

**OVERVIEW OF
RESPONSES TO
COUNTRY
QUESTIONNAIRES**

What role for Government in
the 21st Century?

Strengthening
Trust in
Government

MODERNISING GOVERNMENT



A questionnaire was sent to countries in preparation for the meeting of the OECD Public Governance Committee at Ministerial Level. This document summarises the key challenges for governments and common government responses identified in the individual country replies and highlights emerging trends. Although countries are approaching reform from different standpoints, and are at different stages in their reform efforts, most are focusing on similar sets of issues, although the emphasis may vary. The complete set of replies from countries can be found in document GOV/PGC/MIN(2005)3/ANN. [For an analytical review of the last two decades of reform in OECD countries, see *Modernising Government: The Way Forward* (OECD, 2005), of which the main findings are presented in an OECD Policy Brief by the same title.]

Country Replies I: Key Challenges for Governments

Overall, countries identified the following as the main challenges facing them in the coming years as they strive to expand and deepen their modernisation efforts.

1. *Globalisation*

- **National competitiveness.** An effective and efficient public sector, both in its own operations and in setting the rules for the rest of the economy, is imperative for the relative economic prosperity of nations.
- **Greater role for supranational organisations.** This can lead to smaller margins of manoeuvre for national governments and can obfuscate responsibility for individual government activities. (This applies especially to EU member states.)

2. *Rising Citizens' Expectations*

- **Higher demands.** Citizens want a greater say in policy-making and higher quality government services.
- **Greater diversity in society.** As societies become less homogenous, citizens expect government services to be increasingly tailored to their specific needs.
- **Saying “no.”** Government needs to reconcile the short-term demands of citizens with the long-term collective interest. In some cases, government needs to be clear that it cannot meet all expectations.

3. *Ageing Populations*

- **Unprecedented pressures.** Ageing populations are placing pressures on the reform of social programmes [retirement pensions, health care] as well as on the labour market, including the civil service.

4. *Fiscal Constraints*

- **Value-for-money.** In addition to the looming fiscal challenges of ageing populations, there is a constant need for finding efficiency gains in government in order to lower deficits and/or reallocate to higher-priority areas.

5. *Reform Fatigue in the Public Sector*

- **“No Light at the End of the Tunnel.”** Governments need to sustain the long-term, continual public sector reform agenda
- **Resistance to change.** Vested interests in the public sector which are opposed to the reform agenda need to be overcome, and change-management strategies implemented to help bring about a change in culture.

Country Replies II: Current Government Responses

Below are the key areas of public sector modernisation that countries are currently addressing.

1. *Putting citizens at the centre*

- **Increased consultations with citizens.** This is accomplished through a variety of means including user surveys on satisfaction with individual services, opinion polling, soliciting feedback (complaints) through call centres and the Internet; the use of Ombudsmen as citizens' representatives; the creation of "customer" advisory panels; online discussion forums; "Open Days" to promote direct dialogue between citizens and the government; the use of public hearings and "town-hall" meetings; and the appointment of inclusive consultation panels for policy development.
- **Greater choice.** In some areas citizens may use alternative service providers from the private or voluntary sectors, while still benefiting from government funding.
- **Greater responsiveness and client-focused services.** This is promoted through granting increased managerial flexibility so that public services can be delivered in a manner which closely reflects the needs of individual citizens. Efforts are also being made to co-ordinate and streamline services where a citizen may currently have to interact with several different agencies to address a single set of circumstances.
- **Citizen's service charters.** Charters provide citizen's with an easy-to-understand outline of what is to be expected from public service providers, and contain benchmarks for expected performance levels (e.g. length of waiting time). Formal inspection mechanisms may be in place to ensure compliance.
- **More accessibility.** This includes the use of "one-stop shops," online information and services, and the automatic forwarding of enquiries to the appropriate government body to ease citizens' interactions with the government.

2. *More effective budgeting*

- **A focus on performance and results.** Budgets are now increasingly being constructed in terms of outcomes and outputs in order to reinforce the focus on delivering services to citizens. This is generally accompanied by performance targets and accountability based on their achievement. However, various difficulties with implementation issues are acknowledged, primarily with measurement quality.
- **Top-down budgeting.** In order to promote fiscal discipline and reallocation, governments are setting aggregate ceiling for total expenditures – reflecting government priorities – and devolving authority for final allocations to individual ministries.
- **Introducing greater managerial flexibility.** In tandem with the increasing focus on performance and results, various input and central process controls are being relaxed. This gives managers the flexibility to respond to citizens' needs, and provides increased value-for-money.

3. *Organizing government differently*

- **Reorganizing government institutions.** Countries are reviewing the overall structure of government, both at ministerial and agency level. The establishment of agencies for service delivery is seen as a way to promote effectiveness and efficiency, although there are concerns about the co-ordination challenge with the increasing numbers of agencies.

- **Reallocating tasks among levels of government.** This most commonly involves the transfer of tasks from the central government to lower levels of government in order to bring government services closer to citizens. Reforms that clarify the roles of the different levels of government to avoid over-lapping or joint responsibilities between levels of government have also been made with a view to improving accountability.
- **Outsourcing and other market-type mechanisms.** The use of such mechanisms is on the rise. Policies requiring governments to subject public services to market-testing are increasingly common. There are also examples of private companies having ‘the right to challenge’ current government in-house provision of services.

4. *A more agile and responsive civil service*

- **Devolution.** This has involved a transfer of authority from central personnel agencies to the heads of individual agencies, who are now increasingly responsible for directly managing their staff in order to maximize performance. This can entail devolution of pay-setting arrangements, including the use of performance-related pay.
- **Senior executives.** Special emphasis is placed on developing the leadership and management skills of the highest-level government employees in order to address changing priorities and foster a new organisational performance-oriented culture.
- **Recruitment and skills development.** There is concern about the competitiveness of the government as an employer, especially with the strong demographics affecting the civil service itself and the need for governments to attract new staff. Government are also intensifying various lifelong learning initiatives in order to develop necessary skills -- both technical and often new commercial skills that were traditionally not inherent to government.
- **Preventing Corruption.** Initiatives to introduce or review existing codes of conduct for ethical behaviour and avoidance of conflicts of interest have been widely launched.

5. *E-government for better interaction with citizens*

- **On-line information and services.** Single government portals allow citizens to easily find information on a wide range of government departments and services, sometimes integrating those offered by lower levels of government with the national level.
- **Shared databases.** Governments are increasingly collecting data from citizens once and using it for many different services. This improves the efficiency of government itself and reduces administrative burdens on citizens.
- **A tool to build a two-way relationship.** As noted above, the use of the Internet for consultations with citizens holds the potential to strengthen government-citizen relations and to support more participative policy-making,

6. *Making markets work*

- **Policies to improve regulatory quality.** These include measures to reduce “red tape,” for example by culling existing regulations, and subjecting new ones to regulatory impact analysis.