

Executive summary

In Jordan, recent transformations to the media and online spheres have affected the availability of information, how information is shared, and the main sources trusted by the public. These developments have prompted a whole-of-government reform of internal and external public communication processes with the aim of addressing citizens' changing needs and expectations. Reinforcing this transition toward a more strategic model can ultimately help ensure optimal flows of information, the active involvement of the media, as well as the open and productive debate of key policy issues.

While much has been achieved through the restructuring of public communication in Jordan, evidence suggests that this function remains underutilised as an instrument for openness and policy-making. Surveyed ministries highlight the absence of skilled staff, financial resources, co-ordination, and established procedures as the reasons behind the reactive nature of communications. Moreover, there is scope for repositioning this function as a two-way engagement mechanism: less than one-third of ministries consider promoting participation as a priority objective of communications and engagement with the media occurs on an ad hoc basis. Addressing these challenges has become ever more urgent. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the critical importance of clear communications and transparent flows of information for crisis response efforts.

This review provides an analysis and recommendations on how the Government of Jordan can make strategic use of public communication and strengthen the media and information-enabling environment. This report first takes stock of the main related developments in Jordan and establishes a framework of how public communication can contribute to open government reforms. Subsequently, the report provides an analysis and recommendations for adopting a more strategic use of public communication by institutionalising and professionalising core structures, processes and competencies. Finally, this review identifies opportunities for the government to more effectively engage with citizens by creating an environment that supports the media and information sharing.

Improving the governance of public communication in Jordan

Public communication structures, processes, and mandates in Jordan could be further institutionalised to help government entities engage with the public in more proactive and strategic ways. At present, such structures vary significantly in terms of their organisation, functioning, and level of resources, in some cases relying on the work of a single individual. At the same time, a variety of arrangements contribute to the uneven and uncoordinated application of activities, exacerbated in turn by the lack of an overarching communication strategy as well as limited human and financial resources.

To address these challenges, the OECD suggests several ways to strengthen governance arrangements and support the effectiveness of internal government operations. First, efforts will be needed to standardise structures and formalize procedures to ensure the consistency of the role and mandate of public communicators. Second, professionalising media units will also require technical training and the establishment of dedicated budgets to implement new restructuring directives, which could be monitored through a whole-of-government strategy. Finally, the reactivated network of public communicators could serve as a platform to improve co-ordination and secure buy-in from the political leadership to allocate resources for this function.

Developing a more strategic use of key communication competencies in Jordan

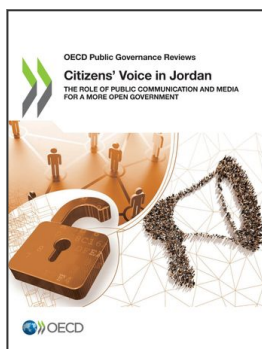
Professionalising core capabilities in government institutions is needed both to establish a two-way dialogue with the public and strengthen internal processes. Overall, OECD survey results reveal that the skills and competencies most lacking in Jordanian ministries include effectively deploying campaigns, producing communication strategies, engaging through digital channels, and evaluating impact. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, setting an established methodology, creating centres of expertise and equipping public entities with the right tools and skills will be central to addressing the *ad hoc* and uneven implementation of activities in these areas.

In order to address these challenges, the OECD provides several recommendations to strengthen key communication capabilities. First, promoting the collection and use of insights from target audiences can help governments better understand the most favoured means of communication and identify messages that have the most impact on citizens. Second, there is potential to standardise the use of digital channels and promote their role as interfaces for stakeholder participation, given the high internet and social media penetration rates in the country. Finally, the establishment of a consistent evaluation methodology, assessing impact metrics and baselines, can help measure performance and better inform future communications.

Leveraging the media and information ecosystem in Jordan

A sound and well-regulated media and information-enabling environment is vitally important for communicating a variety of pertinent policy priorities. However, a number of political economy challenges hamper the effective use of the media and information ecosystem to support Jordan's strategic communications efforts. At a structural level, these include a growing digital divide between urban and rural areas as well as among key segments of the population. Likewise, at an institutional level, challenges include a highly complex legal framework with numerous—and sometimes overlapping—laws, directives, and regulations governing how media and broadcast organisations as well as online outlets can function. Finally, with respect to the various stakeholders involved, challenges include difficulties in the accreditation of journalists, the need for greater plurality and independence of media outlets, the need for greater transparency in the licencing process, capacity challenges for government spokespeople engaging the media, and the changing demographics of media consumers.

To meet these challenges, the OECD offers several recommendations that can support a robust media and information-enabling environment. With regard to structural challenges, strategic channel selection and audience insights are needed in order to tailor content to the context of specific audience needs and support greater media and information literacy capabilities. Likewise, to address institutional challenges, a review of the current legal framework is needed to ensure consistency among laws, regulations, directives, and policies, with an aim to align them with international good practices is crucial. Finally, to address stakeholder challenges, support is needed for increasing the reach of media outlets at the local level, expanding journalist accreditation procedures, supporting the plurality and independence of media outlets, developing an ombudsman or independent complaints mechanism, and building the media literacy of government agencies, CSOs, and citizens.



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