

OECD Public Governance Reviews

Citizens' Voice in Lebanon

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA
FOR A MORE OPEN GOVERNMENT



OECD Public Governance Reviews

Citizens' Voice in Lebanon

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA
FOR A MORE OPEN GOVERNMENT

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

Please cite this publication as:

OECD (2021), *Citizens' Voice in Lebanon: The Role of Public Communication and Media for a More Open Government*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/17a0fdc0-en>.

ISBN 978-92-64-38410-1 (print)

ISBN 978-92-64-32226-4 (pdf)

OECD Public Governance Reviews

ISSN 2219-0406 (print)

ISSN 2219-0414 (online)

Photo credits: Cover designed by Mohamad Sabra; © Maksim Kabakou – Fotolia.com; © Arthimedes/Shutterstock.com; © Peshkova/Shutterstock.com; © Svilen_mitkov/Shutterstock.com.

Corrigenda to publications may be found on line at: www.oecd.org/about/publishing/corrigenda.htm.

© OECD 2021

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.

Foreword

Effective public communication is both a policy tool and an important part of open government. In Lebanon, considerable reform efforts have been under way in recent years to further the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation. This includes landmark legislation on anti-corruption and access to information enacted between 2017 and 2020.

Nonetheless, two-way communication by institutions with citizens remains underutilised as a means to increase openness and improve policy. This OECD Review aims to support Lebanon in designing reforms and introducing good practices that can maximise the potential of such communication. The report and its recommendations were requested by the Lebanese government, whose civil service remains committed to ambitious governance reforms despite a turbulent period for the country.

Indeed, policy interventions that can make Lebanese institutions more open and responsive to citizens have become urgent. Since October 2019, citizens have taken to the streets across the country to demand better governance and economic opportunities. Their calls for change have grown louder in the aftermath of a tragic blast at the Port of Beirut in August 2020 that exposed the real consequences of public mismanagement.

Following an acute economic crisis, aggravated by the hardship of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lebanon's government will face crucial decisions for the recovery and future of the country. More strategic communication would help bring stakeholders into these decisions, thereby improving their outcomes and leading to better policies as well as increased public trust.

This OECD Review analyses the governance structures and procedures for public communication across the public administration, along with the use of core competencies for this function and how they support transparency and stakeholder participation in public life. The recommendations in this report highlight important opportunities to shift towards a more strategic approach to communication that can better serve policy goals and help respond to citizens' needs and expectations.

This publication was approved by the OECD Working Party on Open Government on 15 October 2021 and declassified by the Public Governance Committee on 18 November 2021.

Acknowledgements

The Review “Citizens’ Voice in Lebanon” was prepared by the OECD Directorate for Public Governance (GOV), under the leadership of its Director, Elsa Pilichowski. It was produced by the Open and Innovative Government Division (OIG) under the strategic direction of Alessandro Bellantoni, Head of the Open Government Unit. This work is part of a longstanding collaboration with Lebanon on open government, within the framework of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme.

The Secretariat wishes to express its gratitude to all those who made this review possible, and in particular the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) of Lebanon and to Minister of State Dimyanos Kattar. The OECD would also like to thank Amal Haouet, Senior Campaign Manager, and Shamima Yasmine, former Project Lead in Lebanon, Government Communication Service International, United Kingdom; Erminio Englaro, Head of 6th Section Press Office, Office of the Minister of Defense, Italy; and Lothar Freischlader, Head of Division, Foreign, Security, and Development Policy, Press and Information Office of the Federal Government of Germany, for their valuable support as peer reviewers throughout this process.

This report was co-ordinated by Karine Badr, drafted by Carlotta Alfonsi with contributions from Tarek Bou Chahine, Rebecca Kachmar and Tala Khanji. Khalil Gebara, Senior Policy Fellow at Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, contributed to the research for the report. Meral Gedik prepared the manuscript for publication and ensured its overall quality. Sophie Le Corre and Elena Martin Gomez-Tembleque provided administrative support throughout the development of the publication.

Finally, the OECD would like to thank the German Federal Foreign Office for its financial support for this project.

Table of contents

Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	4
Executive summary	7
1 Context, assessment and recommendations	9
Socio-political and policy context in Lebanon	10
The OECD framework on open government, public communication and media ecosystems	11
Main findings and recommendations	15
References	19
Notes	20
2 The governance of public communication in Lebanon	21
The context for public communication reform in Lebanon	22
The modernisation of the public administration as a lever for institutionalising public communication	29
References	36
Notes	36
3 The use of core competencies for strategic and effective communication in Lebanon	37
How the use of key competencies can evolve communication from dissemination to engagement	38
Overview of the use of communication competencies in Lebanese public institutions	39
Towards the professionalisation of public communication in Lebanon	51
References	55
Notes	55
4 Communications and media for a more open government in Lebanon	57
How public communication and media ecosystems contribute to the principles of Open Government	58
Communication in support of Lebanon's open government agenda	62
The role of media ecosystems for transparency, integrity and accountability in Lebanon	66
References	70
Notes	72

FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Main objectives of CoG's communication strategies	12
Figure 1.2. Public communication and media for a more open government: The OECD framework	14
Figure 2.1. Human resources and structures in Lebanese institutions	26
Figure 2.2. Type of appointments for communication staff in Lebanese institutions	27
Figure 2.3. Principal challenges for public communication faced by Lebanese institutions	29
Figure 3.1. Application of communication competencies across Lebanese institutions	40
Figure 3.2. Use of audience insights	41
Figure 3.3. Frequency of evaluation of communication activities	43
Figure 3.4. Use of communication channels by Lebanese institutions	45
Figure 3.5. Frequency of engagement with the press	48
Figure 4.1. Media and the Public Policy Cycle	59

TABLES

Table 2.1. Key features of tactical and strategic governance models of public communication	23
---	----

Follow OECD Publications on:


http://twitter.com/OECD_Pubs


<http://www.facebook.com/OECDPublications>


<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/OECD-Publications-4645871>


<http://www.youtube.com/oecdilibrary>


<http://www.oecd.org/oecddirect/>

Executive summary

Public communication is a core pillar of open government reforms. It serves as an essential instrument of transparency and a vehicle for citizens' engagement in policy making. Given the challenging socio-economic context, Lebanon is facing and the importance of urgent governance reforms to address public grievances, communication between institutions and citizens will be an important aspect of restoring trust and establishing a constructive dialogue on solving the country's challenges.

This Review presents analysis and recommendations to promote more effective public communication in Lebanon, and to use it to improve policy making and support a more open government. The recommendations build on the OECD's longstanding engagement with the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) in support of its work towards open government reforms. As part of this engagement, they respond to a request from the Lebanese government for policy guidance on making institutions more effective and responsive to citizens.

Eight institutions participated in this report: the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, OMSAR, and the Ministries of Education, Environment, Finance, Information, and Public Health.

While several institutions demonstrate examples of good practices and recognize the urgency of moving towards the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the communications function, in general, communications are primarily *ad hoc* and hampered by underlying structural challenges. Indeed, a majority of institutions surveyed have insufficient human and financial resources to plan and conduct activities. An even larger proportion do not organise their communications according to a strategy based on clear objectives.

Underlying these difficulties is the absence of a mandate and buy-in from senior officials, who tend to limit the scope of the communications function by appointing political advisors as press officers. These ministries' communications thus tend to have a more political character. For this reason, high-level reforms are needed that set a clear mandate and resources for public communication, independently of its political counterpart.

Intra-governmental co-ordination in this area requires similar institutionalisation. Minimal mechanisms in place for communicators to collaborate mean that, for the most part, each ministry communicates for itself, rather than the government speaking with one voice. This has been further underlined during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the long term, reforms could establish a central office to oversee whole-of-government communication, centralising resources to support peers in line ministries. Meanwhile, forming an inter-ministerial committee on public communication would provide a needed platform for co-ordination and promoting the administrative reforms noted above.

Institutionalisation is, ultimately, a prerequisite for applying core communication competencies strategically. However, pending the introduction of reforms, simple interventions, such as training, can help Lebanese ministries mitigate skills shortfalls in the short term and optimise resources for greater impact.

Competencies in digital, internal or crisis communication, campaigns, and media relations can help transform public communications from a one-way dissemination of information to a way to engage citizens.

This can be best achieved by developing written, time-bound strategies tied to measurable objectives and policy goals. To be successful, strategies would also need to rely on evidence gathered by conducting research on audiences as well as monitoring and evaluation activities. While these competencies can include highly sophisticated tools and skills, communicators in Lebanon's institutions could already expand their use of simpler and readily available analytics to improve the effectiveness of their work.

Reforms to public communication could look more specifically at formalising requirements for communications to be conducted in the service of open government objectives. This could include synergies with access to information disclosures or tapping the potential offered by some platforms, such as social media, to interact directly with stakeholders on a more frequent and informal basis.

Successive Lebanese administrations have expressed ambitions to pursue open government reforms and develop a consolidated agenda in this area. As highlighted in the *OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, Lebanon's policy makers would benefit from integrating public communication in such efforts.

Finally, given the fundamental role that information plays in public life, open government reforms should not overlook the role of actors other than government institutions, chiefly the media. Indeed, the media in Lebanon could be a key asset for promoting transparency, integrity, accountability and participation. However, the considerable politicisation of some of the main news outlets in the country may erode public trust in them, while a lack of resources for independent and state media prevents them from filling the gap. Upgrading regulations for the sector, given the increased prominence of digital platforms, would support the role of the media in building a more open government.

1 Context, assessment and recommendations

This chapter provides an introductory analysis of the socio-political context in Lebanon as a backdrop to the report and its recommendations. It then introduces the OECD analytical framework on public communication and summarises the main findings and recommendations from all chapters.

Socio-political and policy context in Lebanon

In the autumn of 2019, a wave of dissent demonstrated the extent of Lebanese citizens' desire for more transparency, integrity, accountability and participation in their politics. The protesters, coming from different regions in Lebanon, demanded to do away with the country's sectarian system that is perceived to have institutionalised corruption and patronage. Significantly, protesters equally saw governance challenges as the root cause of poor economic performance and the onset of Lebanon's worst economic and financial crisis in recent memory.

The hardship of this crisis, combined with the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic on public health and economic activity, brought demonstrators back to the streets in the spring of 2020, as a new government led by former Prime Minister Hassan Diab grappled with the consequences of this dual crisis. The situation was only aggravated after August 2020 when a catastrophic explosion shook the capital, further exemplifying the impact of malfunctioning governance in the country.

Furthermore, the country, beset by one of the world's heaviest public debt burdens, defaulted for the first time on 9 March 2020 on its Eurobonds payments (Perry and Francis, 2020^[1]). The Lebanese Pound collapsed in value on the black market from the official peg of 1 507 to the dollar, to over 9 500 to the dollar at a peak in June 2020. Alongside the currency fall, a steep increase in prices affecting food and essential goods has affected the livelihood of a large segment of the population and is driving an estimated half of them into poverty (Noueihed and Khraiche, 2020^[2]).

Even before the Port of Beirut blast damaged hundreds of businesses and disrupted the tourism sector, Lebanon had already been struggling with a high unemployment rate. As of June 2020, it is estimated that a third of all private-sector jobs have been lost, and the total number of unemployed reached 30% of the total labour force (Reuters, 2020^[3]).

The present economic and financial crisis cannot be understood without considering the political and governance context of the country. A legacy of political instability that has long eroded Lebanon's economic prospects has also weighed on responses to the escalating crisis and undermined citizens' trust in government. Only 19% of respondents to the Arab Barometer Survey in 2020 reported having a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of trust in their government (Arab Barometer, 2020^[4]).

Similarly, governance issues have affected the country's public finances, which have been strained by a "bloated public sector, debt-servicing costs and subsidisation", in addition to corruption and waste (Reuters, 2019^[5]). For the past six years, Lebanon has scored at the bottom of the Corruption Perception Index, or 28 out of 100 where 0 indicates the worst corruption (Lebanese Transparency Association, 2019^[6]).

While social tensions and popular unrest continue to boil over in recent months, this context highlights reform opportunities that can help set Lebanon on a path to exit the crisis by pursuing good governance and inclusive growth. A number of ministries including the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) are already undertaking some of these efforts by setting in motion key open government, anti-corruption and digital initiatives (OECD, 2020^[7]).

Public communication and media ecosystems can be used as additional levers to help manage the crisis in the short term, and be reformed to function as catalysts for a more open government and greater trust from citizens over the long term. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the key role of communicators and information providers in changing behaviours and saving lives.

The OECD framework on open government, public communication and media ecosystems

After a slight recovery since the lows of the global financial crisis, approximately 45% of citizens in OECD countries trust their governments today (OECD, 2019^[8]). To mitigate diminishing levels of trust, OECD member and partner countries have been implementing a variety of open government reforms in the past decade. The OECD defines open government as “a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth” (OECD, 2016^[9]).

Findings from the report *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward* (OECD, 2016^[9]) underline that such reforms are indeed improving policies and services by encouraging greater collaboration between public institutions, citizens, private sector actors, and civil society – thereby allowing better outcomes delivered at less cost. Such an agenda is also changing the relationship between institutions and citizens, rendering it more dynamic and mutually beneficial (OECD, 2016^[9]).

Effective public communication is a central pillar of an open government agenda. Indeed, it is “effective” when it is oriented towards advancing the above principles, and serving as a tool to improve policy making and service design and delivery. Understood as any communication activity or initiative led by public institutions for the public good,¹ it allows for better engagement with citizens and their increased trust in government. It entails responding to people’s concerns in a more informed manner and enhancing their access to public information. Without it, citizens and the media lack essential means to hold their governments to account.

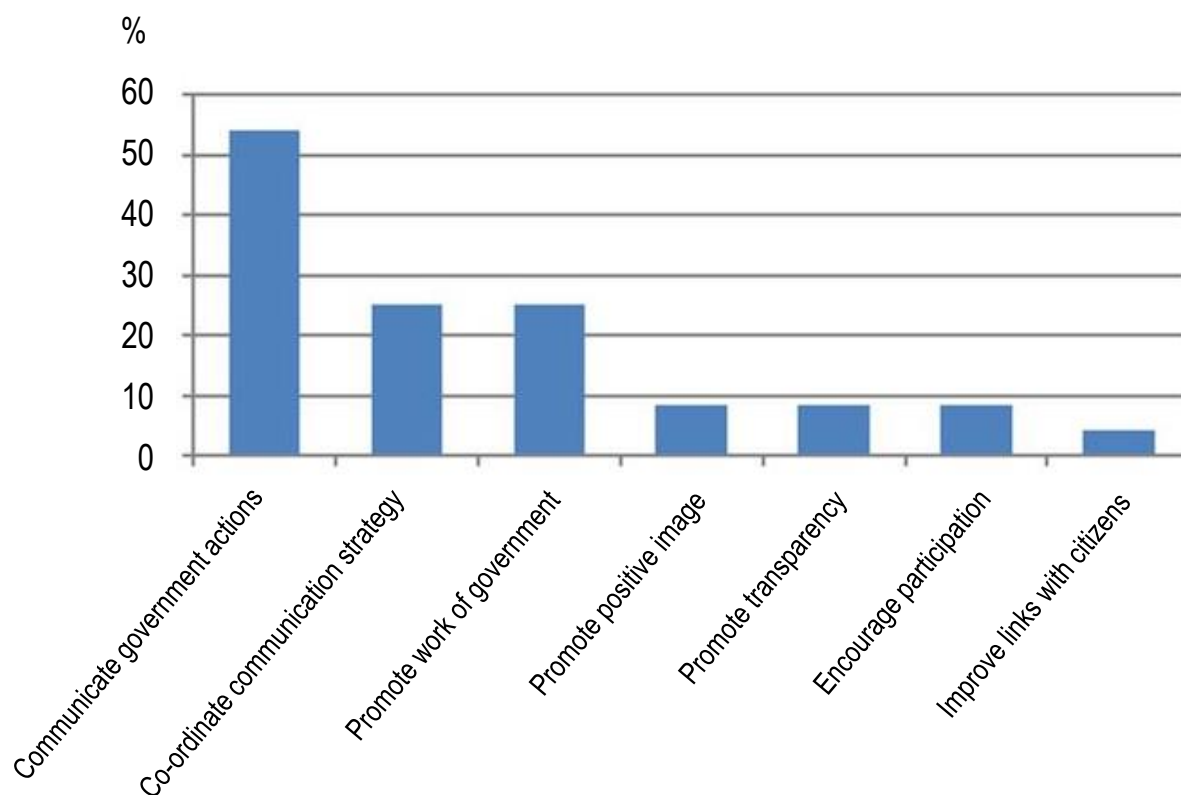
The role of public communication has taken on heightened importance in light of the fast-paced evolutions in media ecosystems² at the global, national and local levels. These have changed how people consume and share information, and have affected who and what sources of news the public trusts. Additionally, audiences across the world are more fragmented and diverse than before, bringing both opportunities and challenges for government efforts to reach out to them (WPP, 2017^[10]).

Despite the strong interlinkages between communication and open government principles, few countries fully recognise or exploit this relationship. Results of the OECD Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government (CoG) show that fewer than 10% of respondents list promoting transparency or encouraging stakeholder participation as one of the key objectives of their communication strategy (Figure 1.1).

Moreover, OECD data suggests that “(m)ost governments still view social media as an additional tool to broadcast traditional communication messages” and only a few try to genuinely leverage these new platforms for more advanced purposes, such as making public policy processes more inclusive or transforming public services delivery (OECD, 2015^[11]).

A review of countries’ Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plans – in which governments define commitments to foster transparency, accountability and inclusion – highlights this missed opportunity, with only about 2% of commitments in those plans being linked to media and communication.³

Figure 1.1. Main objectives of CoG's communication strategies



Source: OECD (2017), Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government.

To this end, the OECD included a provision in its *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government* (hereafter “the *Recommendation*”) emphasising the role of communication as a key pillar for promoting open government (Provision 6). The goal of this provision is to ensure that communication is used not just to disseminate information to the public, but also as a strategic tool to support policy implementation and service delivery, as well as to enhance transparency and participation.

This government function is core to several others of the provisions in the *Recommendation*. Provision 7 underlines the importance of communicating public sector data and information and making it easily available to stakeholders in a clear, complete, timely and reliable manner. Provision 8 calls for public participation opportunities that allow for vulnerable, underrepresented, or marginalised groups in society to participate. Targeted communications are necessary to achieve this and to provide feedback on the outcomes of any instance in which citizens are consulted. Finally, as part of Provision 10 on the concept of an open state, the *Recommendation* recognises the role of other non-governmental actors, including that of media, to support relevant initiatives (OECD, 2017^[12]).

Box 1.1. Provisions relating to communication in the OECD Recommendation on Open Government

Provision 6: “Actively communicate on open government strategies and initiatives, as well as on their outputs, outcomes and impacts, in order to ensure that they are well-known within and outside government, to favour their uptake, as well as to stimulate stakeholder buy-in”.

Provision 7: “Proactively make available clear, complete, timely, reliable and relevant public sector data and information that is free of cost, available in an open and non-proprietary machine-readable format, easy to find, understand, use and reuse, and disseminated through a multi-channel approach, to be prioritised in consultation with stakeholders”.

Provision 8: “Grant all stakeholders equal and fair opportunities to be informed and consulted and actively engage them in all phases of the policy-cycle and service design and delivery. This should be done with adequate time and at minimal cost, while avoiding duplication to minimise consultation fatigue. Further, specific efforts should be dedicated to reaching out to the most relevant, vulnerable, underrepresented, or marginalised groups in society, while avoiding undue influence and policy capture”.

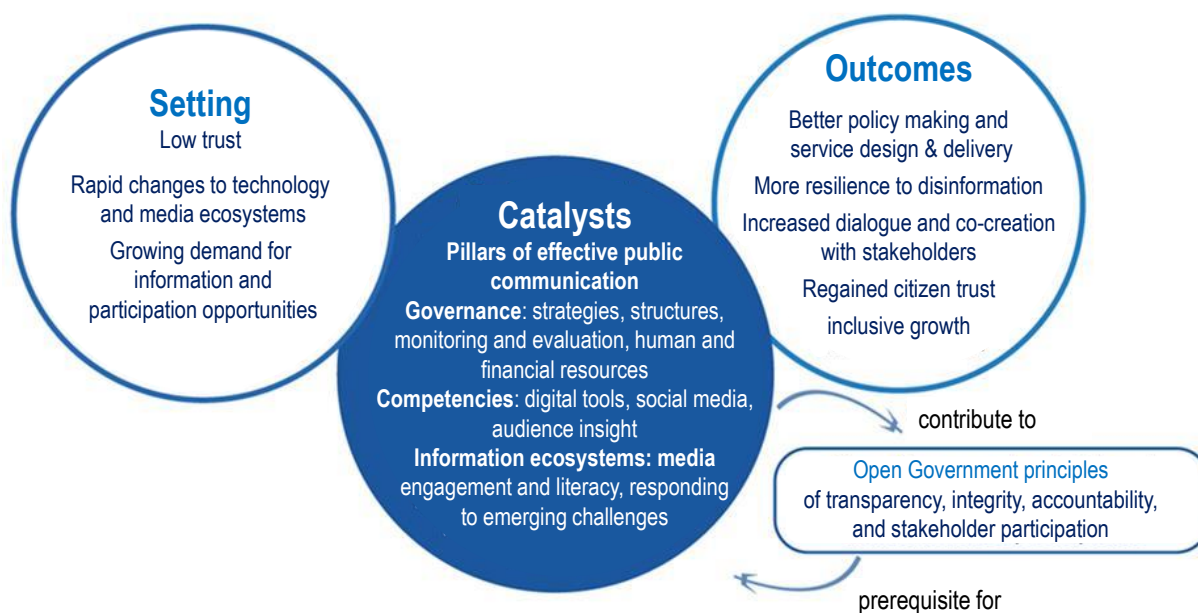
Provision 10: “While recognising the roles, prerogatives, and overall independence of all concerned parties and according to their existing legal and institutional frameworks, explore the potential of moving from the concept of open government toward that of open state”.

Source: OECD (2017_[12]), *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, OECD, Paris, www.oecd.org/gov/Recommendation-Open-Government-Approved-Council-141217.pdf.

To help operationalise the relevant provisions in the Recommendation, the OECD developed an analytical framework built on three pillars of effective public communications that serve as policy catalysts to bring about a set of desired medium- and long-term outcomes, all-the-while building on and reinforcing open government principles. These pillars (Figure 1.2) are:

1. The institutional and governance prerequisites for effective public communication. These include legal and administrative structures as well as human and financial resources that support integrated, strategic, and co-ordinated communication activities across the public sector.
2. Core competencies, when applied well, can evolve communications from an information dissemination tool to a lever of stakeholder participation, policy implementation (e.g. behavioural change), and improved policy and service design.
3. The relationships between public communicators, the media, and phenomena such as citizen journalism, and how they can serve to strengthen transparency and accountability. This also includes an understanding of how changes in media ecosystems have affected governments’ ability to communicate and engage with citizens, including on issues such as disinformation or hate speech for example.

Figure 1.2. Public communication and media for a more open government: The OECD framework



Source: Author's elaboration.

The role of public communication and media ecosystems for a more open government

Public communication can both be leveraged to make governments more transparent, accountable and participative, and can act as a promotion tool to support the introduction of open government reforms both internally and externally and thus support the provisions of the *Recommendation* (OECD, 2017_[12]). Media and information ecosystems can also play a very important role in this context.

Transparency. A growing body of theoretical and empirical studies supports the proposition that public communication and a strong media ecosystem can support improved transparency, including vital information on public policies and performance. A strong media ecosystem, on its own, can improve the quality of information that citizens have access to. However, governments themselves are agents in this ecosystem and can increase transparency about their actions by communicating with them directly and through the media.

Public communication, as supported by the proper strategies, plans, policies, co-ordination structures, and resources, can also amplify the transparency outcomes of open government policies. For instance, it can promote the contents of proactive disclosures under Access to Information (ATI) laws, and raise awareness of how and what information can be requested through this process. Likewise, institutions can use Open Government Data to support their communication and promote its use by journalists and other stakeholders.

On their part, the media and civil society, can be primary interlocutors with this type of communications, and become key consumers of such open government policies by filing ATI requests and analysing Open Data and publicising the related information to contribute to and engage in the policy discourse.

Integrity. The media has a key role in exposing corruption and reinforcing integrity values by highlighting its damaging impact on society. It can also amplify the work of civil society and the voices of whistleblowers, and can be a platform to support and exert pressure for the introduction of integrity and anti-corruption reforms. It has a great opportunity to oversee the implementation, monitoring, and reporting on the effectiveness of existing integrity and anticorruption measures. As such, reporting on the de facto

implementation of existing legislation can provide a critical means to ensure improved integrity, reduced corruption, and more robust rule of law.

Similarly, public communication can ensure the implementation and application of critical integrity policies both internally, through practices that support integrity measures, and externally, by promoting a stronger culture of integrity to the private sector and civil society.

Accountability. Academic literature suggests that the media has a significant role in supporting principal-agent accountability relationships between public entities and stakeholders. By reducing information asymmetries, the media provides citizens (as principals) with the necessary visibility to reward or sanction public and elected officials (their agents).

Alongside a strong media ecosystem, public communication can reinforce accountability mechanisms, processes, and institutions. By simply disseminating publicly records of the government's actions, decisions, and statements to citizens, this function offers a track record for the media to scrutinise and against which citizens can hold officials accountable. By communicating proactively, institutions can also develop a constructive narrative on accountability that notes, for example, the constraints they operate under and justifies their performance to stakeholders.

Stakeholder participation. As noted in the literature, a key role of the media, just as for public communication, is to frame issues in a salient manner for public audiences to increase their interest and engagement with important policy issues. As the common intermediaries between institutions on one hand, and citizens, media and civil society on the other, communicators are central to the participation of these stakeholders in the policy cycle.

By establishing a dialogue with citizens, whether through the new opportunities for interaction awarded by digital and social media or through more traditional face-to-face meetings and events, governments can allow for individuals to voice views and react to content in a way that can inform policy and improve services.

The communication function similarly relies on public feedback gathered via opinion polls, sentiment analysis of public channels, and other audience insights. As such, this "listening" activity can translate into a form of participation when it serves to shape responses and informs policy and service design and delivery.

Main findings and recommendations

The OECD work on the present report is guided by the above analytical framework and grounded in the good practices prevalent across OECD member and partner countries. This review relies on insights gathered from a survey of Lebanese officials overseeing communications across eight institutions in the government. Its findings were informed by a fact-finding mission conducted on 27-29 September 2019 which included discussions between stakeholders in Lebanon,⁴ the OECD Secretariat, and peers from OECD governments with relevant expertise, as well as through desk research. An additional meeting of the network of communicators who responded to the survey on 2 July 2020 provided further qualitative insights. The report and its recommendations were validated through reviews by OECD and Lebanese peers.

The sections below offer an overview of the main findings of the report and a summary of the recommendations proposed to the Lebanese government against each of the challenges identified.

Findings relating to public communication governance and structures

In line with its progress on open government reforms, Lebanon is showing political will to address the challenges facing public communication. Even before the demonstrations of autumn 2019 and spring-summer 2020 added urgency to this issue, stakeholder accounts from an OECD fact-finding mission revealed an emerging drive to develop new capabilities, including a whole-of-government strategy.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, public communication in Lebanon suffers from a relative lack of consolidated structures and dedicated, qualified professionals, and from the prevalence of a politically-driven approach. These challenges, combined with a still-nascent system of intra-governmental co-ordination in this area, result in a fragmented ad-hoc dissemination of information to citizens and the media.

For the most part, this function in Lebanon remains considerably politicised and linked to the individuals in charge rather than to the institutions. The distinction between public and political communication is often unclear and top-level officials are generally reluctant to delegate these responsibilities beyond close political advisors. OECD interviews show that the prevalent practice is precisely for ministers and other high-ranking officials to bring in advisors and personal attachés to conduct communications on their behalf.

Conversely, several ministries seem to lack dedicated personnel that are part of the civil service. Dedicated units or directorates do not seem to exist in current ministries' organigrams. Out of seven surveyed ministries,⁵ only two claim to have such an entity in place. This role is limited to single communication officers in four out of the seven.

Better institutionalising this function within Lebanon's government would address multiple problems that affect it. Yet such institutionalisation requires both an acknowledgement by top decision makers that it is a tool to improve policies and services, and the creation of dedicated structures that govern its development and implementation.

Lebanon would benefit from undertaking reforms to formally designate specific communication roles across its ministries. In the short term, ensuring that a civil servant is assigned to this function in each ministry can help lay the groundwork for the longer-term development of dedicated units. Such administrative reforms also have the wider potential to empower communicators by clearly defining their mandate.

As part of efforts on institutionalisation, developing whole-of-government co-ordination mechanisms would help the government speak with one voice. OECD interviews underlined the limited formalised tools that exist for co-ordinating across government. There appears to be little consistency in the channels, types, and frequency of the information provided. Additionally, some ministries may not communicate sufficiently, and that often depends on the preferences of the Minister in charge at the time. This situation owes in part to the absence of a formal co-ordinating entity.

OMSAR has recently begun efforts to establish an inter-ministerial committee in charge of communication, and led on the establishment of an informal network of communicators from across the government, with support from the OECD. An eventual committee would help accelerate the development and monitoring of reforms, facilitate high-level endorsement, and allow for the exchange of good practices.

Ultimately, a central communication office could be established in order to set a whole-of-government approach. This office should be responsible for ensuring that strategies and objectives across all units are well aligned with the government's policy priorities, as well as with open government principles.

The above solutions are likely to take substantial time to implement. In the short term, evaluation could be conducted on current and upcoming communication initiatives implemented by public entities against desired outcome metrics. This could provide proof of the return on investment, and therefore, demonstrate the value and importance of this function.

Findings relating to the use of core public communication competencies

Chapter 3 of the present report illustrates that a majority of Lebanese ministries lack dedicated staff with professional capabilities to conduct strategic communication. Moreover, the tools, resources, and institutional knowledge to implement activities such as gathering audience insights, conducting public interest campaigns, or managing crisis situations, are underdeveloped across a majority of ministries.

Based on survey responses and on qualitative interviews, there seem to be few established practices of strategy-development and planning, or monitoring and audience insights. The absence of these practices means that the communication that takes place is likely one-way dissemination of information, rather than a more strategic approach that would allow, for instance, a form of dialogue. Similarly, and while good practices exist, there is an untapped potential for greater use of digital channels, whereas more traditional uses of media relations and campaigns are relatively prevalent.

The limited application of core competencies is directly related to a skills and resources shortage, besides the missing strategy and vision that guide their introduction. Currently, both politically appointed and, where present, institutional communicators often lack adequate skills and training to conduct activities strategically and at scale. For instance, press officers seem to be seldom trained to manage the institutions' digital presence and plan their communications alongside media relations, nor may they have the capacity to do so, according to interviews conducted by the OECD.

Addressing this skills shortfall in the short term will require an investment in capacity-building at two levels. The first would consist of specialised trainings for dedicated civil servants and political appointees, with a focus on digital communication skills and the use of data for audience insights and evaluation, highlighted as priorities in survey answers. Secondly, basic trainings can be conducted by sector professionals to help establish baseline skills across government functions, particularly where dedicated staff is missing, to ensure minimum communication needs can be met. Once it is formed, capacity-building could be led by the proposed inter-ministerial committee, who can also establish a set of internal goals to prioritise relevant competencies across all public entities.

In the short term, Lebanese ministries could also focus on developing written strategies to begin transitioning away from an ad-hoc approach to communication. These could set concrete, time-bound objectives centred around each institution's policy priorities and serve as a blueprint to plan detailed initiatives. This step will then guide the smart application of competencies for defined objectives and according to priorities. Lastly, to ensure their effectiveness, strategies should be based on audience insights and monitoring and be evaluated against pre-defined impact metrics.

Dedicated guidelines can help address various areas where public officials need guidance, and consolidate good practices. The existing network of public communicators, or the proposed inter-ministerial committee to be formed, could develop government-wide guidelines, covering aspects of digital and internal communication, campaigns, and media relations. These guidelines can also ensure practices and processes are aligned across all institutions, as well as define clear roles for public communicators.

On internal communication, the ATI Law's Implementation Decree of August 2020 offers an opportunity to develop an internal campaign, led by OMSAR and co-ordinated with the network of public communicators, to inform institutions on their respective obligations, and promote uptake of its provisions among civil servants in an effort to instil a culture of transparency.

Findings relating to the contribution of public communication and media ecosystems for Lebanon's open government agenda

When conducted strategically, communication is a key enabler of open government principles, as is articulated in Chapter 4. As such, it should form an important part of any open government agenda. In Lebanon, efforts to reform the public sector to make it more open and bring it closer to citizens have picked

up in recent years, notably with landmark anti-corruption and ATI legislation. Going forward, there are important ambitions to integrate these efforts in a comprehensive open government strategy or plan, illustrated in the OECD *Open Government Scan of Lebanon* (OECD, 2020^[7]).

Given the limited structures in place in Lebanon, leveraging public communication to advance transparency, integrity, accountability and participation will depend first and foremost on implementing some of the above recommendations on institutionalisation. Including this function as a pillar of an eventual national open government strategy could provide an important opportunity to press for its reform.

In the meantime, public communicators can begin to integrate objectives linked to openness in their work with support from OMSAR, whether via guidelines or the sharing of expertise. In developing strategies and campaigns, they could keep front of mind how these can serve broader open government goals.

For instance, ministries can ensure that the information that is made public is comprehensive, easily accessible on the appropriate channels, and that it is up to date. Another practice to support transparency would be encouraging proactive disclosures as called for in the ATI Law in their communications. The efforts of communicators could also offer an opportunity for participation in itself, whereby citizens are able to react and interact with government content on platforms that permit it.

Conversely, OMSAR, as a primary entity steering initiatives in this space, has a significant opportunity to leverage communication to raise awareness and advocate for open government reforms, both internally and externally. To do so, it could develop a dedicated strategy covering the full policy cycle, that entails public engagement campaigns, and crucially internal ones that aim to inform and build positive attitudes among the civil service. In the near term, OMSAR could develop such a campaign on the ongoing implementation of the ATI Law.

Finally, the media has a key role to play for a more open and accountable government in Lebanon. Yet, interviews conducted by the OECD show that journalists often have difficulties obtaining quality and timely information from the government for their reporting. Recent reports of restrictions to freedoms of the press and of expression are also a source of concern and an impediment to the media's watchdog role (Maharat Foundation, 2019^[13]; Human Rights Watch, 2019^[14]).

Although Lebanon has a greatly diverse media sector, the quality of journalism suffers from a politicised system (El Richani, 2014^[15]). Several outlets are indeed affiliated with a particular political party or coalition through their ownership. Besides amounting to a measure of bias, this also hinders transparent reporting and the holding to account of public institutions (Deutsche Welle Akademie, 2019^[16]). It can additionally exacerbate the loss of trust among the public.

To this end, pursuing reforms to the media regulatory framework would be a welcome step and could help emphasise the role of digital and traditional media to expand public debate and support a more diverse ecosystem that is increasingly digital. Importantly, new rules can also serve to guide the government's response to mis- and dis- information. In parallel, the government can work to ensure that public service media are maintained as reliable sources of information, by overseeing that they operate independently and providing adequate funding.

References

- Arab Barometer (2020), *The Arab World'S Trust In Government And The Perils Of Generalization*, <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2020/06/the-arab-worlds-trust-in-government-and-the-perils-of-generalization/> (accessed on 7 July 2020). [4]
- Deutsche Welle Akademie (2019), *Lebanon's media landscape - struggling with digitalization and media freedom*, <https://www.dw.com/en/lebanons-media-landscape-struggling-with-digitalization-and-media-freedom/a-48635698> (accessed on 6 January 2021). [16]
- El Richani, S. (2014), *Comparative Readings of the Lebanese Media System*, University of Westminster, https://www.db-thueringen.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/dbt_derivate_00033062/Dissertation_El_Richani_Sarah.pdf. [15]
- Human Rights Watch (2019), ““There Is a Price to Pay” The Criminalization of Peaceful Speech in Lebanon”, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/11/15/there-price-pay/criminalization-peaceful-speech-lebanon>. [14]
- Lebanese Transparency Association (2019), “How will Lebanon’s “Let’s get to work” government face the challenges of corruption?”, <https://voices.transparency.org/how-will-lebanons-let-s-get-to-work-government-face-the-challenges-of-corruption-4872f9bc6743>. [6]
- Maharat Foundation (2019), *Maharat Report on World Press Freedom Day*, <http://maharatfoundation.org/media/1584/maharat-report-world-press-freedom-day-english.pdf>. [13]
- Noueihed, L. and D. Khraiche (2020), *Lebanon's Economic Crisis Is Spinning Out of Control, Fast*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-07/lebanon-s-economic-collapse-is-gathering-pace> (accessed on 7 July 2020). [2]
- OECD (2020), *Open Government Scan of Lebanon*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/d7cce8c0-en>. [7]
- OECD (2019), *Government at a Glance 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccf5c38-en>. [8]
- OECD (2017), *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, OECD, Paris, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0438>. [12]
- OECD (2016), *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264268104-en>. [9]
- OECD (2015), *Government at a Glance 2015*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2015-en. [11]
- Perry, T. and E. Francis (2020), *Declaring it cannot pay debts, Lebanon sets stage for default*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-idUSKBN20U0DH> (accessed on 6 January 2021). [1]
- Reuters (2020), *Factbox: Lebanon's spiralling economic crisis*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-factbox-idUSKBN2761M1> (accessed on 6 January 2021). [3]

- Reuters (2019), “Lebanese government says committed to reforms after rating downgrade”, [5]
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy/lebanese-government-says-committed-to-reforms-after-rating-downgrade-idUSKCN1VE080>.
- WPP (2017), *The Leaders’ Report: Increasing Trust Through Citizen Engagement*, [10]
http://www.govtpracticewpp.com/~media/wppgov/leadersreport/2019/wpp_leaders_report_citizen_engagement.pdf?v=1.

Notes

¹ Public communication is distinct from political communication, which is linked to individual political figures and parties, the political debate or to elections. It is instead understood as a public service in itself. Its scope ranges from the provision of information of public value (for instance on changes in policy affecting citizens), to the two-way interaction between public institutions and citizens, to the support of policy implementation and service delivery.

² Media and information ecosystems is understood as the combination of communication, media and internet governance structures (i.e. institutional, legal, policy and regulatory frameworks) as well as principal actors (i.e. governments, traditional and social media companies and citizen journalists) that affect how the public receives and shares news and information via media platforms, government sources and social media platforms.

³ Author’s own research.

⁴ Stakeholders met during the peer review mission include: representatives from the media (Executive magazine, L’Orient Le Jour, Daily Star, An-Nahar, the National News Agency, the Lebanese Press Syndicate, the Lebanese Editors Syndicate); representatives from civil society organisations (May Chidiac Foundation, Gherbal Initiative, Lebanese Transparency Association, Nahnoo, Maharat Foundation, Samir Kassir Foundation); OMSAR; the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM); the Institute of Finance; the Ministry of Information; the Ministry of Telecommunication; the Ministry of Public Health; the Ministry of Labour; the Ministry of Social Affairs; the Ministry of Interior; the Ministry of Energy Ms Paula Yaacoubian MP.

⁵ The question did not apply to the PCM.

2 The governance of public communication in Lebanon

This chapter reviews the governance and structures that apply to the public communication function in Lebanon against a range of approaches. It discusses the level of institutionalisation and the practices that could support a better execution of this function for whole-of-government policy objectives and for greater support of open government principles. It finally proposes recommendations for reforms that favour a shift towards more strategic use of communication.

The context for public communication reform in Lebanon

In early 2020, Lebanon has undergone an important political transition following one of the largest waves of demonstrations in its post-civil war history. This was followed by another even greater socio-economic crisis that returned protesters to the streets in the summer of the same year, peaking after the tragic blast in August that led to the resignation of the newly-appointed government. More than anything else, citizens demonstrating throughout the country called for better governance and accountability, and for more participation in policy decisions. As a result, the country's leadership is under urgent pressure to implement immediate reforms that address key governance issues, primarily corruption, and that instil a culture of open government.

Public communication is an asset in this process. A constructive dialogue and the provision of timely and relevant information to citizens is necessary to navigate this turbulent period for Lebanon and support a new administration's actions. Previous governments had placed less emphasis on this and few formal steps have been taken to address this public function or to set out a vision for developing effective communication between the state and its citizens. At the same time, recent efforts to restructure the administration and ambitions to pursue a package of open government policies have created the impetus for changes to how public entities interact with society.

The current wave of structural and administrative modernisation, originally propelled by the *CEDRE Vision for Stabilization, Growth and Employment* and intensified by the demonstrations after the 2020 Beirut explosion offers a valuable opportunity to introduce reforms for better public communication. As this chapter illustrates, weak institutionalisation underlies several other challenges to developing this function. With the necessary political will, this problem can be addressed in the context of the wider administrative reform drive. The following sections thus analyse the communications governance and structures in place, with an eye to short- and long-term interventions to improve them.

Governance models of public communication

The present institutional structures and communication capabilities in Lebanon can be better understood when viewed against two models of governance for public communication that are found in the public and private sector alike and described below. These models build on the analysis developed by Sanders and Canel (2013^[1]) in their analysis of 15 countries' government communications. Both models are defined by the nature of the objectives set, the position communications occupy within the organisation, and the resources allocated to it. Governance models are also defined by the work and mandate of both communication departments and individual staff, how they interact with policy makers and other government institutions, how they co-ordinate communication efforts or address crisis communication. These criteria are part of the first pillar on the governance of the policy catalysts for effective public communication under the OECD analytical framework described in the previous chapter.

On the one hand, organisations can adopt a tactical model of communications, which is often oriented towards the pursuit of short- or medium-term goals that are modest in their scope. This model is based on the employment of tactics, such as posting on social media or issuing press releases, to communicate on a subject without this activity being intended to serve a purpose beyond widening the reach of a piece of information at that given time. Tactical communications are often ad hoc, dispersed, and with minimal to no internal co-ordination. Consequently, communication under this model is at best an auxiliary function to a given organisation's core activities.

On the other hand, a strategic model of communications revolves around the achievement of an organisation's core objectives, whether the implementation of a policy or the uptake of public service, in a sustained way. It typically involves a desired change in behaviour or perceptions from specific stakeholders. A more sophisticated model, strategic communications require insights-driven planning and internal co-ordination behind the implementation of tactics. This is often delivered through a well-resourced office in which leadership sits at the decision-making levels of the organisation.

A structure that follows a strategic model of communication has defined functions that facilitate an organised and integrated activity undertaken by skilled and knowledgeable professionals who occupy positions at every level of the organisational chart and whose responsibilities and tasks are clearly defined to meet stated objectives. Such institutional set-ups encompass mechanisms to efficiently co-ordinate all communication efforts while assessing their effectiveness in terms of measurable outcomes. Importantly, these teams or units benefit from a clear mandate from the top and are under pressure to deliver against it.

In practice, these two models exist along a spectrum where different elements vary from purely tactical to highly strategic. Table 2.1 below provides an overview of the range that governance structures for public communication can take.

Table 2.1. Key features of tactical and strategic governance models of public communication

Features range from the tactical (left) to the 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-making level
Co-ordination	<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 approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications follow events without advance planning • Objectives of communication activities or strategies are not agreed 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 communications 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 is 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 elaboration.

Structures and organisation of public communication in Lebanon

At present, Lebanese public institutions sit primarily on the tactical end of the spectrum in their governance of public communication. The majority of them have not yet put in place structures that permit the development and implementation of advanced communication strategies. Instead, there is a range of alternative actors who operate in the function but often lack adequate mandates, skills, and resources. According to OECD interviews, communications between the government and citizens have a prevalently political character and are often attached to individual officials and parties rather than to institutions. Indeed, in large part, close media and political advisors to ministers tend to be responsible for communications, as discussed further below.

Co-ordination and whole-of-government communication

Public communication in Lebanon is highly decentralised and no one entity is to date responsible for conducting this function for the government as a whole. In the absence of a central organ, there is no yet an established mechanism for each ministry, institution, and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM) to co-ordinate their activity in this area.

Authority and responsibility for communicating with and informing the public in the Lebanese government are distributed across a number of offices and is presently evolving. However, communication functions are being reorganised in light of a higher perceived need for ongoing dialogue with citizens. Formally, the primary communication functions have been the domain of the following actors:

- The Presidency of the Council of Ministers, as the centre of government, is a primary source of official communication. The Prime Minister is officially vested with the authority to speak on behalf of the Government by Article 64 of Lebanon's constitution (Lebanese Government, 1926^[2]). Responses to the OECD survey reveal that in practice, the PCM performs this function through the work of temporary media and political advisors, as there is no designated office staffed by civil servants. Although the PCM is in principle in charge of whole-of-government communications, it does not have a co-ordinating role, nor does it set out an overarching strategy for the government.
- The Minister of Information holds the formal role of spokesperson for the Council of Ministers, and is tasked with disseminating official statements on decisions taken by the Council. The Ministry of Information (MoI) also oversees state-owned media and has the authority, granted under Law 382/94 to mandate all media outlets to grant coverage to announcements and policies originating from the government. At the time of writing, the Ministry was exploring avenues for reform that could grant it a broader public communication mandate.
- OMSAR has a mandate to co-ordinate administrative reforms across the government and serves as the point of contact for citizens' enquiries relating to public administrative procedures. In practice, it is also acquiring a cross-government co-ordination function on a number of public sector modernisation activities or public services. For instance, OMSAR works on the standardisation of annual reports, as required by an implementation decree of the ATI Law, and publishes the evaluations of the work of all ministries (of which it is overseeing the automation process) OMSAR also works to build the capacity of the public sector to report and publish key performance indicators (KPIs) website. It similarly developed a standardised format for ministerial websites, which has been widely adopted and serves to harmonise the content and visual identity of government sites. Lastly, it acts as a repository of all government studies by publishing them on its website and communicating around this as part of a dedicated strategy. At the time of writing, OMSAR was exploring the possibility of establishing an inter-ministerial public communication network.
- The National News Agency (NNA) is a state-owned news service that covers the activities of the whole administration, including through a press corps deployed to the PCM and presidential palace, as well as other ministries. It serves as a newswire by allowing any public entity to upload

content and information to a distribution service that all Lebanese media subscribes to. The NNA is the official channel for the government to communicate any national security-related news.

In practice, none of these offices conducts or co-ordinates communication for the whole government. Indeed, at present Lebanon lacks a consolidated structure in its communications and each ministry looks after its own communication independently. The lack of co-ordination can often result in conflicting and inconsistent messaging being disseminated on subjects that cut across multiple institutions. It can also prevent the government from presenting a unified agenda and speaking with one voice.

The primary situations in which a measure of whole-of-government co-ordination exists are announcements of Council of Ministers decisions, which by law are issued from the Ministry of Information. In practice, according to stakeholder accounts during OECD fact-finding missions, each ministry tends to put out its own message, often providing a preferred narrative than the central government one. Co-ordination could help to optimise communications efforts across ministries and offices and contribute towards establishing a single voice for Lebanon's government.

To the extent that it occurs, official co-ordination remains challenging, as OECD interviews have revealed that the protocols for communicating between ministries remain lengthy, paper-based procedures that civil servants seek to avoid. These get supplanted in practice with informal interactions, often enabled by new technologies such as instant messaging. Despite this emerging practice, co-ordination interactions are still infrequent according to stakeholder accounts.

Despite the absence of an official mechanism, some co-ordination does take place between ministries and agencies. According to a survey conducted by the OECD across seven ministries and offices and the PCM, half of respondents said they co-ordinated at least occasionally with other ministries and agencies on internal, digital, and crisis communication and on campaigns, and six of the eight respondents said they co-ordinated on media announcements occasionally or frequently. On the other hand, this is rarely or never the case among respondents when it comes to communication strategies, audience insights and evaluation (this is also related to the fact that such activities are seldom performed).

Some of this co-ordination occurs through informal channels such as WhatsApp groups of officials. For instance, such a group has been set up between digital communication officers across the government and in the summer of 2020, they had begun meeting about once per week. Similarly, OMSAR has begun over the past year to establish a government-wide network of communicators as a peer group to share expertise and support, and to explore opportunities for collaborating. This initiative has been kicked off with a number of meetings in 2019 and 2020 with support from the OECD.

Informal mechanisms are useful alternatives in the absence of formal co-ordination, and can serve to test formats that can be eventually institutionalised. In the short term, it is therefore important to encourage those officials who take the initiative to expand areas of cross-government co-ordination and increase its frequency. However, effective co-ordination ultimately depends on attributing leadership and responsibility to one entity that can ensure it serves shared objectives and is durable. For this reason, reforms of public communication in Lebanon could look to designate an office with a mandate for whole-of-government communication, for instance, based on Italy's approach illustrated in Box 2.1.

In response to these issues, the previous administration had explored the option to develop an inter-ministerial committee on communications under the auspices of a UK-funded programme for communications capability-building. OMSAR is presently pursuing its creation under the new government. Consolidating these efforts in the short term will permit rapid improvements towards establishing common baseline standards, but any process of whole-of-government co-ordination will ultimately benefit from greater institutionalisation of the public communication function.

Box 2.1. Whole-of-government communication in Italy

In Italy, the Department for Information and Publishing (*Dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'Editoria*, DIE) is the office of the PCM in charge of whole-of-government communication. On top of conducting public communication for the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department acts as a central co-ordinator of all administrations' activities through a yearly Communication Plan. Based on strategic guidelines developed centrally, every ministry, agency or national-level administration is responsible for providing their own annual Communication Programme, in order for the DIE to combine it into the whole-of-government Communication Plan. Each administration then implements its own programme through their respective public communication units, with guidance and co-ordination from the DIE.

The structure in charge of communication within the DIE is the Service for Institutional Communication, made up of 17 full-time individuals including the Director of the Office and the Manager of the Unit.

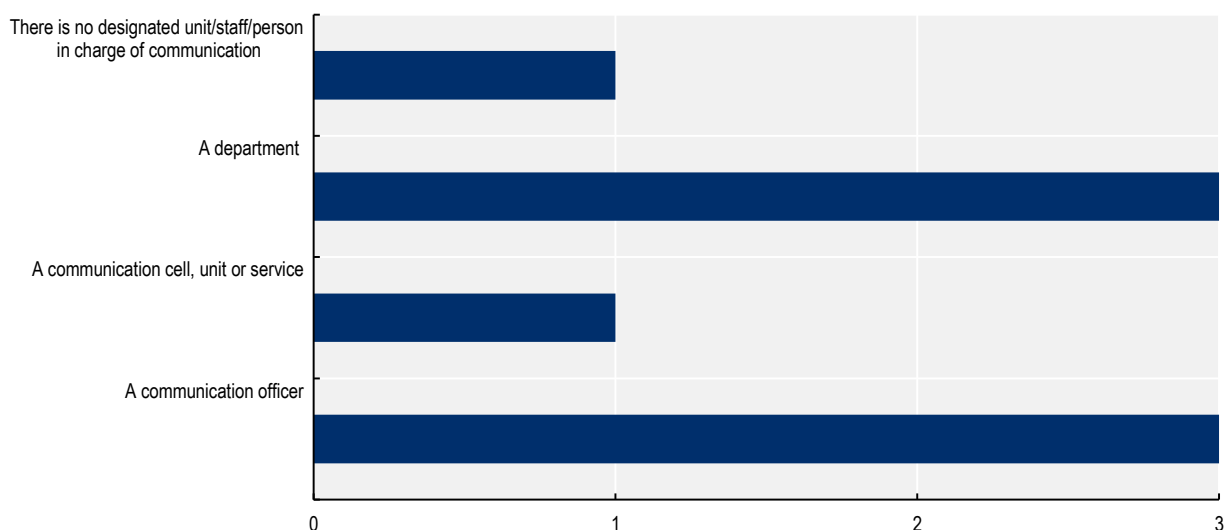
Source: Information provided to the OECD by the DIE as part of its response to the OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

Mandates, structures and resources

The governance and structures in place for communication across Lebanese ministries and institutions are considerably uneven, which accounts for a diverse landscape for this function in the country. However, one significant aspect of governance that is common across the spectrum is that communications in Lebanon remain considerably political in nature and linked to the individuals in charge rather than to the institutions. This aspect is especially challenging to the notion of communication as a public service and in the public interest, which is distinct from political communication. Overall, these challenges relate to the low level of institutionalisation and the absence of a strong mandate for this function.

Figure 2.1. Human resources and structures in Lebanese institutions

Who is in charge of public communication activities within your institution?



Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

At the level of ministries and public institutions, organisational charts reveal the wide discrepancy whereby some have dedicated communications offices while in others this function is covered by single staff. Figure 2.1 shows that half (4) of the sample of institutions participating in the OECD survey have a dedicated department or unit whereas a minority (3) have a single officer and one has no staff. Even where they are present, these structures are not consolidated as they depend mostly on temporary staff who are appointed by ministers and senior officials as consultants or advisors. With any change in leadership, there is a parallel change in the number and organisation of communications staff according to the preferences of the incoming administration. Besides changing the size and responsibilities of the previous structure in a given ministry, this also accounts for high turnover, discontinuity in communication activities, and the loss of institutional knowledge.

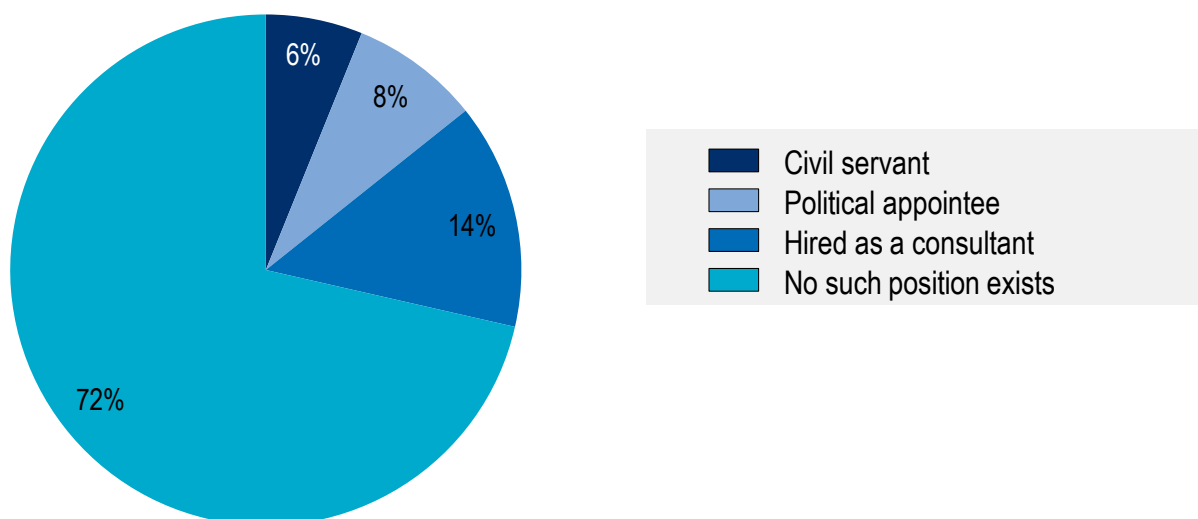
Mostly, the officers working on communication are often not civil servants but rather political appointees and consultants that tend to change with each government or reshuffle (see Figure 2.2). Consequently, communicators are embedded in different parts of the institution depending on the ministry, often within the offices of the minister. According to OECD interviews conducted, in the case that a communication team is already embedded within a ministry, these appointed communicators can be sometimes reluctant to work with the existing staff. Politically appointed advisors in each ministry have become prominent actors in shaping political communication, by curating public statements, social media profiles, and appearances by the ministers they work for. This system implies that communication in these cases serves the political priorities of the minister rather than the long-term or policy-oriented goals of the institutions.

A common exception to this pattern relates to certain donors who provide dedicated funding and staff to give visibility to the projects they finance, which has driven some recruitment of communications professionals. In turn, these new staff's mandates have grown to encompass more of the institution's communications needs. Alternative arrangements also include the examples of ministries whose communication work is assigned to information technology (IT) and e-services personnel.

Figure 2.2. Type of appointments for communication staff in Lebanese institutions

If they exist, how are the following roles (or the closest equivalent) appointed? (Responses for officials responsible for six core areas of communication)

Proportion of staff by type of appointment



Note: Respondents were asked to note how each of the following positions was appointed: Head of communication strategy and planning; Head of communication campaigns; Head of insight gathering; Head of media engagement; Head of digital communication; Head of crisis communication.

Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

The predominance of politically-driven communication structures is visible in Lebanon's Presidency and the PCM. There, these functions are supervised or conducted by advisors to the government's leadership although a number of civil services or donor-sponsored staff are also present to manage some areas of this function. The Lebanese Presidency's Directorate-General features a Media Bureau that consists of two divisions: one looking after print, broadcast and digital media that provides daily summaries and analysis of news, and another co-ordinating publishing that prepares draft press releases and external-facing communications. This bureau works under the supervision of the media advisor of the President, typically a politically appointed role. By contrast, the organisational structure of the Directorate General of the PCM does not include a dedicated unit for media and communication, however up to five staff typically curate media relations and digital communication. They are part of the team that each Prime Minister brings on board to work under the supervision of a politically appointed media advisor.

Across line ministries and other government offices scarce resources and weak structures make for a less strategic and more ad hoc use of communication. OMSAR, as one of the entities with a more established public communication function, relies on a full-time staff member thanks to assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It has developed a communications strategy for internal and external stakeholders, which includes an annual newsletter, project-based campaigns, and social media content. However, its response to the OECD survey indicates that the Office has no dedicated budget for communications and the above work relies on donor funds, including the European Union.

What this overview illustrates is that a relative absence of legal structures and institutionalisation for communication functions have resulted in a fragmented and low-capacity system. These constraints mean that communication in Lebanon is primarily one-way dissemination of information, and is often subject to political considerations.

Hierarchy of decision making and delegation of responsibilities is one area in which this is manifest. Ministers themselves are often the only official spokespeople and their sign-off is required for most activities. This can create inefficiencies and bottlenecks, especially in large and dispersed institutions. For instance, the Institute of Finance is an autonomous agency under the oversight of the Ministry of Finance, yet it still needs pre-approval from the Minister for all its media outreach as revealed through the OECD interviews. The downside of such rigid and hierarchical structures is that when media enquiries are not addressed in a timely manner, other sources, often less authoritative, can shape the narrative in lieu of government voices. Establishing efficient protocols and diffusing responsibilities is therefore an important element of making communications more strategic.

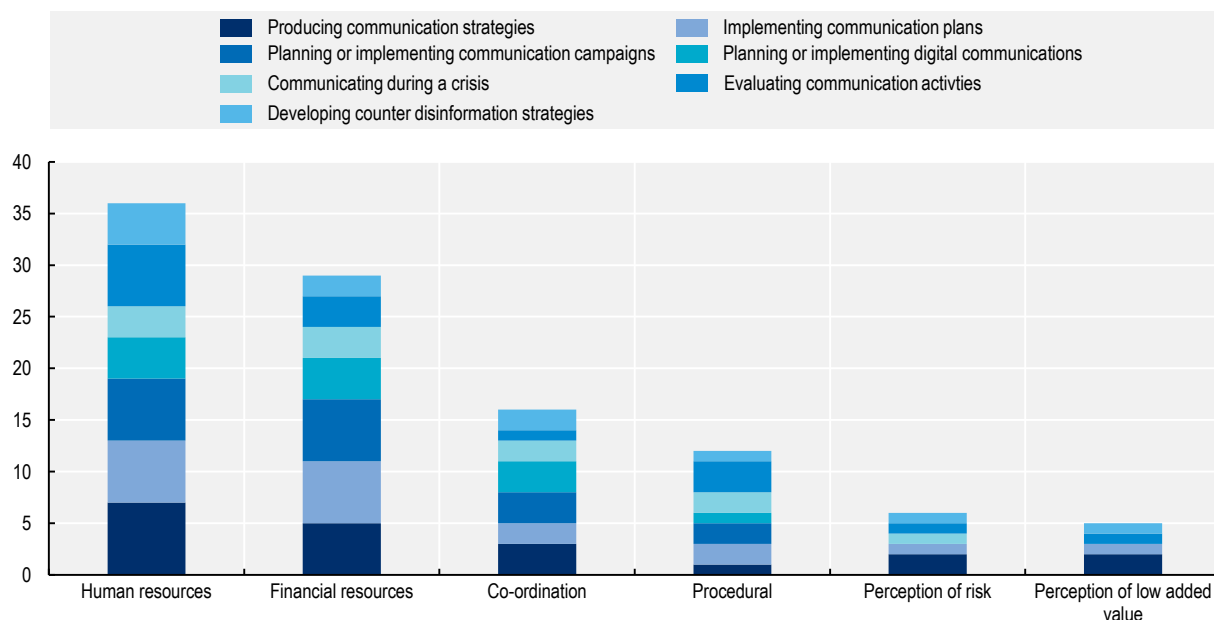
The professionalisation of this function, another prerequisite for strategic communication, similarly suffers under the present system. Since few specialists are recruited in government, the work of the officers in place is broadly limited to simpler, tactical activities. Indeed, only a minority (3) of the eight surveyed institutions reported developing communications strategies internally.

The main constraint in this respect is a lack of human resources (see Figure 2.3), which is also consistent with the survey finding that none of the respondents¹ reported that their staff have communications training. Many of the advisors brought in across ministries yield from journalism and the media, and tend to approach their roles primarily in terms of media relations and reputation management for their superiors. Experience with strategy development, audience insights, and innovative approaches to campaigns is infrequent in Lebanon's ministries and public institutions, but in several ministries where staff is present some core competencies of communication are quite established, as discussed in the following chapter. Neither the political advisors nor the IT staff that occasionally replace them receive training to cover the breadth of tasks that the job entails, according to the OECD survey and interviews conducted. As a consequence, several ministries miss the opportunity to communicate beyond the everyday engagements of senior government figures or develop a conversation with citizens on substantive policy issues.

With the positive finding that “perceptions of low-added value” and “of risk” are the least cited challenges to communication, and prevalent social media presence for many institutions, the obstacles remain primarily structural. This setting makes it difficult to transition to a more strategic approach, which requires instead a solid institutional foundation and a longer-term horizon. These relatively informal and variable structures of public communications, with the lack of fixed budgets and consistent capabilities, deter the stability and continuity of this function. The lack of institutionalisation equally means that less efficient practices and processes can emerge and persist.

Figure 2.3. Principal challenges for public communication faced by Lebanese institutions

Survey question: “Please choose the three most important reasons why the following competencies are challenging”



Note: The above question followed the question “What are the five most challenging communication competencies for the institution?”

Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

In sum, transitioning towards a more strategic model of governance for Lebanon’s government communications will require legal and administrative reforms. With few exceptions, such as the Ministry of Environment’s organisational decree (2275/2009) and the previously mentioned official mandates, no legal framework or official administrative policies presently regulates this function within the public sector. Establishing formal mandates for public communicators and administrative protocols for their operations can therefore help ensure that progress can be consistent and sustainable over successive governments.

The modernisation of the public administration as a lever for institutionalising public communication

Lebanon is in the course of an extensive process of administrative reform, aimed at modernising the public sector and making it more efficient. Restructuring the administration could create impetus for the policy changes that public communication needs. Indeed, there is an opportunity to build the structures, staffing, and funding for this function into current reform packages without necessarily increasing public spending.

Public sector inefficiencies are a challenge for Lebanon's continued development, and the proposed reforms are therefore a crucial and desirable step. The present economic crisis, set off by an unsustainable public debt and sluggish economic growth, makes it difficult to introduce new resources and spending. Given this context, pressures have intensified for Lebanon to introduce public sector reforms that limit the public deficit. A reorganisation of the public administration could therefore bring the necessary changes for a more structured public communication function.

The dialogue on the modernisation of Lebanon's administration has been grounded in recent years in the CEDRE conference, which is being updated in light of developments to the country's economic, social and political context. In April 2018, the "*Conférence économique pour le développement par les réformes et avec les entreprises*" (CEDRE) brought together international stakeholders in Paris to raise funds for the first six-year phase of Lebanon's Capital Investment Program (CIP), designed to modernise the country's infrastructure. Unlike other international support frameworks, the CEDRE conference made funding conditional on the implementation of budgetary and sectoral reforms that Lebanon had committed to. At the time of writing, progress on these reforms is patchy and remains an obstacle to further support from international partners, with a growing pressure for implementation following the tragic blast at the Port of Beirut in August 2020.

These reforms are stated under the *Vision for Stabilization, Growth, and Employment* presented at CEDRE. The first step of its implementation saw the establishment in October 2017 of an inter-ministerial committee with a mandate to audit the entire public sector in Lebanon. The audit would assess existing roles and positions in public institutions, estimate the functional needs of each department, and determine gaps requiring new personnel (Government of Lebanon, 2018_[3]). Since the subsequent government of Prime Minister Saad Hariri endorsed the effort for restructuring the public sector, OMSAR has been spearheading this mapping exercise with support from the Central Inspection Bureau and the Civil Service Board.²

The ongoing review of organisational charts is the first to be conducted for a majority of Lebanon's public institutions, and offers a welcome opportunity for modernisation. Around the world, developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have brought about administrative restructuring and created pressures for public institutions to be more agile and citizen-centric. This has had profound effects especially in the organisation of communication functions, with a growing trend of specialisation and digitalisation going hand in hand with more ambitious objectives for citizen engagement (Sanders and Canel, 2013_[1]).

In the United Kingdom, for instance, administrative reform has seen the creation of the Government Communication Service (GCS) as one of the 14 functions to operate throughout the country's civil service (see Box 2.2). GCS counts over 4 000 professionals in each of its 25 ministerial departments and sub-national administrations, and serves in itself as a co-ordinating system and a network. In each ministry and agency, GCS-affiliated professionals implement communication strategies and campaigns, evaluate their outcomes, gather public insights, and conduct internal communication (UK Government, 2019_[4]).

In Lebanon, public sector mapping can serve to highlight the absence of communications units in a majority of institutions despite the increase in the size of the public sector. One of the recommendations to follow the exercise could therefore be to designate units or positions dedicated to public communication, to be staffed by civil servants. These units can be developed in the short term by allocating existing personnel, given that the public deficit reduction strategies have put in place a hold on the recruitment of new civil servants. Any available funding could be addressed to training and capability-building to ensure any eventual communication units can perform their work. This can also be attained through new and existing programmes by donor organisations and low-cost virtual training resources.

Box 2.2. The British Government Communications Service (GCS)

In the United Kingdom, the GCS (Government Communication Service) is a professional organisation aimed at specialists in the public communication sector that work in departments of the central government, agencies and independent organisations. The GCS's main function is to provide, on an international scale, communications of the public sector that support the government's priorities, ease public sector operations in an efficient and effective way, and improve people's lives. Its goal is to promote the UK abroad to help stimulate exports and external investments, as well as to work with other governments in the goal of reinforcing the country's communication capacities abroad.

The GCS represents the communication function of the central government (including departments, agencies and the independent organisations of Whitehall), as well as one of the ten functions specialised in the functional model of the public sector. The GCS was created to support communication professionals that work within the ministries, agencies and independent organisations of the central government, with the goal of guaranteeing exceptional communication of the public sector and to defend its fundamental values: integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

Source: UK Government Communication Service (n.d.) Government Communication Service website, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/> (accessed on 29 April 2021).

It is useful to stress that introducing public communications structures as part of current administrative restructuring would also support reforms for a more open government. The National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the ATI Law could both be assisted in their implementation by integrating disclosures and transparency provisions with communication activities. As noted previously, it also serves to consolidate a cultural shift in governance. OMSAR, for example, has recognised this opportunity and has begun to increase references to open government concepts in its communications to increase their visibility and endorsement among internal and external stakeholders.

Priority institutions and legal frameworks for reforms on public communication

The OECD's analysis of Lebanon's public institutions reveals that some ministries and agencies play a special role in the packaging and dissemination of information and can therefore expand their mandates in this respect. These include the PCM, OMSAR, the Mol, and the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS).

While embedding higher standard communication structures across all Lebanese government institutions should be an end goal of administrative reforms, the centralisation of the communication function in one office for whole-of-government communication would be a significant milestone towards institutionalising this function. A designated government communication office or unit could be a centre for developing expertise, setting and delivering a strategy for public communication to exist alongside the political one that is currently prevalent, and provide support and co-ordination to all ministries and institutions. The Lebanese government could therefore envision attributing this mandate to an existing entity (such as the ones described below) through a reform process, which could provide greater efficiencies than establishing a new institution.

During the formation process for the transitional government in December 2019, the role of the Mol was called into question and speculations about its abolition circulated in the country (Maharat News, 2019^[5]). However, these speculations dissipated under Diab's government, as the Ministry's increased activity implied otherwise. Having emerged from this transition unchanged, the Mol has nonetheless taken on an important drive to redefine its function, including by issuing a reform proposal in June 2020 that would see it gain a broader mandate for communication. Indeed, reforming the Mol to include a dedicated central

communication office would constitute a significant step towards institutionalising the function and addressing some of the gaps in resources and co-ordination. The Government could achieve this by updating the Ministry's existing structure.

Alongside the MoI, OMSAR features prominently as a focal point for reforming communication since it is a primary driver of administrative and open government reforms. The Office has a core internal responsibility for ensuring that administrative procedures and regulations are circulated and up-to-date across the government. It acts as the repository of all publicly funded studies and research, as well as government resources and information from each ministry and agency. In parallel, OMSAR also serves as the liaison for citizens to understand and pose queries about the same procedures. More significantly, the Office is tasked with simplifying administrative procedures to bring the government closer to citizens, a mandate that positions it to play a central role in any open government reform.

OMSAR's mandate can also be broadened to include fostering whole-of-government co-ordination in the area of public communication. It is enabled to form inter-ministerial committees (such as the country's technical anti-corruption committee which it heads) and introduce new administrative procedures. As such, it is undertaking to establish such a committee on public communication, which it could steer to foster greater co-ordination, promote the adoption of good practices and oversee the implementation of related reforms. OMSAR has indeed been holding meetings with a number of key ministries over the course of 2019 and 2020 to explore co-operation opportunities and consolidate a network of public communicators, which remains informal at present but could be consolidated as part of comprehensive restructuring.

The Office has already performed a similar role in the implementation of the ATI law. Among other activities, it has held a workshop in July 2019 that defined the role of information officers with respect to ATI implementation and provided practical training, developed in partnership with the OECD and UNDP. It has since been following up with the 102 public officials who participated to check whether information officers had been appointed and to lay the grounds for a peers' network.

Moreover, the Office developed a National ATI implementation Action Plan in partnership with OECD and UNDP, which was adopted by the Ministerial Anti-Corruption Committee in July 2020. This Action Plan defines the obstacles, roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the law, as well as a clear timeframe, monitoring and follow-up mechanisms. Action items include appointing ATI Officers within all obligated administrations, providing training and developing support resources, and implementing mechanisms for receiving and handling complaints (UNDP, 2020^[6]). Overall, this experience can both serve to leverage the ATI implementation to pursue some short-term communication goals, and can be replicated in the context of reforms concerning communication.

Such whole-of-government co-ordination could also be conducted at the centre of government level, namely within the President or Prime Minister's Office. In certain OECD countries such as Canada or Norway, these offices work on the co-ordination of departmental and horizontal communications as per Box 2.3 below.

Box 2.3. Whole-of-government co-ordination in OECD countries

In many OECD countries, whole-of-government co-ordination is conducted within the centre of government or a line ministry, and consists of bringing together and harmonising the communication activities of all ministries.

In Norway, the Office of the Prime Minister co-ordinates closely with the heads of communications of all ministries through weekly meetings, in which best practices are demonstrated. Co-ordination is also maintained on a daily basis through digital channels, in order to share any relevant experiences and ensure aligned communications.

In a similar way, Austria's "Inter-ministerial Communication Group" consists of ad-hoc meetings with the heads of public communications of ministries and national institutions. Its goal is to exchange information and co-ordinate important events that concern the entire government, to create more cohesive communications.

In Slovenia, the Government Communication Division, an independent specialist service to the centre of government, ensures co-ordination of all communication officers across the government on a regular day-to-day and weekly basis through meeting sessions. These sessions cover a series of activities that include revising the communication grid, brainstorming on open communication issues, as well as on-spot training through several courses on relevant topics and good practices.

Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

Data and evidence are the foundation of a transparent, open, and effective government. To this end, the Central Administration for Statistics is an important actor to consider in the context of reforming Lebanon's public communication. The CAS, sitting under the PCM, collects and publishes statistics on social and economic indicators, on top of technically assessing data collected across each ministry and ensuring its harmonisation. This is conducted as part of a quarterly data-gathering drive covering all public institutions. Despite these efforts, most of the CAS' data are not in open data formats that permit ease of re-use and analysis, but rather in PDF files. In parallel to a drive to make its data more available, which currently includes the publication of 11 time-series datasets online, the CAS would benefit from creating a communications unit that drives engagement with its data and ensures that it informs public discourse. It would be important for such a unit to support simultaneously peers throughout government in deploying data in their communication.

To conclude, administrative reforms are a priority means of developing the institutional structures that can enable a shift towards a strategic model of communications in Lebanon. OMSAR emerges as a central actor to push forward this progress in parallel to its implementation of various steps for the modernisation of the public administration. The roles of the President and Prime Minister's Office, along with the MoI, will also be key.

While formalising structures and responsibilities is an essential part of the process, ensuring that the appropriate policies and legal frameworks are in place to guide their application is equally important. To this end, over the long term, Lebanon could consider supporting this shift towards more institutionalised public communication with a law that sets its mandate and scope and regulates its conduct. Such a law could further establish the separation between political and public communication. In Italy, Law 150 of 2000 provides a comprehensive legal framework for the management of communication by public administrations, including obligations on the dissemination of specific kinds of information. It is presently being updated to better reflect the use of digital technologies and their impact on media and information ecosystems (Box 2.4).

Box 2.4. Public communication laws in Italy and Spain

In 2000, Law 150 became the legislative framework for the public communication and information function in Italy. Notably, it recognises the purposes of communication, including informing the public about laws, policy processes and activities of the government, and facilitating access to services among others. It recognises responsibilities for public communicators and their distinct mandate within the civil service, and separate from both press offices, and spokespeople (which are traditionally associated with political appointments). Law 150/2000 is undergoing a reform process to update it in light of the significant changes relating to the growth of digital communication technologies, and to strengthen provisions for its implementation.

In Spain, the Commission on Advertising and Institutional Communication (*Comisión de Publicidad y Comunicación Institucional*) was introduced by Law 29 of 20 December 2005. The Commission has the mandate to differentiate between institutional and political communication. Notably, the Law that established it highlights four objectives for its campaigns: public utility, transparency, professionalisation, and “institutional loyalty”.

Sources: Forum PA (2020), “Legge 150 del 2000: cosa prevede la prima (e a tutt’oggi unica) legge quadro sulla comunicazione pubblica”, <https://www.forumpa.it/open-government/comunicazione-pubblica/legge-150-del-2000-cosa-prevede-la-prima-e-a-tuttoggi-unica-legge-quadro-sulla-comunicazione-pubblica/>; Presidency of the Government of Spain (n.d.), “Comisión de Publicidad y Comunicación Institucional”, www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/cpci/Paginas/index.aspx (accessed on 28 April 2021).

Recommendations

To summarise the main takeaways from the present chapter, the following recommendations provide a path for developing specific governance structures and processes that will enable progress towards strategic public communication in Lebanon. The below points take into account the present budgetary and personnel pressures and rely on the expected efficiencies from broader administrative reforms to identify and reallocate existing resources in the short to medium term.

- As part of cross-government organisational restructuring, OMSAR or the PMO can introduce requirements (either through decrees or regulations) to designate communication roles in all public institutions. It should be provided that at least one person is dedicated to this function in each body, and that they are members of the civil service appointed for fixed terms. Such reform should lay out longer-term targets for developing the communication units with a number of specialised roles.
- Existing and upcoming administrative reforms (on anti-corruption, access to information, the open government agenda more broadly or on digital government for example) have the potential to address the issue of empowerment of public communicators by defining roles and responsibilities more clearly and favouring a more prominent representation for them in the policy cycle. They could consider including provisions on the role and authority of such officials and approval protocols to avoid the often cited bottleneck of having to go through the Minister for all communication initiatives.
- OMSAR could drive forward the process of establishing an inter-ministerial committee on public communication as a platform to design and oversee reforms on this function, seek high-level endorsement, allow for the exchange of good practices and help professionalise this function. This can build on the existing network of public communicators established with the OECD.
- The network could benefit from developing interactions and co-operation with the group of Information Officers being trained by OMSAR to better leverage proactive information disclosure and media relations for communication and transparency.
- Ultimately, a central co-ordinating office should be formed, whether within the President or Prime Minister's Office, the MoI, or OMSAR, that sets out a whole-of-government communication approach, lends implementation support to each unit, and manages activities of the network of communicators.
- This centralised communications office should be responsible for ensuring that communicators work in pursuit of objectives that further the government's policy priorities and the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation. Communications strategies, and monitoring and evaluation of their implementation, can be structured around these goals.

While implementing any of these recommendations will bring Lebanon closer to communicating strategically and effectively over the long-term, short-term results will be needed to sustain and grow the support for reforms. It is essential to note that the proposed interventions should be accompanied by acknowledgement from the top decision makers that public communication, as opposed to political communication, is in itself a central service to citizens and a tool to improve policies and services. To this end, a few proposed steps can help improve buy-in from key stakeholders at the start of the process.

- Current and near-future communications campaigns and activities conducted by those public entities who already have established capabilities should be evaluated against some desired outcome metrics to demonstrate the value of this function and provide evidence of the return on investment.

- An important topic that could provide a pilot for a government-wide communications campaign conducted at the institutional level is the CEDRE Vision. As a major driver of policy changes affecting various fields and issues, communicating effectively about CEDRE reforms to domestic and international stakeholders would be an important element for their success. It could therefore serve as an initial opportunity for rolling out a co-ordinated, strategic communications campaign that brings into play some of the recommendations above. Such a campaign could rely on donor funding if existing resources are not yet available.

References

- Government of Lebanon (2018), *Vision for Stabilization, Growth, and Employment*, [3]
<http://www.pcm.gov.lb/Admin/DynamicFile.aspx?PHName=Document&PageID=11260&publis hed=1>.
- Lebanese Government (1926), “The Lebanese Constitution”, [2]
<https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/lb/lb018en.pdf>.
- Maharat News (2019), *Ministerial statement: Work to abolish the Ministry of Information and form the Supreme Media Council*, <https://maharat-news.com/ministryofinformation1> (accessed on 23 November 2020). [5]
- Sanders, K. and M. Canel (eds.) (2013), *Government communication in 15 countries: Themes and challenges*, Bloomsbury, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/government-communication-9781849666121/>. [1]
- UK Government (2019), *Government Communication Plan 2019/2020*, [4]
<https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/communication-plan-2019/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Government-Communication-Plan-2019.pdf>.
- UNDP (2020), *National Action Plan to Implement the Right to Access to Information Law*, [6]
https://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/democratic_governance/national-action-plan-to-implement-the-right-to-access-to-informa.html.

Notes

¹ Responses do not include the PCM, to whom this question did not apply.

² Information collected during the peer review missions in September 2019.

3

The use of core competencies for strategic and effective communication in Lebanon

This chapter focuses on the core competencies that are in place in Lebanon for implementing strategic communications, and how they can be upgraded and deployed to support the country's policy objectives and regain citizen trust. These competencies, when applied well, can evolve communications from an information dissemination tool to a lever of stakeholder participation and improved policy and service design and implementation.

How the use of key competencies can evolve communication from dissemination to engagement

Communication is the practice and discipline of relaying information between stakeholders, and is based on conceiving how to package and deliver that information for the greatest impact. As such, it relies on continuously evolving practices that, thanks especially to technological innovation, are becoming ever more effective. These form key competency areas that public communication units and officers across the administration should attain and strengthen to ensure that their work generates a dialogue with citizens and a better-informed society.

In the first place, strategies are an essential element to communicate effectively. In this context, these represent a practical operating document, developed and implemented by the relevant team, which lays out how communication activities will be conducted to support an organisation's overarching goals. It ties specific objectives to be achieved through communications to the objectives of the organisation, and defines an approach for attaining them over a defined period of time. It provides a single, coherent narrative that describes a solution to a problem, and is often supported by one or more plans, which translate the approach into structured lists of actions.

Strategies can be narrow and specific, for instance applying to one key sectoral objective in the short-term, or broad and comprehensive, for instance, developed annually across multiple areas or for the whole-of-government. For the case of public institutions, it is useful to develop such a document (either nation-wide or per ministry) setting the overall approach to communication and establishing the direction of all initiatives to be carried out, consistently with overarching short, medium and long-term policy goals and actions.

Another important element of communicating strategically is to identify the messages, and channels that can make complex policy questions accessible, relatable, and appealing to the widest range of stakeholders. Simply disclosing an official decision on a government portal or relaying the introduction of a new measure via a press release is usually insufficient to ensure the information is reaching the intended audiences and that it stimulates a desired reaction (be it an awareness, an engagement, or a change in behaviour or perception). For this to occur communication professionals resort to messaging, diverse channels and audience insights, as well as evaluation.

Developing and using key messages consistently across all channels is a key pillar of a strategic approach to communication. Messaging allows institutions to build a compelling narrative as a single thread that brings together different actions and events and serves the strategy's objectives. Consistency of messaging, especially for public offices, is important to maintain trust and avoid that one day's message conflicts with previous statements that can undermine the credibility of the institution. Good messaging also anticipates and rebuts arguments that can be raised against it, thus mitigating reputational risks. Most importantly, messaging as a competency relies on the ability to use language, imagery, or creative slogans that are compelling.

Audience insights allow public communicators to gain a better understanding of the profiles of people they seek to reach and how they consume information. This in turn helps them develop messaging that is likelier to resonate and identify the ideal communication channels to reach such target audiences. Especially in the case of governments, communication often needs to be addressed to a wide variety of stakeholder groups, which makes a one-size-fits-all approach less viable.

Audience insights can be more or less sophisticated, depending on whether they are based on segmentation by known demographic traits, on data analytics from online platforms, or on precise research through focus groups or behavioural insights (BI) gathered around the specific topics of interest. Nevertheless, this understanding forms the evidence upon which strategies, messages and communication tactics are formulated to be effective.

The baseline understanding from such an exercise can also serve as the benchmark for evaluating the impact of activities against the strategy's objectives. Related tools vary in their level of sophistication, but it is important at least that a set of performance metrics are specified. Finally, monitoring public discourse across media and digital channels, alongside other insights and evaluation data, offers a highly valuable means of "listening" to stakeholders. This exercise turns communicators into primary interlocutors with citizens, a role that if adequately acknowledged and integrated within decision making can support better policy making.

Beyond the adoption of this strategic approach and of the practices that underpin it, communicators rely on a broad range of tactics to aid them in delivering their messages through engaging content tailored for different channels. Digital and online channels, media relations, events, and campaigns, when deployed strategically, serve to stimulate interaction and debate, expand the reach of key messages and achieve the desired change in perception or behaviour. Other specific competencies additionally apply to areas such as internal or crisis communication that are important components of this function.

Ultimately, applying these competencies requires teams of trained professionals that can perform these time-intensive tasks and make the most of the available tools. Human resources, however, is a recurring challenge for public communication units across OECD countries, as highlighted in the OECD's 2020 survey *Understanding Public Communication* (and the upcoming OECD Report *Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward*). As this chapter will discuss, investing in upskilling officials in charge of this key function (including both political appointees and public officials who are likely to maintain longer-term appointments) can improve the quality of their work, and help prioritise activities and optimise resources vis-à-vis objectives.

Overview of the use of communication competencies in Lebanese public institutions

The governance structures for communication discussed in Chapter 2 have made the development and application of sophisticated competencies across Lebanese government ministries challenging. Nonetheless, examples of good practices in several areas are visible, especially among those institutions where clear structures and availability of resources. Notably, as discussed below, these examples are often correlated with donor support.

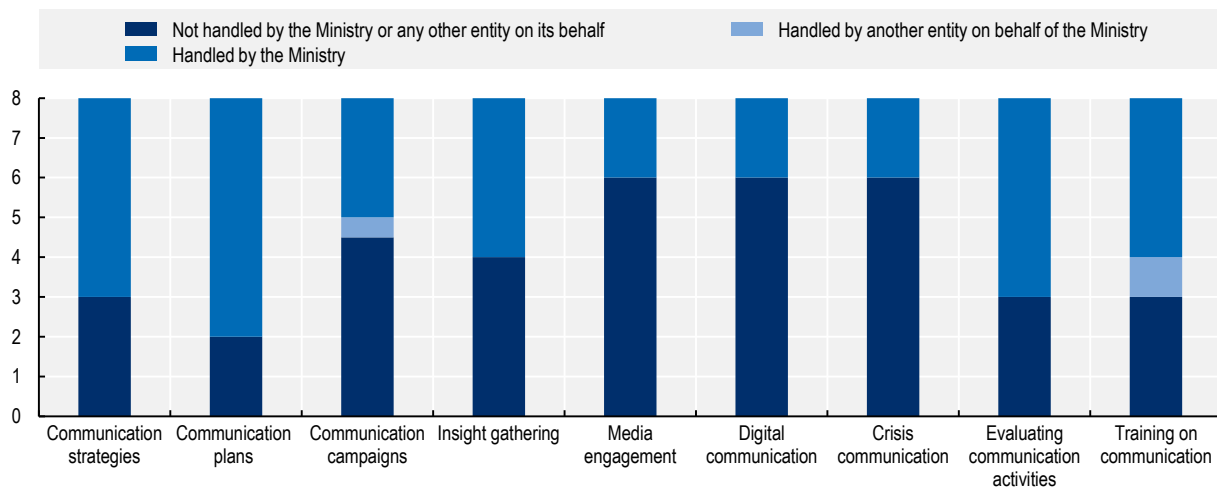
Respondents to the OECD survey remarked that the recent turbulent period, marked by demonstrations and crises, highlighted the importance of this function across all areas of policy. However, this recognition is not yet matched at the highest levels, nor with the necessary resources.

Strategy, audience insights and evaluation

The prevalently tactical nature of public communication in Lebanon is evident in the relative lack of strategies and the sporadic use of data and evidence on audiences, channels and evaluation. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, only three ministries out of the eight participating in the OECD Survey reported developing such documents, and only two reported developing plans. These examples demonstrate however that despite limited resources or a high-level mandate, institutions can still establish a long-term vision of their activities and what they aim to achieve through it. However, from further discussions with respondents, it emerged that those who noted having strategies in place struggled to design and implement them properly. Overall, it appears that Lebanese ministries apply various competencies but do not do so in line with a particular strategy. Rather, they mainly conduct activities ad hoc with short-term horizons.

Figure 3.1. Application of communication competencies across Lebanese institutions

“Which of these functions/areas, if any, are handled by the institution and which ones, if any, are managed/executed by another entity on behalf of the institution?”



Note: One respondent indicated that communication campaigns are handled both by their ministry and by another entity. This response has been split in the count above to keep it consistent with the eight surveys received.

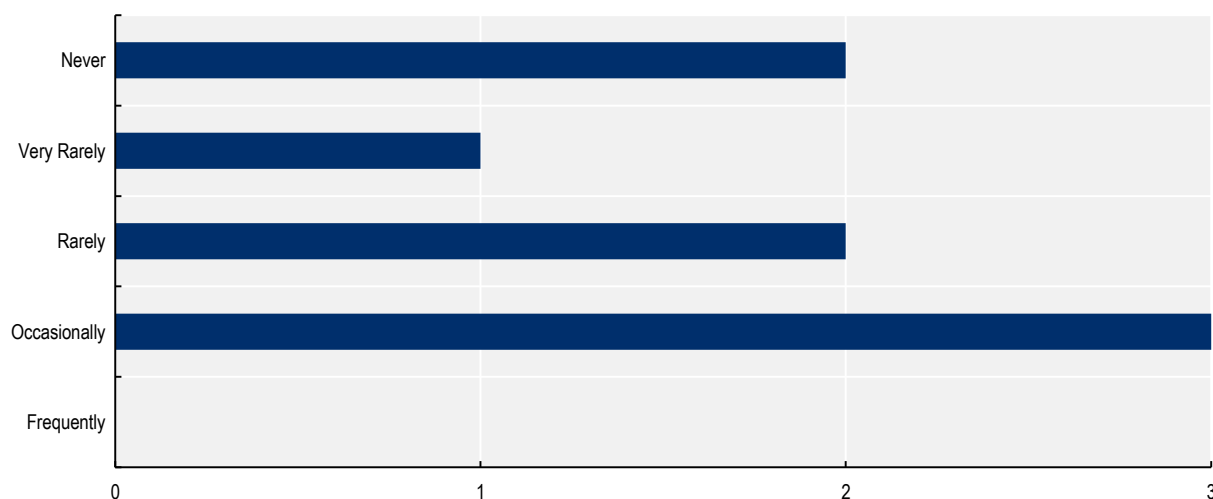
Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

Although it did not report having a strategy, the PCM highlighted in its survey response a number of objectives that guide its communications, namely: to promote transparency; to better understand and analyse public opinion; to strengthen trust in government; to improve the implementation of reforms; to manage crisis or emergency situations. These objectives point to a welcome understanding of communication as a policy tool and a means to get closer to citizens. Formalising them in writing would be a desirable first step.

Similarly, other ministries noted a range of more traditional types of objectives for their activities, such as raising awareness of institution policies and services, as well as some more ambitious ones, such as building trust through transparency and influencing behaviour to align with policy goals. However, an overall analysis of their survey responses suggests that efforts to pursue them so far lack consistency and continuity and that the evidence to understand how to pursue such objectives and measure progress is gathered infrequently.

Figure 3.2. Use of audience insights

“How often, if at all, are audience insights used when conducting communication initiatives?”



Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

Although half of the surveyed ministries noted insights gathering as a responsibility handled internally (Figure 3.1), Figure 3.2 suggests that a couple of those who answered negatively still do employ audience insights on occasion. No respondent, however, claimed to do so frequently or very frequently. Two ministries noted drawing on audience insights to select which communication channels to use. Similarly, two ministries reported using insights to target specific groups, noting women, youth, and people with special needs or disabilities as targets. For instance, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has integrated sign language in video animations developed as part of campaigns and produced tailored content for female audiences around maternal health and breast cancer topics. Similarly, Box 3.1 illustrates in more detail a good use of insights for inclusive and effective campaigns by the UK’s Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Moreover, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MoPH used insights and analytics tools to keep track of audience interactions through different social media platforms, and to better direct the paid content provided by Google and Facebook, as revealed in responses to the OECD survey and validation discussions. Building on these existing fruitful practices, Lebanese institutions can look to systematise audience insights in the short term thanks to rapid and freely available analytics from web and social media platforms, which are the second most popular category of communication channels among respondents (Figure 3.4).

Box 3.1. UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Use of messaging, channels, audience insights and evaluation in a campaign

The UK's DCMS was charged with organising a communication campaign around the centenary of the First World War. One of its primary objectives was to ensure that young people heard the campaign's messages to help build a lasting legacy of commemoration among them.

Insights into this audience group became a key step for developing the campaign. By analysing its target audience, the communications team saw the need to ensure a strong emotional connection to communication activities. When planning around particular milestones, the team, therefore, worked to develop integrated communication activities that were specifically designed to engage younger audiences and minorities.

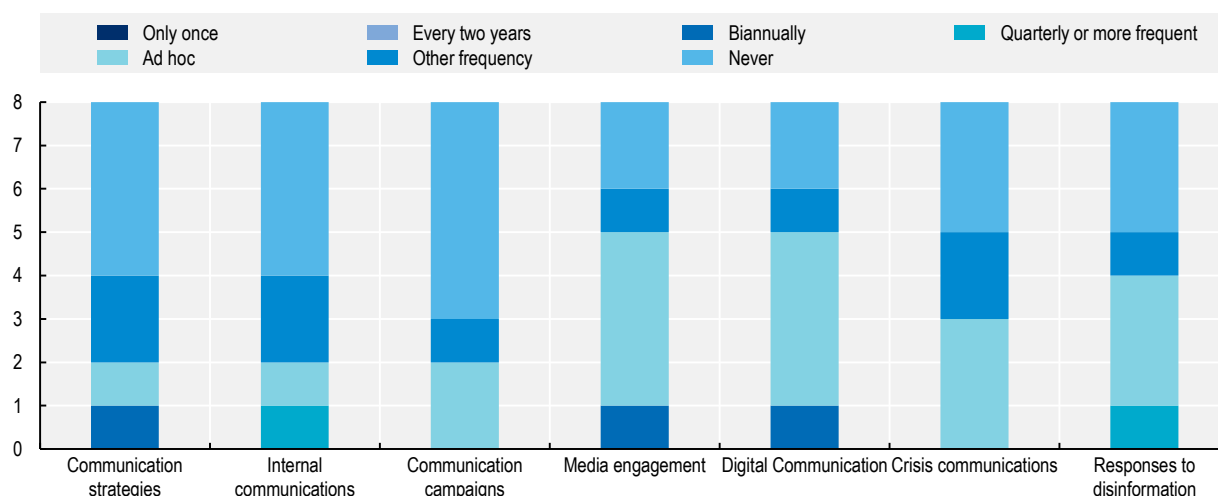
By developing a campaign strategy based on insight into the target audiences' interests and behaviour, the DCMS was able to deliver an impactful programme of activities and reach a greater proportion of the population. Carrying out the research and analysis ahead of time meant that the communications team was able to develop strong and resonant collaterals, which could then be rolled out in line with the strategy tied to key dates. Moreover, by incorporating a strong element of monitoring and evaluation into the campaign to track engagement, the DCMS team was able to collect further information and insight which could then be used to feed into future campaigns.

Source: UK Government Communication Service (2020^[11]), *Modern Media Operation: A Guide*, <https://3x7ip91ron4ju9ehf2unqrm1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Modern-Media-Operation-guide.pdf>.

Online analytics can similarly provide solutions for simple evaluations of communication activities, especially those conducted through digital channels. Indeed, assessing impact and learning from past activities remains infrequent except for a few ministries (Figure 3.3). Conducting evaluations more rigorously and frequently can be a means for greater buy-in from the leadership levels of institutions. Demonstrating the impact of communication can support the argument for a greater focus on reforming this function and attributing it needed resources. Evaluations can likewise be a means of measuring the contribution of this important function to open government objectives for example. Introducing metrics and targets that align with indicators of transparency and participation, which could be as simple as measuring the reach of previously undisclosed information or tracking levels of two-way interactions with citizens, can shift communication closer to these overarching objectives.

Figure 3.3. Frequency of evaluation of communication activities

“How often, if at all, is the impact of the following institution communication functions evaluated?”



Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

Digital communication, campaigns and relations with the media

Overall, Lebanese communicators appear to apply the full spectrum of competencies that can enrich their activities and make them more impactful. However, they tend to do so ad hoc and unevenly, with gaps across the administration.

Digital communication

Digital communication is a priority area of competency for Lebanese public communicators to master. Like many sectors, communication has been disrupted by rapid technological change of the last decade that has revolutionised how people consume and share information. Social media has become a primary source of information for a third of the Lebanese population, with 90% on WhatsApp and 81% on Facebook (Wee and Li, 2019^[2]). Other networks are still wide-reaching, but more established among younger audiences: 40% of Lebanese actively use Instagram, followed by 35% for YouTube, and 24% for Twitter. (Wee and Li, 2019^[2]).

More significantly, digital platforms offer unparalleled opportunities to have a direct channel of interaction with individual citizens, where up until recently public institutions had depended on media organisations to relay their messages to the general public. Social media in particular allows for direct two-way exchanges, as well as providing rapid and accessible data about what different people care and talk about. These features make it a crucial, yet challenging tool to optimise. For instance, the use of such platforms was particularly central for disseminating key health guidance for citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic, as showcased by examples of innovative and creative responses from multiple OECD countries in Box 3.2.

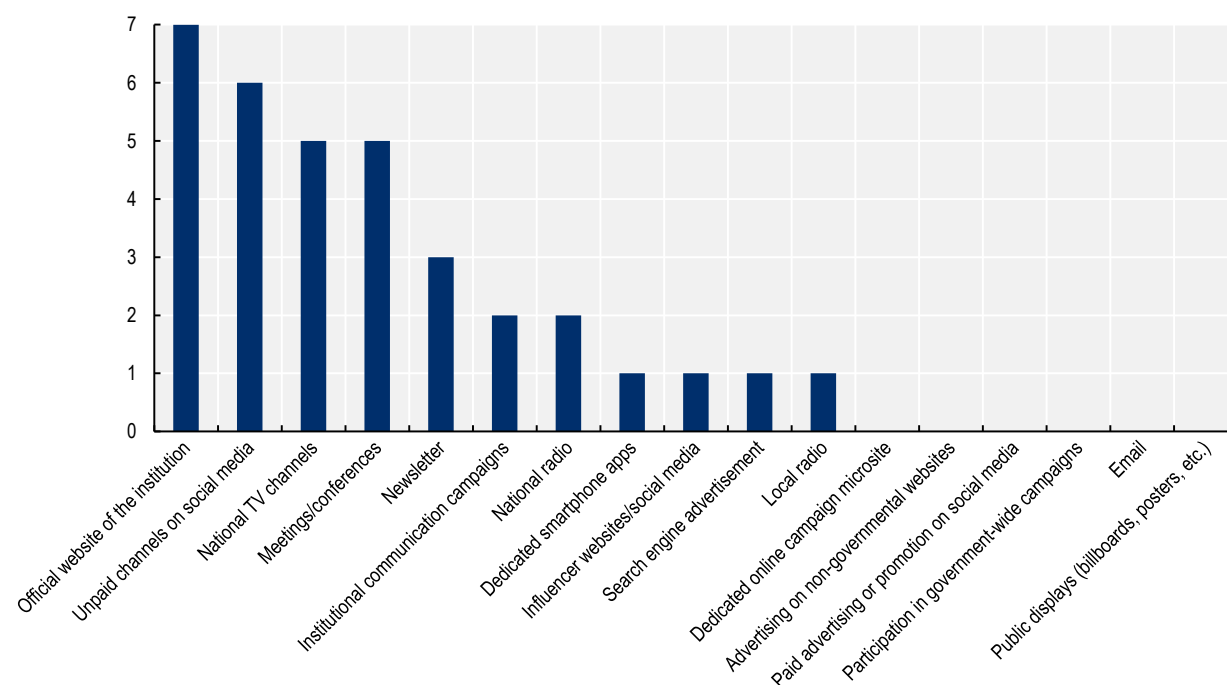
Box 3.2. Use of digital channels in a selection of OECD countries during the COVID-19 pandemic

- In light of the COVID-19 crisis, digital channels have served as a key dissemination tool for innovative and interactive campaigns.
- For instance, a common strategy employed by several governments has been the use WhatsApp in new ways. Singapore provided daily COVID-19 updates through this platform, while France, the United Kingdom and Australia created chatbots as a way to directly interact with citizens and answer their questions. These types of digital communication allow for rapid dissemination of crucial information and data through two-way exchanges.
- On another hand, several digital campaigns were launched to target specific audiences. The Government of Mexico targeted youth through a social media-based cartoon superhero, *Susana Distancia* (meaning “keep your distance”). This initiative proved useful in increasing the understanding and adherence of social distancing measures in younger crowds, through an amusing and interactive campaign.
- In a similar way, the New Zealand Police undertook a series of digital efforts to communicate important instructions and engage with citizens in a creative way. Through the “Creative Genius” campaign, they published regular humorous, informative videos on YouTube, and in turn, invited citizens to submit their own creative videos related to the crisis.

Source: OECD et al. (2020^[3]), *Embracing Innovation in Government: Global trends 2020*, Innovative Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis, OECD/OPSI/Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation/World Government Summit <https://trends.oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/OECD-Innovative-Responses-to-Covid-19.pdf>.

Figure 3.4. Use of communication channels by Lebanese institutions

“What are the top five mechanisms used by your institution to share/disseminate information with the general public?”



Note: Responses do not include the PCM.

Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

To this end, an analysis of the surveys and discussions with officials indicated that Lebanese institutions rely greatly on their websites to publish content and information. OMSAR, for instance, stands out for the modernisation of its website that serves as a hub for information on all of its work, its proactive disclosures under ATI Law, and manuals and guides for the public sector on a wide range of administrative processes. However, there is less indication of how they work to attract people to their pages. Websites, on their own, are not always effective vehicles to communicate because they rely passively on users visiting them. Prioritising the delivery of information where audiences are likely to check and engage with it is essential.

This type of communication can similarly be integrated with and support the shift towards digital services envisioned in the Government’s Digital Transformation Strategy, which also includes improvements to institutions’ web portals. Websites also provide a primary interface for citizens to interact with government information and especially for accessing digital services. As such, refining web portals would efficiently contribute to helping achieve broader digitalisation objectives under the *OECD Digital Government Review of Lebanon* (2020).

Social media channels are common across Lebanese ministries that took part in the OECD survey, all of whom noted having a Facebook and Twitter handle, with a minority (3) also having official YouTube and WhatsApp accounts and one more having an Instagram handle. The choice of these channels is consistent with the prevalence of Facebook as the country’s primary platform, with Twitter being prominent among a smaller but specialised group of stakeholders across the civil society, media, academia, business, and international development sectors. Indeed, all respondents noted overall channel reach as a main criteria for the adoption.

Despite their widespread presence, communicators lamented that social media are insufficiently utilised as channels. In particular, one respondent to the OECD survey noted that engagement on their official handles was low, and recognised digital skills as a barrier for a better application of this competency area. Indeed, low rates of public engagement with official digital channels are often the result of a traditional “one-way” dissemination approach in the use of these platforms rather than one focused on interaction and informed by evidence.

A few good practices exist including that of the Ministry of Public Health in particular which has been conducting sophisticated digital communication, including high volumes of information being provided to citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic via its social media channels and featuring visually engaging content. On this occasion, as mentioned in the OECD survey and by the network of public communicators, the Ministry has also employed paid advertising on digital platforms, thanks to in-kind gifts from the social media companies themselves. Building on this, they further launched the COVID-19 Symptom Checker Chatbot to encourage citizens to conduct self-assessments, and guide them on appropriate steps to take.

Overall, a majority of the eight responding ministries have noted lacking any guidelines for social media, whereas three of them have at least one type (for social media or sponsored content). Such documents can set a baseline for standards and for the ways that official handles can or cannot be used. They can also serve as guiding officials on how to manage content, respond and interact with users on these platforms, in conformity with official requisites (for instance on hate speech, counter-disinformation efforts, or in respect of privacy policies). Moreover, they can provide other criteria to separate political and public communication, enhance the strategic use of digital tools and orient it towards inclusiveness, participation, and policy support.¹ In Italy, an interactive set of guidelines has been developed specifically to support communications around the uptake of digital government services (Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. *Comunica Italia*'s social media and branding guidelines for the promotion of digital public services online

The Italian agency for digital government, *Agenzia per l'Italia Digitale*, has set up a website dedicated to “communicating how to communicate” for officials who are launching or promoting digital services in their ministries or agencies. The site offers specific guidelines accompanied by examples and detailed guidance on how and why to develop communication strategies to support the uptake of a given service.

Guidelines encompass three main categories: marketing, communication, and storytelling. Each section includes an index with detailed sections for all steps of developing and implementing strategies online, including short boxes of what users “must”, “could”, and “should” do for each step.

The website also links to downloadable materials, including branded templates, and its online format makes it easy to navigate and use than a static document. The user-friendliness is important to their uptake by communicators government-wide: their purpose is to ensure consistency in how public services are presented and in the quality of their promotion and communication to citizens.

Source: *Comunica Italia* (2020⁽⁴⁾), “Linee Guida”, <https://comunica.italia.it/linee-guida#block-six8theme-page-title>.

Media engagement

While communicating via digital channels can allow Lebanese institutions to have direct interaction with a vast range of audience groups who follow their accounts or access their websites, doing so via the media can help reach vast and different audiences. Indeed, the more diverse the media that public communicators engage with, the wider the reach of its communication in terms of demographic groups.

Media engagement is a more established and traditional competency, since prior to the rise of online channels it was the dominant means of reaching the public. In Lebanon, media relation is well established and the figure of the media advisor and press officer is a common one especially for the political domain of communication. However, responses to the OECD survey suggest a degree of irregularity with which this competency is applied. For instance, a majority of ministries reported preparing media handling plans only ad hoc when preparing to announce a new policy or initiative. Figure 3.5 illustrates the frequency with which responding institutions issue press releases and hold press conferences. While more than half of respondents disseminate press releases at least once a week, a majority conduct press conferences ad hoc or even more rarely.

In many OECD countries, press briefings with government officials open to all journalists (often with simple accreditation procedures) have become a common feature. In Slovenia, regular sessions are held to interact with the media and keep the public informed (Box 3.4). These events allow journalists the opportunity to ask direct questions to officials and get more in-depth substance about their work and policies. In Lebanon, only half of respondents to the survey noted that participation in press conference was open to all journalists. Moreover, insights from OECD interviews with government and external stakeholders suggest that certain media can enjoy privileged access to officials and information in line with the editorial line or political affinity of the publication. One respondent noted in particular that the institution can urge journalists to highlight desired topics and angles. While this is still a reality in much of the world, it can have detrimental effects on trust in media and government, and undermine the role of the media as agents of government accountability.

Box 3.4. Slovenia's structured media relations approach

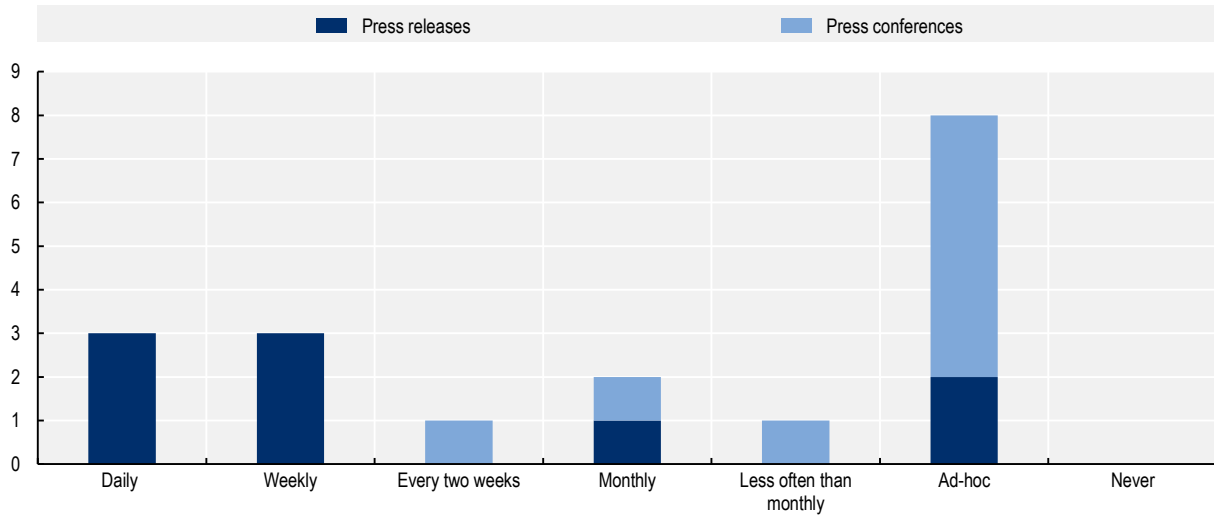
The Government Communication Office (GCO) in Slovenia uses established tools for its media relations, including regular press briefings, releases, and official statements. These are conducted according to a structured schedule that creates a regular news cycle, which allows the media to plan their coverage and questions, and to rely on timely information and access to official sources or spokespeople.

Cabinet sessions are held on a weekly basis, after which press briefings take place where key decisions are announced by ministers and their spokespeople. Key messages and briefing materials are prepared and distributed by the GCO in advance of these press briefings, and a “media room” on the premises allows journalists to work onsite and hold interviews with officials.

Source: Briefing to the OECD from the former Director of Communication of the Government of Slovenia (2020).

Figure 3.5. Frequency of engagement with the press

“How often did the institution issue press releases and organise press conferences?”



Source: OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

Lebanese institutions can take more creative and inclusive approaches to engage media in support of policy and open government objectives. This can for instance include working on features and special content for broadcast programmes and magazines that go beyond the traditional news cycle to make them accessible and relatable to particular audiences, as per the UK’s Department of Education Campaign on Gender Pay Gap (Box 3.5).

Box 3.5. The UK’s Department of Education Campaign on Gender Pay Gap

To shape the narrative on the gender pay gap in the public discourse, the UK’s Department for Education (DfE) pursued a creative approach around a high-visibility moment, provided by “Equal Pay Day”. Using this date as a news hook to engage the media, the DfE provided a range of consumer media titles and magazines with press kits that included explainer graphics, factsheets and “myth-busters”. These helped ensure that reporting on the gender pay gap addressed common misconceptions on the issue. Quotes from official spokespeople were provided in a format that could be presented in a Q&A-style interview.

The campaign achieved significant success in delivering coverage across a range of popular media outlets, including in lifestyle publications that helped reach young, professional women, a critical audience for its gender pay gap messages. By preparing content that was specifically designed to appeal to such publications, the media team helped ensure that key messaging would be carried in coverage.

Source: UK Government Communication Service (2020^[11]), *Modern Media Operation: A Guide*, <https://3x7ip91ron4ju9ehf2unqrm1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Modern-Media-Operation-guide.pdf>.

Communication campaigns

Campaigns are one of the most important tools that public institutions deploy to bring focused attention to a given issue. In OECD countries, campaigns are used in a range of ways, and are increasingly leveraged to support policy goals by growing awareness or nudging desired behaviours, based on insights from behavioural science. Effective campaigns can be resource-intensive and require substantial dedicated planning and execution, but even smaller-scale campaigns can give a useful boost to a policy goal.

In Lebanon, there are considerable disparities between ministries when it comes to communication campaigns. Half of the survey respondents, for instance, claimed that their institution does not conduct them. The other half includes one of the most active ministries across various dimensions of public communication – the Ministry of Public Health, which reported conducting over 50 campaigns in the three years preceding the survey. In 2019 for example, campaign topics included World Antibiotic Awareness Week, National Breast Cancer Day, and Mental Health Awareness.² These campaigns aim to bring visibility and reduce stigma for specific health conditions, and to encourage screening and prevention among target groups. In a recent example of this approach, an anti-stigma campaign was conducted in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (Box 3.6).

Box 3.6. The COVID-19 anti-stigma campaign in Lebanon

In June 2020, the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, in collaboration with Abaad and several international stakeholders, launched an anti-stigma campaign under the slogan “#TheRealTest”. Its main goal was to break social stigma and discriminatory behaviours that emerged from the COVID-19 virus, such as labelling, stereotyping, and discriminating against anyone perceived to have been exposed to the virus, particularly women and young girls.

Collaborating with several national TV outlets, the MoPH kicked off its campaign on synchronised prime-time news segments, in which anchors broadcasted the campaign video and echoed its message. The campaign also included an important digital component, whereby influencers and opinion leaders amplified key messages via their social media platforms.

Beyond countering the stigma and spreading a positive message, the Ministry further encouraged a two-way dialogue with citizens by providing a platform to share and showcase local stories of hope and solidarity.

Source: #TheRealTest, Launching Lebanon’s Anti-Stigma Campaign, OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/therealtest-launching-lebanon-s-anti-stigma-campaign>.

There are several additional examples of campaigns that indicate scope for rapid gains in this competency area. For instance, in 2019 then-Prime Minister Saad Hariri lent his voice to one of the priority policies of his cabinet to support local industry, launching a nation-wide campaign that put the spotlight on local businesses (Xinhua, 2019^[5]). Similarly, with support from UNDP, the Ministry of Finance has been conducting campaigns to encourage citizens to fill out their tax forms and remind them of the deadlines. Likewise, the Institute of Finance runs annual campaigns to explain and simplify the Government’s fiscal budgets to the general public, as discussed as part of the OECD peer review mission.

Like other aspects of communication in Lebanon, donors have a considerable role in sponsoring or driving campaigns directly or through in-kind support for ministries. This is also the case for the Ministry of Public Health, particularly since its response highlighted, like other ministries, that no dedicated budget had been made available for this function. In practice, some ministries’ role in communications campaigns can be limited to approving activities designed and implemented primarily by third-party actors, according to stakeholder accounts during interviews.

In the near term, external support for these activities will remain necessary, but Lebanese institutions can develop a greater role in defining the communication strategy and scope of these efforts and assume greater responsibility in delivering campaigns through their own staff. This can especially be the case of low-cost, smaller-scale types of campaigns.

Internal communication and communication during crises

The competencies discussed in the above sections are applicable across a wide variety of contexts and scenarios. Two contexts in particular, however, present distinct features that have led them to evolve into distinct specialised disciplines of the communication function – internal and crisis communication. Both areas are grounded in the same structural and competency frameworks but present unique characteristics that require dedicated approaches.

Internal communication

Communicating with external stakeholders and citizens is an essential element of delivering policies, information, and listening to public opinions and perceptions. Often, however, a government's own staff are key ambassadors to carry these messages and deliver them across the full reach of the public sector. This is a central objective of internal communication, which can make public institutions more cohesive and effective.

Internal communication can support dialogue, information sharing, and change management within and across institutions. It deploys standard communication competencies, but tailored to an internal audience whose identity and common features can be known with greater precision than citizens at large, and for whom channels of communication are more direct.

Open Government reforms are one particular area where it is important to foster a cultural shift towards openness and inclusion and promote the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation at all levels – an objective that this communication competency area is well placed to support. First, internal communications can be used to facilitate change management to ensure that public officials are aware of the open government agenda and understand how it will affect their work. Second, internal communication can serve as a means to share knowledge and disseminate good practices across government. In turn, it would also allow officials to become effective spokespeople for the open government agenda within their departments and across government agencies. Finally, internal communications on open government reforms can serve strategic goals, including identifying synergies between public communication officers and access to information officers, co-ordinating communication activities horizontally and vertically across the government, and combating the challenges posed by disinformation (including “fake news”).

According to OECD surveys and interviews, internal communication is not a common practice across Lebanese government institutions. Rather, internal information is provided in seemingly traditional and primarily paper-based ways. The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest and unequivocal example of the need for internal communication: at a time when government work is shifting online, public sector staff needs to be equipped with the information to keep public offices and services running and manage organisational change. Beyond these urgent challenges, internal communication is also key to support cohesion and the ability of the government to speak with one voice.

Within the context of a shift towards remote and smart working solutions in the public sector, ministries could envision establishing basic channels, such as intranet and newsletters, to share key information and encourage desired actions from civil servants that support policy implementation and service delivery for a more effective public sector (Box 3.7).

Box 3.7. Internal communication approaches in Paraguay and Norway

Paraguay's Ministry of Technology of Information and Communication (MITIC) conducts and co-ordinates internal communication to ensure key information is shared and available with all ministries and civil servants and that they can then amplify messages and support given objectives. MITIC does so through the use of multiple channels, including internal newsletters, emails, WhatsApp groups and also physical posters on premises. Moreover, the MITIC publishes weekly newsletters on its website. These group and present all relevant news and activities, recent publications, or policies established.

In a similar way, the Norwegian National Security Authority (NSM) launched an internal communication campaign, the National Security Month, in October 2019. The campaign was conducted via intranet and consisted of a series of short podcasts with security experts. The goal of the internal campaign was to raise awareness, guide and inform ministry employees across all institutions on relevant IT news, information security and security strategies.

Source: Information provided to the OECD by the MITIC and the NSM as part of their responses to the OECD (2020), Understanding Public Communication Survey.

Towards the professionalisation of public communication in Lebanon

Improving how core communication competencies are applied to bring about a more engaging dialogue with citizens rests in good part with building qualified and professional teams. As previously discussed, there is an overarching need to expand the often thinly-staffed communication function across government with additional, professionally-trained communicators. This requires first of all mitigating the volatile nature of the public or political communications positions and establishing mechanisms to preserve institutional memory, such as defining protocols and guidelines that facilitate continuity despite the high staff turnover. Secondly, especially in the context of the public sector hiring freeze, it requires an investment in capacity-building to developing essential skills.

There are considerable gaps in the training background of communication teams across Lebanese ministries. For instance, none of the five ministries who reported having a unit or dedicated staff claimed that they had communication training. Several respondents recognised the need for officers to be trained on working with data and digital tools specifically to be able to communicate effectively where public debates are taking place.

As noted previously in this study, donor organisations are providing important support to several of the communication initiatives being implemented with or by Lebanese government institutions. As an important asset in this space, the Government could consider taking a proactive approach to shaping the collaborations conducted with donors in the context of communication to align with objectives for the professionalisation of its teams. Going an extra step, the government could consider developing a set of professionalisation targets and criteria that donors could contribute towards, rather than pursuing initiatives in a disconnected and piecemeal way. The network of public communicators, or the inter-ministerial committee that has been proposed, could be an ideal forum for steering this process.

Another element that can contribute to this end goal is to conduct capacity-building on key competency areas and dedicated training on tools and platforms that can make the work of communicators more efficient and evidence-based. In order to preserve the institutional knowledge and harmonise the skills across institutions, the Government of Lebanon, in collaboration with international support and expertise, could envision introducing a combination of long-lasting digital training materials (increasingly common in the form of MOOCs, or Massive Open Online Courses) and more traditional in-person formative

workshops. Canada's School of Public Service showcases a good practice of these training materials (Box 3.8). While the latter type of capacity-building can be more effective in consolidating skills and practices, the former can help ensure a baseline of competencies over time and at a lower cost. This is an aspect that OMSAR could assist in addressing, having developed an e-learning portal for government employees and that covers a vast range of training courses, including recent modules related to COVID-19.

Box 3.8. Canada's School of Public Service

Canada's School of Public Service (CSPS) is the main educational institution leading the government's enterprise-wide approach to learning. The CSPS offers a wide range of courses, programmes, series and learning tools available to civil servants. The School's curriculum is meant to support and equip these public servants with the necessary training and skills needed as they go through key career transitions.

While many courses are held in conventional classrooms or through on-site workshops, the School also offers a considerable variety of topics online. These digital courses are interactive, self-paced and allow for flexible and long-lasting learning. The CSPC also hosts seminars, forums and other learning events that allow civil servants to interact and engage in dialogue on relevant issues facing the public service.

Relevant topics include capacity-building and training in communication skills, information management, team development, digital communication, policy and regulation, and many more.

Source: Canada School of Public Service; <https://www.cspc-efpc.gc.ca/index-eng.aspx>.

Recommendations

Based on the observations in this chapter, the following recommendations capture a series of medium- and long-term steps to further professionalise public communication in Lebanon and integrate more effective use of key competencies to serve strategic objectives linked to policy and open government reforms.

- In a co-ordinated way, the inter-ministerial committee or network on public communication that will be formed can lead the development of a set of objectives for strengthening relevant capabilities across all Lebanese institutions. Besides setting internal goals, this document could also be provided as a framework for all donor projects relating to this function, with the aim to combine activities with longer-term capacity-building aims.
- A two-pronged approach to capacity-building would help establish some baseline skills and ensure a degree of continuity in the application of communication competencies. This process can be eventually led by the inter-ministerial committee, and when formed, taken over by the central co-ordinating authority for this function proposed in Chapter 2.
 - Firstly, specialised trainings for dedicated political appointees and civil servants can for example prioritise digital communication skills and the use of data and analytical tools for audience insights and evaluation as highlighted by survey responses. Ideally, a programme of trainings can be envisioned, perhaps in collaboration with donor organisations, to cover all competency areas.
 - Secondly, basic trainings on other competencies can be conducted by communication professionals within the government (and/or in collaboration with donors) to establish baseline skills across relevant government functions, such as Information Officers appointed to comply with ATI disclosures and requests and IT and website management staff, to ensure they can perform essential communications for their institutions if dedicated personnel is not in place. This would also support broader efforts for transparency and openness across other functions and achieve a wider understanding of the value of communicating.
- In line with a shift towards a more strategic approach to public communication, Lebanese ministries could focus in the short term on elaborating a written strategy to guide their activities. Effective strategies need not be over-ambitious, but rather align with the scope and capacity of each institution. Importantly, they can be centred around priority policy goals for the Ministry, optimise the use of resources, and guide teams to plan ahead for key moments. They can also include a series of low-cost or no-cost activities.
- The adoption of strategies would be rendered more effective by basing its development on insights on audiences that can help make objectives more precise and can help benchmark ahead of evaluations. To this end, in the first instance, Lebanese institutions could systematise the collection of audience insights based on available social media and website analytics and monitoring of public attitudes online. Over the long term, they can look to complement them with more in-depth types of insights gathered from surveys, focus groups, and other methods. A central unit could take the lead on such efforts and co-ordinate across the government.
- In parallel, it is important that communications are evaluated against a set of pre-defined metrics, which should be systematised as part of any strategy development. For example, metrics can evaluate the reach of content and engagement through audience interactions. At a more advanced stage, activities can be evaluated against the policy objectives they aim to serve, for instance, the use of a given public service or compliance with a particular directive.

More specifically, metrics relating to transparency and to participation can be included in any upcoming Open Government Plan to ensure that communication serves related objectives.

- Dedicated guidelines can address a number of areas where public officials need guidance and can help consolidate good practices for various competency areas. The network of public communicators (or, when it is formed, the inter-ministerial committee) could therefore lead the development of government-wide guidelines covering the following areas as examples:
 - Digital communication (including guidance on responding and engaging with individual users on official social media channels; making content more engaging; targeting specific societal groups via paid and unpaid content to achieve more inclusiveness; separating political from public communication; aligning with branding guidelines; etc.)
 - Media relations (including guidance on preparing press materials, press conferences, conducting media interviews and performing the role of spokesperson; advice on following and reacting to the news cycle and editorial deadlines; templates for press kits for key events and media moments, including print and broadcast content; advice on collaborating with media on features and creative content; etc.)
 - Campaigns (including planning and implementing each phase of a campaign, evaluating it against stated objectives, etc.)
 - Internal communication (including guidance on developing staff newsletters and dedicated platforms such as intranet portals; inter-ministerial co-ordination mechanisms; etc.)
- Additionally, guidelines can serve to harmonise practices and processes across the various ministries and agencies. They could address structural aspects of communication, such as hierarchy of decision making and approval protocols, and define the responsibilities of public communicators vis-à-vis politically appointed advisors to keep the functions distinct.
- Reforms tied to the 2018 draft Digital Transformation Strategy should mandate that each public entity creates an institutional profile on at least one channel of communication, such as a webpage or social media profile (determined by the intended use and audience, and by the capacity for effective management to avoid dormant profiles) for citizen-centred information.
- On internal communication, the passing of the ATI Law Implementation Decree in August 2020 offers an opportunity to develop an internal campaign to raise awareness of obligations for each institutions and promote uptake of its provisions among the civil service in an effort to entrench a culture of transparency in the public sector. Such a campaign could be led by OMSAR as head of the technical anti-corruption commission, in co-ordination with the network of public communicators and key government stakeholders.

References

- Comunica Italia (2020), "Linee Guida", <https://comunica.italia.it/linee-guida#block-six8theme-page-title>. [4]
- Mickoleit, A. (2014), "Social Media Use by Governments: A Policy Primer to Discuss Trends, Identify Policy Opportunities and Guide Decision Makers", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 26, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrcmghmk0s-en>. [6]
- OECD et al. (2020), *Embracing Innovation in Government: Global trends 2020*, Innovative Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis, OECD/OPSI/Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation/World Government Summit, <https://trends.oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/OECD-Innovative-Responses-to-Covid-19.pdf>. [3]
- UK Government Communication Service (2020), *Modern Media Operation: A Guide*, <https://3x7ip91ron4ju9ehf2unqrm1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Modern-Media-Operation-guide.pdf>. [1]
- Wee, J. and S. Li (2019), *Politics and Social Media in the Middle East and North Africa: Trends and Trust in Online Information*, Arab Barometer, https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/AB_Media_Report_Final_Public-Opinion-2019-5.pdf. [2]
- Xinhua (2019), *Lebanon's PM launches national campaign to support industry*, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/31/c_138273001.htm (accessed on 3 November 2020). [5]

Notes

¹ Additional guidance on institutional use of social media can be found in Mickoleit, A. (2014^[6]), "Social Media Use by Governments: A Policy Primer to Discuss Trends, Identify Policy Opportunities and Guide Decision Makers", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 26, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxrcmghmk0s-en>.

² These and other campaigns are featured on the website of the Ministry of Public Health: <https://www.moph.gov.lb/en/Pages/11/1393/awareness-campaigns>.

4 Communications and media for a more open government in Lebanon

This chapter will focus on the role of communication and the broader media ecosystem to support the implementation of the open government agenda in Lebanon. It will look at how public entities in charge of these reforms can use communication, and how they can support a more resilient media ecosystem that serves the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation.

How public communication and media ecosystems contribute to the principles of Open Government

Public communication can both be leveraged to make the policy cycle more transparent, accountable and participative, and as a promotion tool to support the introduction of specific open government reforms both internally and externally. For its part, an active and well-functioning media and information ecosystem plays an important enabling role in holding officials accountable and providing essential information for citizen participation in public policy.

In the past, traditional media, whether in print, broadcast, and now increasingly online, has been the primary vehicle via which public institutions could communicate with the public at large. Citizens would learn about government action and the policies that concerned them through the news media, which also captured public debates and sentiments on these topics.

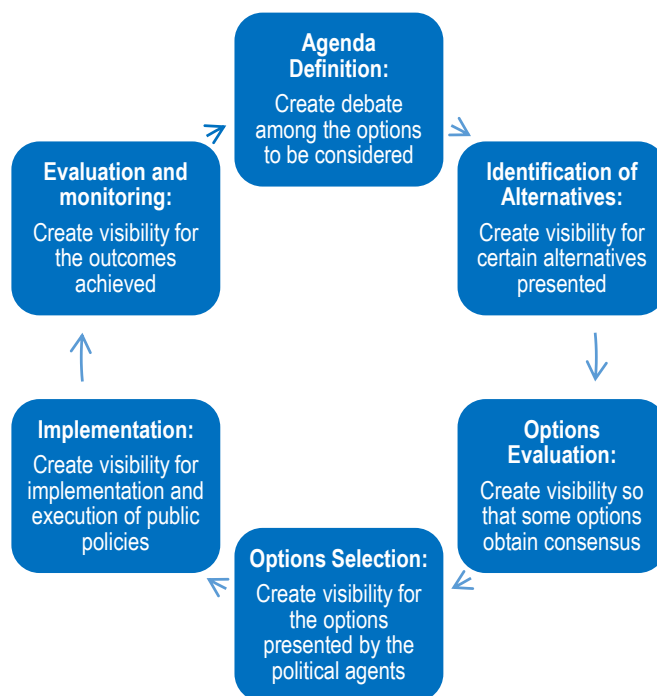
With the rise of digital platforms, public institutions have themselves become key actors in this ecosystem, as direct providers of policy information through their websites and social media handles. These innovations conversely allow citizens to interact directly with the institutions and can lead to the development of a more direct two-way dialogue. These changes have also brought about a complex ecosystem where established sources of policy information, namely traditional media and the government, are complemented by the many voices of individual stakeholders (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020^[1]).

In the public policy process more broadly, media and information ecosystems can function as a privileged arena for debate and critique of public policies, whereby different stakeholders can express their views in a public way. Illustrating this function, Penteado and Fortunato (2015^[2]) have developed a framework through which they seek to illustrate the influence the media can exert on public policy throughout a six-stage cycle (Figure 4.1).

First, media can help to set public policy agenda and bring to bear pressure on public policy agents on issues with greater popular appeal and salience. Subsequent in the cycle, media can help to identify, evaluate, and select policy options, giving space to dispute alternatives via its channels, foster debate in an open and transparent manner, and allow interest groups to indicate their choices within the presented policy options. Finally, media can play a crucial role in implementing policies and monitoring their effects, including providing coverage of the positive and negative impacts of implemented policies and disseminating their findings to a larger audience.

Besides their broader role in the policy-making context, public communication and media ecosystems can specifically support the principles of Open Government, namely transparency, accountability, integrity, and stakeholder participation and contribute to the implementation of the *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government* (OECD, 2017^[3]), as demonstrated below.

Figure 4.1. Media and the Public Policy Cycle



Source: Adapted from Camargo Pentead and Fortunato (2015^[4]), "Mídia e políticas públicas: possíveis campos exploratórios", *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 30/87, p. 129, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17666/3087129-141/2015>.

Transparency

Empirical research and evidence has come to validate the hypothesis that public communication and a strong media ecosystem support improved transparency, including vital information on government policies and performance.¹ A strong media ecosystem, on its own, can improve the quality of information that citizens have access to. However, as discussed above, governments themselves are agents in this ecosystem and can increase transparency about their actions by communicating with them directly and through the media. Public communication, as supported by the proper strategies, plans, policies, co-ordination structures, and resources, can support transparency in a variety of manners.

At a basic level, it can simply be a vehicle for the disclosure of official information, statements from officials, and provide a regular record of government and institutions' actions. When it is carried out through more sophisticated means and in a more comprehensive way, public communication can enhance transparency by not only disseminating information, but by packaging it in formats and with language that resonates better with specific audiences, as discussed in Chapter 3. Additionally, transparency can be increased by using a variety of channels that ensure official information and messages are delivered more effectively to audiences. In this sense, complex and technical policy debates, as could be science or finance-related reforms, can be made more readily accessible to a wider audience, demystified, and presented in an intelligible way that clarifies the implications for citizens.

Public communication can similarly amplify the transparency outcomes of other open government policies. For instance, it can promote the contents of proactive disclosures under ATI laws, and raise awareness of how and what information can be requested through this process. Likewise, institutions can use Open Government Data to support their communication and promote its use by journalists and other stakeholders.

On their part, the media and civil society, can be primary interlocutors with this type of content, and become key consumers of such open government policies by filing ATI requests and analysing Open Data, and in turn, publicising the related information to contribute to and engage in the policy discourse. Throughout the implementation process, the media can help evaluating and sharing the impact of public transparency initiatives—including reporting on rates of responsiveness and rejections of such requests.

Supporting transparency depends not only on the existence of related policies and their communication to external stakeholders. It also depends on a culture of transparency within the public sector and a civil service that is aware and prepared to support the policies and initiatives introduced by the government. In this respect, internal communication is a key tool to instil such a culture across institutions and to ensure officials are well informed about their obligations under ATI or Open Data provisions, and prepared to facilitate the transparent flow of government information.

Accountability

The media has a significant role in supporting principal-agent accountability relationships between public entities and stakeholders. By reducing information asymmetries, the media provides citizens (as principals) with the necessary visibility to reward or sanction public and elected officials (their agents).

Alongside a strong media ecosystem, public communication can reinforce accountability mechanisms, processes, and institutions. By just publicly disseminating records of the government's actions, decisions, and statements to citizens, this function offers a track record for the media and other stakeholders to scrutinise and against which citizens can hold officials accountable. By communicating proactively, institutions can also develop a constructive narrative on accountability that notes, for example, the constraints they operate under and justifies their performance to stakeholders.

Public communication can more specifically support the work of formal and informal accountability institutions. It can for instance raise citizens' awareness about oversight and control agencies common in many OECD countries, such as Ombudsman's offices, Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs), as well as social accountability mechanisms like citizen report cards, social audits, participatory budgeting, etc.

Similarly, the media can play a direct role in maintaining scrutiny by amplifying the work of accountability institutions. This includes following and reporting on the findings of SAIs, legislative oversight committees, and Ombudsman's offices on issues of public importance.

Integrity

Similarly to the relationship with accountability described above, a strong media ecosystem supports public integrity. It has a key role in exposing corruption and reinforcing integrity values. It can amplify the voices of whistleblowers and exert pressure for the introduction of relevant reforms. The media has can also report on the implementation of such measures and give citizens and stakeholders the information to hold those responsible to account as per the above process.

For its part, public communication, in line with the *Recommendation of the Council on Public Integrity* (OECD, 2017^[5]) can help foster a whole-of-society culture of integrity. First, from an internal perspective, it can ensure that core integrity rules, standards, and values are effectively communicated throughout the public sector, including those related to conflicts of interest, whistleblower protections, deontological value statements, and codes of conduct.

Likewise, internal communication informed by behavioural insights can be used to nudge desired attitudes among public officials, including on actions to take when faced with undue influence in policy making, lobbying, policy capture and to manage risks in contexts related to finance or public procurement. The

same values and desired behaviours can be reiterated to external audiences through messaging that extends the same expectations towards the private sector or civil society.

Stakeholder participation

A key role of the media, just as for public communication, is to frame issues in a relevant way for citizens as to increase their interest and engagement with policy issues that concern them. As the common intermediaries between institutions on one hand, and citizens, media and civil society on the other, public communicators are central to the participation of these stakeholders in the policy cycle.

By establishing a two-way dialogue with stakeholders, whether through the new opportunities for interaction awarded by social media or through more traditional face-to-face meetings and events, governments can allow for citizens to voice views and react to content in a way that can inform policy and improve services. The communication function similarly relies on public feedback gathered via opinion polls, sentiment analysis of public channels, and other audience insights. As such, this “listening” activity can translate into a form of participation when it serves to shape responses and inform policy and service design and delivery.

Public communication is equally important when it comes to broadening the reach and appeal of participatory processes conducted as part of open government initiatives and beyond. An effective use of competencies like campaigns can serve to, inter alia: (i) inform the public about the existence of participatory mechanisms and platforms, (ii) mobilise a wider range of stakeholders to partake in consultations, and innovative citizen participation practices; (iii) provide stakeholders with the necessary information to contribute to public decisions; (iv) establish sanctioned fora for the public (e.g. CSO, citizens, private sector) to express their preferences to policy makers; and (v) provide information on how public consultations were recorded and followed-up on. When based on audience insights, communications can also be tailored to reach different and vulnerable segments of the population – including marginalised and under-represented groups – to broaden participation beyond those groups traditionally in possession of access and influence.

As a culture of governance that brings government closer to citizens, open government involves an internal change of culture that actively seeks to create opportunities for participation and involve stakeholders in public action. Internal communication can support this objective, by sensitising officials at all levels to laws and directives about stakeholder consultation and engagement. It can additionally ensure that the proper guidelines, standards, and procedures are disseminated to public officials in conducting these processes and that their results are relayed to the interested parties.

In parallel, the media can facilitate stakeholder participation by serving as a vehicle and barometer for public opinion and by amplifying opportunities for participation. First, it can provide information and publicise existing participation opportunities, as well as invite engagement and debate about other policy processes. In this regard, the media can help to present the public with different options, highlight the merits of each, and provide recommendations.

Similarly, the media can play a watchdog role whereby it can shine a spotlight on government decisions and processes that did not properly follow participation guidelines or allow adequate time for comment. Finally, the media can monitor and evaluate the impact of participatory processes, including reporting on how consultations were eventually incorporated into new laws and policies.

Communicating on open government reforms

Having looked at how public communication and media ecosystems can support individual principles of open government, it is worth highlighting the value they can have in supporting specific policies. First, external outreach can help with sensitisation efforts for citizens and other relevant public stakeholders so that they can better understand why the open government agenda is established and what it will deliver.

Citizens who are more aware of such initiatives, and who understand them better are more likely to participate in such efforts. More broadly, sensitisation efforts and campaigns can be held to encourage a larger cultural change in favour of open government principles.

The second function of external public communication is that it can support knowledge sharing and raise awareness among citizens of the role that they can play in supporting open government initiatives and the opportunities available to engage in public life. To this end, the OECD and OGP have developed a how-to guide on implementing and communicating related reforms (Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. Communicating open government How-to Guide and the example of Morocco

The OECD and OGP published a how-to guide to help steer public officials and communication officers in implementing open government initiatives and strategies within institutions.

The guide recommends steps for developing a communications plan in support of open government principles. These include a thorough pre-assessment, setting clear objectives and responsibilities, monitoring and evaluating progress, identifying audiences and developing key messages.

Communication tools are also elaborated to guide through various aspects of content development and communication channels, ranging from case studies and marketing elements, to press kits and social media content.

The guide emphasises the importance of stakeholder participation for better and more effective communication. Beyond governmental actors and multi-stakeholder committees, external partnerships with civil society organisations or youth associations are strongly encouraged.

As an example, within the framework of the OGP National Action Plan, Morocco's Ministry of Administration Reform and Civil Service (MRAFP) developed a communication plan to raise public awareness about Access To Information. The main elements of their campaign included producing informative content in several languages, and disseminating it via multiple channels as to maximise audience reach. Ultimately, the goal was to popularise the understanding and effective use of ATI both internally to the government and externally, and to ensure responsiveness from public officials to proactive requests for information filed by citizens.

Source: OECD (2020^[6]), *Open Government Scan of Lebanon*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d7cce8c0-en>; Open Government Partnership (2018), Morocco Action Plan 2018-2020; <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/morocco/commitments/MO0001/>.

Communication in support of Lebanon's open government agenda

Over recent years, successive Lebanese governments have taken steps contributing to more transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in public policy, while signalling support for a broader open government agenda. A number of reforms primarily addressing corruption and ATI have been accompanied by initiatives to modernise the administration.

Prior to the tragic blast at the Port of Beirut in August 2020, these efforts had been in part grounded in the pledges made during the « *Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises* »² (CEDRE) of April 2018. These included 11 governance-related measures (such as anti-corruption and digital transformation reforms) as part of a deal to secure foreign funds in loans and grants. Such commitments were reiterated in the subsequent Cabinet's Ministerial Statement of February 2020 in which it pledges to develop a comprehensive package of judicial, administrative, financial and legislative

reforms. It also committed to the swift introduction of new anti-corruption measures (Government of Lebanon, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2020^[7]).

Following the Beirut blast, a new draft proposal was introduced by the French government to renew the commitments of implementing reforms within the CEDRE framework (Al Jazeera, 2020^[8]). These reforms align with the goals of former and current Lebanese Ministers of State for Administrative Development, who have formally expressed interest in working towards Lebanon's adherence to the *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government* and membership of the OGP. A summary of steps in this direction and a detailed roadmap with recommendations are provided in the OECD *Open Government Scan of Lebanon* (OECD, 2020^[6]).

As illustrated above, when conducted strategically, communication is an essential enabler of open government principles, and as such should form an important part of any related agenda. However, evidence from the interviews and surveys conducted for this report suggests that this outlook is often absent. Given the status quo in Lebanon, deploying public communication that reinforce transparency, integrity, accountability and participation will depend on the implementation of some of the recommendations provided in Chapters 2 and 3.

In developing their strategies and campaigns, the Lebanese institutions could keep front of mind how these can serve broader open government goals and reflect this when setting out objectives. For instance, communication is an optimal tool for greater transparency. The government may therefore wish to ensure that the information that is made public is comprehensive, easily accessible, and that it is up to date. Key websites could be updated frequently with relevant information, whereas government meetings and parliamentary sessions could be made more transparent through the use of video streaming and social media. In doing so, the goal of communicators would be to ensure that disclosed information is presented in a user-friendly and compelling way, to maximise its relevance and appeal to the broadest audiences. Finland's Central Government Communication guidelines represent well such practices in promoting transparency (Box 4.2).

Similarly, communication strategies and efforts can be designed to serve a diverse set of audiences and ensure that under-represented and vulnerable groups are included in policy dialogues. For instance, they could include dedicated efforts to reach women and youth on key topics relevant to them.³ This practice has been highlighted by the Ministry of Public Health in its response to the OECD Survey, noting in particular how specific campaigns on health issues affecting women or individuals with special needs and disabilities were designed with those audiences in mind. Similarly, such audience targeting can be conducted with the goal of reaching groups who are less traditionally engaged in public policy by adapting content and messaging to their preferences.

Box 4.2. Finland's central government communication policy

The Finnish Government has introduced policy guidelines that seek to ensure transparency and compliance with stated values in the development and implementation of communication strategies across all ministries.

Notably, these recommend that all government communication be designed to comply with the country's core values of freedom of speech, openness and impartiality. Additionally, all content must use clear, concise and appropriate language so that citizens can easily understand information that is relevant to them.

To this end, the guidelines recommend that the information should be easily accessible and frequently updated through the use of various channels and tools. These include, for instance, streaming press conferences, interactive communications on social media, and engaging content in the form of videos, animations and graphics.

Finally, the guidelines recommend that Finnish officials should strive to be transparent and intelligible in all their work with the public, and senior management, in particular, is expected to lead in reinforcing this culture of transparency and engagement across public administration.

Source: Finnish Government and Prime Minister's Office (n.d.), Central Government Communications Guidelines, <https://vnk.fi/en/central-government-communications-guidelines> (accessed on 29 April 2021).

Communication could similarly be used by Lebanese institutions to directly raise awareness of opportunities to participate and to target specific under-represented groups for engagement. Despite a recently introduced requirement for public consultations on draft legislation, these are still a rarity in Lebanon (OECD, 2020^[6]). However, with the growing focus and commitment to open government reforms, such processes may become more commonplace.⁴ Matching communication activities to the consultation process can ensure greater engagement and visibility, and build a continuous link with stakeholders throughout the policy cycle. It is also important that when citizens are invited to participate in policy making or service design, their contribution is acknowledged and that they are made aware of how their input is used. The OECD report *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions Catching the Deliberative Wave* (2020^[9]) includes some guidance on communicating around deliberative processes that can be applied in various participation contexts to enhance their impact.

Finally, public communication could also function as an opportunity for participation in itself, whereby citizens are able to react and interact with government content on platforms that permit it (see for example Box 4.3). Social media offers a primary channel to do this, as most platforms' features include tools for replying, reacting, polling, that allow for two-way exchanges that can be made more or less formal. In this sense, social media platforms can be used to create virtual "town halls".

Box 4.3. France's online crowdsourcing platform

In France, interaction between citizens and law makers on substantive policy issues is facilitated via a non-partisan online crowdsourcing platform, "Parlement & Citoyens". This has been launched to bring together elected representatives and citizens to jointly work on draft legislation.

Citizens are drawn to the collaborative process through promotion via digital channels. Indeed, areas of potential policy or reforms are publicised on the site, outlining the key dynamics and areas of consideration. The platform then hosts a consultation phase, during which participants can offer input and communicate with parliamentarians on policy proposals. To this end, debates are organised to further enhance the public consultation and engagement phase. The outcomes of these discussions are then communicated to the wider public, as to favour an overall transparent discourse on policy-making processes.

Parlement & Citoyens also offers users the chance to introduce petitions which, if sufficient support is received, are reviewed and discussed by parliamentarians.

Source: Parlement & Citoyens (now called Purpoz), <https://purpoz.com/>.

Lebanon's government could similarly consider developing communication strategies around upcoming reforms such as the National Anti-Corruption Strategy or the ATI Implementation Action Plan to promote a whole-of-society culture of integrity that furthers the objectives of these efforts. In parallel with progress to develop a formal open government agenda and pursue membership of the OGP, Lebanon could consider building in greater integration between the work of the agencies in charge of these activities and that of public communicators.

Policy enablers of strategic public communications

As for other elements of its open government drive, Lebanon's reforms concerning public communication would benefit from being grounded in a robust policy and legal environment that ensures they serve to build a genuine dialogue with citizens and contribute to greater transparency and stakeholder participation. Open, two-way flows of information between citizens and their governments are essential to empower the former and ensure that the latter act in compliance with the expressed wishes of the public.

Freedom of expression is therefore a principal foundation of good communication as it guarantees the right to seek, receive, and impart information through various channels regardless of frontiers. Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution states that the freedom to express one's opinion, freedom of the press, assembly, and association are guaranteed within the limits established by law (Lebanese Government, 1926^[10]). This right was consolidated when Lebanon adhered to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1967^[11]). Despite existing policies, there have been reports indicating recent instances of censorship in the country (Maharat Foundation, 2019^[12]; Amnesty International, 2020^[13]). Such practices undermine efforts for better communication and erode citizen trust.

Freedom of expression goes hand in hand with the right to information as a policy pillar of public communication. The proactive disclosure of government information is therefore an essential policy that can guide the work of communicators. As noted above, in Lebanon, this is granted under Chapter 2 of the ATI Law, which provides for proactive disclosure of laws, decrees, and decisions within 15 days following their adoption. Importantly, the ATI law stipulates that all relevant documents should be accessible by the public through both online channels and designated Information Officers (MEPI et al., n.d.^[14]). While several of Lebanon's ministries and public entities covered by the Law are still working on the

implementation of its provisions, these requirements create opportunities for communicators to eventually integrate relevant disclosures into their work and complement the efforts of Information Officers.

The above legal and policy context can be translated into good practices at a more direct level. Public communicators in Lebanon may benefit from developing practical guidelines that support the application of freedom expression and ATI provisions, for instance. These could set out, among other things, guidance for engaging with and moderating user comments on social media. For example, they could help account administrators distinguish between hate speech or harmful content and take appropriate actions; similarly, they could provide a template for integrating proactive disclosures under the ATI Law into the planning of their activities.

Finally, public communication in support of the open government principles can be sustained by a policy framework that ensures a measure of distinction between institutional and political messages. As noted in Chapter 2, as part of the institutionalisation of this function it will be important to develop policy frameworks that foster and protect apolitical and institution-centred communications.

The role of media ecosystems for transparency, integrity and accountability in Lebanon

As illustrated at the beginning of the present chapter, the media has a primary role in furthering the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability, and stakeholder participation. In this respect, Lebanon has a vast and diverse media sector that benefits from one of the most liberal ecosystems in the region. With a legacy of some ten privately-owned daily newspapers in four languages, and over 1 500 weekly and monthly periodicals, at its peak, Lebanon produced about half of the region's print media (Freedom House, 2011^[15]). The country also has nine television stations and about five major radio stations and a dozen of small ones (European Journalism Centre, 2021^[16]). Additionally, in the wake of the autumn 2019 protests, new alternative platforms, primarily independent digital media outlets, emerged as a main source of coverage for younger generations, but also for foreign networks (Freedom House, 2020^[17]).

The liberalisation of the state monopoly on broadcasting in 1994 meant that Lebanon was the first country in the Middle East to authorise private ownership of radio and television stations (El Richani, 2014^[18]). The 1994 Audio-Visual Law additionally established the National Audio-Visual Council (NAVC) as the licence- and frequency-granting body, with the goal to bring under control the multiple informal stations that had emerged (El Richani, 2014^[18]). Key legislation includes the Press Law, which dates back to 1962 and concerns print media. It sets up distinct bodies to group and regulate media owners, the Lebanese Press Syndicate, and the Editors Syndicate. Significantly, the law tasked the Ministry of Information with monitoring the financing sources of outlets.

For the most part, Lebanese news outlets act as watchdogs and contribute to holding public institutions and officials to account. However, there is greater scope for supporting healthy media ecosystems and their contribution to open government objectives through policy interventions. This is particularly true in the current context of rising mis- and dis- information, which the media is well-placed to mitigate through quality journalism.

Additionally, as for media around the world, Lebanese outlets have been suffering from funding difficulties, which has led numerous media outlets to close down. The media business model has not been reformed since the 1970s and outlets have not always been able to successfully achieve digital transformation. With the financial crisis that hit the country in autumn 2019, many journalists saw their salaries cut by their employing media institution (European Journalism Centre, 2021^[16]).

Like many countries, the degree of media independence and objectivity can also pose a challenge even in a highly pluralistic ecosystem. Lebanon's media landscape indeed seems to mirror the consociational structure of the political system of the country, which in practice means that journalism can sometimes take

sectarian characters and carry political biases (El Richani, 2014^[18]). 43% of media outlets are either directly or indirectly owned by 12 families with ties to political parties. This is particularly the case in the print, television and radio sectors (Samir Kassir Foundation, 2018^[19]). Based on evidence from the Media Ownership Monitor Lebanon, a CSO-led initiative between Samir Kassir Foundation and Reporters Without Borders, out of 37 selected media outlets, 29 were found to be directly politically affiliated (Samir Kassir Foundation, 2018^[19]).

In the eyes of citizens, this aspect can undermine the reliability and trustworthiness of some Lebanese media as catalysts for transparency and accountability. However, a number of independent media also exist. Indeed frustration among some audience groups (particularly young ones) with some outlets' perceived bias has fuelled demand for a new generation of digital media start-ups.

Alongside private outlets, the government funds through the Ministry of Information two state broadcasters, Télé Liban and Radio Liban, and a newswire service, the National News Agency (NNA). These are important stakeholders in supporting government transparency and expanding the reach of its messages to citizens. The NNA, a newswire, is a primary channel for the dissemination of official information, and covers all government activities alongside current affairs. With around 140 reporters countrywide, it produces reporting that is available for syndication to other news outlets.

The NNA, Télé Liban and Radio Liban have the potential to be an important source of objective public-interest information in an environment where other media often take sides. For this reason, it is important that these outlets continue to receive adequate funding and are kept free of political interference, including through the oversight by the country's media regulator, the National Media Council (NMC). The latter is also an important actor in advancing the media's contribution to the open government principles, namely by playing a larger role to ensure journalistic standards are upheld. Similarly, it can extend its role to provide guidance for news outlets to combat disinformation and misinformation.

In its February 2020 Ministerial Statement, the Diab Cabinet had pledged to prepare a unified draft law to upgrade the media regulatory framework in light of the rise of digital and social media, and ensure in parallel protection of freedom of opinion and expression (Government of Lebanon, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2020^[20]). In May 2020, then-Minister of Information echoed the need for an improved regulatory and enforcement system for the media, while noting that “public information should not be subordinate to any political guardianship, but must be free within certain controls, and not directed or affiliated with the state, but rather serve the citizen” (Government of Lebanon, Ministry of Information, 2020^[21]). Although the subsequent policy proposal received criticism from some civil society organisations that it fell short of the above objectives (Amnesty International, 2020^[13]), new efforts to reform the current system remain necessary for ensuring a resilient media ecosystem.

The current regulatory landscape, particularly provisions relating to libel and defamation, has been highlighted by some as leaving scope for its application in restriction of free speech. Indeed, since the October 2019 demonstrations, observers have noted cases of social media activists being detained, journalists being investigated or being tried for defamation, including following their reporting on corruption (Maharat Foundation, 2019^[22]; Human Rights Watch, 2019^[23]).

These examples suggest that the liberalisation of the media ecosystem and the upholding of freedom of expression in Lebanon are not yet fully achieved. New legal and regulatory reforms, as noted above, would offer an important opportunity for updating how harmful or libellous content is dealt with in the digital age, in respect of essential freedoms and with the goal to safeguard the media's ability to hold the government to account.

In addition, a new government may consider introducing measures to combat disinformation and misinformation in parallel, for instance by supporting the media sector and independent fact-checking organisations.⁵ There are growing examples of initiatives where different players in the media ecosystem collaborate against misinformation, as described in Box 4.4 below. Providing direct assistance and

amplifying similar efforts in Lebanon would help counterbalance the diffusion of less reliable content online and in traditional media.

Box 4.4. Multi-stakeholder fact-checking initiative in Mexico

During Mexico's 2018 general election, a group of more than 90 local and national actors in Mexico, including television networks, newspapers, and radio stations, along with universities and NGOs, collaborated on a fact-checking initiative called *Verificado 2018*. This initiative, which was created and directed by *Animal Político*, *Newsweek en español*, *Pop up Newsroom*, and *AJ+ Español*, sought to debunk false content and identify the entities responsible for misusing information.

Verificado 2018 used a search engine powered by artificial intelligence to monitor misinformation and report any problems encountered at polling stations during the election. Daily fact-checks of the day were distributed to all media partners, who subsequently published accurate reporting.

To fight the rapid spread of false information among the citizenry, the initiative promoted the use of the hashtags *#Verificado2018* and *#EstoSiPasó* (“#thisdidthappen”) on the content shared on the platform to certify it. This initiative also supported media literacy by educating readers on how to identify false information and on understanding the role of the media.

A decisive element to the initiative's success was the collaboration between the 90 partners, who all brought their own skills and expertise. For example, *Animal Político* centralised all the information and set up a team of ten fact-checkers and two co-ordinators who worked full-time to monitor content and confirm sources.

Source: Verificado2018 (2018^[24]), “Así funciona #Verificado2018 – Metodología”, <https://verificado.mx/metodologia/>; Terceros (2018^[25]), “Ahead of Mexico's largest election, Verificado 2018 sets an example for collaborative journalism”, <https://ijnet.org/en/story/ahead-mexico%E2%80%99s-largest-election-verificado-2018-sets-example-collaborative-journalism>.

Recommendations

The recommendations below summarise the proposed approaches that Lebanon can adopt to make public communication and media ecosystems work to further the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation.

- Lebanon's government could envision public communication as a pillar of its ongoing efforts to introduce open government reforms and its aspirations to bring these reforms under a unified agenda or strategy. In particular, under OMSAR's leadership, this could include reforms for institutionalisation proposed in Chapter 2, but also formal requirements in upcoming open government strategic documents that communications are conducted to further transparency and facilitate participation, accompanied with guidelines on how to do so.
- Within the same context of reform, and in particular, in the implementation of recommendations from the OECD *Open Government Scan of Lebanon* (2020^[6]), OMSAR should lead public communication and advocacy efforts, both internally and externally, to increase familiarity with related concepts and policy initiatives and gain support for them. For instance, co-ordinating internal government-wide campaigns on the open government agenda would be a key step to ensuring widespread buy-in from civil servants. In the short term, OMSAR could develop such a campaign on ATI implementation.
- Pending any official reform, Lebanese institutions could begin to take up an outlook in their work that aligns with the open government principles, both individually or as part of co-ordination through the inter-ministerial committee proposed earlier.
 - An immediate step to support the principle of transparency, would be for Lebanese communicators to use proactive disclosures under the ATI Law in their work and in co-ordination with the relevant Information Officers. OMSAR could lead the development of a set of dedicated guidelines to advise on applying the above recommendation.
 - Lebanon's public service media could be another asset for transparency: the NNA newswire, for instance, could be used to disseminate periodical round-ups of proactively disclosed information under the ATI Law for other media to easily access and use in their reporting.
- To foster greater objectivity and quality journalism that can further accountability, the Lebanese government would benefit from ensuring adequate funding for public media. At the same time the Ministry of Information and National Media Council, in co-ordination with journalist unions, should develop new standards for journalism that include, for instance, requirements on fact-checking.
- Over the medium term, a new administration could continue the work on a new regulatory framework for the media fit for the digital age, in collaboration with key non-governmental stakeholders. This ought to support a more diverse ecosystem and the role of digital and traditional media to expand public debate. A new framework could importantly include provisions to mitigate the spread of mis- and dis- information, by introducing requirements for platforms' and media's treatment of problematic content. Finally, this framework should include legal safeguards for journalists investigating and exposing wrongdoing by public officials, to restrict the application of other laws that in some cases can amount to censorship.

References

- Al Jazeera (2020), *In full: France’s draft proposal for new Lebanon government*, [8]
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/3/in-full-frances-draft-proposal-for-new-lebanon-government> (accessed on 6 January 2021).
- Amnesty International (2020), *Lebanon: New Coalition to Defend Free Speech*, [13]
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/lebanon-new-coalition-to-defend-free-speech/> (accessed on 6 January 2021).
- Camargo Pentead, C. and I. Fortunato (2015), “Mídia e políticas públicas: possíveis campos exploratórios”, *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 30/87, p. 129, [4]
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17666/3087129-141/2015>.
- El Richani, S. (2014), *Comparative Readings of the Lebanese Media System*, University of Westminster, [18]
https://www.db-thueringen.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/dbt_derivate_00033062/Dissertation_El_Richani_Sarah.pdf.
- European Journalism Centre (2021), *Media Landscapes - Lebanon*, [16]
<https://medialandscapes.org/country/lebanon> (accessed on 6 January 2021).
- Freedom House (2020), *Freedom of the Net 2020 - Lebanon*, [17]
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-net/2020> (accessed on 6 January 2021).
- Freedom House (2011), “License to Censor: The use of media regulation to restrict press freedom - Lebanon”, [15]
<https://www.refworld.org/docid/4eccefc521.html>.
- Government of Lebanon, Ministry of Information (2020), *Abdel Samad for Lebanon Radio: To create a unified platform for public media and one union for media professionals*, [21]
<https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/50331> (accessed on 6 January 2021).
- Government of Lebanon, Presidency of the Council of Ministers (2020), *Ministerial Statement*, [20]
<http://www.pcm.gov.lb/Library/Images/Hok76Ministers/w76n.pdf> (accessed on 6 January 2021).
- Government of Lebanon, Presidency of the Council of Ministers (2020), “The Cabinet is studying options available to address the financial and economic crisis, which were discussed during the financial meeting”, (translated from the website), [7]
<http://www.pcm.gov.lb/Arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=17236> (accessed on 6 January 2021).
- Human Rights Watch (2019), ““There Is a Price to Pay” The Criminalization of Peaceful Speech in Lebanon”, [23]
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/11/15/there-price-pay/criminalization-peaceful-speech-lebanon>.
- Khemani, Stuti, et al. (2016), *Making politics work for development : Harnessing transparency and citizen engagement*, Policy Research Reports, World Bank Group, Washington, D.C., [26]
<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/268021467831470443/making-politics-work-for-development-harnessing-transparency-and-citizen-engagement>.

- Lebanese Government (1926), “The Lebanese Constitution”, [10]
<https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/lb/lb018en.pdf>.
- Maharat Foundation (2019), *Maharat Foundation Report on the Occasion of World Press Freedom Day About Freedom of Opinion and Expression in Lebanon Between May 2018 and April 2019*, <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=8224&file=Annexe5>. [12]
- Maharat Foundation (2019), *Maharat Report on World Press Freedom Day*, [22]
<http://maharatfoundation.org/media/1584/maharat-report-world-press-freedom-day-english.pdf>.
- Matasick, C., C. Alfonsi and A. Bellantoni (2020), “Governance responses to disinformation: How open government principles can inform policy options”, *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 39, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/d6237c85-en>. [1]
- MEPI et al. (n.d.), *The Right to Access Information: Citizen guide*, [14]
<https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/ati-guide-lebanon-en-min.pdf> (accessed on 26 April 2021).
- OECD (2020), *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>. [27]
- OECD (2020), *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>. [9]
- OECD (2020), *Open Government Scan of Lebanon*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/d7cce8c0-en>. [6]
- OECD (2017), *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, OECD, Paris, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0438>. [3]
- OECD (2017), *Recommendation of the Council on Public Integrity*, OECD, Paris, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/OECD-Recommendation-Public-Integrity.pdf>. [5]
- Penteado, C. and I. Fortunato (2015), *Médias et politiques publiques: des possibles domaines de recherche*, pp. 129-141., <https://doi.org/10.17666/3087129-141/2015>. [2]
- Samir Kassir Foundation (2018), “A Family Business”, *Media Ownership Monitor Lebanon*, <https://lebanon.mom-rsf.org/en/findings/family-connections/> (accessed on 6 January 2021). [19]
- Terceros, B. (2018), “Ahead of Mexico’s largest election, Verificado 2018 sets an example for collaborative journalism”, *Collaborative Journalism*, <https://ijnnet.org/en/story/ahead-mexico%E2%80%99s-largest-election-verificado-2018-sets-example-collaborative-journalism>. [25]
- United Nations (1967), “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”, https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1976/03/19760323%2006-17%20AM/Ch_IV_04.pdf. [11]
- Verificado2018 (2018), “Así funciona #Verificado2018 – Metodología”, <https://verificado.mx/metodologia/>. [24]

Notes

¹ For an in-depth assessment of the mechanisms whereby media and communication can support transparency, accountability and participation, see Khemani, Stuti, et al. (2016_[26]), *Making politics work for development : harnessing transparency and citizen engagement*, Policy Research Reports World Bank Group, Washington, D.C., <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/268021467831470443/Making-politics-work-for-development-harnessing-transparency-and-citizen-engagement>.

² “Economic conference for the development through reform and with business”.

³ For detailed recommendations on engaging youth in public life and policy see OECD (2020_[27]), *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>.

⁴ More extensive recommendations on citizen participation and consultations are included in the *Open Government Scan of Lebanon* report (OECD, 2020_[6]).

⁵ For examples of regulatory frameworks and policy concerning disinformation see Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni (2020_[11]), "Governance responses to disinformation: How open government principles can inform policy options", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 39, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD Public Governance Reviews

Citizens' Voice in Lebanon

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA FOR A MORE OPEN GOVERNMENT

Public communication is an essential element of government policy and crucial for transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation. This OECD Review analyses public communication in Lebanon, by reviewing the relevant governance structures and procedures across the public administration, along with the prevailing use of core competencies for this function and their application to support transparency and stakeholder participation in public life. The recommendations in this report highlight important opportunities to shift towards a more strategic approach to public communication that can better serve policy goals and help respond to citizens' needs and expectations.



PRINT ISBN 978-92-64-38410-1
PDF ISBN 978-92-64-32226-4



9 789264 384101