



# DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL CHARTER ON PUBLIC COMMUNICATION FOR JORDAN, LEBANON, MOROCCO AND TUNISIA

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Governments across the world are being increasingly challenged by the rapid development of new technologies and the growing demand of citizens for more openness, transparency and participation. In the MENA region more specifically, countries have directly witnessed the importance of increasing dialogue with citizens and regaining their trust in recent years.

Public communication can play an important role to help respond to citizens' needs and expectations. Distinct from political communication, it refers to any communication activity or initiative led by public institutions for the public good. It is an important pillar for advancing open government principles and a powerful tool for policy development and the efficient implementation of public services.

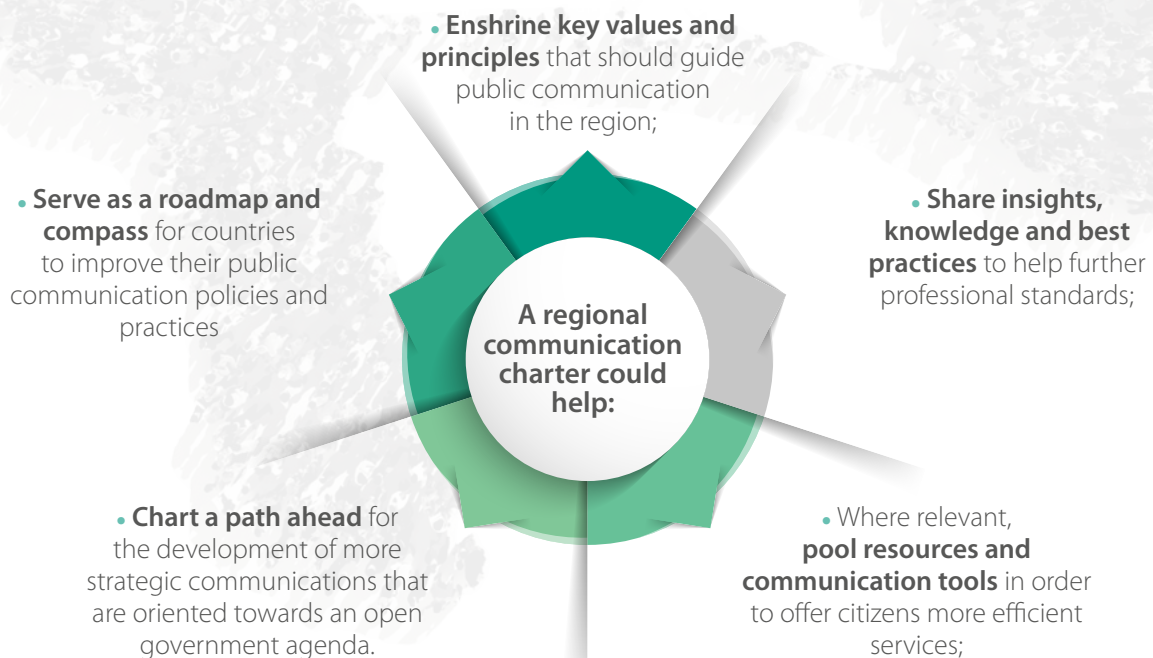
Communication charters are commonly used by public and private sector organisations to set the ground rules for all external and internal interactions and improve

the professionalism of communication. They rally peers around a common purpose and values, strengthen team cohesion and performance, save time, improve efficiency, ensure consistency of messages and make preferred methods of communication clear to everyone, thus mitigating the risks associated with poorly managed and uncoordinated communication.

In the framework of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme, and as part of the OECD's project on "Citizens'Voice: enhancing open government through public communication and media ecosystems", funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, the idea of developing a regional charter on public communication first came about during phase I of the project.

This note sets to clarify the possible objectives for such a charter, that the participating countries (Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon), as well as other potentially interested MENA countries can make use of.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL CHARTER



The implementation of the charter will help recognize, endorse and promote positive ongoing changes and reforms led by participating countries in the area of public communication while also catalysing and inspiring innovation in the region, thus contributing to the advancement of the open government agenda and to improved policies and services.

In the long-run, it will contribute to a greater dialogue between governments and citizens on policies and services.

### 3. WHAT WILL IT COVER?

The charter will build on the *OECD Recommendation of the Council* on Open Government and set out **guiding principles and orientations** on public communication that support the open government principles of **transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation**.

The charter's overarching goals will be:



Members should also be encouraged to **share tools and resources** where relevant. For example, this can include good practice case studies, templates, software, guidance on the use of new technologies and other useful communication materials. These could be shared on the *OECD Toolkit and Case Navigator for Open Government*<sup>1</sup>, an online platform already featuring open government toolkits and designed to inspire policy makers and civil society across the world.

### 4. HOW WILL IT BE DEVELOPED?

The content of the charter should be developed in close collaboration with all parties involved in the areas of open government and public communication within the OECD and participating governmental and non-governmental actors, namely in Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon.

Dedicated working groups or committees could be established in order to efficiently lead all preparatory work ahead of a **high-level conference** to be organised, which would mark the **signing and official launch of the charter**.

The endorsement of the regional charter would mean an acceptance in a **non-binding manner**. Each country would be responsible for working towards integrating the principles of the charter in its regulatory and policy practices as they see fit.

### 5. SUSTAINABILITY

Once endorsed by countries, the road towards implementation of the charter would be discussed during the annual meetings of the MENA-OECD Open and Innovative Government Network, or in the context of an informal network of public communicators in the MENA region. These meetings would also help identify capacity building needs. Progress could also be tracked through submissions on the OECD Toolkit and Case Navigator for Open Government.

The charter can also be tabled at the MENA-OECD ministerial meetings for endorsement. This would allow a greater awareness among countries in the region, and could possibly help enlarge the charter to other countries.

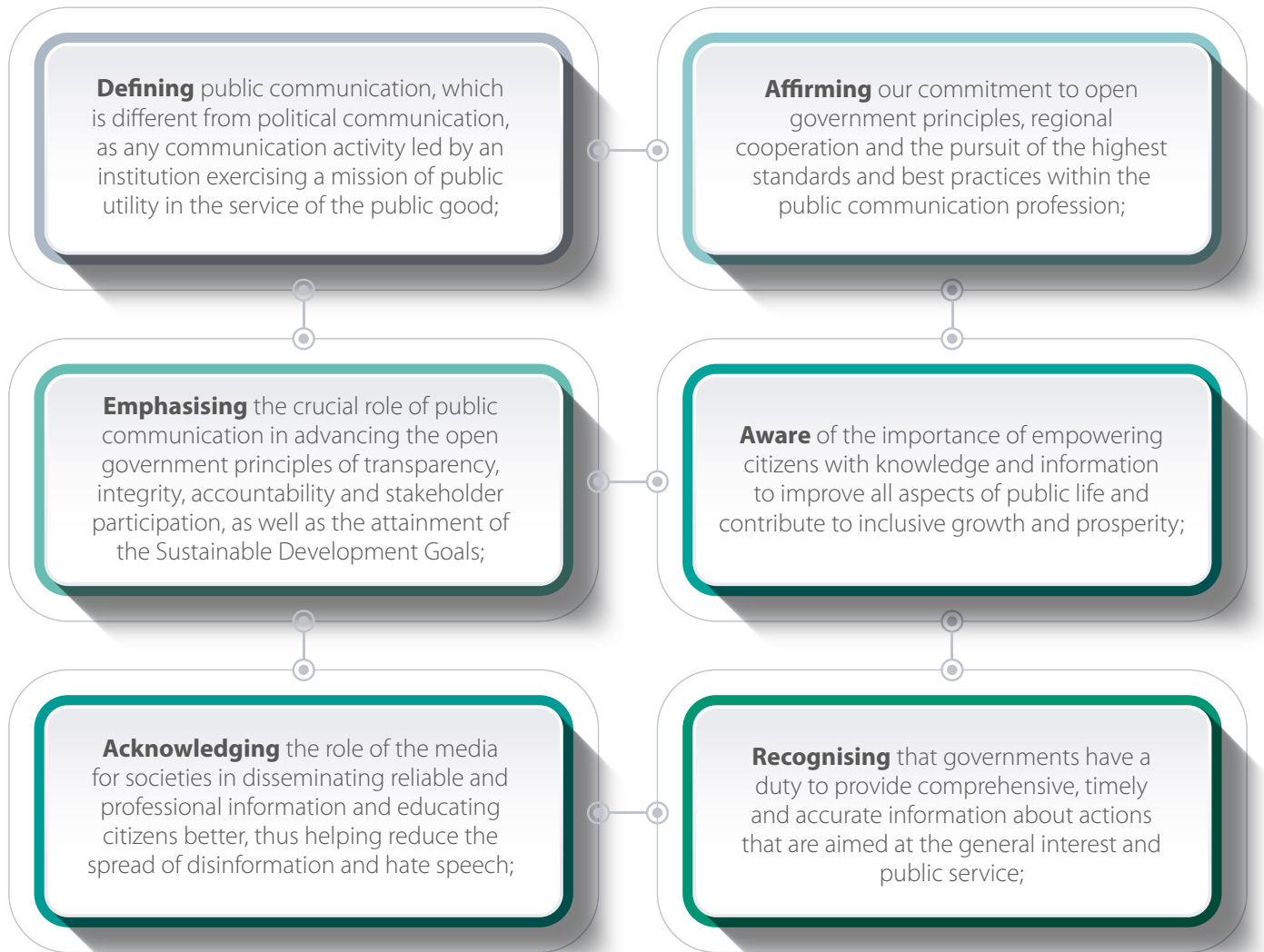
Peer exchange can also be conducted with the OECD Working Party on Open Government and as part of the activities on the project linked to the international report on public communication.

1. [https://oecd-opsi.org/search-toolkits/?\\_sft\\_discipline-or-practice=open-government](https://oecd-opsi.org/search-toolkits/?_sft_discipline-or-practice=open-government)

## 6. DRAFT PRELIMINARY TEXT OF THE CHARTER TO BE DISCUSSED

Examples of key guiding principles and orientations on public communication to be discussed with counterparts:

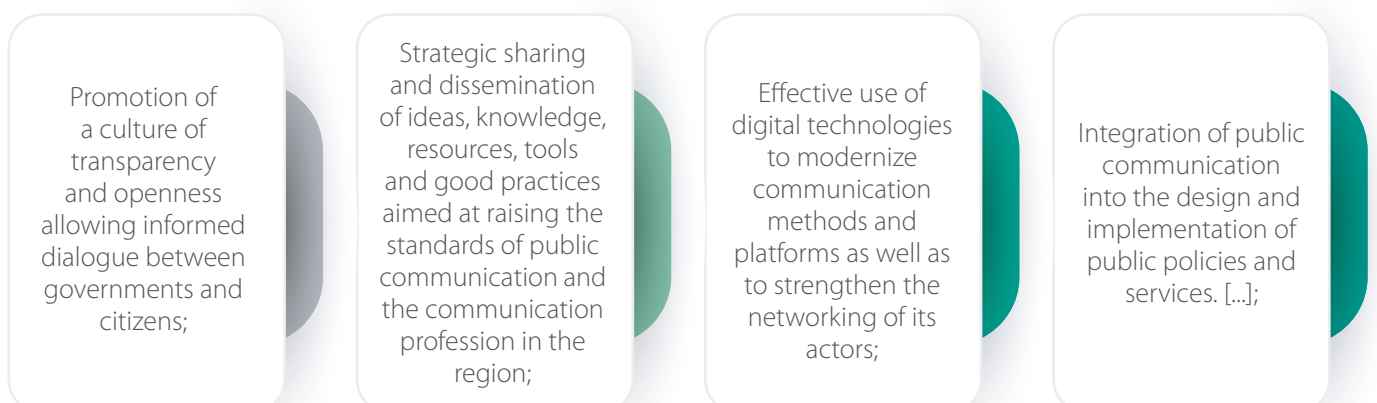
### A. Preamble



[...]

We, the representatives of [...] participating in the MENA-OECD Open and Innovative Government Network, express our commitment to the following objectives, principles and actions:

### B. Objectives



## C. Principles

### • Public communication



#### **PUBLIC INTEREST**

Public communication serves a mission of public service.

It should act in a way that sustains the public's long-term interest and its trust in government information and communication.

[...]



#### **INTEGRITY, ETHICS & IMPARTIALITY**

Public communication should preserve the integrity of public institutions.

The highest legal, ethical and professional standards shall apply for truthful communications free of propaganda and disinformation.

Public communication must protect citizens' personal data and privacy. The dissemination of information shall be carried out in an impartial and objective manner, without stating personal conviction or opinion, in accordance with the principles of equal treatment and neutrality.

[...]



#### **TRANSPARENCY & OPENNESS**

In compliance with access to information laws and the principle of proactive disclosure, public communication should promote greater transparency and openness by facilitating access to complete, truthful and timely information on government activities.

It should also promote open government data and improve the public's understanding and use of it through all available means of communication and by taking full advantage of technological progress in so doing.

[...]



#### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Public communication should allow better understanding and monitoring of government actions, facilitate information sharing, progress reporting and be oriented towards feedback and dialogue at all levels (national

It should enable the public to hold the government to account on the basis of reliable and objective data accessible to all.

[...]



#### **PARTICIPATION**

Communication practices should engage citizens and other stakeholders to actively contribute to improving the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and services.

The chosen methods and means of communication should facilitate stakeholder participation at the three levels outlined in the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (information, consultation and engagement). They should also work towards ensuring the effective inclusion of specific groups such as women and youth.

[...]



#### **DATA AND EVIDENCE BASED**

Public communication should be strategic, modern, cost-effective and time-efficient and, be based as much as possible on factual analysis and data as well as on a good understanding of public audiences, contexts and behaviours.

The integration of monitoring, evaluation and learning tools in communication strategies and initiatives is also essential for the success of communication activities.

[...]

## • Communicants publics

### PROFESSIONALISM

Public communication should rely on adequate human and institutional capacities and be exercised by trained professionals fully dedicated to their functions and subject to the rules of ethics and professional conduct applicable to them.

Professional development and regular training of public communicators are necessary to ensure that their competencies, techniques and tools are adapted to the rapid evolution of the sector and the plurality of communication professions.

[...]



### PROACTIVITY

Communicators should favour proactive communication in order to anticipate needs and potential crises and respond effectively to citizen's needs and expectations.

[...]



### INNOVATION

Public communicators should rely on innovation and technological advancements to promote and enhance communication between people and government.

[...]



### PEER EXCHANGE

Communicators should maintain regular relations with their peers and colleagues at regional, national and local levels, and maintain an open dialogue to exchange best practices, ideas and communication tools that have proven to be effective.

[...]



## D. Actions

The participants undertake, as soon as possible, the following actions:

- ✓ Appoint a national focal point to inform and mobilize all stakeholders, maintain a sustained regional dialogue and participate actively in all work related to the implementation of the Charter.
- ✓ Create and facilitate discussion groups for public communicators based on their missions, themes or other relevant criteria.
- ✓ Ensure the effective sharing of ideas, tools, good practices and other relevant documents with the digital platform created for this purpose.

[...]

