
SHADOW REPORT (SPOTLIGHT) FOR THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REPORT ON THE SDGS-2030

JORDAN – JULY 2022



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BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Government of Jordan (GoJ) committed itself to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Jordan prepared its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum in July 2017. Five years later, Jordan will be presenting its second Voluntary National Review at the July 2022 session, showing commitment to the 2030 agenda. As part of the High-Level Political Forum, civil society organizations from the reporting countries will be able to offer their assessments of the progress achieved.

In Jordan, some civil society organizations collaborated on the present spotlight report for their country's VNR. This report will complement the discussion on implementing the 2030 Agenda in Jordan. Given the expertise of the participating civil society organizations, this spotlight report focuses on the goals No Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Reduced Inequality (SDG 10), Peace, and Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16).

By signing the 2030 Agenda, governments worldwide committed themselves to “leaving no one behind”, eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, and fostering sustainable economic growth in a peaceful society. Achieving the SDGs by 2030 presented a challenge when the Agenda was signed in 2015, and when the Government of Jordan (GoJ) submitted its first VNR in 2017. It remains a challenge today. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the global economy hard, led to job losses worldwide, led to the halting of reform programmes and encouraged governments to act quickly rather than thoughtfully or inclusively. In 2022, the Russo-Ukrainian war is shaking the geopolitical world order and, even more tangibly, has led to a global food shortage.

The Jordanian government considers these developments the main obstacle to its achievement of the SDGs. While it is true that Jordan has not been immune to these global challenges, Jordan's chronic developmental and economic imbalances have simply been exacerbated by, but were not caused by these developments.

Nearly since the inception of the state, Jordan has struggled with economic imbalances, such as public budget deficit and general state indebtedness, resulting in high levels of poverty and unemployment. Accordingly, Jordan has been under the umbrella of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) restructuring programmes intermittently since 1989, and as of 2022, has received nine IMF loans. Most recently in 2020, Jordan has entered a four-year programme with the IMF that will eventually transfer \$1.3 billion to Jordan and which has since been augmented due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy.¹ As with any IMF loans, conditions have been imposed on Jordan to implement non-social austerity measures, restructure its public

sector (the main provider of employment in the country) and amend its tax and social protection systems with negative consequences for the inclusivity of economic growth. Combined with the push of other International Finance Institutions for austerity-driven reforms, it is external demands that have directly, or indirectly, influenced Jordan's economic policies, without addressing the internal economic problems affecting the daily lives of the majority of Jordanians. These austerity reforms have negatively affected unemployment rates, and burdened the poor rather than the rich. Some of these policies negatively affected the achievement of many SDGs in 2030. They have reduced domestic demand and therefore economic growth. Geopolitical developments make the situation even worse, even though there have been some achievements. In the following, this report shines a light on the achievements and challenges Jordan faced and continues to face in implementing the SDGs given these factors.

Jordan's VNR this year comes at a crucial time, as the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, stagnant economic growth, refugee movements and internal political developments slow down the achievement of the SDGs. At the current pace of achievement, Jordan will not meet many of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The pace of implementation in some areas is not only slow but also regressive with regards to some goals. With regards to most SDGs discussed in this report, the situation over the last five years has not only not improved but also shows signs of worsening. Renewed focus on the goals set by the 2030 Agenda can help Jordan provide for its people and achieve equal prosperity and peace and a political climate characterized by partnership and consensus.

Importantly, a more participatory decision-making process with increased accountability and involvement of civil society and the Jordanian public concerning the implementation of economic policies aimed at improving the livelihoods of Jordanians is needed. It will inevitably lead to an improved economic situation and in turn, a better chance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

This report highlights the achievements and challenges Jordan continues to face in the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG 1: NO POVERTY

In 2017, official statistics estimated Jordan's population at around 9.5 million.² Within five years, the population has grown by approximately 15%, well beyond 11 million.³ One scenario calculated by the Jordanian Department of Statistics projects a population size of 19.04 million by 2050. This accelerated growth, both rooted in migration, refugee movements and demographic factors, paired with continued and unresolved economic imbalances means that it has become increasingly more difficult for the economy to provide for all of Jordan's population.

Of those workers who are registered with the Social Security Cooperation (SSC), 55% earn 500 JDs (\$ 700) and less per month,⁴ with a minimum wage set at 260 JOD (\$370), which is often not enough to cover living costs, particularly in the capital of Amman, where living costs for a single person without rent are estimated at 480 JOD per month.⁵ Moreover, the cost of living in Amman is predicted to have increased within the last few years as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis. Even though these wages are above the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day, the most recent data from 2018, shortly after the last VNR, on poverty levels (SDG1) in Jordan estimates that 15.7% of Jordanians live under the national poverty line,⁶ with numbers likely to have risen to 24%.⁷

In both its VNR of 2017 and the Jordan 2025 Agenda, the government planned to decrease poverty in Jordan down to 8% by 2025. However, measured poverty rates have not decreased from 2010 (14.4%) nor are they anywhere near the 8%⁸- target. Recently, a decision to increase the minimum wage in Jordan due to the Covid-19 crisis was deferred despite unprecedented inflation rates.⁹ Comprehensive surveying suggests that 66.2% of Jordanians consider their income "low" or "very low".¹⁰ Jordanians are now more vulnerable to poverty than they were five years ago and the eradication of poverty will not be achieved any time soon. Inflation is worsening the situation considerably. In 2021 alone, the Consumer Price Index increased by 2.3%.¹¹ Inflation is likely to rise even further, with the Central Bank of Jordan an overall inflation rate of 3.8% for 2022¹², given the global price hike in commodities and food.¹³

SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER

Similarly, estimates by the World Food Programme (WFP) the World Bank from 2020 linked about half of Jordan's population to be "vulnerable to food insecurity".¹⁴ Recent price spikes in food items will exacerbate this situation.¹⁵ Jordan's local food production is low. It is therefore dependent on food imports and the volatile international food markets to feed its population. Local food production faces challenges related to very severe water scarcity, more frequent droughts due to climate change, but also the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw a halt in global trade: In November 2021, the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA)¹⁶ stated that agricultural production might witness a 50% decline compared to the previous year. Among financial challenges in cultivating their land, many farmers fear the losses if an export ban, like in 2020, is reinstated.¹⁷ The government did address these issues with the National Strategy for Agricultural Development in addition to the National Water Strategy, both mentioned in the last VNR, as part of the vision Jordan 2025. However, no significant improvements have been seen, as food insecurity indicators remain high.

This comes despite efforts of the government, which has adopted the first national food security strategy for the years 2021-2030 mentioned in the government's key messages for this VNR. The strategy aims to protect Jordan's population from food insecurity and ensure access to safe, stable, nutritious and affordable food supplies at all times, by the end of 2030.

SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

The most recent Gender Development Index (GDI)¹⁸ positions Jordan in the lowest equality quintile of 166 countries with a GDI value of 0.868. Jordan has a Gender Inequality Index (GII)¹⁹ value of 0.45, ranking it 109 out of 162 countries in 2019. Both reports highlight the stark contrast between women’s educational attainment and economic and political participation.

Similarly, the Global Gender Gap Report (2021)²⁰ ranks Jordan 131 out of 156 countries with a Gender Gap Index of 0.638. At face value, this score suggests an improvement compared to the report of 2020, when Jordan ranked at place 138 and achieved an overall score of 0.623.²¹ However, because of the addition of more countries in the ranking and regression in some countries, these scores have been described as “not reflecting reality” by experts.²² On the contrary, while the score for educational attainment remained the same, Jordan saw a significant decline in the sub-index of health and survival (down from rank 103 to 145), as well as political empowerment (down from rank 113 to 144). The decline of women’s participation in parliament and government in recent years, with fewer women in ministerial positions and elected to parliament has to be emphasized,²³ especially as quotas for women’s political participation were introduced.²⁴ Table 1 below shows lower scores in other Global Gender Gap ranking’s sub-indexes, in particular for political empowerment of women, and a worrying decline in women’s health and survival. The gender gap has been aggravated in these areas, thus attenuating achievements in education.

Table 1: Jordan’s Global Gender Gap rankings

Sub-Index	Score	Rank (out of 156)
<i>Economic participation and opportunity</i>	0.538 (up from 0.408 in 2019)	133 (up from 145 in 2019)
<i>Educational attainment</i>	0.991 (same as in 2019)	84 (down from 81 in 2019)
<i>Health and survival</i>	0.957 (down from 0.971 in 2019)	145 (down from 103 in 2019)
<i>Political empowerment</i>	0.066 (down by nearly 50% from 0.121 in 2019)	144 (down from 113 in 2019)

Source: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf / https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf / https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

Despite women being highly educated and their education considered equal to their main counterparts, their participation in the labor market remains very low. During the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, women were then also the first to have to give up their jobs during the pandemic, which led to the majority of household responsibilities and care work being imposed

on women, who also carried the main responsibility for ensuring the continued education of their children.

Re-entry into the labor market is also shown to be more difficult for women than for men: While the unemployment rate for males remained stable between the third quarter of the pandemic year of 2020 and the same quarter of 2021, female unemployment rose by 2.8%.²⁵ Economic participation rates for women started to decrease gradually from 14.9% to 13.7% in early 2022.²⁶

This indicates that majority of women who had withdrawn from the labor market during the Coronavirus lockdown period did not return, unlike their male counterparts. Distance learning and remote working in Jordan due to the pandemic did not improve gender equality. A lot of these measures increased the care work of women who had to give up formal jobs to accommodate for their families, due to the lack of support for women's formal work.²⁷ Women have increasingly started to resort to temporary and informal work, which might encourage economic participation, but does not necessarily lead to better quality, higher paying jobs or a better situation for women.²⁸ An alarming 79.2% of women with bachelor's degrees are not in formal employment (overall women unemployment is 30.7%).

At the same time, those women who are in formal employment systematically receive wages less than their male counterparts for the same work. Estimates on the Gender Pay Gap vary depending on the study consulted. A report by the World Bank (Mashreq Gender Facility) estimates the wage gap at 17%.²⁹ Data from the Jordanian Department of Statistics estimate the pay gap as 13.6% in the public sector and 14.2% in the private sector. They show that the gap tends to be even higher in sectors in which women are concentrated, such as the health sector (31.8%) and the private education sector (30.2%). Additionally, while half of all female workers are classified as specialists, they receive wages less than that of specialized men, with a gap of approximately 19.1%.³⁰ This comes despite the fact that Jordan, in 2017, became the first Arab country to join the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) and adopted legal provisions that make equal pay for men and women obligatory. It had already established a National Committee for Pay Equity in 2011.³¹

Several strategies and policies, such as the 2019 Women's Economic Empowerment Action Plan, and national committees only had limited effect. In addition, Jordan is yet to accede to or lift reservations to remaining international conventions regarding women's rights. While it has been urged by the CEDAW committee, Jordan has not changed its laws and policies regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Jordan has registered several reservations to CEDAW.³²

Also, when it comes to political participation of women, the situation has not improved in recent years. Despite the adoption of a quota of women in parliament (15 out of 130) as well as on governorate and local level, women have not had the opportunity to gain seats in any of the recent elections (parliament and local councils) beyond this quota.

The legal framework continues to discriminate against women in Jordan, including the Personal Status Law and the Nationality Law. While the recent addition of Jordanian women to the constitution has the potential to increase women's role, non-discrimination on the basis of gender is still not included in the constitution under Article VI(1).

However, some achievements have been made. In 2017, Jordan abolished a law that stipulated that as long as rapists married their victims they would be free from punishment.³³ Unfortunately, child marriages went up for the first time in years during the pandemic.³⁴ In addition, the pandemic has exposed other challenges for women's wellbeing and safety. Prolonged lockdowns and other restrictions on free movement of women have led to an increase in domestic violence against both women and children, who at the same time did not have access to services for victims of domestic abuse because of the comprehensive closures. As the Higher Population Council stated in its annual report, according to the Family Protection Unit, Jordan saw a "dramatic increase" in domestic violence in 2020, as a total of 54,743 cases were recorded in that year.³⁵ Many women also lost their participation in family planning and health check-ups as the closures also reduced their access to reproductive health services.

These numbers and indicators show that Jordan, when it comes to gender equality and safety and wellbeing of women, takes one step to the front, and two steps back. Gender equality has not significantly improved, even though the government "believes that the fifth objective is at the heart of the process of comprehensive and sustainable development in all its dimensions".³⁶ A joint effort of all governmental and societal actors is needed to ensure gender equality.

SDG 8: ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DECENT WORK

Economic growth rates in Jordan have remained stagnant at around 2%³⁷ in recent years, with a small spike after the government lifted most Covid-19 restrictions in 2021, resulting in an economic growth rate of 2.5%³⁸ between within the first quarter of 2022.³⁹ This represents a significant slowdown in the last decade compared to 2000-2009, which saw an average growth of 6.5%.⁴⁰ Unfair tax policies have weakened the national economy's capacity to grow, with indirect tax revenues amounting to about 72%. This is in combination with restrictive investment policies, as well as policies that have weakened domestic demand despite it being one of the most important drivers of economic growth.

Unemployment rates in Jordan remain high and increased because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw many employees being laid off. As of the first quarter of 2022, around 22.8% of Jordanians were unemployed, with even higher rates among youth aged 15-24 (47.7%) and women (31.5%). These result in an accrued economic participation rate that stands at just 33.7%, with severe disparities between female (13.7%) and male (53.2%) labor force members. Holders of bachelor's degrees and higher are more likely to be unemployed (78.7% for females and 24.6% for males).⁴¹

Unemployment has increased significantly in all groups of society over the past five years, despite efforts by the government to foster economic growth and employment.

In 2021, the GoJ unveiled its "Governmental Economic Priorities Programme"⁴² to provide a roadmap for economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Programme focuses on three main objectives: 1. Enabling the private sector to create jobs for Jordanians, 2. Stimulating local and foreign investments, 3. Increasing national exports of goods and services.

The government aims to support these objectives by implementing measures to improve the business and investment environment, enhance competition and increase employment and support so-called priority sectors (Tourism, IT, Agriculture and Industry). However, as is the case with other strategies and priorities presented by the government, the effects of the Economic Priorities Programme are yet to be felt on the ground. It has to be said that national indicators have started to improve slightly in some areas, such as exports, which increased by 29.3% between the first quarter of 2021 and the same quarter in 2022⁴³, as well as with regards to the public deficit, which is projected to decline this year.⁴⁴ However, this program adopted the approach to enhance economic growth and generate more job opportunities to confront the growing unemployment by weakening work conditions. It was announced that the labor and social security laws would be reviewed to reduce employment costs for business owners, which would lead to a further decline in various labor standards in Jordan.

Similarly, Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision, recently unveiled so far only outlines broad ideas and policies. In addition, the vision does not include important aspects in need of reform,

such as tax policies, wage policies and labor policies. However, as, at the time of writing, the government is yet to announce the executive plan for the implementation of the Economic Modernisation Vision, it might well be a step in the right direction. Jordan's civil society organizations that prepared this report are ready to support the government in achieving its goals under this vision, despite not being included in its drafting process. The goals under the vision are the minimum that is required to stop the deterioration of the economic and social conditions in Jordan.

In a recent consultation with 129 civil society organizations (CSOs) in Jordan, 47% of survey respondents listed concerns about the economic situation as one of their highest priorities, while 38% listed (un)employment and poverty (also 38%).⁴⁵ In addition, in Focus Group Discussions conducted with 127 young people in several governorates in Jordan, young men and women shared their worries concerning the lack of employment opportunities, particularly those that provide decent work conditions and fair pay.⁴⁶ The same participants stated that they feel uneasy about the future and continue to look abroad for study and employment opportunities. This is supported by a country-wide poll of Jordanians conducted in late 2021. They were asked about their perception of the state of the Jordanian economy about the year prior and their expectations of the future. The survey found that approximately two-thirds (66.1%) of Jordanians define the current economic situation in Jordan as "very bad", while more than a quarter of citizens described it as "bad" (26.1%), while less than 2% of citizens indicated that it was "excellent" or "good", respectively. Another three-quarters of Jordanians (72.2%) described the current economic situation, as of late 2021, as "worse" than it had been in 2020, and two-thirds (63.2%) expected the economic situation to worsen in the next year.⁴⁷

In addition, social protection in Jordan remains sketchy. More than half of the workers, not accounting for the informal sector, are not registered with the Social Security Cooperation. In addition, recent studies estimate that 56% of workers are employed informally, without formal contracts and consequently without access to social security.⁴⁸ The National Social Protection Strategy 2019-2025 addresses some of the gaps that leave the majority of Jordanian workers outside of the social safety net. As part of the Strategy, Monitoring and Evaluation committees regularly assess the progress to include more employees in social protection schemes. This governmental effort is important and crucial for the future of Jordan and has the potential to contribute to eradicating hunger and poverty. However, a 2021 study on the impact of the Strategy concluded that its implementation lags behind its ambition.⁴⁹ In the last VNR, Jordan hailed its amendments to the social security law in between 2010 and 2014, indicating a move to a more inclusive social security by expanding its scope. However, 2019, the year of the publication of the National Social Protection Strategy, saw a U-turn in social protection policies. That year, amendments to the Social Security Law started to exclude young people under 28 working in certain sectors (IT, agriculture, tourism et al. – the "priority sectors" mentioned above) from old-age insurance.

While economic modernisation, economic resilience and inclusive economic growth are the top priority for the government, efforts have yet to prove effective. Policies developed are not comprehensive in the sense that they are endorsed and implemented across governmental ministries. Social protection schemes remain a luxury for many and inclusion of vulnerable groups has all but been achieved. Often, implementation of inclusive policies lags behind in many areas and streamlining in execution is recommended.

Jordanian law does not criminalize forced labor unless it rises to the level of human trafficking. Despite the issuance of the amended Human Trafficking Prevention Law of 2021, there is only one shelter for victim protection. The Karama shelter is affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development, which grants temporary protection to victims, as the victims can only remain there for a maximum of two months. There is also scarce psychological, social or legal support services for victims of human trafficking. Additionally, there is no provision for granting the victim a temporary residence and/or work permit.

As for migrant workers' rights, the Kafala system continues to be applied in Jordan on the ground despite not being codified in law, as workers are linked to their employers. For example, an Egyptian worker cannot leave Jordan without obtaining a clearance from his Jordanian employer. Labor regulations also prevent migrant workers from changing their employer without the consent of the first employer; this has led to an increase in forced labor practices.

Migrant workers are still subjected to many verbal, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of some employers. Domestic workers are especially vulnerable to abuse, who may be forced to reside in their workplace. Many migrant workers still suffer from unfair working conditions, including long working hours, no weekends or annual leave. Moreover, the practice of employers forcibly withholding workers' travel documents persists, while offenders are rarely punished if they return the documents.

Deportation decisions are issued against migrant workers in an arbitrary and random manner. The decision to deport a migrant worker has become automatically and routinely issued, as it is recommended to deport any migrant worker who is arrested by the concerned authorities. Migrant workers are deported regardless of whether or not they have a residence permit, while only the employer has the right to issue work permits and residence permits. Moreover, Jordanian authorities continue to arbitrarily place migrant workers under administrative detention in an arbitrary manner, without informing them of their legal rights or the reason for their arrest. Administrative governors, in coordination with the Public Security Directorate, place migrant workers under administrative detention in violation of Jordanian law and relevant human rights conventions.⁵⁰ Legal procedures can take long periods that may extend for years, and qualified translators are often not available in the courts.

Many of migrant workers are among the most vulnerable groups of society in the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Jordanian government took a number of measures to limit the

spread of the Coronavirus, the most significant of which were curfews and total lockdown after the activation of Defense Law No. (13) of 1992 on the 21st of March 2020 (with the exception of some vital sectors). The government later announced a series of decisions to provide subsidies to workers, the poor, daily laborers and the elderly to compensate them for the damage they suffered due to these measures. As such, the Social Security Corporation contributed, through Defense Orders 1,9,14 15, 18, 24 to protect workers and establishments in the private sector with 13 programs within a temporary period and at specific rates.

However, these measures, whether issued by the Social Security Corporation or the National Aid Fund, largely excluded migrant workers and refugees. This is despite the fact that registered migrant workers had paid contributions to contributory social protection programs. Moreover, the challenges faced by migrant workers were compounded because migrant workers in Jordan are more vulnerable to exploitation, low wages, and unsafe working environments. Their exclusion from the government's employment protection programs also meant that many migrant workers lost their jobs and became unemployed.

The pandemic has also impacted the lives of children through impacting education and child labor. Although no official data is available, field observations show that child labor rates have increased dramatically due to the pandemic, especially among the most vulnerable families and families of day laborers that have resorted to adopting negative coping methods such as pushing their children to work. According to a position paper prepared by Tamkeen Center titled "The Impact of the Coronavirus on Education and Child Labor in Jordan," the worsening economic situation of families was a trigger for increased child labor.

There are different forms of child labor, as the National Framework to Reduce Child Labor and Beggary considered child beggary to be one of the worst forms of child labor. This is in line with the amendments to the Juvenile Law of 2014, which considered children involved in panhandling, waste collection and street vendors as children in need of protection and care.

SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES

The above indicators point towards a considerable increase of poverty and inequality in Jordan. However, estimates regarding the inequality in Jordan have not been updated. The most recent Gini estimate by the World Bank measures Jordan's index at 33.7, indicating moderately high inequality and an increase with regards to the previous years of 2007 and 2008.⁵¹ This index is close to the OECD average, however, other indicators and estimates such as a report by UNESCWA and the Economic Research Forum show higher levels of inequality, as the pre-tax national income share of the highest ten percent was more than 40 percent in 2016.⁵² Jordan's Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2019 is 0.729—which put the country in the high human development category—positioning it at 102 out of 189 countries and territories. Between 1990 and 2019, Jordan's HDI value increased from 0.625 to 0.729, an increase of 16.6 percent. However, when the value is discounted for inequality, the HDI falls to 0.622, a loss of 14.7 percent. Jordan's 2019 HDI of 0.729 is below the average for countries in the high human development group and above the average for countries in Arab States.⁵³ Inequality in Jordan remains a problem and is increasing, in particular given the low wage levels for the majority of workers in Jordan (see above), which will not be raised⁵⁴ even though prices are increasing in Jordan.

One of the main reasons for rising social inequality in Jordan is the application of unfair tax policies, as the bottom-up income tax is applied to the middle class, and more than two-thirds of tax revenues come from indirect taxes, as noted above.

SDG 16: PEACE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

A Royal Committee was established in 2021 tasked with the modernisation of Jordan's political system. The work of the committee is important and commendable. However, increased restriction of civic space, be it the work of journalists, civil society organizations or individual political activists paint a different picture as to where Jordan's political life and institutions are heading. The Covid-19 pandemic in Jordan led to the suspension of normal legislative procedures and the instating of the Defense Law. All restrictions with regard to social distancing, maximum attendees of events and testing requirements have been lifted at the time of writing.

Nevertheless, the Defense Law remains in place, meaning that the government can still take legally binding decisions without even consulting parliament or following any form of inclusive procedure. In addition, the Defense Law – limiting gatherings and therefore protests and demonstrations – has set a precedent over the two past years. It has meant crackdowns of protests or even intention of protest against activists. A further indication of a decline in good governance is the fact that Freedom House now classifies Jordan as “not free”, as opposed to “partly free” in the years before, exposing restrictions in the work of civil society, problems with elections and the tightening of controls on individuals and certain societal groups.⁵⁵ Additionally, Jordan's democracy rating according to the Economist's indicators has declined,⁵⁶ as has its rating according to the CIVICUS civil society monitor.⁵⁷

In its VNR of 2017, Jordan presents itself as including civil society and in initiating reforms aimed at more inclusive governance and rule of law. The report highlighted the role of the Royal Committee for Judicial Reform and Rule of Law, which was to review institutions, legislation and obstacles affecting the rule of law, independence and effectiveness of the judiciary.

The commission issued several legislative amendments that enhanced criminal justice and transparency in Jordan resulting in an action plan and several legislative amendments. These mainly aimed at enhancing the independence of the judiciary but also the right to fair trial and access to justice. While some improvements have been felt, and cases are dealt with much more efficiently and faster, we observe arbitrariness of procedures in some cases. The forced dissolution of the Teacher's Union and the lengthiness of appeal procedures is a prime example of how the freedom of association has been impacted in recent years. Nevertheless, Jordan has been able to keep its ranking in the Global Rule of Law Index at rank 59 out of 139 countries.

Since 2009, a committee on Integrity and Anti-Corruption has implemented a series of national anti-corruption strategies, as nepotism, and corruption are obstacles to good governance. The public demands the abolishment of corrupt practices and successive governments have adopted strategies against it. The work of the committee gained speed during the last five years and resulted in the enforcement of legislative amendments to the Public Procurement Law, the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission Law, and the Illicit Gain Law. However, the enforcement of the laws still lags behind and could be improved.

Jordan has so far not used its potential for inclusive governance found in its democratic institutions such as the parliament and outside the institutional framework in civil society. Increased involvement of these actors is important to increase the trust of citizens in their institutions, which in turn can translate into an attractive investment environment.

The judicial system still suffers from a number of challenges, including the lack of qualified civil administrative staff supporting the work of judges and prosecutors. In addition, the infrastructure and basic requirements that must be met in the courts are not achieved in a number of court buildings. The limited number of judges specialized in certain legal matters and the newly established crimes, weak support agencies for the Public Prosecutor and the judicial officer, as well as the lack of compliance with procedural legislation with international best practices for developing litigation procedures are also major challenges. Additionally, best practices for litigation procedures should be adopted to ensure that disputes are resolved within reasonable periods.

With regard to money laundering, promoting the recovery of stolen assets, and fighting various types of organized crime, the Anti-Money Laundry/Combating the Financing of Terrorism Act was expanded to include non-profit associations and organizations in 2017.⁵⁸ However, there was no significant reform in 2019 with regard to combating money-laundering, nor its scope or mechanism of operation. Amendments to the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission Act were adopted, enabling the Commission to monitor and verify the abnormal growth of wealth. The amendments explicitly provide penalties for corruption, and that the recovery of funds derived from corruption will not be subject to statute of limitations.⁵⁹ The Anti-Money Laundry unit was assessed for its ML/TF risk assessment in Jordan. The assessment was planned in 2017 and was carried out in June and July 2018. However, the evaluation has not yet been published, and the annual reports for 2019 and 2020 that are not yet available.

With regard to actions taken to reduce corruption and bribery, only the Corruption Perceptions Index 2021 has reduced the percentage of bribes due to the increase in the proportion of government actions that have been brought in. The National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy 2017-2025 established plans for the implementation of the monitoring project. The project will provide an online platform for sharing information between institutions and government departments to detect and track corruption cases.⁶⁰ Through the Global Corruption Perceptions Scale (GCB) in 2019, 4% of respondents reported providing informal funds or gifts to access government services, while 55% of respondents reported an increase in the rate of corruption. With regard to the establishment of effective, accountable and transparent institutions, a monitoring project has been set up to compile information, in particular information on assets belonging to those accused of corruption cases, their spouses and their minor children - through relevant government institutions that can be used to detect corruption cases. Since 2018, information on public procurement has been made available to the public through the central electronic database of the General Supplies Service (joneps.gov.jo).⁶¹

Ensuring public access to information and protecting freedoms is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Although Jordan has been proactive in the passage of the 2007 Law on the Right to Access to Teachers, 15 years later, follow-up shows that there is no implementation or enforcement of the right. Therefore, people's access to information is difficult, and is not governed by an institutional context. The problem from the first day of the passage of the Right to Information Act has been clear. The law has legitimized the confidentiality of information and has not given the status of private law (the Right to Information Act) over the various laws protecting the confidentiality of information and preventing their disclosure in the same way as the State Documents and Secrets Act in force since 1971.

The law broadened the exceptions that prevent institutions from giving information to the public by linking it to loose texts, which is not in line with international standards, especially Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. There are numerous details of the weaknesses in the Right to Information Act, including the fact that the Information Council is not independent, and the law requires applicants to have a "legitimate interest", which is a pretext for rejecting requests for information.

The legal context is not the only problem. Field studies have shown that some public institutions do not know about the law, while others have not established an institutional context to enforce this right. The Transparent Government Initiative (OGP) sought to review and amend the law. An independent committee introduced a new bill of law that is a step forward, but the government, together with the Cabinet's Office of Legislation, has made amendments that have been lost in its power, its obligation to improve the state of access to information, yet was referred to Parliament two years ago and no action has been taken. To improve enforcement of the right to information, and in the context of the fourth Executive Plan of the Transparent Government Initiative (OGP) prepared by the Ministry of Planning, an independent expert group prepared three protocols; the first to enforce access to information, ensuring institutional mechanisms, the second to classify information according to the law, best practices, and the third to manage and archive information. Although these protocols have been approved by the Council of Ministers since 2020, the information indicates that they have not been applied by public institutions, and there are no mechanisms to monitor their implementation.

Freedom of expression and media is subject to pressure and restrictions, and the Center for the Protection and Freedom of Journalists in its report on the state of freedom of media in Jordan for 2020 and 2021, his index showed that freedoms are "a doctrine of freedom". A package of legal material is used to prosecute activists and defenders because of their attitudes, and these laws are not compatible with constitutional rights, nor with treaties and agreements ratified by Jordan.⁶²

There is also more than one law used to prosecute the public and journalists for freedom of expression, including: the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Law, but most commonly the Cybercrime Law, especially Article 11 which allows for arrest and imprisonment for what is considered a criminal offence. The Jordan Media Freedom Index 2021 has shown that, according

to the Center for the Protection and Freedom of Journalists, Jordan's Right to Information is "Restricted" with 9.8 points out of 40 points. Nearly half of the 49.3% respondents to the 2021 index believe that loose terms such as "hate speech, national security, national unity" are used to significantly restrict freedom of expression and information. 82% believe that the government does not set up independent commissions of inquiry to rarely consider allegations of violations against journalists. The most common violations in Jordan during the last two years, which have been repeated, have been the withholding of information and publication bans in issues that have been a public opinion, as well as prior oversight by editorial departments of media organizations.

THE WAY FORWARD

Jordan still faces some challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The reasons for this are manifold and stem from internal structural factors preventing progress with regards to many of the SDGs, such as economic imbalances, lack of fairness of these policies and the lack of coordination between and implementation of governmental policies to that effect. Global challenges such as the Russo-Ukrainian War and the Covid-19 pandemic have contributed to the slow progress, but are not the only cause. In order to support the achieving of the Sustainable Development Goals, Jordan should:

- Enhance its institutional structure and strengthen democratic institutions in Jordan such as the Jordanian parliament. This will lead to a more enabling environment to move forward in achieving the sustainable development goals
- Include Jordanian civil society and local stakeholders in policy- and decision-making, as they can help develop and implement policies that take all segments of society into account. Civil society can offer experience and expertise from its work on the ground.
- Continue to review and amend legislation to ensure that it is fully aligned with international standards, in a way that confirms the application of the principle of the rule of law and enhances the right to a fair trial.
- Reconsider the crime prevention law and amend it in line with best practices to protect public rights and freedoms. Take into account the recommendations issued by the international treaty bodies and the universal periodic reviews with regard to strengthening the system and the principle of the rule of law. Provide the institutions of the judiciary with the necessary financial and human resources to enable it to perform its role more effectively. Reconsider relevant legislation that allows for the expansion of arrests, especially in cases related to the cybercrime law. Ensure the financial and administrative independence of all major government institutions that serve the activities of the judiciary, and increase the empowerment of civil society as a key partner in promoting the rule of law approach. Reconsider the legal aid system to allow civil society organizations a space to provide legal services to those who are unable to hire lawyers.
- Adopt an effective mechanism in the Assets Verification Unit aiming to increase oversight over the submission of required declarations by government officials, and to ensure that information on legally compliant officials is published on a website. Expand the scope of the requirement to obligate government institutions and private companies to make the publication of master data available for public viewing, and to ensure its implementation with a focus on access to information.
- Respect all Human Rights, including the freedom of speech and the freedom of peaceful assembly. Giving a voice to all will improve public policy making and ensure inclusivity of decision-making.
- Expand the social protection system to include all workers and vulnerable groups by allowing the contribution of all workers, whether they are self-employed or working informally.

- Provide incentives for informal workers and their employers to formalize their jobs in order to include them in the social protection scheme but also in legislation relating to decent work conditions, such as fair pay, occupational health and safety and secure payment.
- Improve and commit to the enforcement of labor laws and decent work conditions in order to enhance the overall strength of the labor market and make foreign investment in Jordan more attractive.
- Reconsider policies that exacerbate poverty rates and hunger in Jordan, such as cuts in subsidies of commodities, a low minimum wage and exclusion of young people from the social protection.
- Collect data on inequality levels, wage levels, household incomes, inflation and living costs in order to assess the current situation in Jordan. Based on this research, adopt and implement policies that address current economic imbalances, such as inflation and economic stagnation. Policies based on a Household Survey from 2010 are not sufficient to adopt appropriate policies.
- Strengthen the role of women in Jordan both in the economy and the political sphere by enforcing existing legislation and policies on women empowerment and repealing or amending discriminatory laws. Enshrine non-discrimination on the basis of gender in the Jordanian constitution.
- Enable civil society to participate in promoting development by removing restrictions imposed on its work and eliminate the principle of pre- control over its work.
- Adopt a gender-sensitive budget and improve child care services, state care for the elderly, the disabled and other people requiring care in order to reduce the care burden for women and in turn enable their increased economic participation, to the benefit of the overall Jordanian economy.

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