

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The Open Society Foundations have been active in the Middle East and North Africa region since 2002 when we began supporting efforts to end discrimination and push for accountability in the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. We have since expanded our presence across the region to support a diverse array of civil society groups in almost all the region’s countries. In 2006, the first regional Open Society Foundations office opened in the Jordanian capital, Amman.

Today, we remain committed to helping the region’s citizens in their efforts to build bright futures and transition towards inclusive, accountable states and societies.

The Middle East and North Africa region is marked by the highest inequality in the world and has faced the most extreme erosion of global norms in recent years (including flouting of international humanitarian and human rights principles in its conflict zones, and the emergence of a massive refugee crisis). Our grant giving efforts are geared towards helping civil society groups cushion the impacts of the region’s turmoil and set up basic human rights infrastructures in their respective countries.

Just under 3 percent of Open Society’s annual budget funds supports work in the Middle East and North Africa. We have established ourselves as trusted partners of grantees in the region, who are working to boost democratic governance, transparency, rule of law, civic engagement, human rights, women’s empowerment, and independent media and the arts.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: 2020 EXPENDITURES BY THEME



Total Expenditures for the Middle East and North Africa in 2020:

\$35.4M

Total Global Expenditures in 2020:

\$1.1B

9 FACTS ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA AND THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

- 1** We fund local and international entities helping tens of thousands of refugees across Jordan and Lebanon to receive legal aid, rights protection, advocacy support, access to services including education, and assistance in integrating into their host communities.
- 2** We are at the forefront of support to leading Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups and legal bodies that have been instrumental in documenting violations and shedding light on them and promoting respect for international law. Our grantees have made notable strides in curbing digital censorship and pushing for more transparency and equity in coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.
- 3** We are one of the largest private funders of the region's independent arts and culture groups through our support to the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, and the Culture Resource. Both played a key role in launching a multidonor fund for individuals and organizations in Lebanon's cultural sector disproportionately impacted by economic recession, the COVID pandemic, and the blast that hit Beirut in 2020.
- 4** As part of Open Society's commitment to media freedom, over the last 15 years more than 3,500 Arab journalists, editors, and fact-checkers were trained on investigative journalism and coached to produce over 650 investigations, dozens of them award-winning. This was through the work of our Jordan-based grantee ARIJ, which works in 16 Arab countries. We support other independent media platforms including Daraj in Lebanon, Jumhuriya in Syria, and Inkyfada in Tunisia.
- 5** We are committed to helping foster a culture of peaceful and constructive public debate in the region. Among our grantees is the regional award-winning Munathara Initiative which broke new ground when it exclusively led and designed Tunisia's first televised electoral debates in 2019.
- 6** We fund prominent think tanks, public policy research institutes, and advocacy groups in Western capitals promoting open society values in the region, including the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the International Crisis Group, the Project on Middle East Democracy, and EuroMed Rights.
- 7** We support groups in the Middle East and North Africa that advocate for gender justice and strengthen feminist movements. Among our many contributions, we have supported courses at Birzeit University's Institute of Women's Studies, one of the region's first academic institutions to focus on the study of gender.
- 8** We have launched a diverse COVID-19 response including emergency funding for Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and their host communities, as well as to citizens in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We also supported information campaigns aimed at fighting the spread of the virus, as well as research institutions working on public health policies in the region.
- 9** The Open Society Justice Initiative supports regional and national groups pushing for accountability in the region. Among its chief achievements is obtaining the public disclosure of a key U.S. intelligence report identifying individuals responsible for the murder of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The disclosure was spurred by a lawsuit the Justice Initiative filed under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act challenging the withholding of U.S. government records relating to the murder.