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## Context, assessment, and recommendations

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This chapter provides an overview of the main legal and institutional changes that have affected the state of public communication in Jordan, including the recent growth of the media and information sector. It then presents the OECD's framework for open government, public communication, and media ecosystems, which will be analysed in depth in subsequent chapters of the report. The chapter ends with a summary of the main conclusions and recommendations of the report concerning the governance of public communication, the strategic use of core capacities, and opportunities to promote a sound media and information enabling environment in the country.

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## Introduction

Over the last twenty years, Jordan has pursued a path of gradual modernisation and reform that has accelerated since the 2011 Arab Spring, which called for greater voice in public decisions. In response, King Abdullah II established a Royal Committee and the National Dialogue Committee to identify reform priorities and engage in meaningful discussions with the public. As a result of these deliberations, 42 articles in the Constitution were amended and a National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission was formed in 2016. In 2007, the adoption of the Access to Information (ATI) Law (No. 47 of 2007), the first in the Arab region, set a key milestone towards opening up Jordan's government.

The country's regional leadership in promoting an open government agenda also highlights its reform progress, as evidenced by it being the first Arab country to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011. As part of these efforts, Jordan has undertaken four OGP National Action Plans and, in collaboration with the OECD, it established an Open Government Unit within the Ministry of Planning and International Co-operation (MOPIC) in May 2018. The fourth and current OGP Plan (2018-2020) involved an inclusive design process, led by MOPIC's survey of over 170 stakeholders about priorities for open government initiatives. These efforts were complemented by online consultations and public comment sessions of the draft commitments.

Despite this progress, Jordan's progress on governance and social reforms has been challenged by a difficult economic and geopolitical context. In 2019, the rate of economic growth slowed significantly from an expected rate of 5% to 2.2% in real terms (Kardoosh, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>). Fiscal pressures in the country can be linked to mounting regional challenges, most visibly the crisis in Syria and, prior to that, Iraq, which have "caused influxes of refugees that have strained health and education services and disrupted trade routes" (World Bank, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>). This slowdown may be further exacerbated by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which has considerably "weakened Jordan's short and mid-term growth prospects" (World Bank, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>).

The unfavourable economic context has motivated some discontent among Jordanians, as expressed in recent demonstrations. Indeed, a series of protests throughout 2018 and 2019 were sparked in part by IMF-backed austerity measures aimed at tackling the country's public debt. This is in parallel taking place alongside declining levels of trust, with 72% of Jordanians reporting a lack of confidence in the Parliament (International Republican Institute, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). Accordingly, this backdrop makes effective public communication an important asset for Jordan to establish a better dialogue with citizens, allow them to participate, and, ultimately, achieve greater buy-in over policy changes and build trust among citizens.

This chapter will provide an overview of the main findings and recommendations of the OECD Review *"Citizens' Voice in Jordan: The Role of Public Communication and Media for a More Open Government"*. In doing so, it will first take stock of the main developments shaping the Jordanian context, including those pertaining to the public communication function and broader media reform. The chapter will then outline an analytical framework on how public communication and a sound media ecosystem can contribute to promoting the principles of transparency, accountability, integrity and stakeholder participation. Subsequently, it will summarise the key recommendations for the Government of Jordan to strengthen the governance of the public communication function, professionalise core communication competencies and foster a sound media ecosystem.

## Public communication in Jordan

The Government acknowledges the potential and urgency of engaging with citizens, and it has identified public communication as a key element of its reform agenda. In a 2018 public message, King Abdullah II acknowledged that "governments are compelled to work transparently and provide accurate, timely information to the public in this era of openness." (King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, 2018<sup>[5]</sup>). In this op-ed,

the King emphasised the benefits of social media platforms, but also the need to respond to the challenges they pose, in particular those related to hate speech and disinformation.

Similarly, communication was included as a priority within a host of Government Plans providing a roadmap for policy reform, including 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. The Plan included provisions to strengthen freedom of expression and acknowledged public communication as a lever to deliver policy outcomes by “providing channels of communication between citizen and government to ensure transparency, openness and accountability” (Government of Jordan, 2018<sup>[6]</sup>). Overall, the Plan’s aim is to increase public sector transparency, accountability and integrity, as well as foster greater participation and dialogue, all of which are indicative of a greater focus on open government policies.

The Open Government Unit in MOPIC and Jordan’s OGP action plans have also reflected the government’s commitments to better communication and stronger media ecosystems. The Kingdom’s third OGP National Action Plan (2016-18) included two commitments focused on supporting the legislative framework governing access to information and freedom of the media, respectively. Furthermore, the development process of Jordan’s fourth OGP National Action Plan (2018-2020) put in practice many effective communication and engagement practices, as MOPIC leveraged channels of communication to produce the most inclusive and consultative document to date. The process saw over 2 000 Facebook engagements; 269 participants in meetings and consultation sessions; and 145 responses to the opinion poll and call for public comments. This activity exemplifies the potential for communications approaches to drive better and more inclusive policymaking.

To support these public communication efforts, government programmes benefit from a well-established institutional and organisational framework. Consolidating itself as a central hub, the Ministry of State for Media Affairs (MoSMA) leads public communication policy and supports the work of media units across ministries. Likewise, the government has established a network of public communicators, known as the *Shabakat Al Natiqeen fil Wuzaraat wa’al Muasasaat al Hukumiya Al Urduniya*, translated literally as “Network of Spokespersons in the Ministries and Institutions of the Government of Jordan.” Through this network, the government seeks to reinforce the capacities of spokespeople in key ministries, departments, and agencies as well as to co-ordinate messaging across ministries, departments, and agencies.

In addition to these efforts, the government has worked to develop institutional responses to disinformation and misinformation. In this regard, Jordan has established a disinformation platform, “Haggak Tiraḥ” (“You have the Right to Know”), which aims to verify the information presented in news stories and social media to prevent the spread of rumours and disinformation. The platform aims to deliver information and necessary clarifications—or in the case of false or misleading information, to refute claims—in an effort to provide timely, accurate, and reliable information, and in a larger sense, to restore citizens’ trust in the government.

## Media and information ecosystem in Jordan

A diverse media ecosystem is an essential element of open societies, as it enables journalists to amplify the reach of government information, hold the government to account and represent citizens’ voices. In this regard, a sound media landscape calls for the empowerment of a wide diversity of voices, ranging from public, private and commercial news and information providers to those at the very grass root level such as community media and citizen journalism. Acknowledging its important role, Jordan has placed media reform high on its agenda over the last decade. Key political events, such as the 1989 demonstrations, the beginning of the reign of King Abdullah II in 1999, and the 2011 Arab Spring, together with the emergence of digital communications technologies, have prompted Jordan to undertake a gradual transformation of its media sector.

Jordan's media enabling environment is rooted in a well-established legal framework, including Article 15 of the Jordanian Constitution of 1952, which grants the freedoms of expression, opinion, and the press. Similarly, Jordan's first regulations of the media date back to the April 1989 demonstrations, which resulted in the introduction of the Press and Publications Law (No. 8 of 1993), leading to the establishment of several private newspapers. A subsequent Press and Publications Law in 1998 (No. 8 of 1998)<sup>1</sup> further helped to expand the sector but also introduced higher capital requirements for new media outlets (Jones, 2001<sup>[7]</sup>). In parallel, the Jordan Press Association (JPA) was established in 1953 and tasked with regulating professional journalism and serving as a union for its members according to directives of the amended Press Association Law (No. 15 of 1998) (Alisal, 2015<sup>[8]</sup>).

In 2002, a second wave of media reforms was included within the country's national strategy. Notably, this sweeping policy agenda promoted by King Abdullah II aimed to strengthen parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, media freedom, government accountability, transparency, justice and equal rights. In practice, this saw the end of the state monopoly on radio and television broadcasting with the introduction of the Audio-Visual Law (No. 71 of 2002). The subsequent emergence of new radio and television stations considerably increased the diversity of media outlets in Jordan, which were brought under the regulation of the newly-established Audio-Visual Commission (UNESCO, 2015<sup>[9]</sup>). In addition, the Press and Publications law and the 2007 ATI Law also offered Jordan's media an additional tool for more transparent reporting through concrete regulatory provisions safeguarding this right for the media and the general public more broadly (Ibid).

The media ecosystem in Jordan underwent further transformations in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrations. Online platforms and social media became essential means to disseminate information and reach wider segments of the population (Alkhatib, 2017<sup>[10]</sup>). In March 2011, King Abdullah II delivered a royal address urging the government to develop a "media strategy" to respond to the new opportunities and challenges brought about by technological advancements in communications (UNESCO, 2015<sup>[9]</sup>). The resulting Jordan Media Strategy (2011-2015) emphasised the important role of media and journalism in society and set out a reform agenda to meet the emerging issues that concerned the sector. A product of a cross-ministerial committee,<sup>2</sup> the strategy's main provisions underscored the importance of adapting regulations to the new types of media in Jordan, updating standards for professional journalism and promoting media self-regulation (for instance, through codes of conduct). Moreover, the development of the strategy involved an extensive consultation process that brought together public, private and community media stakeholders (UNESCO, 2015<sup>[9]</sup>).<sup>3</sup>

The strategy translated into a number of legislative amendments, including topics related to press and publications, the protection of state secrets and documents, broadcasting and access to information. These changes reflected an effort to adapt legal frameworks to a new media landscape increasingly dominated by digital platforms (United Nations, 2013<sup>[11]</sup>). For instance, the 2012 Press and Publications Law introduced a series of requirements, such as for news websites to obtain a government license. It similarly extended the law's content restrictions to online publications. The law governing the JPA was also revised in 2014 and extended its membership to "include journalists working at news websites or in the newsrooms of private television and radio stations (UNESCO, 2015<sup>[9]</sup>)". Further amendments updating the regulatory framework led to the creation of the Jordan Media Commission in 2014 as a public body tasked with overseeing the licensing and regulation of the sector (Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities, n.d.<sup>[12]</sup>).

Subsequent governments have reacted to emerging threats relating to terrorism and cybercrime linked to the surge in online media and content. Notably, the 2011 Cyber Crimes Law and 2014 amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Law, while seeking to address security challenges, have had the effect of "broadening the grey area over what online content can be restricted" (Freedom House, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). Broadly, these transformations have led to a liberalisation and diversification of the media landscape under an evolving legal and institutional framework.

Most recently, in an effort to improve citizens' ability to critically consume and share news, the Minister of Culture launched the *National Executive Plan on Media and Information Literacy (2020-2023)* on 17 June 2020 (Jordan Times, 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). In addition to the Indicative Executive Program (2021–2023) and the forthcoming Government Economic Recovery Priorities Plan, the National Executive Plan on Media and Information Literacy sets out a programme to improve citizens' ability to deal with information, news sources and digital tools, including a particular focus on empowering youth to discern disinformation, rumours and hate speech. As part of the commitments therein, the Ministry of Culture introduced an online portal called "[Our Trust](#)" to provide cultural and training resources in media literacy, ongoing briefings on the opportunities offered by the plan in schools, universities, or civil society organisations, as well as a series of educational videos.

As a result of the aforementioned legislative and institutional developments, Jordan's print, broadcast, radio, and online outlets are relatively diverse, and have increased over time due to liberalised laws and fewer regulatory restrictions. Key private and public media outlets include 21 press institutions operating in the country—nine daily, nine weekly, and three monthly newspapers—as well as 122 licensed online news websites as of 2019 and close to 180 in total as of 2021 (The Jordan Times, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>). For their part, television broadcast outlets have likewise grown in Jordan. Currently, 45 satellite television channels operate in Jordan, 17 of which are owned by and directed at Jordanians, 15 of which are private, and two of which are public (UNESCO, 2015, p. 105<sup>[9]</sup>). Radio remains an important channel of broadcast in Jordan, both at the national and regional levels, with 37 FM radio stations operating in Jordan, including three international channels (UNESCO, 2015, p. 27<sup>[9]</sup>).

The evolution of the media ecosystem in the country has also affected the ways in which the public consumes, communicates and shares information in favour of online channels. Notably, Jordan has a high internet penetration rate more than half of the population actively using WhatsApp (78%), Facebook (70%) and YouTube (49%) (Internet World Statistics, 2018<sup>[16]</sup>). Television (88%) and smartphones (77%) are the most popular channels for Jordanians to consult the news, in addition to a growing share who use Facebook (41%), YouTube (28%) and WhatsApp (24%) for this purpose (NorthWestern University, 2017<sup>[17]</sup>). These trends are all the more important when it comes to young people. With youth (aged 12-30) accounting for more than one-third of the population, Jordan is one of the youngest countries in the world (OECD Development Centre, 2018<sup>[18]</sup>). As in most OECD countries, social media has become a primary vehicle for engaging with youth, as a significant majority of the target group aged between 18-22 makes use of WhatsApp (82%), Facebook (82%), YouTube (63%) and Instagram (57%) (Northwestern University, 2018<sup>[19]</sup>).

## OECD analytical framework

Many OECD countries have begun to leverage open government reforms to address these critical governance challenges. One critical avenue to facilitate these open government principles is through the use of effective public communication and government engagement with media and information enabling environment. Accordingly, this report seeks to explore the role of communication and media as levers for more open governments, inclusive policymaking, and improved service design and delivery, which can ultimately help restore trust and facilitate inclusive growth.

In doing so, the OECD has identified three pillars of effective public communication that can serve as policy catalysts to bring about a set of desired medium- and long-term outcomes, while building on and reinforcing open government principles (see Figure 1.1).

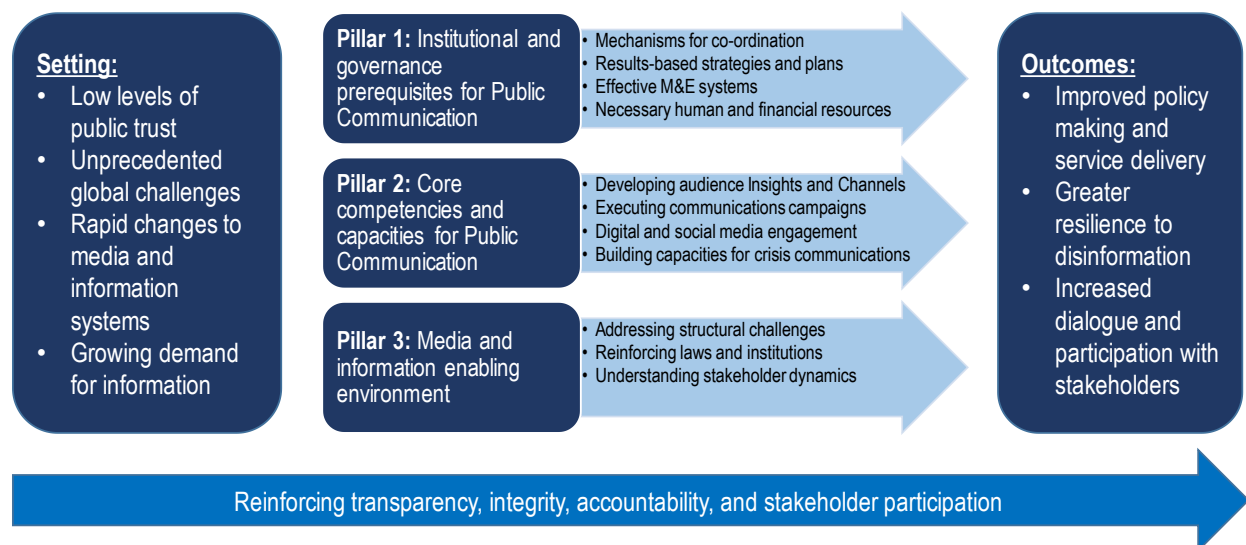
- **Institutional and Governance Arrangements:** In order for public communication to effectively advance open government principles and serve as a tool to improve policymaking and service design and delivery, it is necessary to ensure that certain institutional and governance prerequisites are in place. In particular, to ensure effective public communication across and between levels of government, it is necessary to introduce mechanisms to co-ordinate public communications

functions, including horizontally (across sectors and ministries) and vertically (across levels of government). To facilitate this, results-based strategies and communications plans should be developed based on audience insights, strong M&E systems, and feedback loops to ensure an iterative approach that builds on both past success and failures alike. At the same time, a network of public communications actively engaged in the process is necessary to ensure co-ordination, exchange good practices, as well as to help professionalise the role of government communicators. Finally, the necessary human and financial resources should be in place to better support the public communications function across government.

- **Core Communications Competencies and Capacities:** In addition to having the relevant governance mechanisms in place, it is vital to ensure the development of core communication competencies with an open government focus. This includes, among others, developing audience insights and channels; executing campaigns to achieve strategic objectives; engaging digital communications, including social media; as well as building capacities for crisis communication. These competencies, when applied well, can expand the use of public communication from an information dissemination tool, to a lever of stakeholder participation, policy implementation, as well as improved service design and delivery.
- **Robust Media and Information Enabling Environment:** A final pillar to ensure effective public communication is the existence of a robust and well-functioning media and information enabling environment. To assess the potential role that media as well as the larger enabling environment can play in the public policy process, it is necessary to understand: (i) key structural and contextual dimensions, including historical, political, macroeconomic, and sociocultural issues that impact public communications and the media; (ii) key laws and institutions, including de jure/de facto legal frameworks, regulations, and institutional arrangements that impact public communication and the media; as well as (iii) key stakeholder dynamics of the actors involved in the media, including their incentives, financial resources, and human resource capacities, all of which can greatly impact the role of public communications and the media.

With these three catalytic pillars in place, this framework holds that a number of positive outcomes are possible, including better positioning by governments to ensure that public communication contributes to improved policies and services, more engaged stakeholders, and increased resilience to disinformation. In the longer term, this would help regain trust and channel these advances towards more inclusive growth.

**Figure 1.1. OECD framework on public communication**



Source: Author's own work.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations

Building on the analytical framework, this section offers an overview of the main findings and recommendations of the “*Citizens’ Voice in Jordan: Public Communication and Media for a More Open Government*” review. It identifies actionable policy recommendations for the Government of Jordan to leverage public communication to engender a more open government, restore public trust, and move towards a more inclusive approach to policymaking. This review also analyses the opportunities to promote a sound media and information ecosystem to promote a wider variety of voices in public life.

### ***Improving the governance of public communication in Jordan***

Since 2019, Jordan embarked on an ambitious re-organisation of the public communication profession to align structures, procedures, and reporting lines within line ministries. While the Government of Jordan has achieved important progress, findings reveal room for reforms to further institutionalise and professionalise this function toward enabling a more strategic two-way communication approach. This will be all the more important as the rollout of the restructuring is exacerbating challenges in terms of operationalising new structures, facilitating co-ordination, setting an overarching strategic vision, as well as ensuring adequate human and financial resources.

#### *Strengthening public communication structures in Jordan*

Formal governance structures are a *sine qua non* condition enabling actors, processes and outcomes to foster a strategic communication centred on citizens’ needs. In Jordan, the recent re-organisation process has advanced in consolidating dedicated structures at the level of line- ministries, which has repositioned this function as a key lever of government. Despite the progress to date, OECD evidence suggests that existing structures are largely uneven, and in some cases not fully functional, often lacking adequate resources, capabilities and empowerment to transition from a reactive toward a proactive communication. In this regard, efforts should continue to clarify the roles and responsibilities of media units, simplify reporting lines and facilitate intra-institutional and cross-ministerial co-ordination. Given this progress and the existing challenges, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- 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.
- Scaling efforts to disseminate MoSMA’s manual on the organisation of media units, with an intent to expand on its content to further clarify roles and responsibilities as well as codify key communication processes.

#### *Formalising and facilitating co-ordination mechanisms*

For the successful implementation of the restructuring in Jordan, it will be critical to solidify mechanisms for vertical and inter-ministerial co-ordination among public communicators. At present, OECD evidence identifies challenges to formalising such arrangements, both across Ministries and MoSMA, as these currently remain ad hoc and informal. Nevertheless, the recent reactivation of the national network of spokespeople presents an opportunity to break siloes, optimise communication and promote good practice exchange. Its formalisation through a ministerial decree, together with the adoption of shared online tools, would not only facilitate information sharing but could also incentivise co-operation at both the strategic

and technical level. Given this progress and the existing challenges, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Ensure the continuity of the network of communicators under the co-ordination of MoSMA to facilitate information sharing, align messages and plan joint events.
- 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.
- Expand spaces for inter-ministerial dialogue on technical aspects, such as gathering of 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, calendars of events and other relevant information (i.e. key campaign messages, proof points and recent policy updates) can be accessible to all public entities. This will not only support the dissemination of good practices to professionalise the work of units but also align practices.

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

The Government of Jordan is gradually establishing a formal framework for public communication and media policy in the country. A set of strategies for specific media interventions were developed, including the country's first media strategy (2011-15) and the National MIL Strategy. At the level of ministries, all surveyed institutions report developing communication strategies; nevertheless, OECD evidence reveals that challenges remain in terms of establishing a whole of government vision for the public communication profession, designing quality ministerial strategies and ensuring their implementation. Given this progress and the existing challenges, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Develop a whole-of-government public communication strategy led by MoSMA, which sets the Government's vision for reform, outlines the main objectives for its achievement and identifies concrete pillars of action and evaluation indicators to measure its success.
- 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.
- Consider the development of a template to ensure the translation of ministerial strategies into coherent plans across all ministries.

*Addressing human resource and competency gaps*

At the core of professionalising public communications in Jordan is the establishment of a strategic human resource management framework ensuring adequate levels of staff and capabilities. While the ongoing restructuring seeks to align the functioning of media units, there is considerable diversity in terms of hiring practices, clarity of the mandates and skill levels. To this end, defining a core capability framework for posts could solidify gains and help consolidate a skilled workforce that is able to keep up with the rapid pace of change in the communication profession brought by new technologies and the effects of COVID-19. Given this progress and the existing challenges, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Develop and operationalise a dedicated competency framework for the public communication profession 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.
- 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*

As in many OECD countries, Jordan will need to address low levels of financial resources for the public communication profession. OECD survey results reveal that insufficient funding is the second biggest challenge on average for public communicators to carry out their key functions. With the government has made initial efforts to establish dedicated budget lines in media units, only 2 out of 14 ministries indicate these exist. Mapping future needs to allocate needed resources would help ensure the sustainability of initiatives, equip ministries with adequate tools and skills, and incentivise the regularisation of public communication practices. Given this progress and the existing challenges, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- 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.

### ***Developing a more strategic use of key communication competencies in Jordan***

The Government of Jordan is pursuing efforts to institutionalise internal and external communication processes and strengthen the application of core competencies. When consistently deployed, these can aid public institutions in generating buy-in around key policies, ensuring optimal flows of information, and supporting the ability of stakeholders to participate in public life. Addressing current gaps underlined by ministries to deploy campaigns, engage through digital channels, and evaluate impact will thus be critical to establishing a two-way communication.

### *Utilising audience insights to maximise reach and impact*

Insight gathering - understood as the research into different audiences to build a knowledge base on their motivations, needs and habits – can aid in the design of more compelling and targeted government communications. Similar to several OECD countries, Jordan is taking initial steps to establish this practice. Survey data reveals that insight gathering is conducted on an occasional basis, with a small share of line ministries utilising such data to identify key messages and suitable channels. In order to leverage social listening through audience insights, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Ensure that the selection of key messages, channels, and visual aids respond to the needs, habits, and expectations of different segments of the population, at both the national and local level. Special attention should be given to tailoring communication for vulnerable or marginalised segments of the population, such as women, youth, and refugees among others.
- Continue the professionalisation efforts underway for the use of audience insights across ministries in Jordan by formally including it in the main mandate of the institutions of all media units and providing related training.

- Consider the creation of a central hub within the PMO to monitor, collect insights from different audiences and share it across the administration.

### *Leveraging the interactivity benefits of digital communication*

Digital channels have become one of the primary means for the Government to communicate with the public. In this regard, most public institutions have begun consolidating an online presence through social media platforms and institutional websites. Responding to the challenges that communicators face in using online technologies, needs exist in supporting the alignment of practices, adoption of innovative digital tools, and exchange of knowledge through technical trainings and the creation of communities of practice. Additional opportunities exist for the Government of Jordan to tap into the potential of social media for a more meaningful engagement with citizens, given the wide adoption of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by public institutions. In order to reap the benefits of digital communication, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Build internal capabilities to leverage the interactivity benefits of online platforms. This could take form of specialised trainings or the creation of dedicated communities of practice to share good practices on issues such as social media use, data analytics, web presence, etc.
- Ensure institutional websites and Facebook pages are up to date. Provide easy access for citizens to consult information by centralising relevant documents such as calendars of events, policy documents and other project statistics publicly.
- Communicate regularly about available consultation opportunities and make use of digital platforms, beyond just social media, to crowdsource relevant contributions from the public and establish online spaces for dialogue on key policy issues.
- Develop whole-of-government social media guidelines including for the management of institutional accounts, personal profiles of public officials and online stakeholder participation.
- Encourage collaboration with influencers, civil society and businesses to expand the scale and reach of digital communication campaigns, in particular for younger segments of the population. Such collaborations could take form of joint campaigns, with non-government stakeholders as ambassadors helping to communicate official information to different segments of society.

### *Evaluating the impact of public communication*

Evaluating public communication is indispensable to assess the effectiveness of activities, promote accountability and build comparable evidence on what is working and what is not to inform the design of future activities. Formalising practices in this regard will be all the more important as evaluation is conducted on an ad hoc basis by two-thirds of Jordanian public institutions. Institutionalising practices and building technical skills to evaluate impact metrics, rather than outputs and outcomes, would allow for quality data to better link the contribution of communication to the Government's broader objectives. In order to best evaluate the impact of public communication, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Institutionalise evaluations through a whole-of-government framework with clear processes, methods, metrics, timelines, and reporting mechanisms. Such a framework could build on the impact evaluation guide from the Department of Institutional Development at the PMO and be customised to the needs of media units. Specific output, outcome and impact metrics can be identified in this framework, including for instance changes in behaviours, in levels of stakeholder participation, or in the take up of public services.
- Build technical capabilities within ministries to ground evaluations in user-driven and evidence-based approaches to inform future endeavours and policies.

- Consider the creation of a central entity in charge of overseeing the evaluation of public communication, given the highly technical nature of this task. This structure could be located within the Prime Minister's Office or another relevant institution according to the needs of the Government of Jordan.

### ***Leveraging the media and information ecosystem in Jordan***

A robust and well-regulated media and information enabling environment is vitally important to how the Government of Jordan communicates around a variety of pertinent public policy priorities. However, a number of political economy challenges exist in effectively leveraging the media and information ecosystem to support Jordan's strategic communications efforts. From a structural level, these include a growing digital divide between urban and rural areas as well as between key segments of the population. Likewise, from 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, from a stakeholder level, challenges include difficulties in the accreditation of journalists, a lack of independence of certain media outlets, transparency gaps in the licencing process of key regulatory agencies, capacity challenges for government spokespeople engaging the media, as well as the changing demographics of media consumers.

#### *Addressing structural issues affecting access to media and information*

Jordan has made a significant leap in terms of advancing its digital infrastructure, media connectivity, and accessibility—including the penetration of broadband internet, cell phone technologies, and satellite access—over the past decade. However, these gains in access have not been equal across all regions of the country, pointing to the emergence of a growing digital divide on the basis of geographic and other socio-economic factors, including income, gender, and age. At the same time, exogenous or geopolitical determinants—such as the global COVID pandemic, conflicts in neighbouring countries, and an influx of refugees—are affecting how media and information is produced and consumed, especially by vulnerable groups. Given these various structural challenges, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Use audience insights and channel selection to target messaging and content for a wider variety of local stakeholders, which can help to bridge the digital divide to include the poor, women, and youth as key actors in the media and information ecosystem.
- Develop specialised media outreach campaigns on selected issues to specific vulnerable groups through the use of media and information literacy capacity building.

#### *Addressing institutional issues affecting access to media and information*

Jordan's constitution puts in place the necessary protections and guarantees that support freedom of expression, speech, and press, together with the 2007 law on Securing the Right to Information Access, which was the first of its kind in the Arab region. While the recent adoption of ATI protocols can support improvements to the adequacy and scope of the law, challenges remain in terms of its full-scale implementation and enforcement. In addition to these legal guarantees, a number of enabling laws, directives, and regulations govern how media and broadcast organisations as well as online outlets can function, including laws governing cybercrime, online data privacy and protection, defamation, censorship, hate speech, and secrecy; however, there is often inconsistency within this legal framework and efforts are needed to align it with international good practice. At the same time, Jordan has made notable strides in addressing mis- and dis-information, including the development of an online platform, which aims to verify the information presented in news stories and social media to prevent the spread of rumours and disinformation. To support these efforts, additional capacity building is needed to improve the practices for proactively countering mis- and dis-information, including improvements to the existing platform. Given

these various institutional challenges, both formal and informal, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Support training and sensitisation efforts related to the recently adopted ATI protocols, which provide clear guidance on classifying, enforcing and managing information.
- Conduct a comprehensive legal review of the existing laws, regulations, and policies, with an effort to bring them into alignment with international good practices.
- Conduct an assessment of the government's efforts to counter mis- and dis-information, including a review of the "Haggak Tiraf" platform.

### *Stakeholder issues affecting access to media and information*

Jordan has a robust media and information ecosystem with a variety of actors who produce, regulate, engage with, and consume media. Jordan's print, broadcast, radio, and online outlets are relatively diverse, and have increased over time due to liberalised laws and fewer regulatory restrictions. Despite its growth, a number of systemic challenges for news outlets in Jordan remain, including the need for greater pluralism and independence, particularly at the local levels. The journalism profession and the role of individual journalists in Jordan is largely governed by the Jordan Press Association (JPA), yet significant limitations exist in accrediting journalists working for foreign outlets as well as most other news outlets outside of the traditional print media. While Jordan has a number of regulatory institutions charged with oversight, licencing, and accreditation, challenges exist with respect to their administrative and financial independence. In addition, capacities need to be improved to better engage with journalists through the strategic use of press releases and press conferences. A final challenge is how to address the changing population demographics in order to ensure that all Jordanians benefit equally from improvements to the media enabling environment. Given these various stakeholder challenges, the government may consider a number of recommendations, including the following:

- Support an enabling environment and financial incentives –including fiscal (tax) incentives, lowering capital requirements for licencing, or providing seed-funding for local outlets—to encourage a plurality of media outlets, including those at the local levels who can better cover issues relevant to local communities.
- Support the further professionalisation of journalists through expanded accreditation procedures and local training institutions.
- Support the development of strengthening transparency and oversight mechanisms, including the development of an ombudsman or independent complaints mechanism that governs the broader media sector, including all broadcast outlets and journalists.
- Develop the capacities of government agencies that engage the media, including the institutionalisation of standardised procedures and practices, including those for press releases and press conferences.
- Support ongoing government-led Media and Information Literacy efforts to enable CSOs, citizens, and other individuals in becoming informed media consumers.

## **Methodology**

This report analyses the contribution of the public communication function and the media ecosystem towards an open government in Jordan. It is based on a survey developed by the OECD to take stock of the existing public communication structures, policies and practices in Jordan, as well as to identify the opportunities and challenges ahead for the country to consider. In 2020, MoSMA supported the OECD

with the distribution of the survey to 14 Line-Ministries in Jordan. The results submitted by MoSMA to the OECD Public Communication survey for Centres of Government (CoG) were also used as the basis of analysis for recommendations herein.

This report also builds on extensive desk research and interviews conducted with a wide variety of stakeholders during multiple fact-finding missions. A first fact-finding mission was carried out with MoSMA in 2019 to inform the findings and recommendations of this report. A workshop with the Ministries responding to the OECD survey was also conducted in September 2020 to validate the data and the main findings of this report. The report also benefitted from the input of Ms. Kristina Plavšak Krajnc, former Director of the Government Communication Office of Slovenia, in her capacity as peer reviewer. The survey was shared, discussed, and validated with the units in charge of public communication in the following public institutions in Jordan: Ministry of Transport; Ministry of Labour; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Digital Economy; Ministry of Higher Education; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Trade and Industry; Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Culture; Jordan Investment Commission; and the Social Security Corporation.

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## Notes

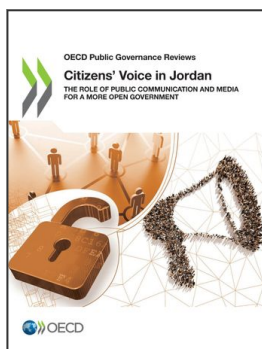
<sup>1</sup> Law No. 8 of 1998, published in the Official Gazette No. 4300, p. 3162, 1 September 1998. Available in Arabic at: <https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/legislation/details/11245>.

<sup>2</sup> The Committee included the Minister of State for Media Affairs, the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and the Minister of Culture, along with the General Secretaries of various ministries and the directors of state media institutions.

<sup>3</sup> The OECD understands that the Ministry of State for Media Affairs (MOSMA) is planning to develop a new national strategy for media and communications. The strategy may ultimately include areas focused on legal reforms, the media watchdog, the JPA, a media complaints commission, disinformation and community media, etc. It is not clear whether the new process has yet started nor the deadline for completion.







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