

14th Annual Meeting of the MENA-OECD Working Group on Open and Innovative Government

Lisbon, 28-29 January 2019

The MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government met in Lisbon, hosted by the Portuguese Mint and Official Printing Office, and the Agency for Administrative Modernisation, which expressed its interest to become the new co-chair of the Working Group. The meeting was attended by Delegates from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Germany (GIZ), Italy, Jordan, Korea, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, the UAE and the UK.



The meeting was opened by Ms Maria Manuel Leitão Marques, Minister of the Presidency and of Administrative Modernisation, Portugal, who highlighted that innovation is at the service of the public administration to make it more transparent and responsive. A cultural and organisational transformation was needed to allow disruptive changes to take place and a new way of designing and testing policies to be adapted. The chair (the UAE's Telecommunication Regulatory Authority) and the other co-chairs (Korea and Italy) furthermore pointed out the importance to institutionalise innovation as a government mandate, to empower citizens through a bottom-up approach and to use digital technologies for innovation.

Throughout the sessions participants agreed that, in order to win back public trust, governments need to put citizens at the heart of every public governance initiative and every public service, while paying special attention to under-represented groups such as youth and women. When discussing "a systemic approach to public sector innovation" delegates presented their innovation approaches and labs that provide a space for innovating without being too risk adverse. While innovation often depends firstly on identifying a critical problem to be solved, the most challenging type concerns anticipatory innovation, in which problems are imminent but may not yet be clearly scoped. Ultimately experimentation and iteratively testing ideas and solutions with users should be principles guiding innovation.



During the sessions “harnessing digital platforms for participation and transparency” and “digital transformation of the public sector” participants highlighted that better communication is needed for citizens to be aware of the services provided. At the same time, if services respond to the actual need and are co-created, there will be demand and uptake.

The different transparency and participation portals presented are a first step to consult citizens and provide access to information. They rely on accurate information, an open data culture and can benefit from access to information laws, their relevance however also depends on useability of the information provided. A further step would however be moving to co-creation opportunities.

Finally, participants highlighted that the Working Group should accompany the countries in institutionalising innovation, openness and going digital. The questions shaping the future of the public administration and its relationship with citizens are: How to use emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and big data, to transform how the administration works? How to build the necessary capacities of public servants to embrace these new opportunities? How to evaluate and measure impact of initiatives that aim to build an open, innovative and digital state?

This year’s meeting closed with a several study visit to gain first-hand experience into the Imprensa Nacional Casa Moeda, LabX – Portugal’s innovation lab, and the citizen-shop, a one-stop shop for services more indepth.



NEXT STEPS

The outcomes of the meeting will be presented at the Public Governance Committee in April 2019 and at the annual MENA-OECD Steering Group Meeting in June 2019 in Tunis, which will also be the occasion to discuss the priorities of the group. Improving citizen-centred policies and services are at its core. To achieve this goal, and in line with the principles included in the Recommendations on Open Government, Digital Government Strategies and the Draft Declaration on Public Innovation, better communication, moving towards co-creation and overcoming exclusion and digital divide are key. Forthcoming work will explore how to create a culture of innovation, better harness data, adapt a user-centred approach and collaborate. It will also explore how to institutionalise open government and innovation approaches and measure impact of reforms. Thus, participants called upon the OECD Secretariat to mobilise resources to collect further data and benchmarking of practices in the region in this regard. The next annual meeting will take place in 2020.