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Improving the governance of public communication in Jordan

This chapter will analyse the actors, structures and processes underpinning the public communication model in Jordan. In doing so, it looks at how the government of Jordan can effectively strengthen related institutional arrangements, formalise co-ordination mechanisms across levels of government, develop a whole-of-government communication strategy, as well as address human and financial resource gaps. It will discuss the building blocks of a whole-of-government communication approach and provide guidance for a more strategic deployment of this function by MoSMA and line ministries. Finally, it will identify recommendations to support the current re-organisation of the communication function in the country.

Introduction

Since 2019, Jordan embarked on an ambitious re-organisation of the public communication function across government to align structures, procedures, and reporting lines. In pursuit of the priorities outlined in 2019-20, the Government notably issued an official directive for the administrative reform of media units within ministries. These reforms can help further position public communication as a key enabler of government, and support the country's transition toward a more strategic use of this function to promote better policies and services. Ultimately, a communication approach grounded in the open government principles of transparency and participation can aid in the implementation of ongoing reforms, strengthen trust and support the attainment of key policy objectives.

The ongoing restructuring in Jordan can be better understood when analysed against two common governance models for public communication – namely tactical and strategic. This distinction draws from existing literature underlining the multi-layered and organisationally diverse nature of this function across the world (Sanders and Canel, 2013^[1]; Gelders and Ihlen, 2010^[2]; Luoma-aho and Canel, 2020^[3]). Notably, the framework is characterised by a set of elements defining the degree to which structures, processes and resources are institutionalised on the one hand, and professionalised on the other (see Table 3.1). In practice, public communication archetypes within a given country are made up of a mix of the below elements ranging from the purely tactical to the highly strategic, with varying transitions between categories.

Table 3.1. Features of tactical and strategic governance models of public communication

Features range from tactical (left) to strategic (right)

	Tactical	Transitional	Strategic
Public Communication Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff covers communication activities irregularly and alongside other functions • Only a press officer is in charge of all communication aspects • Limited authority and/or contact with decision makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A communication professional manages all activities • Some access and buy-in from decision makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated unit with specialised and trained personnel • Unit represented at decision makers level
Co-ordination Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is conducted in silos, without awareness of activities in other government agencies • There are no common practices nor standards • Messages on core subjects vary between departments, or are not respected • There can be overlap in the work of different offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is some co-ordination from the CoG or another entity, perhaps covering only some areas of communication or specific projects • Some key messages are agreed and mostly used consistently • Some steps are taken to harmonise the visual identity of the government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes and protocols are clear and abided by, and create efficiencies • There is high message discipline • Time-intensive tasks (e.g. monitoring) are centralised within a dedicated entity
Formalisation of communication strategic approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications follow events without advance planning • Objectives of communication activities or strategies are not agreed upon in writing • Activities and channels of communication are not differentiated by audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some overarching objectives are stated and elaborated into a strategy, but parts of communication activity remain ad hoc and unrelated to them • Some communication follow pre-defined plans • Simple audience insights • Some communication are tailored to specific audiences (e.g. youth, women) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication priorities are agreed in consultation with policy makers and other relevant stakeholders and are driven by stated objectives that align with the organisation's goals • Short-term planning is managed through a forward-planning grid • Strategies informed by audience insights and monitoring and evaluation • Implementation of pre-defined plans

Human resources and competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication staff are appointed by political figures and change with each election or change at the top • Staff lacks specialised background and/or training. • No clearly defined job descriptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff includes both political appointees and civil servants • Staff receive basic training or have previous relevant experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil servants are in charge of public communication, which are kept separate from political communication • Staff is highly professionalised and regularly trained to stay abreast of innovation • New functions and/or new departments are created to modernise communication
Financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No dedicated budget is available and/or financing for communication staff and activities is volatile. • Lack of budget efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget is shared with another function or is ad hoc • A dedicated budget exists but does not match the communication objectives/ is insufficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dedicated budget guarantees continued delivery against objectives • Financial resources can be allocated for larger activities according to priorities • Financial transparency and performance accountability to maximise budget efficiency

Source: Author's own work, based on (Sanders and Canel, 2013_[11]).

On the one side of the spectrum, a tactical model of communication relies on one-way information sharing measures for the attainment of short- to medium-term objectives. These types of communication are often ad hoc and fragmented due to weak structures, capacities and resources across public institutions. Consequently, communication under this model is primarily of a reactive nature and serves an auxiliary role at best.

In contrast, a strategic model offers the greatest potential for governments to ensure communication is an instrument of policy making and a means to engage with citizens on issues that matter most to them. Communication initiatives follow formal strategies, structures, guidelines and processes, which respond to the attainment of long-term policy goals. They are user-driven in nature and employ sophisticated tools and methods delivered through a well-resourced office with a strong leadership and mandate.

To pursue the objectives outlined in a host of Government plans,¹ including the Indicative Executive Program (2021-2023) and the forthcoming Government Economic Recovery Priorities Plan, Jordan will need to continue its reforms toward a more strategic operating model for public communication. In this regard, the public communication restructuring efforts offer a valuable opportunity to develop the capacity of staff to engage in two-way exchanges with citizens and to leverage related activities to improve policies and services.

Strengthening public communication structures in Jordan

This section will explore the current institutional arrangements governing this important function in Jordan. The analysis will be based on data collected on the mandates, composition, appointment and functioning of organisational structures. Despite the progress and reforms to date, OECD evidence suggests that existing structures are largely uneven and, where they are in place, often lack adequate resources, capabilities and empowerment to transition from the tactical to the strategic spectrum. The ongoing restructuring led by MoSMA, however, provides a timely opportunity to address these concerns by clarifying roles and responsibilities, aligning mandates, establishing clear accountability lines and standardising procedures.

The organisation of the public communication function varies significantly across OECD countries in terms of the degree of centralisation and formality (OECD, 2021_[4]). This can take the form of a single institution steering communication across government or a devolved model where each institution has its independent mandate. For example, public communication in Australia is a shared responsibility across multiple government agencies, whereas in the United Kingdom this is led by a unit at the CoG² (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Examples of public communication structures in OECD countries

The Government Communication Service (GCS) in the United Kingdom

The Government Communication Service (GCS) is a professional body composed of over 4 500 communication professionals supporting and promoting the work of 25 ministerial departments, 21 non-ministerial departments and over 300 agencies and other public bodies. The aim of this entity is to deliver “world-class public service communications that support government priorities, enable the efficient and effective operation of public services and improve people’s lives”.

GCS acts as a central government communication node and is considered as one of 14 functions that operate across the civil service. The entity was created to support communication professionals employed in central government departments, agencies and arm’s length bodies to professionalise public communication through its core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

The Communications Advice Branch in Australia

Whole-of-government communication is a shared responsibility across multiple government agencies and different officers responsible for supporting the work of the executive government (e.g. ministerial media advisers, press secretaries, etc.). For instance, the Communications Advice Branch within the Department of Finance provides specialist advice to non-corporate Commonwealth entities undertaking advertising campaigns; advises the relevant ministers on the framework for campaigns; and manages the Campaign Advertising Supplier Register.

Source: Based on the responses to the Centre of Government Public Communication survey for the *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward* (OECD, 2021^[41]).

While there is no single best arrangement, there are common elements supporting the effective functioning of these structures. First, consistency of communication mandates across government that are in written form and set clear roles and responsibilities are important factors ensuring their legitimacy (IFAC and CIPFA, 2014^[5]). Second, the empowerment of all communicators within the organisation—together with clear accountability lines, objectives, and the monitoring of performance—are key to ensure the effectiveness of operations (Luoma-aho and Canel, 2020^[3]). Third, the establishment of core professional values directing the work of public communicators under a common approach and detaching it from political priorities, in addition to grounding activities in the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability, and stakeholder participation. These elements, together with adequate human and financial resources, are critical to the effectiveness of communication structures.

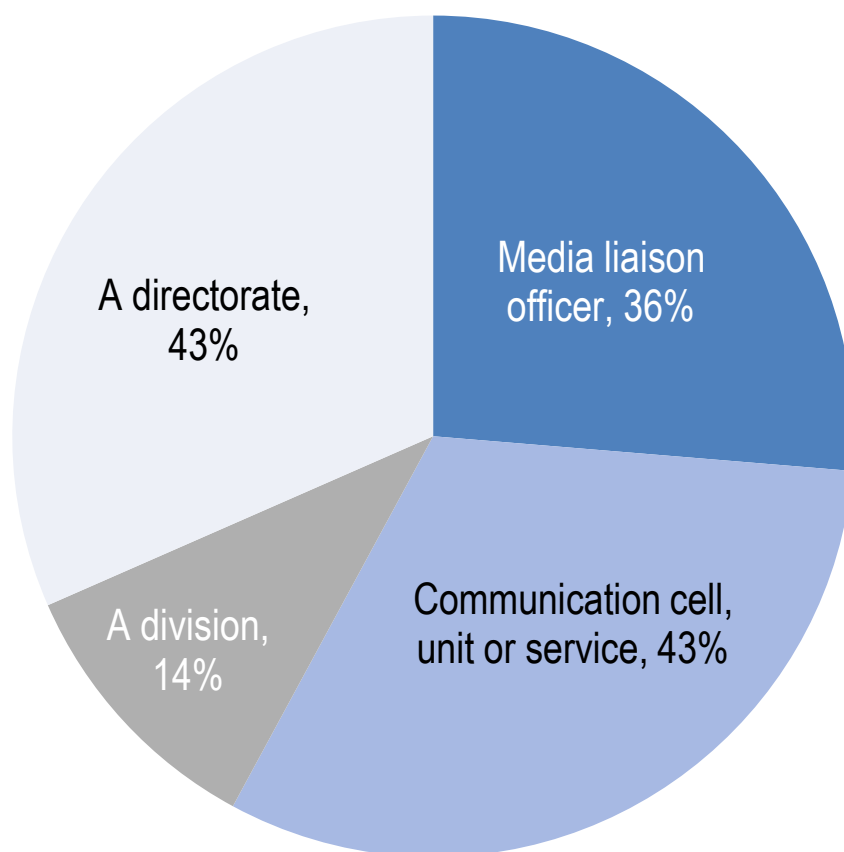
At the centre-of-government level in Jordan, public communication is steered by MoSMA within the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO). According to OECD survey responses, this unit is primarily responsible for communicating government decisions, actions and results. It also oversees public communication policy, conducts internal communication in the PMO, as well as co-ordinates activities with other public authorities. The Minister officially covers the function of government spokesperson and shares official announcements. Other functions that MoSMA carries out include the development of media campaigns, the gathering of insights, engagement with the media, as well as the deployment of digital and crisis communication.³ To carry out these functions, the unit is composed of approximately 22 individuals working full-time.⁴ Staff within MoSMA also often provide support to other government entities upon request.

While MoSMA has achieved progress in consolidating a central public communication hub in Jordan, several challenges need to be addressed to ensure the effectiveness and impact of its current work. To this end, it will be critical to guarantee adequate levels of staff, resources, and training to ensure MoSMA’s capacity to deliver as the leading structure. Interviews with stakeholders also revealed that PMO staff often

have to operate on a reactive basis given the high levels of demand for their support. Formalising existing procedures in a framework or guidance document, as well as developing a dedicated strategy, may support the consolidation of existing good practices within the institution.

At the level of ministries, the recent re-organisation process successfully achieved the creation of dedicated structures to communicate between the Jordanian state and citizens. These efforts are an important step in consolidating a professional public communication service and signal the recognition attributed to this function in the country. Public officials during OECD interviews underlined that further efforts and resources are needed to ensure the effective operation of such structures, as institutional arrangements are newly established or not yet fully functional.

Figure 3.1. Types of communication structures in Jordanian ministries



Note: N=14. Options for this question were not mutually exclusive. 3 out of 5 ministries that selected "Media Liaison Officers" also selected unit, division or directorate. 5 ministries selected 2 options respectively.

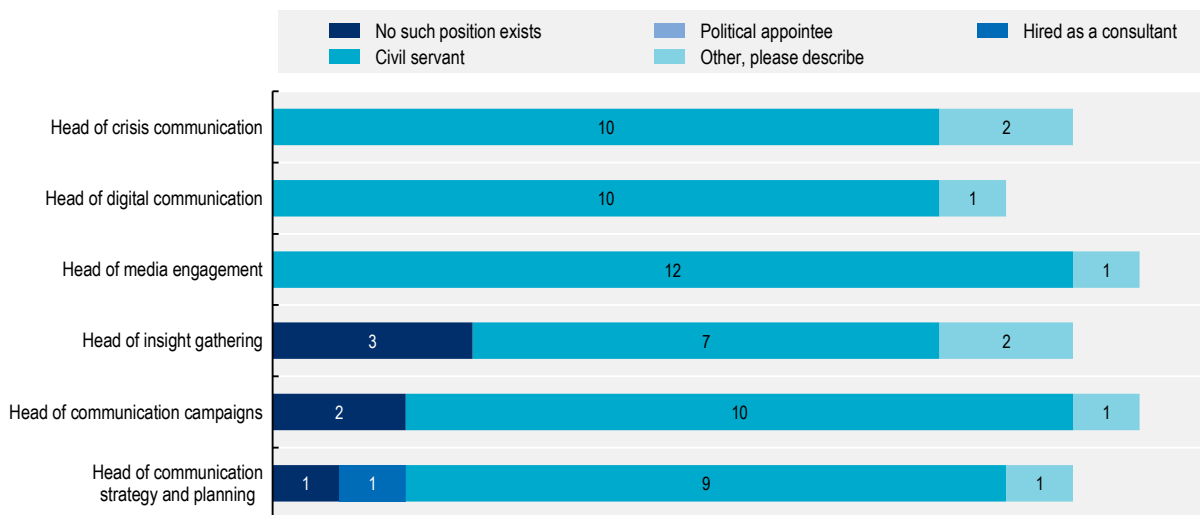
Source: OECD (2020), Survey for line-ministries in Jordan: Understanding public communication in Jordan.

Indeed, OECD findings suggest that communication structures in Jordan tend to vary significantly in terms of their organisation, functioning, and level of resources. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, a large majority of them take the form of a unit (43%), directorate (43%) or division (14%) with the support of media liaison officers. In addition to these institutional arrangements, OECD fact-finding interviews indicated that press officers exist and are tasked with reporting key information, in particular around cabinet decisions. Nonetheless, a small share of ministries (2 out of 14) rely on the work of a single individual, which signals the uneven levels of capacities and resources available across institutions. Findings from an OECD validation

workshop echoed this duality, where in some cases complex structures exist with several departments for media, public relations, and communication.

Factors such as decision-making processes, appointments, reporting lines and specific sector needs may explain differences in terms of the composition and operation of these structures. As Figure 3.2 illustrates, data suggests that most staff with communication responsibilities are civil servants (as opposed to political appointees for example). Nonetheless, interviews with stakeholders revealed that the effectiveness of such teams rely on factors such as individual effort, personality of staff, leadership in place as well as available resources. An additional challenging aspect that was underscored was the burdensome reporting lines and often-bureaucratic procedures that need to be followed, which at times hinder the impact and speed of initiatives and de-incentivises co-ordination. Such arrangements differ from entities where communication staff have a direct means of interaction with the Minister while others need to navigate several layers of approval before being able to disseminate information. All of the elements discussed herein have implications on the ability of staff to separate political from public communication.

Figure 3.2. Types of appointments in Jordanian line ministries



Note: N=14. The graph depicts number of ministries.

Source: OECD (2020), Survey for line-ministries in Jordan: Understanding public communication in Jordan.

Broadly, differing structures that are not institutionalised make it difficult to carry out public communication with a strategic perspective. Findings from an OECD validation workshop note that different institutional arrangements exacerbate administrative challenges facing the work of media units, through unclear roles and responsibilities, burdensome reporting lines, and a difficulty to separate the political and public agendas. This is all the more challenging as the roles and empowerment of communicators are subject to change with a new government. Findings also revealed that the lack of institutionalisation is sometimes leading to different mandates with diverging objectives and practices that ultimately result in misaligned messaging to the public.

For the ongoing restructuring to be effective, efforts must continue to clarify the roles and responsibilities of media units, simplify reporting lines and facilitate intra-institutional and cross-ministerial co-ordination. Together with the modernisation of capabilities through trainings, this could help institutionalise procedures and set professional communication standards. As part of the restructuring process, MoSMA has also developed a manual for media units to align their organisation and functioning. It is intended to “define the basic tasks and roles of these units” in order to work on “strengthening the role of media actors to support the government in communicating its messages and explaining its policies to the public” (Almalakatv,

2020^[6]). Efforts should focus on its ample dissemination and implementation to standardise procedures, clarify roles, and promote a more co-ordinated approach across government. This is a practice adopted by several OECD and partner countries (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2. Examples of manuals and guidelines for public communicators in OECD member and partner countries

Finland's Central Government Communication Guidelines

The Government of Finland developed a series of guidelines, recognising freedom of speech, openness and impartiality as core values of the administration. The fifth edition of the Guidelines explains the values governing communication, outlines the duties and describes the changes in the field of communication and how these changes impact public authorities. It serves as a basis for government organisations to draw up their own more detailed communication guidelines.

Costa Rica's Government Communication Manual

The Ministry of Communications in Costa Rica developed a manual on government communication to support the implementation of the country's strategy and objectives. It sets out the main elements of the whole-of-government narrative and messaging, which is updated on a yearly basis. It also includes a series of principles in regard to editorial work, digital communication, graphic and audio-visual content, and the use of text messages. Acknowledging the differences across regions, the manual also includes a series of recommendations for communication with several segments of the population and on potentially sensitive topics.

Sources: Author's own work, based on <https://vnk.fi/en/central-government-communications-guidelines> and Costa Rica's responses to the OECD (2020^[7]), 2020 Survey for Centres of Government: Understanding Public Communication

Formalising and facilitating co-ordination mechanisms

This section analyses the existing vertical and horizontal co-ordination mechanisms in Jordan in the area of public communication. While OECD evidence identifies challenges to formalising inter-ministerial co-ordination and facilitating information sharing, the reactivation of the national network of spokespeople presents an opportunity to break siloes, optimise communication, and promote peer learning.

At its most basic form, co-ordination can take place horizontally (across government entities or different departments of a same organisation), vertically (from a Prime Minister's office to other ministries or other levels of government), and within a given institution. It sets a framework to support the operational effectiveness of the public sector by establishing processes of inter-governmental consultation, co-operation, and joint decision making, as well as promoting regular information sharing (OECD, 2019^[8]). Aligning the work of all concerned actors can also ensure coherence of goals, actions, and messages. Moreover, good co-ordination can create a conducive environment for the sharing of best practices and lessons learned among practitioners. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, OECD countries have adopted various formal and informal mechanisms to co-ordinate public communication activities. Formal mechanisms are usually those of an official nature, observing a hierarchical path and using official tools such as letters, meetings or committees. In contrast, informal means do not follow any prescribed rules or procedures and therefore provide more flexibility.

In Jordan, MoSMA has progressively adopted a greater role in co-ordinating whole of government communication with line ministries, subnational authorities, and within the PMO. Findings from the OECD survey indicate that MoSMA uses a diverse mix of mechanisms to engage with such entities. These range

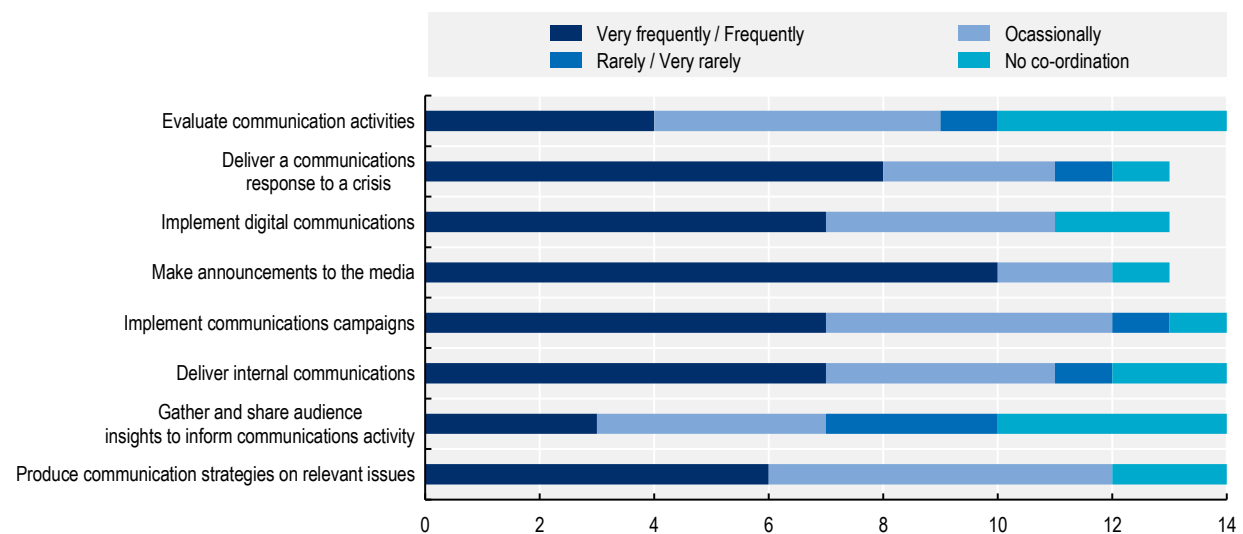
from the use of cross-government teams, internal circulars, joint press conferences, press releases and media handling plans, to the organisation of informal meetings, calls, emails and the use of messaging platforms. At the time of writing, an activity grid to schedule all announcements from the Government was developed but the extent of its application remains unclear.

While substantive progress has been achieved, there is room to strengthen the role of MoSMA as the leading arm unifying and supporting the work of public entities more systematically. In particular, vertical co-ordination between MoSMA and other levels of government could be regularised through the adoption of formal mechanisms, as interviews underlined that current practices ensue only on an ad hoc basis. OECD survey results also suggest that MoSMA could strengthen its role as the central co-ordinating unit for key strategic functions, such as gathering audience insights, campaigns, media announcements, digital communication and crisis responses.

In particular, there is an opportunity to strengthen the link between MoSMA and policy development teams to increase the impact of communication. At the time of writing MoSMA began a process to engage with other units at the PMO to operationalise the reforming of media units. As MoSMA takes on a greater leading role, liaising with policy units will be critical to better inform communication initiatives according to the needs of each policy sector and in turn affect the design and delivery of public services.

At the level of ministries, co-ordination could also be improved to reach its desired potential, as it so far remains ad hoc and informal. According to OECD survey results, co-ordination takes place on an occasional basis on issues ranging from the delivery of internal communication to the implementation of campaigns (see Figure 3.3). Findings from an OECD validation workshop corroborated the absence of a regular dialogue between ministries, where co-operation is sometimes restricted to the start and end date of official Memorandums of Understanding or occurring only at the political level between Secretary Generals. Interviews with stakeholders underlined that these challenges have been perpetuated by leadership changes in various ministries, the reliance on personal relationships, uneven capabilities to share information, and differences in organisational structures and practices. Some of these difficulties were also identified within a given institution in the form of low levels of information sharing between media, communication, and public relation teams.

Figure 3.3. Rate of co-ordination on core communication functions in Jordanian Ministries



Note: Graph depicts number of ministries, N= 14 ministries. Responses to the question: "How often does the institution co-ordinate with other government ministries, departments and agencies to:"

Source: OECD (2020), Survey for line-ministries in Jordan: Understanding public communication in Jordan.

Broadly, the above-mentioned challenges highlight the need to formalise and facilitate co-ordination at both the strategic and technical level in the country. OECD data suggests that a majority of co-ordination efforts focus on the delivery of internal communication, announcements to the media, crisis responses and strategy development. Thus, co-ordination on technical aspects, such as gathering audience insights, as well as implementing communication campaigns and digital communication could be reinforced. In addition, findings from an OECD validation workshop identified potential for regular co-ordination to not only take place for announcements, but also for campaigns and events. In this regard, the Government of Jordan could consider integrating new digital tools for regular information sharing and the co-deployment of initiatives.

Previously, co-ordination efforts took place as part of the *Network of Spokespersons in the Ministries and Institutions of the Government of Jordan* and through an online platform used to share activities and messages (Alrai, 2018^[9]). While these initiatives were temporarily discontinued, at the time of writing MoSMA formalised its re-establishment with the support of the OECD.⁵ This is a very positive development as such platforms can support co-operation, peer learning, and best practice exchange, as per OECD good practices (see Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Examples of bodies supporting public communication co-ordination in OECD and partner countries

The Communications Co-ordination Council of Estonia

To exchange information and organise communication activities, a government communication co-ordination council meets every week in Stenbock House. The council is responsible for co-ordinating whole-of-government communications, organising its working methods, providing consultation to the Government Office in amending and establishing legal acts pertaining to government communication and discussing and adopting positions on key policy issues. The meetings of the council are led by the director of government communication and include heads of communication units from key line-ministries.

The Inter-Ministerial Working Group of Norway

In 2015, an inter-ministerial working group was formed under the Prime Minister's Office, comprised of communication advisors from Norwegian ministries, in order to co-ordinate and stimulate increased usage of social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter at the ministry level. The working group created standards for how the communication departments in ministries employ social media outlets in order to inform and engage with stakeholders.

The Network of Public Communicators in Morocco

In 2017, and with the support of the OECD, the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Administrative Reform established a network of public communication officers to support the public sector modernisation and open government agenda. It includes representatives from all ministries to exchange on communication approaches as well as related challenges and opportunities in promoting transparency and stakeholder participation.

Source: Author's own work based on Estonian Government (2017^[10]), Government Communication Handbook, available online at <https://pdfroom.com/books/government-communication-handbook/Pe5xQPR1dnN>

The Government of Jordan could consider the formalisation of the network of spokespeople through the creation of a ministerial decree that sets out its vision and through a regular meeting schedule. To ensure the continuity of activities, MoSMA could also contemplate engaging in a consultation exercise with its

members to establish a joint mandate with formal objectives, working methods, calendar of meetings and shared digital tools and channels for engagement between peers. Together with capacity building trainings, this platform could help address skill gaps and foster co-ordination on technical policy aspects.

Developing a whole-of-government communication strategy and strengthening the design, implementation and evaluation of ministerial strategies

This section will explore efforts in Jordan towards establishing a unified vision for public communication across government. It will do so by analysing current practices to develop and implement Ministerial strategies, as well as the role of MoSMA in guiding such endeavours. At present, challenges in Jordan remain in terms of establishing a whole-of-government framework, designing quality strategies, ensuring their implementation and translating strategies into actionable plans.

An overarching public communication strategy can help unify efforts under a single vision for the attainment of short, medium and long-term goals. It can also optimise operations and increase the effectiveness of efforts to inform citizens on government action, their rationale and benefits. The use of such documents is particularly important given the specific features of public communication that separate it from other forms of political messaging, where government entities have a responsibility to remain neutral and serve the public interest (Gelders and Ihlen, 2010^[2]). In addition, a strategy helps establish more coherent and relevant messaging, the absence of which can be counterproductive, increasing the distance between citizens and public authorities and engendering negative attitudes towards certain policies and services (Kim and Krishna, 2018^[11]).

A communication strategy can be defined as a written document adopted for the medium to long term that sets out a strategic framework for all communication activities (OECD, 2020^[7]). It outlines the “who”, “what” and “why” of activities across the communication cycle, including their planning, co-ordination, implementation and evaluation. Strategies also ensure that various components (audiences, messages, channels, etc.) are directed towards the achievement of clear and predefined short, medium and long-term objectives. Moreover, they provide an overarching approach for the adoption and implementation of action-oriented communication plans and initiatives. For them to be impactful, they need to be accompanied by plans to operationalise the vision with details about the “when” and “how” of activities, by assigning concrete actions, dates, as well as roles and responsibilities (OECD, 2020^[7]).

While this list is not exhaustive, some of the key elements for the effective development of strategies and plans include:

- **Setting SMART objectives:** Objectives in nature should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and with a clear timeframe. All content developed should be designed to deliver progress towards the achievement of these goals.
- **Establishing clear roles, responsibilities and accountability lines:** For every aspect of the communication plan, it should be clear who is responsible for its delivery, and who must provide input and approval, as well as the timeline for doing so. Those with overall responsibility “should work closely with colleagues to ensure that these timelines are realistic and that all parties are aware of their responsibilities” (OECD/OGP, 2019^[12]).
- **Responding to the needs of different audiences:** It is important to bear in mind how the key messages can best be deployed to reach all audiences. The use of audience insights to inform the development of a strategy is key in this regard, and can support a more tailored choice of channels for engagement.
- **Basing activities on robust evidence:** In order to maximise impact, strategies and plans need to rely on robust research, data and insights that will help assess understandings and perceptions of government actions and reforms. These will help shape tailored messages and targeted programmes, while establishing a baseline for communication.

- **Setting monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:** These mechanisms provide a way to measure the impact of activities and identify areas for improvement. A regular reporting schedule should be built, for example on a quarterly basis, “to assess progress against targets and adjust timelines or mobilise additional resources where needed” (OECD/OGP, 2019_[12]). There should also be clear feedback channels in place for participants to raise questions and concerns and inform about potential delays (OECD, 2020_[13]).
- **Engagement:** engaging with a variety of stakeholders in the development of strategies and plans is key to ensure they respond to various needs.

In practice, several OECD countries have adopted communication strategies. Indeed, out of 36 centres of government, more than half (65%) say they have a government-wide public communication strategy or policy (OECD, 2017_[14]). While they differ in terms of content, they share a number of the above-mentioned elements to guide the implementation of a strategic communication (see Box 3.4 for examples of public communication strategies).

Box 3.4. Examples of public communication strategies and plans in OECD countries

Colombia

The Government of Colombia published a whole-of-government communication strategy in early 2020. It maps the main communication challenges in the country, stressing the importance of making messages relevant and impactful for citizens in the midst of the present information deluge. It also sets out the strategic objectives under the main principle of using this function to provide evidence on the links between government action and citizens’ expectations. In doing so, the document calls for communicators to design initiatives from a rational and emotional perspective, to prove that they listen, propose and act. It also includes key messages, establishes a work methodology, proposes monitoring and evaluation indicators and outlines the next steps for ministries to create their own plans.

United Kingdom

The annual Government Communication Plan outlines what communication professionals across Government will collectively deliver to support the UK Government achieve its priority outcomes. The plan was approved in 2019 and focuses on raising communication standards, strengthening democracy and delivering for local communities. The 2019/20 plan highlights high-profile campaigns contributing towards the Government’s ambition of “building a country that works for everyone”. The work and the standards Government Communication Service (GCS) practitioners adhere to in their work is also outlined.

Source: Based on survey responses from the *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward*; <https://communication-plan.gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Government-Communication-Plan-2019.pdf>.

In Jordan, while standard operating procedures in some media units are available, a whole-of-government communication strategy does not yet exist at the CoG. Discussions with stakeholders during the OECD fact-finding mission indicated that ministerial-level policy announcements often focus on the media coverage of one-off statements. They are not typically guided by a long-term vision to achieve broader policy objectives, nor rely on a planned dissemination scheme across multiple channels according to pre-agreed messaging. Developing such a document and ensuring it is linked with adequate human and financial resources for its implementation would help the country move towards a more strategic and proactive approach to communication.

Nonetheless, MoSMA has supported the development of strategic documents to guide the implementation of specific media interventions. The country’s first media reform vision (2011-15) aimed to foster an

environment supportive of an independent media and to strengthen the existing legal framework governing this sector (UNESCO, 2015^[15]). Efforts by MoSMA are currently underway to develop a new strategy in this regard with a view to strengthening relationships with media actors across the country (Almalakatv, 2020^[16]).⁶ The Government of Jordan has also created several thematic strategies on specific policy issues, including the recently approved Media and Information Literacy National Strategy (2020-23).

With regard to Jordanian ministries, OECD survey results indicate that all 14 ministries report having a strategy, with only 2 institutions having shared a written document (see Box 3.5). Nonetheless, validation interviews noted confusion among ministries between the objectives of communication strategies, plans, and campaigns. Several challenges were also raised in regards to the design and implementation of strategies in this regard. OECD survey results revealed that public authorities face difficulties in designing impactful strategies and ensuring their implementation given the limited availability of human and financial resources. This aligns with findings from a validation workshop underlining that capabilities to design strategies vary significantly, from entities not operationalising these documents to those that engage in extensive media monitoring exercises to support some of its components. An additional challenge was raised in regards to the static nature of these documents, where it is often difficult to adjust the activities, budgets, and timelines therein to unexpected events. Overall, these difficulties together highlight scope to develop more standardised and professional strategies, align practices across ministries, and translate strategies into action plans that can lead to impact through effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Box 3.5. Example from the Ministry of Tourism in Jordan

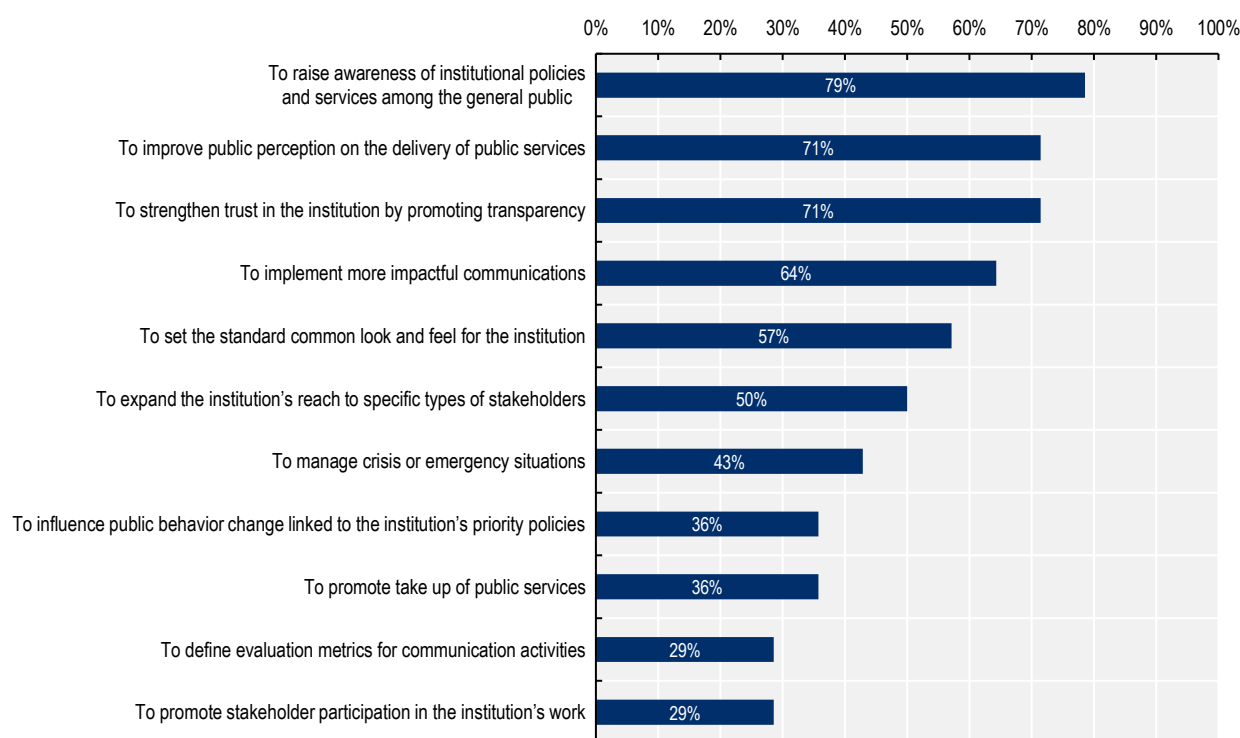
The Tourism Media Strategy sets out as its overall mission and vision to improve Jordan's competitive position and shift it to the forefront of global tourism destinations. It outlines an implementation framework for activities focusing on partnerships with journalists, media professionals, bloggers, and activists in the tourism sector to achieve the objectives therein. The strategy also links existing initiatives with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to promote youth employment in this important sector and ensure appropriate qualification and training of the human force working (local communities, taxi drivers, restaurant and hotel employees, etc.).

In addition, the Department of Tourism outlines several measures to make information readily available to the public. For instance, the Ministry seeks to regularly monitor the reactions and impressions of tourists of their visits to Jordan on tourism websites (Lonely Planet, Airbnb). Its strategy also places an important focus on the Ministry's website, to provide a 24/7 service to all tourists in different languages (in addition to Arabic and English, Russian, French and Spanish).

Source: Author's own work based on the OECD (2020), Survey for line-ministries in Jordan: Understanding public communication in Jordan.

In terms of the objectives highlighted in ministerial strategies, there is also an opportunity to increase the role of communication for transparency and participation. While a majority of OECD survey respondents consider strengthening trust by promoting transparency (71%) as a priority objective therein, less than a third do so for promoting stakeholder participation. In general, strategies primarily focus on raising awareness (79%) and improving the perception of public services (71%) (see Figure 3.4). A positive trend also signals that half of the respondents consider expanding reach to certain types of stakeholders (50%) as an important goal. Therefore, the Government of Jordan could consider focusing communication objectives on opening new spaces for participation, communicating about these opportunities and ensuring the integration of relevant stakeholders, in line with the provisions of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (2017^[17]).

Figure 3.4. Most important objectives of public communication strategies from line ministries in Jordan



Note: N=14 ministries, response to the question: "If you selected communication strategy, what are its most important objectives?".

Source: OECD (2020), Survey for line-ministries in Jordan: Understanding public communication in Jordan.

In response to these challenges, MoSMA could consider the development of a whole-of-government public communication strategy setting out a mid to long-term shared vision. It would not only help institutionalise procedures and strengthen MoSMA's mandate as the central entity for public communication, but it would also guide the development of ministerial strategies under a common set of goals. This shift, however, will require an investment in developing internal capacities on core competencies, such as planning and messaging, audience insights, digital communication, campaigns, and evaluation. It will also require strengthening co-ordination, translating the strategy into an action plan, as well as guaranteeing the needed financial and human resources to ensure its implementation.

In addition to developing strategies and plans, efforts could also focus on providing support toward their effective implementation. A first mapping could be conducted to make sure that all public entities in Jordan have a written public communication strategy and plan. This could be complemented with capacity building activities to develop skills for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such documents. In this respect, MoSMA's current advisory role will be an important factor for continued success (see Box 3.6 on examples of role of CoGs in this regard). This process could help generate consistency among all strategies and ensure that their objectives are SMART, linked to broader policy goals and translatable into outcomes. As done by the Government of South Australia, an additional measure could include the creation of a template for ministerial communication strategies (Department of Premier and Cabinet, n.d.^[18]).

Box 3.6. Ecuador’s committee for the approval and review of communication plans

The General Secretariat of Communications in Ecuador, located under the Prime Minister’s Office, is in charge of whole-of-government communication. In its capacity, the Secretariat is also responsible for the review and approval of all ministerial communication plans to ensure that activities are in line with the overarching national strategy. To achieve its mandate, and in support of its advisory role, the Secretariat created an internal Communication Plan Review Committee (or “*Comité de Revisión de Planes de Comunicación*” in Spanish) to review, analyse and approve ministerial directives. In this respect, the committee has reviewed a total of 110 documents, from which 65 Communication Plans have been approved and 17 requests for communication investment projects endorsed.

Source: Author’s own work, based on Ecuador’s responses to the OECD (2020^[7]), OECD Centre of Government Survey: Understanding Public Communication.

Addressing human resource and competency gaps

Adequate levels of skilled human resources are a *sine qua non* condition for a strategic communication approach. While the restructuring of this function has gradually established dedicated structures at the level of ministries, there is considerable diversity in terms of capacities and skills. OECD survey respondents furthermore underlined that human resource management remains the most challenging competency to establish a two-way dialogue with citizens. This section will therefore explore potential avenues to strengthen human resource management through an initial assessment of existing hiring, training, and professional development practices.

Strategic human resource management can help governments improve the efficiency, quality, and responsiveness of public services by aligning capabilities toward the attainment of organisational goals (OECD, n.d.^[19]). This is no different in the field of public communication, where its evolution due to the introduction of novel technologies and practices calls for an increasingly skilled worked force. From the hiring stage to that of performance evaluation, there is a critical role in “developing communication skillsets of staff and in recognising [...] the increasingly specialised nature of communication knowledge and expertise” (Sanders and Canel, 2013^[11]). This is all the more important considering the growing concern among OECD countries that “the skill sets commonly used within the public sector may no longer be keeping up with the fast pace of change in the societies they aim to support and improve” (OECD, n.d.^[19]).

The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability emphasises the importance of building adequate levels of skills to ensure the transformation of a political vision into policy action (OECD, 2019^[8]). The Recommendation summarises 14 principles to foster a value-driven, trusted, capable, responsive and adaptive public service, suggesting governments invest in core capabilities by (OECD, 2019^[8]):

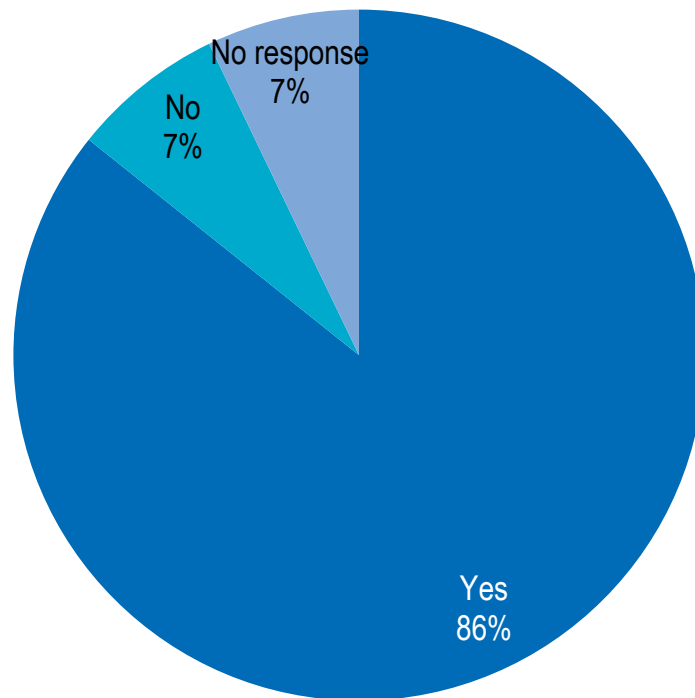
- Continuously identifying skills and competencies needed to transform political vision into services that deliver value to society.
- Attracting and retaining employees with the skills and competencies required.
- Recruiting, selecting, and promoting candidates through transparent, open and merit-based processes.
- Developing the necessary skills and competencies by creating a learning culture and environment in the public service.
- Assessing, rewarding and recognising performance, talent and initiative.

In Jordan, public entities benefit from a relatively established body of communicators, both politically appointed and members of the civil service. As detailed above, Jordan has undertaken, and continues to conduct, multiple initiatives aimed at restructuring its communication model. Further investments in the capacity of communication units and the professionalisation of communicators are necessary for its transition to a more strategic communication approach. Indeed, this is all the more important as the lack of or insufficient human resources was selected as the most important challenge to carrying out core communication competencies by over half of responding ministries on average (53%).

While all surveyed ministries report having dedicated full-time staff, the development of job posts and recruiting practices could be further consolidated. In terms of skills, findings reveal uneven practices regarding the hiring in media units, as only 8 out of 14 ministries have identified a framework or list of core competencies. These findings align with those from an OECD validation workshop stressing that the lack of written and robust job descriptions is at present exacerbating issues in terms of performance evaluations. At the time of writing, MoSMA noted the creation of a manual with recruiting guidelines, but signalled that this has yet to be implemented across public entities in Jordan.

Despite the growing consolidation of media units, several challenges have also obstructed progress in terms of strategic human resource management. First, the lack of operational structures has presented challenges in terms of defining the role of communication teams. Second, slow recruitment processes have impeded the acquisition of talent to fulfil technical roles. Third, turnover levels resulting from past reshuffles has impacted institutional memory, the build-up of expertise, and consistency of a given Ministry's approach. To address such challenges, developing standards for the communication profession and defining a core capability framework for the job posts could solidify gains achieved thus far in terms of establishing media units. At the time of writing, the Civil Service Bureau initiated efforts to develop such a framework in acknowledgement of public communication as a priority lever of government.

Given the uneven resources available across ministries, the Government could also benefit from developing a comprehensive training programme focused on key strategic functions. While 86% of survey respondents reported that communication teams receive training, they also noted the need for technical assistance to better respond to the needs of the citizens (see Figure 3.5). These findings align with OECD survey responses underscoring variances in terms of the background and skills of these teams regarding their degree of specialisation in the fields of journalism, marketing, design, and public relations. Interviews with stakeholders revealed that capacity-building activities in Jordan are mostly conducted on an ad-hoc basis with a limited focus on campaigns and digital communication, in addition to being dispersed and without a concrete programme supporting their institutionalisation. At present, these opportunities are centralised and provided by the PMO, which also deals with requesting specialised technical assistance from external actors and donors.

Figure 3.5. Share of ministries in Jordan that receive communication specific training

Note: N= 14 Ministries, responses to the question: "do the members of the communications team or relevant officer have communications training?".

Source: OECD (2020), Survey for line-ministries in Jordan: Understanding public communication in Jordan.

In terms of skill development, MoSMA could address existing challenges by identifying capacity gaps and recommending a training curricula built around core communication functions. To this end, an initial mapping of skill gaps could allow MoSMA to request relevant trainings according to the needs of different institutions. Such workshops could focus on modernising core skills, such as audience insights, online engagement and interactivity, and new evaluation methodologies. In time, the Government of Jordan could consider formalising training into institutionalised programmes or academies for public communicators as done in several OECD countries (see Box 3.7). Ultimately, future efforts could focus on promoting the reach, relevance, and sustainability of training and professional development opportunities.

Box 3.7. Public Communication skill academies in OECD countries

The UK Government Communication Service Academy

Through its vision to build professional standards across government, the *Government Communication Service Academy* in the United Kingdom aims to improve the performance of communicators and help build their careers through a robust offer of trainings and online resources.

The Professional Standards Team works with the heads of each communication discipline to design and deliver relevant development and training opportunities. Through its online and day courses, the academy provides workshops on themes such as campaign excellence; understanding disinformation; crisis communication; behavioural insights; and presenting with impact. It makes its offer readily available to communicators through an [online site](#) centralising all upcoming workshops. The academy also collaborates with external professional bodies, such as the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) and the Market Research Society (MRS), to expand its offer of webinars and learning resources.

The UK's Government Communication Service also carries out an annual skills survey to measure the capabilities of its teams and uses the results to tailor professional development sessions to improve skills and resources across the entire function. These efforts operate under a formal career framework for its staff to manage their professional development and continue to build their competency and expertise, while gaining relevant experience.

The Academy for Government Communication in the Netherlands

The Academy for Government Communications assists the central government in supporting the professionalisation and training of civil servants in the communication function. It is the knowledge and expertise centre in the field of government communication and is part of the Public and Communication Service of the Ministry of General Affairs. It helps communication staff maintain their professional knowledge, keeping them updated on respective trends within their fields, developing learning pathways as well as creating inter-ministerial networks.

All training courses are bundled in a coherent training programme, called the "Learning Line". The goal is to create a more uniform training of communication staff, government-wide employability and networking. The courses are only available to civil servants. The Academy offers a wide range of courses and trainings that include an introduction course on Communication at the National Government; professional trainings for Experienced Editors, Press Officers, and Speech Writers; modules on Behavior, Visual Communication and Professional Environmental Management; learning routes on Strategic Advice and Connecting Leadership; a masterclass on Theme Inspiration; as well as courses on Podcasts and Content Creation. The Academy also provides training for Policy Officers, in collaboration with the PBLQ ROI training centre in The Hague.

Moreover, the Academy organises meetings to stimulate knowledge sharing through webinars on current subject themes, annual conferences for government communication, as well as learning networks around specific themes (such as inclusion or Instagram) in which colleagues share knowledge through online meetings and record them for further dissemination. In addition to training courses, learning networks and knowledge webinars, the Academy offers an online platform, "Oms CommunicatieRijk", in which communication professionals can share knowledge, ask questions and find colleagues. The Academy can also be found on Twitter, LinkedIn, and a monthly newsletter is published.

A special service carried out by the Academy worth noting is the management of the Communication Pool, a group of 40 strategic communication advisers and press secretaries, mainly self-employed, who

have signed a framework agreement with the central government. These advisers can be hired by ministries whenever they are short on staff, or for specific strategic jobs or projects.

Source: Author's own work based on <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/academy/>; <https://www.communicatierijk.nl/vakkennis/aanbod-academie-voor-overheidscommunicatie>; <https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-general-affairs/organisation>

Recognising highly impactful communication practices and initiatives could also help build core capabilities across all public institutions in Jordan. For instance, the Government of Canada recognises communication excellence in the federal public service and celebrates innovative practices through its yearly Communication Awards (see Box 3.8). Publicising the impact of initiatives would not only serve to recognise best practices, reward and incentivise outstanding performance, but it could also help gain approval for more ambitious activities and investments from senior officials.

Box 3.8. Canada's Communications Awards of Excellence

The Communications Awards of Excellence from the Government of Canada recognise outstanding practices and celebrate the achievements of the public communication community. The ceremony, which takes place once a year, is an opportunity for the sharing of lessons learnt, good practices and innovations in the field. The Government recognises excellence under five excellence in communications awards (Team Awards) and five Spotlight Awards (Individual Awards). Following the robust evaluation criteria online, all entities are able to submit their nomination, which are ultimately reviewed by the Communication Community Office and its Steering Committee.

The Communications Awards of Excellence were established in 2019, and have since then served as a platform to set professional standards for communication across Canada.

Source: Author's own work, based on <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/communications-community-office/communications-awards-excellence.html>

Ensuring dedicated financial resources

As the ongoing restructuring aims to transform the work of public communicators in Jordan it will be critical to ensure adequate levels of financial resources. This short section will take stock of the current related challenges in Jordan and make the case for the importance of establishing a dedicated budget in this regard.

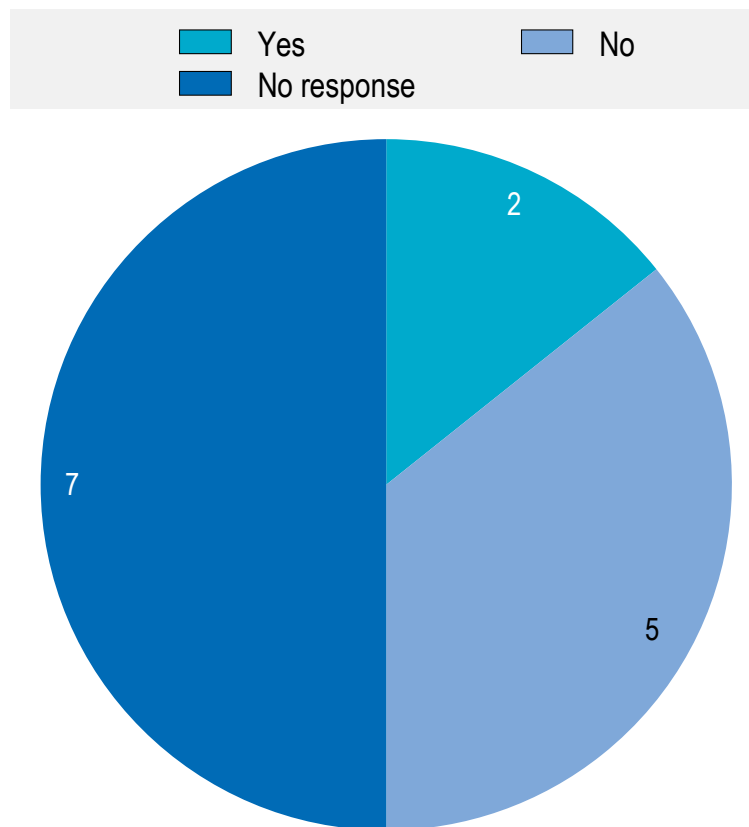
Dedicated fund streams are fundamental in translating strategies and initiatives into concrete results. A budget for public communication not only helps ensure the sustainability of efforts, but also attributes tangible value to this function and helps recognise its importance. A strategic communication approach thus relies on setting dedicated budgetary allocations against concrete objectives, linked to government priorities and evaluated against performance indicators. In this regard, the OECD Recommendation on Budget Governance underpins the importance of budgetary efficiency and sets out ten basic principles for their effective design, implementation and evaluation (see Box 3.9).

Box 3.9. OECD principles for sound budgetary governance

1. Manage budgets within clear, credible and predictable limits for fiscal policy.
2. Closely align budgets with the medium-term strategic priorities of government.
3. Design the capital budgeting framework in order to meet national development needs in a cost-effective and coherent manner.
4. Ensure that budget documents and data are open, transparent and accessible.
5. Provide for an inclusive, participative and realistic debate on budgetary choices.
6. Present a comprehensive, accurate and reliable account of the public finances.
7. Actively plan, manage and monitor budget execution.
8. Ensure that performance, evaluation & value for money are integral to the budget process.
9. Identify, assess and manage prudently longer-term sustainability and other fiscal risks.
10. Promote the integrity and quality of budgetary forecasts, fiscal plans and budgetary implementation through rigorous quality assurance including independent audit.

Source: OECD (2015^[20]), Recommendation of the Council on Budgetary Governance, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/Recommendation-of-the-Council-on-Budgetary-Governance.pdf>

As in many OECD countries, Jordan will need to address low levels of available funding for communication activities. Indeed, OECD survey results revealed that the lack of or insufficient funding streams was selected as the second biggest challenge on average to carrying out key functions (46%). With the exception of MoSMA, 5 out of 14 ministries indicate the lack of a dedicated budget for communication as a key issue (see Figure 3.6). Moreover, MoSMA's survey responses revealed a reliance on donor funds to carry out initiatives such as insight gathering, trainings, and campaign design and delivery. Interviews with stakeholders also stressed that the existing procurement framework presents challenges to the contracting of external services due to bureaucratic and unclear procedures.

Figure 3.6. Number of Ministries in Jordan with a dedicated budget for public communication

Source: OECD (2020), Survey for line-ministries in Jordan: Understanding public communication in Jordan.

To strengthen the strategic perspective of public communication in Jordan, the Government could consider establishing dedicated budget lines in media units to support the deployment of core communication functions and activities. This will be all the more important to ensure the successful re-structuring of these entities, in particular to enable them to deliver on their new responsibilities. Indeed, dedicated funding streams could help ensure the sustainability of communication initiatives, equip ministries with modernised tools and skills, and change the perception around the value of this function at the highest political levels.

An initial step to address funding gaps could involve a mapping of existing and future financing needs to make the case for investment in public communication tools, capacities and initiatives. To support the business case for communication, efforts could focus on the monitoring and impact evaluation of initiatives currently underway.

Recommendations

The following recommendations provide a roadmap to support the ongoing restructuring of public communication in Jordan. They summarise the main takeaways from the chapter and include potential avenues to move toward a more strategic communication approach.

Strengthening public communication structures in Jordan

- Continue existing efforts to standardise and fully operationalise media units as part of the restructuring of the public communication function in Jordan, allowing for more clarity concerning their roles and responsibilities.
- Formalise communication procedures across ministries through guidelines or decrees, to ensure consistency in the role and mandate of public communicators over time and regardless of changes in leadership. A first step could include scaling efforts to disseminate MoSMA's manual on the organisation of media units, clarifying roles, and responsibilities and codifying processes.

Formalising and facilitating co-ordination mechanisms

- Ensure the continuity of the network of communicators under the co-ordination of MoSMA to facilitate information sharing, align messages and plan joint events. MoSMA could consider formalising the network through a decree and engage in a consultation exercise with members to identify and establish a joint mandate with formal objectives, working methods, calendar of activities and digital tools and channels for engagement between peers.
- Expand inter-ministerial dialogue on technical aspects, such as gathering audience insights and digital communications, through the integration of new tools for information sharing and the regularisation of meetings in the framework of the network to foster the exchange of good practices.
- Consider the creation of a centralised information repository where guidelines, manuals and other relevant information can be accessible to all public entities. This will not only support the dissemination of good practices to professionalise the work of units but to institutionalise practices across entities.

Developing a whole-of-government communication strategy and strengthening the design, implementation and evaluation of ministerial strategies

- Develop a whole-of-government public communication strategy, together with an action plan, setting the Government's vision for reform, outlining the main objectives for its achievement and identifying evaluation indicators to measure its success. An overarching strategy and plan could also help guide the development of those at the ministry level, based on a common vision and approach, and provide an implementation roadmap.
- Provide support for the design, implementation and evaluation of ministry-specific communication strategies. This could include the development of guidelines, the deployment of trainings and the establishment of a review committee by MoSMA to approve and evaluate sectoral strategies.
- MoSMA could also consider the development of a template to ensure the translation of ministerial strategies into plans.

Addressing human resource and competency gaps

- Develop and operationalise a dedicated competency framework for the public communication profession in Government to provide clear entry points, requirements for advancement, and opportunities for vertical and horizontal career progression.

- Increase the professional competencies of public communicators through dedicated training programmes on topics such as audience insights, planning, messaging, digital communication, campaigns, and evaluation. An initial mapping of skill gaps could allow MoSMA to design a robust programme for the PMO, which in time could be formalised into a public skills academy or integrated into existing curricula for officials.
- Widely disseminate the newly created recruitment guidelines for the establishment of capabilities within media units and the promotion of professional standards.
- Recognise, award and disseminate highly-impactful communication campaigns and activities across public entities in Jordan.

Ensuring dedicated financial resources

- Establish a dedicated budget for MosMA and media units to support the deployment of core communication functions and activities. Budget allocations could be based on a mapping of funding gaps and an analysis of yearly needs based on communication plans to be developed. To ensure the efficient management of resources, a regular evaluation of funds spent could be envisaged with a focus on increasing the transparency and visibility of results.

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Notes

¹ Public communication commitments in the *Jordan 2025 Vision*, the *National Renaissance Plan* (2019-2020), the *Indicative Executive Program* (2021-2023), and the forthcoming *Government Economic Recovery Priorities Plan*, among others.

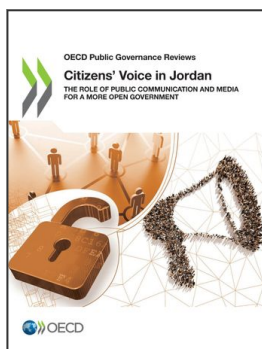
² Centre of government is defined as the support structure serving the highest level of the executive branch of government (presidents, prime ministers and their equivalents).

³ Some of these responsibilities are shared with other public institutions, including the National Center for Security and Crisis Management, Media departments across the government, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Shared responsibilities mainly focus on the formulation and implementation of sector specific campaigns and crisis responses.

⁴ Staff within MoSMA work full time on campaigns, digital communication, crisis communication, countering disinformation and media engagement, whilst specific individuals handle the strategy, internal communication and insight gathering elements of work. Evaluation, stakeholder participation, and trainings are conducted on an ad-hoc basis.

⁵ In the framework of the [Citizens' Voice Project](#), the OECD supported MoSMA in the establishment of a network of spokespeople in the country. This network is meant to serve as a platform to promote formal partnerships between institutions, scale the sharing of good practices and provide training to even capacity levels across institutions.

⁶ The OECD understands that the Ministry of State for Media Affairs (MOSMA) is planning to develop a new national strategy for media. The strategy may ultimately include areas focused on legal reforms, the media watchdog, the JPA, a media complaints commission, disinformation and community media, etc.



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