


# The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Protecting Human Rights in Jordan: Summary





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This publication is a summary of the full publication on the role of CSOs in protecting human rights in Jordan, available in Arabic on the website of the WANA Institute.

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## Introduction

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Civil society plays an important role in the development and support of public policies, raises awareness of fundamental rights, monitors violations of human rights, and provides services to vulnerable communities. To facilitate civil society's efforts in protecting human rights, an agreement needs to be reached about the exact role civil society organisations (CSOs) should play.

The WANA Institute, funded by the Delegation of the European Union to Jordan, held a panel discussion with think tanks and policy NGOs working in the field of human rights on 13 February 2018 in Amman, Jordan. This policy paper is based on the outcomes of the discussion. The publication identifies the main strengths and weaknesses facing CSOs' human rights work, and recommends measures to increase human rights protection.

## 1. CSOs' Strengths and Weaknesses in Human Rights Protection in Jordan

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### **Strong Communication Channels**

CSOs are in close contact with their local communities, and have strong communication channels with community members and institutions. However, communication channels with the government tend to be weak, as well as communication channels with media outlets that could help CSOs advocate for human rights issues.

### **Checks and Balances**

CSOs play a prominent role in monitoring human rights policies and legislation adopted by decision-makers. When needed, they criticise certain practices to advocate for the needs of the communities they represent. In doing so, they have won the support of their local communities, yet their role is often challenged by:

- A lack of government responsiveness to the demands of civil society to protect human rights or make required information available to CSOs despite legislation allowing freedom of access to information. Many CSOs are also not informed about their right to access information.
- The weakness of political parties resulting in policy that is not aligned with community needs. CSOs try to bridge gaps in government programmes by offering additional services to marginalised communities.

### **Shedding Light on the Struggles of Vulnerable Groups**

Vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities are strongly supported through CSO projects and activities. However, while CSO programmes tend to focus on providing services to these groups, they often lack the ability to put in place mechanisms to protect basic rights.

## **Collective Action**

There is a need to create better networks and alliances between CSOs, yet collaboration is challenged by a strong competition between CSOs, a lack of legislation to register official partnerships, and a lack of strong strategic visions that can be used as a basis for durable partnerships. Drafting and continuously updating a directory of all CSOs operating in Jordan could help by giving an overview of the work each institution is doing.

There is also no strong partnership between CSOs and government institutions, which leads to weak programme implementation. This can be overcome by establishing a council that coordinates efforts by CSOs and government institutions through regular meetings, and supporting associations and unions. Government employee awareness of the importance of civil society's human rights work should also be increased.

## **Capacity-building**

Continuously developing the skills of CSO staff is necessary to respond to quickly changing circumstances, yet there are still many weaknesses in the skillsets present in many CSOs. Organisations tend to struggle with writing proposals, developing work plans, implementing activities, and evaluating programmes. These problems are particularly found in CSOs outside of the capital Amman.

Simultaneously, there is a tendency of highly skilled individuals to emigrate and find better employment opportunities abroad. This brain drain impacts the expertise and human rights knowledge in many CSOs, and lessens the degree of innovation in their work.

## **Access to Funding**

Due to a lack of sufficient financial means, many CSOs are continuously applying for funding, which distracts them from their role in protecting human rights. By applying for foreign funding, they may also be restricted to following the donor's agenda instead of setting their own priorities.

The lack of consistent funding also threatens the sustainability of existing projects. In addition, the procedures to apply for funding are often unclear and a justification for the refusal of funding is rarely given.

## **Independence and Impartiality**

For civil society to function properly, CSOs need to be allowed to work independently and impartially, and not be restricted excessively by the government. However, current legislation restricts the work of civil society and heavily regulates donor agencies.

## **Transparency**

Increased transparency and good governance on the part of CSOs will facilitate partnerships and funding opportunities. Trust in CSOs' work will increase through proper monitoring of projects to demonstrate where the money has been invested and whether the objectives were reached or not. CSOs should be asked to publish an annual work plan detailing their objectives, giving insight into their finances, and showcasing their achievements.

## 2. Improving CSOs' Working Environment

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### **Role of Government**

The government should support CSOs by:

- Drafting legislation that facilitates CSOs' human rights work.
- Providing technical and financial support.
- Protecting public freedoms by returning to the constitution.
- Implementing and abiding by ratified legislation, and guaranteeing it is in line with international human rights standards.
- Upholding the freedom to access information and increasing government transparency.
- Empowering judicial officers and developing the judiciary system.
- Strengthening the trust between government institutions and CSOs, and joining efforts with CSOs to promote and protect human rights collaboratively.
- Protecting human rights defenders.
- Drafting a national plan to implement the recommendations of human rights groups.
- Installing an independent unit that studies complaints of human rights violations, and follows up on legal consequences.
- Providing job opportunities in CSOs.

### **Role of CSOs**

CSOs can protect human rights in Jordan by:

- Reviewing existing legislation on human rights.
- Forming a coalition of human rights CSOs and holding regular meetings with government institutions to discuss the human rights situation in Jordan.
- Holding regular meetings with journalists to discuss the human rights situation in Jordan.
- Studying the human rights reports of other CSOs and the National Center for Human Rights, establishing partnerships when possible.

### **Role of Associations and Political Parties**

- Creating a community culture by promoting group work and political engagement in schools, and creating a human rights curriculum.
- Promoting economic, social, and political participation by:
  - o Increasing people's understanding of their freedoms and rights.
  - o Allowing participation in decision-making.
  - o Involving individuals from all segments of society, not only the elite, as well as both genders.
  - o Decreasing the age limit for candidacy for parliamentary elections, and revising the electoral law.

## 3. General Recommendations to Protect Human Rights

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### Labour

- Guarantee equal pay and non-discrimination in job distribution.
- Invest in Jordanian workers' competencies instead of bringing in foreign workers.
- Raise the minimum wage and link wages to the cost of living.
- Prevent arbitrary price increases.
- Improve the link between education and market needs.
- Respect the freedom of organisation and independence of trade unions.
- Provide sufficient training for new staff.

### Education

- Include human rights in the academic curriculum.
- Increase funds for disadvantaged schools.
- Encourage the government to provide transportation for students.
- Strengthen and support youth initiatives.
- Collaborate with the Iftaa Department to use certain Waqf lands to establish schools.

### Health Care

- There is a need for comprehensive and free health insurance.
- Provide appropriate training for all medical personnel.
- Amend the legislation on midwives.
- Provide adequate health care for victims of violence.
- Activate legislation on breastfeeding for new mothers.

### Vulnerable Groups: Women, People with Disabilities, Refugees, Prisoners

- Review all legislation that discriminates against women.
- Raise women's awareness of their legal rights, their rights in harassment cases, and their rights in health services.
- Review the law on administrative detention of women.
- Raise civil society's awareness and understanding of the rights of women.
- Reduce fees and fines related to marriage contracts, as well as the fees to access legal support.
- Provide infrastructure that facilitates access to services for people with a disability.
- Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and regulate asylum.
- Guarantee the safety and non-discrimination of all citizens regardless of their sexual orientation.
- Provide an overview of fair trial standards and educate people on their rights in case of arrest.

#### Civil Society Organisations' Role in Protecting Human Rights in Jordan

- Establish a national preventative mechanism against torture in prisons, and guarantee adequate health care in prisons.
- Stimulate the role of civil society in suggesting alternative forms of punishment to arrest and imprisonment.
- Provide programmes that work on (re-)integrating marginalised groups into society.



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