

Special Session of the MENA-OECD Working Group on Civil Service and Integrity

Access to Information: What works and what doesn't 20 March 2019 - OECD Conference Centre (Paris, France)

The MENA-OECD Working Group on Civil Service and Integrity met on 20 March 2019 in Paris in the context of the 2019 OECD Global Forum for Anti-Corruption and Integrity. The Working Group brought together representatives from government, independent institutions, and NGOs from MENA and OECD member countries to engage in a policy dialogue on integrity and the prevention of corruption.



RESULTS OF THE MEETING

Delivering on the mandate of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme for 2016-2020, this special session of the Working Group focused on access to information and the role it plays to enhance transparency and integrity.

Building on the OECD Recommendations of the Council on [Public Integrity](#) and on [Open government](#), the session drew on the MENA-OECD Governance Programme and the dialogue of the OECD Public Governance Committee and its sub-bodies. It also featured the launch of the preliminary version of the regional report “Institutions guaranteeing access to information in OECD member countries and in the MENA Region countries.”

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AS KEY TO FIGHTING CORRUPTION AND PROMOTING INTEGRITY



Opening session with (from left to right) Mr. Kamel Morjane, Minister of Civil Service, Tunisia; Mr. Marcos Bonturi, Director of the Public Governance Directorate, OECD; Ambassador Rupert Schlegelmilch, Permanent Representative of the EU to the OECD

The meeting was opened by Tunisia and the European Union, the co-chairs of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme. In the first part of the discussion, the participants focused on the role of governmental and non-governmental actors in contributing to the effective implementation of access to information laws.

Comments from the representatives of the Tunisian (INAI) and French (CADA)

institutions guaranteeing access to information then followed. Both stressed the importance of their independent institutions in ensuring the implementation and monitoring of access to information laws. They added that they still face, however, many challenges including an increasing administrative burden due to a rising number of wide-ranging appeals and the necessity to change the administrative culture in order to make it more responsive, open and transparent. Representatives from civil society highlighted their role in helping keep administration accountable and checking the effective implementation of the right to access information. They also gave examples of how civil society can concretely contribute to making information more accessible to and exploitable by all citizens through the leveraging of digital tools.

Finally, a delegate from SIGMA, a joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union, shared his programme's experience in cooperating with Western Balkan states to implement a free access to information.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION

Delegates and participants highlighted that:

- **Guaranteeing the right to access to information can be an important tool in promoting a culture of governance and integrity and renewing citizens' trust in their governments.** Access to information allows citizens to know and understand the actions of their governments.
- Having a sound legal framework and independent institutions guaranteeing access to information is only a first step. **The most important remains the effective implementation of the right to access to information to all citizens**, notably through the free and easy access to information to all and the proactive and systematic publication of information by the administration.
- **Information** should not only be public and available, it **should also be understandable and exploitable by all**. This means that it should be freely accessible, in the shortest time possible and in a user-friendly language and format. Beyond the response to information requests by citizens, **governments should systematically and proactively publish public information**.
- **Digital tools**, such as applications or online platforms, **can help governments and civil society in disseminating and sharing public information** in a didactic and accessible manner for all citizens.
- **There is no single model or roadmap to achieve an effective access to information system.** Each country's system is adapted to its own legal, political and administrative culture.
- They **welcomed the new report** on institutions guaranteeing access to information in MENA and OECD countries. They suggested developing indicators in order to better follow-up on the effective implementation of access to information and integrity reforms. They also invited the Programme to **orient its future work on new topics** including ethics in artificial intelligence, the role of mediators and ombudsmen in strengthening integrity within the civil service, the integration of vulnerable groups' needs within public services and public governance reforms at the central and local level, and the importance of adopting an efficient institutional communication to help citizens better understand national reforms.

