ENGAGING CITIZENS FOR BETTER SERVICES

MENA-OECD WORKING GROUP ON OPEN & INNOVATIVE GOVERNMENT

WORKING CALL - SUMMARY

MENA - OECD
Governance Programme

OPSI
Observatory of
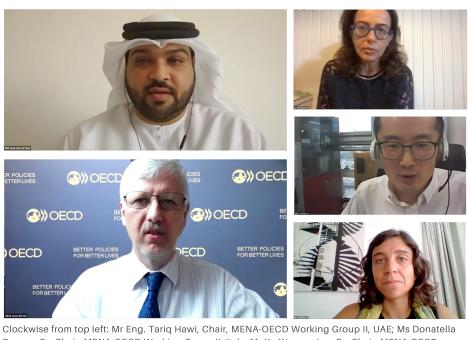Public Sector Innovation

MEPI

OECD

The MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government met remotely for a working call in preparation for the 15th Annual Meeting planned for the beginning of 2021. The purpose of the working call was to discuss the progress made as well as ongoing challenges and opportunities for "engaging citizens for better services". The working call was attended by delegates from Belgium, Brazil, Egypt, Germany (GIZ), Italy, Korea, Lebanon, Morocco, Portugal, Qatar, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

The opening remarks were made by Mr Eng. Tariq Al Hawi, Chair of the Working Group and Director for Digital Adoption and Enablement at Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, United Arab Emirates, who emphasised while the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging, it has also provided invaluable lessons and opportunities in highlighting and developing the crucial role of the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, data and the dynamic youth population in the MENA region – making the region well placed for innovation and inclusive engagement of the public in co-designing policies.

Clockwise from top left: Mr Eng. Tariq Hawi, Chair, MENA-OECD Working Group II, UAE; Ms Donatella Romeo, Co-Chair, MENA-OECD Working Group II, Italy; Mr Ko Woong Joe, Co-Chair, MENA-OECD Working Group II, Korea; Ms Cláudia Barroso, Co-Chair, MENA-OECD Working Group II, Portugal; Mr Janos Bertok, Acting Director of the Public Governance Directorate, OECD.

The co-chairs also opened the meeting: Ms Donatella Romeo, Director for Innovation and Public Administration at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Italy; Mr Ko Woong Joe, Director for International Cooperation Division for Good Governance at the Ministry of Interior and Safety, Korea and Ms Cláudia Barroso, Head of International Relations Unit, Administrative Modernization Agency, Portugal.

They concurred on the importance of international co-operation through the MENA programme, which provides a platform to share experiences and good practices in open, digital, and innovative government for more effective policy making. They also underlined their countries commitment to support action-oriented co-operation within the working group.

Mr Janos Bertok, Acting Director of the OECD Public Governance Directorate highlighted in his opening remarks that due to the COVID-19 crisis, governments have acted urgently to build economic and social resilience, accelerate the process of digital transformation, and innovate at breakneck speeds – in this way, the pandemic has emphasised that good public governance matters more now than ever. Furthermore, he noted that the MENA region has been committed to citizen engagement and the co-creation of service design and delivery, evidenced by the dozens of cases submitted to the Open and Innovative Government COVID-19 Innovative Response Tracker. He also underscored that the OECD Secretariat will continue to support the MENA-OECD Working Group members – fostering policy dialogue and contributing to the outcomes of this area of cooperation.

PEER2PEER LEARNING SESSION

COLLABORATING WITH CITIZENS FOR REINFORCED SERVICE DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Mr. Alessandro Bellantoni, Head of the Open Government Unit, OECD.

The Peer2Peer learning session, moderated by Mr Alessandro Bellantoni, Head of the OECD Open Government Unit, saw a lively discussion among delegates on the policies and initiatives that MENA countries have undertaken and the challenges faced in engaging citizens for collaborative policy making and service design and delivery in the time of

COVID-19. In a poll, most delegates ranked "responsiveness and engagement with citizen feedback" and "mechanisms for innovative citizen's participation" as areas of intervention that could have been better addressed and should be prioritised for the future. "Digital Key enablers (e.g. digital identity, data governance and interoperability)" and "access to public information", as well as "multichannel /omnichannel access to public services" and "quality and timeless of public services" were also broadly prioritised.

Some MENA countries shared that they noticed increased and spontaneous participation and collaboration with the civil society and private sector, namely through digital technologies, such as organising social assistance, mobilising more resources to help vulnerable communities at the local level, and allowing greater public access to information. This involved developing legislation and regulations, ICT key enablers, digital services and portals while promoting the open government principles of transparency, accountability, integrity, and stakeholder participation. Some governments established networks to introduce open government initiatives in different municipalities, train and upskill public servants, adopt mechanisms for citizen participation and respond to new and innovative digital public services demands. It was also suggested that standardised skills assessments could be undertaken to identify remaining capacity gaps as well as the progress made by public officials.

ROUNDTABLE SESSION

FUTURE OPEN & INNOVATIVE GOVERNMENT CO-OPERATION IN THE MENA REGION

The roundtable session, moderated by Mr Marco Daglio, Head of the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, received suggestions for deepening the MENA-OECD co-operation in open and innovative government, including priorities for the next working group meeting that will focus on "citizen participation for improved service design and delivery".

In two polls, a majority of delegates expressed "service design and delivery", "public sector innovation", "data governance and interoperability" and "citizen participation" as top priorities – to be achieved through "toolkits/playbooks of good practices and lessons learned", "thematic groups on relevant work streams" and "regional benchmarking reports, studies or policy briefs on relevant work streams".

Mr. Marco Daglio, Head of the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, OECD.

Mr Jehad Shakshir, Head of Programme, E-Governance in Palestine and the MENA Region (INDIGO), GIZ.

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Mr Jehad Shakhshir, GIZ's Head of Programme for E-Governance in Palestine and the MENA Region (INDIGO), shared two e-governance programmes in Palestine and Jordan that are undertaken to improve citizen-centered participation at the local and municipal level. They emphasised the importance of exchange of experience and knowledge in this respect. Mr. Otávio Neves, representing the Brazilian government and the OECD Latin American and Caribbean Network on Open and Innovative Government underlined the importance of having more collaboration with the MENA-OECD working group. Some delegates also expressed interest in cross-sectoral learning and being involved in the OECD's initiatives on emerging technologies and approaches, such as policy labs.

NEXT STEPS

During the closing remarks, H.E. Mr Ambassador Antonio Bernardini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OECD and Co-Chair of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme stated that the discussions illustrated the role of the COVID-19 crisis in reinforcing the need for transparency and accountability in government. Citizen participation and the digital divide remain critical issues to be addressed. Moving forward, new perspectives and proposals for open, digital and innovative government approaches are needed. Mr. Eng. Tariq Al Hawi, Chair of MENA-OECD Working Group, United Arab Emirates, re-iterated that the exchange of expertise, original ideas and contributions, and lessons learned are key to the effectiveness of the working group.

H.E. Mr Ambassador Antonio Bernardini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OECD and Co-Chair, MENA-OECD Working Group II, Italy.

Ms. Barbara Ubaldi, Acting Head of the Open and Innovative Government Division, Head of the Digital Government and Data Unit, OECD.

In support of the MENA-OECD working group, Ms Barbara Ubaldi, Acting Head of the Open and Innovative Government Division and Head of the Digital Government and Data Unit, underlined that the OECD Secretariat will prioritise action-oriented and practical outcomes that drive immediate and operational results, focusing on the priorities identified during the working call, to be suggested in the 15th Annual Meeting and closed the working call.

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