

This document provides an overview of the activities and achievements of the Working Group 2 on E-Government and Administrative Simplification. Further information on the Working Groups' activities is provided online at www.oecd.org/mena/governance.

WORKING GROUP MEETINGS 2005-2007

1st Regional Working Group Meeting: 12-13 September 2005, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Participants:

Nineteen high-level delegates from 12 Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Dubai, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Sudan, Tunisia, UAE) presented their national approaches and experiences in implementing e-government and administrative simplification and actively engaged in initial policy discussion with international experts from seven OECD countries (Italy, Korea, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and United States) and ARADO.

Outcomes:

In the first Working Group 2 meeting, Arab countries presented their approaches and challenges faced in implementing e-government and administrative simplification. This provided an excellent framework for high-level discussion and exchange of experiences between Arab and OECD countries.

The country presentations showed that Arab countries are facing a number of common challenges related to e-government implementation, ranging from lack of leadership and co-ordination across government to insufficient focus on user demand of e-government. The main areas where reform-oriented action is needed are:

- **Prioritisation:** identifying and prioritising objectives on the e-government agenda (*e.g.* focus on building infrastructure or developing services?).
- **Vision:** high-level vision for e-government exists but needs to be better communicated across government.
- **Leadership:** e-government leaders should be better identified and leadership better communicated and articulated at each level of administration (political, managerial, operational/technical). Another focus should be the role of e-government leaders in reducing resistance to change.
- **Relations with stakeholders:** focusing on the value proposition for citizens when establishing services; defining approaches and strategies to market e-government to citizens and business; setting up frameworks for understanding demand and assessing benefits to users; managing language diversity (official language and dialect) when dealing with service users.
- **Co-ordination:** improving co-ordination mechanisms and frameworks to ensure that e-government is uniformly developed across the country and between sectors.

- **Public-private partnerships:** identifying the main challenge and obstacles in partnering with the private sector; defining requirements and mechanisms to engage in partnerships with the private sector.
- **Back-office management:** ensuring that IT infrastructures and systems are developed and properly maintained.
- **Legislation and regulations:** creating the necessary legislative and regulatory framework for e-government (*e.g.* laws on the right of access and use of public information).
- **Budget arrangements:** ensuring the financial resources needed to implement e-government.
- **Evaluation (*ex post*):** understanding and evaluating the impact of e-government on administrative development.
- **Indicators:** building solid and agreed indicators of e-government advancement in the region, building on existing country frameworks.
- **Digital Divide:** improving availability (*i.e.* building infrastructure) and accessibility to the Internet and other ICT (*i.e.* enhancing IT education and skills for citizens).
- **Capacity building:** focusing on the development of human capital and change management strategies; better integrate ICT staff with decision makers in charge of reform – bring them together to share knowledge.

The country presentations also showed that **administrative simplification** is shared objective among Arab countries, and a horizontal issue closely linked to transparency, accessibility, improvement of services for business and citizens, at the core of modernisation of public administrations.

The key outcomes of the meeting included:

- Creation and launching of a high level network of experts on e-government in Arab countries.
- Scheduling and launching a questionnaire for the completion of the stock-taking phase in view of the preparation of country Actions Plans.
- **Identification of four action groups to progress on a results-oriented thematic agenda** and the identification of corresponding Arab country facilitators and action groups members.
- **Scheduling of high-level seminars** on key components of e-government and administrative simplification to be held in 2006.
- **Promotion of an online knowledge exchange forum** organised by the Dubai School of Government with the support of ARADO.

2nd Regional Working Group Meeting: 6 March 2006, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Participants:

Twenty-four high-level delegates from 10 Arab countries participated in the meeting which was co-chaired by Vincenzo Schioppa, Minister Plenipotentiary, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Chang Kil Lee, former Director General, MOGAWA and Head of the OECD Asia Centre. Experts from 7 OECD and Arab countries (Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Korea, United States, Lebanon and Norway) also participated in the event and engaged in policy discussion with Arab delegates.

Outcomes:

The second meeting of Working Group 2 aimed to update participants on the progress of activities in the WG2 workplan; identify key topics of common interest for a high level seminar on administrative simplification; discuss presentation of national action plans by selected Arab countries and advise on how to move forward; and plan for the May 2005 GfD Initiative Steering Group Meeting.

The key outcomes of the meeting included:

- **Presentation** followed by discussion, **of three examples of draft National Action Plans by Lebanon, Egypt and Bahrain.** Arab presentations were of a high quality with valuable elements for the action plans. Good insights and practical examples were provided by delegates from Italy, Norway, Ireland and Denmark. The followup of this discussion led to the finalisation of these drafts plans and their inclusion in the final collection of Action Plans in the area of e-government (Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Dubai).
- **Presentation and distribution of a draft template for action planning prepared by Lebanon** to facilitate prioritisation of national and regional actions to be included in the national action plans on six areas:
 - E-Government legal framework
 - E-Government technical framework
 - E-Government service framework
 - E-Government capacity building/promotions/operations framework
 - Administrative simplification
 - Cross e-government and administrative simplification
- **Acknowledgement of the excellent results of the Naples High Level Seminar** and validation of the seminar format as the best example of high level exchange of experience between practitioners.
- **Confirmation** that Egypt will host a **High Level Seminar on Administrative Simplification in 2007** on the following topic “Strategies, tools and implementation capacities for administrative simplification”.
- Expression of interest to host High Level Seminars from a number of Arab countries.
- **Discussion and agreement on the WG 2 meeting results and future action targets** in preparation of the May 2006 Steering Committee meeting. The following proposals were discussed:

- Creation of an Arab Fund for the development of ICT/e-government. This could also be conceived as a fund for good governance for development or for promoting modernisation in the Arab world.
- Organisation of a regional forum on e-government every two years. This could also be conceived at ministerial level and extended to the broader issue of modernisation.
- Establishment of an Online Observatory of E-Government Projects through the creation of an online portal focusing on sharing good practices on project development, action planning, development of e-government indicators, etc.
- Fostering “twinning” among Arab countries to support inter-Arab co-operation projects.

3rd Regional Working Group Meeting: 13 March 2007, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Participants:

Twenty-seven delegates from 17 Arab countries (including all the Gulf countries) participated in the event. Regional co-ordinators and experts from international organisations also actively participated in the discussions (World Bank, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, European Commission). Experts from six OECD countries (Canada, France, Korea and Norway) and academia (Dr. Richard Heeks, University of Manchester) engaged in policy discussions with their Arab counterparts.

Outcomes:

This meeting event registered a high participation rate, confirming Arab countries’ high level of interest in e-government and particularly measuring e-government performance. Delegates discussed the programme of activities for the coming months and the Working Group 2 contribution to the GfD Ministerial Meeting and the format and types of regional capacity-building activities – including high level seminars, peer-to-peer visits and training initiatives. This led to an agreement on the benefit of such exchanges between OECD and Arab delegates at the regional level. Delegates also discussed the possibility to carry out e-government peer reviews in Arab countries building on the OECD tested methodology and practice.

The key outcomes of the meeting included:

- **Identification and scheduling of the next round of capacity-building seminars:**
 - Egypt announced the upcoming 5th High Level Seminar on Strategies, tools and capacities for administrative simplification, which took place on 20-21 June 2007 in Cairo.
 - Tunisia stated its intention to host a high level seminar on frameworks and partnerships for e-government collaboration in Tunis (autumn/winter 2007).
 - Morocco expressed an interest in hosting a High Level Seminar on an e-government topic in Morocco.
 - Saudi Arabia expressed an interest in hosting a High Level Seminar on a topic to be determined back-to-back with the 2nd eTransaction Conference in Saudi Arabia.
- **Arab countries identified technical assistance co-operation initiatives in the form of peer-to-peer exchange and capacity building activities at national level where OECD country support is requested:**
 - Lebanon requested assistance for peer-to-peer exchange of experience with OECD countries on strategies to integrate e-government and administrative reform efforts.

- Arab countries declared their intention to have their e-government programme reviewed by the OECD using its tested peer review methodology:
 - Egypt reaffirmed its decision to have the OECD review its e-government initiative as mentioned in the National Action Plan of Egypt and announced that initial steps have been taken.
 - Morocco announced its intention to have its e-government strategy reviewed by the OECD.
- The participants agreed on a set of outputs to be produced and adopted by the group in preparation for the GfD Steering Group Meeting at Ministerial Level. These would include the finalisation of seminar booklets, the launching of an e-government core data collection exercise which could lead to the preparation of a report on e-government to be produced in 2008.

High Level Seminar on E-Procurement

Regional capacity-building seminar, 30-31 January 2006, Naples, Italy

Relevance of the topic:

Public e-procurement, as part of an e-government strategy, can play a fundamental role in achieving good governance. E-Procurement reinforces one of the fundamental rules of information and communication technologies: technological and organisational aspects must be linked within the overall innovation process. Changes in public procurement management – facilitated and promoted by the use of ICT – embrace both technological innovations and organisational and cultural transformations, especially with regard to know-how and practical skills.

Objectives:

The seminar aimed to bring together e-government and administrative simplification experts from Arab and invited OECD countries to share strategic advice and practical know-how on creating conditions for e-procurement, including: regulatory and institutional frameworks; re-engineering and simplification of procedures; skills development. The implementation of effective e-procurement systems was also addressed. Each participating Arab country provided data on its approach to e-procurement by answering a short questionnaire; responses were distributed and discussed during the seminar.

Participants:

Eighteen high-level experts from 10 Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Dubai, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia) presented their approaches to and challenges with developing effective e-procurement systems, actively engaging in open and constructive discussions with experts from OECD countries, *i.e.* Italy and United States, as well as UNDP, the World Bank, and the Development Gateway Foundation. Five Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, United Arab Emirates) provided country data on their country's approach to e-procurement by answering a short questionnaire prepared by the OECD Secretariat; responses were compiled and distributed at the meeting.

Outcomes:

The key outcomes of the high level seminar included:

- **Production of a seminar booklet** including a summary of meeting discussions, country papers and guidelines from practitioners on how to move forward.
- **Dissemination** of Arab experiences on e-procurement through the **collection and analysis of country papers**, which informed the preparation of Arab country **Action Plans** as part of the MENA initiative.
- **Creation of a Network of E-procurement Experts to support bilateral exchange of technical know-how and expertise on the implementation of e-procurement systems.**
- **Identification of areas of interest for possible follow-up activities for this group, including: legislative requirements for e-procurement; guidelines on building an “integrated” (actors,**

processes) approach to e-procurement; effective skills and competences for e-procurement operators; building strong relationships with user groups (agencies, suppliers) in implementing e-procurement.

High Level Seminar on How to Build a Successful Action Plan

Regional capacity-building seminar, 7 March 2006, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Relevance of the topic:

As Arab countries move forward with e-government planning and implementation, it is important that their e-government programmes be guided by action plans detailing the objectives to be achieved and their related timeframe, and defining the actors involved and resources to be mobilised. Action plans could also help governments maintain consistent approaches to e-government implementation at the whole-of-government level by facilitating monitoring and ensuring proper preparation and integration of projects at the agency level.

Objectives:

This seminar aimed to share experiences between Arab and OECD countries on how to create successful action plans, and to help Arab countries set priorities for e-government implementation. This was of particular relevance for the countries which were committed to finalising their National Action Plans for e-government for presentation at the May 2006 steering group meeting.

Participants:

Twenty-four high-level delegates from 10 Arab countries participated in the seminar which was co-chaired by Vincenzo Schioppa, Minister Plenipotentiary, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Chang Kil Lee, former Director General, MOGAWA and Head of the OECD Asia Centre. Experts from 7 OECD and Arab countries (Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Korea, United States, Lebanon and Norway) also participated in the event and engaged in policy discussion with Arab delegates.

Outcomes:

After a lively discussion, a series of **key design elements/steps to produce an action plan** were identified by the seminar participants. These included:

- Definition of the impacts (what to achieve? key issues to focus on? costs and benefits?).
- Ensuring leadership support and mobilisation of resources (issues of political commitment and communicating ownership of action plans across levels of government).
- Capacity building to implement plans (change management processes, definition of roles and responsibilities for staff, ensure staff and client engagement in the implementation process).
- Identifying available options (mix of resources and technology to achieve change, role of research and analysis).
- Designing the plan (technical, organisational architectures/infrastructures, HR strategies).
- Implementing the plan (programme management, marketing activities, measuring benefits).

The results of the discussion were timely for most Arab countries; they provided useful input to help them structure, develop and finalise their National Action Plans.

High Level Seminar on Personalised Service Portals and Special Session on Exchange of Experiences in E-Government

Regional Capacity Building Seminar, 11-12 December 2006, Paris, France

Relevance of the topic:

Governmental portals are one example of how ICT can be used to transform public administration, allowing governments to provide citizens with one-stop access to government services and information at their own convenience. Portals are also good example of how to harmonize administrative solutions and practices across government – moving from informational services to transactional services and to government transformation.

Objectives:

The seminar aimed to foster discussion and share best practices among Arab country and OECD country participants on processes and policy for establishing governmental service portals. This included the following topics: preconditions to set up information portals (*e.g.* institutionalisation and regulatory framework); managing personal data (*e.g.* opportunities and limits imposed to the use and reuse of data); how to move from information to transaction portals; harmonisation of practices across government; strategies to increase user access and accessibility; skill development within the administration.

The second day gave Arab countries the possibility to share their experiences related both to current and planned project carried out by the OECD E-government Project namely in the area of 1) transformation, 2) e-service take up, 2) partnerships across levels of government for e-government implementation 3) process and outcomes indicators, 4) benchmarking e-government expenditures, 5) cost/benefits analysis for shared services, and 6) ROI in ICT-enabled applications. Arab countries expressed an interest in being closely associated to the work of OECD in e-government, in particular in the area of indicators and transformation.

Participants:

The seminar was chaired by Mr Jean-Jacques Leandri, Advisor for E-Government of the French Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry, while the briefing meeting was chaired by Christian Vergez, Head of the Innovation and Integrity Division of the OECD Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate. Mr. Vincenzo Schioppa, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs co- and Co-chair of the Working Group 2 on E-government and Administrative Simplification, co-chaired the two events. Fifteen experts and delegates from seven Arab countries (including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, UAE) and four OECD countries (including Belgium, France, Italy, and Portugal) attended this event. Bruno Lanvin, WB's senior advisor on e-strategies and regional coordinator for Europe and Central Asia, also participated in the events and actively contributed to the discussions.

Outcomes:

As a result of the discussion, participants identified a series of challenges that need to be addressed by Arab countries when developing service portals. Some of these issues which emerged from the discussion are not only relevant to portal development but focus on the framework conditions that need to be established to use ICT as a tool to transform government structures and operations. These are:

- Set up the institutional and legislative framework conditions

- Define a governance/institutional framework for project with identifiable project staff and responsibilities and ensure that knowledge is transferred across the administration (Morocco, Egypt, and Palestinian Authority)
- Introduce the necessary legislation to allow for online transaction (e.g. legislation on e-signature) and develop the e-banking sector (Lebanon)
- Understand the cost associated with establishing portals (the business model)
 - Develop a set of tools and indicators that allows a constant monitoring and evaluation of portal development and achievement of its objectives not only ex post but during the implementation phase
 - Understand the cost and benefits of setting up partnership between the private and public sector for portal development
- Develop a common vocabulary and language among countries which could lead to better understanding and response to common challenges
- Define innovative ways to work together which focus on integrating people (knowledge communities), technology (standards) and processes (policies, regulations, guidelines) (Egypt).
- Go beyond simply monitoring available technologies (e.g. WiFi, Wi Max) and focus on understanding how they could be concretely integrated and used in support of the delivery of services
- Manage the “political risk”: maintain focus on the modernisation agenda regardless of political changes.

As a follow up to the discussion, the following activities were also identified:

- *Regional high level seminars*: a number of countries proposed topics for the next round of high level seminars: 1) Identity management and e-procurement; 2) E-Government in the context of state modernisation, focusing on what needs to be done to translate the central vision for e-government into sectoral strategies at the ministry level; 3) Management of e-government projects; 4) How to mainstream e-government in sectoral ministries; 5) How to increase accessibility of e-government services.
- *Peer-to-peer learning activities*: Participants suggested their interest in peer-to-peer study visits, which would allow public officials from interested Arab countries to participate in study visits in OECD countries focusing on identified themes of interest (e.g. learning from the experience of a given country with service portals). The results of this peer-to-peer visit could be shared with other Arab countries.
- *Ad-hoc capacity building seminars*: Ad-hoc seminars targeting high level officials responsible for e-government in ministries and agencies organised in Arab countries with the assistance of OECD country experts were proposed. This training seminar could take the form of an in-depth capacity-building exchange of knowledge focused on a particular aspect of e-government implementation.

High Level Seminar on Measuring and Evaluating E-government

Regional capacity building seminar, 12 March 2007, Dubai, UAE

Relevance of the topic:

Measuring and evaluation of e-government implementation has become increasingly important for Arab countries to build political support and justify investment decisions; assess progress made and shape the direction of e-government projects in support of a better government agenda; develop a set of indicators which can guide business investments in the region; foster a return on investment mentality and culture of performance among government organisations. The High Level Seminar was welcomed as timely since

most Arab countries are still in the early stages of measuring and evaluating e-government initiatives and are eager to learn from successes and failures of OECD countries in developing and using methods and tools to evaluate e-government progress at both national and project level.

Objectives:

The seminar focused on facilitating the exchange of experiences between Arab and OECD countries in the area of e-government measurement and evaluation. In particular the seminar discussion focused on three areas: (i) identifying the case for e-government measurement and evaluation in Arab countries and the main challenges linked to its implementation; ii) presenting and discussing some of the main evaluation tools and techniques at both national and project level; and (iii) identifying lessons learned and discussing progress to date in developing indicators for e-government. Each of the session was introduced by a series of presentations by invited speakers from Arab and OECD countries, and other international organisations.

Participants:

Twenty-seven delegates from seventeen Arab countries (including all the Gulf countries) participated in the seminar. Regional coordinators and experts from international organisations also actively participated in the discussions (World Bank, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, European Commission). 6 Experts from OECD countries (Canada, France, Korea and Norway) and academia (Dr Heeks, University of Manchester) engaged in policy discussions with their Arab counterparts. The meetings were chaired by Mr. Moosa Al Hashemi, Head of the Delivery Unit of the Executive Office, Dubai and co-chaired by Mr. Chang Kil Lee, e-government Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs (MOGAWA), Korea.

Outcomes:

As a result of the discussion, Arab countries have deepened their knowledge of specific tools adopted by OECD countries to measure and evaluate e-government; identified key experiences and practices in building e-government indicators at both national and international level; and planned follow up initiatives to be led by individual Arab countries and/or to be taken forward collectively by the group with the support of OECD and DSG.

In particular, the following key outcomes were achieved:

- Identification and discussion of the main challenges of measuring and evaluating e-government (e.g. poor data quality, lack of evaluation culture, lack of evaluation methodologies and tools, high cost associated with data collection, fragmented measurement efforts);
- Increased capacity in using some of the toolkits/models available to measure progress (eEurope benchmarking, MAREVA, Common Measurement Tool);
- Stock-taking of progress to date in Arab countries in building up e-government indicators at both national and project level;
- Identification of good practices that need to be taken into account while undertaking any e-government evaluation effort;
- Agreement to focus on mapping out existing data on e-government in Arab countries as a first step to define a programme of work in this area;
- Proposal to organise a follow up workshop on capacity building for indicators with other international actors in the area (e.g. ESCWA).

High Level Seminar on Strategies, tools and capacities for administrative simplification

Regional Capacity building seminar, 20-21 June 2007, Cairo, Egypt

Relevance of the topic:

Administrative simplification has been identified as one of the key elements for good governance in the Arab region.

Objectives:

The aim of this regional capacity-building seminar was to encourage policy dialogue within the region and to set up a solid network of policy makers from MENA and OECD countries currently working on issues of administrative simplification. As administrative simplification has been identified as one of the key elements for good governance in the Arab region, the seminar provided a good opportunity to explore priorities and build a solid framework of discussion on this topic.

Participants:

About 130 participants attended the seminar. In total, 8 Arab countries were represented: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian National Authority and Tunisia. In addition, 12 OECD countries – Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK, as well as the European Commission – were represented by 17 delegates. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Arab Administrative Development Organisation (ARADO) participated as well.

Outcomes:

This high level regional seminar helped to develop the GfD Initiative framework on administrative simplification. Country interest was high, resulting in the following possible future activities for Working Groups II and IV of the GfD Initiative:

1. With the support of the Egyptian authorities, the GfD Initiative has moved forward in launching a **network of policy makers in administrative simplification** among Arab and OECD countries.
2. The planning of **more activities regarding administrative simplification** was encouraged by delegates, especially those related to practice and to concrete challenges in administrative simplification processes. Arab countries have expressed interest in deepening policy exchange with OECD countries on specific areas of administrative simplification and in sharing strategies.
3. Several Arab countries highlighted their interest in deepening knowledge and capacity-building on regulatory reform, in particular the role of **oversight bodies and Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA)**.
4. Some OECD countries informally expressed interest in organising **peer-to-peer learning activities** on administrative simplification techniques in their home countries. These activities would be an opportunity to learn about concrete applications/projects.

OECD E-Leaders Conference, 6 March 2008, The Hague, The Netherlands

For the first time Arab delegates from selected Arab countries which have produced an Action Plan on E-government in the framework of the GfD Initiative (Bahrain, Dubai, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia) gathered together with their colleagues from OECD member, observer and accession countries to discuss opportunities and challenges for the development of the e-government of the future at an high level e-government conference organized by the OECD and the Dutch Ministry of the Interiors and Kingdom Relations.

Relevance of the topic:

Creating the next generation public sector – a seamless, efficient and co-ordinated body serving the public and not the administration itself – has been a major development and transformation goal of most OECD countries during the last decade. However, many challenges remain, reminding governments of public values, and how to use them as a foundation for the public sector of 2020. For the last 15-20 years, e-government – the use of ICT in government administration – has proven to be a key tool enabling extensive efficiency gains within public administrations and driving change; it has enabled governments to innovate and streamline internal processes and external service delivery. The focus of e-government has shifted *from* a focus on widespread integration and use of ICT to automate processes *to* a focus on how e-government can support and enhance broader public sector transformation goals and policy implementation.

Objectives:

The 2008 OECD E-Leaders Conference explored emerging e-government issues which might become tomorrow's operational e-government policy. Looking beyond the short- to medium-term planning horizon, the Conference allowed e-leaders around the world to anticipate the 2020 agenda and identify and discuss opportunities and challenges for future e-government policy development, forecasting its impact on the public sector, the economy and public service delivery.

Participants:

The OECD E-Leaders Conference 2008 was a high-level e-government conference organised under the auspices of the OECD Network of Senior E-Government Officials¹. Observer countries to the Public Governance Committee, accession countries, enhanced engagement countries, and selected Arab countries in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region were invited in order to broaden the perspectives and discussions at the Conference. Delegates from 21 OECD countries participated in the Conference as well as delegates from Chile and Slovenia (Official observer countries to the Public Governance Committee) and from Bahrain, Dubai, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. The Conference was chaired by Mr. William Perrin, Director, E-Government Unit, Cabinet Office, United Kingdom.

Outcomes:

Based on discussion at the meetings and lessons learned, four themes for a future agenda has emerged:

- ***Increasing coherency and integration of the public sector through innovation and change:*** The public sectors in OECD countries are quickly becoming more coherent and integrated. Eliminating redundancies and ensuring the sharing of resources where possible will dominate the e-government

¹ The OECD Network of Senior E-Government Officials is a network of national responsables of e-government policy development and implementation established by the Public Governance Committee in 2002.

agenda towards 2020. This requires an unprecedented change of mindsets and traditional silo-thinking towards ownership of the public sector as a whole by each civil servant.

- ***Putting users at the steering wheel of the public sector:*** Focusing on users and putting them at the centre of public sector activities diminishes silo-thinking and increases civil service providers' awareness of user needs and demands. E-Government will enable governments to hand-over major parts of public sector development and operations to users directly. Collaborative involvement of users in service design and operation could allow them to build their own set of public services adapted to their personal needs at different stages of their lives.
- ***Local service delivery – strengthened co-ordination and management:*** Allowing front-line personnel to deliver public services efficiently and effectively requires a well-functioning and fully coherent and integrated back-office. E-Government enables governments to reprioritise resources, moving more personnel from administrative duties in the back office to front-line duties helping users directly where necessary. Both local support in the front office and effective co-ordination and management in the back-office are vital. Building-up competencies and skills locally will become imperative. Monitoring and evaluations through the use of relevant measures and indicators will be important coherency tools.
- ***Globalisation of public services:*** Globalisation is impacting all countries' public sectors. Regional cross-border seamless services are increasingly apparent. This extra pressure for international collaboration and co-operation leads to increased global integration. Countries should also focus more on sharing resources within national borders. International collaboration is already underway in the European Union, and continues to increase, making both shared e-government services or even a universal electronic identification system a real possibility

Workshop on “Administrative Burden Reduction: Experiences, Practices and Use of ICT tools”

Capacity-building event organised by the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands as a special session of the OECD eLeaders Conference on 5 March 2008 in the Hague, the Netherlands

Relevance of the topic:

The simplification and rationalisation of administrative procedures is a key objective for all countries seeking to improve public sector efficiency, performance and competitiveness. Netherlands is recognized as being a leading country in this area thanks to its programmes which focus on the application of specific methodologies to measure the administrative burden to citizens and businesses and identifying reduction targets for each ministry and for citizen groups.

Objectives:

This workshop addressed Arab countries which are undertaking efforts in designing and implementing programs/activities focused on the simplification and rationalisation of administrative procedures. It aimed at an exchange of knowledge, lessons learned and good practices on implementing policies and tools for administrative simplification - with a particular focus on the use of electronic means – using experience from the Netherlands as a basis.

Participants:

The workshop was chaired by Ms Tanja Timmermans, Deputy Head of the Strategy and Innovation Division, Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations, Netherlands. Delegates from five Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Dubai/United Arab Emirates) and three OECD countries (Finland, Portugal and the Netherlands) participated in the workshop, along with experts from the OECD Secretariat.

The workshop was structured around a series of presentations by Dutch government experts from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Dutch Advisory Board on Administrative Burden, covering the institutions, policies and instruments for reducing administrative burdens for citizens and business. Each presentation was followed by a Q&A session.

Outcomes:

The workshop allowed Arab countries have acquired a better understanding and knowledge of how to implement efforts towards reducing the administrative burden for citizens and business through the analysis and discussion of the approach developed and tools used for administrative burden reduction from one of the most advanced OECD countries in this area. The workshop met its objective also thanks to the limited number of participants around the table allowed a frank and focused exchange on the issues and challenges in implementing administrative simplification policies. The format of this workshop could serve as a pilot for future activities in this area.

Some of the country examples lessons learned and experiences shared by the participants during the workshop were the following:

- *The Regulatory Reform Group within the Ministry of Finance is in charge of undertaking measures to reduce the administrative burden for businesses in the Netherlands. As Ms Cerrato pointed out, the Dutch approach is problem-oriented as it is based on an understanding and assessment of burden perception directly from businesses on a regular basis. The first step is to map out the information obligation on businesses, then measure the overall burden and assign each ministry with a specific burden reduction target. One other feature of the Dutch approach is the linkage between administrative burden reduction targets and budget negotiations. The Netherlands has set a quantitative target of 25% administrative burden reduction for 2008.*
- *The Dutch approach is also characterized by the presence of an independent watchdog, the Dutch Advisory Board on Administrative Burden (ACTAL), which advises ministries on issues of administrative burden assessment and reduction in proposed or existing legislation. For example, with regards to proposed legislation, ACTAL assess, among others, whether or not administrative burdens are quantified; if the quantification is correct; if alternative options exist that may lead to lower administrative burdens.*
- *ICTs are important tools for achieving administrative simplification objectives and reducing the administrative burden on citizens. Netherlands' approach is characterized by a close cooperation between the programme on reducing administrative burdens for citizens and the e-government programme. This is because ICT is considered not only as an important tool to reduce the administrative burdens but also to improve the quality of public services, both dimensions being at the heart of the Dutch concept of citizen centric government.*
- *In Finland, the vision of e-government supporting better government is centred around the customer-centred administrative processes designed to support citizens in different life situations and companies in different phases of their lifecycle. Similar to the Netherlands, the emphasis is on the delivery of "proactive" electronic services designed to minimise the administrative burden on citizens and companies.*
- *For citizens as well, the Dutch approach to administrative burden reduction is based on the measurement and identification of targets (25%) with a specific focus on reducing burdens for specific target groups: handicapped and chronically ill, elderly, benefit claimants, unemployed and volunteers. To give an example, single electronic file for people who receive an unemployment benefit have been introduced so to allow people to provide information only once. The current focus is on*

qualitative (as opposed to only quantitative) targets for administrative burden reduction for citizens through a better attention to reduction of the burden related to most important annoyances of citizens.

- *While participants agreed that e-government is an important tool to cut red tape by diminishing waiting times, increasing transparency and lowering the cost of transactions for citizens and businesses, both Arab and OECD countries acknowledge that a number of challenges still lie ahead in making the most of ICT for administrative burden reduction. One of this is the integration of back-offices which allows the provision of seamless services through online one-stop-shops. Data exchange between administrations is also difficult to achieve existing rigidities in many countries of the legislative and regulatory environment which allow data exchange only under limited conditions.*
- *Communication and branding of administrative simplification efforts is also crucial to ensure major stakeholders understanding and buy-in of reforms. As in the case of Portugal, consultation with business sector and civil society was an important element which helped government fine-tune program implementation targets and create awareness on the objectives and instruments of the Simplex program. In the Netherlands as well, citizen perspective is also considered to be central to ensure the success of burden reduction initiatives.*