

OECD Public Governance Reviews

Governing for Sustainable Prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa



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Foreword

Governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have faced several cross-cutting global issues in the last decade, including climate change and digital transformation, in addition to challenges related to the political, social, economic and security context in the region. These challenges have triggered public governance reforms to build sustainable and resilient administrations that better meet development objectives and citizens' expectations. The challenges faced and progress made in reforms vary significantly across countries and territories, with some Gulf countries performing similarly to OECD Member countries. However, according to most indicators, the MENA region overall has lost ground in the last 10 years in terms of good governance. Data show that citizens' trust in government and public institutions has consistently decreased since 2016 (despite a rise after 2011), and most countries and territories in the region have made little progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

To support and scale up reforms, this Report describes developments in key public governance areas over the past decade and discusses MENA governments' strategic commitments, governance arrangements, capacities and practices to implement public governance reforms across 4 main objectives: (1) fostering sustainable growth; (2) spending public resources efficiently; (3) delivering public services effectively; and (4) promoting open and inclusive societies. Recognising MENA governments' different rates of advancement in public governance reforms, the Report provides general strategic orientations and identifies areas of opportunity that can be adapted to different contexts, needs and priorities. Special attention is given to building the capacity of governments to address the needs of vulnerable groups and to use the green and digital transformations to ensure inclusive and sustainable prosperity in the region, in line with priorities of work already identified by OECD and MENA stakeholders.

The Report is part of the Programme of Work 2023-2024 of the OECD and of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme in support of public sector efficiency in the MENA region. In line with the strategic priorities of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme and the OECD Public Governance Directorate, the Report helps identify key issues and lessons learnt to support public sector reforms to unlock social and economic development and meet citizen's growing expectations in terms of quality services, inclusive policymaking and transparency in the MENA region.

The Report draws on bilateral and regional reviews, projects and exchanges in the framework of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme and its working groups, as well as OECD standards and best practices in public governance.

It aims to inform discussions and promote peer learning on public governance reforms in the MENA region. It will also inform the preparation of the next mandate (2026-2030) of the MENA-OECD Initiative on Governance and Competitiveness for Development, providing a solid basis for discussions to identify the needs and opportunities of support for good governance in each country and territory, based on governments' current efforts and challenges.

The Report was produced within the framework of Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation support to the MENA-OECD Governance Programme. The regional project *COVID-19*

Response and Recovery in the MENA region, implemented from 2021 to 2023, supported MENA governments in their efforts to respond and recover from the COVID-19 crisis and to enhance their resilience to future shocks, with a focus on young people and women. It was implemented by the OECD Development Centre, the MENA-OECD Governance Programme in the OECD Public Governance Directorate, and the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration. The Report will also inform future activities of the OECD Training Centre on Public Governance in Caserta (Italy), which is a hub for sharing knowledge and building capacities among policy practitioners in the MENA region, as well as Sub-Saharan Africa and the Western Balkans.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACAC	Arab Convention Against Corruption
AIG	Anticipatory Innovation Governance
ATI	Access to Information
CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGEM	General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (in French, <i>Confédération Générale des Entreprises Marocaines</i>)
CGI	Central Gender Institution
CoG	Centre of Government
COP	Conference of Parties
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
ERRADA	Egyptian Regulatory Reform And Development Activity
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FMIS	Financial Management Information System
GBD	General Budget Department (Jordan)
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
GPP	Green Public Procurement
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGAI	Institution guaranteeing the right to access information
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRM	Independent Reporting Mechanism
JIACC	Jordanian Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MPED	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (Egypt)
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIGSD	National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development
NMD	New Development Model (Morocco)
OBS	Open Budget Survey
OGD	Open Government Data
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
SAI	Supreme Audit Institution

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGA	Sectoral Gender Analysis
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UN ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Executive summary

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries and territories are facing complex economic, social, political and environmental challenges that vary in scope and extent across the region. Dwindling oil reserves, global energy prices and inflation are exerting mounting economic pressures. Climate change is likely to have a profound impact on the already scarce natural resources in the region, in particular on water availability and food supply. Demographic pressures in the region are putting a strain on education systems and labour markets, which were already fragile before the COVID-19 crisis. These issues are compounded by evolving regional and global conflicts and their social, human and economic costs, affecting the delivery of vital public services and disrupting livelihoods across groups in society.

Achieving long-term strategic development objectives while meeting citizens' immediate needs requires revamping governance arrangements to ensure more coherent and efficient policy responses.

Most MENA governments have developed multi-annual strategic visions – and increasingly involve citizens and other stakeholders in their preparation – to guide policymaking over the long term and address cross-cutting challenges such as climate change, gender equality and intergenerational justice. To operationalise these visions, governments have strengthened strategic planning functions and developed governance mechanisms around planning units, guidelines, monitoring platforms, multi-level strategic planning frameworks and inter-ministerial committees. However, the effective establishment of co-ordination mechanisms to steer whole-of-government strategies and support the mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives remains a key challenge. In many countries and territories, governance frameworks and mandates tend to lack clarity and are not always conducive to pooling and co-ordinating government action. Efforts to promote a more systematic use of tools such as risk management, strategic foresight, public communication, monitoring and evaluation and data governance could better inform planning and ensure buy-in for public action in the long term.

Managing and allocating public financial resources in an efficient, sustainable and informed way in line with national development objectives calls for more comprehensive budgetary governance reforms.

The introduction of medium-term budget approaches by several MENA governments, together with the implementation of performance-related budgetary tools and practices, represents an important step towards developing a long-term strategic vision of public expenditures. Nevertheless, progress remains uneven across the region, with reforms pending and efforts fragmented in most countries and territories. While governments are increasingly shifting towards budgeting approaches that take into account societal outcomes, green and gender budgeting as well as other phenomenon-based budgeting approaches could be more widely adopted. Additionally, transparency and accountability could be enhanced by the development of tools and practices for a more comprehensive, systematic and user-centered disclosure of budget documents, institutionalised stakeholder participation in budget decisions and strong internal and external oversight functions and mechanisms. The application of sound budgetary governance is particularly important to guide spending decisions in infrastructure projects, which are often led by the

public sector in the MENA region and where important investments are needed to sustain development objectives.

To address persisting government performance challenges, MENA governments could build on existing efforts to ensure the design and delivery of high-quality and user-centered services and policies.

Most governments have adopted structural reforms designed to reinforce public integrity and improve public procurement processes, by developing legal, policy and institutional frameworks as well as tools and practices for greater oversight, transparency and stakeholder participation in these processes. Other initiatives have aimed to accelerate the digital transformation of the public sector, including developing and reinforcing institutions, strategies, capabilities and data governance frameworks. Efforts to develop a fit-for-purpose civil service have focused on the renewal of human resource management structures, processes and mandates and the development of capabilities of civil servants to support strategic planning, decision- and policymaking in a rapidly evolving environment. Important advances have also been made to shift towards regulatory reforms that establish whole-of-government policies to improve laws and regulations. Overall, governments are aiming to offer more accessible, simple and responsive public services, both on- and offline, to deliver better for citizens with diverse needs and priorities. There is scope to further develop legal and institutional frameworks and adopt whole-of-government approaches on these issues across the region.

Finally, there is room to further apply open government principles to improve public sector effectiveness and sustainable prosperity.

Governments in the MENA region have undertaken reforms over the past decade to progressively place citizens at the centre of public policies and services with a view to building more open and inclusive societies. Some advances have been made to embed and mainstream transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation in public life. MENA governments have adopted initiatives, including through digitalisation, which allow citizens and other stakeholders to make their voices heard as well as observe, understand and monitor the activities of the government on decisions that affect their daily lives. Efforts have also focused on improving governance arrangements to promote better opportunities for all, especially for women and young people, and mainstream their needs in policymaking. While progress has been achieved, the path towards open and inclusive societies is still hampered by significant challenges in terms of governance arrangements, fragmentation of policy frameworks and inadequate resources. There is an opportunity to strengthen the enabling environment for open government, to better co-ordinate efforts and to ensure impact for citizens, including through legal and institutional consolidation, and to further institutionalise existing practices across all levels of government. In addition, a number of specific legal, institutional and administrative obstacles, including high minimum age requirements for elected officials and limited work-life balance arrangements, must be addressed if the views of all parts of the population are to be taken into account.

1 Public governance in the Middle East and North Africa region at a glance

This chapter briefly outlines the context in the Middle East and North Africa against the backdrop of major transformations and global challenges. It provides a glance at developments in public governance over the past decade across four main areas: (1) fostering sustainable growth; (2) spending public resources efficiently; (3) delivering public services effectively; and (4) promoting open and inclusive societies. In doing so, it sets the stage for an in-depth assessment of governance arrangements and practices adopted by MENA governments in these areas, covered in the respective chapters of the report.

Introduction

The evolution of global challenges over the past decade and their impact on society have brought public governance reforms to the forefront of the policy debate. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)¹ region, in particular, the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings are often portrayed as the result of the breakdown of the “social contract” between governments and citizens (Devarajan and Ianchovichina, 2018^[1]). This is due to governments’ failure to deliver on the political, social and economic needs and expectations of their citizens, including in the areas of social justice, integrity and political representation (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[2]). The reliance on governments to deliver for citizens in the face of a collective threat was underlined by the COVID-19 crisis and recovery, and again more recently by the negative economic and social impacts of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, and of the evolving conflicts in the Middle East, which are generating new risks for governments in the region.

Effective short-term responses and long-term solutions to such crises rest on co-ordinated, cross-cutting and participatory governance approaches. Public administrations in the MENA region will thus need to strengthen their public governance frameworks, tools and capacities to deliver for their citizens in the context of complex and inter-connected phenomena, from climate change to food insecurity, digital transformation, armed conflicts, displacement and migration. Effective and efficient public governance is an end in itself: using limited public resources effectively and efficiently in full transparency and within robust accountability frameworks is in the public interest. But it is also a means to ensure that governments meet the needs of citizens and businesses successfully and enable societies to generate and sustain development and prosperity across generations, thus building and sustaining public confidence in public institutions.

While the MENA region is confronted with common challenges, it is a very diverse and heterogeneous region. The region includes economies with some of the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in the world (e.g., Qatar, the United Arab Emirates – UAE- and Kuwait) as well as others where poverty, conflict and human displacement are widespread (e.g. Libya, West Bank and Gaza Strip, Syria and Yemen). MENA societies also vary across a wide range of other natural, political, socio-economic and cultural factors.

The purpose of this Report is to survey developments in key public governance areas over the past decade and assess MENA governments’ strategic commitments to improve their public governance frameworks, tools and practices as part of their efforts to enhance national sustainable development outcomes and prosperity for all citizens.

In so doing, this Report assesses MENA governments’ approaches to public governance, including governance modernisation efforts, against the OECD standards and best practices on public governance that have been laid out in OECD legal instruments and reviews. The Report draws on evidence and good practices gathered by the OECD Public Governance Committee, the Regulatory Policy Committee, the Committee of Senior Budget Officials and their subsidiary bodies, as well as the working groups and networks of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme. The Report then aims to identify strategic orientations and actionable areas of opportunity for consideration by MENA governments.

Chapter 1 outlines the context in the MENA region and provides a glance at developments in key public governance areas over the past decade, setting the scene for the in-depth assessment of the governance arrangements and practices adopted by MENA governments to grow sustainably (Chapter 2), spend public resources efficiently (Chapter 3), deliver public services effectively (Chapter 4) and promote open and inclusive societies (Chapter 5).

The multiplication of crises in the MENA region reveals the need for more resilient and efficient governments

The 2010-2011 Arab uprisings, the COVID-19 crisis, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the evolving conflicts in the Middle East have represented key turning points for governments across the MENA region. These turning points have exacerbated pre-existing challenges and tested governments' capacities to overcome crises and deliver on citizens' expectations.

In late 2010, the self-immolation of a Tunisian citizen in protest of police corruption and ill treatment marked the beginning of the Arab uprisings, triggering unrest, protests and political change across the MENA region, in a context of discontent with corruption, inequalities and a difficult socio-economic situation. Constitutional reform processes were launched in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. The uprisings also accelerated reforms in a series of public governance areas. For instance, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia accelerated efforts to adopt principles of open government, promote transparency and decentralise government powers (Shalaby et al., 2020^[3]).

Despite these endeavours, public governance challenges persist to this day. In fact, the MENA region is one of a few regions in the world that has lost ground in terms of good governance over the past decade, according to most indicators (World Bank, 2022^[4]). For instance, a number of MENA public administrations continue to face challenges in the area of corruption, inefficient public spending, bloated public sector workforces, administrative red tape and inadequate governance structures, tools and capacities (Biganzoli and Gagliardi, 2021^[5]).

In Libya, Syria and Yemen, the uprisings deteriorated into wide-scale violent conflicts. These protracted conflicts have produced devastating effects on citizens' physical, economic and social security and have deteriorated institutional set-ups and capacities. Today, the estimated total number of casualties caused by the conflict in Syria stands at around 500,000-600,000 people, including at least 300,000 civilians according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2023^[6]; OHCHR, 2022^[7]). Yemen has suffered over 377,000 deaths due to the conflict, including 60% due to conflict-induced famine and healthcare deterioration (BBC, 2023^[8]). The conflicts have also generated displacement, increased migration flows and deteriorated people's well-being and access to services and basic needs. There are also significant economic losses: Syria's economy shrank by 10% a year on average between 2011 and 2014. Similarly, Libya's economy contracted by around 14% per year between 2013 and 2015, and Yemen's by an estimated 38% in 2015 alone (Ianchovichina, 2016^[9]). Mitigating the negative ramifications of these crises has represented an unprecedented challenge for these governments in a context of limited public governance capacity.

The COVID-19 crisis also affected MENA economies – although to different degrees – in terms of high levels of debt, budget deficits, drops in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), limited trade and tourism, reduction of remittances, impact on oil prices, decline of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) revenues and rising unemployment (OECD, 2020^[10]). The impact of the crisis was particularly severe for young people, women and vulnerable groups (Hoogeveen and Lopez-Acevedo, 2021^[11]). For instance, approximately 110 million students no longer had access to education, which led to a decline in youth employment by 7.5% in 2020 across the MENA region (OECD, 2022^[12]). Women in the MENA region were at the frontline of the COVID-19 health emergency response and suffered from increased unpaid care burdens, higher exposure to economic fallout and increased risk of gender-based violence (OECD, 2020^[13]). While the COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts across the whole region, public administrations exhibited different levels of readiness and capacity to respond to the crisis, as a result of divergent trajectories in the past ten years. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a critical test for the region's fragile resilience and for governments' capacity to deliver on people's needs and expectations (OECD, 2020^[10]). For instance, some governments demonstrated strong capacity to mobilise and implement prevention measures and prepare stimulus packages to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis on households and

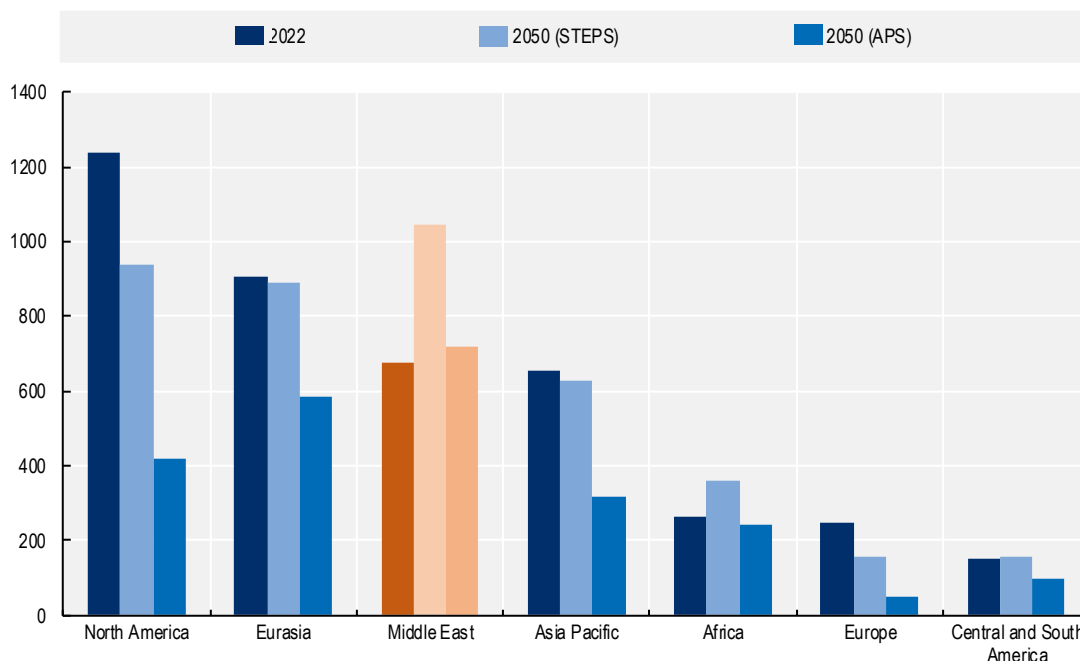
firms. At the same time, the crisis exposed structural public governance weak spots and highlighted the importance of reforms in this area.

Since 2022, the war in Ukraine has generated a number of shocks and ripple effects across the world, notably bringing issues of food and energy security to the forefront of the policy debate. While oil exporting economies in the MENA region largely benefitted from elevated energy prices, the rest of the region has directly or indirectly suffered from higher import bills as well as a depreciation of local currencies in some cases (World Bank, 2022^[14]). Russia and Ukraine are also major players in the energy, minerals and grains markets, which serve as inputs into the agrifood supply chains, including for fertilisers (FAO, 2022^[15]). Before the war, approximately 80% of wheat imports in Egypt and about 95% in Lebanon came from Russia and Ukraine². These events led to soaring world prices on many food commodities and disruptions to global food value chains, leading to an increase in the share of population exposed to food insecurity in a number of MENA countries and territories (OECD, 2023^[16]). The consequences of food and energy insecurity risk exacerbating inequalities, undermining economic prosperity and fuelling political instability. With numerous governments in the MENA region providing food subsidies, higher prices may also have lasting implications for public finances. For instance, in 2021, one third of the calories consumed by people in the MENA region were wheat products subsidised by governments (Belhaj and Soliman, 2021^[17]). While the war context continues to evolve and global food prices seem to decrease to pre-war level (The Economist, 2022^[18]), the crisis has highlighted the need to develop strong governance systems to ensure food security in the MENA region.

The war in Ukraine has significantly changed world energy markets, with important implications for the MENA region. According to projections from the International Energy Agency, by the mid-2020s, the gap left by Russia global fossil fuel exports will be mainly filled by higher exports from the Middle East, whose share of oil global export markets is expected to rise from over 40% in 2022 to 65% in 2050 (IEA, 2023^[19]). Similarly, the Middle East is projected to become the largest producer of natural gas, ahead of North America, increasing its global share of production of natural gas from 15% in 2022 to 25% by 2050 (Figure 1.1). In addition, with large hydrocarbon reserves and renewables potential, many Middle Eastern governments are exploring the potential for hydrogen production and trade (IEA, 2023^[19]).

Figure 1.1. The Middle East is projected to become the largest producer of natural gas by 2050

Natural gas production (bcm), 2022 and 2050, by region of the world



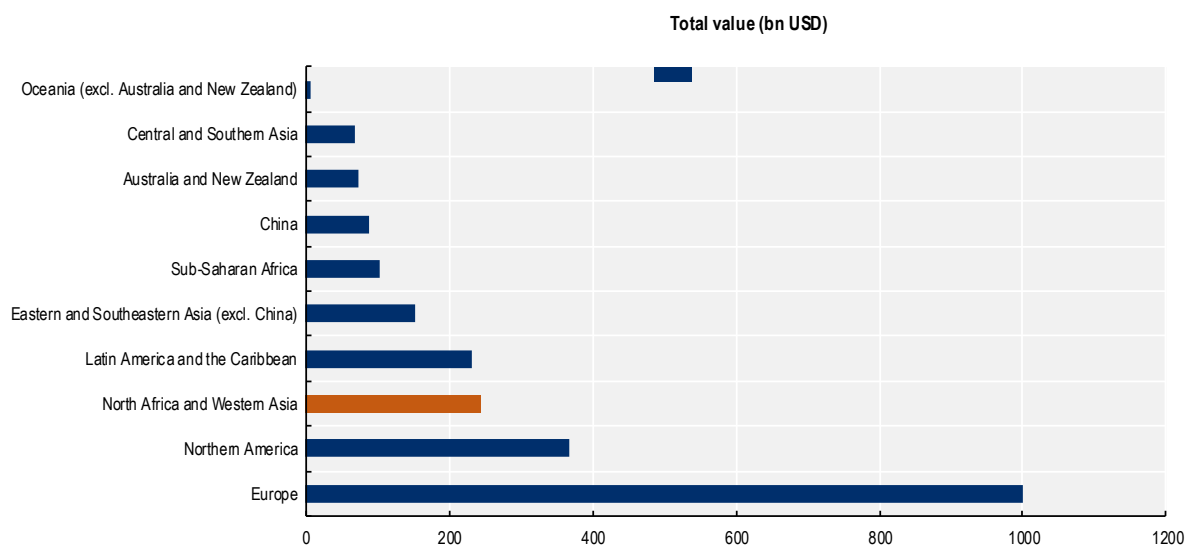
Note: bcm=billion cubic meters ; Middle East includes: Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen; Information on the Stated Policies Scenario (STEPS) is available at <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-and-climate-model/stated-policies-scenario-steps>. Information on the Announced Pledges Scenario (APS) is available at <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-and-climate-model/announced-pledges-scenario-aps>. Regional groupings definitions are available in Annex C of the source.

Source: Author's work based on (IEA, 2023_[19]).

The COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine with their accompanying shocks to global supply chains have also highlighted the importance of international trade in natural resources and related interdependencies. According to data analysed by Chatham House, the “Northern African and Western Asian”³ region imported natural resources worth USD 375 billion in 2020, and exported the equivalent of USD 752 billion in the same year. When looking at natural resources’ trade flows from the perspective of OECD countries, the “Northern African and Western Asian” region emerges as the third-most significant origin of natural resources after Europe and Northern America (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2. The “Northern African and Western Asian” region emerges as the third-most significant origin of natural resources

Region of origin of natural resources by value (USD billion), 2020



Note: The chart shows monetary values across over 1,350 different types of natural resources and resource products, including agricultural, fishery and forestry products, fossil fuels, metals and other minerals, and pearls and gemstones. It contains raw materials, intermediate products, and by-products. Information on methodology <https://resource.trade.earth/about>. “North Africa and Western Asia” includes the following countries and territories: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza Strip and Yemen.

Source: Author’s work based on (Chatham House, n.d.^[20]).

More recently, the evolving conflicts in the Middle East will have long-lasting, profound consequences for the MENA region. One major consequence of the conflict has been the rapid and large-scale displacement of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. While neighbouring states initially dismissed the risk of another migration flow, a protracted conflict could force a revision of this assumption. Important migration flows have also had an impact on the political stability and economy of neighbouring countries and territories. It is estimated that, by the end of 2023, 230,000 additional people had descended into poverty in Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan (UNDP, 2023^[21]).

In addition to the humanitarian challenges they pose, the evolving conflicts in the Middle East disrupt the economies of the region. In 2023, the economy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip lost 8.7% of its GDP and was projected as of May 2024 to lose between 25.8 and 29% during 2024 (ESCWA; UNDP, 2024^[22]). At the regional level, the economic impact has been contained so far, with growth projected as of April 2024 to remain subdued in 2024 but still improving moderately to 2.7% (from 1.9% in 2023) (IMF, 2024^[23]). Nevertheless, the evolving conflicts in the Middle East have heightened uncertainty and risks in the region, particularly as they often result in lasting economic scarring.

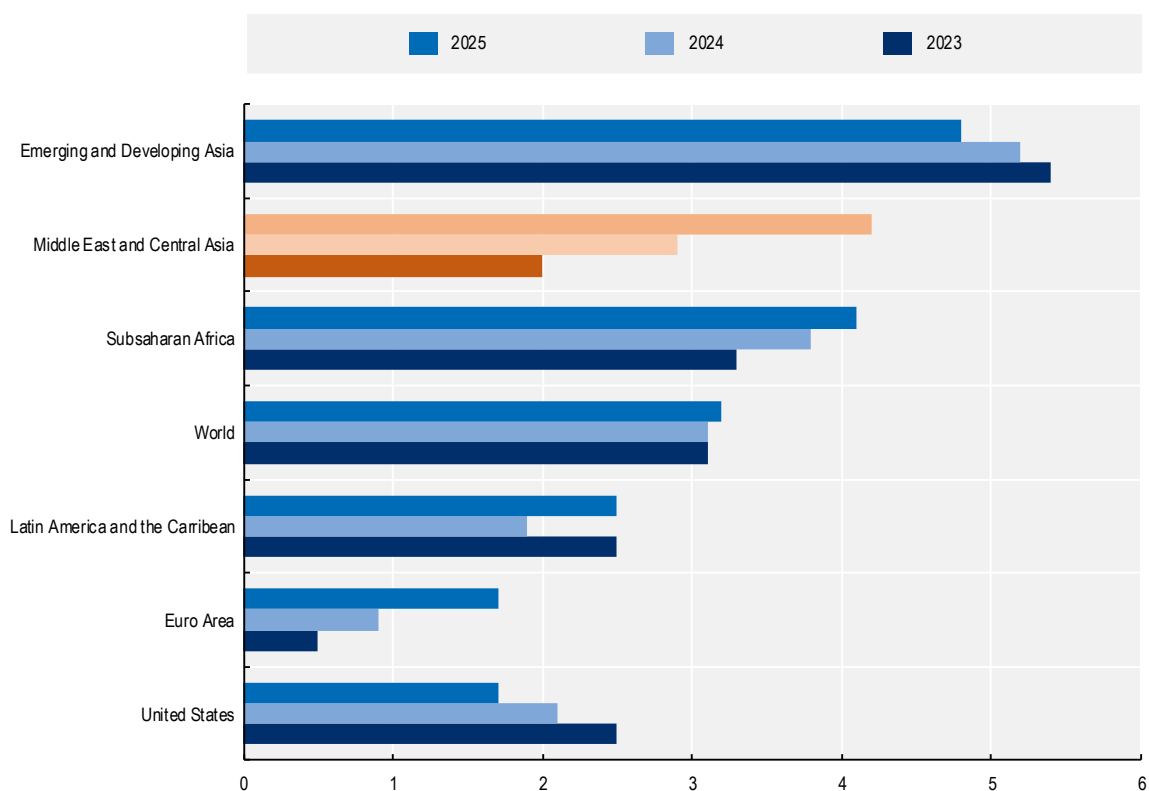
The inflationary pressures caused by the combined surge in energy and food markets could lead to long-lasting contractionary monetary policies, affecting in turn the worldwide economy. In fact, a projected rise of 10% in oil prices is expected to result in a 0.15% decline in global growth, accompanied by a 0.4% increase in global inflation (UNDP, 2023^[24]). This general price increase is likely to be accompanied by rising public debt, fiscal pressure, and currency devaluation, negatively affecting trade, and putting pressure on foreign reserve holdings to sustain exchange rates. The situation is particularly challenging for neighbouring countries and territories that were already in fragile situations, such as Lebanon, where

the financial and economic crisis has been accompanied by high levels of social unrest that peaked in October 2023 (International Monetary Fund, 2024^[25]). In terms of the impact of the evolving conflicts in the Middle East on the energy market, supply disruptions and higher and more volatile prices can be expected. Those evolving conflicts in the Middle East could lead to rising prices and affect the already strained regional gas market by hindering current and potential cooperation among neighbouring economies, especially Israeli exports to Jordan and Egypt. The initial effects on the global oil market were limited: after an initial approximate increase of 6% in the price per barrel during October 2023, overall prices went down to previous levels by the end of the year (EIA, 2024^[26]). However, as illustrated by World Bank's projections, a protracted conflict and the escalation of regional tensions could drive oil prices up to 150 USD per barrel (World Bank, 2023^[27]), an approximate 80% increase compared to late December 2023 levels.

Overall, the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings, the COVID-19 crisis, the evolving conflicts in the Middle East and neighbouring countries and territories have reiterated the significance of the MENA region for global stability. They also demonstrate that public administrations in the region need to invest significantly in accelerating public governance reforms and in sustaining their implementation to ensure that MENA governments can address major development challenges successfully, regain and retain their citizens' trust, and ensure inclusive prosperity for all (Kabbani, 2022^[28]). This will be essential to support the region's growth in the coming years, that is expected to outperform all other regions of the world in 2025 - except emerging and developing Asia - in terms of annual GDP growth, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s latest projections (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3. The MENA region is expected to be the second fastest growing region by 2025

Growth by region in 2023, 2024 projections and 2025 projections (real GDP growth, percent change)



Note: The chart is based on the World Bank's classification of regions of the world, available at <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgateas/archive/2017/the-world-by-region.html>.

Source: Author's work based on (IMF, 2024^[29]).

Contextualising governance reform: trust, demographics and well-being in MENA

Public governance determines how governments make and enforce rules, how they deliver services (including education, employment and health services) and how they engage with, and remain accountable to, citizens in making decisions that matter to them, affecting people's well-being both directly and indirectly (OECD, 2017^[30]). The well-being and demographic set-up of society also matter for how governments design and deliver policies and services. Given their mutually reinforcing interlinkages, this section provides a short account of developments in demographics and key well-being indicators in the MENA region, while the rest of the chapter provides an overview of developments in public governance that will be examined in the remaining chapters of this report.

Although a comprehensive and sound analysis of the impact of ongoing conflicts in the MENA region is not yet possible, they will have long-term socio-economic, human, environmental and political consequences – although with varying scope and range - across the region.

A changing demographic situation

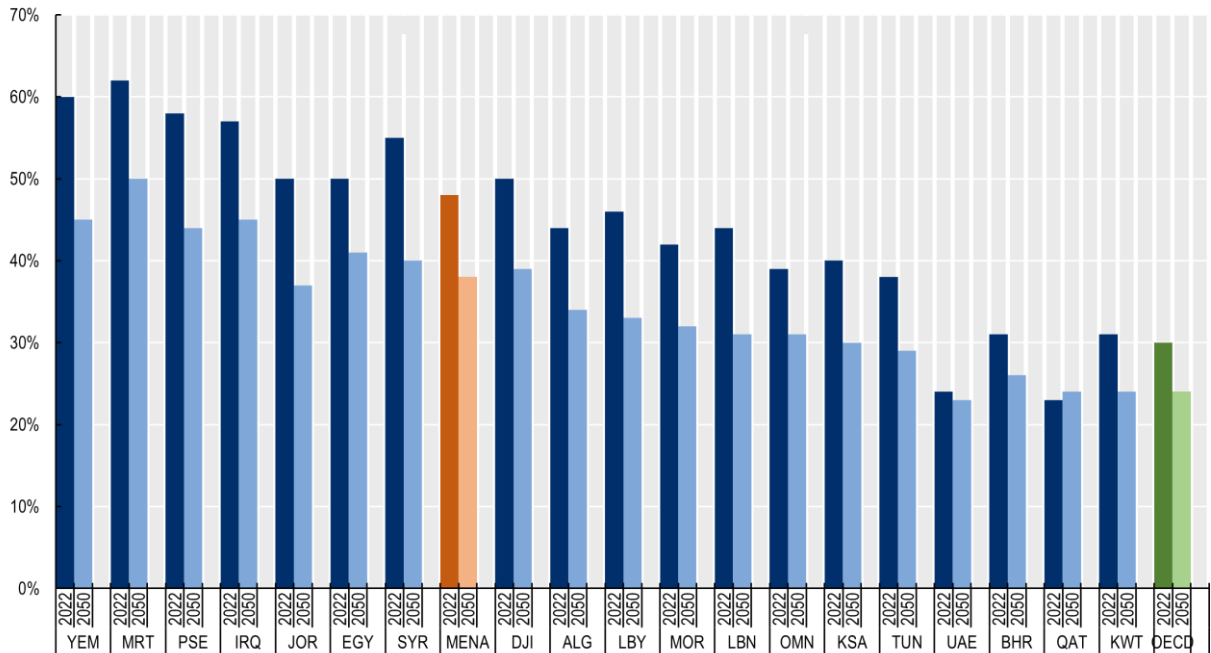
The demographic make-up is a key context factor for government action and governance reforms, as it affects the type, quantity and location of different public services and policies needed to meet people's needs and expectations.

In the MENA region, people under 25 years of age constitute nearly half (48%) of the population, compared with 30% of the population across OECD Member countries (Figure 1.4)⁴. By 2050, half of the countries and territories in the MENA region are set to experience population increases of at least 50% from their 2015 levels (UNICEF, 2019^[31]).

The age-profile of MENA societies calls for youth-sensitive public governance arrangements: the transition of the region's significant youth cohort to adulthood presents both an opportunity and a need for renewed efforts and investments in governance arrangements, youth policies and public services to ensure their successful transition to an autonomous life and participation in economic, social and public life (OECD, 2022^[12]). At the same time, future demographic projections vary significantly within the region; the window of opportunity to benefit from the demographic dividend differs from one society to another (UNICEF, 2019^[31]). For instance, the current population under 25 years old ranges from 24% of the total population in the UAE to 60% in Yemen and is projected to range from 24% in Qatar to 50% in Mauritania by 2050 (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4. People under 25 years of age constitute nearly half (48%) of the population in MENA countries and territories, compared with 30% of the population across OECD Member countries

Share of young people as part of the total population, 2022 and 2050 projections



Note: PSE refers to the West Bank and Gaza Strip or the Palestinian Authority in the figures of the report.

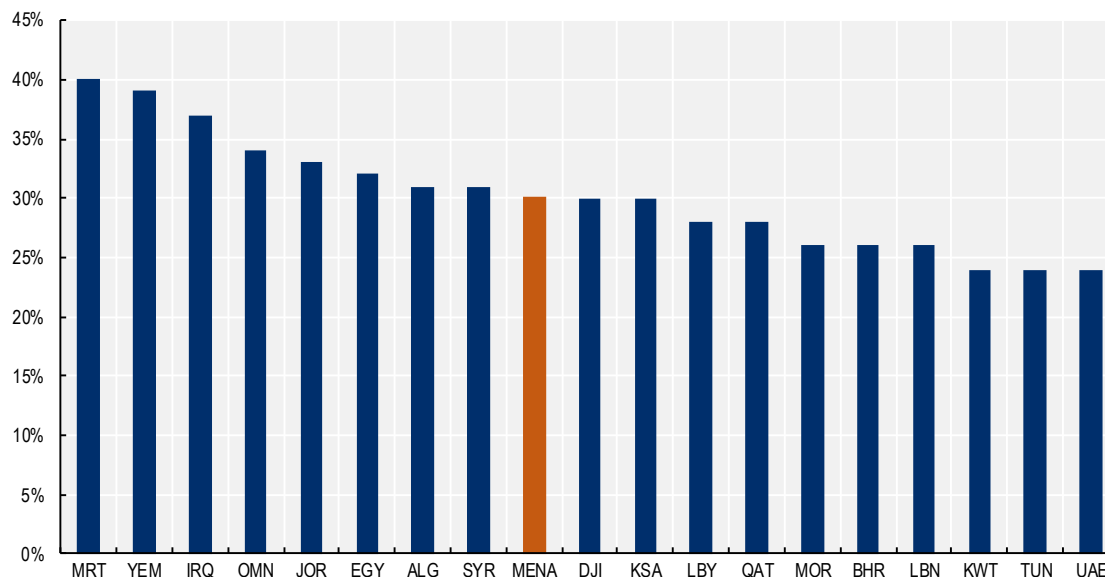
Source: OECD calculations based on (UN DESA, 2022^[32]).

To respond to the growing need to deliver to youth, governments have presented holistic youth strategies in recent years. The report *Youth at the Centre of Government Action: A Review of the Middle East and North Africa* shows that, as of 2022, at least seven governments in the MENA region have adopted a youth strategy to promote a joint vision, co-ordinated approaches and policy coherence in support of young people (OECD, 2022^[12]).

The MENA region is home to almost 250 million women and girls (UNICEF, 2021^[33])⁵. Furthermore, a significant part is aged 14 or below: in 2022, girls aged 0-14 represented more than 30% of the total female population in Mauritania, Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Oman and Algeria (Figure 1.5). Fully unlocking the potential of girls and women, including through public governance arrangements for gender equality, remains an important goal for MENA governments to strive towards.

Figure 1.5. Girls aged 0-14 represent 30% of the total female population in MENA countries and territories in 2022

Share of girls aged 0-14 as part of the total female population, 2022



Note: "MENA" here refers to the average of the percentages included in the chart.

Source: Author's work based on (UN DESA, 2022^[32]).

Regarding the geographical distribution of population, most MENA societies have experienced a period of rapid urbanisation over the past decades. In 2022, two thirds of the overall population in the region lived in urban areas (World Bank, 2024^[34]). In Kuwait and Qatar, 100% or nearly 100% of the population lives in urban centres, followed by Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, Lebanon, and the UAE, all projected to be over 90% urbanised by 2035 (Un Habitat, 2022^[35]). While overcrowding in urban centres can lead to difficulties such as limited water supply, land degradation and air pollution, urbanisation can also lead to growth when supported by adequate policies and services (Un Habitat, 2022). However, Yemen and Egypt are projected to remain 47.6% and 46.8% rural respectively until 2035 (Un Habitat, 2022^[35]). This underlines the importance of ensuring adequate government capacities and services outside of major cities to avoid regional disparities and rural-urban divides.

Migration and displacement shape the region's demographics, societies and economies

As a consequence of war and conflicts as well as economic, social and environmental concerns, migration has emerged as a significant phenomenon in the MENA region. The number of international migrants in the region doubled from approximately 20 million in 2000 to over 40 million in 2020 (International Organization for Migration, 2021^[36]; UN Population Division, 2020^[37]).

Conflict and violence remain the biggest drivers of displacement in the region (International Organization for Migration, 2021^[36]). While home to 7% of the world's population in 2022, the region hosted 15.5 million displaced persons in 2023, accounting for 17% of the overall population of forcibly displaced persons (UNHCR, 2024^[38]; UNHCR, 2023^[39]; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022^[40]). In 2023, the crisis in Syria remained unprecedented in terms of displacement, with 5.1 million of refugees in neighbouring countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey) and 7.2 million being Internally

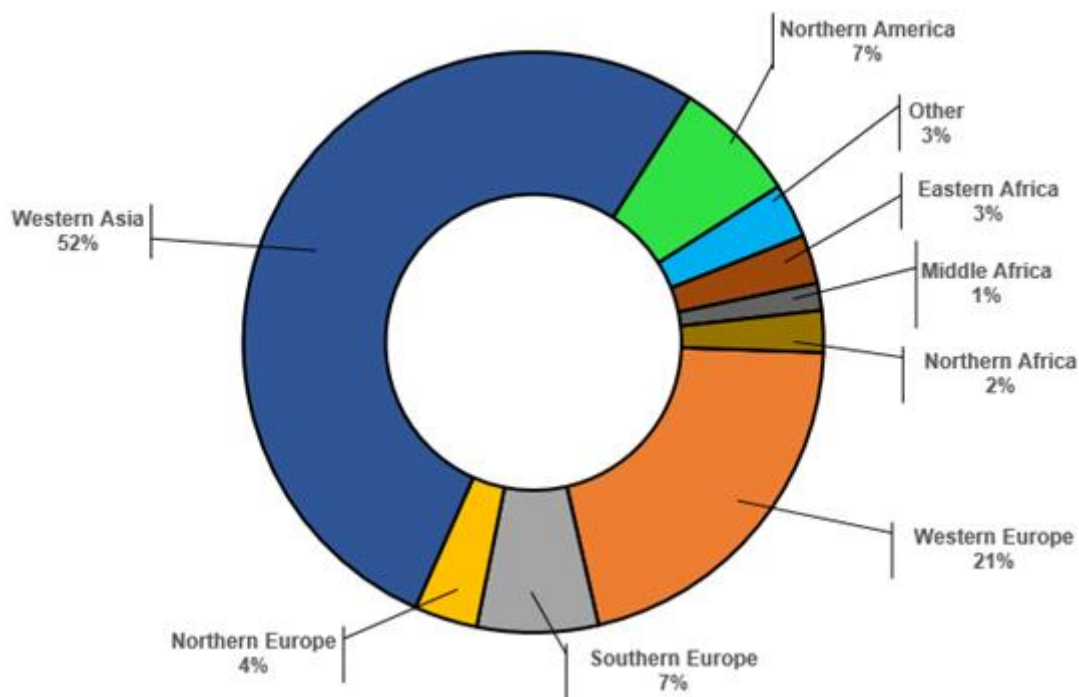
Displaced People (UNHCR, 2023^[41]). Similarly, in Yemen, 4.5 million people, accounting for 14% of the population, were displaced at the end of 2022 despite the ceasefire in October of the same year (UNHCR, 2023^[39]), and an estimated 24 million (83% of the population) are affected by food insecurity and need humanitarian aid and protection (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021^[42]).

As of January 2024, an estimated 1.7 million people living in the northern part of the Gaza strip had to evacuate to the south (UNOCHA, 2024^[43]). Domestic and international population displacement requires that governments invest in administrative capacities and resources to provide access to basic public services to the millions of refugees and displaced persons.

Economic and social factors also frame migration flows within the MENA region and with other regions of the world. 44% of people aged 18-24 years surveyed by the Arab Youth Survey in 2023 reported that they had considered emigrating. The primary reason for half of them was to find a job (ASDA'A BCW, 2023^[44]). Outward migration, including towards OECD Member countries, is prominent in the MENA region, although inward migration, especially towards Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (i.e. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) remains most significant. Most migrants from MENA countries and territories thus move to other countries in the region (54.7%) and to Western Europe (20.7%) (International Organization for Migration, 2023^[45]). Moreover, as shown in Figure 1.6, the number of migrants in OECD Member countries from the MENA region increased by 95% between 2010 and 2020, largely outpacing increases from other regions of the world, including those that had been the origin of significant migration towards OECD Member countries in the past. In addition, despite a notable improvement in the employment situation of immigrants from Africa and the Middle East since 2019, they remain the most disadvantaged group of immigrants in most OECD Member countries (OECD, 2022^[46]).

Figure 1.6. Most migrants originating from MENA countries and territories move to other countries in the region

Destination regions for migrants from MENA countries and territories, 2020



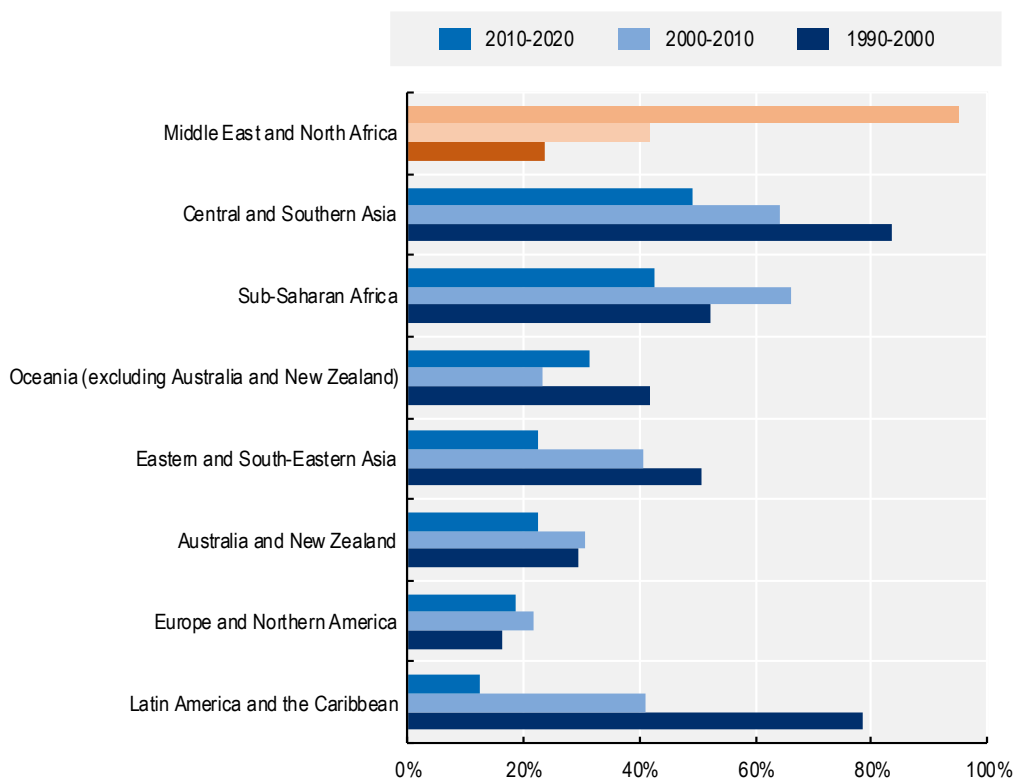
Note: The figure relies on the definition of geographical regions adopted by the United Nations, which defines regions on the basis of the following countries and territories: Western Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Switzerland), Northern America (Canada, United States of America, Greenland, Saint Pierre and Miquelon and Bermuda) and Southern Europe (Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Holy See, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Gibraltar).

Source: (UN DESA, 2020^[47]).

The MENA region is also home to over two million migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. A significant number are located in Yemen and Saudi Arabia and come from neighbouring countries and territories, including Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan. These migration patterns are mainly driven by political instability and the secession of South Sudan in 2011 (International Organization for Migration, 2023^[45]). North Africa is also a significant transit point and departure area for migrants and MENA nationals, from the subregion itself and sub-Saharan Africa, towards Europe and other destinations as shown in Figure 1.7 (International Organization for Migration, 2023^[45]).

Figure 1.7. The number of migrants in OECD countries from MENA countries and territories increased by 95% between 2010 and 2020, now representing the main region of origin

Evolution in number of migrants in OECD countries, by origin, 1990-2000, 2000-2010 and 2010-2020, percentage



Source: OECD calculations based on (UN DESA, 2020^[47]).

Migration and displacement due to climate change are also increasing significantly in the MENA region. Several countries and territories in the region have suffered significant disasters in recent years. For instance, in 2020, floods displaced more people in Yemen than conflict and violence, with nearly a quarter of a million new displacements (International Organization for Migration, 2021^[36]). In 2021 alone, around three million people were forced to leave their homes due to natural disasters and climate induced events (Freedman, 2023^[48]), and there is ongoing concern that displacement due to climate change could sharply increase. The multiplication of climate events in a region facing important environmental challenges exacerbates existing crises and their consequences on the population. In areas affected by conflicts or hosting important refugee populations such as in Jordan and Lebanon, climate disasters have aggravated ongoing humanitarian crises. In Syria, evidence suggests that the extended drought that devastated livelihoods prior to the start of the conflict may have played a role in the complex set of factors that triggered the country's civil war (International Organization for Migration, 2021^[36]).

Overview of key well-being dimensions across MENA countries and territories

Public governance can influence people's lives and well-being; at the same time, how people feel about their lives is an important driver of trust in government and public institutions.

The MENA region displays a wide variety in levels of well-being and human development (having a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living). The Human Development

Index⁶ (HDI) ranked Djibouti and Yemen as societies with “low human development” in 2021, while Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE displayed “very high human development” (UNDP, 2021^[49]). According to the HDI, most countries and territories in the MENA region have improved human development since 2010, largely due to advances in primary and secondary education as well as in healthcare delivery. Nevertheless, economic and political crises as well as conflicts and wars have deteriorated health, education and income outcomes, especially in Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Yemen, which showed a lower HDI score in 2021 than in 2010. Indeed, according to the 2022 Arab Human Development Report, the COVID-19 crisis “has erased several years of previous gains in human development” across the whole region (UNDP, 2022^[50]). Furthermore, gender inequality in human development persists, despite an overall positive trajectory in the last two decades: the MENA region⁷ ranks last among all regions, with a gender parity score of 61.7% (World Economic Forum, 2024^[51]).

Beyond the aggregate picture provided by the HDI, the OECD Well-being Framework provides a useful structure to look at key dimensions of well-being. Comprising 11 dimensions, the Framework covers indicators related to material conditions shaping people’s economic options as well as to quality-of-life factors that encompass how well people are, what they know and can do, how healthy and safe their places of living are and how connected and engaged they are (OECD, 2020^[52]). While not covering all 11 dimensions of the OECD Well-being Framework, the following sections provide a snapshot of some well-being dimensions in the MENA region, with a focus on those that are related to key areas of public service delivery.

Access to education is improving across the region

Governments across the MENA region have made significant progress in providing access to education, despite challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, literacy rates among young people (15-24) reached 91% in 2022 (93% for young men and 89% for young women) compared to 86% in 2000 (90% for young men and 81% for young women) (World Bank, n.d.^[53])⁸. Despite the progress achieved in providing education for all, 14 million children were estimated to be out of school in the region in 2020 (Equitas Education; Save the Children; World Food Programme; UNICEF, 2021^[54]).

Tertiary education enrolment rates vary widely across the MENA region, with the gross enrolment ratio⁹ ranging from 6% in Mauritania to 71% in Saudi Arabia in 2020 (World Bank, n.d.^[55]). Education statistics have improved for women. School completion among women in the region has reached its highest levels in recent years (World Bank, n.d.^[56]). Female graduates of tertiary education outnumber their male counterparts in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia. More generally, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) indicates that girls exceeded boys in tertiary school enrolment by 1.08 % on average in 2022¹⁰ (World Bank, n.d.^[57]). Furthermore, Algeria, Oman and Tunisia achieved gender parity in sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees in tertiary-level education, outperforming OECD Member countries where women on average account for 31% of graduates in these areas (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[58]).

Although these statistics point to significant achievements in increasing access to education, the performance of education systems remains low. OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 results show that students in the six MENA countries and territories¹¹ surveyed scored less than the OECD average in mathematics, reading and sciences (OECD, 2023^[59]). For three countries and territories, results were worse than in 2018. Moreover, inequality in access to education opportunities along household socio-economic indicators remains relatively high (ESCWA, 2021^[60]). Nevertheless, between 2012 and 2022 the gap in performance between students from different socio-economic status narrowed in most MENA countries and territories, while it remained stable across OECD Member countries over the same period (OECD, 2023^[59]).

Conflict and violence greatly disrupt access to education for children in the region. Around 2.2 million of the region’s forcibly displaced and stateless people in 2022 were school-aged (UNHCR, 2022^[61]). As of January 2024, more than 625,000 students had been affected by school closures for over two months in

the context of the evolving conflicts in the Middle East, and almost 70% of school buildings had suffered war-related damages. Furthermore, refugee children and adolescents are at greater risk of remaining out of school: for instance, despite the important contributions of host countries and territories, around 35% of school-aged Syrian refugees were still out of school in 2019, eight years after the beginning of the conflict (UNICEF, 2019^[31]).

Going forward, the number of students requiring education will grow by 25 million by 2030 (a 23% increase compared to 2019), which will test the capacities of MENA governments in providing quality education to all (UNICEF, 2019^[31]). According to the 2023 Arab Youth Survey, 40% of young people surveyed also expressed a lack of confidence about the ability of their governments to tackle educational reform (ASDA'A BCW, 2023^[44]). This represents a key challenge for the future of the region. Studies show that investing in the skills of primary and secondary school children in the MENA region could generate an additional \$266 billion for the region's economy by 2030 (World Economic Forum, 2022^[62]).

The labour market is recovering from COVID-19, but remains structurally fragile

As a whole, the MENA region's labour market is on its way to recover from the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Following an increase in 2020 and 2021 compared to pre-COVID rates, unemployment rates fell in the MENA region by around 1% in 2022 to 10.1%, below pre-pandemic levels. It remained stable in 2023 at 10.2%, although much higher than the world average of 5.1% (ILO, 2024^[63]).

The age and gender dimensions of employment remain long-standing issues in the region and were further exacerbated during the COVID-19 crisis (UNDP, 2022^[50]). The MENA region has one of the highest and fastest growing rates of youth unemployment (15-24 year olds) in the world¹², exceeding 26% on average in 2023 (ASDA'A BCW, 2023^[44]; ILO, 2024^[64]). However, youth unemployment rates vary significantly across the region, from Qatar (0.6%), Bahrain (5.8%), Oman (7%) and the UAE (9.8%), all below the OECD average (13.3%), to Djibouti (76.9%) in 2023 (ILO, 2024^[63])¹³. Furthermore, more than 30% of unemployed people in the MENA region have a university degree, a figure largely exceeding those of other world regions (Kabbani, 2019^[65]).

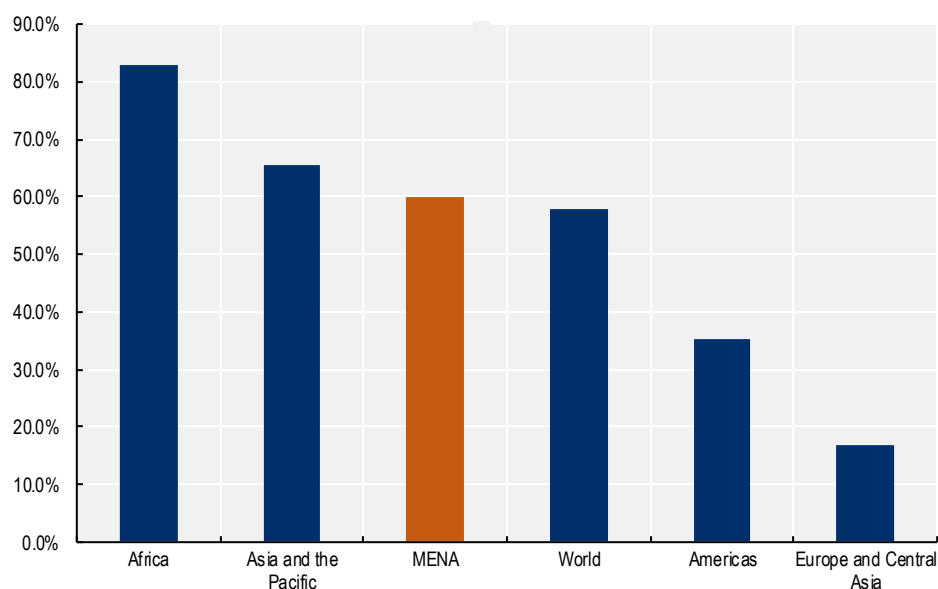
Despite clear improvements in female education, women continue to be distinctly disadvantaged on the labour market in the MENA region (ILO, 2024^[64]). In 2023, the average female labour force participation rate in the MENA region (18.8%) – ranging from 5.1% in Yemen to 64.1% in Qatar – was the lowest of all the world's regions, well below the regional average for men (71.1%) and the global average for women (48.7%) (ILO, 2024^[63]). Figures are even higher among young women aged 15-24. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that women's representation in professional roles has been evolving positively in recent years (World Economic Forum, 2024^[51]). A variety of factors can explain such gender disparity, including restrictive legal frameworks, traditional views on women's roles in society, an uneven allocation of family responsibilities as well as a slow-down in public sector recruitment (Assaad et al., 2020^[66]; OECD, 2022^[12]). Overall, barriers to expanded employment opportunities include poor quality education, a mismatch between skills learned at school and those required by the labour market and a lack of available jobs (ILO, 2024^[64]). Policymakers will also need to factor in the impact of climate change, environmental pressures and the digital transition. For instance, according to UNICEF, half of the jobs of the future do not yet exist and today's learners will need to acquire new skills by the time they enter the workforce (UNICEF, 2019^[31]). By 2030, the MENA region will also see an increase of 39 million (+27% compared to 2019) new entrants to the labour force to be integrated in the economy (UNICEF, 2019^[31]).

The labour market in the MENA region relies heavily on the informal economy, accounting for between 20 and 30% of GDP from 1990-2018, although with shares varying significantly across economies (OECD/ILO/UNDP, 2024^[67]). As Figure 1.8 shows, the MENA region has the third-highest regional level of informal employment in the world (56.9% according to data available¹⁴) (ILO, 2024^[68]). Informal employment is most prevalent in the agricultural sector, where in countries like Egypt, Syria and Yemen, it represents almost the entire workforce (Saoudi, 2022^[69]). High levels of informality prevent inclusive growth

because of limited social protection for workers without access to social insurance, reduced productivity and growth. Informality also constrains fiscal capacity of the government (Nadir et al., 2023^[70]), and limits opportunities for social mobility and professional development in the formal sector, especially among women and young people. In fact, latest data show that 78.5% of young people aged 15-24 in MENA economies¹⁵ hold informal jobs compared to an average of 54.8% for the population aged 25+ (ILO, 2024^[63]). Tackling informality cannot be solved by economic growth alone. It also requires strong institutions, clear legal frameworks for social protection, quality public services and co-ordinated cross-sectoral policies. The impact of economic and social policy initiatives on formalisation or informalisation should be core to the efforts undertaken by policymakers and researchers (OECD/ILO/UNDP, 2024^[67]).

Figure 1.8. The MENA region has the third-highest regional level of informal employment in the world

Share of informal employment in total employment by region, 2024 or latest available



Note: MENA average is based on data from the following countries and territories, latest available: Djibouti (2017), Egypt (2019), Iraq (2021), Jordan (2021), Lebanon (2019), Mauritania (2017); West Bank and Gaza Strip (2022) and Tunisia (2019) (ILO, 2024^[68]).

Source: Author's work based in (ILO, 2024^[68]).

The labour market in the MENA region is also particularly impacted by conflict and violence. In addition to high levels of forced displacement and migration, conflicts cause important losses in employment in areas directly impacted. The unemployment rate in West Bank and Gaza Strip was estimated to have reached 46.1% as of March 2024 (compared to 25.7% in October 2023) and should further increase in the coming months if the conflict continues, in a labour market already facing working poverty, unemployment and other decent work deficits (ESCWA; UNDP, 2024^[22]). A protracted conflict in the region would have important consequences on employment and economic losses, projected to increase if military operations intensify and the humanitarian crisis continues to unfold.

Health care access and delivery are slowly advancing

The MENA region has achieved significant progress on health outcomes through the implementation of reforms to improve health care access and delivery for their population. For instance, all MENA countries and territories (excluding Libya and Yemen) have experienced an increase in life expectancy at birth

between 2010 and 2019 (World Health Organization, 2024^[71]). Child mortality has decreased significantly in most of them¹⁶ in the last decade, at rates faster than other developing countries and territories in the world (World Health Organization, 2024^[71]; Katoue MG, 2022^[72]), although this is not the case everywhere in the region due to ongoing conflicts. More widely, the MENA region is advancing towards providing essential health services to the population. The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) service coverage index¹⁷, that assesses “population’s access to health services they need without facing financial hardship”, reached 69 in 2021 in the MENA region (compared to 50 in 2000), ahead of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (World Bank, World Health Organization, 2023^[73]).

There are however some persisting health risks. Although the share of GDP for domestic general government health expenditure has improved in most MENA countries and territories in recent years, all countries and territories except Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia remain below the world average (Table 1.1). Table 1.1 also highlights the wide variation in density of health care personnel across the region: for instance, in Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, there are more than 25 physicians per 10,000 people, while in Djibouti and Mauritania, there are just 2 physicians per 10,000 people (World Health Organization, 2023^[74]). Evolution in the last decade is also diverse, with a number of countries and territories experiencing an increase in the number of physicians (Djibouti, Jordan, Oman, Tunisia and the UAE) while others saw their situation worsen (Bahrain, Qatar and Syria) (World Health Organization, 2024^[71]).

Table 1.1. MENA countries and territories face diverse situations in regard to health, but remain largely below average according to global indicators

Domestic general government health expenditure (% of GDP) and medical doctors per 10,000 population, latest data available

Country or territory	Domestic general government health expenditure	Medical doctors per 10,000 population
Algeria	3.27	17.3
Bahrain	2.81	8.42
Djibouti	0.97	2
Egypt	1.74	7.1
Iraq	2.59	9.1
Jordan	2.59	25.1
Kuwait	5.19	22.9
Lebanon	2.90	26.2
Libya	3.83	21.6
Mauritania	1.60	1.9
Morocco	2.23	7.3
Oman	3.81	19.9
Qatar	2.46	25.0
Saudi Arabia	4.59	27.9

Country or territory	Domestic general government health expenditure	Medical doctors per 10,000 population
Syria	1.38	11.9
Tunisia	4.13	12.6
United Arab Emirates	3.40	28.8
West Bank and Gaza Strip	/	21.7
Yemen	1.24	2.9
OECD Average	7.06	39.7
MENA Average	2.82	15.8
World Average	4.11	16.3

Note: Data are collected from UNESCO, World Bank, WHO reports between 2009 and 2021.

Source: (World Health Organization, 2024^[75]) (World Health Organization, 2023^[74]) (World Health Organization, 2024^[71]).

As elsewhere in the world, the COVID-19 crisis has also exposed low performance on other indicators such as the number of ventilators, intensive care units, and hospital beds. Compared to world and OECD averages of 29 and 43 hospital beds per 10,000 people respectively, the region scores low with 16.3 beds per 10,000 people, and the number is as low as 4 and 7.1 in Mauritania and Yemen (World Health Organization, 2024^[71]; World Bank, 2024^[76]; OECD, 2023^[77]).

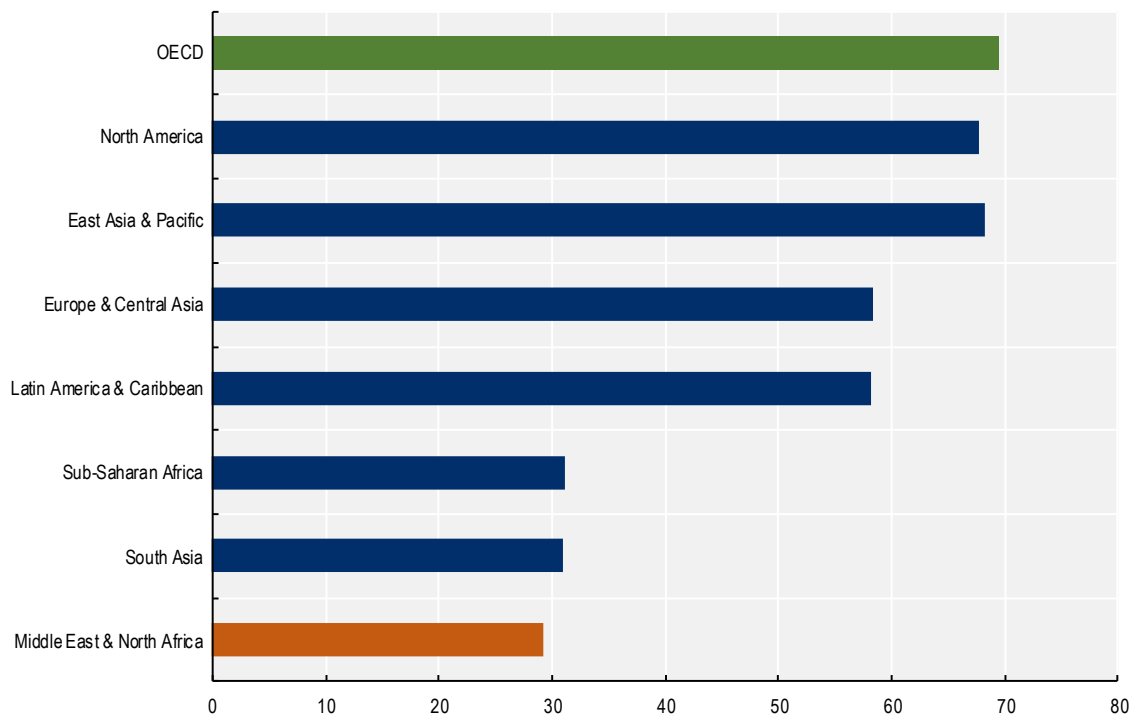
Women and young people are particularly vulnerable to health risks. For instance, the MENA region hosts overall the third highest obesity rate (20.8%) worldwide behind America and Europe, but the second highest female obesity rate (26%) (World Health Organization, 2024^[71]). Women in the MENA region are also particularly vulnerable to reproductive health issues, especially in rural contexts. According to available data, there are approximately 900,000 births to adolescent girls aged 10–19 years each year (UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office and Burnet Institute, 2023^[78]), which can contribute to poor infant health as adolescents are likely to have less knowledge about family planning and sexual and reproductive health than their older counterparts (UNDP, 2016^[79]). Young people in the MENA region also face a higher prevalence of risk factors for health compared to older generations. For instance, latest data available¹⁸ show that only 55.7% of young people aged 15-19 have their demand for family planning satisfied, compared to 72.5% of people aged 20-49 (World Health Organization, 2022^[80]).

Conflict and violence continue to strongly affect the region's stability

As highlighted in previous sections, conflict and violence have severe implications for people's social and economic prospects and aspirations, as well as for social cohesion and institutional capacities (OECD, 2022^[12]). According to the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, the MENA region is the lowest ranking region of the world when it comes to political stability and absence of violence/terrorism (Figure 1.9). Conflicts continue in several countries and territories, with expected human, socio-economic and political consequences on the long-term across the region (IMF, 2024^[23]). For instance, as of 2020 the Syrian conflict had pushed up poverty rates by four percentage points in Jordan, six percentage points in Iraq and 7.1 percentage points in Lebanon (ESCWA; UNDP, 2024^[81]).

Figure 1.9. The MENA region is the lowest ranking region for political stability and absence of violence/terrorism

Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, percentile rank (0-100), 2022



Note: Percentile rank indicates the percentage of countries and territories worldwide that rate below the selected region of the world. Higher values indicate better political stability and lower violence/terrorism. Latest data available in 2022.

Source: Author's work based on (World Bank, n.d.^[82]).

Evidence shows that significant governance reforms are key to supporting stability and promoting development that is strong, sustainable and resilient to future risks. They represent an avenue for MENA governments to foster well-being outcomes, notably to build a more accountable and efficient public sector and generate increasingly inclusive and performant services and policies, especially in light of the specific demographic characteristics of the region (high young populations; significant migration and population churn, etc), as highlighted in the preceding section.

The rest of this chapter provides an overview of developments in four key areas for a strong, sustainable and resilient prosperity, setting the stage for the in-depth analysis of existing public governance arrangements and ways forward contained in the remaining chapters of the Report.

Development faces significant sustainability challenges

From increased periods of extreme temperatures to droughts, desertification, food insecurity and climate-induced migration, climate change and unsustainable development pose several risks in the MENA region. Many MENA governments, especially middle and high-income economies, have started transitioning to renewable energy, adopting green technologies and aligning national development agendas to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Wehrey and Fawal, 2022^[83]). MENA governments have also continued to engage in global discourses on sustainability, as exemplified by Morocco hosting the climate

Conference Of Parties (COP) 22 in 2016, Egypt hosting COP 27 in 2022 and the UAE hosting COP 28 in 2023.

Yet, when it comes to climate challenges, 50.2% of respondents surveyed by the Arab Barometer in 2021-2022¹⁹ across 10 MENA administrations reported on average that their national governments should be doing more to address climate change. Full compliance with Nationally Determined Contributions is expected to fall short of tangible outcomes, as they would result in a 22% drop from 2030 business-as-usual emissions levels albeit still an increase in emissions by 14% compared to 2019 (World Economic Forum, 2023^[84]).

Despite the ‘decoupling challenge’ of trying to reduce emissions in a context of growing energy demand, the region has the potential and the resources to play a leading role in the energy transition. MENA governments face an imperative to strengthen their public governance arrangements in order to ensure they recover and grow sustainably in the context of climate change. Public administrations in the MENA region can benefit from developing and implementing risk governance frameworks and tools to manage climate disasters and develop climate-resilient societies. More widely, long-term whole-of-government strategies, dedicated institutional structures and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems can support MENA public administrations in promoting policy coherence for the achievement of the SDGs. As a prelude to Chapter 2, which assesses existing governance arrangements and identifies outstanding capacity gaps to pursue sustainable development coherently in the MENA region, this section introduces the most pressing contextual challenges affecting governance in the region.

Heat stress and water (in)security are rising quickly

In the MENA region and especially in North Africa, climate impacts on water availability and heat stress will be most acute. Temperatures across the region increased by 0.46°C per decade in the period 1980-2022, well above the world average of 0.18°C (IEA, 2023^[85]). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) research indicates that average temperatures in the MENA region are likely to increase between 3°C and 4°C on average this century, far surpassing the global average limits of 2°C envisioned by the Paris Agreement (Zittis et al., 2021^[86]). Latest estimates show that some countries and territories, such as Algeria, could see their average summer temperature increase by 8°C by the end of the century (Yabi, 2023^[87]). Moreover, concern is growing in the region around decreasing rainfall. Between 1980 and 2022, total precipitation in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region has decreased by around 8.3% per decade.

Annual mean precipitation is projected to decrease in these areas (IEA, 2023^[85]). In Tunisia for instance, depending on climate-change scenarios, the frequency of dry years may increase from 52% (10 out of 19 years) to 79% (15 out of 19 years) between 2031 and 2050. Although the gravity of the situation remains uncertain, this will inevitably exacerbate the already challenging water situation, particularly in the agricultural sector and in rural areas (World Bank Group, 2023^[88]). Furthermore, the IPCC considers likely that drops in precipitation will coincide with an increased frequency and intensity of droughts in the region (Masson-Delmotte, 2021^[89]). This observation seems to confirm the trend already observed in Morocco and Tunisia, with droughts becoming more frequent and, perhaps, more severe (World Bank Group, 2022^[90]; World Bank Group, 2023^[88]). The sharp increase in temperatures, along with the region’s sparse freshwater reserves and arid climates, thus brings elevated risks of droughts and water unavailability.

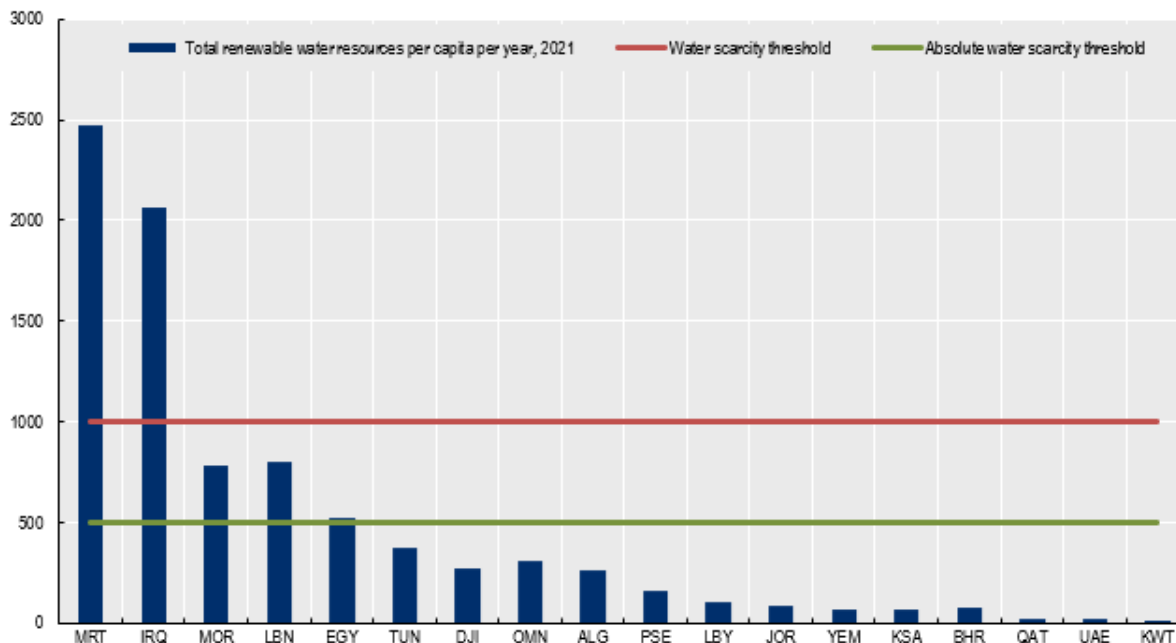
The MENA region is already the most water-stressed region in the world, where 83% of the population is exposed to extremely high-water stress (Kuzma, Saccocia and Chertock, 2023^[91]). According to latest figures, the region is home to 14 of the 25 most water-stressed countries and territories²⁰ in the world (Kuzma, Saccocia and Chertock, 2023^[91]), and as Figure 1.10 shows, total renewable water resources per capita in 13 MENA countries and territories were already below the absolute water scarcity threshold of 500 cubic meters per person per year as of 2021. By 2030, the water available per capita annually in the MENA region is expected to fall below the absolute water scarcity threshold overall (De Waal et al.,

2023^[92]). Its impacts on agriculture, health and incomes are also projected to cost MENA economies between 6 and 14% of their GDP by 2050, compared to a global average reduction of GDP of less than 1 percent by 2050 (De Waal et al., 2023^[92]).

Competition over scarce water resources may also increase internal and regional conflicts, with a higher risk of vulnerabilities and tensions for MENA countries and territories facing armed conflict and weak institutions “in a vicious cycle of water insecurity and fragility” (Borgomeo et al., 2021^[93]; Kabbani, 2022^[28]). In this context, while the MENA region has invested significantly in water infrastructure (such as dams, irrigation systems and water desalination systems), studies highlight challenges in water governance and management in the MENA region, including inefficient centralised systems, underfunded utilities and lack of legitimacy on water regulations and tariffs (Belhaj et al., 2022^[94]; De Waal et al., 2023^[92]).

Figure 1.10. In 13 MENA countries and territories, renewable water resources per capita were below the absolute water scarcity threshold in 2021

Total Renewable water resources per capita per year, 2021



Note: If the amount of renewable water in a country is below 1,700 m³ per person per year, that country is said to be experiencing water stress; below 1,000 m³ it is said to be experiencing water scarcity; and below 500 m³, absolute water scarcity.

Source: Author's work based on (FAO, n.d.^[95]).

Food insecurity is further exacerbated by climate change and demographic changes

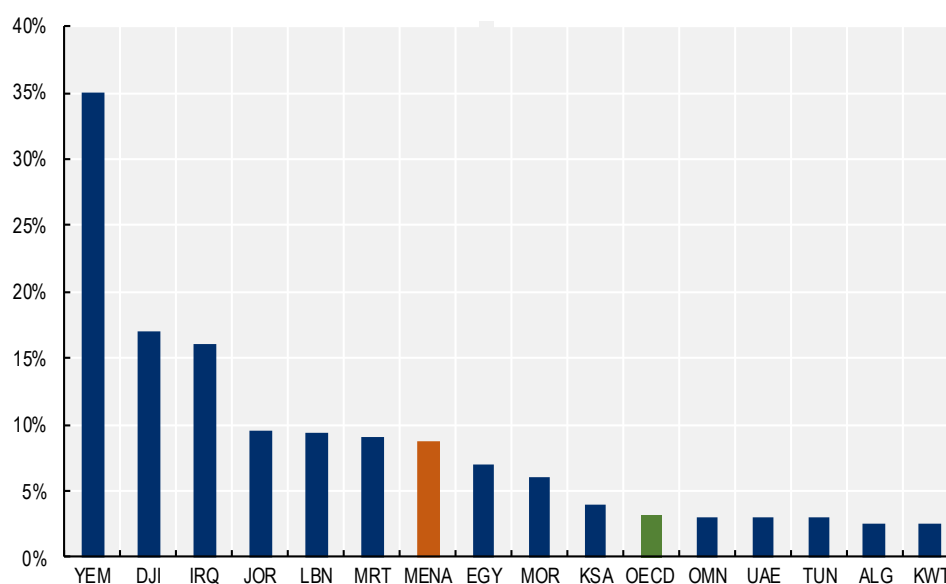
Although many MENA countries and territories have reduced malnourishment over the past decades, water unavailability and rising temperatures pose considerable risks to food security. Furthermore, less than 5% of land is arable in two-thirds of MENA countries and territories, and this figure is projected to worsen due to climate change (Bertini and Zouache, 2021^[96]). In fact, 45% of agricultural land is already exposed to climate-induced challenges such as nutrient depletion, erosion, and salinity (World Economic Forum, 2023^[84]).

These challenges are coupled with a dramatic increase in population in the region, leading to an unsustainable increase in demand for food and agricultural products (Belhaj and Soliman, 2021^[17]).

Evolving conflicts in the Middle East over the last years have also exacerbated disparities in terms of food security and malnutrition across the region (Figure 1.11). For instance, the World Food Programme estimates that despite ongoing humanitarian assistance, 17 million people in Yemen were afflicted by food insecurity in 2023 (52% of the population), with 3.5 million pregnant or breastfeeding women and children under five suffering from acute malnutrition. In Syria, the protracted conflict and the continued shocks such as the earthquakes of February 2023 had equally devastating consequences, with over 12 million Syrians (more than half of the population) affected by hunger in 2024 (World Food Programme, 2024^[97]).

Figure 1.11. Strong disparities in terms of undernourishment persist across the MENA region

Undernourishment in the MENA region, % total population, 2021



Note: "MENA" here refers to the average across Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Source: Author's work based on (World Bank, n.d.^[98]).

The effects of the COVID-19 crisis on purchasing power and foreign reserves and more recently the evolving conflicts in the Middle East and in neighbouring countries and territories have considerably challenged governments' efforts to meet their populations' food demand. Undernourishment increased overall in the MENA region from 11.8% in 2019 to 12.9% in 2022, reaching almost 60 million, the highest value since 2000 (FAO, 2023^[99]). As net importer of food products, and with 40% of its needs for agricultural products met by imports, the MENA region was also heavily affected by the pandemic's containment measures and related disruptions to global food supply chains.

The region's vulnerabilities regarding food security were further exposed by the repercussions of the war in Ukraine on food exports, energy prices and inflation. The MENA region's food and agriculture markets face many risks, such as trade-associated, price-associated, logistical, production and ecological risks (FAO, 2022^[15]). In five out of nine MENA countries and territories covered by the Arab Barometer in 2021-2022, more than half of surveyed people reported that they ran out of food before they had money to buy more (Arab Barometer, 2022^[100]). Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1.12, women in all surveyed countries and territories were more likely to report food insufficiency than men. To reduce malnutrition and inequality, governments in the MENA region have established food fortification policy, in alignment with other food, nutrition, and agriculture policies. Ensuring sound regulatory governance will be essential to achieving the

desired health outcomes from these fortification initiatives (Karapanou, Ardnt-Bascle and Toktosunova, n.d.^[101]). For example, the governments of Egypt and Jordan mandate wheat flour fortification with vitamins and minerals to combat micronutrient-related public health issues, such as anaemia and birth defects (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2020^[102]). Additionally, fortified foods are distributed through social safety net programmes as well as marketed at subsidised cost to vulnerable population and/ or at emergency settings. In particular, in Egypt, the government’s food subsidy programme, where fortified baladi bread is sold in markets at a subsidised cost, reached more than 50 million low-income population (Elhakim et al., 2012^[103]).

Figure 1.12. Women in MENA countries and territories are more likely to report food insufficiency than men

Reported food insufficiency across MENA countries and territories, 2021-2022



Note: Percentage of surveyed people saying that the following statement is often or sometimes true: “The food that we bought did not last and we did not have money to get more.”

Source: Author’s work based on (Arab Barometer, 2022^[104]).

Climate spill-overs will increasingly impact the region’s social, political and economic security

In the absence of effective policy responses, climate impacts are also expected to compound vulnerabilities and have various adverse spill-over effects on the social, political and economic security of the region. Notably, most MENA countries and territories are projected to suffer from climate-related displacement and migration “in the shadow of conflict” (Borgomeo et al., 2021^[93]), as already discussed in previous sections. Climate change may also widen rural-urban divides and exacerbate challenges linked to rapid urbanisation. Such climate spill-over effects make clear the need for MENA public administrations to promote whole-of-government, multidimensional and coherent policy frameworks for sustainable development.

Structural challenges constrain fiscal space

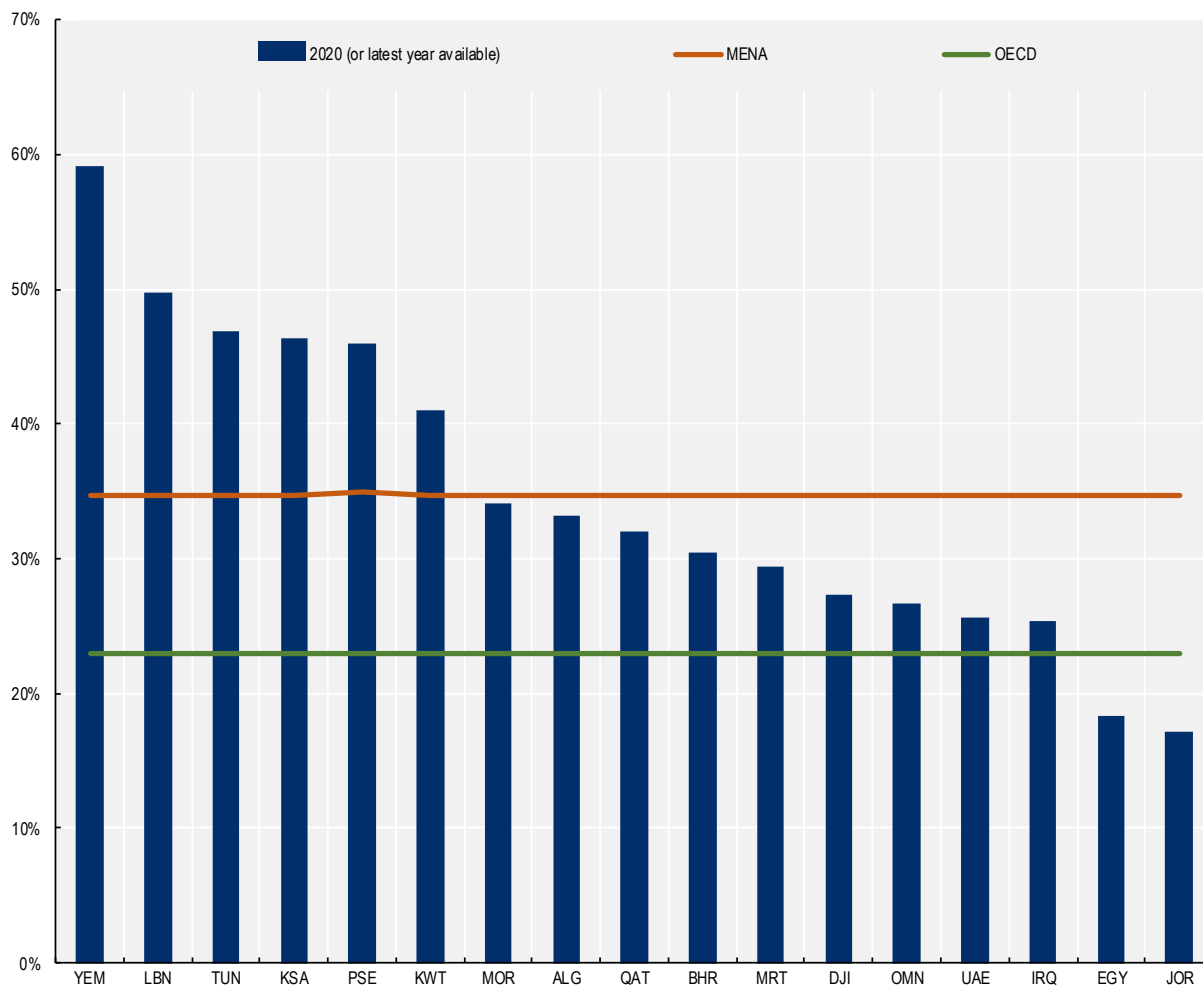
The public sector in the MENA region remains one of the world's largest. For decades, it has been the first national employer across MENA countries and territories (Biganzoli and Gagliardi, 2021^[5]). The efficient and effective use of government human and financial resources is hence even more important in the region. Ensuring adequate fiscal buffers and capacities will be crucial to ensure governments can promote high-level priorities and tackle future crises. This section provides a glance at the size of the public sector in the MENA region and governments' capacities to raise taxes. Chapter 3 will cover in detail budgetary governance and public procurement arrangements.

The public sector is significant in the MENA region

According to the World Bank Worldwide Bureaucracy Indicators, public sector employment represents close to 20% of total employment on average in the MENA region, a larger share than in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean (International Monetary Fund, 2022^[105]). Public procurement amounts to about 18% of GDP on average in MENA economies, as opposed to an average of 12.9% across the OECD area (OECD, 2023^[106]; Giada Modaffari, 2023^[107]). Moreover, the government wage bill has increased rapidly in the last decade as many governments have launched expansive job-creation programmes to maintain social peace following the Arab uprisings, reaching a level of around 10% of regional GDP, higher than all regions except Europe. Recent estimates indicate that, on average across the MENA region, public sector salaries represent 34% of total government spending, compared to 23% on average across OECD Member countries (Figure 1.13). Only in Egypt and Jordan the share lies below 20%. State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) also play an important role in MENA economies, oftentimes generating large costs and requiring government support to offset operational losses. Moreover, fiscal interactions of SOEs are not always accounted for or reported, raising questions about corporate governance, oversight frameworks, management of risks and ownership policies (IMF, 2021^[108]).

Figure 1.13. Public sector salaries across MENA governments represent a significantly higher percentage of total government spending compared to OECD Member countries

Wage bill as a percentage of public expenditures, latest year available



Note: "MENA" here refers to the average across Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Latest data available is 2020 except for the Palestinian Authority. "OECD" refers to an average across all OECD Members countries except for Canada, Japan and Korea.

Source: Author's work based on (World Bank, 2022_[109]; World Bank, n.d._[110]).

Capacity to raise taxes is limited

MENA public administrations generally raise low tax revenues. The region also hosts some of the lowest world outliers such as Iraq and Oman, where tax revenue is equivalent to 0.97% and 1.25% of GDP respectively (UNU WIDER, 2023_[111]). More broadly, according to the IMF, total tax revenues in the MENA region represent 9.3% of GDP²¹, compared to the world average of 17.4% and an OECD average of 25.2% (UNU WIDER, 2023_[111]; IMF, 2021_[112]).

Many reasons underpin the region's limited tax revenues. High-income, oil-exporting economies in the Gulf have historically based their economic model and social contract on zero or extremely low taxes on both individuals and businesses. However, spurred by the challenge of volatile oil prices since 2015 and wary of the need to transition towards greener economic models, GCC governments have started introducing

reforms to increase tax revenues in recent years. Notably, all but Bahrain have now adopted a corporate tax. Moreover, all six members of the GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) have signed an agreement in 2017 that has paved the way for the introduction of Value Added Tax throughout the GCC. Saudi Arabia has uniquely introduced an expat levy in 2017, which aims to both increase government tax revenues as well as favour the competitiveness and growth of local businesses (Schofield, 2021^[113]). Beyond the GCC governments, other MENA governments collect relatively more taxes and have also embarked on tax reforms much earlier. However, their tax regimes often exhibit important inefficiencies and a lack of capacities for tax collection (OECD, 2021^[114]). Tax collection is also complicated by large informal labour markets, which represent an estimated 61.7% % of total employment in the region in 2023 (ILO, 2024^[68]).

MENA governments have nevertheless invested in taxation reforms, even at the international level. For instance, most MENA governments have deposited their instrument of ratification for the OECD's Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting practices adopted by large multinational companies.

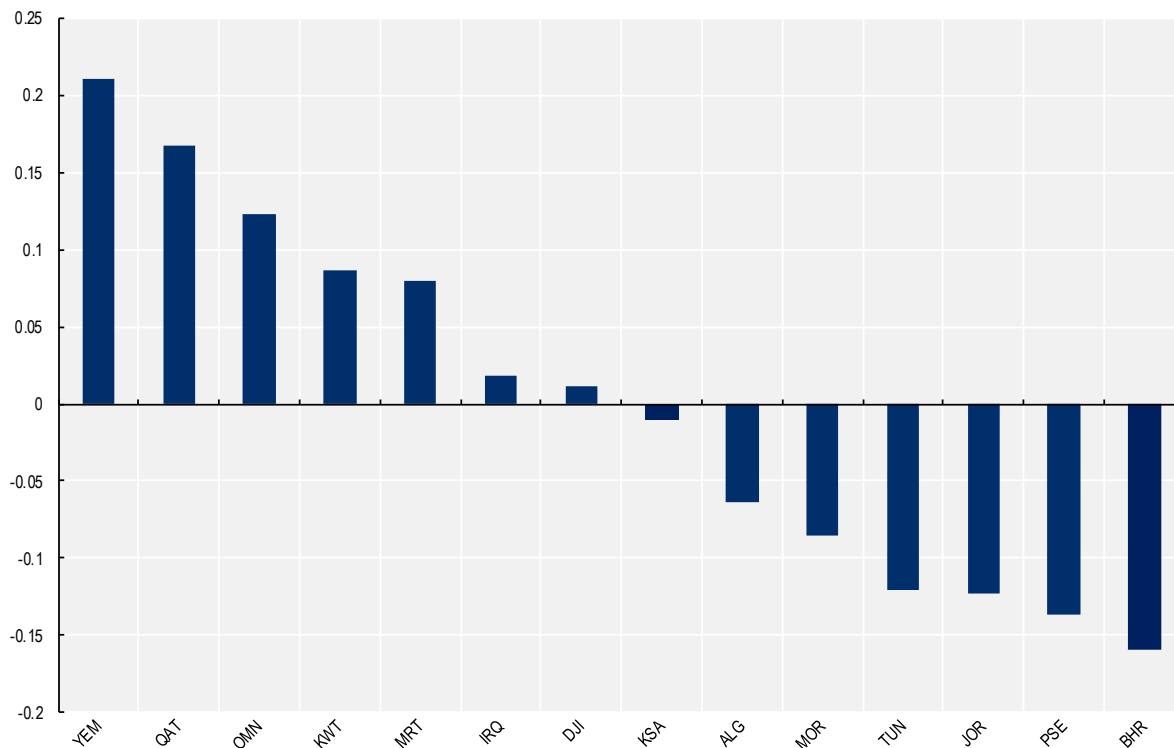
Public debt remains high after the COVID-19 crisis

The MENA region is one of the most highly indebted in the world. Although experiencing diverse situations and challenges, governments face persistent structural weaknesses that include low tax revenue generation, large public sectors and inadequate governance and regulatory frameworks in a context of difficult social conditions (Mazarei, 2023^[115]).

These challenges were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Major upwards pressures on public spending, coupled with low tax revenue generation, has widened fiscal deficits and boosted public debt, making governments vulnerable to external shocks and rising interest rates. For instance, the average overall balance²² in the region worsen from -2.36% of GDP in 2019 to -8.5% in 2020 and stood at -0.85% in 2023 (IMF, 2024^[116]). The central government debt in 2022 compared to pre-COVID levels differed largely across economies (Figure 1.14).

Figure 1.14. The central government debt in 2022 compared to pre-COVID levels differed greatly across MENA economies

Change in central government debt to GDP ratio, percentage points, 2019 and 2022



Note: Data for Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and the UAE are not available.

Source: Author's work based on (International Monetary Fund, n.d._[117]).

Economic projections show that debt levels in these economies are forecast to decline only modestly over the next two years. Nevertheless, the outlook for the MENA region remains highly uncertain and downside risks are resurgent, especially in the current regional context. An escalation or spread of the evolving conflicts in the Middle East, as well as an intensification of disruptions in the Red Sea, could have a severe economic impact on the overall region (IMF, 2024_[118]).

Wide disparities in the effectiveness of government service delivery

Governments need to strengthen the provision of public services that meet the evolving needs and expectations of their citizens. MENA public administrations perform heterogeneously on government effectiveness and on some key factors for effective service delivery, such as regulatory policy, rule of law, public integrity and public procurement. Gender and urban-rural divides also persist in terms of access to digital infrastructure and skills, with implications for the use of digital government tools.

Challenges in effective service delivery are reflected in citizens' dissatisfaction with public services across the region. For instance, an average of 64% of respondents to the Arab Barometer Wave VII across MENA countries and territories surveyed stated that they were either "dissatisfied" or "completely dissatisfied" with their government's performance (Arab Barometer, 2022_[104]). In particular, only an average of 37% of

respondents claimed to be satisfied with the health care system, while over 70% were dissatisfied with the education system, although opinions vary greatly between countries and territories (Arab Barometer, 2022_[104])²³.

This section provides background on government effectiveness in the MENA region, setting the stage for the analysis of public governance arrangements, tools and practices for the promotion of reliable and responsive public administrations presented in Chapter 4.

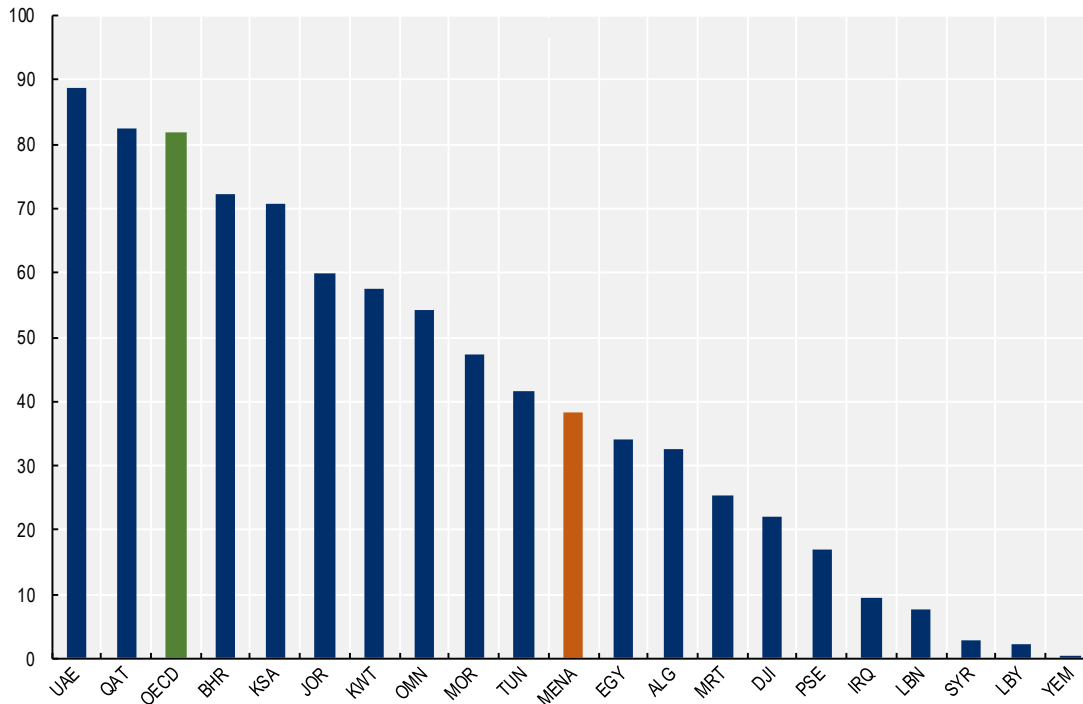
Government effectiveness lags behind most regions of the world

According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators, the MENA region has consistently lagged behind most regions in government effectiveness, with only Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia performing worse. Significant weaknesses are also reported on indicators related to the control of corruption, regulatory quality and rule of law, which are core elements for government to deliver effectively (World Bank, 2022_[4]).

There are however wide differences across MENA governments. As Figure 1.15 shows, GCC governments perform close to OECD levels in terms of government effectiveness, with the UAE and Qatar outperforming the OECD average. Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia also perform above the MENA average. On the other hand, negative outliers such as Yemen, Libya and Iraq have been undergoing protracted armed conflict, which has deteriorated government effectiveness and compromised institution-building. This is reflected across a number of government indicators, as Yemen and Libya rank in the bottom 4% globally for government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption. Lebanon also displays a low score on the World Bank's Government Effectiveness Index, as its institutions have been weakened by successive economic and political crises.

Figure 1.15. Levels of government effectiveness vary significantly across MENA governments, with some GCC governments performing close to the OECD average

Government effectiveness in MENA governments, MENA and OECD averages (percentile rank), 2022



Note: Government effectiveness, as measured by the Worldwide Governance Indicators, “captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies.” “MENA” refers here to the average across Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Source: Author’s work based on (World Bank, 2022^[41]).

Rule of law and public integrity often remain fragile

The rule of law and public integrity are key elements to enhance public sector performance and in turn promote citizens’ trust in institutions. On the other hand, weak rules and integrity frameworks can sustain corruption, generate waste of public resources and widen social inequalities.

In the MENA region, constitutional reforms were adopted by a number of governments following the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings, including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, enshrining fundamental civil rights and freedoms in new or amended constitutions.

Yet, the rule of law and public integrity often remain fragile across the region. According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators, rule of law has been decreasing across the region since 2011. On average, the region has scored better than only 41.2% of countries and territories in the world in 2022, as opposed to 44.7% in 2011 (World Bank, 2024^[119]). Moreover, with an average score of 34 out of 100 in the 2023 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), the MENA region struggles to achieve tangible results against corruption. In fact, five MENA countries and territories²⁴ are included in the bottom ten scores of the latest index, with only Jordan and GCC governments scoring higher than the global average of 43 out of 100. The highest-scoring countries in the region include the UAE (68), Qatar (58), and Saudi Arabia (52),

whereas those embroiled in protracted conflicts show the lowest scores: Libya (18), Yemen (16) and Syria (13). No MENA country or territory surveyed in the CPI has registered significant improvement in the last decade (Transparency International, 2024^[120]). At the same time, some governments have been making considerable efforts to strengthen their public sector integrity frameworks: for instance, Jordan and Morocco adopted national anti-corruption laws and reformed or created independent national anti-corruption agencies (Biganzoli and Gagliardi, 2021^[5]).

Significant disparities persist regarding digitalisation across government and society

Governments can use information and communication technologies to embrace good government principles, achieve policy goals and promote government effectiveness. Digital technologies and tools, along with the use of data, can create greater efficiencies, time- and cost-savings in the design and delivery of public services as well as streamline internal procedures of the public administration. Digital government can also act as a lever to achieve greater transparency, engage with stakeholders and promote more open and inclusive societies (OECD, 2024^[121]).

Digital government however rests on the accessibility, affordability and quality of digital tools. Leveraging digitalisation to promote the transparency, accountability and oversight of public institutions while striving to enhance digital literacy and inclusion is one of the key priorities of MENA countries and territories (OECD, 2023^[122]). For instance, there has been significant progress regarding internet access, as shown by World Bank estimates: while in 2011 only 28% of the population used the internet, by 2021 this figure was already at 77% (World Bank, 2021^[123]). However, notable disparities persist despite the general progress. While the GCC countries are on the brink of achieving or have already achieved internet access for their entire population, other less developed economies still contend with substantial segments of their population lacking internet connectivity. This is in turn reflected in disparate advances in digitalising government across the region. According to the latest United Nations' E-Government Survey (2022^[124]), four of the six GCC countries are in the very high E-Government Development Index (EGDI) category²⁵, with the UAE (0.90), Saudi Arabia (0.85) and Oman (0.78) leading in the score.

Disparities in access to digital tools and services can reinforce pre-existing inequalities. For instance, 88% of urban areas in the MENA region have 4GB mobile network coverage, while this figure drops to no more than 55% in rural areas (Raïq and Roberts, 2022^[125]). Gaps in access to the digital infrastructure emerge also across gender: according to the Arab Barometer, all other factors equal, women have 56% less probability of being internet users compared to men (Arab Barometer, 2020^[126]). Beyond access to the Internet and digital infrastructure, people also need appropriate digital skills to reap the benefits of a digital government: inequalities in digital skills across gender, socio-economic status and urban-rural settings can reinforce existing inequalities.

While inequalities in access to information and communication technology infrastructure and in digital competences remain important obstacles, most MENA public administrations have developed strategic policy frameworks to digitalise government, have established open data portals and revised their legal and regulatory frameworks to consolidate citizens' right of access to information, as covered later in the Report (ESCWA, 2020^[127]; OECD, 2023^[128]; OECD, 2023^[129]; OECD, 2022^[130]; OECD, n.d.^[131]).

Promoting open and inclusive societies remains a priority for action

Establishing a culture of participation enables governments to engage with the public to better understand and meet their needs. The 2010-2011 Arab uprisings put the principles of openness and inclusiveness in the spotlight of the policy debate in the MENA region. In addition, governments in the region face increasing pressure from their own citizens to demonstrate that they understand, and are able to address, their increasingly pressing needs, including in the areas of health, education, and security. Ensuring that public

institutions act in an open, transparent participatory and inclusive way can help better respond to the needs of different societal groups, avoid policy capture and help keep governments accountable, setting the foundations for inclusive growth and social cohesion (Biganzoli and Gagliardi, 2021^[5]).

Open government reforms have been at the core of these efforts. While the situation remains diverse across the MENA region, openness and inclusiveness remain at the heart of the agendas in many MENA public administrations: 48% of MENA public officials surveyed in the Arab Administrative Elites Survey recognise transparency and open government as important trends in the region (Schomaker and Bauer, 2020^[132]). However, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as some of their municipalities and regions, are the only MENA members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multilateral partnership that aims to support the design, implementation, and monitoring of concrete government commitments “to make government more open, responsive, and accountable to citizens” (Open Government Partnership, 2020^[133]). Tunisia and Morocco have also adhered to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (OECD, 2017^[134]).

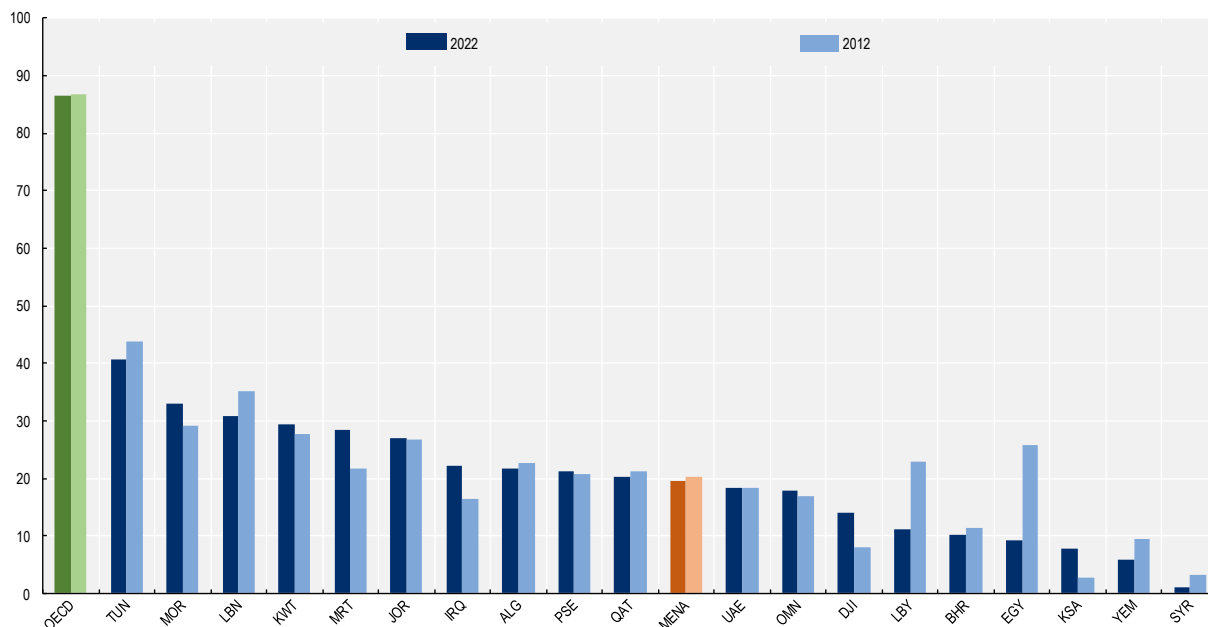
This section provides a short overview on citizen participation, government transparency and decentralisation in the MENA region. This will be covered in detail in Chapter 5.

Citizen and stakeholder engagement in public life remains underdeveloped

Despite common demands for greater political freedom and citizen participation during the Arab uprisings, MENA governments still face challenges to fully promote and harness citizen engagement in public and political life. For instance, during the last decade, the MENA region has consistently lagged behind all other world regions on *voice and accountability* as measured through the Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank, 2022^[4]). As shown in Figure 1.16, MENA governments ranked on average in 2022 in the 19.47 global percentile for this indicator, a score lower than in 2012 (20.19) and much behind the 2022 average for OECD Member countries (86.43). Furthermore, citizen participation initiatives in the MENA region have often remained ad hoc, without structural institutional arrangements and consistent resources underpinning them. More broadly, studies highlight that the MENA region underperforms compared to the rest of the world on accountability, in particular in terms of checks and balances through which state institutions limit the power of the government and in terms of the extent to which governments are accountable to media and civil society (Belhaj et al., 2022^[94]).

Figure 1.16. During the last decade, the MENA region has consistently lagged behind all other world regions on voice and accountability

Voice and accountability in MENA, 2022 and 2012, global percentile ranking (0-100), Worldwide Governance Indicators



Note: Voice and Accountability, as measured by the Worldwide Governance Indicators, “captures perceptions of the extent to which citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media.”

Source: Author’s work based on (World Bank, 2022^[4]).

Citizen participation rests upon an enabling environment: self-reported accounts of citizens from the MENA region indicate challenges in this area. For instance, in Arab Barometer surveys over the last decade, MENA populations expressed an increase in perceived freedoms in the years following the Arab uprisings, but the region has lost ground significantly since then. In 2010, the share of respondents reporting that their freedoms of expressing opinions and protesting peacefully were “guaranteed to a great or a medium extent” stood on average at 60% and 45% respectively. By 2014 these figures had increased to 66% and 57% but stood at 47.7 and 38% respectively in 2022 (Arab Barometer, 2022^[104]).

However, there are notable outliers in the MENA region. In 2022, a relatively high share of respondents said they enjoyed freedom of expression in Kuwait (74.6%) (Arab Barometer, 2022^[104]). Nevertheless, recent developments observed in societies that had made significant progress in increasing citizens’ political engagement and participation in public life raise uncertainty in this area (OECD, 2023^[129]). Citizen participation also diverges within societies, in particular when it comes to women and young people. Women’s participation in political life in the MENA region has significantly increased over the last two decades although it is the lowest on average compared to other regions of the world (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2024^[135]). As of 2024, the region still ranks last in the Political Empowerment Index²⁶ of the Global Gender Gap Report, with a score of 11.7% (100% being complete gender parity) compared to a global average of 22.5% (World Economic Forum, 2024^[51]). This represents nevertheless an increase of 8.4% compared to the 2006 score, showing the significant process made in terms of women’s representation in ministerial and parliamentary roles across countries and territories.

Similarly, young people tend to vote less and are less likely to be a member of a political party or attend campaign rallies than older people in the MENA region. Furthermore, people aged under 40²⁷ represent only 14% of members of parliament in the MENA region on average, compared to 22.4% across OECD Member countries (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2024_[136]). These differences can be partly explained by a lack of interest in politics: for instance, in the MENA countries and territories surveyed by Arab Barometer in 2022, only 22.5% of young people aged 18-29 years reported being very interested or interested in politics (Arab Barometer, 2022_[104]). In addition, complicated voter registration rules, high minimum age requirements to vote and run for office, weak civic and citizenship education curricula and cultural norms and stereotypes can hinder young people's opportunities to participate to public and political life (OECD, 2022_[12]).

Governments can take proactive steps to engage young people in decision-making, notably by strengthening youth organisations, enhancing consultations with young people and establishing dedicated institutional structures. If they are set up based on an inclusive approach, youth councils can for example help address the lack of coordination among non-governmental youth stakeholders and help strengthen young people's voices in policymaking. As of February 2024, available evidence suggests that a number of countries and territories have established youth councils, but that several are not fully operational. For instance, Tunisia and the UAE have an operational national youth council in place, while others such as Morocco are in the process of establishing one (OECD, 2022_[12]). Youth councils at the local level also exist in Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and the West Bank and Gaza Strip widely (OECD, 2022_[12]).

Improvements toward government transparency remain uneven and limited

Ensuring transparency in government processes and action can help promote more open and inclusive citizen participation and strengthen accountability and citizen's trust in government. Moreover, studies highlight how transparency and access to information (ATI) are positively correlated with reduced corruption (Blumkin and Gradstein, 2002_[137]), better service delivery (Shin and Glennerster, 2003_[138]) and positive economic growth (Schomaker and Bauer, 2020_[132]).

Various governments in the MENA region have designed strategies and implemented initiatives to promote transparency, for instance by recognising citizens' right to access information in the constitution and setting specific ATI provisions in legal frameworks. Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan have particularly spearheaded efforts in this area. For instance, Tunisia's 2016 Organic Law on the Right to Access Information and Morocco's 2018 Right to Information Law allow citizens to request access to laws, data, and reports retained by government and public authorities and gain access to the information within 20 days (Biganzoli and Gagliardi, 2021_[5]). Lebanon and Yemen have also enacted ATI legislation. Despite these initiatives, there is still space to strengthen transparency further across all functions of MENA governments.

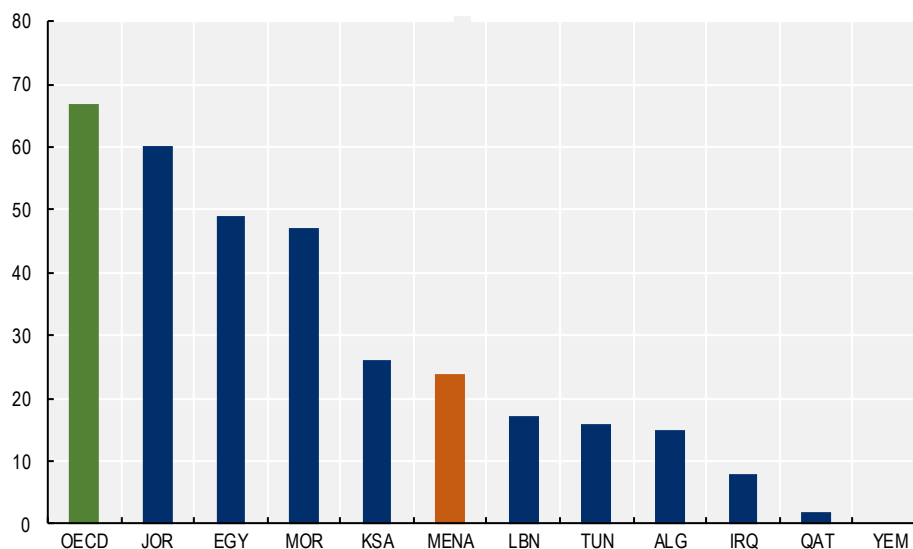
Public budgetary transparency also remains particularly limited in the MENA region. With considerable heterogeneity across governments, the MENA region has ranked lowest globally in budget transparency and has shown little progress over the last decade, with only a marginal increase of two points in the Open Budget Survey (OBS) between 2015 and 2021, from "no/scant budget transparency" (scores 0-20) to the second lowest ("minimal transparency"), and a stagnation of results in the 2023 survey (Frank et al., 2023_[139]). According to the most recent OBS, budget transparency remains "weak" in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen, and "limited" in Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, with no country or territory in the region ranking as "adequate" in this regard (Figure 1.17)²⁸. In particular, whereas almost all OECD Member countries develop and publish In-Year, Mid-Year and Year-End budget reviews, only Egypt and Saudi Arabia consistently do so in the region. Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan are other high performers in that regard, publishing two out of the three types of reports as of 2021 (Frank et al., 2023_[139]).

However, the survey also identifies several MENA governments that do not publish or even develop any budget reviews. In addition, no MENA government except Jordan make audit reports available to the public according to the survey. Finally, participatory budgeting practices also remain limited in the MENA region

(Frank et al., 2023^[139]). Even when commitments are made in that regard, weak oversight institutions and insufficient resources continue to hamper progress (Iskandar Boustany; Sabine Hatem; Tonia Salameh, 2021^[140]).

Figure 1.17. Budget transparency is heterogenous across the MENA region but remains in most economies largely below OECD levels

Budget transparency scores across the MENA region, 2023



Note: The OBS budget transparency score reflects an assessment of eight key budget documents that should be accessible to the public during the budget cycle. “OECD” refers to the average score across the 24 OECD Member countries surveyed in the OBS.

Source: Author’s work based on (International Budget Partnership, 2023^[141]).

Access to, and use of, open government data can enhance transparency, help hold government accountable and ameliorate the use of public resources. According to the E-Government Development Index, several MENA governments have made progress in developing Open Government Data (OGD) portals (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[2]); (United Nations, 2022^[142]). Morocco, Tunisia and the UAE took a number of steps to catalyse the value of open government data (see Chapter 5).

Ongoing decentralisation processes are slowly moving forward despite limited capacities

Decentralisation processes can help expand citizen participation, bring government closer to citizens and tailor public service provision to meet citizens’ needs (OECD, 2019^[143]). Yet, historically, most MENA countries and territories are highly centralised, with local administration expenditure representing about 5% of GDP on average, compared to about 16% of GDP on average across OECD Member countries (Kherigi, 2019^[144]; OECD, 2020^[145]). In recent years, some MENA governments have engaged in a process of decentralisation (e.g. Jordan and Tunisia), regionalisation (e.g. Morocco) or recognising increased autonomy to local authorities in constitutions (e.g. Egypt) (OECD, 2023^[129]; OECD, 2023^[128]). In Morocco, three laws adopted in June 2015 defined the territorial organisation and division of powers for regions, prefectures and provinces and municipalities. The regional and local elections of September 2015 were important steps in implementing the regionalisation process. Similarly, Jordan passed the Decentralisation

Law and Municipalities Law in 2015 and held elections in 2017 for the first time for governorate, municipal and local councils. The government presented a new Local Administration Law in early 2020 to merge the previous two laws, following an evaluation of the main legislative, administrative and technical challenges facing decentralisation (OECD, 2020_[146]). On the other hand, Egypt has so far not implemented a number of provisions on decentralisation contained in its constitution (Shantir, 2022_[147]).

Local governments in the MENA region also suffer from insufficient financial resources and a lack of financial autonomy (Bergh, 2010_[148]). Reliable sub-national fiscal data in the MENA region remains limited (Demmelhuber, Sturm and Vollmann, 2020_[149]). A USAID comparative analysis of MENA governments²⁹ found fiscal decentralisation to be “weak” in Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen and “medium” in Iraq and Morocco. Morocco devotes the largest percentage of central government expenditure to local government in the MENA region, at around 12%, slightly below the median for OECD lower-middle-income Member countries (US AID, 2020_[150]).

Conclusion: Governance for sustainable prosperity in the MENA region needs strengthening

Since the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings, most of the MENA region has undergone a decade of progress and development across a number of dimensions. At the same time, recent events, including the COVID-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the evolving conflicts in the Middle East have revealed, if not exacerbated, pre-existing challenges and put governments’ capacities to the test. Public governance reforms are at the core of government efforts to trigger and strengthen the positive interdependence between better policies and better lives. For instance, a recent consultative survey, administered by the OECD involving experts from civil society and think tanks from the MENA region, identified influential governance reform areas to strengthen inclusiveness in the region, notably strengthening the rule of law and government accountability, enhancing young people’s and women’s participation in decision-making, and building institutional capacities to deliver policies and services.

Public administrations in the MENA region are aware of the need to pursue efforts to foster strong, sustainable and inclusive prosperity. The next chapter (Chapter 2) assesses MENA governance practices in the areas of visioning, planning for sustainable development, co-ordination across policy areas and administrative silos, strategic communication, and measuring policy performance for impact.

The remaining chapters in this Report will pursue this assessment, examining practices in spending public resources efficiently (Chapter 3), delivering public services effectively to citizens and businesses (Chapter 4) and promoting open and inclusive societies (Chapter 5). Each of these chapters then offers strategic guidance and identifies areas of opportunity to move closer to OECD standards and best practices in areas where MENA governance practices could be further reinforced.

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Notes

¹ For the purposes of this report, the MENA region will refer to the public administrations of the MENA-OECD Initiative on Governance and Competitiveness for Development. The MENA-OECD Initiative covers Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

² OECD calculations, UN Comtrade database. OECD (2022), *Navigating beyond COVID-19, recovery in the MENA region*.

³ North Africa and Western Asia” includes Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, West Bank and Gaza Strip Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

⁴ OECD calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, custom data acquired via website.

⁵ The statistics from the UNICEF report cover the following countries and territories: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza Strip and Yemen.

⁶ The Human Development Index is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. See Technical note 1 at <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr2020pdf.pdf> for details on how the HDI is calculated.

⁷ “Middle East and Northern Africa” includes Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and the UAE.

⁸ Literacy rate, youth total (% of people ages 15-24) - Middle East & North Africa. Reproduce query at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.ZS?locations=ZQ&view=chart> (accessed January 29, 2024).

⁹ The Gross Enrolment Ratio represents the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education.

¹⁰ World Bank data based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics (<http://uis.unesco.org/>). Data as of June 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ENR.TERT.FM.ZS?locations=1A>.

¹¹ Jordan, Morocco, West Bank and Gaza Strip, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

¹² When comparing Middle East and North Africa (MEA), Sub-Saharan Africa (SSF), South Asia (SAS), Latin America and Caribbean (LCN), Europe and Central Asia (ECS) and East Asia and Pacific (EAS).

¹³ World Bank, “World Development Indicators,” custom data acquired via <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=ZQ-ZG-8S-ZJ-Z7-Z4>.

¹⁴ Average based on data from the following economies, latest available: Djibouti (2017), Egypt (2019), Iraq (2021), Jordan (2021), Lebanon (2019), Mauritania (2017); West Bank and Gaza Strip (2022), Tunisia (2019) and Yemen (2014) (ILO, 2024_[68]).

¹⁵ Average based on data from the following economies, latest available: Egypt (2019), Iraq (2021), Jordan (2021), Lebanon (2019), West Bank and Gaza Strip, Tunisia (2019) and Yemen (2014).

¹⁶ Excluding Yemen and Syria (World Health Organization, 2024_[71]).

¹⁷ The UHC service coverage index (SDG 3.8.1) combines 14 tracer indicators of coverage of essential health services (defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable

diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population). The indicator is an index reported on a unitless scale of 0 to 100. The tracer indicators are as follows, organized by four components of service coverage: 1. Reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health 2. Infectious diseases 3. Noncommunicable diseases 4. Service capacity and access. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/4834>.

¹⁸ Algeria (2018), Djibouti (2006), Egypt (2014), Iraq (2018), Jordan (2017), Morocco (2003), Qatar (2012), Syria (2006), Tunisia (2018) and Yemen (2003).

¹⁹ Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021-2022), including Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia.

²⁰ Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Tunisia, Iraq and Syria.

²¹ According to latest data available: Bahrain (2020), Djibouti (2020), Egypt (2020), Iraq (2019) Jordan (2022), Kuwait (2020), Lebanon (2020), Mauritania (2022), Morocco (2022), Oman (2022), West Bank and Gaza Strip (2021), Qatar (2019), Saudi Arabia (2018), Tunisia (2020), UAE (2022) and Yemen (2019). No data available for Algeria, Libya and Syria (UNU WIDER, 2023_[111]; IMF, 2021_[112]).

²² Defined as the difference between revenue and total expenditure, using the 2014 edition of the IMF's Government Finance Statistics Manual (GFSM 2014). Does not include policy lending. For some countries, the overall balances continue to be based on GFSM 1986, which is defined as total revenue and grants minus total expenditure and net lending (IMF Fiscal Monitor October 2023). The regional average does not include data for the Palestinian Authority.

²³ Responding governments to the survey are: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco (only on health), Palestinian Authority and Tunisia.

²⁴ Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq and Lebanon.

²⁵ The E-Government Development Index (EGDI) presents the state of E-Government Development of the United Nations Member States. The EGDI is a composite measure of three important dimensions of e-government, namely: provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity and human capacity. Within 0 to 1 range of EGDI values the countries are then grouped into four levels mathematically defined as follows: very high EGDI values range from 0.75 to 1.00 inclusive, high EGDI group values range from 0.50 to 0.7499 inclusive, middle EGDI values range from 0.25 to 0.4999 inclusive, and low EGDI values range from 0.0 to 0.2499 inclusive. <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index>.

²⁶ This index measures the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision-making through the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. In addition, the index includes the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (prime minister or president) for the last 50 years. Differences between the participation of women and men at local levels of government are currently not captured (World Economic Forum, 2024_[51]).

²⁷ Age at last election or renewal (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2024_[136]).

²⁸ The Open Budget Survey considers budget oversight to be “weak” for countries and territories scoring between 0 and 40, “limited” for countries and territories scoring between 41 and 60, and “adequate” for countries and territories scoring between 61 and 100 <https://internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey/>.

²⁹ The study includes Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria and Yemen.

2

Growing sustainably in the Middle East and North Africa

This chapter focuses on how governance arrangements surrounding the design, delivery and monitoring of national development strategies can support the effective and efficient pursuit of sustainable prosperity over the medium- and long-term; It presents how such practices and mechanisms are developed in the Middle East and North Africa. It then provides recommendations for governments to ensure that long-term sustainable growth objectives are consistently at the heart of their action and develop and implement a coherent approach to ultimately achieve greater prosperity.

Governments face a number of increasingly prevalent and multifaceted global challenges. As outlined in Chapter 1 of this Report, among the most pressing are climate change, an accelerating but uneven digital transformation, poverty reduction, inequalities and the impact of the evolving conflicts in the Middle East on global value chains, on access to essential public services, and on access to essential goods, food and energy (OECD, 2022^[1]).

These contextual factors affecting the MENA region are exacerbating pre-existing political, environmental and security challenges. To address these challenges and build a sustainable and prosperous future, governments in the region have adopted long-term development strategies, many of them called “visions”, that are often aligned with the global roadmap provided by the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Objectives (SDGs).

Hence, many governments in the region are consolidating capacities to simultaneously address multidimensional, interdependent, and intergenerational challenges and achieve SDGs within their long-term visions.

The state of SDG implementation across MENA countries and territories provides an opportunity to assess and compare the progress of the different governments in modernising their approaches to public governance to pursue the SDGs successfully. It offers a good indication of their governance capacities to pursue specific development priorities effectively.

Overcoming these complex challenges requires effective, accountable and transparent institutions with the capacity to design, co-ordinate, implement and evaluate the performance of policy responses, reflective of robust citizen and stakeholder engagement, in an agile and effective manner.

This chapter focuses on how framework governance arrangements and tools to design, deliver and evaluate the performance of national strategies can support the effective and efficient pursuit of sustainable prosperity over the mid and long-term. Tools include visioning, planning, co-ordination, communication and the generation and use of performance information.

Challenges in achieving SDGs highlight the need to further strengthen the performance of public policies

Recent economic shocks and evolving conflicts in the Middle East have underlined the difficulties governments face in pursuing development objectives, as it requires making trade-offs between managing immediate needs and long-run societal challenges whilst delivering results for citizens. This is reflected in the progress against the SDGs, which provides a good indicator of how governments handle such long-term challenges.

The MENA region shows mixed results in pursuing the SDGs but demonstrates real, if slow, progress in meeting some targets

Countries and territories in the MENA region have made some important advances in their progress towards SDGs (Sachs, Lafortune and Fuller, 2024^[2]). Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have achieved at least one SDG. More specifically, No Poverty (SDG 1) has reportedly been achieved by Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and the UAE. The UAE and Algeria are reported to have achieved Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10). Additionally, several MENA governments are also reportedly on track to achieve Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17), while there are moderate increases in performance across other SDGs.

Despite these efforts, the MENA region continues to face significant challenges across SDGs. As shown in Figure 2.1, only Tunisia, Morocco, the UAE and Algeria are achieving 70% or more of SDG objectives (Sachs, Lafortune and Fuller, 2024^[2]).

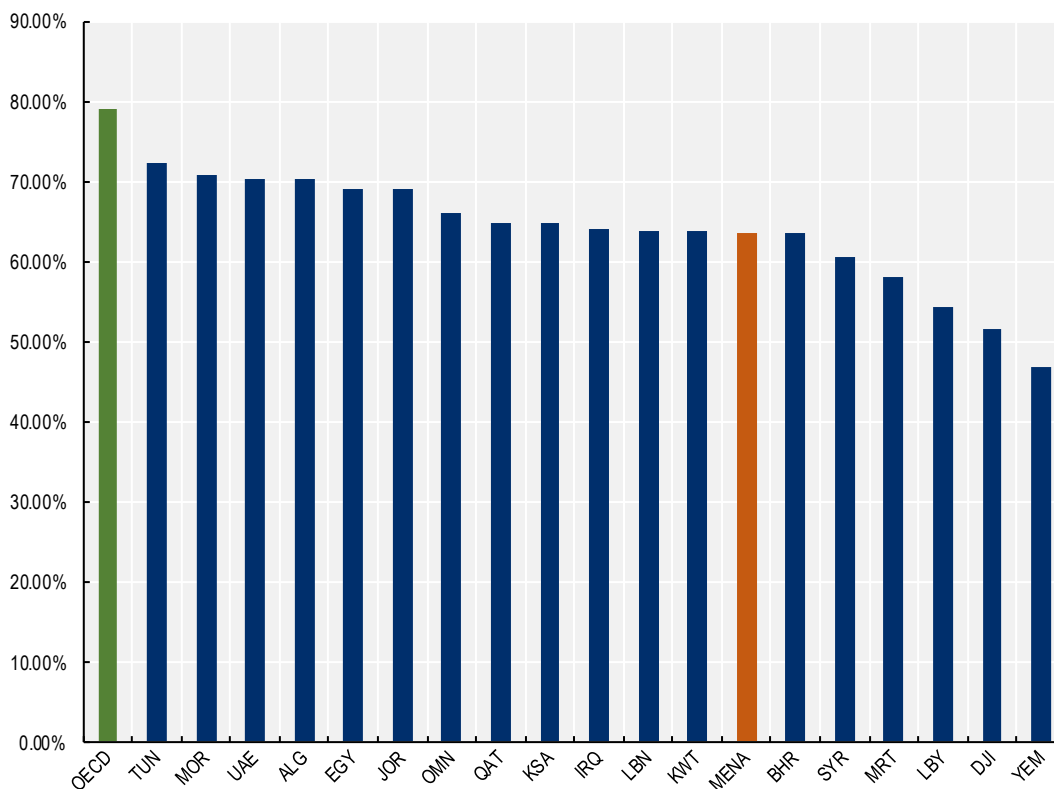
Across the region, achieving Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Zero Hunger (SDG 2) remain the greatest challenges, and progress towards Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) continues to be insufficient. In terms of climate change impact, the least developed economies in the region carry the heaviest burden. Although they show better results in Climate Action (SDG 13) compared to higher-income economies, it is mainly due to lower levels of economic activity and consumption. Moreover, these economies score poorly on the indicator related to the number of people affected by climate disasters, highlighting the need for support in addressing climate vulnerabilities.

While some countries and territories in the region have made progress in the transition towards low-carbon societies through increased use of renewable energy and the establishment of dedicated institutional structures, much remains to be done to achieve Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), although most governments are showing moderate progress. For the majority of countries and territories, score on SDG 7 remained low in the latest index and the indicators show an overall stagnation in renewable energy adoption. Water stress is another significant environmental challenge in the region: most countries and territories have received a poor score on Clean and Water Sanitation (SDG 6) in the latest index, and so far, none have managed to achieve it despite progress made. Another shared challenge in the region is the Sustainability of Cities and Communities (SDG 11), where achievements so far remain modest. One of the main factors contributing to this poor performance is air quality, for which none of the countries or territories show a positive trend in their indicator despite its major health impacts. In fact, the region underperforms in the indicator related to deaths caused by air pollution (Sachs, Lafortune and Fuller, 2024^[2]).

Overcoming the challenges to achieving the SDGs goes beyond specific obstacles. These challenges are multidimensional, interdependent, and intergenerational, with profound implications for societies, economies and the environment over the long-term. As such, these challenges not only affect the implementation of the SDGs but more largely the achievement of long-term development objectives. In the case of the MENA region, the complexity of the situation is compounded by ever-increasing socio-political, economic, environmental and security turmoil, which has a significant impact on the region's population and socio-economic development.

Figure 2.1. Some MENA countries and territories have completed over two thirds of the road towards achieving the SDGs while some remain far from full attainment

2024 Sustainable Development Report 2024 (0-100%)



Note: The 2024 SDG Index Scores comprises 110 indicators covering the 17 SDGs, each of which have an assigned score (0–100); “MENA” indicates a simple average of the scores shown in the chart. Data for all countries and territories are from 2024, except for Libya (2023). Source: Author’s work based on (Sachs, Lafortune and Fuller, 2024^[2]; Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2024^[3]).

Governance as assessed by SDG 16 is a main enabler to deliver on the SDGs and long-term objectives

Delivering on the long-term challenges presented above in a context of emerging and evolving threats and priorities requires agile, responsive and resilient public governance that enables governments to design and implement responses quickly, effectively and sustainably. In this regard, the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions as promoted by SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is a key enabler to implement such responses.

Indicators reveal a particularly challenging picture when assessing the effectiveness of governance in pursuing sustainability, as all countries and territories in the region for which information is available¹ show a worsening record or stagnation in progressing towards SDG 16 (Sachs, Lafortune and Fuller, 2024^[2]). Furthermore, as covered in greater detail in Chapters 1 and 4, the MENA region has consistently lagged behind most of the world in terms of government effectiveness, notwithstanding significant variations. Indeed, some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) governments perform close to the OECD average (World Bank, 2024^[4]). These challenges in effective governance are in turn reflected in citizens’ dissatisfaction with their government’s performance, which according to the Arab Barometer stood at over 60% across the MENA countries and territories surveyed in 2022 (Arab Barometer, 2022^[5]).

Delivering on sustainable development requires setting long-term objectives supported by high-level political commitment

Today, “traditional” machinery of government is not always adequately equipped and organised to identify, address and adapt to such complex, cross-cutting challenges in a highly volatile and uncertain environment. Considering that such issues as climate change or digital transformation are increasingly multifaceted and cross-boundary, the way government bodies are usually designed and structured to focus on sectoral issues, and the existing distinction between domestic policy issues and foreign affairs, can hamper government action (OECD, 2022^[6]). This is especially the case when it comes to climate change, for instance, that require concerted efforts at all levels of government and in all policy areas, not just environmental affairs. It calls for a transformation of government institutions, along with greater co-ordination and alignment between them and across levels of government.

Several OECD instruments, including the OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (OECD, 2019^[7]) and the OECD Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance (OECD, 2020^[8]), highlight the need to adopt a whole-of-government approach to design and implement coherent and effective policy responses. Establishing a strategy that encompasses the main orientations for the development of the country and that is supported not only at the highest political level but also broadly across society are essential drivers in that regard.

Setting national strategies as a means of guiding sustainable development

The capacity to pursue long-term objectives towards sustainable development is generally guided by a national strategy, often called “vision”, that presents the end-state of where governments and their citizens see their country at the end of the multi-year planning cycle (OECD, 2019^[7]); (OECD, 2020^[8]). These strategies tend to address the question of what sustainable development will look like for the country once the planning horizon is reached.

In OECD Member countries, these strategies aim to define desired sustainable development outcomes for the country using a pluri-annual planning horizon as the guidepost (usually a decade or more), and are used to frame scenarios and actions, which together can guide governments in their efforts to improve coherence across sectors (OECD, 2019^[7]). These strategies are also often developed in co-operation with citizens and other key stakeholders, including non-state actors. Involving all stakeholders aims to foster an inclusive approach, stressing the universality of the 2030 Agenda with objectives going beyond the present governmental term (OECD, n.d.^[9]). A representative example of this approach is the drafting process of Slovenian Development Strategy 2030, that also included a preliminary process to design the Vision of Slovenia (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. The drafting process of the Vision of Slovenia and Slovenian Development Strategy 2030

In 2015, the Slovenian government launched the drafting process of the “Vision of Slovenia” as a key step in the drafting of the larger Slovenian Development Strategy 2030.

To develop the Vision, the government formed the “Horizontal Interdepartmental Group” to start the drafting process. This group was tasked with co-ordinating the elaboration of development documents, preparing the analytical basis and collaborating in the selection of strategic priority areas. In addition, the “Group for the Future”, composed of 14 experts from various fields, was established to advise on the drafting process and select participants for a three-day workshop, where the initial components of the Slovenian Vision were elaborated in November 2015.

During 2016, several interactive events were organised. Participants discussed their desired future, reviewed the first draft of the Vision, identified possible gaps in the text and proposed improvements. In total, 27 events were held with the participation of more than 600 people. The formulation of the Vision and the identification of strategic areas and priority objectives also included a public survey on the quality of life in Slovenia, in which more than 1,000 inhabitants participated. A government conference and a workshop with senior ministry officials was held to discuss the content and drafting process of the Vision and Strategy. Meetings were also held at ministerial level to draw parallels between the priorities highlighted by the population and the work areas of the ministries. The Vision of Slovenia was presented to the public in February 2017.

Alongside the drafting of the Vision, the drafting of the Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 began during the summer of 2016. The process included several rounds of meetings and reviews with a large range of professionals and government officials to determine priorities and key performance indicators. The contributions of the departments and participants served as an important basis for the further development of the Strategy. A public consultation on the draft Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 was organised in October-November 2017. During this time, the government received several contributions from various organisations and interested parties. In addition to the public consultation, several discussions were held with interested stakeholders who wanted a more detailed presentation of the Strategy and a discussion of the draft document. After the public consultation, the draft Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 and a report on the consultation were drawn up. After a final round of inter-departmental harmonisation, the draft Strategy was discussed by the Slovenian government at its 159th regular session on 7 December 2017.

Source: (Government of Slovenia, 2017^[10]).

Similarly to OECD Members, MENA governments have started developing multi-annual strategies to guide policymaking over the long-term, balance short term needs and longer-term challenges, and ensure that national development priorities are addressed. They are referred as “visions” in a large number of MENA countries and territories.

Since the 2000s, national visions in the MENA region have started to incorporate the narratives, objectives and policy instruments of sustainable development, prioritising not only economic but also social and environmental dimensions of development. By the mid-2010s, most MENA countries and territories² had at least in part incorporated aspects of sustainable development in their national visions such as poverty reduction or gender equality, issues that were hitherto underrepresented in such documents (Göll, Uhl and Zwiars, 2019^[11]). The adoption of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda in 2015 reinforced this dynamic towards long-term visions while considering sustainable development considerations and goals.

These long-term national visions are often aligned in their timeline with the UN Agenda 2030. Some national strategic visions are formulated to closely mirror the pillars and strategic objectives of the SDG framework, including Egypt's Vision 2030 or Oman's Vision 2040. Recently, there is moreover a tendency to move beyond 2030 towards visions and strategies for 2050 and even further, as it is the case in the UAE for instance. As outlined in Box 2.2, the strategies' main pillars vary from country to country, mirroring the heterogeneous political priorities and stages of economic development in the region. In most economies of the region, they are nevertheless oriented towards economic development, with a strong focus on infrastructure development (ESCWA, n.d.^[12]). Most national visions also increasingly include a focus on a number of multidimensional challenges that are key to sustainable and inclusive development, including women's empowerment or the green transition (ESCWA, n.d.^[12]).

Box 2.2. Setting societal goals through government “Visions”: Examples from select MENA countries

Several countries in the MENA region have launched whole-of-government strategies which leverage governance reforms to support the development of their societies and economies.

Egypt Vision 2030. Sustainable Development Strategy

This is Egypt's first such strategy. It guides ongoing reform efforts to match the 17 SDGs, as well as the African Agenda 2063. In particular, it covers economic, social and environmental dimensions of SDGs and outlines strategic targets and sub-targets to achieve the goals, key performance indicators as well as expected challenges.

Morocco New Development Model 2035

Adopted in 2021 under the King's leadership, the new Development Model is “designed by Moroccans, with Moroccans and for Moroccans”, having benefitted from insights and ideas discussed in a commission made up of citizens with different and complementary backgrounds. The Model embodies a new way of looking at development, one that is more participative, involving all stakeholders. Through the Model, the Kingdom commits to achieving several targets by 2035, making progress in terms of economy, human capital, inclusion, durability as well as governance and administration.

Oman's Vision 2040

Oman Vision 2040 is the national reference for economic and social planning for the period of 2021-2040, and the source of national sector strategies and five-year development plans. The Vision is organised around four pillars: an environment with sustainable components; Responsible State agencies; a competitive economy; and a society of creative individuals.

Qatar National Vision 2030

Dating back to 2008, it is structured around four pillars covering “economic development” (ensuring efficient management of the national economy, taking a responsible approach towards natural resource management and working to develop a knowledge-based economy); “social development” (encouraging the adoption of Islamic philosophy and humanitarian and family values, as well as sport and physical activity); “human development” (improving education and health care, and increasing cultural awareness and employment opportunities) and “environmental development” (advancing the technological frontier, conducting environmental awareness campaigns and promoting sustainable urban growth).

UAE Centennial 2071, Principles of the 50 and We the UAE 2031

The UAE have developed a number of strategic visions, principles and plans over different timeframes to guide their long-term development.

The Centennial Plan 2071 is a long-term, full-vision plan that covers the period 2021-2071. It forms a clear map for the long-term government work. The UAE Centennial 2071 is based on four pillars: Future-focused government; Excellent education; diversified knowledge economy; and a happy and cohesive society. This long-term vision is complemented by the “Principles of the 50”, that are 10 principles acting as guidelines for all institutions in the UAE in the next 50 years to implement the economic, political and developmental roadmap.

Additionally, the UAE also develop medium-term strategies for 10-year period to translate their long-term objectives into concrete actions and policies. The current strategy “We the UAE 2031” is based on four pillars that cover all sectors including the society, economy, diplomacy and ecosystem. It sets specific targets and indicators to achieve its objectives and contribute to the long-term development of the country as set in the 2071 Centennial and the Principles of the 50.

Saudi Vision 2030

Launched in 2016, it promotes several Realisation Programmes underpinning three main strategic objectives. These pivot around an “ambitious Nation” (through enhanced government effectiveness and enabled society responsibility); a “thriving economy” (to be achieved through economic diversification and growth as well as more employment); and a “vibrant society” (based on Islamic and national identity and enjoying a fulfilling and healthy life).

Sources: (Qatar's Government Communications Office, n.d.^[13]; Egypt's Presidency of Government, n.d.^[14]; U.AE, n.d.^[15]; Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement, 2021^[16]; U.AE, n.d.^[17]; Oman Vision 2040's Implementation Follow-up Unit, n.d.^[18]; Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d.^[19]; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.^[20]).

As in OECD Member countries, in the MENA region visions tend to contextualise development objectives in light of evolving challenges and develop tailored responses. For example, in Egypt, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MPED) updated its Vision 2030 to strengthen the link between investments and socio-economic programmes for sustainable development, address pressing challenges hindering socio-economic growth (i.e. water scarcity, climate change, high population growth), as well as respond to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis (OECD, n.d.^[21]) This change also aimed to ensure a better and more rigorous alignment of the national goals with the SDGs.

Moreover, many MENA governments have undertaken consultation processes to involve stakeholders in the strategy development process in order to make sure that the national long-term visions reflect the needs and priorities of all segments of the population and society. In Morocco, the New Development Model 2035 was developed following a co-construction approach. During this process, a number of consultation spaces were open to gather the concerns and proposals of citizens and institutional stakeholders (Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement, 2021^[16]). Oman's government conducted dialogues during the elaboration of Oman's Vision 2040 (Government of Oman, n.d.^[22]). Vision committees included representatives of the government, the Council of Oman, the private sector, civil society organisations (CSOs) and citizens (including experts, scholars and specialists), with emphasis on inclusivity and the attendance of groups representing women, youth, persons with disabilities and students from all levels to ensure that the population was represented in its diversity (Government of Oman, n.d.^[22]). In Egypt, a series of consultations with external stakeholders was also organised to identify priorities for the updated Vision 2030 (OECD, n.d.^[21]).

Strong political and policy leadership is key to lead the design of long-term strategies and champion their pursuit

In both OECD and MENA countries and territories, the political level is invariably mandated to lead the development of the long-term strategy and to ensure their pursuit. This entails identifying key policy issues, establishing what needs to be addressed first, creating solutions to critical challenges, allocating resources and adjusting policies according to observed outcomes and impacts. Political ownership at higher levels of government as a prerequisite to design and pursue whole-of-government strategic policy objectives coherently is emphasised in the OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (2019^[7]) and in the OECD Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance (2020^[8]).

Building strong institutional frameworks to steer and coordinate the implementation of whole-of-government strategies

As mentioned above, implementing a whole-of-government strategy needs strong political commitment, steering and coordination at the highest level to avoid a fragmentation of political initiatives and to ensure sufficient political buy-in and visibility across all key government institutions and stakeholders.

The institutional settings for steering the implementation of strategic priorities can take several forms

Implementing long-term strategies requires first strong institutions to steer strategic planning at the whole-of-government level, that is the shift from political commitments and visions on the one hand to the actual results-based operationalisation of government action on the other. Strategic planning is covered in more detail later in the chapter.

The centre of government has an increasing role in strategic planning in OECD Member countries

As explained in Box 2.3, due to their central position at the heart of governments where they hold a strong convening power and can sometimes bring a more horizontal perspective, centres of government (CoGs) are uniquely placed to lead governmental action on cross-cutting challenges and whole-of-government visions. In the past decade, their strategic positioning, combined with the growing complexity of today's policy challenges, has led them to play an increasingly strategic and forward-looking role in OECD Member countries.

Box 2.3. The centre of government (CoG) in OECD Member countries

The OECD defines the centre of government (CoG) as “the body or group of bodies that provide direct support and advice to Heads of Government and the Council of Ministers, or Cabinet”. A key institution of the executive branch, it is mandated to ensure elected politicians make decisions informed by coherent evidence and expert analysis, and facilitates co-ordination across government siloes.

However, the CoG concept does not denote any specific organisational structure: the composition of the CoG can vary depending on the constitutional order, the political system, contextual and historical factors and the Head of Government’s preferences. The CoG has therefore a great variety of names across countries, such as General Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Chancellery, Office/Ministry of the Presidency, Council of Ministers Office, etc. No two countries are identical in their approach to their CoG’s institutional and decision-making arrangements.

Generally, the role of the centre of government has expanded from purely procedural and agenda-setting functions to playing a more strategic leadership role of supporting the Head of Government and Cabinet.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[23]).

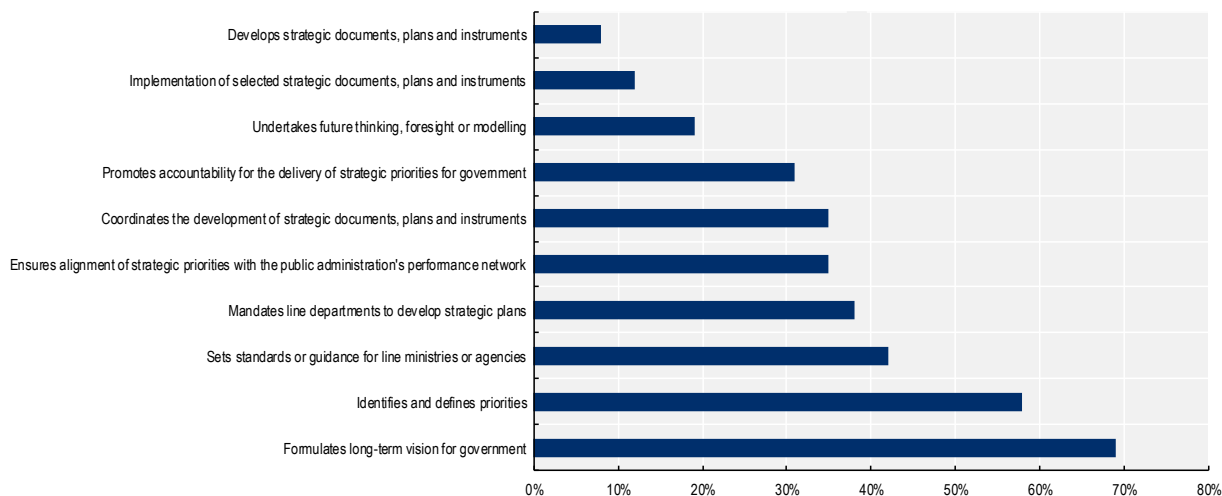
Strategic planning is considered as a key responsibility of the CoG for more than half of OECD Member countries surveyed, where they are tasked to maintain the balance between long-term objectives and day-to-day business through the operationalisation of the Government Programme (OECD, 2018^[24]). Strategic planning units located in the CoG usually perform a wide range of activities including steering and ensuring the implementation of the government priorities and programmes, aligning national and sectoral strategies, co-ordinating the strategic work of line Ministries and leading foresight activities, among others.

CoGs can have an oversight, steering and monitoring function to ensure delivering on strategic priorities (Figure 2.2) (OECD, 2024^[25]). In 58% of countries surveyed, CoGs oversee the identification of government priorities. The process requires them to define priorities based on criteria, arbitrate between initiatives submitted by line ministries, and ensure that the government’s electoral mandate is translated and implemented through the government’s programme and sectoral policies. CoGs also often operationalise the government’s vision or programme into an action plan or roadmap for implementation by line ministries, and they can mandate line ministries to develop long-term plans.

Furthermore, in some OECD Member countries, CoGs have issued various guidelines with standards and good practices for policy development to support line ministries’ work (OECD, 2024^[25]). Some countries have also set up new central delivery units composed of a small group of highly skilled people responsible for preparing delivery plans to oversee and support progress towards a select number of top priorities. However, such a steering role can only be fully played if CoGs have put in place effective working relations and robust co-ordination processes with line ministries, especially with key ministries involved in strategic planning such as ministries in charge of planification or budget.

Figure 2.2. CoGs play a key role in the development and implementation of a country's long-term vision

Centre of government's role in priority setting and strategic planning in OECD Member countries



Note: n=26. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked: "For each of the below activities regarding setting the vision, priorities and strategic planning, please indicate who has the primary responsibility".

Source: (OECD, 2024^[25]); (OECD, 2023^[26]).

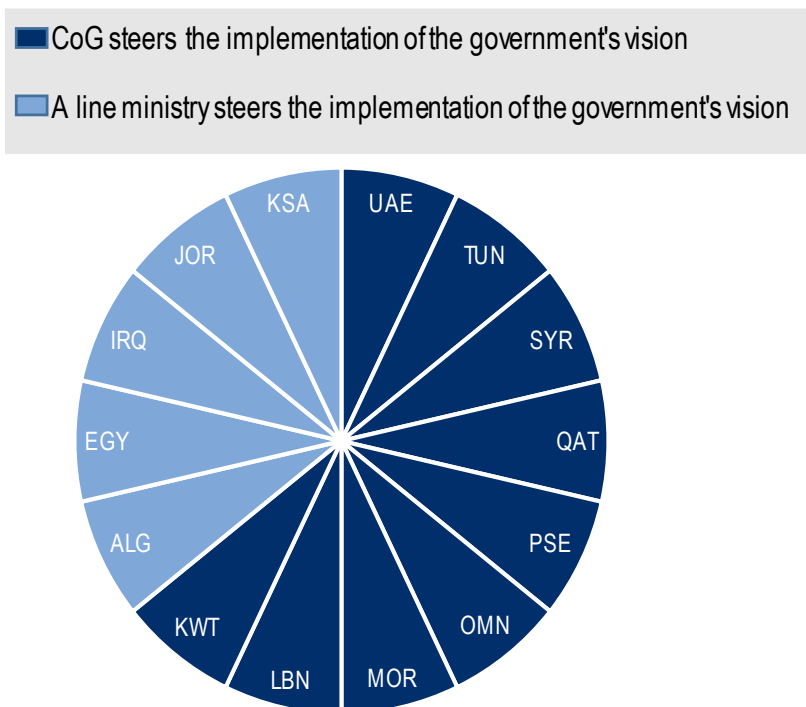
Nevertheless, it is important to note that institutional settings for strategic planning vary across countries. Across the OECD, many Member countries have established specific institutional arrangements for whole-of-government strategic planning within the CoG (in most cases) or shared between the CoG and another institution - where CoGs tend to play a more collaborative or supportive role (Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Japan, Mexico, Norway) or within a Ministry (e.g. Ministry of Development in Türkiye). Line ministries and notably the Ministries of Economy, the Ministries of Planning and the Ministries of Finance, sometimes combined into a single ministry, can play an essential role in strategic planning to ensure alignment between national strategies and budget (OECD, 2018^[24]).

Institutional settings for strategic planning differ across MENA countries and territories

Strategic planning to steer the implementation of whole-of-government visions has increasingly become part of the functions led by CoG institutions in a majority of MENA countries and territories, whether under the mandate of a Prime Minister's Office or a Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, as depicted in Figure 2.3. This is the case for instance in Morocco where the Head of Government Services are also developing a role of delivery unit to steer specific key priorities (Box 2.4).

In other MENA governments, a specific line ministry is responsible for strategic planning with the support of CoG institutions. As such, the planning function is usually played by the Ministry of Economy or Finance, as illustrated by the MPED in Egypt, or by ministries of aid and international cooperation (e.g. Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation) given the importance of development assistance in setting the planning agenda. It can also be led by a dedicated ministry for planning or sustainable development, as in Iraq with the Ministry of Planning.

Figure 2.3. Institutions responsible for steering government visions in MENA governments



Sources: Author's work based on the data indicating the government institutions responsible for their planning, co-ordination, and implementation, sourced from (OECD, 2023^[27]; Government of Lebanon, 2018^[28]; Government of Syria, 2020^[29]; UAE National Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, 2022^[30]; Republic of Iraq, 2021^[31]; Republic of Iraq, n.d.^[32]; State of Kuwait, 2019^[33]; Government of Oman, n.d.^[22]; Sultanate of Oman, Supreme Council for Planning, 2019^[34]; (Prime Minister's Office of the Palestinian Authority, n.d.^[35]; State of Qatar, 2018^[36]; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018^[37]; Government of Algeria, 2019^[38]; Ministry of Planning and Economic Development of Egypt, 2021^[39]; République Tunisienne, 2021^[40]; Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan, 2022^[41]).

Box 2.4. Strengthening the role of the centre of government in strategic planning in Morocco

In Morocco, the Head of Government Services (SCG) were established in 2012 to better support the Head of Government, particularly in the co-ordination of public policies and in the achievement of the 5-year governmental programme objectives. The creation of the SCG also aimed to improve decision-making in particular at the Council of Government, for which the SCG have been proposing items on the agenda and reviewing the consistency of the proposals with the government programme during the preparation process of the meeting. The SCG have also enabled greater agility at the centre of government to respond to national issues and immediate or long-term challenges for Morocco.

The role of the SCG was further reinforced in the framework of the implementation of the Government Programme 2021-2026. They have a leading role in steering the implementation of government priorities in co-ordination with line ministries; they support decision-making by the Head of Government; they ensure the co-ordination and alignment of strategies and policies, providing expertise both on legal and substance matters; they also contribute extensively to the preparation of the annual budget law by establishing the strategic framework driving the budget distribution that is then validated by the Head of Government before discussions with the Ministry of Economy and Finances.

Moreover, the SCG team is in charge of monitoring the implementation of the strategic priorities and of ensuring that new laws and strategies are in line both with the Government Programme and the long-term New Development Model. In addition to these functions, the SCG has been developing a role of delivery unit to steer more specifically some key priorities and accompany line ministries in the development and implementation of those priorities in connection with their sectoral strategies.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[27]).

Improving co-ordination mechanisms to support the implementation of strategic priorities

Co-ordination contributes to a more effective implementation of whole-of-government strategies. It can strengthen coherence and alignment across sector strategies especially when diverse actors and institutions are involved, better information sharing across policy areas and administrative silos, more integrated monitoring frameworks, and more informed and evidence-based decision-making.

Strengthening institutions in charge of coordination for whole-of-government strategies

The role of the institutions in strategic planning in steering the implementation of whole-of-government strategies is enhanced by their responsibilities for whole-of-government policy co-ordination. In OECD Member countries, whole-of-government policy co-ordination has been predominantly a responsibility of the CoG, sometimes shared with another institution (OECD, 2018^[24]).

Similarly, in many MENA countries and territories, institutions mandated with strategic planning, whether they be CoG institutions or key line ministries, also tend to be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the economies' whole-of-government strategies.

In many cases, MENA governments have also set up distinct dedicated bodies or units to co-ordinate or monitor the implementation of their whole-of-government strategies, sometimes alongside existing institutions mandated to lead strategic planning. For instance, in Egypt, the government has established sustainable development units and focal points within different ministries to ensure whole-of-government coherence between the national vision and sectoral policy plans. They also provide the necessary data for the monitoring and evaluation of these plans to the MPED, that coordinates strategic planning activities. However, implementation in practice remains incomplete and the exchange of information between focal points in line ministries and the MPED is functional solely on a bilateral and ad hoc basis (OECD, n.d.^[21]).

Where it is not the case yet, MENA governments could reinforce the role and capacities at the centre in setting priorities, planning, steering and monitoring the implementation of whole-of-government strategies. This is for instance the case in Estonia, where the Government Office Strategy Unit is in charge of co-ordinating work on a number of strategic plans, including the whole-of-government strategy and the SDGs strategy, and facilitating coherence between them (Box 2.5).

Moreover, MENA governments could also build on existing (or establish when needed) ministerial or inter-ministerial working groups. These working groups would gather relevant actors (line ministries, CoG institutions, etc.) under the leadership of the CoG or of the line ministry in charge of strategic planning during the preparation of strategies, policies and laws to review the proposals and ensure their coherence with national visions, priorities and objectives. Depending on the national context, these bodies could also be responsible for monitoring the implementation of SDGs (OECD, 2020^[42]).

Box 2.5. The Government Office Strategy Unit in Estonia is in charge of coordinating work on a number of long-term strategies

The Government Office Strategy Unit in Estonia co-ordinates work on sustainable development and fosters information sharing among bodies such as the inter-ministerial working group gathering representatives from all ministries and Statistics Estonia working on an ad hoc basis, and the Estonian Sustainable Development Commission, a non-governmental stakeholder organisation. As the Government Office Strategy Unit is co-ordinating not only the implementation of Agenda 2030 but also other strategies (Estonia 2020, Estonia's EU policy), it is able to ensure coherence in various horizontal planning documents.

Sources: (OECD, 2015^[43]; Government Office of Estonia, 2024^[44]).

Finally, vertical co-ordination capacity could also be reinforced in the MENA region. Studies show that in most countries and territories of the region, co-ordination with local governments remains too limited, which hampers the effective implementation of whole-of-government strategies at the local level. Sub-national authorities themselves often lack human and financial resources required to engage effectively with the national government in strategic planning efforts for sustainable development, whether in contributing regional data and evidence to national strategy-setting, pursuit and evaluation, or engaging systematically with local stakeholders and citizens to ensure that whole-of-government strategies properly reflects specific local circumstances, strengths and needs (OECD, 2020^[45]; OECD, n.d.^[21]). This could be addressed for instance through the development of specific action plans on long-term development challenges at the sub-national level, tailored to the needs and priorities of each territory and, where feasible and appropriate, with municipal/local authorities (OECD, n.d.^[21]).

Fostering co-ordination mechanisms to address cross-cutting challenges

In addition to the co-ordination functions for the whole-of-government strategies, OECD Member and partner countries have also established co-ordination mechanisms – under the leadership of the CoG or other institutions - such as inter-ministerial committees, focal points, networks, or thematic working groups to deliver on cross-cutting topics, including gender equality, youth affairs, digitalisation or climate change (OECD, 2020^[8]). Such co-ordination mechanisms encourage synergies between government actors and allow to articulate the integration of strategic priorities and the implementation of sectoral policies and services. They also serve as a tool to facilitate and mainstream the integration of cross-cutting issues within the structure and functioning of public institutions.

Addressing climate change

For example, a number of MENA governments have established ministerial portfolios in charge of climate change as well as whole-of-government co-ordination structures to ensure the effective implementation of climate and environmental objectives in all policy areas. In the UAE, the Council on Climate Change and the Environment, an inter-ministerial, inter-Emirate governance body, is in charge of overseeing the national Climate Change Plan, which is aligned with the long-term national agenda UAE Vision 2021. The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment assumes the role of the secretariat and is responsible for monitoring the progress of the plan (LSE Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, 2022^[46]).

Another existing setting, implemented by a number of OECD Member countries, places the climate portfolio directly under the authority of the Prime Minister - or equivalent - supported by dedicated units

created within the CoG. Box 2.6 describes the cases of Australia, France, Spain and the United States, where the unit at the forefront of the climate policy co-ordination efforts is in the centre.

Box 2.6. Examples of OECD Member countries that co-ordinate climate policy from the centre of government

Australia

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) plays an important role in co-ordinating the development and delivery of the Government's climate change and energy policy and engagement. PM&C works closely with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) as well as other relevant departments, agencies, and scientific institutions to support Australian efforts to capture the opportunities of the net zero transformation and advance progress towards reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

France

In 2022, the President provided direction to the Prime Minister to lead inter-ministerial "ecological planning", and the Secretariat General for Ecological Planning was established to support her in this endeavour. The responsibility covers all areas of ecological transition (climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, natural resources and health & environment) and involves co-ordinating the elaboration of policy, organising arbitrations, monitoring implementation including at the local level, and mobilising stakeholders.

Spain

Given Spain's highly decentralised institutional set-up, Autonomous Communities (regional governments) are responsible for key competences related to the implementation of climate-related policies. Hence, a Commission for the Co-ordination of Climate Change Policies deals with the co-ordination and collaboration between the State and the Autonomous Communities. It includes groups of technical nature on inventories, mitigation, adaptation and emissions trading.

United States of America

The Climate Policy Office is the co-ordinator of the whole-of-government approach to tackling the climate crisis in the United States. The Office is located in the centre of government and is led by the Assistant to the President and National Climate Advisor. Among the functions of the Office are:

- Co-ordinate the domestic policymaking process
- Co-ordinate domestic climate-policy advice to the President
- Ensure cohesiveness across policy decisions, programmes, and the President's goals
- Monitor the implementation of the President's domestic climate-policy agenda

The Office engages with other institutions and agencies from the administration to support the delivery of climate-related goals.

Sources: (OECD, 2023^[47]; Government of the United States of America, 2023^[48]; France Stratégie, 2022^[49]; The White House, 2023^[50]; PM&C, 2023^[51]).

Gender equality

MENA governments have established central gender institutions (CGIs) since the 1990s. CGIs are bodies tasked with promoting, co-ordinating and facilitating the gender equality policy at the central or federal level. CGIs are devoted to supporting women's empowerment projects and mainstreaming gender into the government as a whole (ESCWA, 2020^[52]). Across OECD Member countries, and in the MENA region, there is no standardised blueprint for institutional design, due the varied nature of governmental setups and specific contexts in each country or territory (OECD, 2022^[53]). Several CGIs are fully dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, for instance in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority and the UAE. Others have broader or combined portfolios that include women's affairs among other mandates that are traditionally considered as the domains and responsibilities of women, such as in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (ESCWA, 2020^[52]).

In order to implement government-wide gender equality goals and support gender mainstreaming, several MENA governments have also established co-ordination structures involving various public institutions, which often have a direct relationship to CGIs. Tunisia has established the Council of Peers composed of representatives across the government and civil society organisations (with the Head of Government as chair and Minister for Women, Family, Children and the Elderly as the deputy chair) to work on a gender-based approach to planning, programming, evaluation and budgeting to eliminate all forms of discrimination (ESCWA, 2019^[54]). Similarly, in the Palestinian Authority, a National Committee for Gender was established to co-ordinate the Cross-Sectoral Gender Strategy. The committee constitutes the main forum to discuss gender policy in the Palestinian Authority. It gathers all 22 ministries and is chaired by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Additionally, it includes dedicated working groups to deal with specific strategy programmes in which relevant institutions are selectively involved (OECD, 2024^[55]).

Youth affairs

A number of MENA governments have put in place an institutional co-ordinating body or committee on youth affairs and/or have established MoU to facilitate co-ordination with other ministries, as highlighted in Table 2.1. Some of them have moreover established bodies to engage and co-ordinate with other stakeholders involved on the topic. This is for instance the case in the UAE, where the Emirates Youth Council serves as an advisory body for the government and the Minister of State for Youth on national issues and engagement with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. The model has been adopted and replicated in 13 ministries of the country, where young employees of the respective ministries co-ordinate with other ministries and different stakeholders on topics related to young people and supervise the organisation of relevant activities and programmes (OECD, 2022^[56]).

Table 2.1. Approaches to inter-ministerial co-ordination on youth affairs across select MENA administrations

Country	Institution responsible for horizontal co-ordination	Main type of co-ordination mechanisms used
Jordan	Ministry of Youth	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
Lebanon	Ministry of Youth and Sports	No specific mechanism; Informal and ad hoc meetings
Mauritania	Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Relations with Parliament	Institutional co-ordination bodies and committees
Morocco	Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU); Institutional co-ordination bodies and committees; Formal meetings
Tunisia	Ministry of Youth and Sports	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU); Institutional co-ordination bodies and committees; Formal meetings
United Arab Emirates	Ministry of Culture and Youth	Institutional coordinating bodies and committees; formal meetings

Note: The table shows the entities responsible for the horizontal co-ordination of youth affairs and the main co-ordination mechanisms used in selected MENA countries and territories. Information for Mauritania refer to the steering committee elaborating the National Youth Strategy 2020-2024.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[56]).

Other models that could be implemented include the establishment of youth focal points in line ministries to facilitate co-ordination with the national youth council, as it is the case for instance in Slovenia. In Flanders, Belgium, there is a contact point for youth in all agencies and departments (OECD, 2020^[42]). These formal arrangements can be supplemented by dedicated networks and information-sharing tools, such as online platforms.

Effective inter-ministerial co-ordination remains nevertheless a key challenge in the MENA region

Despite the increase in number and topics covered by these inter-ministerial co-ordination bodies in the region, they often suffer from a structural governance challenge, including unclear or unarticulated mandates and a lack of legal framework or general principles, sometimes preventing their effective operationalisation (OECD, 2021^[57]). Moreover, the tendency to multiply these bodies often leads to mandate overlaps or gaps vis-à-vis existing institutions.

The lack of clear mandate can result in infrequent ad hoc meetings, lack of precise deliverables for objectives and unclear assessments of competencies needed, as well as varied work practices and mechanisms across bodies that further hamper information sharing and the effective implementation of a whole-of-government vision, limiting the impact of their work and recommendations. In many cases, the themes of these commissions do not always correspond to the priorities of the government or to the long-term objectives of the country or territory.

Moreover, institutions in charge of mainstreaming such multidimensional issues often lack capacities and convening power. This is notably the case for institutions in charge of youth and women's affairs (OECD, 2022^[56]; OECD, 2022^[53]). Taking the latter as an example, even though some gender institutions have access to power in their respective countries and territories, the capacities of CGIs remain limited, as they face several barriers in carrying out their mandates. In part, this is the result of limited resources and institutional capacities of CGIs, difficulties in generating buy-in for the gender equality agenda, as well as legislative, economic, and political obstacles (ESCWA, 2019^[54]). Moreover, CGIs in the MENA region are almost systematically led and staffed by women, and in some cases, this may be the only ministerial-level positions held by women (ESCWA, 2020^[52]). Regarding youth affairs, the high turnover of leadership positions in the ministries of youth is also seen as an important barrier, as it can make it more difficult to create trust and a culture of co-operation between different ministries over the long-term (OECD, 2022^[56]).

MENA governments could thus further clarify and strengthen existing institutional arrangements and responsibilities to lead co-ordinated approaches to cross-sectoral issues. It is important to note the efforts undertaken by some countries, such as Morocco, to rationalise and increase the efficiency of existing inter-ministerial commissions, that could help them be further integrated into the decision-making processes and better deliver on government priorities (OECD, 2023^[27]).

Translating the Vision into Action: Planning and ensuring buy-in for a successful implementation of strategic priorities

Today, many governments struggle with a disconnect between the high-level vision for development outlined in national long-term strategies and the day-to-day priorities and constraints of line ministries and public agencies. This is further amplified by new cross-cutting issues and crises that can hamper the government's capacity to deliver on originally planned priorities.

The need for governments to deliver on cross-cutting policy challenges at the national and international level has revived interest in ensuring that the public governance system, including its planning function, support coherent decision-making and alignment on countries' key priorities (Barasz et al., 2022^[58]).

A number of governance tools, including stakeholder engagement, risk management, strategic foresight, strategic communication and information-sharing, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems can support this approach.

The potential of strategic planning to align and better deliver on countries' priorities

In many countries, the number of strategies and plans identified across the government exceeds several hundred that are not always up to date, leading to an absence of consistency and continuity in the implementation of priorities and very often duplications of efforts. The multiplicity of players engaged in delivering on these strategies and plans also limits governments' capacity to deliver effectively.

A coherent strategic planning framework makes it possible to focus, over the course of the planning time horizon, the limited resources of government on a few strategic policy priorities and objectives in order to have stronger and more realistic public commitments and policy interventions that are better designed, resourced and implemented (OECD, 2020^[8]). Moreover, it is also key to align domestic policies and priorities with international commitments, such as the SDGs, or Nationally Determined Contributions defined in the framework of the Paris agreement on climate. Setting objectives and targets in a coherent and strategic way across planning documents also helps to ensure the relevance of existing documents in the face of cross-cutting challenges and make the necessary policy trade-offs to achieve high-level or long-term objectives for the countries' development. Prioritisation is often one of the most challenging dimensions of strategic planning for governments and decision-makers, as it requires them to “downgrade” or postpone some worthwhile reforms or policy areas.

Prioritisation, alignment and coherent sequencing across all levels can also have a strong impact on the action and perception of governments' action by citizens, especially when dealing with issues that impact their lives in the long-term, as it helps clarify how efforts on specific policies contribute more broadly to other stated ambitions. For instance, governments' climate and environmental strategic objectives could be used to guide choices made on infrastructure systems and public expenditures in a number of areas, notably industry, agriculture and beyond (OECD, 2022^[1]).

As part of their strategic planning efforts, some OECD Member countries highlight the value of setting a limited number of key priorities to encourage cross-sectoral co-operation and move beyond a siloed organisation. This approach has been implemented since 2015 in Finland to prepare the Government Programme, as presented in Box 2.7 below. Some OECD Member countries have decided to translate

SDGs into national milestone indicators, allowing governments to better integrate SDGs in strategic planning (OECD, 2019^[59]). This is for instance the case in Finland, where SDGs are incorporated into long-term strategies in a number of key policy areas - such as development, foreign and security policy, but also taxation, finance, trade, migration, and agriculture – and in key legal documents, policies, as well as monitoring, reporting and evaluation mechanisms (OECD, 2019^[59]).

Box 2.7. A targeted number of priorities in Finland’s Strategic Government Programme

Prior to 2015, Finland’s strategic planning was marked by a tradition of coalition governments, and the siloed organisation of its administration. As the number of parties involved in coalitions grew, attempts to capture all of their objectives in government programmes led to the creation of vast unwieldy documents with hundreds of goals. By 2011 for instance, the government was attempting to track approximately 900-line items.

In 2015, the government of Finland attempted to deviate from this trend, moving beyond siloed priorities with its new strategic government programme “Finland Vision 2025”. This system was built around 26 strategic objectives in five policy areas, complemented by a set of structural reforms. The government allocated 1 billion euro to ensure the effective implementation of those key projects. Representatives of the Government Strategy Secretariat, set up in the Prime Minister’s Office in 2015, participated in the work of the five Groups of Ministers dealing with these priority areas. The Strategic Government Programme was accompanied by an annual implementation plan. Government Strategy sessions were held fortnightly – four-hour evening sessions – with an agenda designed by the Strategy Secretariat together with the Prime Minister’s political cabinet. The changes introduced in 2015 appear to have made a difference in delivering on policy goals. For instance, the government realised its target of raising the employment rate from about 65% to 72%.

Building on this successful initiative, discussions on the importance of interlinkages increased in Finland. The 2019-2023 Government programme was developed based on phenomenon-based strategic objectives, which support a cross-sectoral approach and aim at addressing interlinkages in an effective manner. The programme is organised around seven strategic “themes” each managed by an inter-ministerial group composed of ministries which have a substantial link to the theme. The government is further focused on four “priority goals”: balanced finances; employment rate at 75%, carbon neutrality by 2035, and decreasing inequality. These strategic themes and priority goals are further specified with around 64 subgoals with 70 indicators.

Source: (OECD, 2018^[24]) and information provided by the government of Finland.

In the MENA region, a number of governments started developing planning frameworks that aim to better align the objectives of their strategies and plans encompassing different time horizons, sectoral focuses or levels of government with long-term objectives set in visions.

For instance, the Palestinian Authority developed and circulated the “Strategic planning guidelines for the strategic planning cycle 2024-2029” to ensure coherence and support line ministries and agencies in applying the new “Strategic planning approach for 2024-2029”. These guidelines include, among others, instructions for setting strategic objectives, results and actions, which require line ministries and agencies to link them with the Government Programme’s priorities set by the Prime Minister’s Office in line with SDGs. For each objective, line ministries and agencies are requested to outline the expected results and to identify performance indicators, related baselines and interim and final targets. Each indicator is to be clearly linked with the Government Programme’s and SDGs’ indicators (OECD, 2024^[55]).

Governments also focused efforts on developing monitoring mechanisms to better track the contribution of sectoral strategies towards meeting objectives for the country or territory's development as stated in the vision. This will be detailed later in the chapter.

Despite these steps, as in other countries, MENA governments still face practical difficulties in ensuring policy coherence and a meaningful whole-of-government approach (OECD, n.d.^[21]). In many cases, there is no clear institutionalised common framework effectively organising the relationship between different strategies and ensuring their co-ordinated and coherent implementation. Sector-based strategies and plans tend to be developed within a narrower institutional environment, which limits possible linkages and synergies across policy areas. There is also limited harmonisation in terms of timelines, objectives, indicators and reporting activities. This is often due to the existing time lag between the conception of a long-term vision and the governmental programme, which creates governance and strategic alignment challenges. Capacities and tools could therefore be further strengthened for greater coherence and more effective delivery on horizontal, multidimensional challenges.

MENA governments could further develop or strengthen and institutionalise a range of frameworks, tools and mechanisms (written procedures, manuals, etc.) enabling better strategic alignment between different policy instruments and policy priorities and objectives set across different timelines, starting from the design phase and throughout the rest of the policy and strategy development cycle.

To support governments in implementing their public administration reforms sequentially and with a whole-of-government perspective, SIGMA (a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU) developed the Principles of Public Administration (OECD SIGMA, 2023^[60]) and assessment methodology (OECD SIGMA, 2019^[61]) that, together with a Strategy Toolkit (OECD SIGMA, n.d.^[62]), were used to provide an objective assessment and tailored recommendations in Jordan and Morocco (OECD SIGMA, 2019^[63]; OECD SIGMA, n.d.^[64]).

Box 2.8. SIGMA's Principles of Public Administration and Strategy Toolkit

The Principles of Public Administration

The Principles are a comprehensive framework of standards expressing values and behaviours that citizens and businesses can expect from a modern public administration. While there is no single model for the organisation and functioning of public administration, the Principles can be used, together with the accompanying monitoring framework, as a guide for reforms of the public administration and a tool for assessing progress. The Principles build on existing EU acquis, OECD standards and best practices, other international standards, as well as good practices of the EU and OECD Member countries.

The latest edition (2023) covers 32 principles divided into six areas: 1) Strategy; 2) Policy Development and co-ordination; 3) Public service and human resource management; 4) Organisation, accountability and oversight; 5) Service delivery and digitalisation and; 6) Public financial management.

The 2023 Principles also extend the scope beyond central government to include regional and local levels of government, with the aim of fostering a coherent policy approach.

They constitute an instrument for dissemination of the OECD standards and best practices of good public governance and a tool for continuous improvement of public administration systems.

The Strategy Toolkit

The Strategy Toolkit provides practical insights and advice, as well as easy-to-use tools for the development, implementation, monitoring and overall management of public administration reform (PAR) and sector strategies. It covers problem analysis; the prioritisation of reform ambitions; the setting

of objectives; the definition of indicators (with baselines and targets); action planning and costing; implementation monitoring, reporting and evaluation; and PAR management and learning.

Source: (OECD SIGMA, 2023^[60]; OECD SIGMA, n.d.^[62]).

To facilitate the alignment of existing policies and strategies with the national priorities and objectives, it is also important that governments conduct mapping exercises of their main national strategies, both sectoral and horizontal, to identify synergies with long-term visions and medium-term governmental programmes, but also the inconsistencies and potentially necessary adaptations.

OECD Member countries have adopted different approaches to establish a sound hierarchy of planning instruments and articulate them across different timeframes. For instance, Latvia embedded the hierarchy of strategic documents and results in its legal framework in order to increase policy coherence and coverage (Box 2.9).

Box 2.9. The Latvian Law on the Development Planning System

The law came into force in 2009 and outlines the principles of development planning, types of planning documents, their hierarchy, relations, and responsibilities of institutions.

National planning documents are prepared for the long- (up to 25 years), medium- (up to seven years) and short-terms (up to three years), and their hierarchy is based on a chain of policy objectives and outcome indicators. This implies that short-term documents are derived from or consistent with higher-level documents. The system includes national, sectoral and cross-cutting planning documents and requires coherence with regional- and local-level planning documents. National and local authorities initiate development plans if the issue is within their scope or is required by higher authorities, laws or regulations.

According to the law, Latvia's Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 defines long-term development priorities. The National Development Plan (NDP) is the main medium-term plan, including objectives, priorities, results and information on responsible authorities. It also programmes EU and other external funds and includes an annex with the necessary additional funding.

Moreover, the law requires that the Government's Declaration and Action Plan (i.e. the government's political guidance documents) be in line with development priorities or indicate the need to revise the planning document under consideration.

Finally, according to the law, the Cabinet of Ministers can determine levels, types and timeframes of planning documents, including suggesting changes in content and procedures, although it has never exercised this power.

Source: (Saiema, 2009^[65]).

MENA governments could also develop specific processes to ensure that long-term priorities, including cross-cutting ones, are systematically taken into account in strategic planning and budgeting for national, sectoral and local strategies. In New Zealand for instance, the policy papers that are used to present proposals to the Cabinet must include sections on the proposal's climate implications – when relevant – as well as on the impacts that the proposal could have on population groups, including indigenous groups, children, seniors, disabled people, women, people who are gender diverse, Pacific peoples, veterans, rural communities, and ethnic communities. If the impacts are expected to be significant, analysis of these impacts should be included as part of the general discussion on the proposal (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2020^[66]). In Austria, the country's Strategy 2050 states that “legal projects at the federal and provincial level are to be subject to a mandatory climate review in order to prevent undesired adverse effects on the climate” (OECD, 2022^[1]).

Promoting a more systematic use of governance tools to support strategic planning

Strengthening the use of governance instruments and tools to support strategic planning, such as stakeholder engagement, risk management, strategic foresight, strategic communication and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, is key to aligning governments' policies and practices with their long-term development objectives. By systematically bringing attention to issues that will affect the country's long-term development, mainstreaming the use of these tools and instruments can enhance the resilience of countries to respond to future crises. It can also improve the responsiveness and fairness of policy delivery and outcomes by shedding light on shared and group-specific concerns. Their systematic use also shows governments' commitment to take action and engage citizens on issues that shape the future of their country and the world, which is key to fostering trust and ensuring buy-in.

MENA governments could build on existing experiences to more systematically engage stakeholders over the course of the strategic planning process

Recent experiences in OECD Member countries show that when the strategic planning process is more open and inclusive, and features stakeholder engagement and citizen-driven approaches through information, consultation and co-creation mechanisms, strategic planning can enhance the legitimacy of policymaking and increase the sustainability of policies (OECD, 2020^[8]; OECD, 2022^[67]). This is notably highlighted in the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (2017^[68]) and it is particularly important in the current context, where governments are increasingly asked to justify how policies and programmes contribute to the greater good of current but also future generations.

Beyond building consensus, the mobilisation of diverse stakeholders is also key to evidence-based strategic planning. Actors such as external partners, agencies, independent institutions, academia, and CSOs can provide evidence and expertise that governments may lack. External partners and institutions can, for instance, prepare anticipatory studies on long-term issues, conduct evaluations of existing strategies, run analyses on strategic priorities or develop new concepts that can contribute to the strategic planning work led by governments (OECD, 2022^[67]). The inclusion of diverse perspectives during the planning process can also improve the quality of problem analysis, generate new ideas and eventually support the successful implementation of the plan. Accordingly, governments increasingly involve citizens through deliberative processes to address long-term challenges, turning to Citizens' Assemblies, Juries, Panels and other representative deliberative processes to tackle complex policy problems such as climate change (OECD, 2020^[69]). Similarly, engaging stakeholders from across the public administration can be very beneficial given their knowledge about their respective sectoral areas (OECD, 2022^[67]).

Building on recent stakeholder engagement initiatives taken by some MENA governments to inform public policies and services, policymakers could further strengthen the use of such practices to better include the diversity of perspectives existing in the society in decision- and policymaking. Public authorities from the region could also have a close look at deliberative initiatives that are increasingly taking place in OECD

Member countries and allow citizens to channel their demands in a constructive way within an institutionalised space, which ultimately can facilitate dialogue with governments. Citizens' assemblies in particular have been used by national and local governments to guide decision-making on climate policy (OECD, 2020^[69]). The Irish Citizens' Assembly was the first to consider climate at a national level in 2016, followed by the French Citizens' Convention on the Climate (2019-2020), the Climate Assembly UK (2020), and the national citizens' assembly on climate change in Spain (2021) (European Climate Foundation, 2021^[70]).

Developing risk management frameworks could significantly improve long-term planning in the MENA region

When it comes to risk management, governments are responsible for managing resources while correctly identifying risks and the potential impact of internal and external shocks on the country in a way that optimises the country's resilience. The OECD Recommendation on the Governance of Critical Risks (2014^[71]) recognises the escalating damages resulting from extreme events. As a result, it underlines the importance of adopting a fundamental shift in risk governance towards a whole-of-society effort to better assess, prevent, respond to, recover, learn from and become resilient to systemic disruptive shocks.

It is thus crucial to develop informed risk management frameworks with anticipation capacities and governance tools, such as regular risk assessments or crisis management protocols, to foresee and mitigate risks (OECD, 2022^[72]). Scenario planning can also help countries and territories strengthen the resilience of their economy in the face of future natural hazards.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, MENA countries and territories have a high vulnerability to several risks, including food and water insecurity, climate change, rapid urbanisation and population growth, and challenges associated with health and digital transition (Belhaj and Soliman, 2021^[73]). In a context of increasing awareness about these vulnerabilities, governments are seeking to develop more structured and effective risk management frameworks to better anticipate the effects of long-term challenges in their strategic planning.

Some countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have developed national risk management plans and strategies, drawing from past disasters experience to promote disaster risks reduction and align with 2030 SDGs (Cabinet of Egypt, 2017^[74]; Royaume du Maroc, n.d.^[75]; République Tunisienne, 2021^[76]). Algeria is in the process of developing its own national strategy (Union Européenne, 2019^[77]). Some governments also put in place a legal and regulatory framework regarding the risk management cycle. For instance, in Morocco, sector-based plans and programmes and single-risk strategies have been introduced, often with medium-term horizons (10-30 years), in critical areas such as flooding, drought, and forest fires (OECD, 2017^[78]). The country has also taken actions to reinforce risk management at the local level and better align it with efforts undertaken at the national level.

However, operational and institutional risk management strategies at national and local levels remain only partially integrated and cohesive (OECD, 2017^[78]). A study of climate vulnerabilities and risk management in the region found that while surveyed MENA countries and territories have an "acceptable" status of infrastructure and habitat-related measures, they have a "tolerable" status in the field of health and ecosystem measures, and an "inappropriate" status when it comes to water and food measures (Namdar, Karami and Keshavarz, 2021^[79]). The study also highlights considerable differences between MENA countries and territories across these six indices. The highest level of vulnerability is found in Yemen and Djibouti, which also have the lowest levels of disaster preparedness, followed in order by Iraq, Syria, Oman and Morocco.

Governments could continue their efforts to develop comprehensive frameworks and holistic approaches to risk management. This needs to be accompanied by strengthened co-operation at the international and regional level to benefit from the exchange of best practices, particularly in the context of common

challenges and hazards, in order to build national resilience. Strong political leadership is needed to ensure that national strategies are put in place and updated, and that risk awareness is promoted. MENA governments could also focus on developing a structured approach to the identification and resilience of critical infrastructure and the understanding of emerging critical risks.

Using strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation planning tools can help prepare for a better future

Strategic foresight, that is “a systematic approach to looking beyond current expectations and taking into account a variety of plausible future developments in order to identify implications for policies today” (OECD, 2019^[80]), provides decision-makers with tools to prepare for the future in an informed way.

Strategic foresight uses a range of methodologies to identify implications for policies developed today, including horizon scanning for emerging changes, analysing weak or distant signals and emerging megatrends and developing multiple scenarios to consider a variety of plausible future developments (OECD, 2019^[80]). Foresight approach and insights are often integrated into the strategic planning process to inform and anticipate future trends and priorities. Implementing such methods requires tools, information resources, as well as institutional structures and organisational capacities enabling public servants and organisations to embed these new ways of experimenting for possible futures into their day-to-day work.

MENA governments could develop the use of strategic foresight to inform decision- and policymaking, building on practices emerging across the world. Several OECD Member countries have been developing strategic foresight over the past few years. This is for instance the case in Finland, where the government developed a National Foresight Network to promote the use of future perspectives and foresight data in the country’s decision-making process at various governance levels (Box 2.10).

Box 2.10. The National Foresight Network in Finland

Under the co-ordination of the Prime Minister’s Office and Sitra (the Finnish Innovation Fund), Finland’s National Foresight Network acts as a forum for discussion and co-ordination among the country’s strategic foresight players. By bringing together ministries, government agencies, regional councils, private sector actors, academia and NGOs, the Network promotes the use of future perspectives and foresight data in the country’s decision-making process at various governance levels. It is an open network holding monthly Foresight Fridays meetings that involve participants in trainings, presentations and networking events.

In the lead-up to parliamentary elections, it produced future scenarios envisioning Finland up to 2025 and focusing on digitisation, the needs of an ageing population and labour market reform. The scenarios were made available online and successfully brought discussions about the future into the electoral debate.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[81]).

A number of OECD Member governments have in addition launched “anticipatory innovation governance” (AIG), defined as a “broad-based capacity to actively explore possibilities, experiment, and continuously learn as part of a broader governance system” (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2022^[82]). Compared to traditional policymaking that tends to attempt to predict potential outcomes and develop approaches to address them, anticipatory innovation strives to develop a governance system aiming to anticipate and innovate in practice in order to introduce long-term perspectives and future-oriented decision-making (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2022^[82]).

Investing in public communication resources can support MENA governments in raising awareness and ensuring buy-in for their long-term strategies

An institutionalised and co-ordinated whole-of-government public communication, that is the communication within and across public sector organisations (OECD, 2021^[83]), is central to ensure optimal flows of data and information to support government action. It presents diverse advantages, including optimisation of resources, message coherence, and amplified audience reach (OECD, 2020^[23]). It also helps facilitate the implementation of whole-of-government approaches to achieve long-term objectives by raising public officials' awareness across the government on the importance of strategic priorities and to create alignment with, and buy-in for, such efforts (OECD, 2021^[83]).

In recent years, governments in the MENA region have taken important steps to establish a more strategic public communication with the gradual institutionalisation of structures, processes and mandates within the administration. In fact, public communication has become an established function led by CoG institutions with a dedicated structure, team or individual in 75% of surveyed MENA countries and territories (OECD, 2021^[83]). Networks convening public communicators from line ministries have also been created in several countries, such as in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, to enhance co-ordination, share good practices and align government messaging.

While progress has been achieved, evidence suggests further efforts are needed to support the operationalisation of a whole-of-government vision and promote proactive rather than reactive communication across government. Notably, the use of whole-of-government strategies is not an established practice in the region but is gradually being recognised as a priority for various CoGs (OECD, 2021^[83]). For example, the government of Tunisia developed a communication plan for internal use (OECD, 2019^[84]; OECD, 2021^[85]). More recently, the Head of Government Services in Morocco have introduced a planification communication grid (OECD, 2023^[27]). Strategies or plans used on an ad hoc basis at the level of line ministries are often informal, face implementation difficulties and lack an overarching whole-of-government vision. In fact, producing government-wide communication strategies and plans was selected as part of the top 3 challenges by CoGs in the MENA region, in particular due to insufficient human resources, dedicated budgets and co-ordination (OECD, 2021^[83]). Some countries, such as Jordan and Morocco, have developed manuals with directives on processes and procedures to enhance the institutionalisation of this function and show its value to secure more resources. They are presented in Box 2.11.

Box 2.11. Examples of public communication guidelines and manuals in Morocco and Jordan

Public Communication Guide in Morocco

In 2019, the Ministry of Economy, Finances and Administrative Reform, with the support of the OECD, developed guidelines for communicators to move from one-way communications to a more strategic, two-way effort. This document provides public communicators with an understanding of how to use this function to strengthen open government principles and contribute to policymaking and service design and delivery. It includes concrete guidance on how to conduct professional and strategic communications and covers good practices from OECD Member and partner countries as well as from Morocco. The Guide expands on core competencies and themes ranging from planning, budgeting, evaluation to crisis communication.

The Guide was shared for comments with the national network of public communicators, established with the help of the OECD, and launched in February 2021.

Public Communication Directive in Jordan

At the centre of government level in Jordan, public communication is steered by the Minister of Government Communications (previously Minister of State for Media Affairs (MoSMA)) within the Prime Minister's Office. In 2019, the institution led an ambitious re-organisation of this function to align structures, procedures, and reporting lines across the administration. In pursuit of the priorities outlined in its 2019-20 National plan, MoSMA issued an official directive for the administrative reform of media units within line ministries. The directive also defines the basic tasks and roles of these units in order to work on strengthening the role of media actors to support the government in communicating its messages and explaining its policies to the public. To accompany this process, it also developed a manual with practical steps and requirements for media units to align their organisation and functioning. Additionally, the government has established a network of public communicators, known as the *Shabakat Al Natiqeen fil Wuzaraat wa'al Muasasaat al Hukumiya Al Urduniya*, translated literally as "Network of Spokespersons in the Ministries and Institutions of the Government of Jordan." Through this network, the government seeks to reinforce the capacities of spokespeople in key ministries, departments, and agencies as well as to co-ordinate messaging across ministries, departments, and agencies.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[85]; OECD and Ministry of Economy, Finances and Administrative Reform of Morocco, n.d.^[86]).

Moreover, there is room to further professionalise core public communication capabilities. The highly specialised nature of this function and the speed of change that public communication faces place a renewed importance on technical upskilling. The effects of the COVID-19 crisis have further accentuated the need to equip public communicators with the right tools and competencies to capture citizens' attention in a highly saturated media ecosystem, as well as to establish a regular two-way dialogue with the public (OECD, 2021^[83]). Efforts have been deployed in some MENA countries and territories, such as in Morocco, to build capacities and target recruitments to strengthen communication teams' capacities in CoG and ministerial departments, including the recruitment of former journalists and digital designers or developers (OECD, 2023^[27]). Nevertheless, upskilling communication teams remains a challenge governments in the MENA region need to prepare for, in particular to even capabilities across line ministries on technical issues, such as using audience insights, evaluating public communication and managing crisis communication.

MENA governments could reinforce monitoring and evaluation systems to strengthen strategic planning responses

The establishment of rigorous and institutionalised monitoring and evaluation systems is critical to ensure government action effectively achieves operational and strategic objectives, especially when they are long-term and involve numerous and diverse actors (OECD, 2022^[87]).

Although they are distinct practices, monitoring and evaluation are complementary. They should be planned and implemented following a coherent approach to strengthen strategic planning and policy implementation by improving links between public interventions and their results. A sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system generates evidence on what has worked, why, and for whom. Fed back into the decision-making and planning processes, this evidence can help improve the design of future public policies and programmes and revise the course of existing ones. Furthermore, sound M&E can help identify challenges to policy implementation and ways to address them, based on lessons learned (OECD, 2021^[88]).

Monitoring requirements can take the forms of regular reporting, frequent inter-ministerial meetings to measure the achievements of targets against set goals, as well as performance management mechanisms

(D. Brown, 2021^[89]). Given its capacities and role in planning, steering and co-ordinating public policies, many OECD Member countries consider that monitoring the delivery of key strategic priorities is a prerogative of the CoG. It can facilitate the identification of actions to address potential lack of progress, support decision-making and improve strategic planning (OECD, 2015^[90]). Performance monitoring, using detailed and timely data on the implementation of public policies, can be a crucial tool to help governments adapt their planning, decision-making and implementation processes to better respond to complex challenges (OECD, 2020^[8]).

In the same way, evaluation systems provide critical tools to support the real-time sharing of lessons from policy responses. Moreover, evaluation also gives an opportunity to share information with citizens and stakeholders on whether public funds have achieved their intended objectives and are producing the expected results (OECD, 2022^[91]).

In the MENA region, governments have first focused their efforts on developing monitoring mechanisms to better track the contribution of sectoral strategies towards meeting long-term objectives and SDGs included in national strategic visions. Although this may differ across MENA governments, the structure in charge of monitoring the implementation of the long-term vision is usually also in charge of monitoring the implementation of SDGs (OECD, n.d.^[21]). Some countries and territories, such as Egypt, have separate institutions in charge of monitoring the diverse strategies and plans. Additionally, Morocco and the Palestinian Authority are developing frameworks to improve monitoring of progress on long-term development objectives across strategies and plans. These diverse approaches, that are at different stages of advancement, are detailed in Box 2.12.

Box 2.12. Select MENA governments' efforts toward improved monitoring of long-term priorities

Egypt

The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MPED) in Egypt is responsible for steering the strategic planning process to translate Egypt Vision 2030 into annual plans at the central and local level. MPED also reviews their implementation and monitors their performance by co-ordinating with ministries leading key programmes and reviewing data shared at the outcome level. In particular, the annual investment plan approved by Cabinet outlines concrete sustainable development objectives, policies, programmes and activities along the dimensions of the Egypt Vision 2030 with its respective indicators and foreseen effects in its various sectors and levels of government. While efforts to monitor the performance of these programmes has been gradually established, challenges persist in the differing quality of the contributions submitted by each ministry to inform the annual investment plan as well as the capabilities to implement the approved programmes therein. (OECD, n.d.^[21]). In addition, the National Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was established by executive decree to act as a high-level institutional body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs. The primary mandate of the committee is to work collaboratively to ensure that Egypt achieves the 2030 Agenda. While it is currently composed of representatives from 17 ministries and state entities, this Committee meets only on an ad hoc basis and its role in technical implementation and performance management could be enhanced. Egypt also started to establish a performance management framework, focusing on the assessment of outcomes of key strategies and the achievement of the SDGs with the Integrated System for Investment Plan Preparation and Monitoring (ISIPPM) and the National System for Monitoring and Evaluation (ADAA). Although these systems are thorough, there is an opportunity to embed KPIs to measure the outcomes and impact of SDGs and sectoral programmes, which is a common challenge that persists across various OECD Member countries and partner countries and territories.

Morocco

In Morocco, the New Development Model (NDM) is the country's long-term strategic plan developed under the aegis of H.E King Mohammed VI. Along with the Government Programme, which defines priorities for a five-year governmental mandate, these documents were developed by different institutional actors, making alignment between these different strategic plans essential considering their complementary objectives. The Head of Government Services are focusing on building a general coherence between both strategic documents, ensuring that the implementation of the government programme supports the fulfilment of the objectives of the NDM. They are currently in the process of developing more broadly a strategic monitoring framework to analyse systematically the contribution of each strategy and law to the objectives set in the two strategic documents. The NDM foresees the creation of a monitoring mechanism reporting to the King, which has not been implemented yet.

Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority has developed an integrated general Strategic Results Framework to monitor progress towards achieving long-term development objectives laid out in the National Development Plan and in the new Government Programme that substituted it. Line ministries are asked to develop monitoring and reporting indicators aligned with the framework for sectoral strategies in order to build more coherence and ensure strategic alignment. However, it appears that while the framework allows for measuring outputs of different reform measures, it does not provide the progress toward expected improvements yet, making it difficult to assess the alignment with the National Development Plan's and the Government Programme's priorities.

Sources: (OECD, n.d._[21]); (OECD, 2023_[27]); (Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement, 2021_[16]); (OECD, 2024_[55]).

Governments continue to face common challenges in effectively assessing this progress, including the lack of a clear link to high-level, outcomes-based performance indicators and to the SDGs in the M&E systems. MENA governments could thus develop more comprehensive M&E systems and structures to measure the progress and outcomes of key national, territorial, and sectoral strategies as part of advancing on long-term objectives. This could include developing a limited set of key performance indicators with intermediate targets to monitor and evaluate horizontal and sectoral strategies and policies with different time horizons, and ensure that they contribute to common objectives on the long-term.

Several OECD Member countries have implemented tools in this regard, such as Scotland and the United Kingdom (Box 2.13). These instruments can also be part of a broader government efforts to steer and focus government work on a limited number of priorities using a delivery unit approach, as presented later in the chapter.

Fully exploiting the potential of the digital tools and platforms that MENA governments use to monitor more effectively the achievement of long-term objectives – by using them for instance to promote and co-ordinate a more transparent and evidence-driven strategic planning process across the policy cycle – could advance and strengthen the coherent implementation of the reforms.

Box 2.13. A number of OECD Member countries have developed performance frameworks to improve planning towards achieving long-term development objectives

The National Performance Framework of Scotland

The National Performance Framework of Scotland sets National Outcomes that reflect the values and aspirations of the people of Scotland, which are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and help track progress in reducing inequality. These outcomes include:

“We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy”, in regard to the Scottish economy.

“We are healthy and active”, in regard to health.

“We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination”, in regard to human rights.

Each National Outcome has a set of 81 outcome-level indicators updated on a regular basis to inform the government on how their administration is performing concerning the framework. A dashboard where citizens can access data on these indicators is available on the Scottish Government Equality Evidence Finder website.

The United Kingdom’s Outcome Delivery Plans

In an effort to improve planning and spending, the British government recently instituted regulations around strategy reporting, with the aim of better defining how planning and performance information is central to not only ensuring funding, but to demonstrating the long-term sustainable value of any money spent.

The new framework, known as Outcome Delivery Plans, or ODPs, was devised following the government’s yearlong Spending Review (SR) of its own internal programmes and initiatives. What resulted from the SR was a recognition that in order to better track spending and outcomes, it is critical to evaluate progress along the way.

The structure of the ODPs is meant to be informative both for the team itself as well as external actors.

At the highest level, the ODP requires a list of Priority Outcomes, each with their own set of metrics: Each UK government department has agreed priority outcomes which capture the government’s long-term policy objectives, from maximising employment and improving skills to achieving net zero by 2050. In areas where closer working relationships between departments would achieve better results, outcomes are agreed on a cross-cutting basis between departments.

The next level includes a number of sub-objectives that can be linked to each Priority Outcome and should indicate the key levers of change.

Finally, the last level includes a list of major activities, projects and programmes that can be connected to each sub-objective.

Outcome Delivery Plans are revised annually. They are linked to the Spending Review and the Budget processes, as part of the planning and performance framework, so that a department can show how it will use its resources (the funding set in its departmental settlement and any adjustments to spending plans made at fiscal events, such as the Budget) to work towards priority outcome delivery.

Source: (Scottish Government, n.d.^[92]; OECD, 2023^[26]).

The development of data collection frameworks can support more informed and responsive policy development, monitoring and evaluation in the MENA region

Strengthening the collection and use of data is also crucial to inform the design and implementation of long-term visions and plans. Policymakers must have access to quality data in a timely manner and in a format that enables decision-makers to take the appropriate decisions for policy development and M&E. Data disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location, disability and other characteristics, as well as information and actionable advice from technical suppliers (such as strategic planning agencies, national statistics agencies and policy advisory bodies) can help take into account the reality of the issues at stake and the differentiated impact decisions and policies can have on different sections of the population (OECD, 2022^[93]).

This way, decision-makers can adapt if data show that the results are not achieved properly through current policies. It is therefore important to generate substantive evidence databases as well as mechanisms to ensure that information from a variety of sources – data, evaluation, insights from stakeholders, civil society and citizens – is made accessible to inform policy design and development. It also includes ensuring that tools, methods and data for policy are accessible to policy professionals and effectively used by them in their day-to-day work, as highlighted in the OECD Recommendation on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data (2021^[94]). Such efforts represent a key area of opportunity for MENA countries and territories, who suffer from limited quantity and quality of data in monitoring the implementation of national visions and strategies.

Areas of opportunity

To further foster coherence in approaches to long-term development and ensure that cross-cutting issues remain central to their actions in rapidly evolving environments, governments could envisage pursuing their efforts in the following areas:

Strengthening the governance framework to steer and achieve the SDGs and national visions

- Clarifying institutional structures and responsibilities of key entities involved in steering the national vision to facilitate the efficient identification and management of priorities, as well as the articulation, implementation and monitoring of strategic issues towards achieving long-term outcomes.
- Clarifying the governance and mandates of co-ordination mechanisms across the government and reinforcing vertical co-ordination to ensure consistent and effective approaches and policies to deliver on long-term goals.
- Strengthening the use of stakeholder engagement and citizen participation practices during strategic planning to better embed the diversity of perspectives.

Developing strategic tools and instruments to address long-term, complex priorities

- Developing, strengthening and institutionalising a range of frameworks, tools and mechanisms as a driver to foster among others more effective strategic alignment between various policy instruments and long-term priorities and objectives, including strategic guidelines, mapping exercises and strategic foresight.
- Establishing comprehensive frameworks and holistic approaches to risk management to address the complexities of multidimensional challenges, especially crises affecting long-term outcomes.

- Developing more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems to measure the progress and outcomes of key strategies and proactively adjust plans and activities as part of advancing long-term sustainable growth objectives.
- Institutionalising strategic public communication by producing government-wide communication strategies and plans with an over-arching whole-of-government vision.

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Notes

¹ In the 2024 SDG Index Report, information is available for: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE and Yemen (Sachs, Lafortune and Fuller, 2024^[2]).

² Examples of pre-SDGs national or sectoral strategic visions that include some sustainable development aspects include: Qatar's National Vision 2030 (2009) and National Development Strategy 2011–2016; The United Arab Emirates' National Agenda Vision 21; Jordan's National Resilience Plan 2014–16 (2014) and Jordan 2025 Vision; Bahrain's Vision 2030 (2007); Development Strategy of the New Tunisia (2012) and National Sustainable Development Strategy 2016–2020 (2014); Iraq's National Development Plan 2010–2014 (2010); Algeria's National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty (2005–2015) and Five-Year Plan (2010–2014); Sudan's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2012); Djibouti's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2009); and Morocco's National Sustainable Development Strategy (2015) (Saab and Saduk, 2016^[95]).

3 **Spending public resources efficiently in the Middle East and North Africa**

This chapter provides an overview of the public governance mechanisms, tools and practices that can be leveraged to help governments allocate and manage resources in an efficient and effective manner. It then presents the reforms undertaken by Middle East and North African governments and the existing opportunities to strengthen integrity, transparency and participation in the design and management of spending.

Budgeting is a key policy instrument to set priorities and generate and allocate resources to achieve societal goals and objectives. Aligning planning and spending priorities is one of the challenges many governments face, particularly when trying to design policies to pursue sustainable prosperity while delivering on day-to-day priorities.

In general, governments face significant financial and budgetary constraints. In addition, armed conflicts, migration challenges and structural economic fragility are critical factors that are affecting Middle East and North Africa (MENA)'s economies' fiscal space. Even where sound budgetary tools are available, challenges persist in allocating public resources efficiently.

This chapter provides an overview of the budgetary governance mechanisms, tools and practices that can be leveraged to help governments allocate and manage resources in an efficient and effective manner, along with the reforms undertaken by MENA governments in these areas. It then presents a short case study on spending in infrastructure development to illustrate the importance of budgetary governance for MENA countries and territories in this area. Finally, it provides strategic guidance and recommendations to foster existing opportunities to enhance sound and transparent public financial management as a driver to support sustainable prosperity and enhance resilience.

Pursuing efforts toward sound budgetary governance can contribute to pursuing sustainability

The budget is a policy instrument that enables governments to generate public revenues and allocate financial resources across their entire remit. The budget process operationalises political and policy decisions taken at the highest levels of government, affecting the way wealth is generated and distributed to fund the different areas of public action. As such, the budget, as a public policy tool, is integral to advance effectively and efficiently strategic priorities in the short-, medium- and long-term with the financial resources required to achieve them (OECD, 2020^[1]).

The OECD Recommendation on Budgetary Governance (2015^[2]) sets out core principles of good budgetary governance, that is “the processes, laws, structures and institutions in place for ensuring that the budgeting system meets its objectives in an effective, sustainable and enduring manner” (OECD, 2015^[2]), covering the strategic, qualitative and technical aspects of the full budget cycle.

The reform of budgetary governance has been a key area of focus for governments in the MENA region since the 2000s. Most MENA governments have adopted large-scale budgetary governance reforms, focusing on developing and strengthening existing legal frameworks, institutions and practices. The aim has been to enhance the strategic allocation of scarce financial resources more efficiently and transparently across government, and to improve the efficiency and quality of service delivery at a lesser cost (OECD, 2017^[3]).

While they vary in scope and depth, such efforts have been triggered by the commitment to strengthening integrity and transparency in the design and management of spending decisions on the one hand, and to tackling corruption on the other hand, as core levers to achieve accountable and good governance (OECD, 2017^[3]). In addition, climate change challenges are significant in the MENA region, and require shifting policy priorities toward supporting climate-adaptation and mitigation strategies, as well as investing in climate-resilient infrastructure. These pressing issues have resulted in a reallocation of public resources to respond to new priorities, which may also impact the funding of other long-term priorities and budgetary-restructuring efforts.

The following sections present an overview of the budgetary governance mechanisms, tools and practices that can be further leveraged to help governments allocate and manage resources in an efficient and effective manner, and review key reform initiatives by MENA governments in these areas.

Developing a more strategic vision of public expenditures by establishing planning and monitoring budgetary tools

Fiscal discipline demands that governments place their annual budgets in a multi-year perspective. Policies provided for an annual budget can have impacts that extend well beyond the current budget year. Accordingly, the future fiscal impact should be taken into account and assessed fully. The one-year time span of an annual budget is not enough if a government wishes to assure itself and the public that it is indeed making rational decisions about priorities.

Medium-term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs) are at the heart of budgeting and are crucial to achieving a government's fiscal objectives. They allow governments to plan expenditures beyond the budget year by taking account of the resource availability and current spending needs for the next three to five years (OECD, 2019^[4]). They consist at their core of three elements: forecasts of resource availability, baselines of ongoing expenditures and expenditure ceilings. Resource availability is estimated on the basis of economic projections/revenue forecasts and the application of a government's high-level fiscal rules (top-down). Current spending needs are baseline projections of existing policy expenditures (bottom-up). A MTEF brings the top-down and the bottom-up approaches together and is the foundation for each year's budget allocation. In doing so, MTEFs operationalise high-level fiscal objectives in concrete terms and serve to demonstrate credibility and political will, while also enhancing the accountability and transparency of government action when they are made publicly available.

Several MENA governments have developed legal and strategic frameworks to introduce medium-term budget approaches, such as in Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia or the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2018^[5]; OECD, 2023^[6]; United Arab Emirates Ministry of Finance, n.d.^[7]; OECD, 2017^[8]). Among the most recent governments to have undertaken such reforms, Egypt enacted in 2022 the Consolidated Public Finance Law No.6 that introduces the publication of the medium-term budget framework, among other measures (OECD, 2024^[9]).

In addition, some MENA governments have developed tools to support the implementation of multi-year budgeting frameworks. The Palestinian Authority developed a "Medium-Term Budgeting Procedures Manual" to guide both the medium-term and annual budget preparations process for programmes and reforms implemented by individual ministries and public institutions. It outlines the medium-term budget preparation cycles and provides more detailed guidelines, while emphasising the important link between planning and budgeting. Instead of providing a uniform calendar, the manual envisages that the Planning and Budget Management Group within each ministry sets the planning and budgeting calendar deadlines (OECD, 2024^[10]). Efforts to establish strong MTEFs could be further pursued by MENA governments, including through the development of tools to ensure the appropriation and implementation of such budget frameworks by all public institutions. Measures could also be taken to make the MTEFs available to citizens in a user-friendly format in order to enhance the transparency and accountability of budget decisions.

Better alignment between budget and policy objectives can be found in the MENA region through the implementation of performance-related budgetary reforms

Since budgets enable governments to give effect to their priorities with practical actions, better aligning budget and planning frameworks is crucial to allocate the adequate funds to pursue the strategic objectives and priorities of the government, especially in the long-term. Performance budgeting can support achieving these long-term objectives and priorities by providing an approach focusing more on the outcomes of public expenditure rather than the input provided to public institutions to fund their activities.

Performance budgeting refers to the use of performance information in making budget decisions, either at the budget allocation stage or in budget planning (OECD, 2019^[4]). In aligning policy and spending objectives, it enables governments to match spending targets and indicators in the budget's programme areas with targets and indicators of national strategies and plans. It provides governments with a

substantial policy instrument to achieve medium-term policy objectives, as promoted in the OECD Recommendation on Budgetary Governance (2015^[2]).

As this process is broadened and deepened, governments can align more closely their fiscal, budgetary and strategic frameworks. It enables more efficient and coherent prioritisation and sequencing of strategic initiatives to pursue sustainable development outcomes that are properly funded in the budget, quantify progress toward their achievement, and report to themselves and to citizens on this progress.

As part of the transition towards performance-based budgeting, many countries including OECD Members are also developing programme budgeting and results-based budgeting.

Programme budgeting is a type of budget classification grouping expenditures with related objectives. It enables governments to identify spending targets under programming objectives and align them with objectives laid out in national strategies and plans, including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other long-term development objectives. By setting objectives, outcomes and performance indicators at the programme level, results-based budgeting frameworks can further support addressing inequalities between various groups in society arising from policy choices, and therefore facilitate greater targeting of public expenditure to address social issues while maintaining the long-term sustainability of public finances (OECD/KIPF, 2024^[11]). In OECD Member countries, performance budgeting plays an increasingly instrumental role in enhancing efficiency and accountability throughout the public sector. Some good practices have been identified in the OECD Good Practices for Performance Budgeting (2019^[4]), recognising that OECD Member governments offer a diversity in approaches to their implementation (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Examples of performance budgeting in OECD Member countries

New Zealand: New Zealand is known for its performance-based budgeting approach, which includes the use of "output budgeting." Departments and agencies are required to identify outputs and set performance targets, allowing for a focus on results and outcomes.

Norway: Norway's budgeting system focuses on performance through its "Responsibility and Results Framework." Agencies are required to set performance targets and are held accountable for achieving them.

Sweden: Sweden uses a results-based budgeting system where government agencies are required to set objectives, outcomes and performance indicators at the programme level. The government assesses and evaluates the performance of agencies, and funding is allocated based on the achievement of results.

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom introduced the "Public Service Agreements" and "Sustainable Development Indicators" to align budget allocations with key government priorities and sustainability goals. The use of the "Three Es" framework (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness) is common in performance assessments.

Source: (OECD, 2024^[12]).

MENA governments are increasingly using performance-based budgeting frameworks, allowing funds to be linked to output objectives (OECD, 2017^[3]). This is for instance the case in Morocco and Tunisia (OECD, 2023^[6]; OECD, 2017^[8]). In Jordan, the General Budget Department (GBD) in the Ministry of Finance applies a results-oriented approach to budgeting by linking budget programmes to strategic goals and measuring progress with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Moreover, the GBD publishes annual reports of their activities including the results against the KPIs (OECD, n.d.^[13]). Previously using performance-

based budgeting, the UAE have introduced since 2011 medium-term zero-based budgets, which specify activities and services against costs (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Finance, n.d.^[7]).

Egypt is also gradually undertaking a process of moving from an approach of exclusively line-item budgeting to a mix of line-item and programme- and performance-based budgeting by the fiscal year 2025 (OECD, 2024^[9]). In all MENA countries and territories that undertook such reforms, the aim is to overcome current challenges in linking the national budget to societal goals, and help match public expenses and investments to goals and KPIs related to the SDGs (OECD, n.d.^[14]).

The implementation of reforms, however, is pending in most MENA countries and territories, where they are hampered by uncertain financial contexts (OECD, 2024^[10]). Moreover, efforts remain often fragmented and require the adoption of additional regulations and mechanisms to develop comprehensive budgetary governance frameworks (OECD, n.d.^[14]; OECD, 2023^[6]).

It is also important to acknowledge that performance budgeting is complex and challenging to implement effectively. For instance, administrations are organised by entities and not by policies, so performance budgeting might require changes to the traditional structure as well as enhanced national co-ordination mechanisms amongst government entities. While performance budgeting links strategic planning to the budget, it can be difficult to establish a link between all spending and outcomes. It is not sufficient solely to provide performance information; it is important that this information be used during the budget process and be relevant in order to create a genuine demand for it among stakeholders such as decisions, line ministries and the general public. This requires a cultural change both at the level of the administration as well as within the government and main stakeholders. Budget transparency will be covered in detail later in the chapter.

The development of spending reviews as used in most OECD Member countries could also help align limited fiscal resources with the priorities of the government and to increase transparency and accountability. By systematically analysing the government's existing expenditure, reviews enable governments to manage the aggregate level of expenditure and identify savings and/or reallocation measures, therefore improving effectiveness within programmes and policies during their implementation. Denmark has been undertaking spending reviews for over 20 years, as presented in Box 3.2. Budget impact assessment and expenditure appraisals for both current and capital spending can also help align inclusive growth objectives with resource allocation over different time horizons.

Box 3.2. Spending reviews in Denmark

Spending reviews are led by the Ministry of Finance, with the government using spending reviews to reallocate resources and increase efficiency. The spending reviews inform budget negotiations and decisions on multi-annual budget agreements. The reviews are conducted over a relatively short period, where the decision on which reviews to conduct is taken in January or February and the reviews are undertaken over the ensuing months with the aim of having the findings available by the beginning of May. This ensures the findings of a spending review are available when the government decides on budget priorities in June.

Source: (OECD, 2024^[15]).

Budgeting for long-term challenges contributes to advance sustainable development

The use of budgetary governance tools can facilitate the inclusion of a broad range of public policy dimensions into spending decisions, in line with long-term objectives in the policy formulation process. It is particularly the case for those associated with inclusive and sustainable development, such as climate

and gender considerations. MENA governments are increasingly mainstreaming multidimensional, horizontal challenges linked to strategic priorities in budgetary frameworks and in budget tools mechanisms. Examples of these horizontal challenges include greening the economy, mainstreaming gender equality, and frameworks to mainstream intergenerational equity and wellbeing. A similar approach can be adopted to mainstream other multidimensional challenges-related priorities across public action. In particular, the systematic use of analytical tools in the budgeting process and the consequent allocation of specific funds is essential to ensure that budgets respond to the specific needs of different groups of the population (for instance, people with disabilities).

Reinforcing green budgeting in the MENA region appears essential to address rising climate challenges

Integrating climate change consequences and risks into long-term spending and fiscal decisions is one of the challenges that governments face today to promote the transversal integration of climate and environmental issues in public policies and services (Boustany, 2021^[16]).

By 2022, more than 50% of OECD Member countries had adopted green budgeting tools to incorporate and mainstream climate and environmental matters into budgetary and fiscal choices across budgetary programme areas, against around 30% in 2021 (OECD, 2021^[17]). There is no single approach on how best to initiate green budgeting, but tools can include (i) the ‘greening’ of medium-term budget frameworks, highlighting linkages among the economy, budget policy and the environment and guiding the allocation of resources within a framework that clearly demonstrates existing commitments and constraints; (ii) introducing climate change in fiscal-risk assessments and management; (iii) tagging budgetary items for their green impact (iv) policy evaluations and environmental impact assessments; (v) green spending reviews; and (vi) green accounting statements (European Commission, IMF, OECD, 2021^[18]).

Green budgeting practices vary in nature across OECD Member countries, with approaches adapted to national contexts. Overall, the most common tools are carbon pricing instruments, environmental impact assessments, green tagging, and reviews of harmful tax expenditure, as part of a country’s larger green budgeting approach. The United Kingdom’s approach to green budgeting encompasses several of these tools and practices (Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Green budgeting approach in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, environmental considerations are taken into account as part of *ex-ante* cost-benefit assessments that inform budget decision-making. A Green Book is issued by His Majesty’s Treasury and provides information on how to appraise policies, spending proposals, programmes and projects, with instructions and supplementary guidance on the design and use of monitoring and evaluation before and after implementation. This ranges from policy and programme development to taxation and benefit proposals, as well as changes to existing public assets and resources. In particular, it provides an integrated approach to the assessment of climate mitigation, transition and other sustainability considerations across all government programmes. This encourages departments across the government to robustly quantify and monetise (wherever possible) the differential “green” impacts in calculations for value-for-money and cost-benefit assessments.

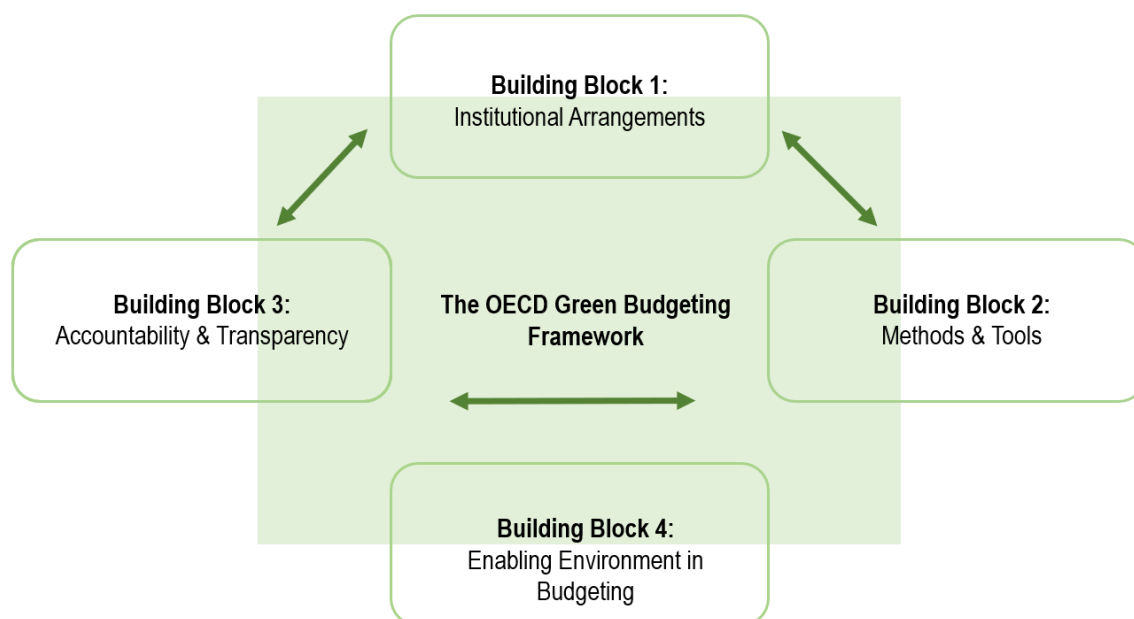
Source: (GOV.UK, 2024^[19]).

MENA governments are increasingly keen to adopt green budgeting frameworks and practices to better address climate change (OECD, 2019^[20]). For instance, by implementing programme budgeting, Egypt is developing an important foundation for green budgeting to classify budget areas according to their function.

The government started to classify its expenditures according to the sustainable development goals, including those related to climate and environment. However, the process is still in its infancy.

Moving forward, MENA governments could build on existing practices in OECD Member countries and the OECD Green Budgeting Framework (Figure 3.1) to develop the use of the green budgeting tools. The Framework applies across the budget cycle and provides a structure for countries to develop green budgeting (Blazey, A. and Lelong, M., 2022^[21]). It is built around four building blocks: Institutional arrangements, Methods and tools, Accountability and transparency and the Enabling environment in budgeting.

Figure 3.1. The OECD Green Budgeting Framework



Source: (OECD, 2020^[22]).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that MENA governments have recently undertaken efforts to enable and support the use of sustainable finance mechanisms and practices. A study examining seven MENA countries¹ found that each of them is using some of the key green financing mechanisms and policies (Beyer and Bayoumi, 2022^[23]). Many MENA governments are also rolling out green bonds and green sukuk² to mobilise private capital towards sustainable investments (Beyer and Bayoumi, 2022^[23]). Similarly, MENA governments can capitalise on the prevalence of state-owned enterprises to drive the sustainable transition, which is in no small part driven by infrastructure investments, as also highlighted later in the chapter. Some governments have further included sustainable finance priorities within vision documents and national development plans (Beyer and Bayoumi, 2022^[23]).

Most MENA governments are also developing sustainable finance taxonomies to better identify and classify activities that support environmental targets (Beyer and Bayoumi, 2022^[23]). For instance, Egypt's Financial Regulatory Authority announced in 2020 that they are developing a "green projects taxonomy" that defines three types of green projects: low carbon emissions, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and the protection of biological diversity (Zawya, 2020^[24]). Similarly, the UAE's Ministry of Climate Change and the Environment has recommended the establishment of a nation-wide taxonomy for sustainable finance along with tools for identifying and assessing eligible projects (UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, 2021^[25]).

Gender budgeting practices are well established in the MENA region but lack comprehensive frameworks

Gender budgeting is a public financial management tool that can be used to integrate gender considerations into budget decision-making (OECD, 2023^[26]). It helps expose how gender inequalities may have inadvertently become embedded in public policies and the allocation of resources, and promotes budget measures that will be effective at closing gender gaps (OECD, n.d.^[27]). The updated OECD Framework defines building blocks for effective gender budgeting: 1) institutional and strategic arrangements; 2) methods and tools; 3) enabling environment; 4) accountability and transparency; and 5) impact (OECD, 2023^[26]).

Gender budgeting is a tool used to help close gender gaps in 61% of OECD Member countries. Support for gender budgeting measures have generally increased and broadened across the OECD. Although methods and tools vary, most Member countries tend to use multiple analytical tools to support gender budgeting, as it is the case in Sweden (Box 3.4). An increasing number of countries have also adopted legal basis for these practices (OECD, 2023^[26]).

Box 3.4. Sweden's multi-faceted approach to gender budgeting

In Sweden, gender budgeting is applied throughout the budget process, steered at the operation level via the budget circular instructions. There is a government decision stipulating that gender mainstreaming of the state budget process, i.e. gender budgeting, is mandatory.

In addition to gender mainstreaming the budget process, there are specific government appropriations for gender equality measures to fund targeted policy measures to advance gender equality. In line with the principle of gender mainstreaming, specific gender equality challenges that are identified in various policy fields, such as the higher rate of long-term sick leave for women, the gender care gap, or women's lower participation in paid work, are addressed with special measures in respective policy areas.

However, it was acknowledged that there is an opportunity for gender budgeting principles to be further operationalised, and to more frequently and widely influence policy design to address inequalities and reallocate resources to increase impact.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[26]).

Many MENA governments are using gender budgeting mechanisms and practices. Morocco became the first country in the region to engage in gender budgeting in 2002, as highlighted in Box 3.5. Several governments have since introduced gender budgeting practices, including Bahrain, Egypt and Jordan (Kolovich, 2016^[28]). In the case of the Palestinian Authority, gender-responsive budgeting was identified as one of the priority areas for reform included in the "Sectoral Strategy for Public Finance Management 2021 – 2023" (OECD, 2024^[10]).

Box 3.5. Gender budgeting in Morocco

Morocco is a pioneer country in the implementation of gender budgeting in the MENA region, having started its initiative in 2002.

The government gradually introduced a gender dimension into ministerial department budgets. Gender equality considerations are integrated into the performance budgeting framework and each ministry must provide objectives and indicators relating to gender equality. Since 2007, several ministerial departments have created their own programmes to incorporate gender into budgeting at the local level. A Gender Budget Report is published annually, summarising the commitments to gender equality made by ministries (key priorities and targets). Since its introduction in 2006, it has become an important accountability and monitoring tool.

Finally, the government amended the budget law in 2014, making gender perspective setting and objectives a requirement for all budget formulation efforts.

Source: (OECD, 2017^[29]; OECD, 2018^[30]; OECD, 2023^[6]).

Similarly to OECD Member countries, practices in the region vary from government to government, in part because of different approaches to budgeting and different institutional frameworks. Governments use a number of gender budgeting mechanisms and tools, as presented in Table 3.1. Among these instruments, presentation of fiscal data disaggregated by gender and the definition of performance indicators are most frequently used. Gender related provisions in the legal framework, *ex-post* impact assessments and gender-related audits are less common in the region.

Table 3.1. MENA governments usually use several gender budgeting tools, similarly to OECD Member countries

Use of gender budgeting tools by select MENA governments

	Algeria	Egypt	Iraq	Lebanon	Morocco	Palestinian Authority	Tunisia
Gender Budgeting Framework			✓				✓
Gender provisions in public finance and budget laws		✓					
Gender Budgeting Statement			✓		✓		✓
Gender Impact Assessments	✓						
Budget circular and statements including instructions related to gender budgeting							
Performance indicators related to gender equality goals					✓	✓	
Fiscal data disaggregated by gender		✓			✓		
Budget classification according to gender perspective		✓					

	Algeria	Egypt	Iraq	Lebanon	Morocco	Palestinian Authority	Tunisia
Ex-post gender impact assessments of budget expenditures			✓				
Audit of the budget covering gender aspects							

Source: (Rame and Seiwald, 2019^[31]).

Some MENA governments have also established dedicated authorities to oversee and regulate the use of gender-responsive budgets. In the UAE, the Gender Balance Council established in 2015 is responsible for developing and implementing the federal gender balance agenda, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Finance (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Finance, n.d.^[7]). The Palestinian Authority and Tunisia have moreover established a gender unit in the Ministry of Finance to co-ordinate gender budgeting while in Egypt, the National Council for Women, established in 2000, co-ordinates these practices (Rame and Seiwald, 2019^[31]).

However, although the use of gender budgeting tools is increasing in the MENA region, no country or territory has adopted a comprehensive framework so far (Rame and Seiwald, 2019^[31]). Governments face a lot of common challenges when implementing these tools, notably a lack of gender-disaggregated data, weaknesses in the public financial management system and a limited understanding with regard to how different measures impact gender equality. These issues are similar to the ones faced across the OECD (OECD, 2023^[26]). Further challenges contributing to the limited implementation of gender budgeting include limited institutional co-ordination of processes, the fragmentation of initiatives, the lack of monitoring mechanisms within the administration, as well as limited political support (Rame and Seiwald, 2019^[31]). The OECD Framework on Gender Budgeting and good practices from OECD Member countries provide guidelines that MENA governments could use to pursue their efforts in building strong gender budgeting frameworks across the budget cycle.

Tools and practices could also be further developed to mainstream intergenerational equity and wellbeing in spending and financial decisions

MENA governments could further promote and strengthen the use of other phenomenon-based³ budgeting approaches to include other considerations that are essential to inclusive and sustainable prosperity, including budgeting for wellbeing, intergenerational justice and equality across societies.

Many OECD Member countries are using these different tools, as presented in Box 3.6. Countries have moreover adopted different approaches to develop comprehensive policy frameworks for budgeting and address multiple high-level priorities on the long-term. In Iceland for example, goals for the SDGs, gender equality, but also specific sectoral strategies and political priorities are embedded in the national strategy where targets feed into a set of 180 goals for expenditure areas and functions (OECD, 2021^[32]).

Box 3.6. OECD Member countries are increasingly using budgeting tools to integrate consideration of wellbeing, intergenerational equity and equality in budget decisions

Wellbeing budgeting

New Zealand has developed a framework which considers domains for wellbeing in its policymaking process. The Living Standards Framework (LSF) has worked to identify four “capitals” (Natural, Financial and Physical, Human, and Social) to help drive the basis for its recent wellbeing budget.

This process, driven by the Labour-led coalition in 2019, is attempting to develop multi-dimensional considerations to its budgeting process by facilitating cross-sectoral co-ordination through shared objectives by ministries and using evidence to drive person-centric needs and long-term considerations.

The Government sets out a list of five outcomes to focus on, determined every year, to ensure discretionary resources are prioritised to these areas.

In 2020, the wellbeing budget had developed five outcomes of focus for the government’s efforts:

1. Taking Mental Health Seriously – Supporting mental wellbeing for all New Zealanders, with a special focus on under 24-year-olds
2. Improving Child Wellbeing – Reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing, including addressing family violence
3. Supporting Māori and Pasifika Aspirations – Lifting Māori and Pacific incomes, skills and opportunities
4. Building a Productive Nation – Supporting a thriving nation in the digital age through innovation, social and economic opportunities
5. Transforming the Economy – Creating opportunities for productive businesses, regions, iwi [indigenous communities] and others to transition to a sustainable and low-emissions economy

Existing frameworks (e.g. Living Standards Framework) and wellbeing domain assessments provide the structure for analysis if the government identifies green objectives as its set of priorities.

Budgeting for future generations and intergenerational justice

In **Slovakia**, the Council for Budget Responsibility considers intergenerational fairness in connection with the long-term sustainability of public finances and quantifies the net contribution to and receipt from public finances of individual age cohorts.

Moreover, in **Finland**, the Prime Minister’s Office has recently set up a working group to study child budgeting as part of the national children’s strategy. The task of the working group is to prepare a concrete proposal on how the child budgeting section will be introduced in the state budget process. This was piloted in the 2022 draft budget and consolidated in the 2023 draft budget. To support this, the Ministry of Finance worked on an assessment of the possibilities to move towards a phenomenon-based budgeting system in Finland.

Equality budgeting

In **Ireland**, equality budgeting was introduced as a pilot programme for the 2018 budgetary cycle and expanded in subsequent years. It is a cross-government commitment that builds on Ireland’s performance budgeting framework by encouraging departments to identify programmes and set performance targets related to inequality. According to a recent Public Service Performance report, all 18 government departments now report equality budgeting metrics, with some departments reporting progress on multiple high-level goals.

The equality budgeting initiative is also informed by the Equality Budgeting Experts Advisory Group, which is comprised of experts from academia, civil society, government departments and agencies. In March 2021, the Irish Government defined several priorities to take Equality Budgeting further, including the establishment of an Interdepartmental Network for Equality Budgeting. Along with the Expert Advisory Group that advises on the direction of Equality Budgeting in Ireland, the Interdepartmental Network helps build capacity within government departments and share information.

Source: (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2022^[33]; OECD, 2020^[34]).

Strengthening transparency and accountability of the public action by reinforcing existing budget governance arrangements

Transparency and accountability are key principles for governments and public administrations to function better, deliver quality services and ultimately increase the legitimacy of decisions taken. When it comes to budgetary matters, it should drive the improvement of resources' allocation and strengthen trust by showing citizens that their views and interests are taken into account in spending decisions and that public money is used well (OECD, 2017^[35]).

As covered in detail in the following sections, ensuring budget transparency and accountability requires governments to provide adequate information and to engage citizens in the budget cycle. It also calls for strong budgetary oversight and reporting mechanism and practices.

A more comprehensive, systematic and user-centered disclosure of budget documents could further contribute to budget transparency

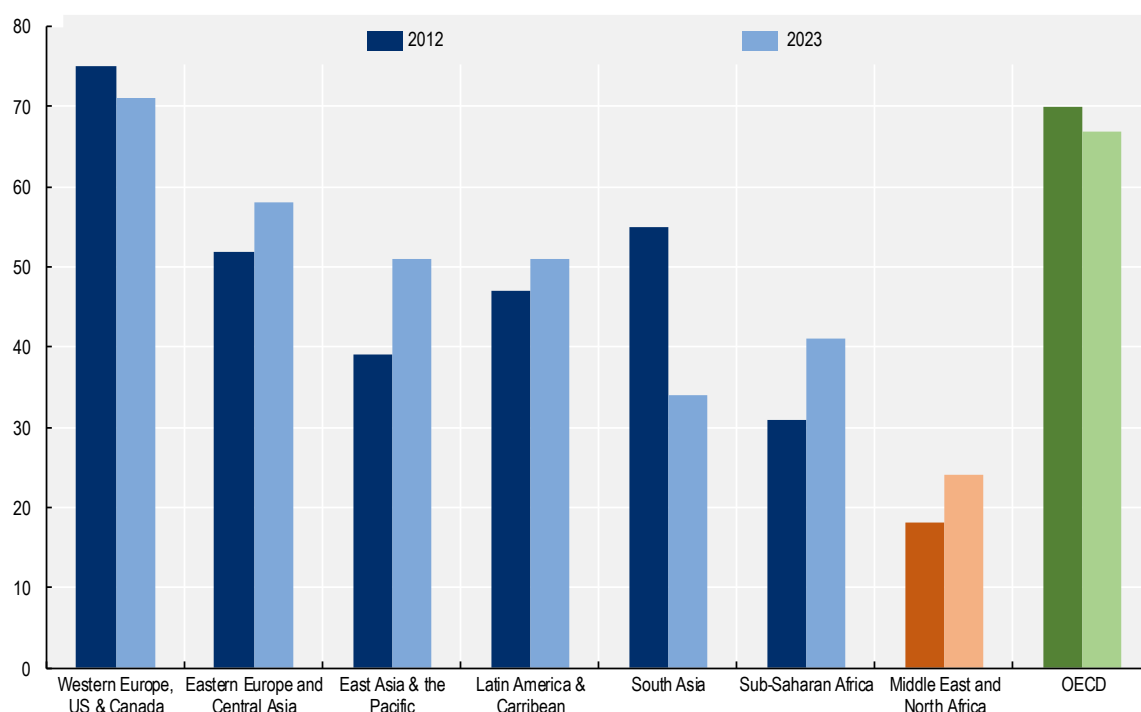
Budget transparency, referring to the full disclosure of all relevant fiscal information in a timely and systematic manner, is fundamental to improving accountability, integrity, inclusiveness and quality of budget decisions (OECD, 2019^[36]).

Budget transparency is a key element in underpinning “the overall agenda of transparency and accountability of government” among others. The OECD Recommendation on Budgetary Governance (2015^[2]) and the OECD Budget Transparency Toolkit (2017^[35]) highlight the importance of ensuring that budget documents and data are open, transparent and accessible, so policymakers can take sufficiently informed budget decisions to address policy problems, and citizens and other stakeholders can play an active watchdog role and keep governments accountable for budget allocation and spending. Recent figures show that only 44% of the MENA region's budget information is available, and in 63% of the cases, documents are not publicly disclosed, are only available for internal use or not published in a timely manner (Boustany, 2021^[16]). In terms of budget transparency, although situation varies greatly across countries and territories, the MENA region has lagged behind compared to other regions in the world over the years, as shown in Figure 3.2.

According to the latest Open Budget Index⁴ (International Budget Partnership, 2023^[37]), most participating MENA countries and territories⁵ are below average standards of budget transparency (average considered at 45/100), except for Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, which scored 49/100, 60/100 and 47/100 respectively in 2023. Chapter 1 provides detailed information on documents published by the different governments.

Figure 3.2. The MENA region lags behind other regions in budget transparency

Evolution of the Transparency Score at the regional level and in the OECD between 2012 and 2023



Notes: For categories other than Middle East and North Africa and OECD, the figure compares countries and territories that have been evaluated since the 2012 Open Budget Survey. Middle East and North Africa covers 10 countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen). OECD covers 20 countries in 2012 (Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States) and 24 countries in 2023 (Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States).

Source: Author's work based on (International Budget Partnership, 2023^[37]).

Despite the challenges to introduce better budget transparency, a number of MENA governments prepare and publish an increasing number of budget documents at central level (see Table 3.2) (Frank et al., 2023^[38]), building consistency in their budget transparency practices. Although some of the documents have not been published in the last decade, Jordan has been preparing and publishing Pre-Budget Statements, Executive's Budget Proposals, Enacted Budgets, In-Year Reports, Mid-Year Reviews, Year-End Reports and Audit Reports since at least 2010 (International Budget Transparency, 2023^[39]).

Table 3.2. MENA governments prepare and publish an increasing number of budget documents

Public availability of budget documents in select MENA countries, 2023

Country	Pre-Budget Statement	Executive's Budget Proposal	Enacted Budget	Citizen Budget	In-Year Reports	Mid-Year Review	Year-End Report	Audit Report
Algeria	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Egypt	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Iraq	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Jordan	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Lebanon	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Morocco	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Qatar	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Saudi Arabia	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Tunisia	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Note: The table includes MENA countries publishing at least one type of key budget document.

Source: (International Budget Partnership, 2023^[37]).

A growing number of municipalities also publish budget information at the local level, where citizens have most interactions with governments and the issues are directly linked to daily livelihoods and basic public services. In Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, access to information laws require municipalities to publish all administrative documents (including decisions, budgets, annual accounts and tenders), create special websites for this purpose, and reply to access to information requests (OECD, 2019^[40]; OECD, 2020^[41]). In Egypt, the government also publishes the governorates' budgets and financial statements on the website of the Ministry of Finance (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[42]).

In addition to the increase of documents published, some governments, notably in Jordan and Morocco, also advanced on the comprehensiveness of the documents made available (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). This was further enhanced by the adoption of access to information laws that aim at facilitating the accessibility of public information and data together with their proactive disclosure (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[42]). In Jordan, the General Budget Department (GBD) developed a Citizen Guide which presents a user-friendly summary of the draft budget law and has published it on its website to allow citizens to provide comments on the draft law, which they opened for consultation (OECD, n.d.^[13]).

A number of initiatives are also being implemented to raise awareness among citizens and public institutions on the budget process. In Egypt, the Ministry of Finance established a Transparency and Community Participation Unit in 2018, institutionalising a work area that started in 2015. The Unit aims at raising awareness among citizens on the concepts of budget transparency and participatory budgeting (Arab Republic of Egypt, 2020^[43]). In Jordan, the GBD developed in 2023 an awareness campaign for youth on budget execution. In Lebanon, the government has undertaken significant efforts with the support of civil society to raise awareness of citizens and promote transparency on budgetary matters, as highlighted in Box 3.7.

Box 3.7. In Lebanon, several governmental initiatives aim to raise awareness of citizens and promote budget transparency

In Lebanon, since 2018, the Ministry of Finance has been publishing citizen budgets that are simplified, easily accessible and readable documents comprising key public finance information targeted to a general audience.

In 2020, the Institut des Finances *Basil Fuleihan* at the Ministry of Finance created the Lebanon Citizen Budget Dashboard (LCBD) in cooperation with civil society, providing access to disaggregated budget data. The LCBD aims to transform metadata from the Ministry, retrieved from the official budget and monthly reports, into understandable, easy-to-read figures and appealing graphs and visuals. Information on the budget calendar helps citizens better contextualise the data. A feedback section is available for users to submit comments for improvements in presentation and request further information. Between 2020 and 2021, the dashboard became a unique point of access to budget data. The Institute witnessed a growing demand for accessing and understanding fiscal information, demonstrated by the large number of inquiries received through social media and other communication channels, as well the number of requests for awareness sessions, especially from youth groups and media. Live demonstrations and hands-on training on the use of the data were organised for more than 20 civil society organisations and development partners in Lebanon.

Finally, for the first time in 2022, the government published a booklet presenting in a simplified format the general budget draft law as received by the Parliament and prior to its discussion, amendment and ratification. It aims at providing citizen with information on what the government is intending to spend and how it intends to finance its activities.

Source: (International Budget Partnership, 2015^[44]; Republic of Lebanon, 2022^[45]; Republic of Lebanon, n.d.^[46]; Moubayed Bissat, 2023^[47]).

Nevertheless, the evolution toward full budget transparency in the MENA region remains slow and heterogeneous. Data show that the increase in overall budget document publication rates between 2019 and 2021 was only 3%. Over the same period, two countries (Iraq and Lebanon) stopped publishing Year-End Reports (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). Some governments develop documents but do not publish them, while overall the comprehensiveness of documents varies largely across governments (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). Moreover, the application of budget transparency at the regional and local levels remains challenging in most countries and territories (OECD, n.d.^[13]; OECD, 2021^[17]).

To further strengthen their efforts in increasing transparency in the budget process, MENA governments could seek to improve their data collection and management systems to provide decision-makers and other key stakeholders with sound budgetary information for decision-making, scrutiny and accountability. In this sense, the Ministry of Finance in the UAE launched a project to consolidate financial data across the Emirates, in collaboration with local government departments. This initiative, expected to conclude in 2024, aims to prepare and publish unified national-level government finance reports encompassing revenue, expenditure, assets, liabilities and government spending by job classification. This would contribute to support assessing government policy impact, sound fiscal planning and monitoring and oversight of economic policies, in addition to enhancing transparency in government spending (National Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, 2023^[48]). Similarly, in a number of OECD Member countries, such as Australia, the United States and Mexico (Box 3.8), budget information is regularly produced and analysed.

Box 3.8. The treatment of budget information in OECD Member countries

In **Australia**, the Final Budget Outcome is the government's key *ex-post* accountability document and is published within three months of year-end, using the same basis as the budget and the mid-term updated, both as regards flows (revenues, expenditures and balances) and stocks (net debt and net financial worth). However, the financial statements in the Final Budget Outcome provide actual outcomes rather than estimates.

In **the United States**, the Office of Management and Budget provides Analytical Perspectives of budget which contains analyses that are designed to highlight specified subject areas or provide other significant presentations of budget data that place the budget into perspective. It also supplies Historical Tables which provide a wide range of data on Federal Government finances and Economic Assumptions from the 1970s. In addition, all US federal government budget data are now machine-readable in "raw" format, and publicly available on *USAspending.gov*.

In **Mexico**, the government has a budget transparency portal where it publishes its "citizens' budget", whose first version was presented in 2012. This document summarises in a user-friendly way the key content of the budget document to improve citizens' understanding of government policies and increase transparency. This citizens' budget is prepared in collaboration with Civil Society Organisations. In addition, the transparency portal includes citizen versions of other key documents, such as the annual public accounts report or a guide to the macroeconomic framework and public finance targets in the country.

Source: (Australian Government, 2024^[49]; The White House, 2024^[50]; Gobierno de México, 2024^[51]; OECD, 2017^[35]).

MENA governments could also ensure that budgetary information is more systematically available in a clear and simplified way as a means to i) allow the executive and the legislative to participate in a timely discussion on policy priorities; ii) inform citizens and stakeholders on government actions and foreseen allocation and spending of public money; and iii) enable citizens and stakeholders to engage actively with the government, participate in the budget cycle and monitor the budget activities and performance of their government.

A growing momentum for participatory budgeting, which could be further institutionalised

Beyond the disclosure of budgetary information, budget transparency also encompasses citizen participation in the budget process (OECD, 2019^[36]). As highlighted in the OECD Recommendation on Budgetary Governance (2015^[2]), budgetary decisions can be improved if they are the result of discussions and engagement with parliament, citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs), about the key priorities, trade-offs, opportunity costs and value for money.

Participatory budgeting has proven to be an effective tool to involve citizens and stakeholders in public decisions, with concrete and tangible impacts on inclusion, democratic quality, and social wellbeing. They allow citizens to have a role in deciding how public money should be spent. It encourages them to identify, discuss, and prioritise public spending projects, and gives them a role in the decision-making process. This trend is accentuated when participatory budgeting mechanisms are institutionalised and implemented over a longer period. In addition, participatory budgeting supports social inclusion and increases diversity in public decisions. Data show that traditionally under-represented groups in the public sphere, such as women or lower-income segments of society, participate more in participatory budgeting processes than in other democratic processes (OECD, 2022^[52]).

The OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes (2022^[53]) identify two types of participatory budgets:

- **Project-based processes:** a pre-defined amount of the budget is allocated to citizens' projects and ideas. The amount depends on each authority.
- **Budget cycle processes:** citizens and stakeholders can participate throughout the budget cycle by providing comments or making recommendations on the overall budget or strategic priorities. This can be done by creating a dedicated participatory body or by inviting participants to public decisions bodies, such as budget committees.

In addition, there are different approaches regarding who can take part in a participatory budget:

- **Universal access:** the process is open to individuals of a certain territory or institution.
- **Targeted audiences:** some processes can be aimed at more targeted audiences or specific social sectors.

Efforts to involve citizens in public budgeting have been undertaken in the MENA region at different levels of government. At central level, some governments have started strengthening institutional frameworks and developing practices to promote citizen and civil society participation across budget cycle. In Egypt, recent preliminary Pre-Budget Statements and draft proposals included approaches to a citizen budget. The Ministry of Social Solidarity has furthermore deployed an accountability tool for local communities to provide feedback on social programmes in order to better direct social funds and public service delivery (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). The Ministry of Finance also adopted the Participatory Budgeting initiative, which is being led by its Fiscal Transparency and Citizen Engagement Unit (OECD, n.d.^[14]). While this mechanism has been rolled out, future editions could be more ambitious and enhance the representativeness and engagement of non-governmental stakeholders in these processes (OECD, n.d.^[14]). In Tunisia, the Ministry of Finance created in 2013 a joint commission for financial transparency. The commission was composed of high-level public officials and CSOs working on transparency and open governance. It was responsible for preparing the citizen budget and advising the Ministry, strengthening the monitoring and supporting co-ordination of reforms and co-operation with civil society in this regard (OECD, 2016^[54]).

Nevertheless, similarly to OECD Member countries, participatory budget initiatives are undertaken mainly at the local level in MENA countries and territories. It allows citizens to be involved in the orientation of dedicated municipal resources through their participation in the definition, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of projects that concern them and respond to their needs.

If some municipalities started adopting participatory budgeting as early as the 2000s, its use has been expanding in the region in the last decade, notably in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, often with the support of central authorities (Frank et al., 2023^[38]; OECD, n.d.^[13]; OECD, 2024^[55]; OECD, 2019^[56]). In Egypt, there has been a total of 10 to 13 participatory budgeting processes, including eight to ten at the local level and three in large cities (Qena, Sohag and Alexandria) (Participatory Budgeting World Atlas, n.d.^[57]). In Jordan, participatory budgeting represents a good example of collaboration between the government and CSOs. The organisation *Partners Jordan* works alongside the government to implement participatory budgeting at the municipal level, bringing together public officials and their communities across municipalities (Partners Jordan, n.d.^[58]). Jordan has also recently engaged local communities in the decision-making process of their Governorate Councils' budgets (OECD, n.d.^[13]).

Participatory budgeting mechanisms have been institutionalised by a number of local authorities. This is the case, for instance, in a number of municipalities in Morocco. In Larache, the municipality formalised a steering group, made up of CSO representatives who participated in the first participatory budget cycle experience, as its key interlocutor for all actions related to the development of the medina (OECD, 2024^[55]). In Tunisia, 18 municipalities adopted participatory budget initiatives in 2018, involving around 6,500 citizens in the process (OECD, 2023^[59]). Several municipalities, including La Marsa, Menzel Bourguiba, Gabès, Tozeur, La Manouba, Sfax and Gafsa, further signed an inter-municipal mutual aid agreement on

participatory budgeting to support the sustainability of the mechanisms on the long-term (OECD, 2019^[56]). Some governments also adapted legal frameworks and developed guidance tools to promote the broader use of such practices. In Morocco, the General Directorate for Local Authorities of the Ministry of Interior develops operational guides in an effort to support the generalisation of participatory budgets in a growing number of municipalities (OECD, 2024^[55]). In Egypt, the government has organised seminars, workshops and trainings for university students, governmental and non-governmental actors, and has established a network of different actors (e.g. CSOs, ministries, local authorities) with governors to begin expanding participatory budgeting in different regions around the country (Egyptian Ministry of Finance, 2020^[60]).

Despite these efforts, opportunities for citizen participation in budgetary matters remain limited, especially at the central level (OECD, n.d.^[13]; OECD, 2024^[55]; OECD, 2019^[56]). The 2023 Open Budget Survey data highlight that several countries and territories, including Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Yemen do not have mechanisms and practices in place for citizen participation on budget matters (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). In addition, opportunities for structured dialogue between governments and civil society that could have enabled citizens to channel their feedback on budget issues are largely limited (Boustany, 2021^[16]).

Some experiences of participatory budgeting at local level in OECD Member countries, presented in Box 3.9, provide key information on possible areas for improvement and avenues to scale up participatory budgeting at the national level in the MENA region.

Box 3.9. Participatory budgeting at local level in OECD Member countries

Kotrijk Participatory Budgeting (Belgium)

Since 2021, the participatory budgeting process of the city of Kotrijk incorporates elements of deliberation in conjunction with the traditional participatory budgeting methods. Citizens can propose their ideas online, after which a randomly selected citizen jury deliberates and recommends certain proposals for their neighbourhoods. They then move on to budget gaming. Here, citizens can negotiate with each other about (fictive) budgets related to the proposals from the online platform. The output of these budget games become a source of input for the randomly selected citizen jury to make the final recommendations.

School Participatory Budgeting in Phoenix (United States)

After several schools decided to experiment with school participatory budgeting, in 2017 Phoenix's Union High School District implemented this concept on a larger scale, introducing a district-wide opportunity for participatory budgeting. Students brainstormed ideas for school improvement projects for six months, after which they developed formal plans which were then put to a school-wide vote.

Citizen Budget Committee in Oregon (United States)

The Budget Committee is made up of five county commissioners and five citizens. This committee reviews and approves the County budget, limits the amount of tax which may be levied by the County and establishes a tentative maximum amount for total permissible expenditures for each department and fund in the County budget.

Portugal's National Participatory Budgeting

The Portugal Participatory Budget (PPB) is the first participatory budget done at the country level. To ensure the maximum engagement of citizens from all over the country, the PPB consists of a hybrid participatory model that combines digital and face-to-face interactions. The face-to-face approach is

based on participatory meetings held nationwide, in which the population can present and discuss their ideas in person, with the assistance of facilitators. In addition, citizens can also submit their proposals at the Citizens Spots (assisted digital services counters) and at some public libraries all around the country. The citizens can use digital tools to participate, but also more traditional channels, so anyone can take part of the initiative, even the ones with fewer digital skills or without internet access.

Sources: (Kortrijk, n.d.^[61]; OPSI, n.d.^[62]; Lane County Oregon, n.d.^[63]; Participedia, 2016^[64]).

The role and capacities of Parliaments and Supreme Audit institutions in budgetary oversight could be further strengthened

Adequate internal and external budgetary oversight strengthens the checks and balances required for budget accountability and fiscal sustainability (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). As reaffirmed in the OECD Recommendation on Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions, oversight institutions such as fiscal councils, parliamentary budget offices and Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) “both promote and operate under independence, non-partisanship, transparency and accountability, while demonstrating technical competence and producing relevant work of the highest quality that stands up to public scrutiny and informs the public debate” (2014^[65]).

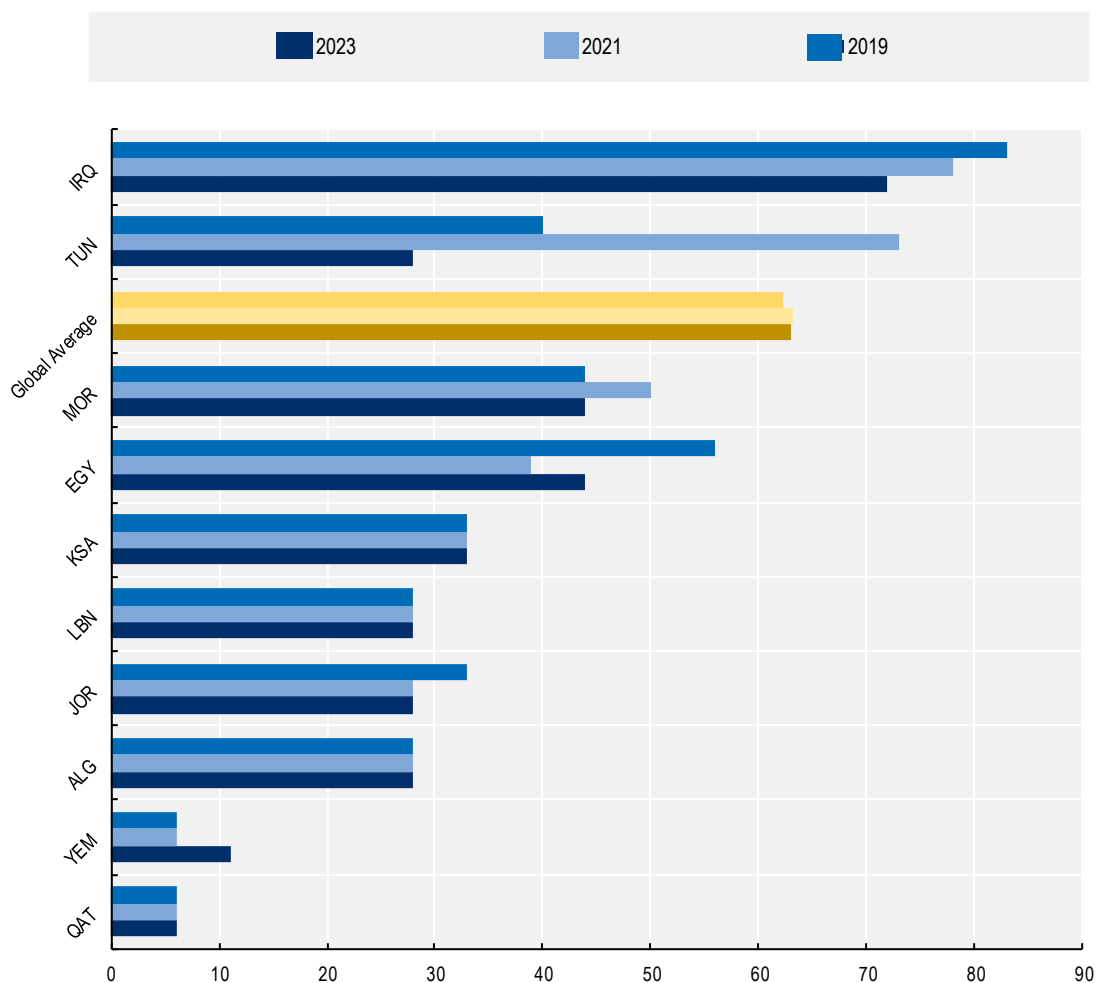
Legislative bodies have a key role in approving budgets, allocating resources and providing external oversight to budgetary debates or ensuring the underlying assumptions of the budget are sound (OECD, 2019^[66]). Additionally, SAIs are fundamental to parliaments’ ability to hold government to account. Through independent, timely and quality audits, they can assess whether public funds were spent economically, efficiently and effectively by government entities, in compliance with existing rules and regulations.

In recent years, a number of MENA countries and territories have experienced an increase in their budget oversight scores. Some of them have made progress in strengthening oversight of the Parliament and/or the SAI. In Iraq, which reaches the highest score for the region, the adoption of the General Financial Management Law of 2019 provided a solid foundation for the parliamentary authority to amend the budget (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). The law stipulates that legislative committees discuss the Pre-Budget Statement, review the Budget Proposal and budget execution as well as meet with SAI members during the budget year. However, the budget process remains in practice often delayed and lacks transparency and participation (UNICEF, 2023^[67]). In Morocco, the Organic Budget Law No. 130.1 from 2015 strengthened the oversight role of Parliament and the Court of Auditors (*Court des Comptes*) (Transparency International, 2021^[68]).

Nevertheless, budget oversight in the MENA region remains overall limited (Figure 3.3). Data show that the MENA region is the only one displaying a “weak” budget oversight with a score of 27.6 in 2023, far below other regions in the world. None of the MENA countries and territories have “adequate” legislative oversight and only Iraq has “adequate” SAI oversight (International Budget Partnership, 2023^[37]).

Figure 3.3. Despite some progress in budget oversight scores, most MENA countries and territories remain below the global average.

Evolution of Budget Oversight Score in MENA countries and territories in 2019, 2021 and 2023



Note: Global average was calculated by averaging the scores of all countries included in the survey

Source: Author's work based on (International Budget Partnership, 2023^[37]; Partnership, 2020^[69]; Partnership, 2018^[70]).

More specifically, parliaments have the authority to amend the draft budget in only four countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan), where they still face limitations in that respect (Frank et al., 2023^[38]). Parliaments in the region have traditionally suffered from a lack of information and resources for better oversight and accountability. For instance, only three countries have legislative committees that either examine in-year execution of the budget (Iraq, Jordan, and Morocco) or examine the Audit Report on the annual budget produced by the SAI (Algeria, Jordan, and Morocco) (Frank et al., 2023^[38]).

The role of parliaments in scrutinising and approving the executive's budget proposal as well as holding the executive to account on behalf of citizens for spending and policy execution could be strengthened in the MENA region. Parliamentary committees are a useful forum for focused, in-depth scrutiny and effective engagement with the budgetary process. Parliamentary Budget Offices have also been established to provide independent budget and fiscal analysis in various OECD Member countries. Some examples of budgetary oversight by parliaments are highlighted in Box 3.10.

Box 3.10. Parliamentary engagement and scrutiny in OECD Member countries

In **Germany**, the Bundestag's Budget Committee has a strong and active role in scrutinising the government's draft budget. The committee sends "rapporteurs", along with representatives from the Supreme Audit Institution, into each ministry to discuss proposed spending allocations. This allows for a strong feedback loop from audit into the budget deliberations. The rapporteurs are responsible for this portfolio for the full electoral term, allowing them to develop expertise. The committee considers proposals from the sectoral committees and amendments to the draft budget and can place conditions on the execution of particular budget lines.

In **Sweden**, the annual budget process is divided into two distinct phases, with a Spring Fiscal Policy Bill in April setting down broad aggregates for fiscal policy development, followed by a government Budget Bill in the autumn specifying allocations for the budget year ahead. The Spring Fiscal Policy Bill provides for parliamentary debate on fiscal policy in general terms. The main budgetary aggregates are voted on in a single spring vote.

In **Austria**, the Parliament decides on financial resources and on results (outcomes and outputs) as part of an annual budget bill. The Parliament also assesses the performance reports by the government, reflecting critically on performance information and using it to ensure a more strategic budget debate. The Parliament and its Budget Committee are assisted by a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) helping parliamentarians to engage constructively with performance information by providing information, analyses and studies. In doing so, the PBO contributes to counteracting the information asymmetry between the Parliament and the federal government on budgetary matters.

In the **United Kingdom**, the Parliament and some of the devolved regional legislatures have established in-house technical units to support budget scrutiny and enhance transparency. For example, the Scottish Parliament, helped by its Financial Scrutiny Unit (FSU), negotiated with the executive to speed up the provision of detailed budget information for all portfolios, in order to enable effective oversight. In addition to providing in-depth technical analysis of the budget figures, the FSU has worked to simplify the presentation of budget information by producing different resources and tools to help MPs and committees with financial scrutiny.

Source: (Austrian Parliament, n.d.^[71]; Government Offices of Sweden, n.d.^[72]; Deutscher Bundestag, n.d.^[73]; The Scottish Parliament, n.d.^[74]; OECD, 2017^[35]).

Moreover, a general pending issue in the MENA region concerns SAIs' restricted independence. Data show that in a number of countries and territories of the region, the government can remove the head of the SAI without the need for consent from the judiciary or the Legislature. It can also interfere with the SAI's mandate and operations, including by limiting access to information and delaying the provision of resources (Frank et al., 2023^[38]).

Governments in the MENA region could strengthen the role of SAIs to allow them to actively engage in budget formulation and execution and oversee budget implementation. The independence of SAIs could be further improved, for example, by making the appointment or removal of their heads subject to legislative or judicial, and not only executive, approval. Allocation of resources could be further improved to ensure full independence in financial terms. Technical capacities and timely delivery of reports could also be further strengthened. Publishing information about the implementation of the SAI's recommendations would enable analysis as to the extent to which the government and public institutions use these recommendations.

Financial Management Information Systems enhance budget monitoring and transparency

Financial Management Information Systems (FMIS), or Information Technology (IT) systems used by governments for financial management, offer structured platforms for gathering, processing and analysing real-time, comprehensive and reliable financial and non-financial data.

They allow for the monitoring of daily financial operations and debt management, and thus help in detecting irregularities and providing inputs to control and audit institutions. As such, they can play an essential role in streamlining processes, bolstering the control mechanisms financial transactions and promoting heightened fiscal transparency (OECD, 2024^[75]).

The introduction of FMIS has been a major reform in the MENA region. Such tools have been introduced by a number of governments to improve the efficiency and transparency of budgetary systems, building on international control criteria and safeguards (OECD, 2017^[3]). In Egypt and Jordan for instance, the specific objectives linked to the implementation of the FMIS are defined in manuals, as detailed in Box 3.11 (OECD, 2017^[3]). Governments have also made significant technical and human investments to ensure their effective implementation (OECD, 2017^[3]). For instance, training programmes and awareness-raising campaigns about the benefits of FMIS were organised both for public officials and citizens in several countries and territories (Boustany, 2021^[16]).

Box 3.11. The FMIS in Egypt and Jordan aim to support the integration of public financial management processes

Egypt

The Financial Control Manual defines the objectives for implementing the GFMS:

- Directly linking the different budget authorities/units and accounting units to the Ministry of Finance
- Reducing the time taken to receive results of works and reports
- Approving a unified design for the databases of the standard government applications
- Issuing overall and detailed reports to monitor government spending from the state budget
- Obtaining clear indications on the volume of spending in due time, to help prioritising spending and rationalising it
- Providing the data needed to ascertain the availability of cash in due time and the amounts needed to fulfil obligations/liabilities with greater efficiency and as little cost as possible, while assisting decision-makers by determining the deficit or surplus
- Being able to compare revenues and expenditures, enabling the burden of debt service interest to be reduced in the case of deficits and investment increased in the case of surplus, and helping to plan the issue of treasury bonds and bills
- Carrying out all government financial payment and collection operations centrally through the e-payment and e-collection system
- Comparing expected and actual cash flows to show the degree and cause of any deviation, to take it into consideration when drawing up future expectations.

Jordan

The FMIS is used for:

- Providing an electronic financial system that manages the financial processes in all budget institutions

- Enhancing the accountability and transparency of the public sector accounting system
- Improving the budget cycle to enhance the effectiveness of governmental performance and provide quality services to the citizens
- Applying procedures to control the allocation of financial resources in the budget law and unify the government systems for information and the financial and accounting database

Source: (OECD, 2017^[3]; USAID, 2018^[76]).

To ensure that such systems remain effective in supporting the implementation of new budget procedures and processes, MENA governments should provide public administrations with the necessary technical and human capacities to develop, make use and update when necessary the systems in an informed way (OECD, 2024^[75]).

Budgeting for sustainable infrastructure: A key challenge in the MENA region

The infrastructure sector is a good illustration of the importance of developing strong budgetary frameworks and tools. The G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment recognise infrastructure as a “driver of productivity, economic prosperity and strong, balanced, inclusive growth and sustainable development” (G20, 2019^[77]). Public investments also deliver public outcomes and determine the quality of people’s lives.

Better governance of public infrastructure investment is therefore crucial to ensure that the affordability of public investments is considered along the entire life cycle of infrastructure, and that projects are accommodated within the government’s current and future budget constraints.

This is especially important in the MENA region where the public sector (especially through State-Owned Enterprises - SOEs) is a major actor in the infrastructure sector, in which important investments are needed to sustain the development of the region.

Today, MENA countries and territories face increasing strains on their existing infrastructure with a need for technologically advanced, sustainable and resilient infrastructure that can support the economic growth by attracting investment and promoting industrial development and economic diversification. Some of the challenges for transforming infrastructure are the low quality of hard and soft infrastructure, such as connectivity infrastructure, fragmented maritime networks, insufficient diversification of renewable energy resources, high costs of Information and Communication Technology infrastructure. It is estimated that the region will need over USD 100 billion a year (7% of the annual regional GDP) over the next five to ten years to maintain existing and create new infrastructure (OECD, 2021^[78]).

Improving infrastructure governance is essential to ensure that public resources are spent effectively, but also to attract more private investments that will be critical to meeting investment needs, especially in fast-developing regions like the MENA region (IEA, 2021^[79]). The OECD Recommendation on the Governance of Infrastructure (2020^[80]) highlights that sound policies, frameworks, norms, processes and tools are a precondition for the use of innovative funding and financing, efficient channelling of finance, and can support quality investment at both national and sub-national levels. This requires strengthening capacities for public investment and promoting policy learning at all levels of government, ensuring adequate financial resources, professional skills and sound institutional frameworks.

Many MENA governments have launched national strategies to upgrade infrastructure that promote sustainable development, (OECD, 2021^[78]). A number of governments have been developing project selection methods, notably cost benefit analysis⁶ (CBA), to systematically calculate the benefits and costs of policy options and projects, also supporting budgeting by ensuring that capital and operational

expenditure is being allocated to the highest priorities. While CBA has traditionally been used to monetise the benefits and costs of public investment proposals, it can also include wider economic benefits that are harder to monetise, such as peoples' ability to access community services.

Despite these efforts, MENA economies are facing various challenges in relation to public spending. The application of project selection methodologies varies across the MENA region but remains overall limited. For instance, in Morocco, prioritisation is essentially based on sectoral strategies and criteria are not standardised. Each sector has its own informal selection criteria, which are often not communicated to the Ministry of Finance or the public (OECD, 2024^[81]). Egypt's criteria for prioritising investments in transport and water remain large, limiting the possibilities to compare investments within or between sectors and ensure public resources are being directed to the highest priorities. A more widespread adoption of CBA would help with these bottlenecks.

Moreover, infrastructure reforms require mobilising the necessary resources through planning and prioritisation of projects. While infrastructure project budget and investments are typically set over mid-term planning and financing, MENA governments tend to operate on a shorter-term allocation planning that is not always aligned with their strategic priorities. Moreover, public investment processes and frameworks remain to be further strengthened (International Monetary Fund, n.d.^[82]). On the other hand, and more generally, most MENA governments have struggled to keep their finances on a sustainable track, as a large share of public funds is used to pay wages and salaries, in addition to debt servicing in a context of low tax revenue generation (Biganzoli and Gagliardi, 2021^[83]).

To move forward, MENA governments could make sure that long-term infrastructure plans are fiscally sustainable by systematically and rigorously linking these plans with their medium-term fiscal plans and the annual budget formulation process. In particular, a MTEF can help to integrate fiscal policy and budgeting over a multi-year horizon, by creating linkages between fiscal forecasting, fiscal objectives, and rules and the forward planning of multi-year budget estimates. It provides the basis for budget negotiations in the years to follow (OECD, 2019^[66]). To support implementation, the MTEF could take into account estimates of the costs associated with the infrastructure projects of the government.

Infrastructure plans could have a proper link to the annual budget formulation process, since it is at this time that resources are allocated to government projects and programmes. The way capital expenditure is integrated into the overall budget process has different advantages and disadvantages. While full integration between current and capital expenditure can improve planning, facilitate co-ordination and increase flexibility, separate budgets can ensure that mandatory items, such as entitlements, do not crowd out discretionary items, such as capital investment (OECD, 2021^[84]).

In addition to project preparation and selection, monitoring and evaluation of public investment projects are also crucial to ensure that the purpose of the investment meets the objectives initially identified during project preparation (OECD, 2020^[85]). The monitoring of investment projects can serve two different purposes, i.e. facilitating the proper allocation of resources and the early identification of potential problems and their corrective measures (European Commission, 2022^[86]).

Monitoring of the investment project during implementation should be complemented by *ex-post* evaluations after completion and commissioning, through to decommissioning and dismantling. Indeed, right from the preparation phase of public investment projects, public entities verify the need for the project and the contributions it can make to achieving the objectives set out in national or sectoral plans. The objectives of the project itself are then defined, and indicators created to measure whether these objectives have been achieved. Thus, *ex-post* evaluation should not only measure whether the public investment project has been achieved on time and within budget, but also whether and how the project has achieved the objectives for which it was designed (OECD, 2024^[81]). In addition to project performance, *ex-post* evaluation not only provides detailed information for future investment decisions, but also enables to draw lessons about the governance of the public investment system, for example by measuring the impact of certain policies on public investment, identifying improvements that need to be made to certain investment

programs, or evaluating the fiscal impact of the public investment system (OECD, 2024^[81]). Another key area of improvement concerns the governance of SOEs, responsible for the majority of infrastructure delivery and management in the MENA region. Improving their governance would contribute greatly to improving infrastructure investment. Finally, while their use remains limited, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) could also represent an avenue through which private sector resources and expertise could be leveraged to finance resilient infrastructure systems (OECD, 2022^[87]). Political support for PPPs has been growing across MENA countries and territories in the recent years, and a number of MENA governments have boosted efforts to build an enabling environment for PPPs by updating their regulatory frameworks and setting up PPP agencies or specialised units within existing institutions as a first step (Middle East Business Intelligence, 2020^[88]).

Areas of opportunity

To foster efficiency and accountability in public spending, governments could pursue their efforts in the following areas:

Establishing planning and monitoring budgetary tools to support a more strategic approach to public expenditures

- Pursuing efforts to establish a medium-term expenditure framework, including through the development of tools to ensure the understanding and implementation of such frameworks by all public institutions and other stakeholders.
- Promoting the use and development of performance budgeting, through the development of frameworks, tools and capabilities across public administrations.

Mainstreaming considerations of long-term cross-cutting issues in spending decisions

- Further promoting the use of phenomenon-based budgeting approaches, including green and gender budgeting but also mainstreaming of other considerations (intergenerational equity, well-being, etc.).

Reinforcing governance arrangements and tools to foster transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of spending decisions

- Providing stakeholders with sound and accessible budgetary information through improved data collection and management systems and more comprehensive, systematic and user-centered processes of disclosure for budget documents.
- Strengthening the use of participatory budgeting initiatives across all levels of government, and considering their institutionalisation when relevant.
- Enhancing oversight by strengthening the role of Parliaments and Supreme Audit Institutions throughout the budget process.
- Developing and reinforcing Financial Management Information Systems and building capabilities to develop, make use and update when necessary the systems in an informed way.

Leveraging budgetary governance to improve infrastructure investment

- Reinforcing the use of project selection methods, notably cost benefit analysis, to systematically calculate the benefits and costs of policy options and projects.

- Linking long-term infrastructure plans to medium-term fiscal strategies and the annual budget process to ensure their fiscal sustainability.

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Notes

¹ Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

² The green sukuk is a new green Islamic bond where the proceeds are used to fund specific environmentally sustainable infrastructure projects (World Bank, 2018^[89]).

³ Phenomenon-based policymaking means addressing phenomena (e.g., climate change, social disintegration, urbanisation, and immigration) for which no single part of the system holds full responsibility for and which require the collaborative interaction of different parts of a system. This often requires establishing cross-ministerial policy networks and the ability of government to aggregate financial and human resources from across individual entities to cross-administrative objectives to achieve higher impact. The main idea is that societal problems (e.g., climate change, urbanisation, and immigration) tend to get lost in government silos and ‘projectification’ of government action, meaning that the money in government is divided into small projects that do not sufficiently follow cross-administrative objectives and needs and their combined impact remains unclear (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2022^[33]).

⁴ The Open Budget Index (OBI), prepared by the International Budget Partnership (IBP) results from the Open Budget Survey (OBS), a comprehensive assessment of government budget transparency, public participation, and accountability in over 100 countries and territories around the world. A country/territory’s score on the OBI is calculated from the results of a subset of the survey that assesses whether governments give the public access to budget information at the national level. It looks at the availability

and comprehensiveness of eight key government budget documents. OBI scores can range from 0 (no transparency) to 100 (total transparency) - <https://www2.internationalbudget.org/>.

⁵ Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen.

⁶ Cost benefit analysis (CBA) is the standard project selection methodology. CBA can be used to establish the following points in relation to a project proposal:

- Whether people's wellbeing, welfare or utility, would be higher under the proposal than the status quo
- Whether people are willing to pay for a benefit and accept compensation for a cost
- When the sum of all individuals' benefits and costs are aggregated, whether the collective social benefit outweighs the social cost
- Whether beneficiaries can hypothetically compensate the losers from a change, and have some net gains left over, which indicates that the benefits exceed the costs (OECD, 2018_[90]).

4 Delivering public services effectively in the Middle East and North Africa

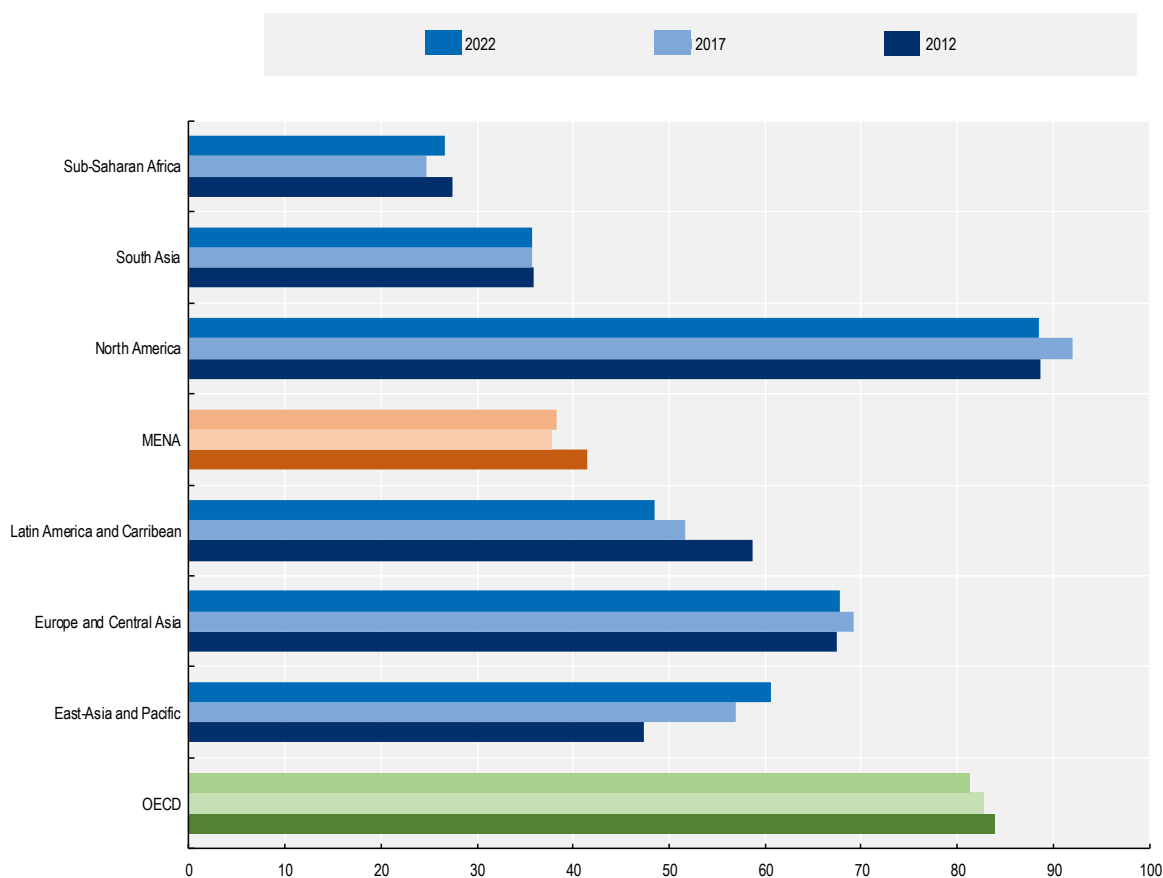
This chapter presents the reforms undertaken in the Middle East and North Africa and the existing opportunities for governments to develop comprehensive public integrity, public procurement, infrastructure governance and regulatory policy frameworks; to improve the digitalisation of public administrations; to reinforce the skills and capacities across the civil service; and to ensure inclusive access to quality public services.

Citizens and businesses interact with their governments mainly through their access to public services. Delivering effectively means providing policies and services that are qualitative, accessible and responsive to society's needs, and for which governments are accountable. In times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the continuity of services is particularly essential, thus underscoring the necessity for resilient and agile administrations.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, most governments have embarked on structural reforms designed to modernise public administrations processes, enhancing civil service performance and reinforcing accountability to serve citizens better and build trust. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, a majority of citizens remain unsatisfied with their governments' performance, and the region continues to face major challenges in terms of government effectiveness¹ (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. The MENA region has made progress in recent years on government effectiveness but remains below other regions

Worldwide Governance Indicator on government effectiveness at the regional level and in the OECD in 2012, 2017 and 2022



Note: The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) are a research dataset summarising the views in quality of governance provided by a large number of enterprise, citizen and expert survey respondents. These data are gathered from a number of survey institutes, think tanks, non-governmental organisations, international organisations and private sector firms. Percentile Rank (0-100) indicates rank of countries or territories among all countries and territories in the world. 0 corresponds to lowest rank and 100 corresponds to highest rank. "MENA" refers here to the average across Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, West Bank and Gaza Strip, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Source: Author's work based on (World Bank, n.d._[1]).

The OECD Trust Survey highlights that experience and satisfaction with public services is highly related to levels of trust: the more people feel that their administration delivers effectively through quality services, the more they are likely to trust their government and administration (OECD, 2021^[2]). Results from the 2023 survey confirm the importance of transparency for citizen trust in government (OECD, 2023^[3]).

A human-centred approach focusing on people's needs, experiences, and perspectives can help understand users' real needs and design the most appropriate solutions. The OECD is developing a new Recommendation which details several enablers for human-centric public policies and services (OECD, 2024^[4]). Public integrity is critical to ensure transparency and accountability in using public funds, including through public procurement, which can be leveraged to improve the quality of public goods and infrastructure. Reducing red tape and improving responsiveness and access through digitalisation and regulatory policy and tools is also an important way to meet the necessary quality standards. Finally, public policies and services are designed and implemented by civil servants. Building the civil service's competences and skills is thus key to make sure they are equipped to responding to current and future needs.

This chapter takes stock of recent initiatives implemented by MENA governments across these different enablers, vis-à-vis OECD standards and best practices on public governance, to support efficient and effective service delivery as a means to pursue sustainable prosperity for all. In so doing, this chapter offers ways to close gaps where these exist and move practices in the MENA region closer to OECD standards and best practices.

Public integrity as a safeguard for public sector effectiveness

Public integrity refers to “the consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests in the public sector” (OECD, 2020^[5]). In this sense, public integrity is a cornerstone of good governance as it helps to ensure that decision-making, including to design and deliver public services, serves citizens' needs and expectations rather than benefits the self-interest of specific groups, notably those in power. Commitment to and the implementation of public integrity principles and practices also safeguard the public interest, leading to more productive economies, more efficient public sectors, and more inclusive societies (OECD, 2020^[5]). The OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity (2017^[6]) presents the building blocks to developing and implementing a coherent and comprehensive integrity strategy, as detailed in Box 4.1.

Box 4.1. The OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity

The OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity shifts the focus from ad hoc integrity policies to a comprehensive, risk-based approach with an emphasis on cultivating a culture of integrity across the whole of society. It is built on three pillars:

1. **Having a comprehensive and coherent system in place.** This is key to reduce opportunities for corrupt behaviour where the top management is committed to develop the necessary legal and institutional frameworks and displays high standards of personal propriety, and where public institutions coordinate well with each other to strengthen the effectiveness of the public integrity system. Such a system includes a strategic approach to public integrity that is evidence-based and aimed at mitigating public integrity risks, as well as rules and public sector values that are effectively communicated in public sector organisations and externally to the private sector, civil society and individuals.
2. **A culture intolerant to corruption.** Developing a culture where corruption is socially unacceptable from a whole-of-society perspective, where businesses, individuals and non-governmental actors uphold public integrity. In the public sector, developing a culture of integrity and preventing misbehaviour is not only a matter of setting comprehensive integrity standards. It also requires helping public officials understand, adopt and implement integrity and merit values and standards in the workplace and in recruitment processes, and nurturing an open organisational culture where public officials feel free and safe to discuss ethical dilemmas, potential conflict-of-interest situations, and other integrity concerns. To build a culture intolerant to corruption, countries must foster the skills and knowledge related to integrity, and then use these acquired skills and knowledge to develop an organisational culture that is rooted in integrity. First, building knowledge and skills on integrity and anti-corruption is an essential element of a strategic approach for public integrity. Well-designed guidance and training equip public officials with the knowledge and skills needed to manage integrity issues appropriately. However, to be effective, three aspects are essential when designing and implementing integrity training: the timing and frequency of the training, the target audience, and the content and delivery methods. Second, an open organisational culture can only be achieved by ensuring that senior public officials are committed to public integrity and responsive to providing timely advice on relevant integrity issues, and that employees are comfortable raising ethical concerns. This is complemented by having formal reporting mechanisms that encourage and protect reporting of public integrity violations and misconduct, notably through whistleblowing practices.
3. **Making people accountable for their actions.** Integrity systems must be underpinned by sound accountability and transparency mechanisms, including effective integrity risk management and control systems, enforcement mechanisms to detect, investigate and sanction violations, and meaningful participation from stakeholders in the development, implementation and oversight of public policies.

Sources: (G20, 2011^[7]; OECD, 2016^[8]; OECD, 2017^[9]; OECD, 2020^[5]).

Fighting corruption in the public sector has been a primary issue in the MENA region. Government attitudes have shifted over the years, from acknowledging the existence of corruption practices to recognising that such practices hinder development, distort markets, and undermine legitimacy and credibility.

Their accession to international binding agreements such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), ratified between 2004 and 2009 by 20 of 22 countries and territories in the MENA

region, and the subsequent Arab Convention Against Corruption (ACAC), set the first milestone for a wave of reforms in the region.

The development and implementation of national anti-corruption strategies in several countries and territories, such as in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Qatar and Tunisia, also marked a significant acceleration in efforts to promote whole-of-government approaches to foster integrity and reduce corruption in the public sector. For instance, the Palestinian Authority's "National Cross-Sector Strategy for Integrity and Anti-corruption" provides a framework and roadmap structured around four main pillars, differentiating between prevention measures, social participation, law enforcement, and international cooperation (OECD, 2024^[9]; ESCWA, 2024^[10]).

Governments are increasingly developing institutional and legal frameworks in line with international standards, as well as tools and practices to improve public sector integrity and support the implementation of their whole-of-government strategies – when they exist – in line with the pillars defined in the OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity (OECD, 2017^[6]; ESCWA, 2024^[10]). These initiatives are presented in the following sections.

Strengthening institutional and legal frameworks could help develop coherent and comprehensive public integrity systems

First, governments in the region have adopted a series of measures aimed at upgrading their public integrity institutional and legislative frameworks (OECD, 2017^[11]).

Several governments, including Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and Qatar, established national anti-corruption agencies in the last decade to prevent, detect and investigate cases of corruption in the public and private sectors and to transmit them to the competent authorities. In most countries and territories, these agencies oversee the implementation of national anti-corruption strategies (OECD, 2024^[9]; ESCWA, 2024^[10]). Other institutional reforms include the creation of ombudsman offices in some countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco, to investigate individual citizens' complaints of mismanagement, especially by public organisations (OECD, 2017^[11]). In Jordan notably, the functions and capacity of the national Ombudsman have been strengthened by merging the office with the Anti-Corruption Commission (Kingdom of Jordan, n.d.^[12]). The implementation of whole-of-government strategies is accompanied, in some countries and territories, by the development of institutional capacities to oversee, coordinate and monitor the implementation of the strategies, such as in the Palestinian Authority (OECD, 2024^[9]).

In addition to institutional settings, MENA governments are also increasingly including new standards in civil and criminal law as well as organisational policies to guide behaviour in the public sector. This can be done through the development of codes of conduct or codes of ethics (Bacio Terracino, 2019^[13]). Codes set the standards of conduct that are expected from public officials, but also inform citizens on what to expect of public officials in conduct and attitude, and create a benchmark to assess officials' behaviours. Among other things, codes of conduct and ethics for the civil service address persistent challenges to public integrity, including conflict of interest, employment restrictions, gifts and the "Wasta" phenomenon, a practice that encompasses forms of favouritism, cronyism, nepotism and patronage.

The Palestinian Authority introduced a Code of Conduct and Ethics for the civil service in 2012, which has paved the way for equivalent initiatives in the region (OECD, 2016^[14]) including Egypt (OECD, n.d.^[15]) and Tunisia (République Tunisienne, 2014^[16]). Other countries, such as Morocco, are currently developing a code of ethics (OECD, 2023^[17]).

Ensuring stakeholder engagement through awareness-raising and capacity-building is key to developing a whole-of-society culture of public integrity

Promoting a whole-of-society approach to public integrity, encompassing the public sector but also the private sector, civil society and individuals, is essential as these actors interact with public officials and play a critical role in setting the public agenda and influencing public decisions. They therefore have a shared responsibility with the public sector to promote public integrity (OECD, 2020^[5]).

This notably requires that all relevant actors have the necessary capacities and knowledge to engage, coordinate and co-operate in the implementation of public integrity standards across the public sector and society more broadly (OECD, 2017^[6]).

Some MENA governments are already engaging relevant stakeholders in the development, regular update and implementation of their public integrity systems. In Egypt and the Palestinian Authority (see Box 4.2), the codes of conduct and ethics were developed through consultation processes involving other stakeholders, also helping build a common understanding of expected standards and values (OECD, 2016^[14]; OECD, n.d.^[18]). In Morocco, four organisations (the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises, Transparency Maroc, the Moroccan Network for the Defence of Public Goods and the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption) were involved in the preparation of the national anti-corruption strategy. The latter two organisations are also represented on the central body overseeing the strategy (OECD, 2023^[17]). MENA governments could further systematise and institutionalise the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) and other relevant stakeholders in the development of public integrity systems. Box 4.3 provides examples of how Costa Rica and Mexico engaged stakeholders in the development of their national public integrity strategies, practices that could be replicated for other public integrity mechanisms and tools.

Box 4.2. The process of preparation of the Palestinian Code of Conduct and Ethics

With a view to building more performant institutions and promoting a culture of integrity in the public sector, the Palestinian Authority commissioned the National Committee of the Code of Conduct (NCCC) to draft a code of conduct for Palestinian public officials.

In line with its Action Plan, in 2011 the NCCC drafted the Consultation Plan for the Code of Conduct. In the proposed plan, the objectives of the consultation were to:

- Receive feedback and comments from stakeholders.
- Create a positive and constructive attitude towards the code.
- Involve the largest possible number of stakeholders and the entire public administration and political level.

The General Personnel Council led the consultation process and, on 11 January 2012, an open Information Day was held with the purpose to bring key stakeholders together and inform them about the planned consultation process on the draft code. During the event, the consultation plan was presented and the draft code introduced. Representatives from ministries, other public agencies, civil society organisations and the academia committed their participation and provided their input.

According to the Action Plan of the NCCC, five initial workshops were scheduled in January-February 2012. Each aimed to involve a different group of stakeholders to initiate a cascade process of consultation inside each group. This was then followed by independent meetings and workshops organised directly by such groups, which collected comments and reverted back to the NCCC. It was the first comprehensive and well-structured consultation process in the Palestinian Authority that met internationally recognised good practices.

The consultations achieved high and diverse representation of government agencies, civil society organisations, university students, union and syndicate representatives, academics and experts. The events attracted a great deal of interest, in particular because they afforded a not so usual opportunity to be involved in such a process. Participants received the draft code well in advance, which allowed them to prepare and engage in genuine participation. This prompted a wealth of substantial feedback. The consultations were documented and institutionalised with members of the NCCC.

Eventually, the text of the Code of Conduct and Ethics of Public Service Code was finalised and the Council of Ministers adopted the document in 2012.

Source: (OECD, 2016^[14]).

Box 4.3. The engagement of Civil Society Organisations and other relevant stakeholders in the development of public integrity systems in Costa Rica and Mexico

Costa Rica's National Integrity and Corruption Prevention Strategy (*Estrategia Nacional de Integridad y Prevención de la Corrupción*, ENIPC) was launched in August 2021. Between October 2019 and December 2020, the Attorney for Public Ethics (*Procuraduría de la Ética Pública*, PEP) and Costa Rica Íntegra (the national chapter of Transparency International) jointly led the development of the ENIPC through a participative process involving civil society, academia and the private sector. The ENIPC was prepared through a co-creation process in a working group made up of 17 public, private, academic and civil society organisations. Amongst others, the working group steered a public consultation process, in which 350 responses were received from citizens, and which was complemented with focus groups of selected specialists by sectors (business, academia, civil society and government). Stakeholders of the ENIPC consider the working group as an achievement in itself, as it de facto constitutes an inter-institutional co-ordination and monitoring mechanism, with a diversity of actors and responsibilities that previously never met in such a co-ordinated and constructive way.

In Mexico, the National Anticorruption Policy (*Política Nacional Anticorrupción*) was developed through a participative process and discussion involving civil society, academia, business chambers, public institutions and experts from all over the country.

- First, a Consultative Council (*Consejo Consultivo de la Política Nacional Anticorrupción*) was established by the National Anti-Corruption System (*Sistema Nacional Anticorrupción*, SNA)'s Citizen Committee and Executive Secretariat to collect inputs from and promote dialogue with experts from civil society organisations, academia, the business sector, public institutions (including at the sub-national level) and international organisations.
- Second, a parallel public consultation process collected citizens' opinions and perceptions related to the causes and effects of and possible solutions to the problem of corruption in Mexico (*Consulta Ciudadana*).
- Third, the consultation process involved the sub-national level, with eight regional forums organised throughout the country to include local needs and challenges in the development of national policy.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[5]).

Governments also implement initiatives, often in co-operation with other actors, to raise awareness and introduce more public and private players to public integrity practices and corruption risks, using a diversity of formats and channels. In Egypt, the National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (NIGSD)² developed a training curriculum on anti-corruption aimed at diverse stakeholders (OECD, n.d.^[15]). The Jordanian government organised different awareness-raising campaigns targeting citizens. For instance, during 2021 and 2022, over 2 million SMS messages about the danger of nepotism and its negative impact to society were sent to different segments of the population via a partnership with the private sector and CSOs (OECD, n.d.^[19]). Specific efforts to support the implementation of the National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy targeted young people, including the campaign “I am against Bribery” (Box 4.4) and the organisation of awareness-raising workshops and lectures within selected youth centres (OECD, n.d.^[20]). In Morocco, the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM) also organises awareness-raising workshops and exchanges of best practice between companies (OECD, 2023^[17]). In Tunisia, the National Anti-Corruption Commission had set up a web radio station, Radio Nazaha, to raise awareness and promote citizen participation in the fight against corruption (OECD, 2023^[21]). The organisation *iWatch* has also been particularly instrumental in promoting public integrity across the country (Box 4.5).

Box 4.4. The “I am Against Bribery” Campaign to support awareness raising on public integrity and corruption in Jordan

The campaign “I am Against Bribery” was organised by the Jordanian Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission (JIACC) in collaboration with the civil society organisation Palladium and various universities in Jordan. For a month, the campaign promoted integrity standards and raised awareness about the dangers of nepotism and bribery. Slogans were designed to target young people specifically via JIACC’s website and social media platforms, accompanied by outreach efforts via government websites. Slogans, posters and other communication material to support the campaign were developed together with 15 students from 12 government and private universities. Examples of the slogans included:

- “Wasta is an assault on the rights of others, so let’s work together to combat this scourge.”
- “Nepotism and Wasta are two sides of the same crime, so let’s work together to fight this disease.”
- “Defend the future of your children and say no to nepotism and Wasta.”
- “Nepotism and Wasta violate the values of justice, equality, and equal opportunities, so don’t be a part of it.”

Source: (OECD, n.d.^[20]).

Box 4.5. The key role of *iWatch* to fight corruption and promote public integrity in Tunisia

iWatch is a Tunisian non-profit, independent watchdog organisation that aims to combat financial and administrative corruption and enhance transparency. iWatch became the official contact point for Transparency International in Tunisia in November 2013, and has been its official branch since 2017.

The organisation was established by a group of young men and women from different regions of the country with the aim of preserving the gains of the Revolution.

iWatch works mainly on transparency and corruption. In the first area, it works to ensure that all political events are transparent including pre- and postelection monitoring. It also seeks to facilitate access to information. In the second area, believing that corruption is one of the reasons behind the Revolution, the organisation fights corruption all over the country.

To promote citizen engagement in combatting corruption, iWatch established the “Whistleblower of the Year” award. Together with other equivalent initiatives organised over the past years, it has thought to honour the men and women who have denounced cases of corruption. They report instances of injustice or illegality, often related to corruption, in ministries, private enterprises, and even civil society organisations.

Source: (OECD, 2016^[22]; iWatch, n.d.^[23]).

Finally, some governments also engage with the private sector and civil society to support mainstreaming integrity in business and in non-profit activities. The NIGSD in Egypt is currently drafting a code of ethics for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (OECD, n.d.^[15]). In Morocco, the National Authority for Probity, Prevention and the Fight against Corruption is helping to establish a culture of risk management by encouraging public and private authorities, through various partnerships, to adopt internal control mechanisms (OECD, 2023^[17]).

To pursue efforts undertaken, MENA governments could further develop awareness-raising and capacity-building campaigns and programmes for different stakeholders (private sector, CSOs, citizens with a specific focus on young people and kids, etc.) to foster a whole-of-society culture of public integrity. Regarding awareness campaigns, governments could diversify the formats and channels from traditional media (radio, television, print) to new forms of social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) in order to increase their reach and impact on all segments of society. Ecuador and Peru have for instance implemented large-scale awareness campaigns to inspire cultural change and help prevent acts of corruption, as highlighted in Box 4.6.

Box 4.6. Awareness campaigns to foster a whole-of-society culture of public integrity in Ecuador and Peru

“Creole Honesty” (Honestidad Criolla) campaign in Ecuador

On 9 December 2019, the International Chamber of Commerce, through its Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission, launched the “Honestidad Criolla” campaign with the aim of promoting a cultural change in Ecuadorian society and preventing acts of corruption. The campaign, which includes a YouTube video, seeks to reach Ecuadorians with a positive message to promote a change in citizens’ behaviour and to stop normalising acts that are wrong, such as petty corruption and bad actions. The video presents citizens who, given the choice to act contrary to integrity – for example, by buying pirated films, plagiarising publications or accepting bribes –, decide to act honestly and contribute to change.

The High-Level Commission Against Corruption #Peruanosdeverdad Campaign in Peru

The High-Level Commission against Corruption (CAN) in Peru launched the campaign #PeruviansForReal (*#Peruanosdeverdad*) in 2016 as part of its integrity strategy. The campaign, which includes a YouTube video, aims to counteract the norms that undermine the integrity of Peruvian society by providing new, positive norms to promote change. The video begins with a series of integrity breaches, ranging from paying bribes to breaking traffic rules, to other forms of civil disruption such as assault and petty theft. The statement, “The change that Peru needs begins with oneself”, follows the images. Citizens are then seen with messages for integrity, including *#PeruviansForReal: comply with the law*, and *#PeruviansForReal: we don’t pay bribes*. Citizens of all ages are included in the video, and a Peruvian footballer delivers the final message: “How can we expect the authorities to act with integrity and make the country better when we do not do those things ourselves?”

Source: (OECD, n.d._[19]).

Governments in the MENA region could further reinforce internal and external accountability mechanisms

Another pillar for developing a comprehensive approach to public integrity places emphasis on effective accountability. Managing, monitoring and scrutinising the development, implementation and review of commitments made by the public sector contributes to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of public services, as well as the regularity of public spending. This includes risk management, internal controls, and internal and external oversight, as well as participation by external stakeholders (OECD, 2020_[5]).

As highlighted in Chapter 3, a first area of efforts for several governments in the MENA region concerns the development of internal control, audit and risk management mechanisms to align with international standards (OECD, 2017_[11]).

Several countries and territories developed strong internal institutional settings for audit functions. For instance, in Morocco, control activities are entrusted to the *Inspection Générale des Finances*, a centralised financial inspection function with a governmental mandate to monitor and control expenditure and the proper use of public funds, together with the General Treasury of the Kingdom (OECD, 2023_[17]). The Tunisian internal institutional framework features the Controller-General for Finance (under the Ministry of Finances), the Controller-General for Public Departments (under the Presidency of Government) and the Controller-General for State Property and Land Affairs (under the Ministry of State Domains and Land Affairs). Each of these has an important anti-corruption role, as they exert ex-post control on the institutions and agencies under the tutelage of these ministries (OECD, 2017_[11]). Jordan is

also strengthening its audit framework, especially independent oversight functions, through the introduction of an internal audit function and the continued strengthening of the Audit Bureau (OECD, n.d.^[19]). In 2018, Egypt established the internal audit function in all public bodies through the Decree of the Prime Minister 1146/2018, and since then the authorities have availed of donor support to enhance institutional capacities in internal audit.

In some countries and territories, the establishment of an institutional framework to ensure the audit and control functions of the government is complemented by initiatives to enhance accountability across the government and administration. In Morocco, the *Inspection Générale des Finances* is developing follow-up matrices for its recommendations and is actively designing a new internal audit and control manual for wider use among government ministries and agencies (OECD, 2023^[17]). In Tunisia, the High Committee for Administrative and Financial Control ensures that the audit recommendations are implemented. Building on existing efforts, governments could further promote harmonised and unified approaches to internal control and internal audit across government to enable a coherent response to integrity risks. This could be done for instance by setting clear responsibilities for audit institutions and a reference framework, procedures and tools as well as capacity-building activities for implementing internal control in the ministerial departments (OECD, 2023^[17]; OECD, 2017^[11]).

Similarly, governments could develop more systematic approaches to managing and assessing risks, including integrity risks in the public sector. A number of governments started implementing initiatives and mechanisms to evaluate corruption. In Morocco, the *Inspection Générale des Finances* has previously led an initiative to harmonise the methodological framework for risk assessment in select ministries (OECD, 2023^[17]). Jordan is in the early stages of implementing integrity risk management. All ministries and departments are required to have a Quality and Risk management unit, and the Jordanian Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission (JIACC) has undertaken since 2020 to conduct risk assessments relating to corruption in the public sector (OECD, n.d.^[19]).

However, MENA governments have overall not yet implemented integrated approaches to risk management at the government level, which is essential for risk management to be effective (OECD, n.d.^[19]; OECD, 2023^[17]). Effectively implementing internal control and audit requires a clear allocation of responsibilities, as well as capacity-building across government institutions. It could also entail codifying risk management practices into management processes but also policies and tools such as an integrated risk management policy, a framework outlining key principles of risk management and accompanying guidance providing practical advice on operationalising the principles of the framework.

In addition to the gradual development of internal audit, control and risk management mechanisms, MENA governments have been increasingly recognising and reinforcing the role of citizens and civil society in maintaining external accountability pressure on their government to promote public integrity and reduce corruption.

This key role is increasingly highlighted in national anti-corruption strategies, that also emphasise in some cases the need to strengthen the oversight function of the media and to establish independent, external and effective oversight mechanisms for all public institutions (OECD, 2024^[9]).

As a result, MENA governments have developed diverse tools and mechanisms for citizens and other actors to report acts of corruption. For instance, in Morocco, as part of the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, the Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office set up a hotline for reporting acts of corruption in May 2018. Calls are handled by a special centre staffed by two Ministry officials who are in contact with judges. The hotline has recorded over 60 000 calls in the first three years of operation. However, it is to note that only 20% of calls received are related to acts of fraud or corruption, the large majority concerning general complaints from citizens regarding public services. Nevertheless, the hotline has led to over 200 arrests related to corruption, in co-ordination with the competent public prosecutors' offices. To promote the use of the hotline and other tools developed to fight corruption, the Moroccan

government launched an awareness campaign, encouraging citizens to denounce instances of corruption, through radio and television commercials (OECD, 2023^[17]).

As part of efforts to improve government transparency and public service performance, some MENA governments have developed online portals allowing citizens to submit suggestions and complaints about public services and the general administration, including acts of corruption and other breaches to public integrity.

The essential role of whistleblowers in ensuring the integrity of public administrations is also increasingly recognised in law by MENA governments. In Morocco, article 42 of the Code of Criminal Procedure mandates civil servants to report acts of corruption (OECD, 2023^[17]). In doing so, they are protected by laws on the protection of whistleblowers and their anonymity.

However, in many countries and territories, when they exist, reporting mechanisms are often limited to mail, emails and telephone, which do not guarantee basic requirements such as confidentiality and the possibility to report safely. MENA governments could develop online platforms enabling citizens and other stakeholders to report corruption acts safely, as it is the case in Austria (Box 4.7). Governments should further enhance communication efforts on the various means available to citizens and other stakeholders to report incidents to the competent authorities.

Box 4.7. The Austrian government developed a portal for reporting corruption

In 2013, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice launched a portal to enable individuals to report wrongdoing. The portal can also be accessed via a link on the homepage of the Federal Ministry of Justice, where individuals can find and download additional information about the portal. The portal is managed by the Central Office of the Public Prosecutor for Combating Economic Crime and Corruption (COPPCECC).

To guarantee anonymity, when creating a secure mailbox, the whistleblower is required to choose a pseudonym/username and password. The anonymity of the information disclosed is preserved through encryption and other security procedures. After submission, the COPPCECC provides the whistleblower with feedback and the status of the disclosure via a secure mailbox. If questions need to be clarified about the case, they are addressed to the whistleblower via an anonymous dialogue. These verified reports may lead to the opening of investigations or raise concrete suspicions requiring the opening of preliminary investigations.

Source: (OECD, 2023^[17]).

Moreover, despite progress made and the existence of many initiatives led by CSOs to keep governments accountable, CSOs still suffer from limited space to promote public integrity and address issues of corruption in the majority of MENA countries and territories, as also highlighted in Chapter 1 (Transparency International, 2024^[24]). Governments could therefore further encourage the development of an enabling environment for the civil society, media but also citizens to operate as “watchdogs” and keep governments accountable (OECD, 2020^[5]).

Strong and transparent public procurement systems can support better delivery on essential public services

Public procurement is critical to the delivery of public services (health, education, or infrastructure among others) and ensure the proper functioning of the public sector. The COVID-19 pandemic showed the

importance of public procurement, especially in the MENA region where governments had to make considerable investments in the health care sector (OECD, 2020^[25]). The COVID-19 crisis management also highlighted existing challenges in the way governments plan and conduct procurement at different levels, as well as manage their ongoing contracts, not only for health products and services, but also for the goods, services and infrastructure needed to provide essential public services (OECD, 2016^[26]).

The OECD Recommendation on Public Procurement (2015^[27]) stresses the importance of developing and ensuring the implementation of procurement systems that are honest, transparent, sustainable, efficient, accountable, offer an equitable access to public procurement opportunities and fair treatment for potential suppliers of all sizes and trusted by investors, citizens and other stakeholders. Value for money remains a fundamental principle of public procurement, as also highlighted in the Recommendation on the Governance of Infrastructure (OECD, 2020^[28]). Public procurement has moreover evolved to encompass a wider range of considerations such as environmental, economic and social aspects, in line with the growing importance given to growing sustainably.

The weight of public procurement is comparatively large in MENA economies: it amounts to about 18% of GDP on average, as opposed to an average of 12.9% across the OECD area (OECD, 2023^[29]; Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]). This can have an impact on the vulnerability of procurement cycles of MENA governments to public integrity violations, due to the complexity, volume and speed of transactions between sectors. Beyond risks related to fraud, corruption or misuse of public funds, there are other risks to the efficiency and the effectiveness of public procurement, such as the risk of waste or inefficiency across the procurement cycle, due to a lack of awareness or low technical capacity related to complex projects. Financial risk, particularly during times of fiscal constraint and austerity, is another significant risk category.

In response to these identified challenges, MENA governments have modernised their public procurements frameworks in recent years. Efforts focused notably on upgrading institutional, legal and policy frameworks as well as enhancing the transparency, accessibility and sustainability of procurement processes and decisions.

Further strengthening governance frameworks for public procurement would improve its effectiveness and transparency

Throughout the past decade, MENA governments have been actively reviewing and upgrading the legal, institutional and policy frameworks governing national public procurement policies towards more transparency, efficiency and participation (Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]). Table 4.1 provides an overview of legal and regulatory measures introduced by select MENA governments to strengthen their public procurement frameworks (OECD, 2016^[26]).

Table 4.1. Most MENA governments have upgraded their legal and regulatory frameworks on public procurement in the last decade

Legal framework and applicable public procurement laws in select MENA countries

Country	Applicable legislation	Number and/or year	Name and scope	Main procurement law	Last reform
Algeria	Law	No. 23-12 of 2023	Law setting out the general rules governing public contracts. National Scope	✓	Replaces Presidential Decree No. 15-257, 2015
Egypt	Decree	No. 33,2010	Introduction of electronic means in public procurement		
	Law	No. 182 of 2018	Regulating Contracts Entered by Public Entities	✓	
	Law	2018	Bids and Tenders		Replacing the Bids and Tenders Law No. 89 of 1998
Jordan	Supplies Act	No. 32, 1993	Goods and services (covers governmental entities under budget law)	There is no unified central procurement law applicable to all government	Recently prepared draft of unified legislation
	Joint procurement by law	No. 91, 2002	For medicine and medical supplies		
	Law	No. 71, 1986	Public works and services		
	Instructions	No. 1, 2008	Regulation of tendering procedures and participating conditions		
Lebanon	Law	2021	Public Procurement	✓	
Libya	Regulation	No. 563, 2007	Administrations contracts (central and regional contracts)	✓	
Morocco	Decree	No. 2-22-431, 2023	Public procurement National Scope	✓	Replaces Decree No. 2-12-349, 2013
Saudi Arabia	Law	2019 (latest amendments in 2024)	Government Tenders and Procurement	✓	
Tunisia	Law	No. 73-81, 1973	Public accounting code		
	Law	No. 89 -9, 1989	Institutions and public enterprises		
	Decree	No. 1039, 2014	Public procurement National Scope	✓	
United Arab Emirates	Law	No. 4 of 2019	Procurement, supply contracts,	✓	

Country	Applicable legislation	Number and/or year	Name and scope	Main procurement law	Last reform
			works and the provision of services performed by the government, ministries or government-affiliated federal entities		
Yemen	Law	No. 23, 2007	Public procurement	✓	Draft amendment under way
	Regulations	2009	Executive regulations		

Source: (OECD, 2016^[26]; United Nations, 2019^[31]; Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]; ESCWA, 2024^[10]).

The legal review and consolidation was complemented by the establishment of institutional arrangements to oversee public procurement in some countries, such as Egypt, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia (Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]). In the latter case, the National Observatory of Public Procurement was created to evaluate the national public procurement system, as presented in Box 4.8.

Box 4.8. The National Observatory of Public Procurement in Tunisia

The National Observatory of Public Procurement (NOPP - *Observatoire National des Marchés Publics* in French) in Tunisia is responsible for many evaluation tasks, including:

- Maintaining a register of information on the suppliers of public contracts based on the follow-up sheets established by the public buyer after the execution of each public contract.
- Establishing an information system to collect, process and analyse data relating to public contracts and public procurement in general, and allowing the establishment of statistics on the number of contracts awarded according to subject matter, geographical distribution, contracting authority, method of award and any other criteria, including contracts awarded to small businesses.
- Establishing an annual general census of public procurement and partial censuses concerning a group of public entities or a particular category of procurement.
- Developing summary files for each supplier based on updated and accurate data integrated in the information register.

Within the framework of this mandate, all public purchasers are required to periodically transmit to the NOPP the data necessary for the statistics and the information system, in accordance with the models and procedures established by the government.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[32]).

Although procurement systems are improving in most MENA countries and territories, challenges remain in the implementation of fully operational public procurement frameworks. In many MENA countries and territories, the regulatory framework governing public procurement remains complex and opaque because of the insufficient level of legislative simplification and codification so far. Moreover, a number of them do not have a public procurement authority or body to oversee public procurement, and co-ordination mechanisms remain limited when they exist (Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]).

In line with efforts undertaken by some of them, governments could pursue the development of legal and institutional frameworks for public procurement. This also implies reinforcing horizontal and vertical co-ordination across sectors and levels of government (OECD, 2024^[33]).

MENA governments could also envisage developing integrated strategic visions for public investment, particularly in infrastructure. Most major investments around the world involve private sector participation at many stages of the investment lifecycle. Through this strategic vision, the private sector can rely on a steady, predictable and reliable pipeline of projects to invest in the necessary personnel with high-quality skills and capabilities, facilities and equipment. This vision can be translated into an investment plan or other politically-approved document that requires concrete action in terms of infrastructure provision over the long-term (e.g. more than five years). Box 4.9 provides examples of strategic visions for public investment in Bulgaria, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Box 4.9. The strategic vision for public investment in OECD Member and partner countries

Bulgaria: 2022-2024 Action Plan for the Bulgaria 2030 Programme

The Bulgaria 2030 programme is based on three-year action plans, with the current plan covering the period 2022-2024. These plans list the programmes and projects that will deliver the 2030 objectives and priorities. To ensure the alignment of Bulgaria 2030 and the action plans, as well as co-ordination between sectors, the action plans are approved by the Development Council of the Council of Ministers, which is made up of all the ministers concerned. Each ministry is required to demonstrate that their investments are in line with the Bulgaria 2030 Programme.

Ireland: The National Development Plan (NDP) for 2021-2030

The revised NDP sets out the ten-year investment ceilings to 2030 that will support economic, social, environmental and cultural growth across the country as part of the Ireland 2040 project, alongside the National Planning Framework (NPF) which sets out the overall spatial strategy for the country.

The alignment of the NDP and the NPF under the Ireland 2040 project creates a unified and coherent plan for the country by ensuring that the national investment strategy supports spatial planning based on a common set of strategic objectives for rural, regional and urban development.

United Kingdom: National Infrastructure Assessment

Every five years, the National Infrastructure Commission publishes a National Infrastructure Assessment. Each assessment analyses the UK's long-term economic infrastructure needs, setting out a strategic vision for the next thirty years and making recommendations on how to meet the needs identified.

Source: (OECD, 2024^[33]).

MENA governments are increasingly reinforcing tools and practices to enhance the transparency, accessibility and sustainability of procurement processes and decisions

Reforms in the MENA region focus in particular on improving the transparency, accessibility and inclusiveness of public procurement systems to support their efficiency and sustainability.

Although direct award and limited procedures can be used in specific cases, open procurement procedures are now the general rule in MENA countries and territories. As of 2023, most of them (including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia) had a regulatory framework requiring public

tenders information to be public and advertised in a national gazette or a widely circulated newspaper, as well as on central web portals with varying degrees of accessibility to relevant information (Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]). Other initiatives to improve the efficiency and inclusiveness of procurement processes include broadening the basis of eligible tenderers and pursuing multiple objectives. Governments are increasingly considering the “balancing principle” encouraging the inclusion of complementary policy objectives such as small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development in public procurement processes. For example, Morocco and Tunisia set aside 20% of the annual estimated value of public procurement to SMEs in order to encourage their participation in procurement processes, while in Egypt the government allows direct agreements with SMEs, as an exception to competitive tendering (OECD, 2016^[26]).

An important area of progress in the last years in the region has been the increasing introduction of digital tools and processes for public procurement at national and local levels. If, in some countries and territories, the websites only provide information on government tenders and their awards, in others, they are comprehensive e-procurement platforms allowing bidders to apply directly to tenders, such as in Morocco. In Tunisia, for example, the platform TUNEPS was introduced in 2013 and allows certain automated procedures, thereby reducing the risk of corruption stemming from direct contact between public officials and contractors. It also provides a list of enterprises approved to provide services and goods for the public sector. TUNEPS has evolved at a rapid pace since the project launched in 2011. After a few years of pilots and progressive use, the Tunisian law made e-procurement mandatory for all entities in 2019, including municipalities. This provision is unique in the region with respect to e-procurement (OECD, 2020^[34]).

At the local level, the Greater Amman Municipality in Jordan launched an updated e-tenders platform in 2019 (Greater Amman Municipality, n.d.^[35]). The platform lists all local and international procurement opportunities and bid applications for municipal projects and contracts. It aims to manage and control the procedures governing tenders with full transparency, and to provide bidders with fair and equal opportunities. All municipal tenders are now submitted electronically. All information regarding the tenders is published on the website, including announcements and annexes, results of open tenders and prior tenders, technical qualifications of bidders, and appointment decisions. Bidders or their representatives are allowed to attend the public bid opening sessions held by the directorate.

Finally, MENA governments have invested in developing guidelines and building professional procurement capacities across public administration to ensure high standards of effectiveness and integrity (Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]). Most MENA governments offer procurement trainings to civil servants. They developed guidelines and codes of conduct for procurement officials, such as in Egypt, Morocco and Yemen (OECD, 2016^[26]). The OECD also contributed to such capacity-building initiatives in a number of MENA countries and territories in recent years, as highlighted in Box 4.10.

Box 4.10. The OECD supported MENA governments in building capacities for effective and transparent public procurement processes

The OECD assisted MENA governments in issuing dedicated guides and manuals on concepts, tools and good practices for the public procurement cycle. Among these tools can be mentioned:

- Guide des marchés publics – République algérienne démocratique et populaire (2021)
- Guide de management des risques dans les marchés publics en Tunisie (2020)
- Guide sur l'intégrité dans les marchés publics au Maroc (2019)

Source: (OECD, n.d.^[36]).

Efforts to further strengthen the transparency, accessibility and inclusiveness of public procurement systems could be pursued. One area of opportunity for such reforms concerns the participation of State-

Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the dedicated processes. In most MENA countries and territories, public procurement processes favour the participation of national companies in public tenders, limiting the ability for the private sector to benefit from public procurement opportunities and making governments vulnerable to instances of fraud and corruption (Ali, Jabbourt and Sahaydachny, n.d.^[37]; Giada Modaffari, 2023^[30]).

Moreover, in some countries and territories, the regulatory framework for the implementation of e-procurement systems remains incomplete (OECD, 2019^[38]). As a result, economic operators often still need to go through expert intermediaries, which may constitute a disproportionate burden for many businesses, especially SMEs. In addition, such platforms and databases, when they exist, are not always freely accessible, updated in a timely way, or user-friendly, preventing full and transparent access to procurement opportunities (OECD, 2020^[34]).

Governments in the region could also further strengthen their accountability and control mechanisms to timely and decisively prevent and detect irregularities, mismanagement and unethical practices. Multi-stakeholder oversight initiatives and institutions could also be further promoted. Systems of transparent, effective, and enforceable sanctions for government and private sector procurement participants could be strengthened. Finally, additional efforts could be made to improve the professionalisation of relevant civil servants across the entire procurement cycle.

Public procurement as a tool to promote sustainable prosperity

By providing governments with opportunities to give preference to specific goods, works and services, public procurement has the potential to be a strategic lever to pursue policy objectives and long-term development goals (OECD, 2015^[27]). The introduction of green public procurement (GPP) can help governments prioritise less environmentally damaging products, works and services, especially infrastructure, contribute to foster green growth, and deliver for climate and environment-related objectives. It further contributes to spur innovation and promote more resilient economies and societies against climate and environmental challenges (OECD, 2015^[39]). In line with their efforts to improve their public procurement systems and to integrate long-term development objectives in all areas of society and economy, a number of MENA countries and territories, such as Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, the UAE and Yemen, have started to use GPP across all levels of governments. Morocco and Tunisia encourage green procurement through decrees on public procurement. In Tunisia more specifically, tender specification takes into account not only environmental considerations, but also more broadly social aspects in line with long-term development objectives (OECD, 2016^[26]).

Some governments have also developed procedural guidelines to promote sustainable procurement practices. This is the case in the UAE, where the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah launched in 2020 a Green Public Procurement programme. In this framework, guidelines were developed and established criteria for procurement of frequently purchased product categories, such as paper, furniture, light vehicles, air conditioning, household appliances, carpets, IT equipment and others (Government of Ras Al Khaimah, 2022^[40]). Government entities were invited to follow these guidelines on a voluntary basis. In 2022, the initiative expanded and now includes items with high environmental impact such as buildings.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that, in most MENA countries and territories, the application of GPP provisions and practices is still being structured. Governments could further better embed rules and standards in tender processes to help promote innovation and sustainability in public procurement. Governments could also create incentives for achieving net zero digital emissions, for example by selecting and endorsing environmentally responsible suppliers and by promoting public-private collaboration to identify and endorse environment-friendly digital technologies that help achieve the green transition.

More largely, MENA governments could envisage the development of GPP strategies and frameworks. Results from the OECD 2022 survey on GPP, carried out in 38 countries, show that countries increasingly

recognise GPP as a major driver for innovation. As of 2022, 92% of the surveyed countries (35 out of 38) had adopted a national GPP or policy framework, and 29 of them referred to GPP, or at least to public procurement, in their national environmental commitments as a tool for pursuing sustainability goals (OECD, 2024^[41]). Monitoring the implementation of GPP against national targets is key to ensure public procurement contributes to the country's sustainability goals and climate commitments. It can also help identifying barriers and bottlenecks that hinder GPP potentials and limit its uptake by contracting authorities. In 2022, around 76% of the countries participating in the survey had put in place monitoring systems to keep track of the use of GPP in public tenders. However, not all of them make it mandatory for contracting authorities to report on the use of GPP in procurement procedures (OECD, 2024^[41]).

It is also important to note that public procurement can be used as a lever to promote gender equality and encourage suppliers to improve their performance on gender equality and women's empowerment. While a number of governments have policies and regulations to stimulate gender-sensitive public procurement, the implementation of these practices remains limited, mainly due to a lack of knowledge, data and institutionalised mechanisms (OECD, 2021^[42]). This could represent an area of opportunity for MENA governments.

Digital government reforms as a driver for better public service delivery and user experience

Digital government can serve as a powerful driver towards improving service design and delivery. As highlighted in the OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies (2014^[43]), it contributes to achieving greater transparency and accessibility, but could also enhance stakeholder engagement in designing and delivering more responsive and inclusive services. In turn, it also helps enhancing sound government spending and ultimately improving trust in government (OECD, 2020^[44]). The COVID-19 crisis further underscored the important role of digital government in responding swiftly to rapidly evolving crises and environment, ensuring continuity of services and accurate information-sharing and data with the public. It also highlighted the role of digital government in supporting rebuilding more resilient societies and economies, which is essential to foster sustainable growth (OECD, 2020^[45]).

Building the capacity and capability to design and deliver public services effectively in the digital age, while integrating emerging and evolving technologies such as artificial intelligence, calls for the development of more agile delivery approaches within the public sector to make it adaptable to rapidly evolving contexts (OECD, 2024^[46]). As a result, it requires flexible design, decision-making and delivery techniques, not only into taking account technological considerations, but also human needs and experiences (OECD, 2019^[47]). One key objective in developing a digital government is to renew the interactions and relationships that the public sector has with citizens, the civil society and the private sector, from being one-directional and transactional to being collaborative and consensus-building (OECD, 2020^[44]; OECD, 2019^[48]; OECD, 2020^[49]).

Legal, policy, institutional, technical and cultural changes within the public sector are needed to manage the use of digital technologies and data inclusively, equitably, sustainably and in a trustworthy manner (OECD, 2021^[50]).

The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework (2020^[44]) sets a new way of thinking, approaching, engineering, and transforming the design and delivery of public services. It aims to help governments identify key determinants for the transition towards digital maturity. The framework advises governments to reconsider digital technologies as transformative elements to be embedded throughout policy processes rather than just technical tools. This move to a digital government also involves creating frameworks and mechanisms to ensure that the government is 1) digital by design, 2) data-driven and 3) yet also operating as a platform, 4) open by default, 5) user-driven and 6) proactive (2020^[44]).

Evolution of legal, policy and institutional arrangements to drive digital transformation in the MENA region

To support governments in better delivering public services, it is needed to engage in a government-wide digital transformation in a coherent and inclusive manner. Digital government strategies, with solid governance, can enable governments to strengthen their ability to design and deliver public services that meet changing demands and user expectation in a swifter, cost-saving and more inclusive way. They can also improve performance in public spending and reduce the risk of security vulnerabilities, as well as support administrative simplification by streamlining government operations and reducing transaction costs (OECD, 2012^[51]).

MENA governments have recognised the potential of digital government, improved digital connectivity, established basic digital infrastructure and used information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance the efficiency of public services (OECD, 2017^[52]). At the international level, Egypt and Morocco have, for instance, adhered to the OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies (OECD, 2014^[43]). At the national level, governments are increasingly developing frameworks, tools and practices as part of their efforts to implement digital government. These initiatives are presented in the following sections.

Moreover, most MENA governments have implemented – and updated – digital government strategies over the last decade, including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, albeit not all with comprehensive policy objectives and a multi-sectoral scope. These strategies recognise the contribution of digitalisation to reforming public administration and modernising the public sector to reach sustainable growth objectives. In the Palestinian Authority for instance, the digital transformation of the public administration has been identified as a priority for reform (OECD, 2017^[52]; OECD, 2023^[17]; OECD, n.d.^[18]; OECD, n.d.^[20]; ESCWA, 2024^[10]; OECD, 2024^[9]). In 2021, the Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology presented the "Technology and Public Administration Strategy 2021-2023", which offers a framework and a roadmap for advancing the Palestinian Authority's technological infrastructure and enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the public administration (OECD, 2024^[9]). In Egypt, the "Digital Egypt Strategy", led by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, aims at digitalising key public services, consolidating digital infrastructure in the public sector, and developing the "Digital Egypt" online government platform (OECD, n.d.^[18]).

Governments in the MENA region, as in the rest of the world, acknowledge the importance of developing approaches to digital transformation that encompass all areas of life and economy and not just the modernisation of the public administration. Digitalisation of government is increasingly reflected in national visions as a key enabler to achieve the long-term development of the country or territory, such as in the Egypt Vision 2030 (OECD, n.d.^[18]). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's National Transformation Programme, one of the plans aimed at implementing the long-term objectives of the country's Vision 2030, includes initiatives aimed at incubating digital technologies into various aspects of the country's economy, society and government, ensuring a development in the technological strategies adopted by governmental entities (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.^[53]). In Morocco, to deliver on the long-term strategic priorities identified in the New Development Model and the Governmental Programme, the Ministry of Digital Transformation and Administrative Reform has developed a whole-of-government approach and strategy to digital transformation in addition to the development of a roadmap to support the digitalisation of public administration as a key policy priority. Consultations with governmental actors and other stakeholders were part of this process (OECD, 2023^[17]).

To effectively implement their digital government strategies, MENA governments also regularly update related legislations and regulations as well as their internal practices (OECD, 2017^[52]). For instance, with the support of the OECD and based on the recommendations developed in the Digital Government Review (OECD, 2018^[54]), the Moroccan government has worked on standards to implement citizen-driven public service design and delivery across the public sector, as presented in Box 4.11.

Box 4.11. Morocco's draft public service design and delivery standards

1. Understand the needs and experiences of users of public services.
2. Involve users and all stakeholders in the design and delivery of public services.
3. Ensure openness and transparency towards users during the design and delivery of services.
4. Ensure that the use of digital tools and data by public administrations ensures and strengthens user confidence.
5. Be ambitious in the use of digital tools and data for the transformation of public services.
6. Implement a transversal omni-channel digital strategy to guarantee that users will always have access to a perfectly coherent, integrated and high-quality service.
7. Create conditions in public administrations that help civil servants to design and deliver high-quality public services.
8. Encourage public sector teams and their external providers to follow a consistent methodology for delivering public services to users.
9. Organise an ecosystem of tools, practices, and resources that can enable teams to perform high-quality work at scale and pace.
10. Consider data as a strategic asset as the basis of the transformation of public administrations.

Source: An output of the "Support for the implementation of the OECD Digital Government Review of Morocco (2018) recommendations: Development of digital government standards and guidelines" project under the framework of the Morocco Country Programme: Phase II.

A number of governments from the region have institutionalised at the highest level efforts to lead digital transformation in their society and economy. They have created dedicated digital government authorities or departments to ensure a coordinated whole-of-government approach in the uptake and use of digital technologies and data. In Morocco, digital transformation was integrated as one of the main topics of a ministerial department in 2021, giving the topic an unprecedented scope and priority (OECD, 2023^[17]). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established a Digital Government Authority in 2021, following the launch of the national digital strategy. The Authority is in charge of regulating digital government across government agencies, but also of preparing and overseeing the implementation of the national strategy for digital government, in line with the national long-term development vision (Mourtada et al., 2022^[55]).

In line with recent efforts, governments could pursue the consolidation and implementation of legal and policy frameworks, as well as institutional settings for digital government. Indeed, governments often share the challenge to embrace digital technology throughout the whole policy cycle and service lifecycle and equip public sector appropriately. In that regard, legal and regulatory hurdles are often cited as one of the biggest obstacles to cultural change, which continue to limit the emergence of a digital culture in government (OECD, 2017^[52]; World Economic Forum, 2017^[56]).

Digital technologies enable the delivery of services that are more responsive to citizens and businesses' demands

Digital reforms in the MENA region also focused specifically on developing tools and practices to improve the effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of public services.

A major area of efforts across all levels of government in the MENA region is the development of digital platforms and channels to handle business-related administrative procedures, including one-stop shops. These single access points to administrative services effectively contribute to enhanced transparency and efficiency, saving time for both the administration and users (Kabbani, 2022^[57]). The UAE led the way in

this regard, with the launch of the Federal Feedback Gateway “My Gov” in 2008. Now *U.ae*, the one-stop shop provides access to over 3,000 government services (U.AE, n.d.^[58]).

As of 2024, most MENA governments had taken steps towards developing unified e-government portals. For instance, Oman’s Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology recently launched the first phase of Omanuna, the National Unified E-Government Services Portal, unrolling 88 e-services and streamlining procedures for 70% of basic e-government services (Omanuna, 2022^[59]). In Egypt, the ‘Digital Egypt Portal’ to access governmental services online already features over 155 digital services, including notarisational, law enforcement, traffic and real estate registration, among others (OECD, n.d.^[18]). The Moroccan government is also currently finalising the preparation of a one-stop-shop (Royaume du Maroc, 2024^[60]).

Some MENA governments have advanced in building better enablers for delivery, such as digital identification: the Ministry of Interior in Saudi Arabia adopted the National Single Sign-On service for its government portal for citizens and residents to manage their digital identity, while directly and easily accessing public services (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2022^[61]).

Despite significant progress, to date only few services are fully transactional and integrated in the MENA region. Most interactions with the public administration remain offline, communication occurring by phone, on paper or in-person, especially at the local level (OECD, 2020^[62]). As highlighted in Chapter 1, significant discrepancies in access to ICTs and digital literacy exist within the public administration and among the wider population in the region, limiting the digitalisation of governments in some countries and territories (World Bank, 2021^[63]). The use of various tools and channels of delivery and dialogue between public administrations and citizens (such as in-person, online, mobile apps, phone, (e)mail, social media, etc.) is therefore key to ensure that all citizens can access public services more easily through a channel of their choice.

Governments in the MENA region could pursue efforts to adopt omni-channel approaches to service design and delivery to ensure that services are user-driven, inclusive and involve all citizens and their diverse needs from the outset (OECD, 2020^[25]; OECD, 2022^[64]). This is the objective of the government in Dubai, that developed a one-stop shop service centre delivering integrated government services based on life events, without the need for customers to visit other government service centres (Government of Dubai, n.d.^[65]). As part of these efforts, it is also essential to ensure that the delivery methods are inclusive. Vulnerable segments of the population, such as women, young people, elderly, disabled, migrants, refugees, low-income people, and other marginalised groups, have limited access to public services but it improves when using digital channels. A number of OECD Member countries have developed multi-channel and multi-service approaches to government delivery that are integrated, connected and interchangeable to reach out to all segments of the population, such as Chile (Box 4.12).

Box 4.12. The “ChileAtiende” network for public service delivery in Chile

To bring the State closer to its citizens, the government of Chile has established the “ChileAtiende” network that involves the whole public sector and its partners in a three-fold approach: (i) multiservice (i.e. aggregating 247 public services from 28 public sector organisations), (ii) multichannel (i.e. phone, website, social media, self-service kiosks, face-to-face), and (iii) multilayer (i.e. according to the depth of integration for a given institution).

The multi-channel and multi-service network includes the following channels among others:

- Offices geographically distributed across the country to cover most of the population;
- Digital Channel: a website that provides information on more than 2,500 benefits and services in simple citizen language;
- Call Center: provides information and orientation on public services and benefits and
- ChileAtiende Vehicles: vans that reach remote and rural areas to provide public services.

ChileAtiende also ensures inclusion by providing sign language and special spaces for breastfeeding mothers – and training the staff to be user-centered in their services.

Source: (OECD, n.d.^[66]) (Welby and Tan, 2022^[67]).

Another area of opportunity that MENA governments could explore concerns expanding the engagement of public, private and civil society stakeholders in better using digital tools for policymaking and public service design and delivery (OECD, 2014^[43]). For instance, in the Palestinian Authority, the “Technology and Public Administration Strategy 2021-2023” places special emphasis on the involvement of the private sector in the process of digitalisation of the public administration (OECD, 2024^[9]). In Dubai, the one-stop shop service centre *Services 1* also aims to provide a platform for the co-creation and delivery of government services in collaboration with users, including citizens and businesses, using behavioural science and information technology (Government of Dubai, n.d.^[65]). Building on these practices, MENA governments could thus establish frameworks of collaboration, both within the public sector and with external actors to improve the use and provision of digital services.

MENA governments could strengthen the availability, use and sharing of data to inform public service design and delivery

A data-driven public sector is essential to ensure the technical integration required to provide policies and services that are designed to respond to targeted user needs and overcome siloes in a coherent way across different sectors and levels of government. For data-driven public services to fully deliver public value to citizens and businesses, capacity and capability are needed in terms of (i) the architecture and infrastructure for data access and sharing across the public sector; (ii) laws and regulations to enable data publication, interoperability, privacy and security; and (iii) leadership, training and skill-building to manage the data value cycle (OECD, 2019^[68]). This is especially important in today’s context, as artificial intelligence will increasingly transform the way governments and users interact.

Many digital government strategies in the MENA region include specific policies and stipulations relating to data access, sharing or interoperability. For instance, the “data-driven” dimension sets out UAE’s objective of governing data “as a key strategic asset in generating public value through applying it in the planning, delivering and monitoring of public policies, and adopt[ing] rules and ethical principles for their trustworthy and safe reuse.” (UAE Government, 2022^[69]). A few MENA governments have also developed specific policies to improve data skills in the public sector (OECD, 2017^[52]).

Moreover, most MENA governments have adopted new data protection laws to ensure compliance with data privacy and cybersecurity regulations, as well as dedicated data protection authorities. Some governments have also created institutions for digital development that are also in charge of building better data governance and institutional practices across the government, as the case of the Moroccan Digital Development Agency (World Bank, 2020_[70]).

Finally, most governments, including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and the UAE, have established open data portals, providing citizens public access to important datasets across various topics and institutions, including on public services (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021_[71]; ESCWA, 2024_[10]). This topic will also be covered in Chapter 5.

Nevertheless, most countries and territories are lagging when it comes to establishing effective data governance frameworks. When they exist, data governance frameworks in the MENA region tend to remain fragmented, with roles and responsibilities for data governance functions distributed across multiple ministries, departments, and agencies (World Bank, 2020_[70]). Overall, governments have also not developed dedicated standards and guidelines for public sector data use, management, sharing and interoperability (OECD, 2017_[52]). These challenges prevent governments from using and accessing data to inform decision and policymaking.

Governments in the MENA region could focus their efforts on reinforcing government arrangements for data management to strengthen data availability and data-sharing across all levels of government. The data must be disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location, but also disability to generate inclusive outcomes. It is particularly important for topics like climate change or digital transformation, where the impact of decisions may not be equal for everyone in society.

As part of their efforts to deliver more effective and accessible public services to all citizens, MENA governments could also strengthen the availability and use of data to overcome data siloes in identifying users' needs, tailor services and deliver a proactive and continuous experience for all citizens. The Argentinian government has implemented an initiative to improve the accessibility of its public services for disabled populations through improved data-sharing, as highlighted in Box 4.13.

Finally, efforts to develop policy and regulatory frameworks on digital security and data protection should be further pursued to ensure the security of government services and data in ways that mitigate risks without blocking the transformation of the public sector (OECD, 2020_[44]).

Box 4.13. Using data to improve service delivery for disabled populations in Argentina

In the process of attempting to simplify the previously burdensome, complex and analogue process to obtain the disability certification (*Certificado Único de Discapacidad*, CUD) and the International Symbol of Access (ISA), the National Agency for Disability (ANDIS) and *Mi Argentina*, the digital public service delivery platform, created a multi-disciplinary team of software engineers, designers, psychologists, political scientists, anthropologists and sociologists to conduct user research and interviews with stakeholders.

Concurrently, the process relied on cross-matching and validation of biometric data from the National Registry of Persons with data regarding the CUD from the ANDIS – which were enabled by existing secured data-sharing arrangements. The final result was an online service that puts the ISA on *Mi Argentina* in one step with a wizard that guides users. It replaces what used to be a physical meeting over four steps.

Source: (G20/OECD, 2021_[72]; OPSI, 2018_[73]).

Building a competent and agile public sector to deliver high-quality public policies and services in rapidly changing environments

As introduced in the previous section, an effective service delivery depends on the public sector's capability and competences to navigate change and effectively carry out its responsibilities and mandates. This requires the ability to attract, recruit and retain public servants with specific skills adapted to the quickly evolving needs of the administration in today's world.

The OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability (2019^[74]) recognises the importance of a highly-professional administration based on merit, transparency, accountability and the rule of law to design and deliver quality public policies and services.

In this sense, governments in the MENA region are increasingly developing civil service reforms to improve recruitment, training and career development opportunities in the public administration.

One important area of reform includes the development of fit-for-purpose civil services, with the skills to deliver in rapidly evolving contexts with new policy challenges and technologies. As highlighted in the Recommendation (OECD, 2019^[74]), specific skills and capabilities are required to understand complex challenges, to produce data and assess evidence, and to design policy and planning documents integrating cross-cutting issues. Skills to effectively engage citizens, crowdsource ideas and co-create better services, and skills for commissioning and contracting are also required, including skills in designing, overseeing and managing contractual arrangements and procurement processes. Civil servants must also know how to manage networks, requiring skills to convene, collaborate and develop shared understanding through communication, trust and mutual commitment. These skills, instilled at an individual level, create the elements and capability necessary to ensure organisation capability and system-wide capacity. Finally, skills in digital technology and innovation should also be continuously developed in order to keep up with, and harness the potential of, the digital transformation.

Similarly to OECD Members practices, most MENA governments started undertaking reforms to strengthen the transversal skills and capacities of civil servants, including management, digital skills and mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues such as gender and climate, to support strategic planning, decision-making and policy development.

In Egypt for instance, developing the capacities of civil servants has been regarded as one of the main pillars of the Administrative Reform Plan since 2014 (OECD, n.d.^[18]). The Central Agency for Organisation and Administration (CAOA) is charged with the strategic human resources management of the Egyptian public administration. As part of its mandate, it leads the delivery of capacity-building programmes and other learning and development initiatives - encompassing a large range of transversal skills - which are in turn implemented by the institution or through various accredited entities. A key actor in this regard has been the National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (NIGSD) as the executive "training arm" of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MPED) (see Box 4.14). Regarding more specifically the development of digital tools, in Lebanon, the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) has run since 2016 a large-scale e-learning project "Boost Yourself" for civil servants across the public sector to take courses in information technology, Microsoft Office, management and soft skills, in line with the national digital transformation strategy (Republic of Lebanon and Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform, 2022^[75]). Between 2016 and 2020, 2,871 public sector employees participated in the e-learning programme, with 1,519 completing at least three courses (OECD, 2020^[76]). The Palestinian Authority also has a strong basis on which to build in this area, particularly through its dedicated public administration school – the Palestinian National School of Public Administration-, which has a modern purpose-built headquarters with 11 training rooms designed to centralise the training offer to public servants. It has a particular focus on leadership training. The current focus of training is on e-learning to expand the base of trainees and achieve economies of scale. In the UAE, the government launched in 2022 Jahiz, a digital platform that offers to civil servants around 90

programmes on four groups of “skills of the future” that can support the country’s growth, namely digital skills, data and artificial intelligence skills, new and digital economy skills, and advanced project management skills (Government of the UAE, 2024^[77]).

Box 4.14. The NIGSD and its role in supporting institutional capacity-building within the Egyptian Administration

The National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (NIGSD) is a public economic organisation under the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MPED) with advisory, training and research functions. In 2020, the NIGSD replaced the National Management Institute to promote good governance and enhance the development of human capital, in line with Egypt Vision 2030. The main areas of work of the NIGSD align closely with Egypt’s commitments to deliver on the SDGs through consultancy work, provision of technical support and delivery of strategic guidance to government institutions. As such, the institute actively monitors progress in SDG implementation, emphasising the critical link between governance and sustainable development.

As part of its mandate, the NIGSD is tasked with carrying out regular training of public sector employees on topics related to governance and sustainable development. The Institute provides ad hoc training programmes for civil servants on soft skills, leadership skills, as well as more technical trainings on internal audit, SDGs, Egypt Vision 2030, and application of good governance practices. In close collaboration with international partners, the NIGSD plays a pivotal role in raising awareness of sustainable development’s importance and fostering cross-sector partnerships to achieve the SDGs. While doing so, the NIGSD seeks to elevate Egypt’s standing in international reports and rankings, in turn reflecting the country’s strong commitment to sustainable development, through targeted programmes for empowering women and young people in public and political life.

As a manner of illustration, the NIGSD launched a flagship Programme in 2018 with the National Council for Women (NCW) “Women Leaders Qualification”, targeting female Egyptians civil servants with high-level potential, aspiring to leadership responsibilities in the public administration. The upskilling programme has been designed with the support of experts, as well as members of parliament and the NCW. Since its creation, the programme has covered 3,400 women aged between 30-50 years old in 12 governorates, offering courses targeting gender equality in the workplace, human resources and sustainable development.

The NIGSD also lends support to various organisations in different ways. For example, it collaborates with MPED regarding the Sustainable Development Strategy, CAO on matters of public governance, and works alongside the public governance units within line ministries. Additionally, it plays a role in supporting different agencies and institutes, such as the Administrative Control Authority (ACA), particularly in addressing public integrity and anti-corruption issues.

Source: (OECD, n.d.^[18]; OECD, n.d.^[15]).

In most countries and territories of the region that implement such trainings, as in OECD Member countries, these initiatives are part of larger processes of Public Administration Reforms (PAR) that aim to have a more flexible, more agile civil service that keeps pace with societal developments (OECD, 2021^[78]).

However, trainings and programmes developed by governments often do not address bottlenecks or skill gaps identified in public administrations (Akram Malik and Kromann Kristensen, 2022^[79]).

Moreover, MENA governments still face challenges in developing the capacity of its civil service while attracting and retaining experienced public servants. In a number of countries and territories, this is due to a lack of resources and flexibility in human resources management processes (OECD, 2023^[17]). To

address these challenges, the Moroccan government, for instance, launched a series of reforms to develop skilled and adequate human resources across all levels. The government produced priority policy goals and plans (e.g. Maroc Digital 2020) to develop an ecosystem that is skilled in ICTs and can deliver effectively for its citizens and businesses (OECD, 2018^[54]; OECD, 2023^[17]).

In order to pursue their efforts, MENA governments could consider strengthening human resources management policies to better attract, develop and retain skills and expertise. This could include investing in learning opportunities for employee training and development by reinforcing capacity-building programmes and learning and development systems (OECD, 2017^[80]). One could notably invest in prioritised skills to gather and analyse relevant data, to develop aligned strategies and pertinent indicators, to co-ordinate with other actors, and to engage effectively with citizens and stakeholders.

In line with practices existing in some countries and territories of the region, MENA governments could also further their existing efforts in building the digital skills of their civil servants. Today, the capacity and capability to manage digital tools and data's growing use in the public administration is a horizontal skill needed by all civil servants. Over the past several years, the fast-changing environment towards increasingly electronic and digital ways of working in the public sector left many governments experiencing gaps in digital skills. Attaining digital government maturity also calls for governments to rethink and redesign human resources and project management approaches, processes and tools; they must aim to build up a capable civil service that can overcome the challenges and seize the opportunities of using digital technologies and data for better delivery, as underlined in the OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies (OECD, 2014^[43]). The OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector (OECD, 2021^[81]) presents a three-pillar framework for how governments can equip their civil service with the skills needed to ensure the effective implementation and use of digital to improve service delivery. It encompasses (i) an environment that encourages digital talent; (ii) the skills across all levels to support digital transformation; and (iii) the practical steps and enabling activities to establish and maintain a digital government workforce. The processes and activities should also support the mobility and development of the civil service to attract, recruit, and retain digital talents proactively and fairly, and commit to upskilling the workforce in the use of digital tools and data for effective delivery in the fast-changing digital age.

Moreover, improving the ways of organising and managing public employees could also encourage proactive collaboration and innovation, therefore leading the way for constant improvement in the design and delivery of public policies and services. Governments could for instance promote and incentivise the creation of diverse, multi-disciplinary teams that can work well across organisational siloes. They could promote the integration of professions across job families to avoid a disconnect among policymakers, product and service designers, procurement officers, data scientists, communication officers and client relations officers who, otherwise, would not be able to gain a full understanding of designing and delivering based on user needs from end to end. Furthermore, governments could also further promote knowledge-sharing between civil servants at the national level, but also across the region to build capacities for government performance. This is promoted for instance by the UAE through the Government Experience Exchange Programme, that aims to exchange best practices on public governance areas with 33 countries in the world, including Egypt, Iraq and Jordan (Government of UAE, 2024^[82]).

At the same time, governments could promote in their human resources management policies: the continuous identification of skills, attraction and retention policies targeting all groups, especially underrepresented people; transparent, open and merit-based recruitment and promotion processes; and the establishment of learning and performance cultures to ensure integrity and capacity. In fact, a growing number of governments have already started to produce and rely on competency frameworks and incorporate them into human resources management processes (OECD, 2022^[83]).

Other good practices from OECD Member countries that can be mentioned include the development of integrated strategic documents to guide skills development across government on the long-term, such as in Czechia and Ireland (Box 4.15).

Box 4.15. The development of strategic documents to guide skills development across government in Czechia and Ireland

The Framework for Client-Friendly Public Administration 2030 in Czechia

The Framework for Client-Friendly Public Administration 2030 is a strategic document defining development of the national public administration in the period 2021-2030. It highlights a number of measures to bolster skills for developing policy, including:

- The implementation of evidence-informed decision-making in public administration, including specialised training of public officials responsible for analytical research and reports;
- The establishment of a working group on co-operation of analytical units and establishment of analytical teams within the civil service, together with a collaborative network and web platform for sharing the analytical data;
- The development of skills to provide timely policy advice and analysis;
- The implementation of training for front desk public officials with the aim of improvement of client-oriented communication and services in order to develop effective and trusted public service;
- and new tools for centralised civil servants' training targeting common cross-sectional issues using e-learning.

The Civil Service Renewal Strategy in Ireland

Ireland's reform initiatives are guided by the Civil Service Renewal Strategy, a document which sets three strategic priorities to be achieved over a ten-year framework.

Stemming from the previous iteration of this strategic document, Ireland has developed a centralised learning and development offer to boost future-oriented skills and competencies across 44 civil service bodies. This was formal recognition of the importance of learning and development's role in supporting all civil servants to continue developing essential skills for their current and future roles in a culture of continuously improving the quality of service to the citizen.

Prior to the establishment of One Learning, 44 Civil Service Bodies (CBSs) delivered their Learning & Development programmes independently. There were no synergies and consistency, with CBSs doing their own procurement. This resulted in major inefficiencies and duplication across the Civil Service. This did not deliver value for money for the citizen and the civil service. In addition, there was no consistency of access to training for civil servants across government.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[84]).

Investing in regulatory governance to optimise the delivery of public services

Laws and regulations³ affect all areas of life. By setting the “rules of the game” for citizens and businesses, sound regulation helps ensure the effective delivery of public goods and services (OECD, 2021^[85]). Indeed, overregulation often creates burdens and inefficiencies for citizens as well as for the public sector. As enshrined in the OECD Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance (OECD, 2012^[51]), a robust regulatory system, based upon on a whole-of-government framework and including regulatory management tools, can contribute to optimise the delivery of laws and regulations. It contributes to providing the best possible public services and policies that answer to the needs in terms of risk prevention,

public welfare, social inclusion and gender equality, without excessive costs for the state or placing regulatory burdens on citizens or businesses (OECD, 2018^[86]). In doing so, regulations can also create the necessary conditions for economic and social growth. (OECD, 2022^[87]).

Governments around the world, including in the MENA region, are increasingly shifting towards regulatory reforms that establish whole-of-government policies for regulatory policymaking (World Bank, 2018^[88]), as also reaffirmed by their endorsement of the Regional Charter for Regulatory Quality (Box 4.16). As such, they have also invested in regulatory governance to improve the ways regulations are designed, delivered and evaluated in a context of increasing regulatory complexity. The main areas of reform are detailed in the following sections.

Box 4.16. The Regional Charter for Regulatory Quality

In 2009, the Regional Charter for Regulatory Quality (“the Charter”) provided a common framework of principles and good practice for regulatory management in governments of the MENA region. This Charter is based on the 1995 OECD Checklist for Regulatory Decision Making and the 2005 OECD Guiding Principles for Regulatory Quality and Performance.

In the Charter, governments recognised that a “(...) good regulation should:

1. serve clearly identified policy goals, and be effective in achieving those goals;
2. have a sound legal and empirical basis;
3. produce benefits that justify costs, considering the distribution of effects across society, and taking economic, environmental and social effects into account;
4. minimise costs and market distortions;
5. promote innovation through market incentives and goal-based approaches;
6. be clear, simple and practical for users;
7. be consistent with other regulations and policies; and
8. be compatible as far as possible with competition, trade and investment facilitating principles at domestic and international levels.”

The Charter also emphasises the importance of commitment at the highest political level to an explicit whole-of-government policy for regulatory quality.

The principles of the Charter were reflected in the 2012 OECD Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance. This document is the first comprehensive international statement on regulatory policy after the 2009 global financial and economic crisis. The Recommendation provides governments with clear and timely guidance on the principles, mechanisms and institutions required to improve the design, enforcement and review of their regulatory framework to the highest standards. The 2009 Charter and 2012 Recommendation constitute a common framework for the design and implementation of an effective and high-quality regulatory reform policy.

Source: (OECD, 2013^[89]).

Efforts to improve legislative drafting and reduce administrative burdens are increasing

As part of efforts to improve the overall effectiveness of regulation, a first area of reforms consists of improving legal drafting to ensure the development of high-quality laws and regulations responding to the needs of citizens.

The Palestinian Authority was a pioneer in the MENA region in developing a legislative drafting manual as presented in Box 4.17 (OECD, 2022^[87]). In the last years, similar legislative guidelines have been developed by other governments in the region (OECD, 2019^[90]). One can notably mention the “Legislative Information Memoranda” in Egypt aims to ensure the quality of new legislation as well as its consistency with the provisions of the constitution and international agreements (ERRADA, n.d.^[91]). The development of such practices and tools could be further expanded in the MENA region.

Box 4.17. The Legislative Drafting Guidelines in the Palestinian Authority

The legislative drafting guidelines were approved in 2013 and then updated in 2018 by a working group led by the Ministry of Justice. The current manual builds on earlier versions of the guidelines developed in 2000 and evaluated by the OECD in 2011. The legislative drafting guidelines have been approved by the Council of Ministers in 2017 and are considered binding.

Goals of the guidelines:

- Provide a procedural and technical guideline for preparing primary laws and subordinate regulations for competent authorities (legal units in ministries, Bureau of Legal Opinion and Legislation, etc.), based on international best practice;
- Unify the methods of preparing legislation in the Palestinian community.

The guidelines contain two parts, one on the stages of drafting primary legislation and one on the particularities of drafting secondary legislation.

Part one: Stages of drafting primary legislation

- *Planning stage:* Civil servants should specify the problem and planning impact evaluation, and plan the regulatory impact assessment (definition of the problem and SMART goals, identification of regulatory and non-regulatory options including the option to do nothing), consultations, enforcement, and evaluation;
- *Legislative Policy:* This section explains the purpose of the National Policy Agenda and the process of translating overarching policy priorities into concrete regulatory proposals by preparing a legislative policy memorandum;
- *Action Plan:* Upon receipt of the legislative policy memorandum, the competent authority is tasked with preparing an action plan to prepare the drafting process. This includes assigning tasks among team members, preparing a list of regulatory elements to be drafted, and anticipating enforcement measures;
- *Legislation Unit:* This section explains the structure to be used when drafting a primary law (preamble, definitions, goals, enforcement);
- *Transitional and permanent provisions:* This section refers to different implementation methods for primary laws, which can be transitional (“articles that pave the way to transition from the implementation of a previous legislation to a new implementation which amends or annuls it”) and permanent.
- *Standards of legislative drafting:* This section specifies the language to be used when drafting articles of a primary law.

Part two of the guidelines specifies the particularities of drafting secondary legislation, which mainly refer to the drafting structure of different types (bylaws, ministerial decisions, instructions).

The guidelines also contain a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) template.

Note: The members of the working group included the Office of the President's Legal Unit, the Council of Ministers and its General Secretariat, the Ministries of Interior and Finance, the Bureau of Legal Opinion and Legislation (Diwan Alfatwa), Birzeit and Al-Quds Universities, and representatives from the private sector

SMART: = **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**greed upon, **R**ealistic, **T**ime specific.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[87]).

The MENA region has also implemented laws or initiatives aiming to simplify existing regulations and reduce administrative burdens by reviewing the “stock” of regulations, that is the number and diversity of regulations to comply with (OECD, 2013^[89]).

For instance, the Egyptian Regulatory Reform and Development Activity (ERRADA) initiative, created in 2008, has engaged in a large-scale regulatory simplification with the removal of 2,000 contradictory or redundant instruments and the online publication of 30,000 legislative texts (OECD, 2018^[92]; OECD, 2013^[89]). Through the SIGMA initiative, the OECD supported ERRADA in developing standards for good governance in Egypt. It also accompanied more specifically the Industrial Development Authority to simplify its administrative practices. Other governments, such as the Palestinian Authority, have similarly placed consolidating the body of law as one of their strategic policy objectives and have started implementing a number of reforms to reduce the burden of regulation on enterprises, although they have yet to be fully implemented (OECD, 2024^[9]). In the UAE, the Zero Government Bureaucracy Programme aims to eliminate a minimum of 2,000 government procedures and streamline bureaucratic processes by the end of 2024 (Ministry of Finance of the UAE, 2024^[93]). In addition, as reforms move forward, governments often realise they must pay attention to the “flow” of regulations, that is the pace and quality in which new regulations are made and added to the stock. While the flow is generally smaller than the stock of regulations (OECD, 2020^[94]), the challenge is to ensure that any gains realised via burden reduction are not replaced with new sub-optimal policy decisions that would accumulate over time and return the government back to the original baseline.

Box 4.18. SIGMA's cooperation with the Egyptian Industrial Development Authority

SIGMA's cooperation with the Egyptian Industrial Development Authority (IDA) dates to 2017. At IDA's request, SIGMA was engaged in the drafting process of a new Law on Licencing (Law No. 15) and the related Executive Regulation. SIGMA undertook this legislative support in parallel with a long-term strategic project to support the Egyptian Regulatory Reform and Development Activity (ERRADA) in developing standards for good governance in Egypt. This resulted in the “Egyptian Guide to Good Administrative Procedures” and the “Guide to Developing Secondary Legislation in Egyptian Legislating Bodies”.

The “Egyptian Guide to Good Administrative Procedures” is a manual to help administrative practitioners to apply administrative principles to their decision-making processes. The content of the guide is inspired by the concept of “Good Administration” as it has been evolving within the European Union and its Member States. The “Guide to Developing Secondary Legislation in Egyptian Legislating Bodies” provides a comprehensive state-of-the-art toolbox for solving complex problems in public affairs through reasonable solutions of legislative or non-legislative nature. Both Guides were elaborated by SIGMA-ERRADA in the time between 2018 and 2022.

In the period 2022-2024, SIGMA supported IDA in a reform project with the overall aim of a simplified, investor-orientated and rule-based administrative practice at IDA. This project aimed at (1) finding and mitigating administrative obstacles investors are facing in Egypt when taking part in various processes to obtain an industrial operation licence to be issued by IDA, and (2) apply for the implementation of Guide I and Guide II.

The pre-application and the licencing phase were analysed in depth down to the concrete day-to-day administrative practice and for both, concrete, effective and promptly implementable solutions were conceptualised, derived from the facts and data obtained from investors and IDA employees. Furthermore, the complete RIA method was applied for the problem-solving concept of the pre-application phase.

The project resulted in concrete achievements:

- A substantially upgraded web-based communication system is now operational, providing potential investors with easy and comprehensive access to official information on all legal and factual (both economic and technical) requirements for obtaining an industrial operating licence.
- The reorganization and upgrading of the system of the 28 regional IDA Branches is being tested in one Branch. The recommended system, once fully operational, would make it easier for investors to contact IDA directly. This will speed up the process and save costs for investors and the IDA.
- IDA Branch staff will be empowered by a new IT system that will manage support requests to IDA Headquarters and provide a frequently updated database of procedural- and office rules.
- A Code of Conduct is adopted for the interaction between IDA staff and investors. This is a notable contribution towards investor-orientated behaviour of IDA staff.
- A proposed legislative concept aims to ensure legal protection of investors against the current IDA administrative practice, which is contrary to the rule of law and illegal, in cases of rejection of a licence application.

Source: Information provided by OECD/SIGMA; (OECD SIGMA and ERRADA, 2019^[95]; OECD SIGMA, MPED and ERRADA, 2022^[96]).

MENA governments are progressively adopting RIAs to increase agility and responsiveness of policies and services

The development and use of regulatory management tools and practices such as regulatory impact assessments (RIAs), policy reviews and a more systematic engagement of stakeholders in law- and regulation-making is key to ensure that regulations meet the desired objectives (OECD, 2022^[87]); (OECD, 2020^[97]).

A well-functioning RIA system can provide governments with as much as possible objective information about the likely benefits and costs of regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. It helps reduce regulatory failures by identifying where unintended consequences would exceed any of the purported benefits. The evaluation of existing policies through *ex post* impact analysis is also necessary to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of new regulations. Early attention should be paid in the policy cycle to the performance criteria for *ex-post* evaluation, which involves clarifying regulatory goals, determining relevant data for assessing performance, and allocating institutional resources. Additionally, the involvement of a variety of state and non-state actors to review existing and new regulations is essential to ensure that they serve the public interest and are informed by the legitimate needs of those interested in and affected by them (OECD, 2012^[51]). The implementation of tools and practices mentioned above is also key to creating a culture of

effective inspection and enforcement to ensure regulations are adequate and achieve their goals of improving services and policies for citizens and businesses.

In lines with practices adopted across the world, MENA governments are increasingly institutionalising RIAs to support responsive and agile law-making in line with national development objectives. In the UAE, the recent review of existing laws and regulations to simplify government procedures also focused on assessing the impact of legislation on all groups of population to ensure the equal application of laws (Government of UAE, n.d.^[98]). Several governments, including Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, have recently developed RIA policy guides and good practices manuals in cooperation with the OECD and SIGMA⁴ to strengthen the capacities of government institutions and decision-makers on the use and implementation of impact assessment instruments more generally (OECD, 2022^[87]; OECD, 2022^[64]). Moreover, a number of ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice in the Palestinian Authority and different line ministries in Jordan, are implementing pilot RIAs on selected regulations in an effort to gradually build a systemic approach (OECD, 2022^[87]; Government of Jordan, 2022^[99]).

More particularly, as part of the response to tackle cross-cutting challenges that hamper sustainable development, some governments started using RIAs to anticipate the impact of new legislation and policies on specific groups of the population (OECD, 2021^[100]).

Gender impact assessments (GIAs) notably, also known as gender analysis, can help analyse any given policy or funding decision throughout its lifecycle, in order to identify and assess its (potential or actual) gender-specific impacts (OECD, 2021^[101]). In Morocco, the Sectoral Gender Analysis (SGA) is used systematically in the development of the gender strategies of different ministries to highlight the most persisting instances of inequality between women and men and to assess the current lack of quantitative and qualitative statistical data (OECD, 2023^[17]). The SGAs also serve as a reference for the development and revision of all public policies and sectoral programmes through the Medium-Term Sectoral Action Plans of the ministries, as well as for quality assurance.

Some MENA governments have also developed the use of *ex-post* reviews and evaluations. This is the case in Egypt, where the ERRADA initiative is in charge of evaluating Egyptian policies and laws transparently and assessing their implementation through *ex-ante* and *ex-post* assessments. In other countries and territories, the use of *ex-post* reviews and evaluations by line ministries is developing, but remains for now largely carried out on an ad hoc basis (OECD, 2022^[87]). Efforts have also been made by MENA governments to better engage stakeholders in regulatory processes in order to ensure law and regulations better respond to the needs of citizens and businesses. For instance, the Palestinian Authority developed an online platform to conduct e-public consultations and developed standardised procedures for government entities to conduct public consultations (OECD, 2024^[9]). The development on an online portal for public consultation is also a measure undertaken by the Jordanian government as part of its action plan to update and systematise stakeholder consultation in policy- and law-making processes, and also as part of the country's Open Government agenda (Government of Jordan, 2022^[99]). The action plan also foresees the introduction of a new requirement for institutions to attach information on stakeholders consulted and their feedback for every draft policy or law proposed to the Cabinet.

Taking a wider approach, the Government of Abu Dhabi in the UAE released a Public Policy Framework in 2021, which seeks to provide a unified framework to guide the creation of regulatory policies across the government (ADEO, 2021^[102]). It contains an overview, guidance and suggested tools for the use of RIA and stakeholder engagement for better regulatory policymaking.

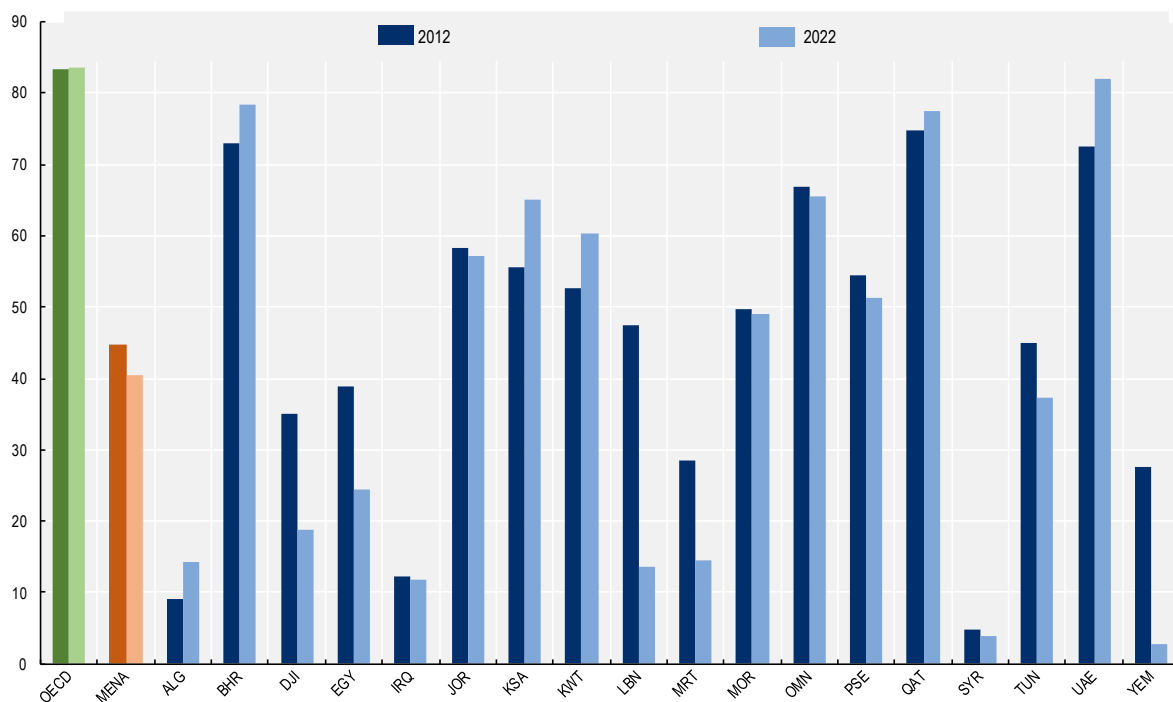
Efforts could be pursued to strengthen regulatory frameworks across the MENA region

Despite reforms undertaken, regulatory delivery has become more difficult across the MENA region over time as their regulatory stock has grown in complexity. As shown in Figure 4.2, regulatory quality has shrunk or stagnated in most countries and territories of the region since 2012, except in Gulf countries and

Algeria. Despite progress made through the implementation of specific programmes and mechanisms, many MENA governments do not yet have clear and co-ordinated or whole-of-government approaches in their regulatory processes and suffer from fragmented institutional landscapes for regulatory policy, with resulting difficulties in ensuring clear, co-ordinated, well-enforced and monitored regulations (Biganzoli and Gagliardi, 2021^[103]; OECD, 2022^[87]).

Figure 4.2. Regulatory quality has shrunk or stagnated in most countries and territories in the MENA region between 2012 and 2022

Worldwide Governance Indicator on Regulatory quality in MENA countries and territories in 2012 and 2022



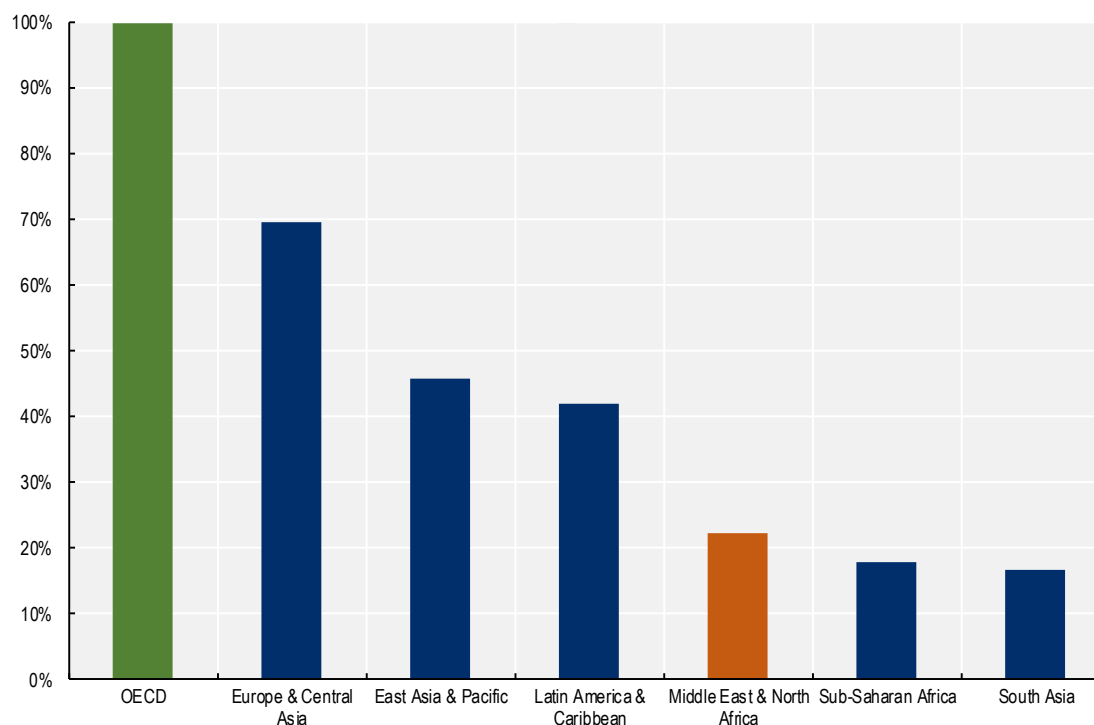
Note: Regulatory quality, as measured by the Worldwide Governance Indicators, “measures the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development.” The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) are a research dataset summarising the views in quality of governance provided by a large number of enterprise, citizen and expert survey respondents. These data are gathered from a number of survey institutes, think tanks, non-governmental organisations, international organisations and private sector firms. Percentile Rank (0-100) indicates rank of countries and territories among all countries and territories in the world. 0 corresponds to lowest rank and 100 corresponds to highest rank.

Source: Author’s work based on (World Bank, n.d.^[11]).

The slow development of legal and institutional regulatory frameworks further limits the use of regulatory tools across MENA governments. For instance, as depicted in Figure 4.3, slightly over 20% of MENA governments conduct RIAs, a proportion that remains low compared to other regions in the world. Stakeholder consultation and participation in regulatory processes remains also underdeveloped. In addition, civil servants often lack guidance and methodologies, as well as sufficient training, to carry such processes out (OECD, 2022^[87]).

Figure 4.3. The MENA region has low levels of RIA implementation compared to other regions.

Proportion of governments conducting RIAs within their respective region



Note: MENA as classified by the World Bank dataset includes: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Source: Author's work based on (World Bank, n.d.^[104]).

Efforts to further develop a co-ordinated, whole-of-government approach that places a priority on the use of regulatory management tools, including RIA, stakeholder engagement and policy review could be a viable source of future plans for regulatory reform across the MENA region.

Developing and strengthening mechanisms and tools related to the development, implementation and enforcement of regulations is one important area of possible reform, as well as encouraging further participation and co-ordination between stakeholders involved in the regulatory processes.

Regarding more specifically the development and mainstreaming of the use of impact assessment tools, developing strong guidance and capacity-building could contribute to enhance their use across public administrations. Countries including Austria, Canada and Sweden have for instance also established requirements to complete gender impact assessments as a separate analysis that accompanies RIAs (OECD, 2019^[105]).

Similarly to other countries and territories in the world, MENA governments could also expand the use of RIAs to drive the consideration of a large range of cross-cutting issues into the law-making process beyond gender equality, in line with their long-term development objectives (OECD, 2021^[100]; OECD, 2024^[106]). Such tools can notably be mobilised to assess the impact of regulations on main priorities such as climate change, that is sustainability impact assessments (SIA) and environmental impact assessments (EIA) (OECD, 2023^[107]), as well as on specific groups, such as young people. For instance, Austria, France, Germany and New Zealand now apply *ex-ante* "youth checks" to incorporate youth consideration more

systematically in policymaking and legislation (OECD, 2020_[108]). In Iceland, the Ministry of Education Science and Culture in charge of youth portfolio reported developing a youth check in co-operation with the Office of the Ombudsman for Children (OECD, 2020_[108]). Box 4.19 presents how these instruments are implemented in OECD Member countries.

Box 4.19. The use of regulatory impact assessments on cross-cutting issues in OECD Member countries

Assessing performance for impact in Germany and Belgium

It is mandatory in **Germany** to assess the impact of all proposed laws and regulations on the principle of “sustainable development”. Within the framework of the Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA), Germany has also introduced an online tool to assess the proposed laws and regulations vis-à-vis the German Sustainable Development Strategy as well as SDGs. The SIA serves as an instrument to check whether and how intended legislation contributes to implementing Germany’s National Sustainability Strategy. All draft bills are evaluated by the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development to conduct quality assurance for the SIA.

Belgium introduced *ex-ante* impact assessment tool, the Sustainable Development Impact Assessment (SDIA), which is integrated into the RIA. SDIA, made a mandatory requirement in 2007, screens the impact of draft regulations in terms of sustainable development. Therefore, the RIA assesses the impact of preliminary draft regulations on economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The RIA (including SDIA) is one of the documents that must be presented to the Council of Ministers along with the draft regulation for approval. Officials in charge of drafting regulations, such as members of ministerial cabinets and/or members of administrations, are responsible for filling in the impact assessment form.

The “Gender-based analysis plus” in Canada

The Government of Canada has put in place a “Gender-based analysis plus” (GBA+) tool to ensure that “the differential impacts on people of all genders are considered when policies, programmes and legislation are developed.” It is an analytical process that seeks to advance gender equality, but it goes beyond considerations of sex and gender differences to also look at other factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.

Using better regulation to improve environmentally related regulatory proposals

The Ministry of the Environment in **Denmark** amended the Environmental Protection Act by the executive order on waste management. The Implementing Regulation on waste management executive order was initially drafted in a way in which businesses were imposed DKK 24 M in administrative burdens. Based on the results of a RIA on administrative burdens for businesses, the regulation was rewritten putting the burden on fewer businesses, thereby lowering the burden substantially to less than DKK 4 M.

Portugal established the Single Environmental Permitting Platform, developed to operationalise the Single Environmental Licensing Scheme (LUA) which was introduced in 2015 to simplify, harmonise and integrate 12 different environmental permits. The OECD currently supports the Portuguese government with reviewing and updating the Licensing Scheme to further reduce administrative burdens on businesses.

Sources: (Igriglu, 2020_[109]; OECD, 2019_[105]; OECD, 2023_[107]; OECD, 2021_[85]; European Commission, 2019_[110]).

Practical methods, such as incorporating sunset clauses or mandating periodic assessments, establishing review schedules, and creating platforms for public input on regulatory modifications could also facilitate *ex-post* impact analysis processes. The OECD developed the Best Practice Principles on RIA (2020^[97]) to provide governments with more detailed information and guidance on how to develop and sustain sound RIA systems. Additionally, the reinforcement of civil servant capacities and skills through trainings and guidelines to carry such processes out appears also essential.

Finally, the development of one-stop shops could be an opportunity for governments to support the implementation of administrative simplification strategies, as well as to improve regulatory delivery and compliance with regulations. One-stop-shops allow citizens and businesses to locate forms and do business more easily, and to provide information once for multiple purposes. Governments can receive better quality information in the first instance, with improved compliance rates that reduces the amount of resources needed for enforcement. The OECD has set out a framework for supporting one-stop shops, through the OECD Best Practice Principles on One-Stop Shops for Citizens and Business (OECD, 2020^[111]).

Areas of opportunity

Building on existing reforms and initiatives, there is scope for governments to pursue efforts undertaken in the following areas:

Fostering a culture of public integrity across the public sector and society

- Strengthening institutional and legal frameworks to implement coherent and comprehensive public integrity systems, including through the implementation of anti-corruption agencies and Ombudsman offices, the development of codes of conduct and ethics.
- Ensuring stakeholder engagement in the development of public integrity systems (participation in development of mechanisms and tools for instance) and through awareness-raising and capacity-building activities.
- Reinforcing internal and external accountability mechanisms.
- Promoting harmonised and unified approaches to internal control and internal audit as well risk management across government, by setting for instance clear responsibilities for the different institutions and reference framework, procedures and tools as well as capacity-building activities for implementing internal control and risk management in the ministerial departments.
- Encouraging the development of an enabling environment for the civil society, media but also citizens to operate as “watchdogs” and keep governments accountable.

Reviewing public procurement processes to improve their effectiveness and transparency

- Further developing policy frameworks and strengthening legal and institutional frameworks for public procurement.
- Pursuing efforts to strengthen the effectiveness, transparency, accessibility and inclusiveness of public procurement systems, including:
 - Developing regulatory frameworks linked to the participation of SOEs in public procurement processes and the implementation of e-procurement systems.
 - Strengthening internal and external accountability and control mechanisms.

- Improving the professionalisation of the public function across the entire procurement cycle through the development of guidelines, tools and capacity-building activities.
- Fostering the use of public procurement to promote more sustainable public services and growth, including through the development of green public procurement practices, strategies and frameworks.

Embedding digital government in public service design and delivery

- Further developing whole-of-government approaches to digital government strategies through strengthening policy, legal and institutional frameworks on digital government.
- Fostering the development of omni-channel approaches to public service delivery and engaging key stakeholders in service design and delivery to improve accessibility, responsiveness and inclusiveness.
- Strengthening the availability, use and sharing of data through the development of strong data governance and digital security frameworks improving the collection, use and sharing of data across administration in a secure way.

Modernising human resources management to build a fit-for-purpose civil service

- Strengthening human resources management policies to better attract, develop and retain skills and expertise, including through:
 - Investing in learning opportunities for employee training and development.
 - Promoting in human resources management policies the continuous identification of skills, attraction and retention policies targeting all groups, including underrepresented ones; transparent, open and merit-based recruitment and promotion processes; and the establishment of learning and performance cultures to ensure integrity and capacity.
 - When necessary, developing integrated policy documents to guide skills development across government in the long-term.

Investing in regulatory governance to optimise the delivery of public services

- Pursuing efforts to support the development of co-ordinated, whole-of-government approaches to regulatory governance, including:
 - Pursuing the development of tools and practices to improve legislative drafting and reduce administrative burdens.
 - Strengthening the use and mainstreaming of impact assessment processes, and building capacities across public administration for their effective implementation.
 - Further engaging stakeholders in law-making processes.
- Envisaging the development of one-stop-shops to support the implementation of administrative simplification strategies and to improve regulatory delivery and compliance with regulations.

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Notes

¹ According to the World Bank definition, government effectiveness captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies.

² The National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development" (NIGSD) is a public economic organisation, with advisory, training and research identity, supervised by the Minister for Planning and Economic Development (MPED).

³ Regulation refers to a wide range of tools used by governments to intervene in markets and society to change the actions and behaviours of citizens and firms, ranging from hard rules to alternatives such as incentives and guidance (OECD, 2020_[97]).

⁴ SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) is a joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union.

5 Promoting open and inclusive societies in the Middle East and North Africa

This chapter expands on two core governance values promoted by the OECD, namely openness and inclusiveness. It provides an overview of opportunities and challenges to embed the principles of openness and inclusiveness in the Middle East and North Africa to promote open government reforms, address the digital divide and engage underrepresented groups in public life.

Openness and inclusion reflect core OECD values that underpin the capacity of governments to design and deliver policies and services that meet the needs of citizens and businesses effectively and efficiently. The OECD Recommendation on Open Government (2017^[1]) 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”.

When these principles are implemented in synergy to guide government action, they provide meaningful opportunities to deliver results for all groups in society by opening new interfaces to interact with the state, bridging the digital divide and integrating a wide diversity of voices in public decision-making processes, in particular those of traditionally underrepresented groups. Public administrations are able to work better, deliver the services their constituencies need and ultimately enhance the legitimacy of decisions by placing citizens at the heart of policymaking.

Open government reforms therefore help bridge the divide between government and citizens. Beyond their intrinsic value, grounding policies and services in the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation can improve processes and outcomes across the full spectrum of public policy. In doing so, these reforms can “help citizens to understand how government works and are able to collaborate with public authorities to improve public decision, policies, services and all kinds of governmental processes (e.g. procurement, budgeting, etc.)” (OECD, 2022^[2]). As such, countries and territories are recognising the potential of open government reforms to support the effectiveness of the public sector and to act as a catalyst to achieve broader policy aims, such as promoting inclusive socio-economic development.

Over the last decade, countries and territories in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have undergone profound transformations, placing citizens progressively closer to the centre of public policy and service design and delivery. This shift in paradigm has been gradually consolidated in a wave of reforms grounded in new development models aiming at building more open and inclusive societies. While progress has been achieved, the promise of these reforms to promote inclusive growth and more participatory decision-making has yet to meet citizen’s needs and expectations.

This chapter focuses on how the principles of openness and inclusiveness are implemented in the MENA region through the promotion of open government reforms as drivers to promote access to information and stakeholder participation, address the digital divide and engage underrepresented groups in policymaking.

Embedding Open Government and its principles into public governance reforms

For open government to achieve its transformative potential, governments ought to establish ambitious targets that can be measured and showcase impact as well as define concrete responsibilities together with the right resources and skills for their implementation. Fair, inclusive and sustainable development cannot be achieved without an open government agenda that encompasses whole-of-government cross-sectoral approaches, is backed by high-level political support and creates spaces for active public participation.

While the depth and focus of open government reforms in the MENA region vary, some national administrations have been carrying out several efforts to establish an enabling environment for open government reforms at both the national and local level.

At the international level, some countries and territories have taken important steps in recent years, reiterating their commitment and showcasing political support to push forward the Open Government agenda. For instance, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia adhered to the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the last two also adhering to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government.

Governments have also started developing their institutional, legal and policy frameworks on Open Government, as detailed in the following sections.

Governments are increasingly adopting legal, policy and institutional frameworks to drive the implementation of their Open Government agenda

With the gradual adoption of open government reforms in some countries and territories within the region, various types of legal and policy frameworks have been established to mainstream transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation. As in many OECD Member countries, policies and initiatives to promote these principles in the MENA region are usually spread throughout several strategic documents and laws, given the transversal nature of open government that affects all areas of the public administration (OECD, 2021^[3]). Findings from the OECD Survey on Open Government reveal that OGP national action plans, presented in Box 5.1, have served as relevant policy frameworks for Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia to coordinate horizontal open government initiatives. While most countries and territories in the region do not have a dedicated policy, strategy or action plan in this regard, several have adopted commitments within National Government Programmes or other policy documents, including strategies for digital government, anti-corruption or public sector reform, to promote the implementation of some dimensions of open government (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]). Alongside this process, various governments have also taken steps to create an enabling regulatory landscape (OECD, 2021^[5]), through the inclusion of constitutional provisions that aim to uphold open government principles (such as in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia). Governments also adopted in recent years amendments of regulations focusing on specific topics including access to information laws (as in Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia), or anti-corruption and whistleblower protection (as in Tunisia).

Box 5.1. The adoption of Open Government Partnerships national action plans in the MENA region

Since joining the OGP, Jordan (2011), Tunisia (2014) and Morocco (2018) have made over 130 commitments within their national action plans. These commitments have ranged from improving access to information and open data to supporting the media, strengthening national dialogue, supporting open government reforms at the local level as well as promoting the role of women and young people in public life.

Jordan adopted its 5th OGP National Action Plan (NAP) (2021-2025) to advance commitments on strengthening participation mechanisms, supporting civil society, adopting gender mainstreaming in public policies, strengthening the role of young people in government plans, enhancing integrity and engaging local level actors in the design of public services, government projects and investment plans.

The Open Government Unit within the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) also organised thematic seminars with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and government focal points on each of the 4th NAP commitments to exchange good practices, lessons learned and help improve the implementation of the 5th OGP Action Plan.

Morocco has successfully implemented its 2nd OGP NAP (2021-2023). This action plan, developed through an extensive and thorough co-creation process in partnership with Moroccan civil society between January 2020 and June 2021, covers 22 commitments divided into five thematic areas: transparency and quality of public services; equality and inclusivity; open justice; citizen participation; and open local communities.

It capitalises on the progress made during the implementation of the first action plan (2018-2020), particularly in the areas of access to information, support for civil society and strengthening public sector

integrity, and further deepens efforts to promote open government at all levels and in all areas. The focus on open justice and the commitments related to the health sector reflect a move toward a broader, integrated approach to open government, highlighting Morocco's ambition to move toward an open state and expand the reach of open public policies and programmes. This development highlights the evolution from initiatives that focus more on improving the functioning of government and its internal methodology and processes, to initiatives whereby the government adopts an open government approach and tools in the design and implementation of services in different policy areas. In parallel to the finalisation of the implementation of the 2nd NAP, Morocco adopted a new innovative approach in the design of its 3rd NAP, using a "collective intelligence" methodology to facilitate the co-creation workshops held in October 2023. Through this new methodology, supported by academic experts in the field, Morocco aimed at further encouraging a more active and direct engagement of citizens in this process and in the open government field more broadly.

In **Tunisia**, the government launched its 5th NAP of the OGP in March 2024 for the period 2023-2025. In line with previous national action plans, the 5th NAP comprises 15 commitments divided into four main pillars: transparency and natural resources management; public participation and open government at the local level; accountability and integrity in the public sector; and development and digitalisation of the administrative services.

Sources: (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]; Government of Jordan, 2022^[6]; Open Government Partnership, 2022^[7]; OECD, 2024^[8]; République Tunisienne Présidence du Gouvernement, 2021^[9]).

Moreover, as in the rest of the world, institutions with the mandate to oversee and implement open government reforms have gradually emerged over the last decade in the MENA region, taking different forms across countries and territories in terms of their formality, reporting lines and mandates.

Upon joining the OGP, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia sought to establish institutional arrangements driving national open government agendas (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]). Some governments created dedicated teams or units within ministries, such as the Open Government units within the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) in Jordan and in the Ministry of Digital Transition and Administrative Reform in Morocco. Others added open government to the portfolio of existing teams managing a broader range of policy issues, as in the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform in Lebanon and E-government unit in Tunisia. Countries that have joined the OGP also created multi-stakeholder steering committees or forums, which include both members of government and civil society, to coordinate, implement and monitor commitments in national action plans (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]).

The evolution of these institutional, policy and legal frameworks in the region has contributed to gradually establishing an enabling environment for the implementation of a wide range of open government reforms at both the national and local level. Open government initiatives in MENA countries and territories have expanded across a wide range of policy issues (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]). Some of these reforms have facilitated the deployment of response and recovery measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic¹, whilst serving as drivers to achieve long-term development objectives, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (OECD, 2020^[10]).

Despite progress to date, the enactment of open government reforms remains uneven across the region. Findings from the OECD and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA) (2021^[4]) reveal that governments face a series of challenges in ensuring their medium- and long-term sustainability and responding to the needs, concerns and growing expectations of citizens and businesses alike. This move towards embedding open government and its principles in the way public administrations work has yet to be fully translated into robust institutions coupled with sound legal and policy frameworks, with these reforms seen as a policy issue embedded within other sectoral agendas or, in some cases, implemented on an ad hoc basis without a dedicated mandate.

Given the fragmented and short-term nature of policy frameworks for open government in the MENA region, there is an opportunity to consolidate and scale up support for this agenda to better co-ordinate initiatives across levels of government and ensure impactful results for citizens. This is all the more important as open government reforms commonly emerge from the grassroots level through interactions with local governments and their communities.

This be done through open government strategies or other types of broader policy frameworks, combined with tailored and extended co-ordination mechanisms. Putting in place an open government strategy requires setting up the required institutional architecture that can support its effective implementation (OECD, 2021^[5]). Strong institutional settings can also help raising open government literacy levels across the administration, clarifying roles and responsibilities, improving accountability lines and fostering high-level political commitment. Examples of institutional frameworks in OECD Member countries and presented in Box 5.2.

Box 5.2. Institutional framework for open government in OECD Member countries

Most OECD Member countries have a specific governmental office responsible for the horizontal co-ordination of open government initiatives, which is often located within the Centre of Government and more precisely, in 62% of OECD Member countries, it is placed either in the Office of the Head of Government or in the Cabinet Office/Chancellery/Council of Ministers. In **Canada**, open government initiatives are co-ordinated through the inter-departmental Open Government Steering Committee, chaired by a Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, the Chief Information Office of Canada. **Mexico** created a co-ordinating committee that is integrated in and chaired by the Presidency of the Republic. In the **United Kingdom**, a group of civil society organisations created the UK Open Government Network that meets regularly with the Cabinet Office to co-ordinate the development and implementation of the United Kingdom's Open Government Partnership National Action Plans. **Italy** has established a Forum on Open Government, co-ordinated by the Department of Public Administration of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Source: (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]).

To go further, the adoption of a whole-of-government approach can provide a more coherent and co-ordinated implementation, which should be coupled with protection and promotion of civic space as a key precondition for open government (OECD, 2021^[3]). Acknowledging this need to move towards a holistic approach for these reforms to achieve their full potential, Tunisia and Morocco are currently working towards the development of national open government strategies to align objectives under a common medium- to long-term vision. The development process of the National Open Government Strategy in Tunisia is presented in Box 5.3.

Box 5.3. The development of a national Open Government Strategy in Tunisia

In line with the OECD Recommendation on Open Government, Tunisia committed to designing and adopting a national open government strategy (8th commitment of the 4th NAP of the OGP), thus becoming the first country in the MENA region to launch such a project.

The participatory process to develop a strategy was launched in November 2020, with OECD's support. In October 2021, following preparatory meetings with the E-government Unit in the Prime Minister's Office, Tunisia launched an online consultation, partly inspired by a good practice from Argentina. In December 2021, in-person consultation workshops were held with participants from government, public institutions and CSOs to discuss strategic priorities on the three pillars of transparency, accountability and participation. In 2022, Tunisia's OGP steering committee, comprising government officials and civil society representatives, held a series of meetings to brainstorm, conceive and agree on a national definition of open government as well as a mission and strategic objectives for the strategy. In August 2022, a consolidated draft of the strategy was shared with the members of the OGP steering committee for their approval before the finalisation of the document.

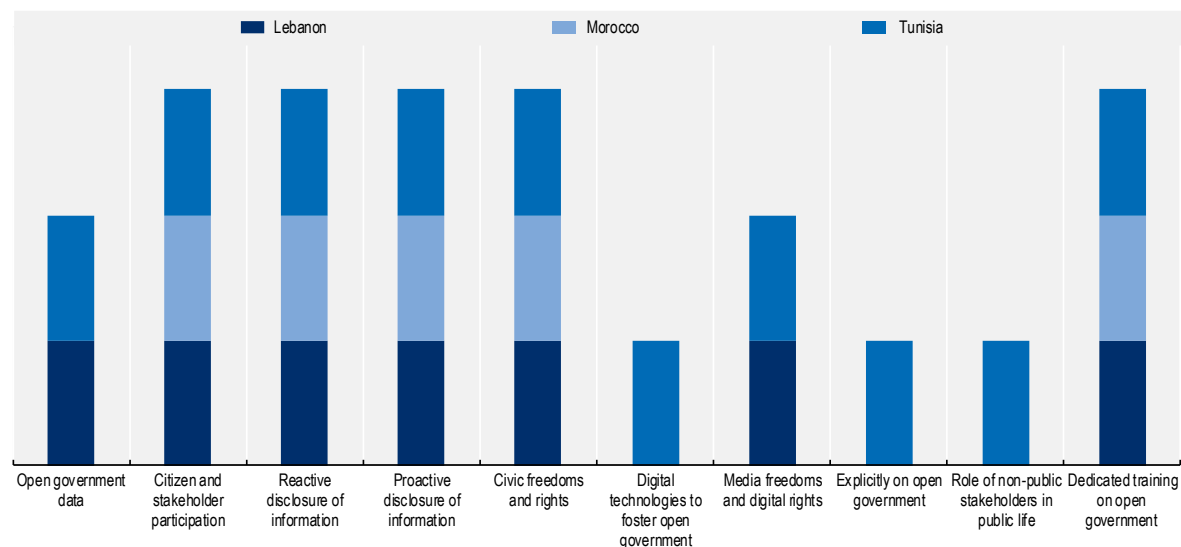
The final draft of the strategy was presented and discussed with public stakeholders and civil society actors during a high-level meeting in January 2023, and is pending official adoption.

Source: Author's own work.

Open government tools and processes could be further strengthened to promote a culture of openness across public administrations

From a governance perspective, the appropriation of open government reforms across and beyond public administrations could be strengthened. While the concept of open government has gained popularity over the last decade, the degree of open government literacy remains uneven across line ministries, inhibiting a whole-of-government implementation of this agenda. This has in turn contributed to insufficient co-ordination and the fragmented implementation of initiatives reducing their reach and impact, even within governments that have a dedicated unit leading the national open government agenda or ministerial oversight committees (OECD, 2023_[11]). To address this challenge, some governments in the region are adopting guidelines, toolkits and conducting trainings to ensure that civil servants and policymakers embody open government principles (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Some MENA governments are developing toolkits, guidelines and training for civil servants on open government



Note: From the MENA Region, Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon responded to this question on the OECD Survey on Open Government. Source: (OECD, 2021^[5]).

Supporting this agenda with adequate human and financial resources will also be crucial. This is a common challenge shared by OECD Member and partner countries who identified “limited communication and awareness of the benefits of open government reforms among public officials” as the second main challenge for open government reforms, the first one being the “insufficient political will/leadership of senior government leaders” (OECD, 2023^[11]).

Expanding and diversifying the range of technical capabilities to implement open government reforms may also help governments in the region avoid the common pitfall of overly focusing efforts on one component of open government (e.g. open data, access to information or anti-corruption) without a comprehensive approach to reach the goals of transparency, accountability and participation.

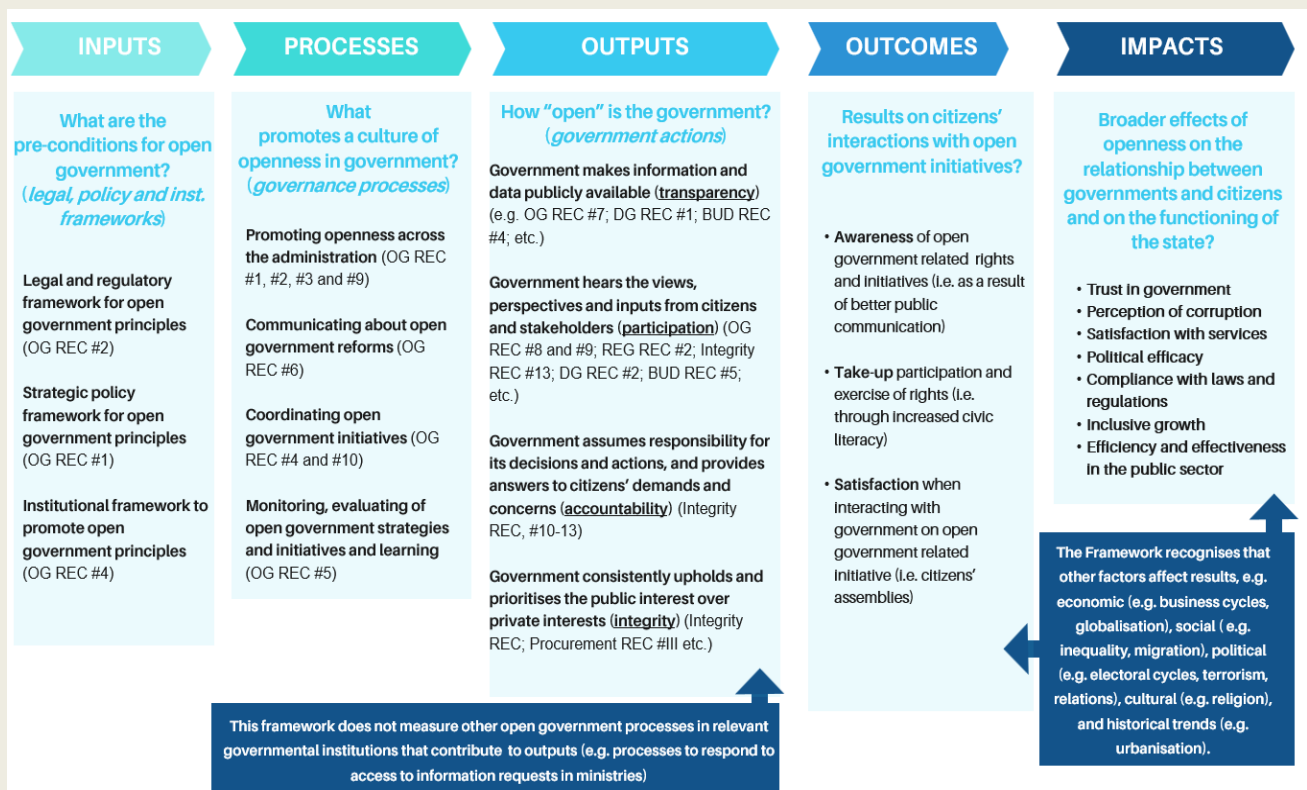
In addition, measuring and showcasing the impact of open government reforms remains a challenge (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]). While various governments in the region have stepped up efforts in this regard, in particular those within the framework of the OGP, it has proven difficult to quantify the long-term impact of such reforms on broader policy goals, such as health care or education. Findings from the OECD Survey on Open Government (2021^[5]) reveal that efforts in the region focus on self-monitoring outcomes through online platforms, such as the interactive Open Government portal in Morocco and the OGP portal in Tunisia, or as a result of ad hoc meetings (e.g. Morocco and Tunisia).

Only a few governments evaluate impact indicators. Where they exist, these can take various forms, including self-assessments, evaluations from the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) and other external surveys conducted by stakeholders which seldom are published online (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]). The OECD has been working closely with OECD Member and partner countries in the measurement of performance indicators, through the OECD Open Government Dashboard and OECD Citizen Participation Barometer, presented in Box 5.4.

Box 5.4. The OECD Framework to Assess the Openness of Governments

The OECD Secretariat is currently working on a “Framework for Assessing the Openness of Governments”. The proposed framework, which is based on the provisions of the OECD Recommendation on Open Government, is structured as a theory of change and provides the basis for a model showing how the Open Government principles contribute to increased levels of openness and how openness, in turn, has a broader impact. When seeing this as an implementation model, this framework can also represent a suggested “roadmap” for implementing Open Government reforms and assess how they lead to policy change results.

Figure 5.2. The Open Government theory of change



As part of this framework, the OECD is developing the OECD **Citizen Participation Barometer** with the primary objective to provide policymakers with a concise, data-driven and internationally comparable overview of their countries’ practices in the field of citizen participation, allowing for the identification of bottlenecks and facilitating evidence-based interventions. The Barometer aims to measure meaningful citizen participation with three key considerations:

- It considers the implementation or practice instead of governance systems.
- It goes beyond availability of participation processes by evaluating aspects such as whether public inputs are indeed considered for public decision-making.
- It encompasses the wider ecosystem for participation, explicitly recognising that meaningful participation is not possible without citizens having access to relevant and high-quality information and data and that civic space needs to be protected and promoted to enable impactful government-citizen interactions.

The Barometer's conceptual framework is framed around three pillars:

1. Inform: this pillar is looking at citizen's access to information and data as the basis for informed involvement;
2. Enable: this pillar is looking at the protection of civic space as a prerequisite for democratic involvement;
3. Engage: this pillar is looking at citizen's access to decision-making processes in practice and ability to make their voices heard.

Each pillar encompasses specific indicators that, together, provide an overview of countries' openness in practice.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[12]).

Taken together, these factors are hampering a linear and progressive move towards more open and effective governance models, the full exploitation of the OGP membership, and the translation of open government reforms into more inclusive growth.

Looking ahead, MENA governments should therefore prioritise scaling and expanding the impact of open government reforms with the aim of empowering the next generation of citizens and public officials to implement the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder and citizen participation. Doing this will require setting up adequate legal and regulatory frameworks as well as governance arrangements and mechanisms, together with well-trained civil servants with the capacity to prioritise the principles of openness, being user-driven and proactive in their day-to-day work and with the broader digital government ecosystem.

Open Government initiatives are increasingly being promoted at the local level in the MENA region

Local governments – regional, provincial, and municipal – have a direct impact on people's daily lives and are essential to building more open and inclusive societies, as that is where “interactions with citizens are most frequent, demands for responsive public services are most pressing and there is often more space to innovate” (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[41]). Not only are they responsible for the direct delivery of public services, but also play an intermediary role between citizens and policymakers throughout levels of government.

Beyond initiatives lead by the executive at the national level, open government principles are increasingly being applied and promoted at the local level. According to the OECD Survey on Open Government (2021^[51]), some governments in the region are engaging in efforts to implement joint open government initiatives which allows to share good practices and experience across levels of government.

The implementation of open government principles at the sub-national level through the OGP local initiative has also constituted a promising avenue to expand the relevance and reach of localised reforms. Various sub-national authorities in the region have joined the OGP local initiative and developed dedicated action plans in this regard. These actors include the Greater Karak and Salt municipalities in Jordan, the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima and Beni-Mellal regions, the consortium of Souss-Massa, Oriental, Draa-Tafilalet and Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra and the municipalities of Tetouan and Agadir in Morocco, and El Kef, Regueb, Zriba, Dar Chaabane El Fehri and more recently Carthage in Tunisia (OGP, 2022^[13]).

Ongoing efforts undertaken in the MENA region to decentralise power to the sub-national level have also been important drivers of open government reforms and have served to reiterate commitments to bridge the gap between public institutions and its citizens at the grassroots level. These processes have been shaped by territorial administrative decentralisation or regionalisation reforms in countries such as Egypt,

Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Together with the implementation of open government initiatives at the local level, of which a few examples are presented in Box 5.5, these reforms offer an opportunity to strengthen the role of local governments in shaping new governance models.

Box 5.5. Open government practices at the local level in select MENA countries

Acknowledging the need to decentralise power to the local level, governments in the MENA region are progressively taking steps to embed the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation alongside this process.

- For example, **Jordan** embarked on a decentralisation reform process in 2015 with the aim to empower sub-national administrations and place citizens at the heart of local decision-making. In doing so, it sought to expand engagement efforts with citizens and to help ensure development plans reflect community needs more accurately. Consultations with stakeholders from civil society, academia and unions took place as a part of three National Dialogues in 2015, 2019 and 2020 respectively on the political reform of decentralisation. This platform contributed to the drafting of a new local administration law, which sought to revamp decentralisation efforts by granting new powers and procedural requirements for Local, Executive and Governorate Councils.

More broadly, open government reforms at the local level have also begun to flourish in the MENA region. The interface between local authorities and citizens offers direct opportunities for the public to participate in the decision and policies that affect their daily lives. Some examples include:

- In Morocco, the Ministry of the Interior's General Directorate for Local Authorities (DGCT) is leading the way for a structured and integrated promotion and implementation of open government principles of transparency, access to information, accountability, citizen participation and digitalisation at the local level, in line with the ambitions of the regionalisation process. In 2022, this work led to the launch of the Support Programme for Open Local Authorities (PACTO) and the creation of the Moroccan Network of Open Local Authorities (REMACTO) as part of the programme. REMACTO provides a forum for exchange, dialogue, capacity-building and mutual learning between local authorities committed to openness. An initial cohort of 63 local authorities, including 50 municipalities, joined the network, and a second pilot group joined in February 2024. As part of the Network, the DGCT supported local and regional authorities in the design of local openness programmes.
- In Lebanon, local governments incorporate open government principles from the Municipal Act of 1977. More recently, the 2017 Right to Access to Information Law requires central institutions and municipalities to publish all administrative documents (decisions, budgets, annual accounts and tenders), create special websites for this purpose, and reply to access to information requests.

Sources: (OECD, 2020^[14]; OECD, 2017^[15]; OECD, 2019^[16]; OECD, 2019^[17]; OECD, 2020^[18]).

Nevertheless, in the MENA region as elsewhere, local governments generally face similar challenges to their national counterparts in transitioning towards a culture of open government. Factors such as insufficient co-ordination, unclear roles and responsibilities, low political buy-in, lack of technological maturity and scarce human and financial resources are among some of the key barriers observed across countries and territories in the region (OECD, 2020^[14]; OECD, 2019^[17]; OECD, 2020^[18]).

Based on over a decade of work supporting governments in the region, the OECD has identified various supporting conditions to strengthen the enabling environment for open government reforms to flourish at both the national and local level (OECD, 2020^[19]):

- Enabling the right legal and institutional framework
- Securing strong political leadership at the central and local levels
- Stimulating civil service capacity and leadership
- Protecting and promoting a robust civic space
- Fostering the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders
- Promoting a sound media and information ecosystem

Applying open government in practice

The success of open government reforms also depends on the implementation of open government measures, laws and standards by public officials. MENA governments have embarked on a number of initiatives to translate these frameworks into practices supporting effective access to information, sustained dialogue and citizen and stakeholder participation in public life.

Some significant advancements in terms of transparency and access to information in the region, although legal and regulatory frameworks could be further consolidated

Transparency is a core building block of open government by facilitating the accessibility of public information and data together with its proactive disclosure. The OECD defines transparency as “stakeholder access to, and use of, public information and data concerning the entire public decision-making process, including policies, initiatives, salaries, meeting agendas and minutes, budget allocations and spending among others” (2021^[3]). It is fundamentally about ensuring that citizens and other stakeholders can exercise their voice, observe, understand and monitor the activities of the government on decisions that affect their daily lives. For it to achieve its full potential, the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (2017^[1]) calls on governments to promote the disclosure of “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”.

In the MENA region, the Arab uprisings brought about a profound transformation driving a more favourable enabling environment for access to information (ATI) through developments in terms of its legislation and operationalisation (OECD, 2019^[20]). The right to access information is, in many countries and territories, stated in the Constitution or in constitutional provisions, and institutions guaranteeing the right to access information (IGAI) have been set up to operationalise this right. As of 2024, five countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen) had a law guaranteeing the right to access to information (Table 5.1), and three of them had a Commission overseeing its implementation. The Palestinian Authority developed a draft law in 2018, which has yet to be adopted. Nevertheless, the Authority's new comprehensive reform programme in 2024 included the adoption of an ATI law as a key priority under its “Democracy and Human Rights” pillar. Additionally, countries such as Kuwait and Iraq have been in the process of developing such laws in the past years (ESCWA, 2024^[21]). In the case of Algeria, the High Authority for Transparency, Prevention and Fight against Corruption is responsible for the oversight of broader transparency and anti-corruption commitments within the Constitution and the Communal Code, despite the absence of a dedicated ATI law.

Table 5.1. A snapshot of ATI Laws in select MENA countries

Country	Stipulated in Constitution	ATI Law	Year of issuance
Algeria	●	○	NA
Egypt	●	○	NA
Jordan	●	●	2007
Lebanon	○	●	2017
Morocco	●	●	2018
Tunisia	●	●	2016
Yemen	○	●	2012

Source: Author's work based on (UN ESCWA, 2021^[22]).

Following the adoption of these laws, countries and territories in the region have established diverse types of mechanisms to operationalise ATI. Box 5.6 presents examples of tools and mechanisms developed by MENA governments. Notably, efforts have sought to address low levels of awareness that exist about ATI both across society and public administration. OECD data show that practices used to facilitate information requests in the MENA region have included the provision of information on how to make a request online, the assignment of a dedicated body/public official as an assistance point, or the provision of specific support for requesters who may face particular challenges due to disabilities, for example (Figure 5.3) (2021^[5]). This data also reveals, however, that mechanisms are not always anchored in ATI legislation and/or policy frameworks, which may hinder their degree of institutionalisation, take up and enforcement. While these efforts together have progressively enhanced access to public information, this right remains underutilised, with proactive disclosure policies implemented and monitored unevenly across institutions in an ad hoc manner according to available capacities, resources and staff (OECD, 2023^[23]; OECD, 2021^[24]; OECD, 2019^[20]).

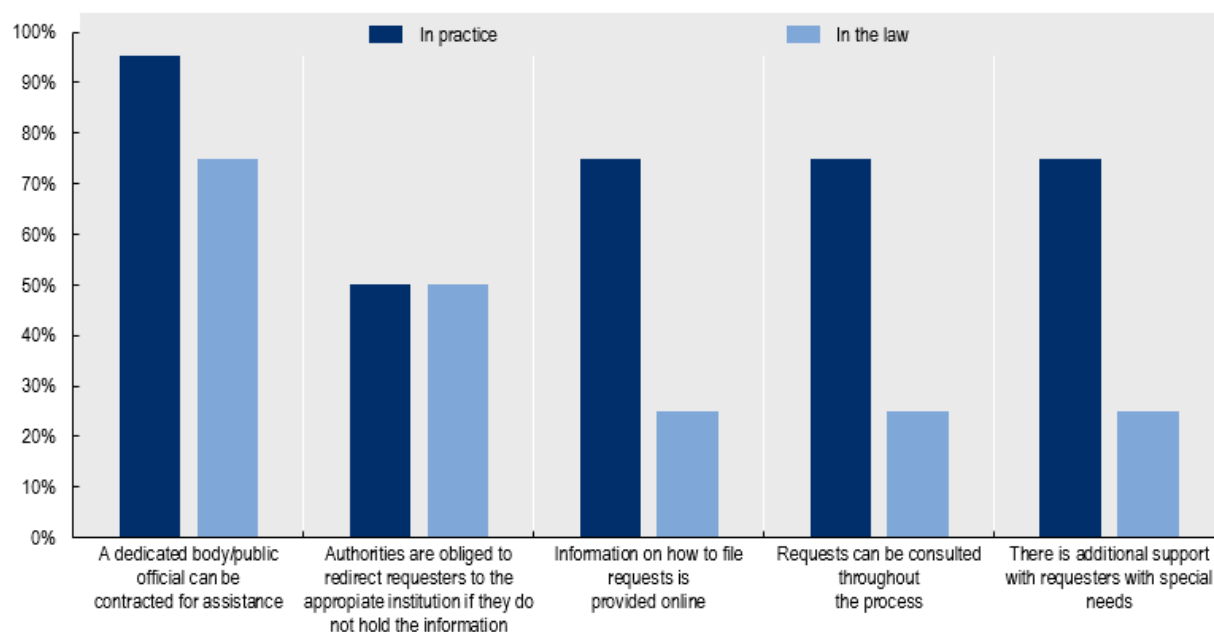
Box 5.6. Experiences in select MENA countries on the right to access information

Jordan, as the first country in the MENA region to pass legislation on access to information in 2007, developed three protocols for classifying, enforcing and managing information. Their overall objective is to provide clear procedures and standards for public bodies subject to the ATI law. The protocols were elaborated by a multi-stakeholder committee composed of government officials, CSOs, academics and international experts, and were subject to a public consultation over the course of 2020 and adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2020. In April 2024, an amended version of the ATI law was adopted.

Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon have introduced explicit references to the ATI right in constitutional amendments over the last decade. Related laws were then adopted in the three countries, the Organic Law 2016-22 in 2016 in Tunisia, a law in Morocco in 2018 and in Lebanon in 2017 respectively. The countries' new Constitutions provided also for the creation of more or less independent institutions, responsible for protecting and developing civil and human rights. Within the sphere of their jurisdiction, collegial commissions or other types of bodies participate in promoting and defending access to information. The Tunisian National Authority for Access to Information, for instance, is an autonomous legal entity. In Jordan, the Information Council was set up in 2007. In Morocco, the Moroccan Commission on Access to Information is placed under the responsibility of the Head of Government. In Lebanon the National Anti-Corruption Commission ensures the right to access of information.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[20]; OECD, 2021^[24]; OECD, 2020^[18]).

Figure 5.3. Diverse types of procedures are used to facilitate requests for information in select MENA countries



Note: N= 4 countries from the MENA region, including Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[5]).

Open data policies have also helped advance efforts to promote the transparent sharing of statistics, data, plans and operation in the region. These initiatives have often preceded and advanced at a faster pace than ATI efforts in the region. Notably, several governments have adopted open data strategies and/or developed open data portals (Table 5.2) (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]). The legislative framework for open data includes legal aspects related to citizens' right to access and use government data, as well as the right to reuse and distribute data; grant a license for reuse; publication exemptions; and the protection of personal data. While few MENA governments have set up such a regulatory framework to date, relevant examples can be highlighted (See Box 5.7). Despite these frameworks, no MENA government has adhered to the Open Data Charter, which was adopted at the OGP Summit of 2015 in Mexico.

Table 5.2. MENA governments have developed open data portals

Government	Open Data Portal(s)
Algeria	http://portal.datalageria.cerist.dz
Bahrain	https://www.data.gov.bh
Egypt	https://egypt.opendataforafrica.org
Jordan	https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/wps/portal/Home/ https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/wps/portal/OpenData?lang=en#/manageDataSets
Kuwait	https://e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenlish/Pages/OtherTopics/OpenData.aspx
Lebanon	https://www.opendatalebanon.org
Libya	https://libya.opendataforafrica.org
Mauritania	https://mauritania.opendataforafrica.org
Morocco	https://www.data.gov.ma
Oman	https://data.gov.om
Palestinian Authority	https://www.opendata.ps
Qatar	https://www.data.gov.qa
Saudi Arabia	https://data.gov.sa
Tunisia	http://fr.data.gov.tn/ and http://openbaladiati.tn/
United Arab Emirates	https://bayanat.ae

Source: (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]).

Box 5.7. Experiences in select MENA countries to leverage Open Government Data (OGD)

As part of ongoing efforts towards enabling a data-driven public sector, countries and territories in the MENA region have sought to catalyse the value of open government data. The following provides some examples of successful initiatives in this regard.

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** has placed open government data high on its national agenda, namely through the UAE Government Strategy (2011-2013) and the UAE Vision 2021. In 2011, the government published a set of open data principles and guidelines for UAE government entities in a bid to improve co-ordination and coherence on the release of open data by public sector organisations. Since then, the government has continued to launch and pass a series of high-level policies including the Dubai Data Strategy, the Dubai Data Law, the DubaiPulse platform, open data portals (i.e. the UAE's data portal [bayanat.ae] built on the existing government portal [u.ae], the Abu Dhabi open data portal [addata.gov.ae], the Ajman data portal [ajman.ae/en/ajman-data]), and the Abu Dhabi Government Data Management Policy and Standards. This is all with the aim of developing a mature open data ecosystem that can support the advanced analytics and digital services, and collaboration with external stakeholders built on data protection and privacy.

In 2019, in **Morocco**, to support the promotion of open government data and strengthen its impact, the Government established an Open Data Steering Committee, coordinated by the Digital Development Agency (ADD). The Committee created four thematic working groups for the inventory of data, the

identification of a repository to be developed, technical standards, and communication, awareness-raising and training of public, private and civil society actors on open data. In this framework, Morocco also established an action plan defining short, medium and long-term actions and launched the National Open Data Portal (<http://data.gov.ma>) in December 2021. The technical sophistication and usability of the portal suggest an awareness of the potential of open data to engage with civil society and businesses to create good governance for social and economic value. Available datasets cover a wide range of subjects, including health, finance, education, employment, geo-data, and tourism.

In **Tunisia**, the national open government data portal (<http://data.gov.tn/fr>) provides easy access to datasets on a wide variety of subjects. This national open data is complemented by other sectorial open data portals, such as the ones of the Ministry of Interior (opendata.interieur.gov.tn), Ministry of Transport (data.transport.tn) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries (agridata.tn). The E-Government Unit in the Prime Minister's Office ensures the monitoring of open government data, and follows up on implementation by central government. The national open government data portal is complemented by open data portals of various sectorial ministries.

In **Jordan**, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE) has developed a procedural framework for classifying, measuring, and evaluating the quality of open government datasets. MoDEE also manages Jordan's Open Government Data Platform, which allows concerned entities to access governmental data and enables all beneficiaries to access the list of government data available. This platform reviews the open datasets in possession of government agencies in open and machine-readable formats, so that, according to the conditions contained in the Jordanian Open Government Data License, it is allowed to use the datasets published on the platform, reuse and redistribute them by anyone and in any place for any purpose. This is done in accordance with the Open Government Data Policy issued by the Council of Ministers in 2017, and the instructions for publishing open government data on the platform issued in 2019. Moreover, as provided for in the National Digital Transformation Strategy and Implementation Plan (2021-2025), MoDEE is currently developing a more advanced "Open Data Portal" that will have more modern features in line with international good practices.

Sources: (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]; OECD, 2017^[25]; Government of Morocco, n.d.^[26]; OECD, 2024^[8]; OECD, n.d.^[27]; OECD, 2016^[28]).

While countries and territories in the region have made significant progress in terms of promoting access to information as well as the use and reuse of open data, evidence suggests that legal and regulatory frameworks for ATI should be further consolidated, implemented consistently and further aligned with good international practices. Additional capacities should be built in the public administration to speed up processes, monitor compliance with proactive disclosure and handle requests more swiftly and competently. National ATI institutions have an important role to play in this regard.

Useful avenues to promote access to public data and information could include awareness-raising campaigns for a more informed citizenry to make ATI requests, formal capacity-building efforts to strengthen knowledge and skills to implement this right within the administration and leveraging transparency portals to provide up to date, clear and reliable information proactively. Streamlining and enhancing proactive disclosure of information, especially with information and data related to crises, would also reduce the administrative burden for public officials handling and answering individual ATI requests and support more effective access to information. At the same time, more traditional non-digital tools should still be used to avoid widening the digital divide and make sure the most vulnerable segments of the population are able to consult key information.

Leveraging public communication is paramount for governments in the region to foster transparency, participation and government effectiveness

Governments are encouraged to make a strategic use of public communication as a tool to enhance the visibility of open government reforms, raise awareness and engage citizens and stakeholders in participation processes. Indeed, public communication plays a critical role in safeguarding an open, transparent and inclusive interface between the government and its citizens. The OECD defines public communication as the government function to deliver information, listen and respond to citizens in the service of the common good (OECD, 2021^[29]). It is distinct from political communication, as it is not linked to political parties, debates, or elections. When conducted strategically, it can fulfil different key roles, such as acting as an enabler of government-stakeholder dialogue; a means to greater transparency and participation; and an instrument for better policies and services. At its core, it implies a two-way relationship that allows governments to understand, listen and respond to citizens, supporting a stronger engagement from their end in public life. The effective dissemination of government information is also a pillar of transparency and a key means to allow stakeholders to hold the government to account.

Evidence also suggests that public communication remains underutilised as an instrument for openness and more inclusive policymaking. As in many OECD Member countries, most Centres of Government (CoG) surveyed in the MENA region and responsible for leading the strategic direction of this function consider promoting transparency (75%) as a priority objective of public communication activities, in stark contrast to the promotion of participation (OECD, 2021^[29]). Data also suggest there is room to diversify public communication efforts and target underrepresented groups more explicitly across the work of both CoGs and ministries alike. In fact, only two out of four MENA CoGs surveyed target key groups as part of their communication work, and limited efforts exist to reach audiences such as the elderly, individuals with disabilities, ethnic minorities and migrants (OECD, 2021^[29]).

Promoting more inclusive communication will be critical for governments in the region to expand the reach of policies and services to a wider range of actors, in particular to engage with and give a voice to traditionally underrepresented groups in policymaking. Acknowledging these challenges, various governments in the region adopted a regional charter on public communication, agreeing on guiding principles, identifying standards of effective communication and means to improve the contribution of this function to the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation (Box 5.8).

Box 5.8. The MENA-OECD Regional Charter: Public Communication for a more Open Government

The MENA-OECD Regional Charter was developed with the aim of defining standards and rules to enhance the professionalism of public communication and its contribution to open government principles. The charter's objectives include defining key values and principles, sharing insights and best practices, pooling resources and developing strategic communications. The structure of the charter underlines the main objectives, guiding principles for public communicators and a list of the actions that adherents should undertake. To do so, it covers overarching goals of improved transparency, professionalism, collaboration, networking and peer support. Ultimately, the charter aims to strengthen the two-way dialogue between governments and citizens and contribute to a more open government.

The charter was developed in the framework of the OECD Citizens' Voice project, building on outcomes of policy discussions among governments, as well as the key findings from OECD reviews of public communication structures, processes and practices in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[24]; OECD, 2021^[30]; OECD, 2019^[31]; OECD, 2019^[32]).

Better engaging citizens and stakeholders in decision-making processes allows to design and deliver more relevant and inclusive policies across the MENA region

Establishing a culture of participation enables governments to engage with and better understand the needs of citizens and stakeholders for the design and delivery of more relevant and inclusive policies and services. The OECD defines stakeholder² participation as “all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery (2017^[1]).” It thus refers to the efforts by public institutions to communicate, listen to and integrate the views, perspectives and contributions from citizens and stakeholders into public decision-making. When carried out effectively, participation around the policies and decisions that affect the daily lives of citizens and stakeholders can improve the relevance of policy outcomes and garner support for policy measures. It can also “build civic capacity, improve the evidence base for policymaking, reduce implementation costs, and tap wider networks for innovation in policymaking and service delivery” (OECD, 2016^[33]). In this regard, the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (2017^[1]) recognises the importance of granting all relevant actors equal and fair opportunities to be engaged for the effective deployment of open government reforms.

Stakeholder participation, however, is not a linear concept. It comprises different modalities as well as degrees of involvement across the different stages of the policymaking cycle. As part of its framework of analysis, the OECD ladder of participation distinguishes between three levels of stakeholder participation (2016^[33]):

- **Information:** refers to the one-way relationship in which public organisations produce and share information for the general public, which cover both “reactive” measures responding to citizens and stakeholders’ information demands and “proactive” measures to disclose information and publish open datasets.
- **Consultation:** refers to the two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government, where public institutions still define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the consultative process.
- **Engagement:** refers to the provision of opportunities for stakeholders, as well as adequate resources (e.g. information, data and digital tools), to collaborate with public institutions throughout the policymaking cycle (OECD, 2016^[33]). It may include elements of co-decision or co-production.

In the MENA region, the use of participation mechanisms to engage with various groups in policymaking are diffused practices across countries and territories. Indeed, there is a diverse breadth of participation mechanisms that have been utilised to progressively give a voice to the public on issues that matter most to them, as presented in Box 5.9. In this regard, the preparation of OGP National Action Plans in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia appear to have frequent and diverse forms of citizen and stakeholder participation, through online consultations, meetings, national dialogues forums, technical boards and local councils amongst others. OECD evidence reveals, however, that participation in the MENA region is more frequent in the design of policy documents and gradually declines during the stages of implementation and monitoring as in many OECD Member countries (OECD, 2021^[5]). Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and academia are the main actors engaging in these processes, with citizens, trade unions and the private sector, involved to a significantly lesser extent (OECD, 2021^[5]).

Box 5.9. Examples of efforts to promote stakeholder participation in select MENA countries

Promoting the participation of Jordanian and Tunisian stakeholders in the OGP process and beyond

In **Jordan**, the 5th and current OGP National Action Plan (NAP) (2021-2025) was developed following the advanced consultation model which the OGP advises. A first draft of the methodology for the development of the NAP was submitted for review and approval to a multi-stakeholder forum consisting of representatives from CSOs and governmental bodies and chaired by MoPIC. The methodology was then published to receive public comments and feedback. Once it was finalised, the methodology was implemented through activities involving governmental and non-governmental institutions to draft the final commitments of the NAP. Notably, MoPIC launched a new version of the Open Government Unit's website, where it published the invitations to the public to participate in the activities, disseminated the results of each stage of the process, and received feedback from stakeholders.

The Government has also undertaken efforts to open spaces for citizens and stakeholders to take part in its ongoing decentralisation reform. With the support of the OECD, a series of national dialogues were organised convening over 1,500 members of civil society. Recommendations by attendees informed the drafting of the new local administration law and capacity-building efforts to strengthen capacities of local and governorate councils.

Similarly, **Tunisia** has already drawn up five NAPs of the OGP in a participatory way through online consultations and workshops. The co-creation process of the 5th NAP started with an online public consultation and several public consultation meetings held in different regions of the country with representatives from municipalities and CSOs active at the local level, followed by a workshop with representatives from public bodies, civil society, and partner institutions to present and discuss the result of this extensive consultation phase. This first phase was followed by several working sessions of a Joint Steering Committee (composed equally of representatives from public institutions and CSOs) to draft commitments based on the propositions gathered, which were later published for a last round of online public consultation.

Open data hackathons in the United Arab Emirates

The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) of the UAE developed in 2018 its official Hackathon website³. It comprises a number of hackathons that take place at specific locations throughout the seven emirates to provide an opportunity for different groups—including students, entrepreneurs and IT experts—to use and reuse open datasets to come up with solutions based on specific themes and challenges facing the administration. The government also supports the translation of successful ideas into real life projects.

These spaces for stakeholders to directly help in finding solutions to the most pressing policy issues achieved important results. In the first three versions, about 6,306 participants grouped in 764 teams developed 872 ideas, based on over 3,566 public datasets. Organisations expressed interest in 161 innovative ideas.

The Open Government Participatory website of Morocco

The open government portal of Morocco was launched with the aim of providing an online interface for the co-creation of the second OGP NAP for the 2021-2023 period, with the support of the OECD. Through its interactive functionalities, stakeholders were able to submit ideas and proposals as well as consult information on and register for thematic events and co-creation webinars along 10 axes: “integrity and fight against corruption, access to information, gender equality, innovation and digital governance, transparency on budget and taxation equity, open justice, participative democracy, inclusiveness and inter-regional equity, quality of public services and environment and access to natural resources” (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]). These inputs informed discussions of the OGP steering committee and identified implementing public administrations, and resulted in 22 commitments. In addition, in December 2021, Morocco launched the online “civil society space” on the national open government portal to increase the engagement with CSOs in the OGP process and open it more largely to civil society, in addition to the CSOs taking part in the OGP steering committee, thus building on the participatory approach adopted in the co-creation process and strengthening it beyond it. Similarly, the new version of the portal also includes a comment section for the implementation of each commitment as well as a public consultation module, in an effort to further engage citizens and CSOs throughout the implementation of the NAP.

Sources: (OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[4]; OECD, 2021^[24]; OECD, 2023^[34]; Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan, 2021^[35]).

MENA governments could leverage existing online platforms to allow for more direct consultations for policymaking with citizens and stakeholders

The adoption of online portals launched by both government and civil society stakeholders by various MENA governments has also supported the steady opening of new interfaces for citizens and stakeholders to interact with public institutions. While not exhaustive, Table 5.3 provides some examples. Most online platforms in existence facilitate the ability of the public to consult information, report issues or share complaints. Figure 5.4 illustrates the main functionalities in online platforms from respondents in the MENA region (Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia), which focus on providing information to stakeholders on their right to participate and past consultations. However, it is less common for most government-wide portals to provide feedback to citizens and stakeholders on their inputs and contributions, if this functionality is available at all. In addition, these platforms are often underutilised due to lack of awareness around their existence or due to low levels of digital literacy.

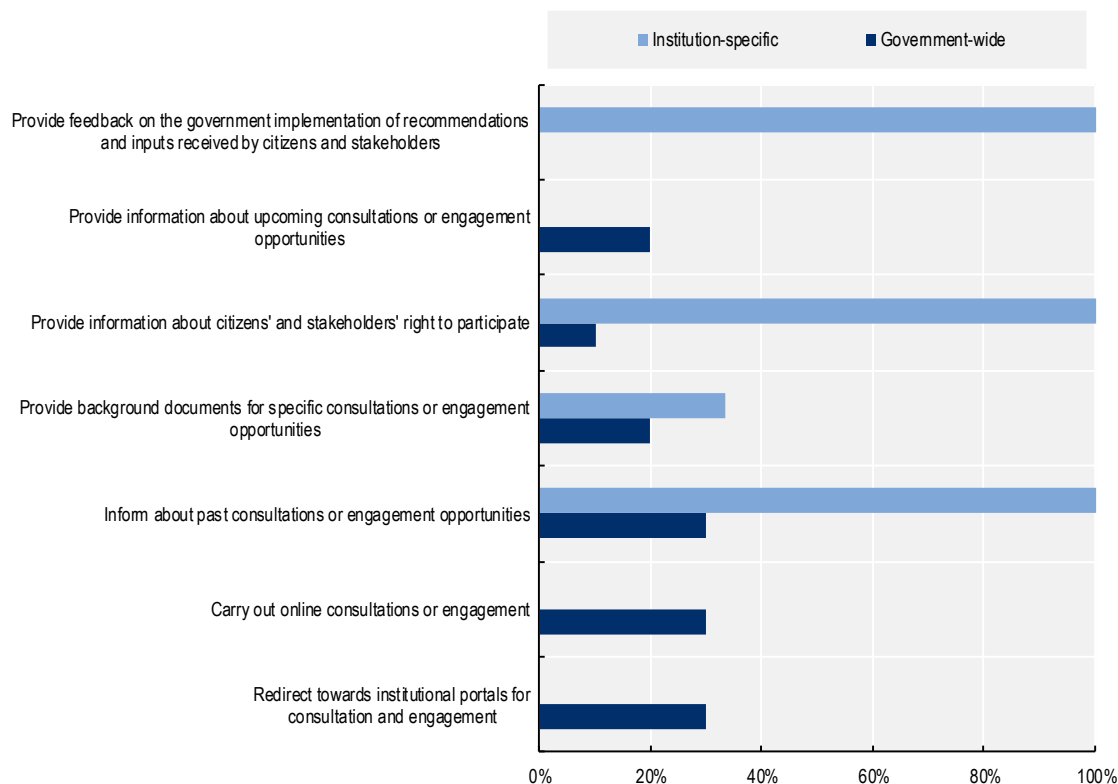
Table 5.3. MENA governments have developed online portals for citizen and stakeholder participation

Online portals for citizen and stakeholder participation developed by select MENA governments

Government	Platform	Objective	Link
Algeria	CONTACTINI	Reporting instances of corruption	https://contactini.mjs.gov.dz/
	E-Nyaba	Filing of complaints, requests and the monitoring of their processing by the Ministry of Justice.	https://www.mjjustice.dz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/service_parquet_electronique_fr.pdf
	E-Participation Form of the Ministry of Justice	Forms to submit queries and complaints to the Ministry of Justice	https://www.mjjustice.dz/fr/e-participation/
	Nechki	Online service to submit complaints to the Ministry of Interior	https://nechki.interieur.gov.dz/fr/accueil.php?view=v
Egypt	Online platform for stakeholder engagement	Online mailbox for citizens to submit queries, complaints and requests to the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development	https://mped.gov.eg/Initiatives?lang=en
Jordan	"Your right to know" or Haggak Tiraf	Verify the information presented in news stories and social media to prevent the spread of rumors and disinformation	http://www.haggak.jo/
	Human rights complaints mechanisms	Icon on the websites of several relevant institutions (e.g. the National Centre for Human Rights, the Human Rights Unit in the Prime Ministry, Office of the Government Coordinator for Human Rights etc.) whereby citizens can submit complaints and report instances of human rights abuse. Citizens can also submit in-person, via Whatsapp and via phone call to the public body.	https://www.nchr.org.jo/
	"At your service" or <i>Bekhedmetkom</i>	Online portal to interact with the government by asking questions, submitting proposals, complimenting work, and registering complaints.	https://portal.jordan.gov.jo/wps/portal/Home/CMU?lang=en
Morocco	Open Government Portal of Morocco	Space for the "co-creation" of the second OGP national plan and "civil society space" since 2022 for CSOs for a sustained interaction between CSOs and the administration on OG reforms	https://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/co-creation.php?lang=ar https://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/espace-ong.php?lang=fr
	National Claims Portal	Online portal for citizens to interact with the administration and submit claims, questions or suggestion as well as follow-up	https://www.chikaya.ma/
	Eparticipation.ma	Online citizen participation portal to submit petitions and motions. Pending module on public consultation	https://www.eparticipation.ma/
Palestinian Authority	"Raise your voice" platform	Online public consultation platform for draft legislation by the Ministry of Justice	https://econsultation.moj.pna.ps/
Tunisia	E-people.tn	Offers mediation services for citizens with 6 headings (request, suggestion, alert, information, forum and survey).	E-people.tn
	E-participation.tn	Platform with modules for consultations, public debates and proposing ideas.	E-participation.tn
	Legislation.tn	Offers free access to information, a quick navigation and search in different sections such as the Constitution, circulars, codes in force as well as international conventions and treaties. In addition, it provides access to projects of laws submitted to the legislative power and draft texts submitted for public consultation	Legislation.tn
United Arab Emirates	Tawasul	Centralised portal for citizens' observations, suggestions and inquiries	https://171.ae/en/

Source: Author's own research.

Figure 5.4. The online portals for citizen and stakeholder participation have several objectives in Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia



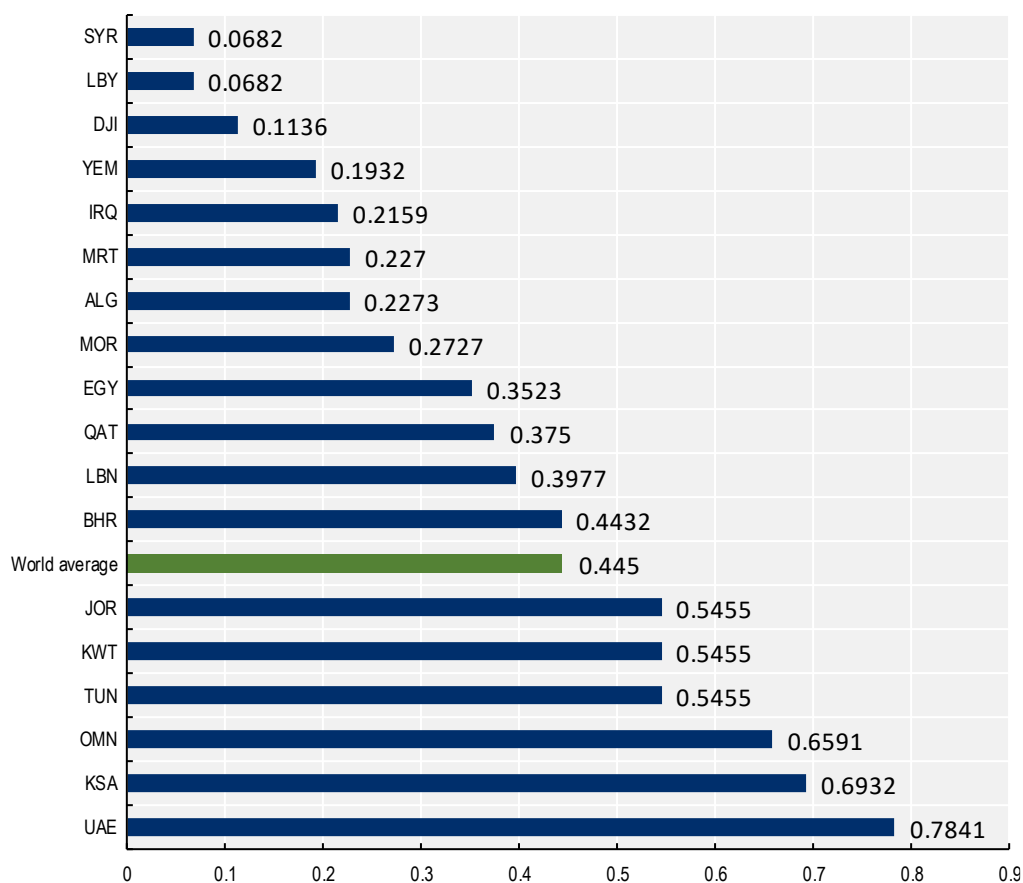
Note: N=13 based on 10 government-wide platforms and 3 institution-specific platforms in Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[5]).

Building on these efforts, there is an opportunity to leverage existing online platforms to expand their functionalities and allow for direct spaces to conduct consultations for policymaking. In particular, interfaces where government institutions publish consultations and other engagement opportunities can help facilitate exchanges with citizens and stakeholders when designing public policies, and widen the opportunities to those who are unable to attend in-person meetings (OECD, 2021^[3]). Efforts in this regard have begun emerging in some countries such as Morocco, with the launch of its open government interactive portal⁴ (see Box 5.9 above). Opening new spaces for a two-way dialogue to take place will be all the more important, as a more collaborative and inclusive approach in the form of e-participation needs to be mainstreamed in most MENA countries and territories. In fact, this will be even more important as many of the countries and territories in the region are below the world average in regard to the e-participation index (see Figure 5.5). Promoting the integration of open government portals in the region could also facilitate their use by citizens, reduce costs and facilitate their management.

Figure 5.5. Many MENA countries and territories are below the world average in regard to the E-Participation index

E-Participation Index in select MENA countries and territories, 2022



Source: Author's work based on (United Nations, 2022^[36]).

Opportunities for citizen and stakeholder participation in MENA countries and territories would benefit from more formal policy frameworks that ensure a whole-of-government approach

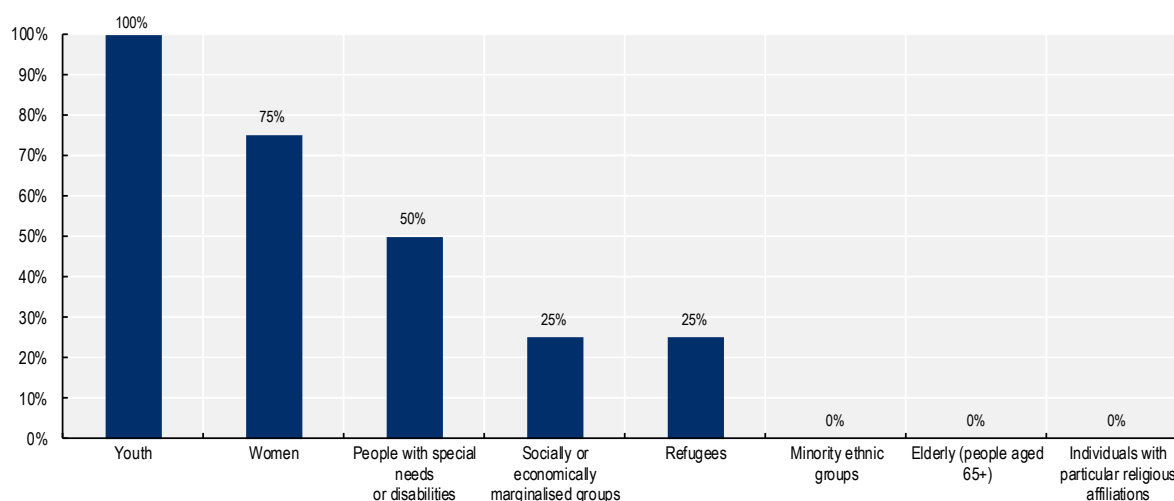
While governments have progressively spearheaded efforts to engage with citizens and stakeholders in policymaking, these developments have unfolded at a different pace across the region. According to the OECD and UN ESCWA report (2021^[4]), efforts from governments in the MENA region are still needed to enable a transition from the most basic forms of stakeholder participation (informing and consulting) towards more meaningful and structured opportunities for collaboration and engagement. In this regard, addressing uneven capacities across countries and territories to institutionalise stakeholder participation mechanisms, ensure their representativeness and provide meaningful opportunities to directly contribute to the design of policies and services will be critical for this transition to take place.

A common challenge that countries and territories in the MENA region are confronted with is the fragmented, ad hoc and non-institutionalised nature of stakeholder participation efforts across the whole of government. As in many OECD Member countries, participatory processes are often deployed in a

decentralised manner with uneven capacities, resources and skills available at the level of line ministries (OECD, 2021^[3]). OECD evidence reveals that while responsibilities for citizen and stakeholder participation are assigned to an office or institution in each of the four MENA countries surveyed, responsibilities at the level of line ministries are less clear-cut with two countries reporting that between 1% - 49% of ministries have available staff to conduct these exercises, and the rest not having this information available (OECD, 2021^[5]).

Incorporating the views of a wide range of stakeholders in participatory processes, particularly those of traditionally underrepresented groups, is also a recurring challenge in the region. According to the OECD survey on Open Government (2021^[5]), some governments in MENA are progressively establishing mechanisms to engage young people and women in certain policymaking processes, as presented later in the chapter. Nevertheless, strategies to involve other traditionally underrepresented groups in public life, such as people with special needs, minority ethnic groups, refugees and the elderly, are less prominent (Figure 5.6). Inclusive policymaking is essential in ensuring the effective uptake of policies and services that respond to citizens' needs, expectations, preferences and habits.

Figure 5.6. Most strategies to encourage participation of specific groups are focused on young people and women across select MENA countries



Note: N= 4 countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[5]).

Considering these challenges, countries and territories in the MENA region stand at an inflection point to revamp and scale existing consultation, participation and engagement practices that are fundamental to improve the quality of policies, laws and regulations. Opportunities for participation would benefit from improving their systematic application, representativeness and robustness across all stages of the policymaking cycle.

Promoting the establishment of formal policy frameworks for whole-of-government stakeholder participation that would consider specific needs throughout the whole public policy cycle will be key in this regard. The establishment of an assigned team, office or body that could lead these efforts and sensitise public officials would also be crucial to support the implementation of such frameworks. The OECD has developed a series of guidelines to accompany the planning and implementing of citizen participation processes that are presented in Box 5.10.

Box 5.10. OECD citizen participation guidelines

The OECD has outlined eight steps for planning and implementing a citizen participation process:

1. **Identifying the problem to solve:** The first step when deciding if citizen participation is necessary is to identify if there is a genuine problem that the public can help solve. It is also important to be clear about the stage of the decision-making process in which citizens' inputs are most valuable and can have influence.
2. **Defining the expected outcome:** Before involving citizens, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the expected outcomes of the process. This means the desired type of inputs and the impact they will have in the scope of your project.
3. **Identifying available resources:** The necessary resources vary depending on the design and implementation of the process. Some elements that will impact the amount and type of resources needed can include: the scope of the process (timeframe, quantity of participants), the method used, the type of recruitment, the tools and some logistical considerations such as venues and facilitation. The resources can be human, financial, and/or technical.
4. **Identifying the relevant public to be involved and recruitment:** The next step is identifying the public to be involved in the process, depending on the purpose. This decision will affect how the public will be selected or recruited.
5. **Choosing a participatory method:** Once the problem to solve, the expected inputs, and the public you are working with have been identified, it is time to choose the method of participation. There are many different methods that can be used to engage citizens in any given context, including information and communication, open meetings/town hall meetings, civic monitoring, representative deliberative processes, among others.
6. **Tips for implementation:** The implementation of a participation process largely depends on the method chosen. Key elements of each model are outlined in the previous section. However, there are some general considerations that concern any participatory process – such as preparing an adequate timeline, communication strategy and selecting appropriate digital tools.
7. **Keeping your promise:** Getting back to participants and the broader public about the results of the citizen participation process is an essential step. It is also one that is often neglected. Without proper acknowledgement of the hard work and inputs from citizens and stakeholders, participants might get a wrong message that their input was not important or will not be taken into account, discouraging them from participation in similar activities in the future.
8. **Evaluating the participatory process:** Evaluation allows to measure and demonstrate the quality and neutrality of a participation process to the broader public. This can increase trust and legitimacy in the use of participation processes for public decision-making and implementing projects.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[37]).

Any formalisation of participation and engagement in the policy cycle and concrete demonstration of a political will to take better account of the needs of people will help to anchor practices and change the culture of governance.

Interestingly in Morocco, the Special Commission for the Development Model was established in 2019 by the King with the mandate to undergo a diagnostic of the development situation in the country and define the contours of a New Development Model through a participatory approach. In 2020, it adopted a collective intelligence methodology and implemented a multi-channel participatory process with eight

consultation methods: (1) stakeholder hearings; (2) working sessions; (3) citizen meetings bringing together 30 to 60 participants selected through an online call for proposals in all 12 regions of the country; (4) listening sessions organised by local associations; (5) an online survey ; (6) field visits by Commission members to the country's 12 regions; (7) calls for written contributions organised with institutional partners; (8) free contributions from individuals and organisations. In total, through these methods, the members of the Commission interacted with almost 9,700 people, gathering written contributions from 6,600 individuals and 185 organisations. The online platform attracted about 50,000 unique visitors, and the campaign launched on social networks reached nearly 3.2 million citizens (Paulson, 2021^[38]).

An enabling environment for civil society to operate is a prerequisite for effective stakeholder engagement

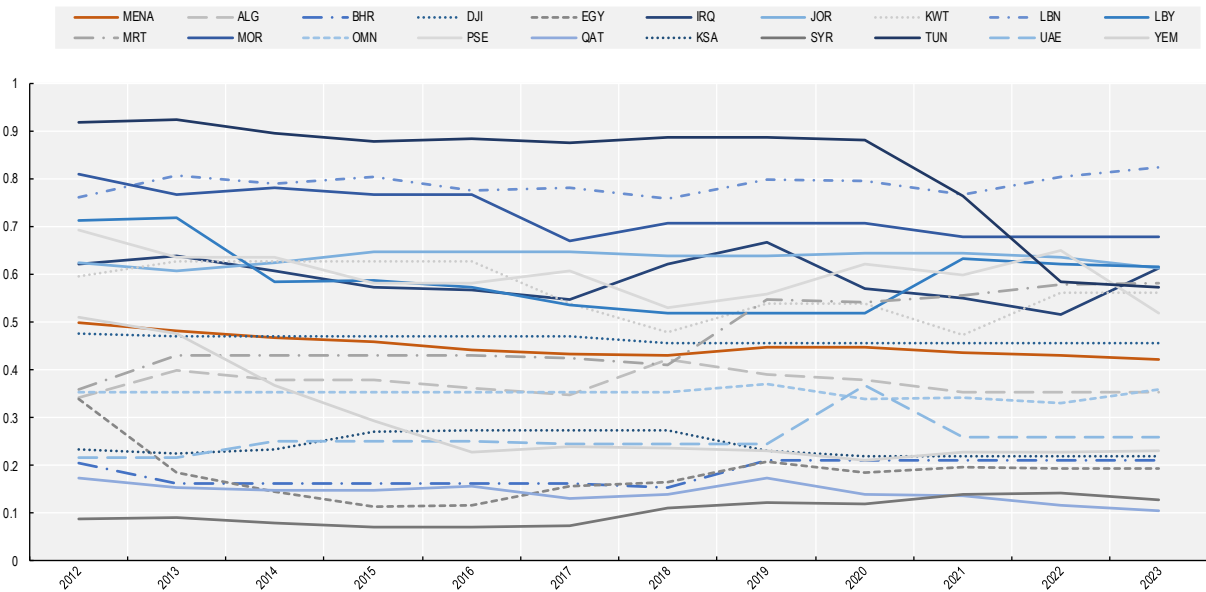
Civic space⁵ is a prerequisite to effectively engage citizens, stakeholders and CSOs in decision-making processes (OECD, 2022^[39]). As an important element of protecting and promoting a healthy civic space, governments in the region could increasingly strive towards strengthening an enabling environment for a diverse civil society sector to operate.

Indeed, civil society organisations have played a key role as advocates, watchdogs and contributors to the improvement of public policies and services in the MENA region. Following the Arab uprisings, these actors have increasingly consolidated their presence and contributed to a number of key reforms across the region.

The capacity for civil society in the region to advocate, influence and enact change, however, differs from one country or territory to another. Spaces for CSOs to engage in a two-way dialogue with the government remain limited in number and focused on select policy issues. Notably, the enabling environment for CSOs to operate must contend with limited regulatory frameworks protecting freedom of association, uncertainty in terms of their financial sustainability and potential instances of interference or limited spaces to contribute to the policymaking cycle (Civicus, 2022^[40]). Addressing these factors is essential to protecting and promoting a healthy civic space in the region, which over the last years has been curtailed, according to actors such as Civicus (2022^[40]; OECD, 2022^[39]). In fact, CSO participation has remained limited with similar levels to those in 2012 in most countries and territories of the region, namely in terms of the degree to which these actors are consulted by policymakers and involved in public decision-making processes, as highlighted in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7. Levels of civil society participation remain low following the Arab uprisings

Scores of select MENA countries and territories in the Civil Society Participation Index between 2012 and 2023



Note: Scale constitutes intervals, from low to high (0-1).

Source: Author's work based on (V-DEM, 2024^[41]).

Empowering these actors with the right resources and promoting meaningful spaces for engaging with the government could support more relevant and inclusive policymaking. In this regard, a conducive legal framework guaranteeing freedom of association is a crucial part of the enabling environment for civil society. The legal framework regulating CSOs registration and operation, including administrative obligations, needs to be predictable and transparent for civil society actors to work effectively without fearing political interference (OECD, 2022^[39]). Similarly, facilitating transparency and access to public and foreigner funding, as well as supporting associations in exploring other funding opportunities, is another important lever to support the sustainability of the civil society sector and its contribution to a more inclusive society. In addition, other type of support could be considered, such as specific tax exemptions, while ensuring that the access to these exemptions is transparent, clear, and based on objective criteria. Finally, trainings and capacity-building could be considered to strengthen evidence-based advocacy work.

Leveraging digitalisation and inclusive policymaking for open and equitable societies

As MENA governments are stepping up their efforts to digitalise the administration, as presented in Chapter 4, ensuring that this process translate into more equitable and inclusive society is key. The OECD Recommendation on Open Government recognises that digitalisation can constitute a lever for open government and calls governments to “seize the opportunities provided by digital government tools, including through the use of open government data, to support the achievement of the objectives of open government strategies and initiatives” (2017^[1]). At the same time, it is essential to ensure that the integration of digital technologies in the public sector and public service delivery does not become an exclusionary factor by guaranteeing the necessary infrastructure and digital literacy of all categories of the population. In parallel, equality and non-discrimination represent a precondition to open societies, and

open government policies cannot be effective if capacity of part of the population to engage in public life is hindered by socio-economic factors.

This section explores how MENA governments can leverage the potential of digitalisation for open government while establishing the framework and practices needed to ensure policymaking processes are inclusive of all parts of society.

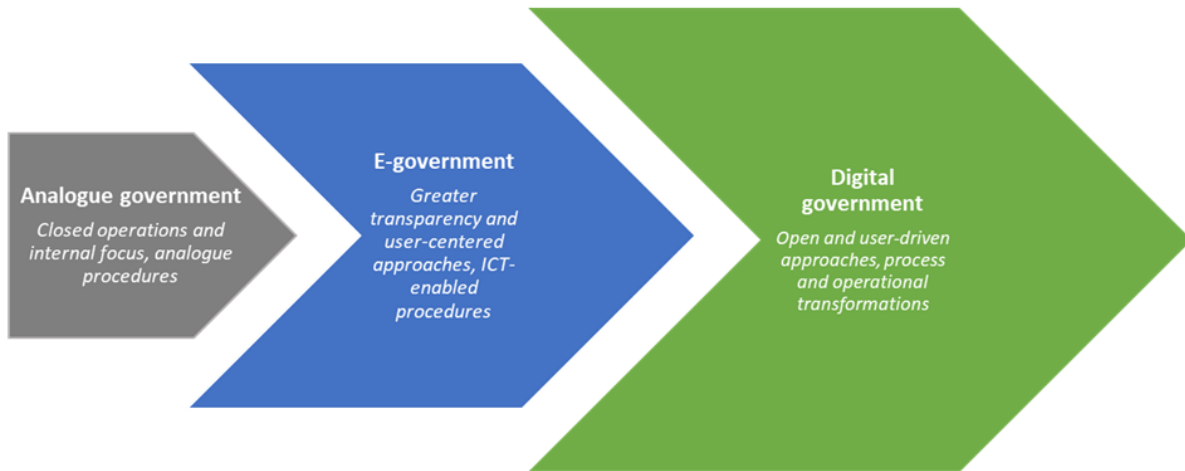
Twinning digitalisation with openness to bring governments closer to citizens

As outlined in Chapter 4, the use of digital government strategies and tools can significantly improve all stages of policymaking and facilitate stakeholder's participation through more agile, effective and convenient public engagement. The OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies (2014^[42]) stresses the public value of modernising government through digital and electronic transformation and the need for a paradigm shift from e-government (i.e. the use by governments of ICTs as a tool to achieve better government) to digital government (i.e. the use of digital technologies as an integrated part of modernisation strategies to create public value), which implies critical dimensions such as “digital-by-design” and “open-by-default” approaches. This presumes a proactive, data- and user-driven public sector (OECD, 2020^[43]).

Persistent digital divides must however be properly addressed in order to avoid the emergence of new forms of digital exclusion. They reflect the fact that societies consist of people who do and people who do not have access to – and the capability to use – digital technologies. Among the many inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital divide has emerged as a factor threatening the inclusiveness and effectiveness of public governance reforms in many countries (OECD, 2021^[29]). It is therefore paramount for governments to address communication inequalities, technological divides and improve Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) literacy in society. In doing so, involving citizens and civil society in developing, securing and implementing reforms is imperative, and all relevant voices must be heard – including those from those least equipped to engage, because of lack of awareness, low participation literacy, information overload, low interest in politics, cultural, language, physical disability or geographical barriers (OECD, 2022^[39]).

In the MENA region as well, ensuring the digital transformation delivers results for all citizens is an essential component underpinning the effective functioning of open and inclusive societies. Notably, the acceleration of political, social and economic activity online is providing new opportunities to “exercise civic rights, support mass mobilisation and facilitate more dynamic and inclusive participation” through what is also referred to as the “online civic space” (OECD, 2022^[39]). In today's fast-paced digital age, ensuring a transition from e-government to digital government will be fundamental for public administrations to ensure all groups in society benefit from the digital dividends and can take active part in public life (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8. From E-Government to Digital Government

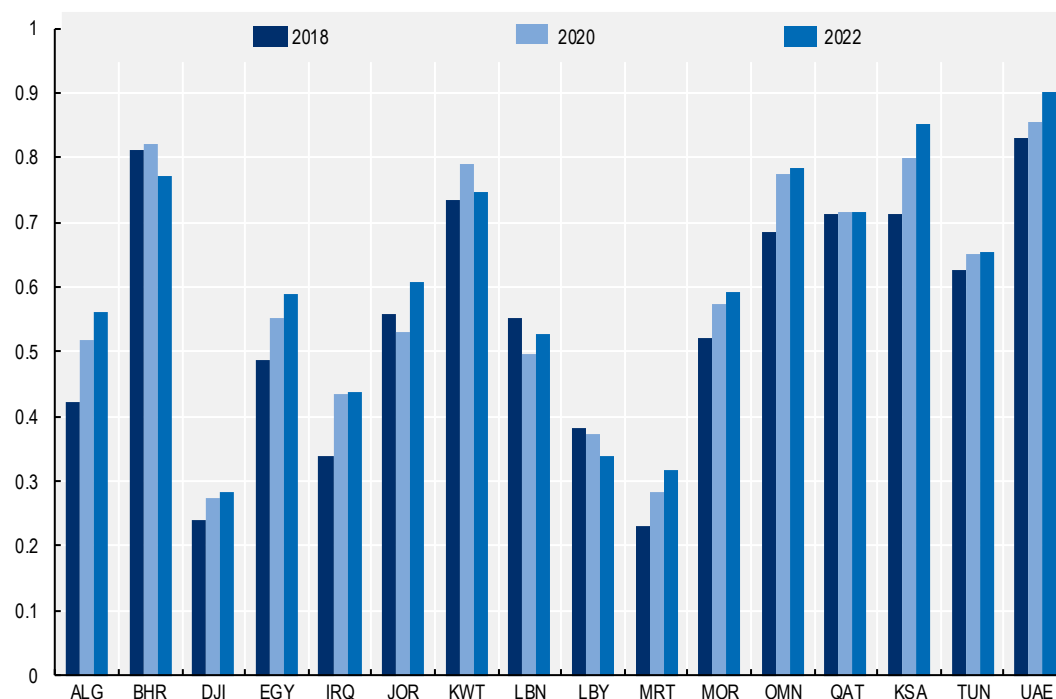


Source: Author's work based on (OECD, 2014^[42]).

In the MENA region, significant progress has been made in e-government and open data. The E-Government Development Index confirms the progress made by many MENA governments in developing Open Government Data (OGD) portals and adopting participation at different levels. Several of them score above world average, although some others remain far below. Gulf countries are at the forefront of these reforms, as testified by the UN E-Government Development Index (see Figure 5.9). Countries such as UAE, for instance, are characterised by mature government technology capacity and a track record of important achievements (OECD, 2017^[25]). Another example is the experience of Tunisia, which has progressively integrated openness in its digital government agenda. Its national e-government strategy “SmartGov2020” specifies the establishment of an open data framework that promotes transparency and reuse and the establishment of a citizen participation framework that fosters participatory democracy as key orientations – towards the goal of having “better informed citizens [who are] more active in public life, and communicate more easily with their administrations, through intelligent and enhanced use of digital technology” (OECD, 2020^[43]).

Figure 5.9. The Gulf countries are at the forefront of e-government development in the MENA region

Evolution of E-Government Development Index in select MENA governments, 2018, 2020 and 2022



Source: Author's work based on (UN E-government Database, n.d.^[44]).

Acknowledging such important disparities, basic infrastructure has been established in the region, digital connectivity has been diffused, and ICTs are being increasingly deployed for more efficient services. E-government policies have made the processing of administrative procedures more agile. This has translated into better accessibility for all, thanks to more co-ordinated and coherent e-government strategies. Most MENA governments have developed online services, e-government applications and e-government portals (see Table 5.3), which could further facilitate enhanced open government and participation, also for more entrepreneurial private sector activities. They have simplified access to those services by developing one-stop-shops for digital services or centrally available lists that define all services by the public sector. Box 5.11 illustrates some e-government good practices of countries and territories in the region, which are increasingly aware of the importance of opening government and better engaging with citizens.

Box 5.11. E-government initiatives for open government in the MENA region

Oman has developed an e-voting system for the elections of the Shura (Consultative Assembly) and local councils (11 governorates), which take place every four years. The system allows political candidates to submit their applications online. Electors can also register and vote through online polling stations or mobile applications. The identity of candidates and voters is verified through their national registration system with biometric authentication. The system has benefited from the deployment of the

national public key digital infrastructure in Oman, with digital identity (eID), mobile identity (mID) and digital signature, connected to 77 electronic e-government services.

As a part of its 2020-2030 Digital Transformation Strategy, **Lebanon** is developing several digital innovations such as a unified e-government platform for commercial registry and formalities; a courts automation project; an e-learning project for civil servants; and an e-procurement platform for public entities. Additional initiatives include a unified database for all public sector planning students; an e-appointment mechanism for the senior vacant positions in the Lebanese public administration; as well as a sectoral and organisational performance measurement and inspection programme for civil servants.

Qatar was the first country in the world to implement a generalised electronic patient medical record in 2016. 90% of the country's population are now offered this instrument. The Clinical Information System connects hospitals, primary health care centres, physicians and laboratories and enables them to quickly retrieve all information on patient health records.

In the **UAE**, several flagship e-government portals (such as “Smart Dubai”, “Smart Abu Dhabi” and others) provide all public services and administrative documents interactions through mobile phones application mainly. Users are offered quick access to information without the need to visit government entities or their websites. The UAE also launched electronic ID cards, carrying biometric details for the whole population, nationals and residents, as well as “smart pass” to access e-government services and a “UAE Pass App” with similar functions and secure digital signature on smartphones.

In **Egypt**, the “Digital Egypt e-Platform” enables people to access public services online. More than 168 digital government services are being provided, with the project to expand to other governorates. Several e-services were developed and launched for a number of entities, including law enforcement, notarisation, personal status, family courts, electricity, agriculture, traffic, real estate registration, etc.

In **Kuwait**, all residents have smart civil ID cards that are designed to allow citizens of all Gulf Cooperation Countries to travel freely between member states. These ID cards serve as an ID document in the format of a credit card, allowing cardholders to access digital government services and perform transactions securely. The Public Authority for Civil Information manages a secure data exchange highway, allowing people, the government and companies to share data securely and verify the identity of the other party.

Strong units that coordinate effectively the digital transformation of the public sector and have the necessary levers to consolidate these strategies are missing in most MENA governments and differences can be observed even among well performing countries. In most MENA countries and territories, the regulatory framework for open government has moreover remained incomplete, rather fragmented and in some cases outdated. Achievements in some areas (such as the access to information legal bases discussed above) contrast against limited improvements in others, possibly because the lack of consistent leadership and strategic coherence that may be compromising a more rapid transformation. At the same time, these gaps complicate enforcement and reduce possibilities for good practice sharing and innovation.

Sources: (UN ESCWA, 2021^[22]; OECD, n.d.^[45]; OECD/UN ESCWA, 2021^[41]).

Making use of digital tools to support a more open government implies a new paradigm of governance for the MENA region. Digitalisation is a mean to move towards an open government. MENA governments need to see citizens not only as “users” of public services, but to consider them as actors that fully participate in all spheres of public life and can make valuable contributions to finding policy solutions to their challenges (OECD, 2020^[46]). A new generation of open government initiatives (OpenGov 2.0), including a stronger focus on improving citizens’ living conditions, is permeating a range of policy areas and requires the executive to have a structured approach for an effective implementation of this agenda. More than ever, a “whole-of-government” approach is needed to respond to the cross-cutting challenges to attain inclusive and sustainable development in the MENA region.

Additionally, in order to strengthen data governance, MENA governments should address existing gaps in regard to interoperability, duplication of efforts and fragmentation of the public sector. Box 5.12 illustrates various practices in OECD Member countries that have aided in the development of institutional capacities and skills to promote the availability, use and reuse of public data.

Box 5.12. Data-driven public sector dimension of the OECD Digital Government Index (DGI)

The OECD Digital Government Index (DGI) benchmarks the progress of digital government reforms across OECD Member and key partner countries. The data-driven public sector dimension is one of the six dimensions that compose the DGI, and it measures the extent to which governments have adopted and implemented a data governance approach to secure the effective management of data across public sector organisations. Many countries still lack a strategic and coherent whole-of-government approach to the development of a data-driven public sector. In 2019, only **Canada, Denmark, Greece** and the **United Kingdom** had a single dedicated public sector data policy. In contrast, 23 out of 29 (80%) surveyed OECD Member countries reported their approach to public sector data was divided across one or more related policies, such as digital government or open government data. Only seven OECD countries (**Denmark, France, Israel, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands** and **New Zealand**) have both a co-ordinating body and a dedicated leadership role (e.g. Chief Information Officer) to lead the development of a data-driven public sector.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[47]).

Governments in MENA could further reflect on potential avenues to promote skills assessments across the public sector and develop human resources strategies that help develop, attract and retain data skills across the public sector. In addition, training and capacity-building to make public servants responsive to engagement is necessary, particularly in administrations that have not been exposed to extensive public participation. Capacities can also be supported by the development of standards and guidelines for public sector data use, management and sharing. These efforts could build on the OECD Recommendation on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data which provide governments with a series of provisions to enhance data governance in the public sector (OECD, 2021^[48]).

Ensuring diverse perspectives are included in policymaking to support more responsive policies and services

Evidence from experiences in OECD Member countries suggests that promoting inclusive policymaking processes can help design policies and services that meet the diverse needs and interests in society, creating better opportunities for all, addressing systemic inequalities – such as gender or intergenerational inequalities – and ultimately promoting societal resilience and prosperity. At the same time, groups such as women and young people face specific obstacles to participating in social, economic and public life. For

instance, women, particularly in the MENA region, enjoy less job security and are over-represented in part-time and informal employment compared to men (OECD, 2020^[10]). The MENA region is also marked by one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world (OECD, 2022^[49]). Women and young people also face specific barriers in accessing politics and public life in the region, for instance in terms of discriminatory social norms and legal barriers, as well as lack of party support for women and young candidates (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014^[50]).

The OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life (2016^[51]) and the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People (2022^[52]) provide governments with policy guidelines and international standards to support their reform efforts on ensuring inclusive policy outcomes for women and young people. The OECD Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance (2012^[53]) and the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (2017^[1]) also underline pathways to include perspectives from vulnerable and underrepresented groups in government action.

Implementing policies and delivering services for specific groups in society requires action across a wide range of policy areas. Evidence-based, transparent, participatory, inclusive, cross-sectoral and budgeted government strategies can unite institutional stakeholders behind a joint vision and promote responsive policy outcomes (OECD, 2022^[52]). Policymakers can also proactively take youth and gender perspectives into account by applying public management tools in the policy cycle, for instance within the national budget cycle (e.g. gender budgeting practices) and in regulatory policy (e.g. through *ex-ante* regulatory impact assessments) (OECD, 2021^[54]; OECD, 2022^[52]). In addition, governments can take targeted action to encourage the participation and representation of young people and women in public and political life, for instance through awareness-raising and civic literacy activities, review of legal barriers and requirements, targeted and inclusive stakeholder consultation processes, and the establishment of dedicated advisory bodies (OECD, 2022^[52]). Encouraging gender-balanced representation in public life also requires tackling stereotypes and sociocultural norms. This sub-section explores how governments in the MENA region can strengthen governance arrangements to promote youth empowerment, gender equality and inclusiveness in policymaking.

Young people at the centre of government action

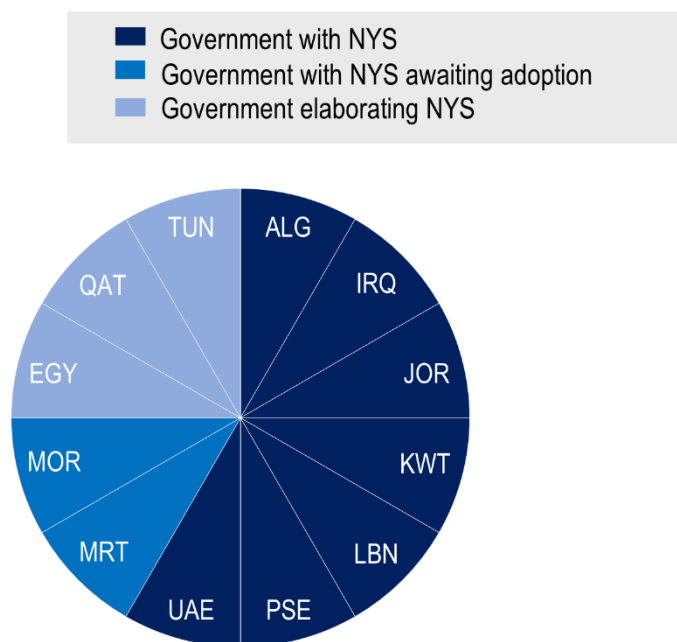
In the MENA region, people under the age of 30 constitute 55% of the population, representing significant potential for inclusive growth. At the same time, youth unemployment rates are among the highest in the world, young people tend to express low trust in public institutions and nearly four in ten live in fragile and conflict-afflicted areas (OECD, 2022^[49]). These challenges underscore the need to strengthen governance arrangements to ensure co-ordinated government action across the whole of government to promote better opportunities for young people and to mainstream their needs in policymaking.

Strengthening governance arrangements for youth empowerment

Promoting youth inclusion in social, economic and public life requires government action across numerous policy areas, such as employment, participation in public life, education and health. Ensuring whole-of-government co-ordination is hence necessary to promote better opportunities for young people. National youth strategies are a particularly useful tool to promote cross-sectoral approaches and unite stakeholders behind a common vision. As evidenced in the OECD report “Youth at the Centre of Government Action: A Review of the Middle East and North Africa”, at least seven governments in the MENA region have adopted national youth strategies (Figure 5.10), oftentimes including commitments and actions on youth participation in decision-making, similar to OECD Member countries (Figure 5.11) (OECD, 2022^[49]).

Figure 5.10. Several MENA governments have developed national youth strategies

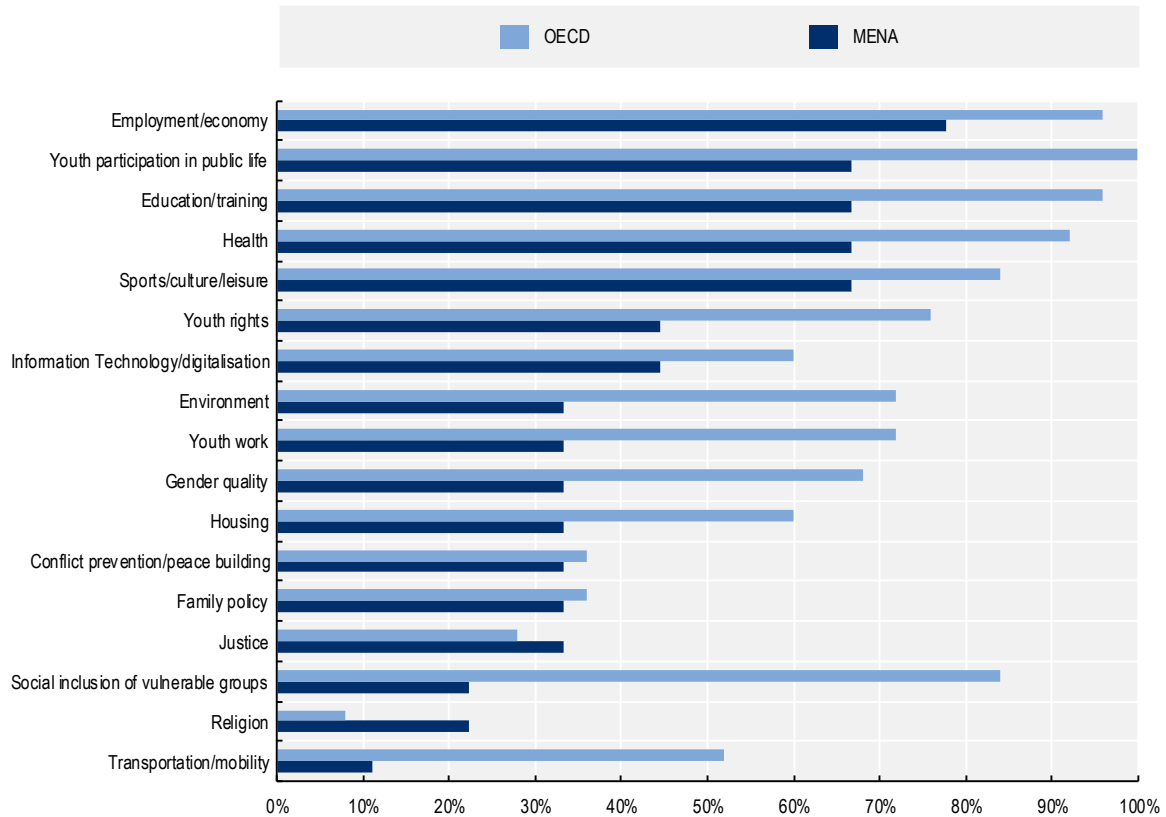
Governments in the MENA region with a National Youth Strategy (NYS) or elaborating one as of 2022



Source: (OECD, 2022^[49]).

Figure 5.11. National youth strategies in OECD and MENA countries and territories cover similar topics, including young people participation in public life

Thematic areas addressed in select OECD and MENA national youth strategies, 2022



Note: OECD refers to 25 OECD Member countries. MENA refers to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[49]).

At the same time, there remains a need for more participatory approaches in the design and implementation of the strategies and for stronger arrangements to monitor implementation and evaluate impact. In addition, national youth strategies (and government action more widely) require data and evidence disaggregated by age and other relevant factors in order to understand the situation and needs of young people, design adequate policy objectives and measures, track implementation and assess impact. OECD evidence suggests that there remain significant gaps in the availability of age-disaggregated data, notably in policy areas other than employment and education. These pitfalls for MENA governments are common also among OECD Member countries, where only 20% of national youth strategies have emerged as fully participatory, budgeted and monitored and evaluated (OECD, 2020^[55]).

Gathering age-disaggregated data, co-ordinating across ministries, designing and implementing youth strategies and delivering services all require a lead institution with a clear mandate and adequate capacities. Most MENA governments have a ministry of youth in place, often combined with other portfolios, notably sports. However, these entities oftentimes lack sufficient institutional and administrative capacities at national and sub-national levels. For instance, in the majority of MENA governments for which information is available, the budget allocated to the ministry in charge of youth affairs remains at 1% of the total government budget, or below (OECD, 2022^[49]).

Additionally, youth representation in the public workforce can help bring new skills and competences, inform policy solutions with diverse policy perspectives and ensure adequate institutional capacities. OECD evidence also finds that the share of young people working in ministries of youth varies widely across the MENA region, from more than 80% in the UAE to less than 10% in Morocco. According to OECD survey results, governments in Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and the UAE have put in place internships and training programmes to attract, develop and retain young talents in the public sector (OECD, 2022^[49]). MENA governments can ensure that public recruitment systems and assessment methodologies keep pace with changing skills and competency requirements as well as changing aspirations. They can also consider the creation of dedicated graduate programmes to promote the representation of young people in the public sector workforce, while ensuring the administration is able to benefit from new talent and diverse perspectives.

Enhancing youth participation and representation in public life

Promoting the participation and representation of young people in public and political life can strengthen their relationship with institutions and inform the policymaking process with innovative and diverse policy solutions. However, the participation of young people in public life and their representation in public institutions remains limited in the region: for instance, people aged under 40 represent only 16% of members of parliament in the MENA region on average compared to 23% across OECD Member countries, most of which have a significantly older population (OECD, 2022^[49]).

Barriers to youth participation include age-based stereotypes, lack of interest in politics, complicated voter registrations rules and minimum age requirements, among others. For instance, most administrations in the MENA region set the voting at 18 years of age, similar to OECD Member countries. However, the age to run for public office varies more significantly across the MENA region, from 18 years of age to 35 years of age, compared to an average of 19.8 years across OECD governments (OECD, 2022^[49]). Governments could consider lowering age requirements, as recently done by Jordan, where candidacy age was reduced from 30 to 25 years. Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia have also introduced youth quotas in their constitutions or electoral laws to promote youth representation. For example, according to Morocco's 2011 electoral law, 30 seats shall be reserved for candidates under the age of 40, and 60 seats shall be reserved for women in the national parliament (OECD, 2022^[49]).

While young people's participation and representation in institutional channels remains limited in the MENA region, they tend to participate in the public debate through non-institutionalised channels and contribute to community life, including through civil society and volunteering activities, both online and offline. Public authorities can thus take proactive steps to ensure targeted public communication and involvement channels, including as part of broader open government initiatives (e.g as part of national action plans to advance the open government agenda), and through formal institutions and mechanisms at all levels. MENA governments have taken steps to promote young people's participation in public life, including through civic and citizenship literacy programmes, targeted public communication and through youth centres/houses (see Box 5.13).

Box 5.13. Encouraging young people to participate in public life in select MENA countries

Civic and citizenship education

In Jordan, since 2013, the programme “Ana Usharek” (“I Participate”), organised by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), supports young people in applying democratic methods and engaging in community action. It targets university students through dialogue and debates to learn among young people as well as with politicians about democratic practices and principles, political and electoral systems, local and national governance, human rights, positive communication, citizenship, and gender. As of June 2021, over 10,500 students from 350 schools had participated in these classes.

Public communication via digital means

In the United Arab Emirates, the Federal Youth Authority shares a newsletter on a weekly basis with over 50,000 subscribers and has active social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter. In Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco, an increasing number of ministries and politicians communicate to citizens and young people through social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. For instance, in Tunisia, the ministry in charge of youth affairs has a website and a Facebook page posting regular updates.

Youth centres and youth houses

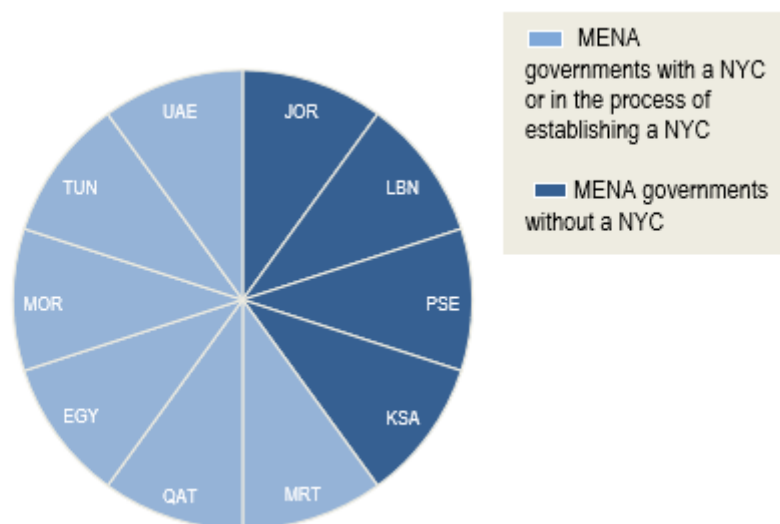
Youth houses or youth centres provide another institutional framework for young people to develop active citizenship and participate in public and political life. In Morocco, a network of around 510 youth houses exists to support the capacities of registered youth organisations and encourage the social inclusion and participation of young people in local sport, cultural and leisure activities. In Jordan, the Ministry of Youth oversees the infrastructure and work of 190 youth centres (106 for young men and 84 for young women) and 355 youth clubs. There are currently over 350 youth houses in Tunisia, managed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In the United Arab Emirates, the government has supported the reconversion of older youth centres into Youth Hubs, multi-function centres for young entrepreneurs and artists to connect, exchange and work together.

Source: (OECD, 2022^[49]).

Governments can also partner with youth organisations to strengthen societal resilience as well as engage young people through youth councils and deliberative processes. As of August 2024, available evidence suggests that Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have an operational national youth council in place, while Morocco is in the process of establishing one; similarly, 78% of OECD Member countries had a national youth council as of 2020. In addition, youth councils at the local level exist in Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the UAE, similarly to 88% of OECD Member countries (OECD, 2022^[49]; OECD, 2020^[55]). If they are inclusive in their approach, youth councils can help address the lack of co-ordination among non-governmental youth stakeholders and mainstream young people’s voices in policymaking.

Figure 5.12. A number of MENA governments have established national youth councils

National youth councils (NYC) in select MENA governments, 2024



Source: Author's work based on (OECD, 2022^[49]).

More broadly, participatory exercises should be inclusive in terms of groups involved (e.g. underrepresented and marginalised young people), but also in terms of their design such that they take into account specific needs (OECD, 2021^[54]). Box 5.14 presents a number of mechanisms and practices implemented in OECD Member countries to engage young people.

Box 5.14. Engaging young people and youth organisations in the policy cycle in OECD Member countries

Participation of youth organisations in planning COVID-19 recovery measures

In **Australia, Austria, Estonia, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic**, public consultations included youth organisations as key stakeholders. In Austria, each measure proposed by civil society organisations, including youth organisations, was displayed in a table which included a pillar on young people and future generations. In Australia, a list of youth organisations that provided feedback on the 2021-2022 Budget priorities is publicly available, and non-confidential submissions, including those of youth organisations, were transparent and accessible online. Estonia included its National Youth Council as a key partner in the consultation that led to the creation of its response and recovery plan.

Youth parliaments

In **Luxembourg**, the Parliament for Youth is an assembly composed by youth and working for youth. Every person aged 14-24 living in Luxembourg can be a member. A parliamentary session lasts from October to the following October. The Parliament for Youth is composed of commissions and an executive board. Since its creation, it has published resolutions on a variety of policy areas including waste management, European affairs and the quality of life. It also holds regular meetings with government officials. The Youth Parliament's main partners are the National Youth Council of Luxembourg (*CGJL – de Jugendrot*), the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth as well as the Chamber of Deputies.

Youth councils

Youth councils can help address the lack of co-ordination among non-governmental youth stakeholders and help mainstream young people's voices in policymaking. Among OECD Member countries, 78% report youth councils are in place at the national level and 88% at the sub-national level. Considerable differences exist with regard to their institutional architecture. For instance, in the **Netherlands**, the government recognises the Dutch Youth Council as the main national partner on youth affairs in the country, involving it through thematic working groups. In **Estonia**, the National Youth Council participated in the elaboration of the country's long-term development strategy, Estonia 2035. In some Member OECD countries, such as **Finland**, **Luxembourg** and **Slovenia**, youth laws also feature provisions on the status and functions of the National Youth Council, including membership conditions and responsibilities, among others.

Youth advisory councils affiliated to government

In **France**, the Youth Policy Advisory Council, created in 2016, acts as administrative advisory committee to the Prime Minister's Office, and is responsible for creating coherent and transversal public policies concerning young people. It may be consulted on legislative proposals of relevance to young people, and can examine any question of general interest in the field of youth policy.

Deliberative processes targeting young people

The Barcelona Youth Forum (*Fòrum Jove BCN 2021*) was a representative deliberative process that convened 99 randomly selected people living in Barcelona aged 16-29 to deliberate about the needs of young people in Barcelona and what the city council could do to help them in their development. They deliberated for five months and issued 22 recommendations in December 2021. In February 2022, representatives from the youth forum and city officials met at the Barcelona town hall for a public event in which the mayor explained the next steps regarding their proposals. The city hall also published a response for each recommendation in March 2022, accepting 18, confirming 2 were already in progress and rejecting 2 with rationale provided. Additionally, a commission with representatives from the forum was established to follow up and evaluate the uptake of the recommendations.

Sources: (OECD, 2018^[56]; OECD, 2020^[55]; OECD, 2022^[57]; OECD, 2022^[49]).

Volunteering can also support young people's empowerment, by fostering their skills and their civic engagement, while also help building societal resilience. However, only 20% of young people across the MENA region reported volunteering in 2018, similarly to findings for OECD Member countries (21% in 2022). OECD analysis finds that countries and territories with national youth volunteering programmes in place also report higher rates of youth volunteering (OECD, 2020^[55]). In fact, at least 16 OECD Member countries, including for instance Italy, France and the Netherlands, have put in place a national youth volunteering programme. Similarly, all MENA administrations that participated in the OECD Youth Governance Survey reported running programmes or activities for young people to volunteer (OECD, 2022^[49]). Enabling a common vision for the volunteering sector, setting clear responsibilities and ensuring adequate resources can help strengthen meaningful youth volunteering service, hence encouraging their civic engagement and participation.

Young people interact with all levels of government, but their first interaction often takes place at the sub-national level, where important services and programmes are delivered in most countries and territories. The needs of young people at the local level are often very different from one region to another, and expectations may differ from those aggregated nationally. However, most MENA governments are historically highly centralised, with local government expenditure representing about 5% of GDP on average across the MENA region (Kherigi, 2019^[58]), compared to about 16% of GDP on average across OECD Member countries (OECD, 2020^[59]). Prompted in part by the need to bring policies and services

closer to people and to address regional disparities and lack of public services outside large cities, some MENA governments have engaged in recent years in a process of decentralisation (e.g. Jordan and Tunisia) or regionalisation (Morocco) (OECD, 2022^[49]). This has implications for youth policies, strategies and responses to the needs of young people. Effective co-ordination of youth policies and initiatives between the national and sub-national governments is therefore crucial, requiring clear distribution of responsibilities, adequate financial and human capacities and strong co-ordination mechanisms.

Towards more gender equality

Alongside the deployment of ambitious public governance reforms in the MENA region, important progress has been made in relation to advancing gender equality. Overall, gender issues have gained significant momentum throughout the last decade.

Setting constitutional, legal and institutional frameworks promoting gender equality

Major constitutional and legal changes have been introduced by some countries and territories while in others progress has been more incremental. Most MENA countries and territories have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), albeit with reservations in most cases. This is a flagship instrument that provides the needed framework for the design of laws and policies that ensure gender justice. All Arab governments have developed institutional mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality, notably through the establishment of a central gender institution (CGI), in response to national reform developments, and in line with the Beijing Platform for Action. Additionally, many CSOs that are actively working on the promotion of women's rights are important partners in strengthening gender justice.

The Arab uprisings resulted in new constitutions in some MENA countries and territories, as well as in constitutional reforms and legislation in others, that have enshrined women's rights and provided better protection from gender-based violence and discrimination. Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia stipulate in their constitutional provisions that the government should take an active role in working towards the realisation of parity between the sexes, including by establishing independent commissions for the promotion and enforcement of these rights. In other MENA countries and territories, constitutional provisions on equality of all citizens in their rights and duties without including gender have been made more explicit (UN ESCWA, 2017^[60]).

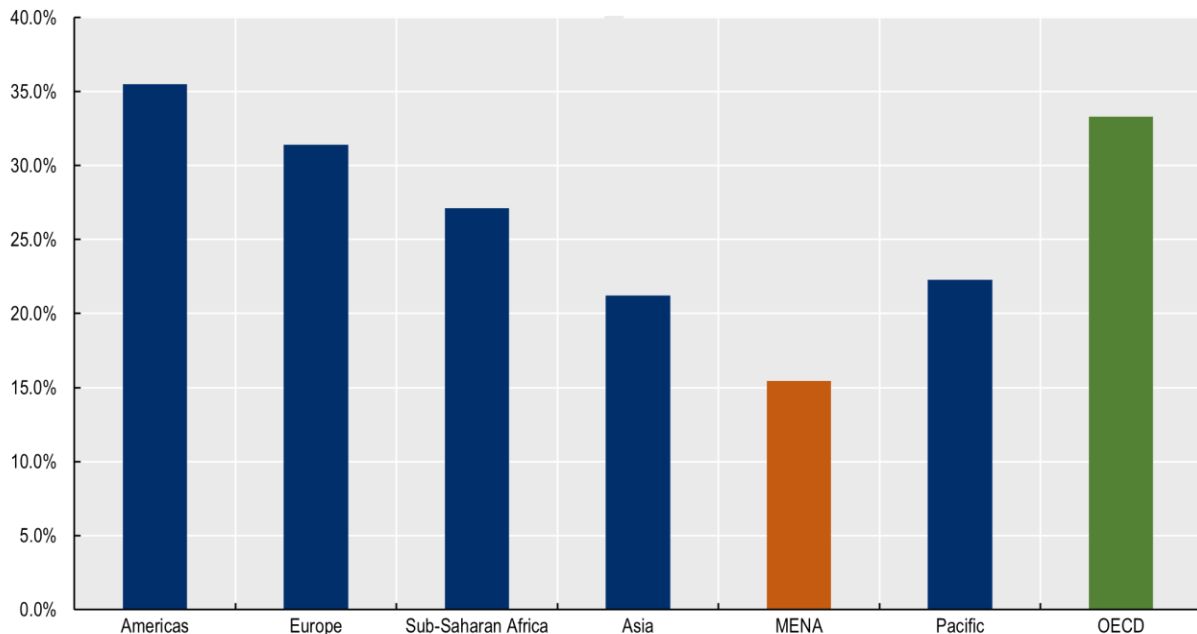
Gender justice is promoted also at the legislative level. The labour codes of Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia include generic non-discrimination provisions, and those of Egypt and Morocco also explicitly prohibit wage discrimination based on gender. Governments are implementing initiatives to address the gender pay gap. Yet, only Morocco and Jordan give full legislative expression to the principle of "equal remuneration for work of equal value" in line with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Equal Remuneration Convention. In Jordan, the labour code has been amended so that employers who apply discriminatory wages for work of equal value can be fined (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020^[61]). In the UAE, the labour law was modified in 2019 and the actual version included many gender provisions: the new law prohibits termination of women's contract because of pregnancy. It also revokes all restrictions on women working at night, in a broad and subjective category of jobs deemed hazardous, arduous, or morally or socially inappropriate, as well as women working in the mining, construction, manufacturing, energy, water and agriculture and transportation sectors (UAE Gender Balance Council, n.d.^[62]). Six MENA governments – Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia – have adopted standalone domestic violence laws, with diverse provisions covering prosecution and punishment as well as prevention (UNDP, 2019^[63]).

Strengthening the engagement of women in public life in practice

As discussed previously, several barriers continue to impede women and young people's access to politics and public life. The consolidation of women's engagement in public life requires reaching gender-balanced representation and effective participation in decision-making positions across public institutions, namely across the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government.

Following the Arab uprisings, women's representation in public and political lives increased in the MENA region. The share of women parliamentarians in the region reaches around 15.5% as of 2024 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024^[64]). While a significant increase, this figure was significantly lower than that in OECD Member countries as of 2019 (33.3%), and the lowest compared to other regions in the world (see Figure 5.13) (OECD, 2019^[65]). Intra-regional differences among countries and territories also persist. While in the UAE, there is gender parity in parliament, in four other countries in the region, women represent less than 5% of the lower house members: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen (0%) and Qatar (4.4%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024^[64]).

Figure 5.13. Despite improvements, women's representation in parliaments in MENA countries and territories remains lower than other regions



Note: MENA covers the following: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The average takes into account both lower and upper chambers for bi-cameral parliaments (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia)

Source: Author's work based on (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024^[64]).

Women's representation also needs to be strengthened in the executive and the judiciary. The percentage of women ministers in MENA governments increased throughout the years, but remains low. As of 1 January 2023, the average share of women in ministerial positions in the region was 14.5%, while the OECD average for the same year stood at 35.7% (IPU, UN Women, 2023^[66]). As a global trend, women ministers are generally entrusted with allegedly "soft" portfolios, traditionally associated with the gender roles of women in society (e.g., women and gender equality, family and children affairs, social affairs, education and health care) (IPU, UN Women, 2023^[66]). In 2020, women heads of government departments in the MENA region were four times more likely to be found in sectors such as care and sociocultural

ministries (Khurma, 2020^[67]). Very few women have been appointed in other policy areas, such as interior or finance ministries. Statistics about the proportion of women active in the judiciary are limited. Data from Tunisia and Morocco indicate an increase from 28% to 39 % and from 20% to 24 % between 2010 and 2017 respectively (UN ESCWA, 2017^[60]).

Taking note of the slow progress in this regard, several governments in the region are undertaking targeted efforts to improve women's representation in public decision-making. One of the most commonly used measures to this end is the use of quotas, with at least eight countries and territories in the region having implemented it, Egypt being the most recent one. Some of the other measures and initiatives undertaken by governments in the MENA region are highlighted in Box 5.15.

Box 5.15. Increasing women's representation in decision-making in select MENA countries

Quotas and targets

Quotas and targets can be powerful tools to increase women's representation and participation in decision-making positions.

In Tunisia, a legislated candidate quota for national elections was implemented in 2011. This measure was strengthened in 2014, when the parliament included a requirement that lists must alternate between women and men candidates. As a result, the share of women parliamentarians increased to 31% in 2014 and 36% in 2018. Building on this approach at the national level, the Tunisian parliament also revised the electoral legal framework to apply a legislated candidate quota to local-level elections, asking parties respect both vertical and horizontal parity for local-level elections. According to the law, non-compliant lists are automatically rejected for local-level elections. This quota system allowed women to win 47% of all seats in the 2018 local elections. However, women lost 25 seats in the 2019 parliamentary elections, compared to 2014. This decrease may be attributed, inter alia, to the election of a more fractious parliament. The new electoral law adopted in September 2022 eliminated the gender parity principle for legislative elections. As a result, only 25 women were elected in the 2023 parliamentary elections, representing 16.2 % of the total seats.

In Djibouti, a quota for both sexes is foreseen in the law, which requires at least 10% of both women and men in senior public positions.

Observatory on Gender in the Civil Service

In Morocco, the objective of equality in the civil service is included in the job and skills frameworks, and institutional mechanisms have been developed specifically to enable women to access positions of responsibility in the Moroccan administration. To this end, the Observatory on Gender in the Civil Service (*Observatoire Genre Dans La Fonction Publique*) was created in 2016 with the aim of informing decision-makers on the evolution of the situation of women in the public service; ensure strategic monitoring and examine the obstacles to equality; produce indicators on the evolution of the situation of women in the public service in terms of leadership positions; and contribute to the development of public policies that enable women to advance in their career while maintaining a work-life balance.

Family-friendly measures

Access to maternity and family supports is key to enhance women's participation in public life. In the United Arab Emirates, mothers working in the public sector are entitled to leave work for a period of two hours each day to breastfeed their child during the four months after the expiry of the maternity leave,

which lasts 90 days in line with Article 53(2) of Law No. 11 of 2008 on Human Resources in the Federal Government.

Advancing representation through strategic frameworks

Developing and implementing strategies for effective gender equality and mainstreaming is an enabler for women's equal participation. In Jordan, the National Strategy for Women 2021-2025 identifies four strategic goals, and the output area "More women and girls have equal opportunities to participate and lead in public life and the labour market, and to enjoy economic independence in a manner that allows them to freely make their own financial decisions" proposes interventions to improve women's access to leadership positions in public sector and political life without discrimination, among others. Such interventions as part of a strategic framework have already been used in Jordan. As such, the National Strategy for Women 2013-2017 defined a target of 20% of women in the legal sphere and the judiciary, which was achieved by 2015.

Parliamentary Caucuses

Since 2013, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (or Forum) in the Jordanian House of Representatives has provided a cross-party platform for female Member of Parliament to unite on policies to promote gender equality and women's greater inclusion in decision-making roles. So far, issues dealt with by the Jordanian Caucus have included: violence against women; rights of citizenship and nationality of Jordanian women and their children; empowering women politically and economically; defending human rights, individual and collective freedoms; and improving women's image in the media.

Sources: (Nasser, 2018^[68]; OECD/CAWTAR, 2014^[50]; ESCWA, 2019^[69]; OECD, n.d.^[27]) and Information provided to the OECD by Government of Morocco.

In light of these challenges, governments in the region would benefit from taking stock of the persisting gaps and barriers in their respective national contexts to identify the most optimal way forward. This can be done through developing strategic frameworks to map the overall picture and employing measures such as networking and capacity-building, as well as programmes to support quality and affordable childcare and initiatives to tackle gender-based violence. Some of the reforms undertaken by OECD Member countries include measures to address barriers to elected office, targets or quotas for gender equality in recruitment in the civil service, standardised, confidential complaints procedures and voluntary in-service trainings for staff on sexual harassment. Overall, significant and sustained efforts could be pursued in this regard to attain gender balance at all levels of decision-making, notably through reducing stereotypes and changing the culture, including around availability and use of work-life balance arrangements for both women and men. Governments could also work to enhance transparency in selection, recruitment and promotion processes in public institutions (OECD, 2022^[70]).

Areas of opportunity

Embedding Open Government and its principles into public governance reforms at all levels of government

- Pursuing the development of open government legal and policy frameworks at all levels, such as open government strategies or other types of broader policy frameworks, supported by strong institutional capacities and co-ordination mechanisms.
- When possible, adopting a whole-of-government approach to open government, which should be coupled with protection and promotion of civic space as a key precondition for open government.
- Further strengthening the use of open government tools and processes to promote a culture of openness across public administrations, including through adequate human and financial resources and the diversification of technical capacities.
- Fostering the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders.
- Promoting a sound media and information ecosystem.

Strengthening transparency and access to information

- Developing awareness-raising campaigns for a more informed citizenry to make access to information requests.
- Building capacities to strengthen knowledge and skills to implement the right to access information within the administration.
- Leveraging transparency portals to provide up to date, clear and reliable information proactively.
- Streamlining and enhancing proactive disclosure of information.
- Fostering the development of digital and non-digital channels for access to information requests to ensure the most vulnerable segments of the population are able to consult key information.
- Enhancing communication efforts to promote more effective and inclusive communication.

Better engaging citizens and stakeholders in public life

- Pursuing the development of diverse stakeholder participation mechanisms, including:
 - Leveraging existing online platforms to allow for more direct consultations for policymaking with citizens and stakeholders.
 - Envisaging the integration of open government portals in the region.
- When possible, promoting the establishment of formal policy frameworks for whole-of-government stakeholder participation that would consider specific needs throughout the whole public policy cycle.
- Encouraging the development of an enabling environment for civil society engagement through adequate legal frameworks, support to access funding and training and capacity-building opportunities.

Reinforcing digitalisation and inclusive decision-making as drivers for more transparent and responsive governments and policies

- Developing institutional capacities and skills across public sector to strengthen data governance.

- Ensuring the engagement of all groups of citizens in policymaking to support more responsive policies and services, including through:
 - Pursuing efforts to strengthen legal, policy and institutional frameworks promoting youth participation and representation in public life.
 - Setting constitutional, legal and institutional frameworks promoting gender equality and women's representation in decision-making.

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Notes

¹ The OGP COVID-19 Open Government tracker (2021^[71]) identified a series of good practices implemented in the MENA region to embed the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation across and beyond response and recovery measures. It identified respectively a total of 29 examples across Jordan (14), Morocco (9), the UAE (4) and Tunisia (2) led by stakeholders from government, civil society and academia together with citizens.

² Stakeholder is defined by the OECD as any interested and/or affected party, including: individuals, regardless of their age, gender, religious and political affiliations; and institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media or the private sector.

³ Official Hackathon website of the UAE, <https://hackathon.ae/en/>.

⁴ Morocco's open government online interactive portal, <https://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/co-creation.php?lang=ar>.

⁵ The OECD defines civic space as the set of legal, policy, institutional, and practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate, organise, and participate in public life. The enabling environment for civil society to operate and thrive is a core element of the OECD civic space framework.

OECD Public Governance Reviews

Governing for Sustainable Prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa

Cross-cutting global and regional challenges have triggered or reinforced efforts by government in the Middle East and North Africa to undertake public governance reforms. These reforms aim to build sustainable and resilient administrations that better meet development objectives and citizens' expectations. To support these efforts, the report looks at developments in key areas of public governance in the Middle East and North Africa over the past decade. It discusses governments' strategic commitments, governance arrangements, capacities and practices to implement public governance reforms to achieve four main objectives: (1) growing sustainably; (2) spending public resources efficiently; (3) delivering services effectively; and (4) promoting open and inclusive societies. The report provides general strategic orientations and identifies areas of opportunity that can be adapted to different contexts, needs and priorities.



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