-government services, including ID or residency cards (100% of residents connected), the registration system of SIM cards<sup>71</sup>, easy business formalities<sup>72</sup> and Zakat payment<sup>73</sup>.

Lebanon is developing, within its 2020-2030 Digital Transformation Strategy, its single point e-government platform for commercial registry and formalities<sup>74</sup>, a courts automation project, a civil servants e-learning project<sup>75</sup>, an e-procurement platform for public entities<sup>76</sup>, a unified database for all public sector planning studies<sup>77</sup>, an e-appointment mechanism in the senior vacant positions in the Lebanese public administrations and institutions<sup>78</sup>, an integrated solid waste management system<sup>79</sup> and a sectoral and organisational performance measurement and inspection programme for civil servants<sup>80</sup>.

Qatar has deployed extensive e-government services<sup>81</sup>, based on the development of a centralised Government Data Exchange platform (GDx) facilitating the back-end, day-to-day exchange between public entities. The services to the population are available through comprehensive portals on the internet and smartphones, named Metrash<sup>82</sup> and Hukoomi<sup>83</sup>.

Also, Qatar was the first country in the world to implement a generalised electronic patient medical record in 2016<sup>84</sup> deployed to reach 90% of its 2.7 million population. This clinical information system (CIS) connects hospitals, primary healthcare centres, physicians and laboratories and enables them to retrieve quickly all information on patient health record. Other examples of e-government in Qatar include<sup>85</sup>: the single window for investors<sup>86</sup>; the initiative for digital transformation of small & medium business enterprises (SMEs)<sup>87</sup>; the labelling of local commerce, Theqa<sup>88</sup>; the assistive technology center, Mada<sup>89</sup>, dedicated to connecting people with disabilities to the ICTs (that ranked in 2020 as 1<sup>st</sup> in the world by the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs)<sup>90</sup>; the worldwide media analytics information service<sup>91</sup> to government entities scanning 150 million sources of information including social networks in order to capture and analyse the community opinion; and a network for building a database of volunteers and connecting volunteer pioneers, named TAMM<sup>92</sup>.

One of the most impressive areas of progress in terms of e-government is the UAE and especially the emirate of Dubai. The flagship e-government portals are called Smart Dubai<sup>93</sup>, Smart Abu Dhabi<sup>94</sup>, Smart Sharjah, Smart Fujairah, etc. offering all public services and administrative documents interactions through mainly mobile phones for citizens, residents, visitors and investors by providing them quick access to information without the need to visit government entities or their websites. This includes the Abu Dhabi TAMM portal<sup>95</sup> as a single point of access to 350 government services and Dubai Business Ledger on Blockchain, online court audiences, etc. The UAE also launched electronic ID cards, carrying biometric details for the whole population, nationals and residents, as well as a “smart pass” to access e-government services and a “UAE Pass App” with similar functions and secure digital signature on smart phones.

The "*Digital Egypt e-platform*" enables people to access public services online. Currently, 155 digital government services are being provided, with the project to expand to other governorates. Several e-services were developed and launched for a number of entities, including law enforcement, notarisation, personal status, family courts, supply, electricity, agriculture, traffic, real estate registration, the Mortgage Finance Fund (MFF), and the General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI). The project was completed in Port Said, and the same services are being deployed nationwide.

An E-government portal was launched in Saudi Arabia as a one-stop-shop portal<sup>96</sup>. It includes a participatory function, Sahem<sup>97</sup>, feedback with public institutions, Watani<sup>98</sup>, a dialogue portal with the Royal court, Tawasol<sup>99</sup>, as well as many other interactive options with different ministries. There are many examples of e-government initiatives in Saudi Arabia including mobile application for air quality status in users' location in Riyadh<sup>100</sup>, the capital.

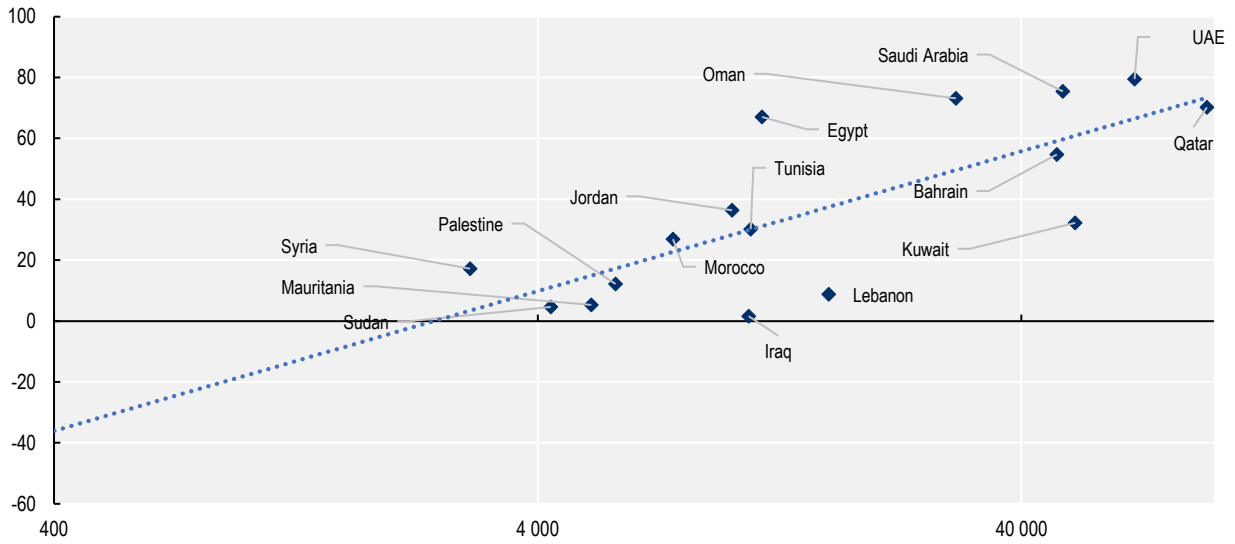
In Kuwait, all residents now have smart civil IDs cards that are designed to allow citizens of all GCC countries to travel freely between member states. These ID cards serve as an ID document in the format of a credit card and includes overt and covert security features, allowing cardholders to access digital government services and perform transactions securely. The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) manages a secure highway for data exchange, allowing people, the government and companies to exchange data securely and verify the identity of the other party<sup>101</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the significant development of e-government in the Arab countries was sometimes criticised for on-line censorship and tracking as well as non-respect of privacy and confidentiality, which makes legislative reforms in this perspective. This is essential to increase citizens' trust and to respect human rights, in line with open government principles<sup>102</sup>.

#### Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) maturity

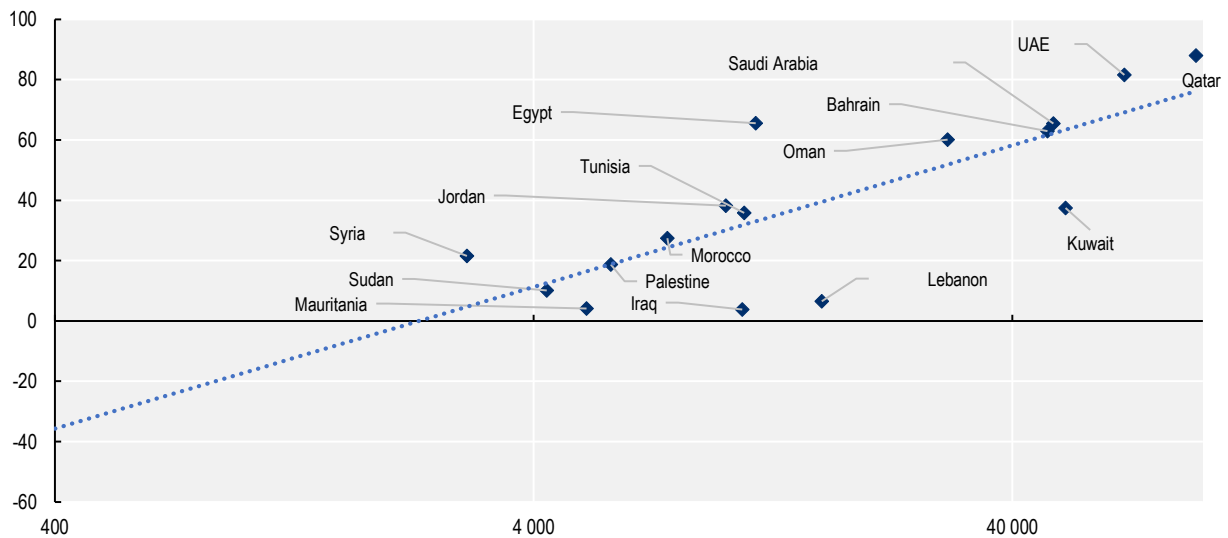
For its support to Arab countries in their e-government agenda, ESCWA has developed a Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) maturity index. It aims to measure the maturity of government services provided through portals and through mobile applications in the Arab region. It seeks in particular to bridge the gap in most of the international indicators, related to service maturity, its use and user satisfaction. To this end, 84 government services have been identified that each country needs to deliver electronically for individuals and businesses. The principle of life cycle has been adopted in service selection, which covers all individuals who need these services at different stages of life. It also encompasses companies that need such services since its establishment to its closing. The index is mainly elaborated for policy makers, enabling them to assess the situation and to identify the services that still need to be developed. For individuals, these include healthcare, education, employment housing, family affairs, travel and tourism, social well-being, transportation. Whereas, for businesses creation, this includes financing, operations, and the end of the company. Figures 4.9 to 4.11 show the results for the 3 key issues surveyed for GEMS in 2020 (ESCWA, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>) along GDP per capita PPP: availability of services, reach of services and their usage.

**Figure 4.9. GEMS Availability of services**



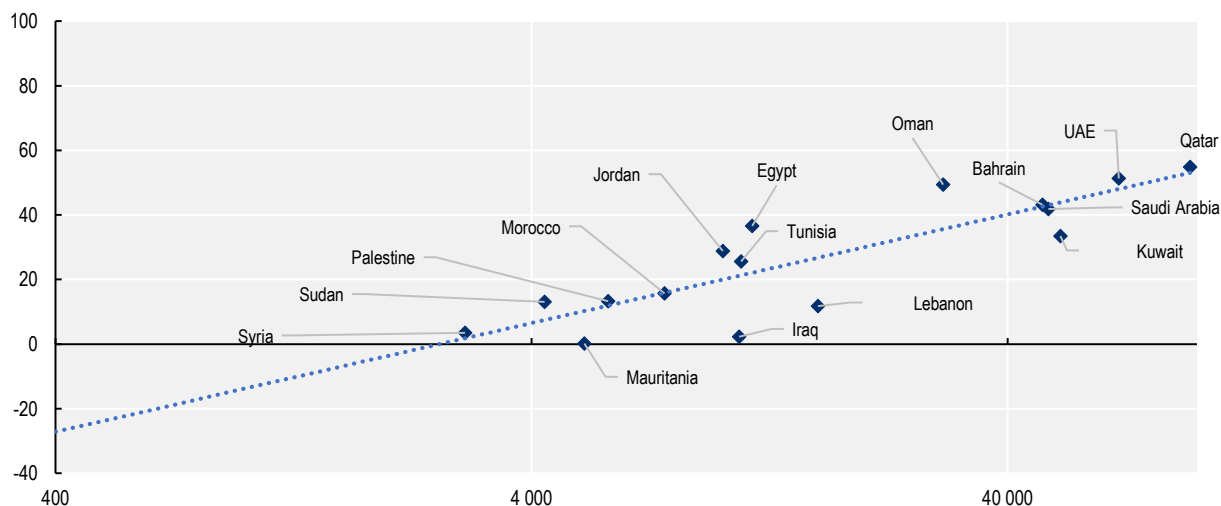
Source: ESCWA (2020<sup>[3]</sup>), *Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) maturity index - 2020*, E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/TP.17, ESCWA, Beirut, <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/government-electronic-mobile-services-maturity-index-GEMS-2020>.

**Figure 4.10. GEMS Reach of services**



Source: ESCWA (2020<sup>[3]</sup>), *Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) maturity index - 2020*, E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/TP.17, ESCWA, Beirut, <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/government-electronic-mobile-services-maturity-index-GEMS-2020>.



**Figure 4.11. GEMS Usage of services**

Source: ESCWA (2020<sup>[9]</sup>), *Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) maturity index - 2020*, E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/TP.17, ESCWA, Beirut, <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/government-electronic-mobile-services-maturity-index-GEMS-2020>.

According to assessments, the maturity of Arab countries in terms of e-government was deemed to be relatively high. However, the number of applications and services available is still limited, in particular those on mobile phones. The rates of users' satisfaction are also assessed as limited.

## Open government data

While e-government aims mainly at simplifying administrative procedures for citizens, residents and enterprises in a sort of one-stop-shop, OGD aims at opening up government, statistics, data, plans and operations to the general public. Thus, the subject of OGD is much more connected to open government and the right to information (RTI).

Many Arab countries have launched Open Data strategies to promote transparency and accountability of the public administration and sector. The ESCWA had accompanied these efforts by elaborating capacity development material for open data (ESCWA, 2019<sup>[9]</sup>) and supporting selected Arab countries namely Jordan, Palestine and Syria. Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the UAE have developed specific open data portals (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. Open Data Portals and Institutional framework in Arab countries**

Country	Open Data portals
Algeria	<a href="http://portal.dataalgeria.cerist.dz/">http://portal.dataalgeria.cerist.dz/</a> <a href="https://algeria.opendataforafrica.org">https://algeria.opendataforafrica.org</a>
Bahrain	<a href="https://www.data.gov.bh">https://www.data.gov.bh</a>
Egypt	<a href="https://egypt.opendataforafrica.org/">https://egypt.opendataforafrica.org/</a>
Jordan	<a href="https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/">https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/</a>
Kuwait	<a href="https://e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/Pages/OtherTopics/OpenData.aspx">https://e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/Pages/OtherTopics/OpenData.aspx</a>
Lebanon	<a href="https://www.opendatalebanon.org/">https://www.opendatalebanon.org/</a>
Libya	<a href="https://libya.opendataforafrica.org/">https://libya.opendataforafrica.org/</a>
Mauritania	<a href="https://mauritania.opendataforafrica.org/">https://mauritania.opendataforafrica.org/</a>
Morocco	<a href="http://www.data.gov.ma/">http://www.data.gov.ma/</a>
Oman	<a href="https://data.gov.om/">https://data.gov.om/</a>
Palestine	<a href="http://www.opendata.ps/">http://www.opendata.ps/</a>
Qatar	<a href="https://www.data.gov.qa/">https://www.data.gov.qa/</a>
Saudi Arabia	<a href="https://data.gov.sa/">https://data.gov.sa/</a>
Somalia	<a href="https://somalia.opendataforafrica.org/">https://somalia.opendataforafrica.org/</a>
Sudan	<a href="https://sudan.opendataforafrica.org/">https://sudan.opendataforafrica.org/</a>
Tunisia	<a href="http://fr.data.gov.tn/">http://fr.data.gov.tn/</a> and <a href="http://openbaladiati.tn/">http://openbaladiati.tn/</a>
UAE	<a href="https://bayanat.ae/">https://bayanat.ae/</a> <a href="https://bayanat.ae/en/Resources">https://bayanat.ae/en/Resources</a>

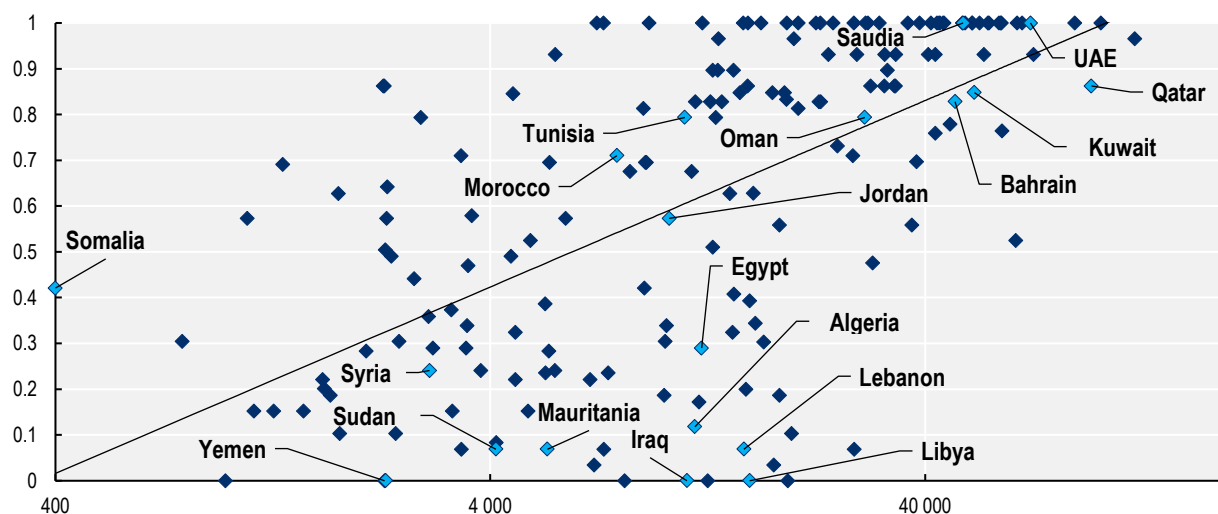
Source: Compiled by ESCWA team and the Consultant for this report.

No Arab country has adhered to the **Open Data Charter**, which was adopted in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Summit of 2015 in Mexico, including those who joined the OGP. This charter sets six base principles for open data, namely: open by default, timely and comprehensive, accessible and usable, comparable and interoperable, for improved government and citizen engagement, and for inclusive development and innovation<sup>103</sup>.

UN DESA developed an open government data index (OGDI) that is different from the one on e-government. The index is based on three key dimensions: policy and institutional framework, existence of OGD portal and features, and data availability in various sectors such as health, education, employment, social security, environment and justice and data application (UN DESA, 2020, p. 258<sub>[10]</sub>).

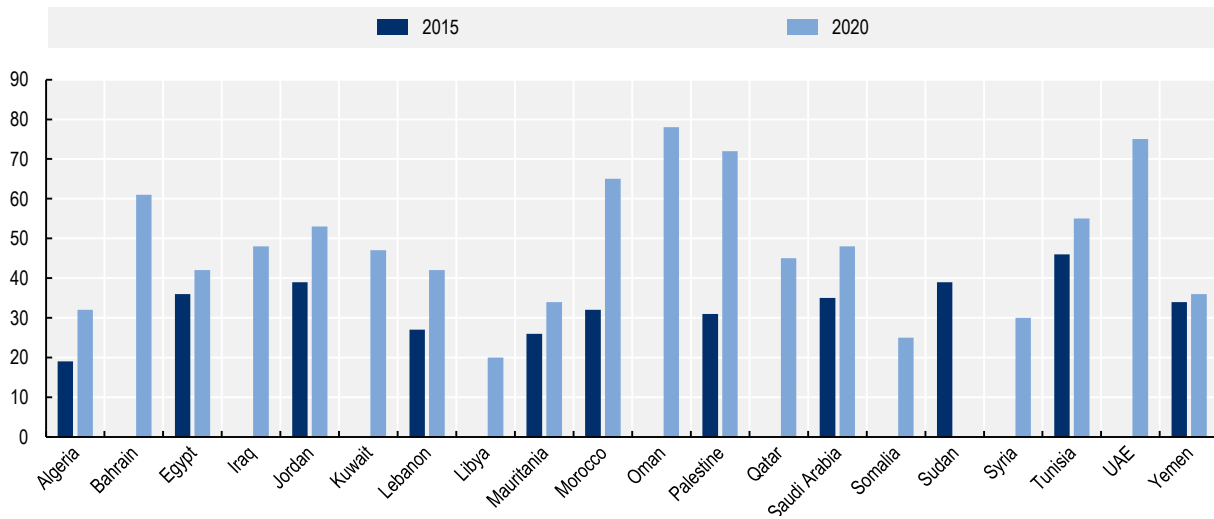
The results of the related UN assessment (Figure 4.12) show that most high-income world countries have high scores, while low- and medium-income countries are widely scattered. The scores of the GCC countries are along OECD countries, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia being the best performers. Among the middle-income Arab countries, the members of the OGP have the highest scores. The others register low scores, as well as their world counterparts.

Figure 4.12. UN DESA OGD Index 2020



Source: UN DESA (2020<sup>[10]</sup>), United Nations e-Government Survey 2020: Digital Government in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development; ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E/214, United Nations, New York, <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2020>.

In these matters of OGD, some countries follow the guidelines of Open Data Watch (ODW)<sup>104</sup> for openness and coverage of their publicly released data. ODW is an international watchdog organisation concerned with these issues, publishing yearly an Open Data Inventory (ODIN) that helps to identify and address data gaps. This is, for example, the case of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)<sup>105</sup> which has seen its ODIN score improving substantially between 2015 and 2020. Its ranking is now on par with the high-income Arab countries or even the most developed countries (Figure 4.13). Palestine was ranked 20<sup>th</sup> worldwide, while Oman 11<sup>th</sup>; Singapore being ranked first. This significant achievement in the conditions of the Palestinian authorities (in particular, the divide between the West Bank and Gaza) is linked to the establishment of a specialised team within the PCBS. It works with an OGD team created by a decision by the Prime Minister in 2018. It is chaired by the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technologies, involving several Ministries and CSOs<sup>106</sup>. An online platform (C-Kan platform<sup>107</sup>) had been established and the staff of the different Ministries trained. Specific surveys are conducted by the PCBS to fill the gaps. The official launching of the OGD platform<sup>108</sup>, expected in 2020, has been, however, delayed due to COVID-19 confinement conditions. Figure 4.13 shows the leapfrog improvement of Palestine's ODIN score in only five years, as well as that of Morocco.

**Figure 4.13. Evolution of ODIN scores for Arab countries (2015-20)**

Source: Extracted from <https://odin.opendatawatch.com/>.

Many Arab countries situated in Africa have shared an African open data portal initiative supported by the African Development Bank<sup>109</sup>. Lebanon has opened to the public all projects studied by the administration<sup>110</sup>. The UAE has developed one of the most comprehensive open data portals for health, education, government human resources and employment, social affairs, labour and private sector establishments, finance affairs, environment and justice<sup>111</sup>.

Jordan made comprehensive efforts for its OGD initiative<sup>112</sup>, in close collaboration with both the OECD and the ESCWA. In 2017, Jordan launched an initiative on open data focused on various fronts from conceptualisation and regulation to implementation. Instructions, based on consultation with civil society and other sectors, were issued by the Council of Ministers to all government ministries, agencies and organisations to publish their data on the platform. An awareness plan was put into motion to promote the dissemination and use of the available data among private and public sectors. This was an essential step in curbing the poor use of the data and the platform. ESCWA supported the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship for the formulation of the open data strategy and hosted a capacity building workshop for government officials. The Jordanian license for open government data encompasses procedures necessary to classify, measure and evaluate the quality of open government data. The license was formulated in collaboration with the Jordanian Association for open source and reviewed and commented publicly. A policy on the classification and management of government data, in partnership with public sector representatives and private stakeholders, was put in motion in 2020. In 2020, 28 public institutions published their data, among 500 databases<sup>113</sup>.

In Qatar, the government agencies were required to publish their data, but it was difficult due to the lack of a central platform. The open data portal of Qatar was launched in 2019<sup>114</sup> providing such a central platform for government entities to share data and make it available to the public. Portal users can access open datasets as well as important statistical information from government entities in a single window. Other than making data available for re-use, the open data portal aims to promote transparency, increase citizen engagement, improve governance, enhance inclusive economic development and foster innovation in Qatar.

In Saudi Arabia, a typical example of OGD is the digital map of building regulations and land use in the city of Riyadh<sup>115</sup>. Freely available, it includes the city's expansion projects and benefits citizens, governmental institutions, private sector, planners and researchers<sup>116</sup>. A more impressive geodata portal has been developed for Riyadh city and its region<sup>117</sup>, covering a large spectrum of issues from historical development

to all public services, with reference to specific regulations and development studies, including for example transportation plans, regional water and electricity networks and flood risks<sup>118</sup>. However, the access to this portal is subject to approval and involves several levels of clearance.

In Tunisia, the “OpenGovDataHackathon 2020” competition<sup>119</sup> was the outcome of a project focused on the re-use of open government data. The need for such a project arose from the fact that even though Tunisia opened data sets, the re-use of this data remained intangible, which discouraged public organisations from joining open data initiatives. The hackathon was an event that sought to create a dynamic around the re-use and exploitation of open government data. In preparation, several workshops were held to identify areas and training programmes on open data were organised, including follow-up meetings, to ensure the quality and quantity of the data for the competition. More than 640 people applied to the hackathon most of whom were students (76%) and 11% were public officials with over 70% of the applicants between the ages of 18 and 26. In the end, 150 participants were selected to participate, forming 38 teams. Six teams were awarded prizes and encouraged to continue working on their solutions.

The UAE has launched its OGD portal<sup>120</sup> offering more than 2 500 datasets covering various areas such as food security, economy, agriculture, health, education, technology and transportation and others. The webpage is available in several languages. In fact, since 2016, the UAE has been an open data pioneer for the region. Today, the portal uses advanced AI technology to facilitate user searches. “BAYANAT.AE” is a federal initiative, thus, more than 50 partnerships have been built with government entities covering various domains. The portal includes datasets from local government; however, several initiatives have taken place on the local government level, to build their own open data platforms.

In Palestine, in 2018, an Open Government Data Initiative was launched, and a policy paper on OGD was prepared and submitted to the Prime Minister<sup>121</sup>. ESCWA collaborated with the Ministry of ICT for the revision and enhancement of the Open Data policy.

## Participation, collaboration and engagement in the Arab States

Following government openness, the next stage towards open government according to the ESCWA framework is encouraging citizen and stakeholder participation in government decision making, which should be upgraded to collaboration and then full engagement.

Some Arab countries have undertaken steps in this direction. Bahrain launched, in 2014, an initiative that utilises the crowdsourcing model Fix2Go feature that is part of the Tawasul application<sup>122</sup>. The goal is to provide a one-stop-shop channel for the public to be able to interact easily with governmental entities regarding suggestions, complaints or queries.

In Jordan, the Prime Minister<sup>123</sup> in 2018 upgraded an initiative, which had begun in 2014 with US-AID to launch an ambitious central interactive participatory platform for public services, as part of e-government efforts. The platform named “Bi Khidmatak” (at your service...as this is our duty)<sup>124</sup> allowed inquiries, complaints, suggestions, compliments and reporting irregularities to 106 institutions providing public services. It was put online and on mobile phones within a record time, while it faced many difficulties in the public institution reforms<sup>125</sup>. The platform had received as of end-2020 around 170 000 requests, 99% of which were answered. In terms of responsiveness, the platform achieved a 68% satisfaction rate in terms of responding within the pre-defined time limit<sup>126</sup>. The largest share of inquiries concerned drinking water provision and irrigation, labour, education, health, the Greater Amman municipality, social development and local administrations. Requests to the Ministry of Finance ranked only eighth.

Also, in Jordan, the Ministry of Social Development had initiated a participatory dialogue with national CSOs on the sensitive issues of foreign financing of the CSOs, their governance and the policies needed to develop their activities. The Ministry oversees the coordination of social services and the supervision of welfare organisations and voluntary institutions. It has a division dedicated to auditing the finances and the

activities of non-profit organisations. This dialogue was in line with the first commitment of Jordan's 2018-2020 OGP action plan. It aims at adopting standard, clear, transparent and streamlined procedures according to best international standards. The dialogue led to a report with a clear matrix of the necessary procedures<sup>127</sup> and authorisations, as well as with recommendations to boost participation.

In Saudi Arabia, the Royal Commission for Riyadh City (RCRC) launched initiatives aiming to boost the population's participation and engagement in the design of the new metro (Riyadh Transit Network (RTN) Project), and thus encourage its use. A children drawing competition<sup>128</sup> was organised with the winning drawings to be displayed in the nearby metro station. A visitor centre<sup>129</sup> was erected to collect opinions of potential users. However, the construction of this significant metro project<sup>130</sup> (involving 6 metro lines over 176 km with 85 stations, in addition to 80 bus routes with 3 000 stations over 1 900 km) created traffic problems and inconveniences for the 7 million inhabitants of the city during more than 6 years of construction. RCRC launched a large face-to-face (F2F) communication programme to inform residents in advance about the inconveniences, such as traffic detours. Also a Community Engagement Initiative was created for the Naming of Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) to build a sense of ownership among residents. The naming competition increased awareness and gave a sense of ownership of the project among citizens. This initiative could be used as a foundation to develop future civic pride in the city.

In Tunisia, a public consultation website was launched<sup>131</sup> in March 2018 as a pilot to 10 public institutions. The e-people platform is available in Arabic and French and acts as a one-stop-shop for citizen complaints<sup>132</sup>. The complaints are received centrally and then dispatched to the different public institutions whether central, regional or local. The purpose of the project is to empower citizens and enhance their interaction with government administration, fighting corruption and ensure the quality of administration and its services. Statistical information has shown that the interest in the platform is growing and training programmes have been organised for public officials on the use of the system so that they may better assist citizens. In the future, the platform will be rolled out through all public structures with a dashboard showcasing its use and complaints received. This platform was launched as part of the implementation of the tenth (10) commitment included in the Second OGP Action Plan.

In the UAE, the Department of Community Development in Abu Dhabi has developed Ma'an<sup>133</sup> (together) *"with the aim of bringing together the government, the private sector and civil society to support a culture of social contribution and participation. The authority will deliver solutions for social challenges with four main pillars of work: A Social Investment Fund, a Social Incubator Program, a Social Volunteering Program and the introduction of a new type of public contracting, Social Impact Bonds"*. In particular, the "Together, we are Good" programme, is another programme of the Ma'an Social Investment Fund and it was established to support citizens and residents affected by health and economic challenges. Also, most ministerial websites have created e-participation and open data spaces; for example the Ministry of Finance<sup>134</sup>, the rules of which are defined by the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA)<sup>135</sup>.

In Qatar, an "e-Participation Policy" was launched in 2015<sup>136</sup>. This policy was part of the country's development strategy for 2011-2016 and was developed by the government as an effort to increase transparency. In 2019, the Ministry of Transport and Communications launched the Qatar Open Data Portal while eGov and OGD uses a national digital identification and smart ID cards called Tawtheeq<sup>137</sup>.

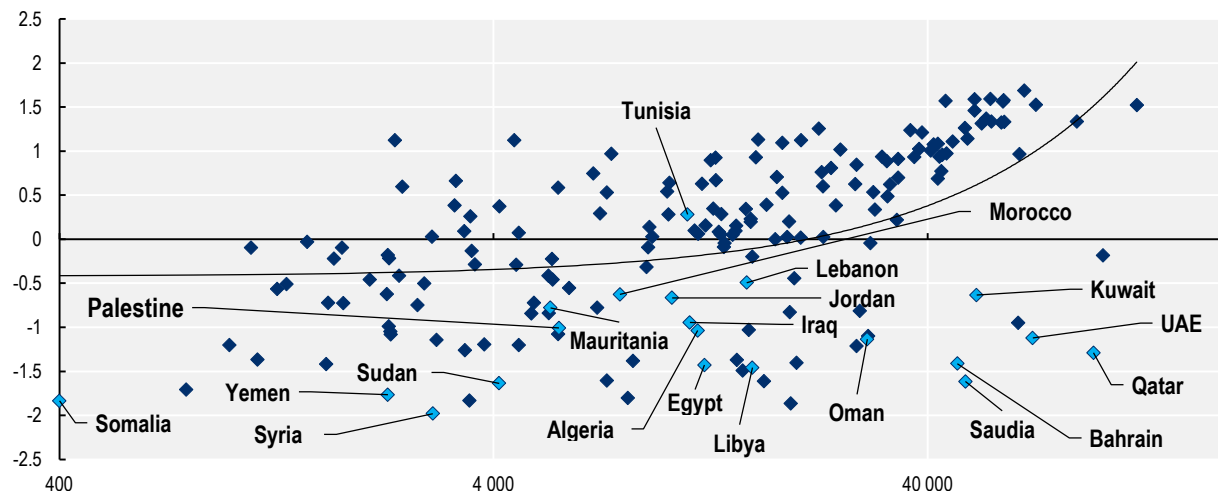
To facilitate and support participation, Morocco inaugurated its parliamentarian website<sup>138</sup> in five languages, Arabic, Amazigh, French, Spanish and English, allowing extended information and interaction with a population having different sensitivities.

This overview shows the richness and diversity of initiatives designed to engage citizens in the Arab region, and while some of them are on minor topics, others allow meaningful consultation with citizens on key policy issues, even though participation remains a challenge overall, as confirmed by the following indicators.

Participation, collaboration and engagement are directly correlated with **voice and accountability** of governments, for which the World Bank has developed a specific indicator. Most Arab countries, except Tunisia, rank low on this indicator (Figure 4.14).

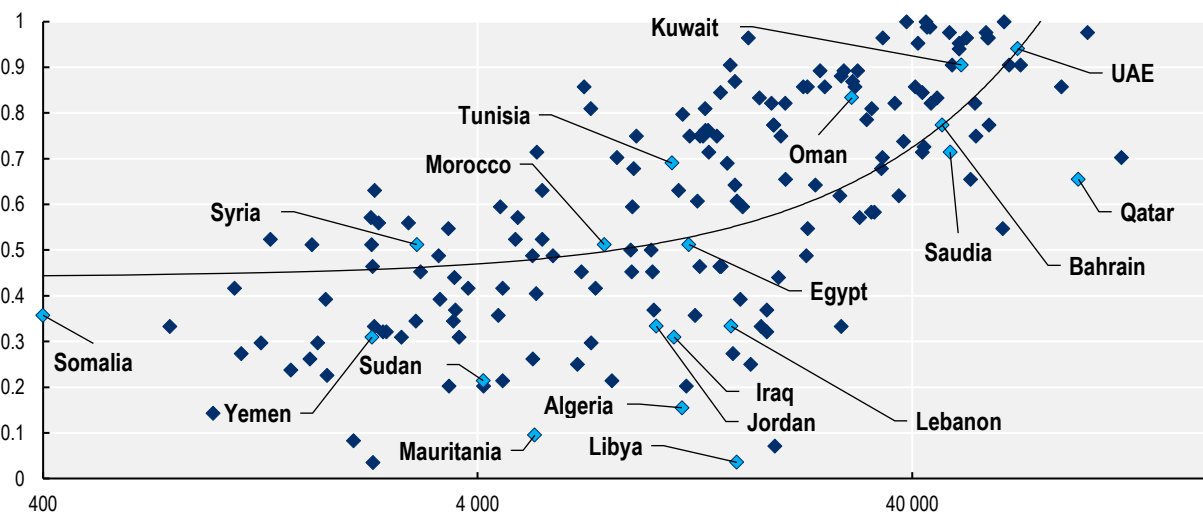
UN DESA also addresses these issues through its **e-participation index**, which measures the participation through electronic means. It is constituted of e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making. The e-participation index ranks some Arab countries better comparatively with world trends. However, many Arab countries still underperform compared to global ones with similar levels of economic development (Figure 4.15).

**Figure 4.14. World Bank Voice and Accountability 2019**



Source: <https://govdata360.worldbank.org/>.

**Figure 4.15. UN DESA e-participation index 2020**

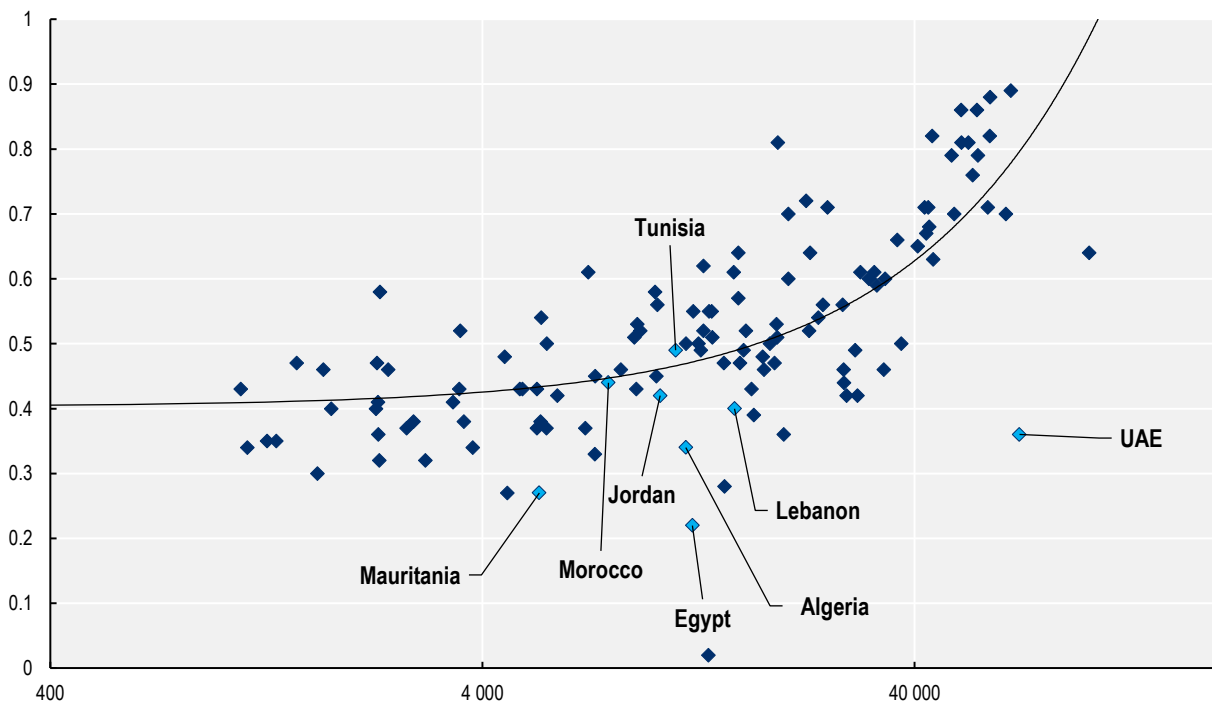


Source: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/E-Participation-Index>.

Another assessment is made by the World Justice Project (WJP), an independent, multidisciplinary organisation<sup>139</sup>, through its Rule of Law index (WJP, 2020<sub>[11]</sub>). The index results from surveys conducted in most countries (only eight Arab countries are surveyed), based on eight pillars, two of which are closely related to open government stages: 1) the open government index (if laws and government data are publicised, if there is a right to information, if there is civic participation and a complaint mechanism is in place) and 2) the constraints on government powers (limits by legislature, judiciary or independent auditing, sanctions for official misconduct, non-governmental checks and balances, and a lawful transition of power). The WJP approach clearly shows that the objectives of open government involve constraining government powers to ensure the rule of law.

Except for Tunisia (mainly) and Morocco, the surveyed Arab countries scored low in the open government index comparatively with the international trend (Figure 4.16), while they scored better in terms of constraints on government power (Figure 4.17).

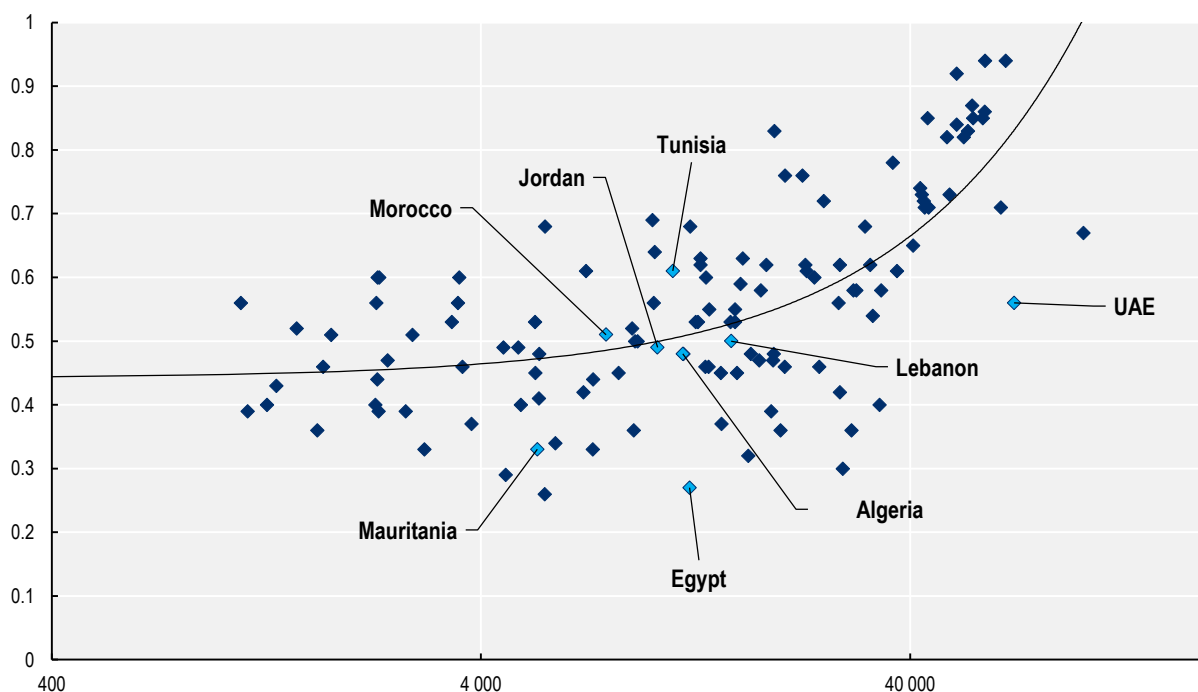
**Figure 4.16. WJP Open government 2020**



Source: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/>.



Figure 4.17. WJP constraints on Government power 2020



Source: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/>.

## Selected open government practices from Arab States

This paragraph presents some good examples of open government practices, mostly selected among the cases submitted by member countries to the ESCWA-OECD survey. These good examples do not imply full implementation of open government by the concerned countries but represent good practices towards this objective.

### The Access to Information Authority (INAI) in Tunisia

The INAI authority<sup>140</sup> was created by Organic Law 22 of 2016 as an independent public institution. It comes as a response to the demands of the 2011 Tunisian revolution to ensure the right to information and to strengthen transparency and accountability in public affairs.

It started operations in November 2017 with a small team and issued its first judicial decision on 1 February 2018 in favour of a citizen requesting information on usage of a public utility. This famous decision led to a flow of case submissions and to increasing media coverage<sup>141</sup>. The light was shed on its three main functions:

- The judicial settlement of disputes related to the refusal to access information. For this, it closely collaborates with the Administrative Court, especially as this court had overseen the settlement of ATI claims since Law 41 of 2011, but was superseded by the creation of the INAI and the issuing of its proper jurisdiction.
- The regulatory role in monitoring the commitment of public entities to proactively disclose information and spreading the culture of access to information (ATI) through capacity building and coordination and partnership between the public institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs).
- In addition, the authority has a consultative role on all draft laws having a direct or indirect relationship with ATI: statistics, archives, open data, etc. The INAI issues annual reports with

suggestions and recommendations concerning ATI. The report details the statistics of the claims received and the decisions made, as well as the monitoring of implementation of decisions. The report is submitted to three relevant authorities: The President, the President of the Parliament and the Prime Minister.

The main challenges of the authority concern:

- The promotion of ATI rights in the education curricula, the law, media, and to universities and the public administration school;
- More involvement in fostering the proactive disclosure of information by public entities;
- The revision of all laws and by-laws in contradiction with the ATI law, in particular the laws on archives and on professional secrecy in civil service;
- And also, the revision of its own law to include more severe penalties to be inflicted to anyone impeding ATI rights.

The INAI finds it challenging to issue the decisions on complaints within 45 days as provided by the ATI law, even though it is conducting its meetings every week instead of every 15 days. This is due to limited staff and lack of certain qualifications, while the number of cases is continuously increasing. It still awaits the issuance of a statute for its agents by the Council of Ministers for this purpose. Also, some public entities have no website and no agent in charge of ATI requests. Some entities also failed to answer the decisions or were reluctant to provide the required documents and data, arguing the confidentiality of personal information or secrecy. The INAI organises dialogues with the concerned entities, while it aims at reinforcing the penalties for non-compliance.

The INAI intends to develop its networking with its international counterparts and with the Tunisian CSOs. It has already signed several partnerships with similar organisations worldwide<sup>142</sup>. It has also participated in the creation of the League of Independent Public Institutions, including the National Body for the Fight against Corruption, the National Body for the Protection of Fundamental Human Rights, etc. It often bases its decisions on the jurisprudence of similar institutions<sup>143</sup>, such as the French counterpart, “Commission d'accès aux documents administratifs (CADA)<sup>144</sup>”.

Within a short period, INAI is considered a success story and attracted media attention, especially after the decisions issued against high level institutions, such as the Presidency, the Council of Ministers or the Parliament and the main workers' union. The INAI is considered a main tool to fight corruption through ATI. Since its creation and until end-2020, INAI received 1 973 claims and made 1 382 decisions. The number of claims doubled between 2018 and 2019 but slowed down in 2020 due to the COVID-19 confinement and restrictions<sup>145</sup>.

#### The participatory approach for decentralisation in Jordan

In line with its third commitment in the 2018-2020 OGP national action plan convening a national participatory dialogue on the key political laws of the country, in particular the electoral, decentralisation and municipalities laws, the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs<sup>146</sup> conducted, in coordination with Al-Hayat Center (Rased)<sup>147</sup>, a CSO, and with the administrative Committee of the Parliament, and a number of consultations with a large spectrum of stakeholders. The consultations took place in all governorates, mostly on university campuses, and involved successively: local councils and administrations, local social and economic stakeholders, political parties, women associations and activists, as well as representatives of the youth.

Between September 2018 and June 2020, 43 round tables were organised, involving 1,568 participants, a third being women. The results of the consultations were presented at a press conference by the parliament<sup>148</sup>. They consisted of around 1 000 recommendations. One of the most important was to merge the decentralisation, the municipalities and the local administration laws in one single law. The government prepared a draft law accordingly and submitted it to the Parliament on February 20, 2020. Also, based on

the consultations, Rased issued a study with recommendations on “Decentralization in Jordan and the ways to its Development”<sup>149</sup>.

The OECD supported an additional two days of National Dialogue to launch the Reviews “Engaging citizens in Jordan’s Local Government Needs Assessment Process” and “Supporting Open Government Principles and Practices at the Local Level in Jordan”, on 15 and 16 December 2020 in Amman. This led to the issuing of two OECD reports (OECD, 2021<sup>[12]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[13]</sup>).

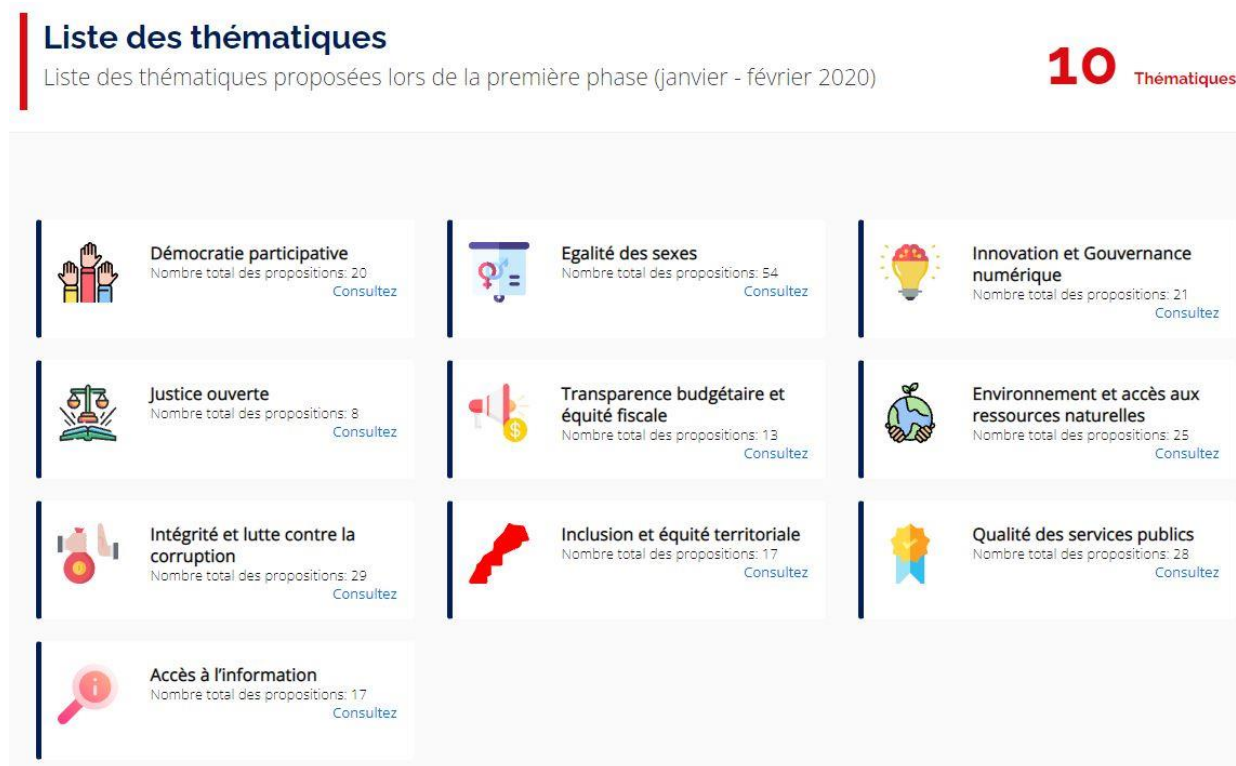
This positive result was due to the methodology elaborated by the executive committee of the organisers, raising key questions to spark a debate, and organising the recommendations along clear themes (e.g., the regulatory framework, the executive orders, the relations between councils within governorates, etc.). Independent and famous journalists were often asked to moderate the debates.

A survey showed that participants were very satisfied with the issues discussed during the roundtable sessions. However, they criticised slow implementation on the ground. In fact, the issue of confidence-building between the government and the different stakeholders was a major challenge that was raised during all consultation roundtables<sup>150</sup>. Participating in the roundtables was initially met with some reluctance from officials; however, 75% of the officials eventually participated in the dialogue<sup>151</sup>. The meeting place was also a challenge, between the premises of the governorate administrations, or the municipalities, or the universities. Finally, choosing the universities facilitated the involvement of researchers and academics, as well as graduate students.

#### The open government participatory website in Morocco

The open government portal of Morocco<sup>152</sup> introduced a space for the “co-creation” of the second OGP national plan for the 2021-2024 period with the support of the OECD<sup>153</sup>. It makes it possible to submit ideas and proposals, and register for thematic events on this co-creation. After a period of submission of ideas and their grouping, the priorities were discussed in a national dialogue. Public proposals were shared with relevant administrations, who presented 30 commitments to the OGP steering committee<sup>154</sup>. The ideas were grouped and discussed along 10 axes: integrity and fight against corruption, access to information, gender equality, innovation and digital governance, transparency on budget and taxation equity, open-justice, participative democracy, inclusiveness and inter-regional equity, quality of public services and environment and access to natural resources (Figure 4.18). The whole process was performed using a publicly released manual for the activities of the project’s steering committee<sup>155</sup>.

Figure 4.18. Image of the Open government interactive portal of Morocco



Source: <https://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/co-creation.php?lang=ar>

This major step followed the launching of many others, for example the e-government website “Fikra” in 2011 collecting suggestions to improve public administration<sup>156</sup> and the organisation of three forums on “Your ideas for new eGov services”, “Your ideas for simplifying administrative tasks” and “Your ideas for improving the Administration” submitted to the General Secretariat of the Government<sup>157</sup>, where citizens can also comment on draft laws and decrees.

#### UAE Open Data hackathons

The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) of the UAE developed, starting in 2018, a hackathon portal<sup>158</sup> under the motto “Data for happiness and wellbeing”<sup>159</sup>, embodied in the government’s strategies and plans. It comprises a number of hackathons that take place at specific locations throughout the seven emirates and anyone residing in the country can participate.

This hackathons provide an opportunity to different sections of the community—including university and high school students, entrepreneurs, employed people and IT experts—to use open data as a tool for coming up with solutions based on specific themes and challenges. The governmental organisations provide the hackathons with real challenges that they had already faced. They help winners to transform their ideas into projects.

The typical themes and examples were: the UAE golden Jubilee (how to document the 50 years achievement?), digital transformation (how to develop smart services for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs around the world?), technology for the financial markets (how to develop innovative ways for open finance for SMEs?), security, safety and justice (how to detect and prevent bullying on social media?), smart sustainable cities (how to encourage citizens and stakeholders to participate in making decisions regarding the development of services provided by government entities?), travel and tourism (how to monitor and predict real time accidents or hazards at Dubai airport?), education (how to redesign science labs and

laboratory practices for digital and distance education?), healthcare (how to reduce the risk of cyberattacks on online healthcare services?) and work efficiency and productivity (how to design mechanisms to enhance the participation of the national workforce in the labour market through flexible patterns? how to foresee the future of labour relations and the management of labour complaints amid the coronavirus pandemic?), etc.

The hackathons are presently in their fourth version. In the first two versions, about 3 183 participants were involved in 414 teams. They developed more than 400 ideas by using 1 412 datasets. Organisations expressed interest in 161 innovative ideas. In the third version, there were 3 133 participants in 350 teams that developed more than 350 ideas by working with 2 154 datasets<sup>160</sup>. This led to more than 112 innovative ideas, including ideas to participate in the world summit on the information society. In the UAE Hackathon 2020, there were more than 3 000 participants in seven hackathons spread over four weeks.

#### TAMM Volunteer Network in Qatar

Many volunteer organisations lack the human resources necessary to fulfil their commitments. These organisations find it difficult to find volunteers, while many volunteers lack knowledge about volunteering and/or struggle to find opportunities to contribute to activities that would benefit society.

In an effort to bring volunteer organisations and volunteers together, Qatar Digital Government (QDG) implemented an initiative to modernise and digitise the volunteering process. QDG established TAMM161 as a digital volunteer network to streamline the process and to build a database of volunteers that can be connected to volunteer opportunities and organisations across Qatar. The result is a centralised platform with a complete and up-to-date information base of opportunities and volunteers along with tools that ensure quality and efficiency in local community volunteering activities.

The initiative has a special focus on youth and spreading the culture of volunteering and contribution among this population group, identifying volunteerism as a key component of education. TAMM supports youth through capacity building and volunteerism by providing technical support.

#### Open Government at Local Level in Morocco, Tunisia, and the UAE

There are a few initiatives for open government in the Arab region at local level, below are some examples.

The municipality of Casablanca in Morocco<sup>162</sup> launched an online platform that provides citizens with access to data and services<sup>163</sup>. The beneficiaries of this platform are citizens, visitors, organisations and professionals, and the platform covers all socioeconomic sectors from electricity to businesses. The platform also provides access to portals specific to the 16 districts within the municipality of Casablanca. It is available in both Arabic and French language and it promotes the city, resources and the activities within its borders.

In Tunisia, to initiate OG at the local level, the government launched a project in 2018 with the goal of implementing OG initiatives in 12 Tunisian municipalities<sup>164</sup>. This project was part of the third OGP action plan (2018-2020), and it aimed to develop local OGP action plans for each municipality and to implement projects that will result in the development and improvement of local services to citizens<sup>165</sup>. A first public consultation was also held to collect ideas and proposals on initiatives. Some 1 200 people participated in the consultation and more than 5 800 proposals were received. During the implementation phase<sup>166</sup>, 73 municipalities applied to participate and through a selection process they were reduced to 12 municipalities covering the three regions (North, Central and South) or four municipalities per region.

In the UAE, data about the Fujairah Municipality<sup>167</sup> is made available to customers and beneficiaries such as students, researchers and visitors. A policy for open data has been developed and approved by senior management and was based on international best practices. Adopting the open data policy reflects the municipality's desire for continuous development by providing data and information needed for citizens in a transparent and smooth manner. The dataset covers insurance, transport, civil registration, infrastructure, finance and employment. Ajman also developed its Open Data Portal<sup>168</sup> which displays free

datasets in different formats published from nine different entities in the emirate, covering eight main topics/subjects (Business and Industry, Economic and Finance, Environment, Health Well-being and Care, Housing, Leisure and Culture, Public Order Justice and Rights, Transport and Infrastructure).

## The COVID-19 pandemic and open government

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit hard worldwide and forced governments to impose social distancing measures, confinements and even curfews for long periods. It also pushed working conditions to change drastically as online work was imposed for most office jobs. These effects were felt acutely in Arab countries, especially those with a large share of manpower working informally, where the dilemma was between health and economic impact.

Acknowledging that this situation constitutes a moment of peak uncertainty for governments, civil society and citizens alike—as new policies and approaches are tested in real-time—the OGP has issued a guide on open government and the coronavirus (OGP, 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). It issued recommendations to protect civic space, as open response measures place transparency, accountability, and participation at the centre of immediate government efforts to curb contagion and provide emergency assistance, and to prepare recovery and reform. Indeed, open government is at the heart of medium-term government efforts to rebuild in the wake of COVID-19.

The report praised two initiatives made by its partner Arab countries: the strengthening of resources available for persons with disabilities in the justice system in Jordan (as part of its 2016-2018 commitments) and a toll-free number for protection of domestic violence victims, alongside a campaign launched by the National Union of Women of Morocco (UNFM) put in place following the pandemic in Morocco.

To support its member states during COVID-19 and encourage government to take policy measures to overcome the challenges, ESCWA developed the COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker<sup>169</sup>. It is an interactive platform that provides mapping of stimulus measures for 178 countries around the world. Data in the tracker are updated regularly.

Government authorities in the Arab states have found the tracker to be very helpful. In addition, they have reviewed data in the tracker and provided very good feedback and updates that have been taken into account.

Almost all Arab countries have quickly developed websites and mobile applications concerning the spreading of the pandemic (Table 4.4)<sup>170</sup>. They were principally informative, providing hot lines in case people had symptoms, and the nearest place for testing/treatment. Contact-tracing applications were also developed. However, some of these contact-tracing applications were judged “invasive”. This was also true in some OECD countries, especially as they use GPS localisation of citizens, leading Amnesty International to state that “*privacy must not be another casualty as governments rush to roll out apps*”<sup>171</sup><sup>172</sup>. In some cases, the applications’ security flaws exposed sensitive personal details, which led to misuse. Norway, to take just one example, has withdrawn the criticised features in response to complaints.

**Table 4.4. Coronavirus websites and important features in Arab countries**

Country	Website	Registry for vaccination	Mobile	Contact tracing
Algeria	<a href="http://covid19.sante.gov.dz/">http://covid19.sante.gov.dz/</a>		yes	yes
Bahrain	<a href="https://www.healthalert.gov.bh/">https://www.healthalert.gov.bh/</a>	yes	yes	yes
Egypt	<a href="https://egcovac.mohp.gov.eg/">https://egcovac.mohp.gov.eg/</a>		yes	yes
Iraq				No
Jordan	<a href="https://corona.moh.gov.jo/">https://corona.moh.gov.jo/</a>	yes	yes	yes
Kuwait	<a href="https://corona.e.gov.kw/">https://corona.e.gov.kw/</a>		yes	yes
Lebanon	<a href="https://corona.ministryinfo.gov.lb/">https://corona.ministryinfo.gov.lb/</a>	Covax.moph.gov.lb	yes	yes
Libya	<a href="https://covid19.ly/">https://covid19.ly/</a>			No
Mauritania	<a href="https://www.sante.gov.mr/">https://www.sante.gov.mr/</a>			No
Morocco	<a href="http://www.covidmaroc.ma/">http://www.covidmaroc.ma/</a>		yes	yes
Oman	<a href="https://www.moh.gov.om/en/corona">https://www.moh.gov.om/en/corona</a>		yes	yes
Palestine	<a href="https://corona.ps/">https://corona.ps/</a>			No
Qatar	<a href="https://covid19.moph.gov.qa/">https://covid19.moph.gov.qa/</a>	yes	yes	yes
Saudi Arabia	<a href="https://covid19.cdc.gov.sa/">https://covid19.cdc.gov.sa/</a>	yes	yes	yes
Somalia				No
Sudan	<a href="https://fmoh.gov.sd/">https://fmoh.gov.sd/</a>			No
Syria	<a href="http://www.moh.gov.sy/">http://www.moh.gov.sy/</a>			No
Tunisia	<a href="http://coronavirus.mns.tn/">http://coronavirus.mns.tn/</a>		yes	yes
UAE	<a href="https://covid19.ncema.gov.ae/">https://covid19.ncema.gov.ae/</a>	yes	yes	yes
Yemen				No

Source: ESCWA authors' own elaboration.

Many CSOs have observed that the COVID-19 crisis has led to a serious shrinking of the civic space<sup>173</sup>. Also, trust in government measures has been challenged with the confinement measures, the response of the healthcare systems, the lack of availability of protection tools (masks, etc.), the difficulties to make diagnostic tests, the slow vaccination campaign and the availability of vaccines, etc. These trust challenges jeopardised the efforts of many countries towards open government, openness, transparency and accountability.

Also, the pandemic had severe consequences on government budgets and employment. However, both issues are major components of the necessary interaction between governments, citizens and stakeholders. All of these players rely on transparency and accountability (i.e., open government) to build confidence in the recovery phase.

The COVID-19 crisis has in fact severe implications on the healthcare systems, on the economy and on the revenues and livelihood of the most vulnerable share of the population. The IMF issued a report depicting the increase of the social spending in the region accordingly (IMF, 2020<sup>[15]</sup>) A spending envelope of USD 544 million had been decided in Algeria, with 24% as a bonus to health workers, 30% for unemployment benefits, 16% for transfers to poor households, and the rest for the healthcare system. In Egypt, a package of USD 6.13 billion was also decided. Monthly grants for three months totalling USD 93 (EGP 1 500) has been extended to day-labourers and irregular workers, and pensions increased by 14%. Targeted cash transfers were also set up to reach vulnerable families. In Oman, the government announced several measures to support the economy, including employee retainment schemes,



temporary tax cuts and fuel subsidies, as well as the postponement of electricity and water fees. In Saudi Arabia, a package worth USD 18.7 billion was announced to support the private sector.

Knowing that a large share of the workforce in the Arab countries is informal (between 60 and 85% of the total workforce) (Aita, 2017<sup>[16]</sup>), which leaves both national and foreign workers as well as refugees without social protection. In response, many CSOs have called for urgent governmental action.<sup>174</sup> According to the key findings of a study<sup>175</sup> by a specialised international CSO defending informal workers (WIEGO) 1) less than half of workers surveyed reported receiving cash or food in cities where governments announced relief measures to support vulnerable groups; 2) grassroots organisations played an important role in providing access to relief for informal workers and 3) the level of relief provided was insufficient to impact significantly food security and coping strategies.

This would have been an excellent occasion to create open government channels to let citizens, CSOs and stakeholders participate, collaborate and engage with the government in complex decision-making processes. However, the efforts made by governments, in particular through ICT tools, to buoy livelihoods were meagre compared to those for tracking and mitigating the pandemic as a public health issue.

## Strategic directions for the Arab region

The Arab countries have made important steps towards open government. They took advantage of their accelerated development and penetration of the ICT technologies to reform their governance and policy making, reaching out to citizens, CSOs, enterprises and other stakeholders.

There is still, however, a need for 'leapfrog' moves towards the commitment and implementation of open government principles. The present conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and its difficult economic implications offer an opportunity for such moves.

Three significant and strategic examples may be highlighted in this regard as they affect the daily livelihood of the population and the economic situations in the Arab region, namely open budget, open local governance and open labour and social protection. The choice of these examples as key for the way forward in open government takes into account the specific economic and social conditions of the Arab countries, the reconstruction in many crisis-affected countries, citizen demands for better transparency and accountability, and the importance of fair social protection systems, especially in view of the high level of unemployment, the effects of COVID-19 on employment and socio-economic development (ESCWA, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>)<sup>176</sup>.

These strategic orientations were chosen as they represent critical concerns for citizens, businesses and civil society stakeholders in the Arab countries. They are directly linked to the livelihood of the population and to the major challenges that these countries are experiencing. The application of open government principles in these areas will certainly improve transparency and accountability and thus enhance trust in government.

### 1- Open budget for better transparency

Many Arab countries have recently been running up large public debts, reaching a significant share of their GDPs and posing difficulties for the servicing of these debts. This is even the case of some oil producing countries. It results in a slower development of public services and social protections to meet the population's needs. The COVID-19 crisis and the social calls to mitigate its economic impact have exacerbated this situation. As a result, trust must be built between governments and citizens on budget issues and their efficient usage.

One of the key issues in open relations between governments and citizens is budget allocation and spending. Surely, this applies to the national level where there is a need for the publication of national budgets and their allocation, both during the budget preparation phase and at closure of budgets,



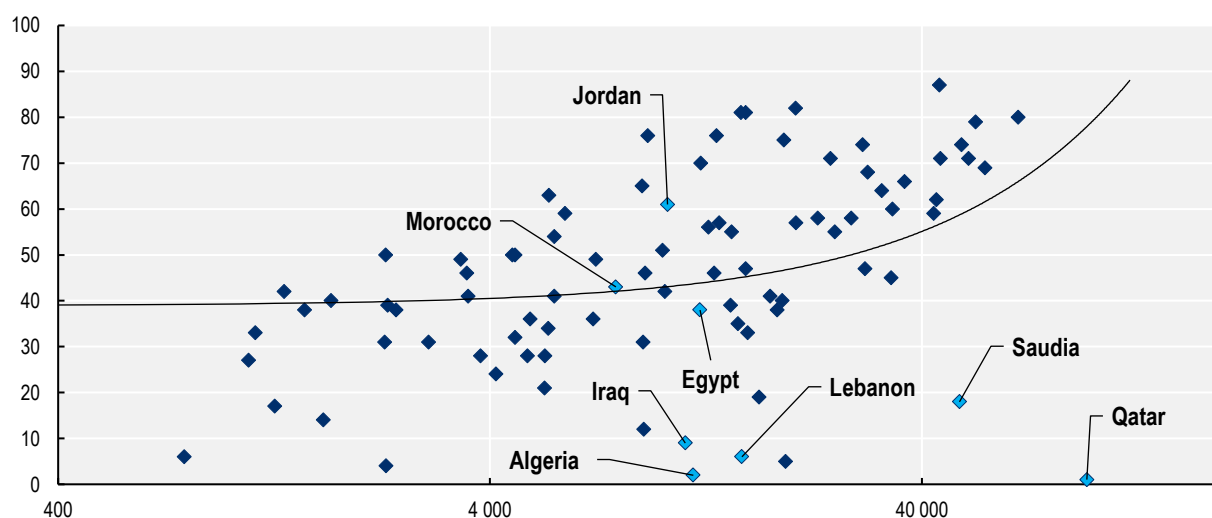
according to strict governance standards (OECD, 2019<sup>[18]</sup>), to ensure the basic principles of transparency, integrity and accountability.

Egypt publishes on the website of the Ministry of finance the national budget and financial statements<sup>177</sup>. The website allows citizens to follow twice a year, and eventually monthly, the execution of the national budget, and that of public entities and companies, the public and foreign debt, etc.

In most Arab countries, budget preparation is not proactively published in order to submit it to public scrutiny in line with its submission to the parliament for approval, when this is the case. Also, effective budget spending is rarely submitted for the scrutiny of an independent court of audit with the results of the audit published for public information.

A global research and advocacy programme promoting public access to budget information and the adoption of inclusive and accountable budget systems, the International Budget Partnership (IBP)<sup>178</sup>, assesses budget openness around the world. It issues a biannual open budget survey (117 countries) based on a questionnaire related to oversight by the legislature and supreme audit institution, as well as on transparency and public participation (IBP, 2017<sup>[19]</sup>). Among the 13 Arab countries assessed, most score badly compared to world trends. The case of Jordan emerges as a best practice; those of Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia are on par with the global average (Figure 4.19).

**Figure 4.19. Open Budget Survey 2019**



Source: IBP (2017<sup>[19]</sup>), Open Budget Survey 2017, [https://www.internationalbudget.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/2017\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](https://www.internationalbudget.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/2017_Report_EN.pdf).

## 2- Open local budget for better local governance

The above also applies at the local level, in particular at the municipal level, where citizens are closer to their governance structures and the issues are directly linked to daily livelihoods and basic public services. At the same time, Arab cities are experiencing rapid developments and a large share of this development is made through informal settlements with poor public services, as shown recently by UN Habitat.

On the website of the Ministry of Finance, Egypt also published the governorates' budgets and financial statements<sup>179</sup>. However, this openness does not include the most direct municipal level. In Lebanon, UNDP has undertaken a substantial effort with the local municipalities and their federations to enable to systematically publish their budget and financial statements<sup>180</sup>. This was part of a more general initiative regarding the right to information on the finances of the public sector, which is called the Gherbal initiative<sup>181</sup>. Not all municipalities or state institutions joined this initiative for good OGD practices. However,

it helped to make progress to put the local and national institutions budgets under public scrutiny and progress toward open government. The continuation of such openness practices shall shape the recovery of Lebanon as it emerges from its present economic and financial crisis.

The publication of municipalities' budgets and accounting is not a common practice among municipalities in the Arab countries, even though this is where institutions are closest to their citizens. It is also a major component of sustainable urban development as advocated by UN Habitat (2020<sup>[20]</sup>) for SDG 11.

### 3- Labour force, employment and informality

There is a dearth of information on the labour markets in the Arab countries and labour market institutions are often weak and social protections partial and complex. The issues of employment and social protection for different swaths of the population continue to constitute major challenges for these countries, especially for women, youth and migrant workers. They are crucial subjects for open government.

In the context of the socio-economic causes of the "Arab spring", the significant waves of refugees and migrant workers that the Arab countries are experiencing and now the aggravating repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis and confinement, employment, especially for women and the youth, and informality (absence of social protection of labour and livelihoods) appear to be a highly critical issue in all Arab countries.

Labour force surveys (LFS)<sup>182</sup> need to be conducted at least yearly to measure the effects of government policies on subsequent crises. The results are to be reported to the International Labor Organization (ILO). The publication of these surveys, according to ILO guidelines, is also essential to follow up the governments' commitments to labour rights and social protection, notably through the signed and ratified conventions with the ILO and for the SDG 8 "*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*". Furthermore, opening up the information and data about the labour force will benefit citizens, NGOs, the private sector and public sector entities.

Lebanon published in 2019 the results of a labour force and household living conditions survey for 2018-2019, the previous one had been conducted in 2012. The sampling of the survey did not fully include migrant workers and refugees constituting more than one-third of the labour force. Morocco timely performs quarterly labour force surveys and publishes some of the results. However, the country has no official definition of informality in employment according to ILO standards and the link between employment and social protection cannot be assessed. In the UAE, while in a population of 9.1 million, 8 million foreigners are resident in the country, mostly temporary contract workers; hence, few timely statistics are available on this workforce and their working conditions<sup>183</sup>.

**With the difficulties that all countries are experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social fallout and while the use of ICT technologies continues to expand, Open Government could offer the occasion for more decisive steps toward fair, equitable and trustworthy economic and social recovery.**

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## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Jordan\\_Action-Plan\\_2018-2020.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Jordan_Action-Plan_2018-2020.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/jordan/>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://bit.ly/3r35pHA> and <https://bit.ly/3cz3zdp>
- <sup>5</sup> [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Morocco\\_Action-Plan\\_2018-2020\\_EN\\_Revised.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Morocco_Action-Plan_2018-2020_EN_Revised.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/morocco/>
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/axes.php?lang=fr>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/tunisia-end-of-term-report-2016-2018/>
- <sup>9</sup> [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Tunisia\\_Action-Plan\\_2018-2020.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Tunisia_Action-Plan_2018-2020.pdf)
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.omsar.gov.lb/>
- <sup>11</sup> Lebanon's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey
- <sup>12</sup> <https://bit.ly/3bTp4oN>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://bit.ly/3cuP1eI>
- <sup>14</sup> Created by Law in 2019, but not formed and activated
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-local/>
- <sup>16</sup> Compiled by author
- <sup>17</sup> [http://www.jji.gov.jo/sites/default/files/info\\_low.pdf](http://www.jji.gov.jo/sites/default/files/info_low.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup> <http://www.jiacc.gov.jo/>
- <sup>19</sup> <http://www.egov.ma/en/governance-structure>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.cdai.ma/compositioncdai/>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/Guide%20DAI.Final.VFr.pdf>
- <sup>22</sup> For a recent assessment of laws pertaining to Access to Information in Arab countries, see (Shuqeir, 2019<sup>[21]</sup>)
- <sup>23</sup> The Centre for Law and Democracy is a non-profit corporation that undertakes research, outreach activities and technical assistance to governments to advance civil society and human rights
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.rti-rating.org/>

<sup>25</sup> GDP per capita PPP (purchasing power parity) data are according to the World Bank database, RTI scores are from <https://www.rti-rating.org/>; OECD countries are coloured orange, and the six Arab countries with ATI laws are depicted. Countries not listed have no ATI laws

<sup>26</sup> <https://bit.ly/2Mgy0KT>

<sup>27</sup> <http://bit.ly/2YLTfqi>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia\\_2014.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Law no. 2016-22 24 March 2016;  
[https://www.steg.com.tn/fr/cell\\_acces\\_info/loi\\_organique\\_N22\\_2016\\_du\\_2432016.pdf](https://www.steg.com.tn/fr/cell_acces_info/loi_organique_N22_2016_du_2432016.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.inai.tn/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.chafafiya.ma/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/uncac.html>

<sup>33</sup> Full-text of the law can be accessed at <http://www.undp-aci.org/publications/ac/compendium/algeria/anticorruption/corruptionprevention-20feb06-ar.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Risk and Compliance Portal, 2020, Bahrain Corruption Report

<sup>35</sup> <https://bit.ly/3tjhr1k>

<sup>36</sup> <https://perma.cc/G78P-U5CD>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/Iraq/>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.undp-aci.org/publications/ac/legalcompendium/Iraq%20CoI.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> <https://bit.ly/3cqVhb>

<sup>40</sup> <https://bit.ly/3j3PoOJ>

<sup>41</sup> <https://bit.ly/3j4sfLX>

<sup>42</sup> <https://bit.ly/3r7q4KB>

<sup>43</sup> [http://undp-aci.org/publications/Nazaha%20Law%20no%202%20of%202016%20-%20FINAL%20\(EN\).pdf](http://undp-aci.org/publications/Nazaha%20Law%20no%202%20of%202016%20-%20FINAL%20(EN).pdf)

<sup>44</sup> <http://bit.ly/3oNQEGU>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.lp.gov.lb/Resources/Files/67b41a38-8eea-4759-9489-fd83ddd829ce.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.lp.gov.lb/Resources/Files/1bd91fcd-4d9a-434e-84fd-ded264ffde79.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.lp.gov.lb/Resources/Files/7074bca0-5db3-4b05-8a2c-13354cb2726b.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> <http://bit.ly/39JyaTS>

<sup>49</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/uk-and-libya-agreement-open-government>

<sup>50</sup> <https://bit.ly/3tpnykP>

51 [Full text of the decree is available from https://www.bibliotdroit.com/2020/06/214267-21-1437-4-2015.html](https://www.bibliotdroit.com/2020/06/214267-21-1437-4-2015.html)

52 [Full text of law 31-13 is available from https://www.oc.gov.ma/sites/default/files/loi%2031-13/1.%20BO%20Loi%2031.13%20en%20français.pdf](https://www.oc.gov.ma/sites/default/files/loi%2031-13/1.%20BO%20Loi%2031.13%20en%20français.pdf)

53 <https://bit.ly/3pNvWlX>

54 <https://bit.ly/3jdRaNq>

55 Palestine's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey

56 <http://bit.ly/3pKck8e>

57 Deloitte, <https://bit.ly/2MCljtl>

58 <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/sudan/>

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66 <http://bit.ly/3tzFcCH>

67 Despite the ongoing conflict

68 Except Lebanon due to its financial crisis

69 Oman answer to ESCWA-OECD survey

70 <https://mc2020.elections.om/>

71 <https://omanportal.gov.om/tam/>

72 <https://www.business.gov.om/ieasy/wp/en/>

73 <https://www.mara.gov.om/>

74 <http://www.dawlati.gov.lb/>

75 <https://omsar.eu.crossknowledge.com/>

76 <https://omsar.eprocurement.gov.lb/>

77 <http://studies.gov.lb/>

78 <http://seniorrecruit.omsar.gov.lb/>

<sup>79</sup> Financed by the EU

<sup>80</sup> <https://bit.ly/3oytS61>

<sup>81</sup> <https://hukoomi.gov.qa/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://portal.moi.gov.qa/metrash2/en/index.html>

<sup>83</sup> <https://hukoomi.gov.qa/en/>

<sup>84</sup> Qatar answer to ESCWA-OECD survey

<sup>85</sup> Qatar answer to ESCWA-OECD survey

<sup>86</sup> <http://investor.sw.gov.qa/>

<sup>87</sup> <https://godigital.motc.gov.qa/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.theqa.qa/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://mada.org.qa/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://g3ict.org/country-profile>

<sup>91</sup> <http://bit.ly/3rt1rs5>

<sup>92</sup> <https://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal/tamm/home/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.smartdubai.ae/>

<sup>94</sup> <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/digital-uae/smart-abu-dhabi>

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.tamm.abudhabi/>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.my.gov.sa/>

<sup>97</sup> <http://sahem.my.gov.sa/>

<sup>98</sup> <https://watani.gov.sa/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://tawasol.royalcourt.gov.sa/>

<sup>100</sup> <http://aq.riyadhenv.gov.sa/>

<sup>101</sup> <http://bit.ly/3pLleRW>. The system was provided by Thales Group as in the cases of Algeria, Bahrain and Oman

<sup>102</sup> See for example <https://bit.ly/2NPDgWn>

<sup>103</sup> <https://opendatacharter.net/principles/>

<sup>104</sup> <https://opendatawatch.com/our-work/>

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/>

<sup>106</sup> Palestine's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey



107 CKAN is a tool for open data websites. It helps in the management and publishing data collections:  
ckan.org

108 <http://opendata.ps/>

109 <https://dataportal.opendataforafrica.org/>

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112 Jordan's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey

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114 ESCWA-OECD survey submission, August 2020

115 <http://rbrs.sa/Amana/BuildingLaws/viewer.html>

116 Saud Arabia's responses to the ESCA-OECD survey

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119 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY0pjxPf7I> and ESCWA-OECD survey submission, August 2020

120 <https://bayanat.ae/> and UAE responses to the ESCA-OECD survey

121 Palestine's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey

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123 Mr. Omar Razzaz, 2018-2020

124 <https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/wps/portal/Home/CMU>

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132 ESCWA-OECD survey submission, August 2020

133 <https://maan.gov.ae/>

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135 <https://www.esma.gov.ae/en-us/E-Participation/Pages/E-Participation-Policy.aspx>

136 [https://www.motc.gov.ga/sites/default/files/e-participation\\_policy\\_1.pdf](https://www.motc.gov.ga/sites/default/files/e-participation_policy_1.pdf)

137 <http://bit.ly/2MYbdDh>

138 <https://www.chambredesrepresentants.ma/>

139 <https://worldjusticeproject.org/>

140 <http://www.inai.tn/en/>

141 <http://www.inai.tn/revue-de-presse/>

142 For example, with Article 19 (<https://www.article19.org/>) and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF, <https://dcaf.ch/dcaf-tunisia>)

143 [http://www.inai.tn/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Livre\\_DRI\\_Fran%C3%A7ais\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.inai.tn/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Livre_DRI_Fran%C3%A7ais_WEB.pdf)

144 <https://www.cada.fr/>

145 Tunisia's responses to the ESCWA and OECD survey

146 <http://moppa.test.jo/index.php/ar/>

147 <https://www.rasedjo.com/>

148 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eo4gRPVJR0>

149 <http://bit.ly/3cqs0to>

150 Jordan's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey

151 Jordan's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey

152 <http://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/>

153 Morocco's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey

154 <http://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/co-creation.php?lang=ar>

155 <http://gouvernement-ouvert.ma/files/ManuelCopil.pdf>

156 <http://fikra.egov.ma/>

157 <http://www.egov.ma/en/e-participation> and <http://www.sgg.gov.ma/>

158 <https://hackathon.ae/>

159 UAE's responses to the ESCWA-OECD survey

160 See the report [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FyJvNQJEypUGxW4gOSiNj9zB-Fq\\_nP0r/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FyJvNQJEypUGxW4gOSiNj9zB-Fq_nP0r/view)

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<sup>166</sup> <http://www.ogptunisie.gov.tn/en/?p=1804>

<sup>167</sup> [http://data.bayanat.ae/en\\_GB/dataset?organization=government-of-fujairah](http://data.bayanat.ae/en_GB/dataset?organization=government-of-fujairah)

<sup>168</sup> <https://www.am.gov.ae/> and ESCWA-OECD survey submission, August 2020

<sup>169</sup> <http://covdata.unescwa.org/RPT/RPTDSH1.aspx>

<sup>170</sup> Collected by ESCWA

<sup>171</sup> <http://bit.ly/3avfJS4>

<sup>172</sup> <http://bit.ly/3aqRZOZ>

<sup>173</sup> <https://bit.ly/3bWYMSc>

<sup>174</sup> <https://www.wiego.org/COVID-19-Crisis-and-the-Informal-Economy-Study>

<sup>175</sup> [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/PI2English\\_0.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/PI2English_0.pdf)

<sup>176</sup> <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/socioeconomic-impact-covid-19-policy-briefs>

<sup>177</sup> <http://bit.ly/3rjIQzz>

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.internationalbudget.org/>

<sup>179</sup> <http://bit.ly/3rjIQzz>

<sup>180</sup> (UNDP, 2020<sub>[22]</sub>). See for example the case of Zghorta municipality  
<http://www.zghartamunicipality.org/>

<sup>181</sup> <http://elgherbal.org/>

<sup>182</sup> As well as households' income and spending surveys

<sup>183</sup> <http://bit.ly/39LapL4>





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