Foreword

As part of its efforts to promote better public governance and state modernisation, Jordan has embarked on an ambitious decentralisation reform agenda to address the social and economic challenges rooted in its highly centralised political and administrative system. Two laws approved in 2015, one focusing on governorates and one on municipalities, provide the key foundations of this process. Together, these laws create elected governorate and local councils that are designed to foster a bottom-up approach to national planning and socio-economic development.

The decentralisation reform is aligned with the objectives of the country’s ten-year vision, “Jordan 2025”, as well as the “Executive Development Programme 2016-18”. It also coincides with the approval of Jordan’s third National Action Plan (2016-18) for the Open Government Partnership (OGP), which is the country’s most ambitious, comprehensive, and concrete attempt to date to promote the implementation of the principles of open government (i.e. transparency, accountability and citizen participation) in its public administration. Taken together, these initiatives provide an integrated policy framework for the country’s long term commitment to continue to move forward with its efforts to improve good governance and to strengthen its democratic institutions at central and local levels.

This report focuses on how the principles and practices of open government are integrated in and supported by Jordan’s decentralisation reforms (namely, the creation of elected bodies at the subnational level and the transfer of powers from central government to lower levels) and administrative deconcentration initiatives (where central government offices are relocated to the subnational level while leadership remains centralised). In fact, promoting the role of citizens, non-governmental stakeholders and civil society across all levels of government is at the heart of this process. For the first time, elections of the governorate and local councils – the major institutional change introduced by the new legal framework – will take place in August 2017. Accordingly, the reforms have raised public expectations that citizens’ needs, particularly those of vulnerable groups, will be better represented, ultimately resulting in increasing levels of transparency and accountability.

However, the new policy and legal frameworks do not yet seem to provide for a major transfer of competencies and resources to subnational levels of government and do not yet fully define the vertical and horizontal relationships between them and with the central administration. This situation presents the government with the dual challenge of simultaneously managing the high expectations among citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) regarding their new roles and relationships with different government levels, while continuing the process of clarifying what kind of decentralisation will be implemented in Jordan and of designing the related institutional, legal and policy requirements.
Building on OECD principles, as well as good practices from OECD member countries and countries from the MENA region, this report highlights the need for Jordan to develop a roadmap on how the reform policy objectives will be achieved in order to facilitate the centre of government’s ability to support and monitor their implementation. The report also recommends that the government better specifies roles and responsibilities for the reform implementation across ministries and government levels and communicate them to public officials and citizens. Additionally, the report stresses the importance of building the capacity of local offices, including of the members of elected councils, to allow them to successfully fulfil their new roles, including – in particular – the new competences they will have in the areas of strategic planning and citizen engagement. Finally, the report points to the need to better foster a culture of open and participatory government across the different levels of the administration and in the population by disseminating the tenets of open government as well as providing adequate training, financial resources and, most importantly, concrete opportunities for stakeholder consultation and engagement.

This report was prepared in the framework of OECD’s broader engagement to strengthen good governance, open and inclusive policy-making in Jordan. Notably, as a founding member of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme, Jordan has been working closely with the OECD to reform its public sector in line with OECD best practices. This includes OECD support for an inclusive formulation and implementation of the country’s OGP Action Plan, the participation of women in parliament and policy-making, and of youth in public life.
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