OECD Study Maps how Governments are Engaging Citizens in Policy-Making

Waning public confidence in official institutions is forcing governments to listen more, become more transparent and, ultimately, be more accountable. A new OECD publication, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making*, identifies some of the methods that governments can use to increase transparency, accountability and openness by engaging citizens in policymaking.

Drawing on surveys of OECD countries and case studies from a range of countries (Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Flanders (Belgium), France, Hungary, Korea, Norway, the United States) and policy fields (e.g. education, health, environment) the report identifies the main ingredients for successfully engaging citizens in policymaking. It finds that while legal rights to information are now widespread in OECD countries and the use of consultation is increasing, examples of active public participation are far less common.

It concludes that if citizens are to have more say in policymaking, they must have access to information that is clear, objective, comprehensive, relevant, and easy to find. Governments, meanwhile, must have clear goals when consulting the public, they must lay down the rules and define the limits of the exercise from the start and state how they intend to use citizens’ input. In seeking public participation, the report says, governments should provide sufficient time and flexibility to allow for the emergence of new ideas and proposals by citizens, as well as mechanisms for their integration into government policy-making processes.

As governments experiment with new channels of communication, including those offered by new information and communication technologies (such as Internet and mobile phones), it adds, they need to find an appropriate balance between official requirements for secrecy, citizens’ rights to information, and the protection of individuals’ privacy.

The report will be accompanied by a practical handbook designed to help government officials put principles into practice: *Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making* (available shortly).

To receive a copy of the report, journalists may contact the Media Relations Division (request by fax: [33] 1 45 24 80 03 or news.contact@oecd.org). For further information on the report, journalists are invited to contact Joanne Caddy, OECD’s Public Management Service (tel. [33] 1 45 24 89 56 or joanne.caddy@oecd.org).

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