



محامون من أجل إدارة سليمة
Lawyers for Good Governance
עורכי דין לקידום מנהל תקין

TRANSPARENCY MONITOR 2020: ENGLISH ABSTRACT

What is the Transparency Monitor?

The *Transparency Monitor* is part of a wider initiative to tackle the lack of transparency within Arab local municipalities in Israel. It is an annual report that summarizes findings from a thorough examination of the websites of all 85 Israeli-Arab municipalities. In this report, LGG elucidates the concept of transparency, how it has evolved over the years and its meaning in today's Arab society. We also outline, as a way of clarification and for the convenience of Arab local municipalities, the legal obligations and responsibilities of local municipalities. The first report was published in 2017 and has since been updated each year to reflect new data. Today, we are pleased to share with you the results of the 2020 *Transparency Monitor*.

Methodology

The law in Israel stipulates that every local municipality must operate a website that provides citizens with full access to important information such as the municipality's annual budget, protocols etc. LGG conducted a comprehensive analysis of the websites of all 85 Arab local municipalities and evaluated the degree to which each municipal website has met its legal requirements vis-à-vis transparency. In this process we examined information that municipalities are legally obligated to include in their websites as well as additional information, which we consider to be equally important despite the fact that strictly speaking, municipalities are not legally obligated to provide. We then used a point system to assess the overall score of each municipal website: Each information item was given a score which reflects its type (whether it is a *key item*, a *sub item* or an *additional item*). After all the websites were assessed we divided the municipalities into three groups based on their total scores: higher than 65%, 50%-65% and below 50%.

Main Results

- Not a single Arab local municipality received a score above 65%.
- Only 9 Arab local municipalities scored between 50%-65%.
- The overwhelming majority (the remaining 76 municipalities) scored under 50%.
- Of those that scored under 50%, some municipal websites only provide the most basic information (i.e., contact information, name of the head of the council).

Some noteworthy examples include:

- 84% of Arab municipalities failed to present their annual budget on their websites;
- 95% of Arab municipalities did not present to the public reports of their internal comptrollers;
- 49% of Arab municipalities did not publish/published only partial information concerning tenders and calls for applicants.

These results reveal a gloomy picture in which it would seem that most Arab local municipalities have not yet internalized the importance of transparency or their legal obligation to uphold it. However, when comparing these results to previous years, we take note of several encouraging trends:

- While when the Monitor was first published in 2017 9 Arab municipalities did not even have websites, this number decreased to 0 in 2020. For the first time ever, all 85 Israeli-Arab municipalities now have their own websites.
- The average score of Arab municipalities has gradually increased from 21% in 2017 to 32% in 2020. Progress has been very slow, but should be recognized nevertheless.

Recommendations

Throughout the report we noted that it would actually take minimal effort and investment of resources on the part of the municipalities to meet the legal requirements for transparency. Therefore, despite this gloomy picture, it should be relatively easy to rectify the situation. We therefore encourage Arab local municipalities to use this report as a tool to assist them in increasing their transparency and in meeting their legal requirements. This is our main recommendation to municipalities and the ultimate purpose of producing this report.

However, over the years, Arab municipalities have consistently neglected their legal obligations in transparency. We therefore suggest that the problem runs deeper. The municipalities' disregard of transparency requirements is indicative of a more fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of their work, their public mission and the fact that they exist for the service of the public. We therefore recommend raising public awareness of this problem and leveraging public pressure on the municipalities to change their behaviors. We hope that this report will also serve as a tool in the hands of the public, empowering them to stand up, demand their rights and hold Arab local municipalities to a higher standard.

About Lawyers for Good Governance (LGG)

"Lawyers for Good Governance" (LGG) is a non-profit organization founded in 2014 by Arab lawyers and based in Nazareth. Our mission is to promote transparency, encourage greater civic involvement and fight corruption within local government in the Israeli-Arab sector. The work that we do is vital to the socio-economic advancement of the Arab society and we are the only organization addressing the issue of corruption specifically within Arab society.