



Transforming government: Taking innovative approaches to public services and citizen engagement

3-4 October 2022

Rome, Italy

Summary Note



Overview and objectives of the MENA-OECD Working Group meeting

The purpose of the event was to host a discussion on the topics that are currently the focus of the **MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government**. As such, it concentrated on the synergies that governments can identify in being more **open, digital and innovative** and how this approach can contribute to promoting greater **citizen and stakeholder participation** in the region. Throughout the policy-making cycle, governments have opportunities to engage with citizens to co-source ideas and co-create solutions to collective challenges. At the same time, the availability and advancement of digital technologies have improved existing practices and initiatives and encouraged innovative and cross-border approaches. Furthermore, omni-channel strategies, as well as effective and inclusive public communication, are needed to ensure that participation in public decision-making is accessible to all and that no one is excluded due to a digital divide.

The meeting will draw on the dialogue of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme and the OECD Public Governance Committee and builds on the [Recommendation of the OECD Council on Digital Government Strategies](#) as well as the [Recommendation of the OECD Council on Open Government](#).



Opening Remarks

Mr Francesco Leone, Diplomatic Advisor to the Minister for Public Administration, Prime Minister's Office, and Co-Chair of the MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government, Italy opened the meeting and welcomed all participants to Rome. He expressed **Italy's** pride in holding the co-chairmanship of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme and of this Working Group. The Caserta Centre has continued to design and deliver capacity-building and policy dialogue initiatives for public officials from the MENA region, while disseminating the OECD's research, analysis, and standards through many of its activities. He emphasised that this meeting aims to highlight the role of citizen-centred public administration in improving digital public service design and delivery and increasing public trust. Lastly, this discussion is timely given the upcoming [OECD Global Forum on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy](#) which will be held in Luxembourg on 17 November 2022 and focus on related topics, including digital democracy, tackling misinformation and disinformation, and enhancing civic participation.

Dr Eng. Tariq Al Hawi, Director of Digital Adoption and Enablement, Telecommunication Regulatory Authority and Chair of the MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government, **United Arab Emirates** underlined the significance of this platform given the major economic and social developments underway in the region. In addition, groundbreaking technological advancement and the rise of big data requires new thinking and strategic foresight to absorb these fast-paced changes, identify opportunities, and find solutions where needed. The meeting today is a confirmation of our shared vision to deliver high quality public policies and services by learning from – and building upon – one another's success stories.

Improving digital public service design and delivery for greater civic engagement and citizen participation

In today's digital age, citizens' expectations for public services have never been higher. Leveraging digital tools and data strategically can enable governments to design accessible and inclusive services and deliver them in ways that impact people's lives. This can make people feel that they can engage with their governments and advocate for their needs and demands. In this sense, countries in the MENA region can take steps towards identifying and balancing the challenges and opportunities that arise from embracing the digital transformation while maintaining human-centred and user-friendly public services.

Ms Seong Ju Park, Policy Analyst, Open and Innovative Division, OECD presented the Good Practice Principles for Public Service Design and Delivery in the Digital Age, which were developed under the lead of the OECD Working Party of Senior Digital Government Officials (E-Leaders) to help governments design and deliver public services. The principles are framed by 3 fundamentals: 1) Build accessible, ethical and equitable public services that prioritise user needs, rather than government needs, 2) deliver with impact, at scale and with pace, and 3) be accountable and transparent in the design and delivery of public services to reinforce and strengthen public trust. Under these fundamentals, there are 9 principles and 68 sub-principles overall. A working paper is under preparation to complement the Good Practice Principles, and both will be launched in the coming months. The Secretariat will work with OECD member and partner countries in 2023 to develop an implementation plan for the principles.

 [See PowerPoint: Good Practice Principles for Public Service Design and Delivery in the Digital Age](#)

 [See Document: Good Practice Principles for Public Service Design and Delivery in the Digital Age](#)

Dr Ghada Labib, Deputy Minister for Institutional Development, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Egypt, emphasised that today, no country can achieve its ambitions on sustainable development without placing technology and digital transformation at the core of their agenda. Digitalisation, when used correctly by governments in collaboration with civil society and the private sector, can foster greater inclusiveness and ensure that no one is left behind – or offline. **Egypt** is leading a “citizen-centric” approach to creating a secure and interactive digital society, by building tech talent, maximising gains and minimising risks in digitalisation, and developing the infrastructure and institutions necessary for such a transition. These goals are central to Egypt’s sustainable development strategy: Vision 2030, under which the ICT 2030 strategy was elaborated in 2018. The ICT strategy supports Egypt’s Vision 2030 through the “Digital Egypt” project, which aims to enhance the sector’s infrastructure, improve financial and digital inclusion, boost capabilities, ensure cybersecurity and encourage innovation. To provide an example of some recent achievements, 1.6 billion USD was invested over the past two years to establish a new network of fibre optic cables to connect 32 500 government buildings across the country, in addition to connecting more than 2 500 schools nationwide. In addition, the Government Gateway eases communication between 75 government entities and the Government Digital Service Portal which provides 164 services online. Lastly, there are ongoing efforts to further improve connectivity in rural areas, modernise local public services (e.g. post offices), and improve citizens’ digital literacy.

Mr Khaled Sellami, Director General, Electronic Administration Unit, Presidency of the Government, Tunisia, welcomed the GPPs and highlighted that they will support the services agenda in Tunisia. He presented **Tunisia’s** efforts in improving online service design and delivery for greater civic engagement and citizen participation. Tunisia ranks highly compared to its peers in many indexes measuring e-government and digital infrastructure, for example the United Nations E-Participation Index (EPI) categorises Tunisia as having a “High EPI”, at 67th place worldwide. Tunisia currently has a digital transformation strategy which aims to reduce the digital divide, develop ultra-fast broadband, digitalise the public administration, leverage big data and artificial intelligence, and modernise the legal framework around digital governance. Moreover, Tunisia also has a digital government strategy, which intends to develop end-to-end, accessible, omni-channel online public services, create an interoperable and interconnected public administration, establish a framework for open data that promotes transparency and the reuse of public data, and strengthen citizens’ trust in digital public services. Tunisia has a number of projects to improve the quality of online services, including guidelines that define unified standards for their development and an [evaluation system](#) that collects user feedback on their level of satisfaction. Other projects include a [one stop shop citizen portal](#) to centralise online public services. Lastly, Tunisia is prioritising open government reforms through its [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\) National Action Plan 2021-2023](#), which emphasizes transparency, open data, national portals for citizen participation, the role of youth, and more.

 [See PowerPoint: Improving online services design and delivery for greater civic engagement and citizen participation in Tunisia](#)

Mr Mohamed Moussa, (Acting Director) Head of Division of Internal Information Systems, Ministry of Digital Transition and Administrative Reform, Morocco, noted that citizens have multitudinous opportunities to participate in public decision-making in Morocco at the national and local level. Citizens can propose initiatives for the development of digital services for users, through a [web platform](#) which allows the public administration to collect ideas. **Morocco** also enables citizens to

file complaints and suggestions on public services either through a [web platform](#) or through a dedicated call centre. Citizens and civil society organisations can also comment on draft legislation and identify ways to be involved in public decision-making through a national portal for citizen participation. In particular, the Ministry of Digital Transition and Administrative Reform invites all stakeholders to contribute to the development of its digital strategy as well as in its various projects and services.

During the discussion, the delegates highlighted the importance of governance, digital skills, change management and policy levers for the success of digital government transformation. **Morocco** discussed how it addresses the challenges of processing and filtering the proposals submitted by citizens and civil society and further explained how each public administration uses the online portal. It also emphasised the importance of open data in this regard, so that citizens are aware of government activities and do not ask for information, projects or services that are already available. **Lebanon** and **Egypt** discussed the similarities between their digitalisation goals and the need for change management and a cultural shift towards the digital transformation. **Lebanon** noted that as part of its digital transformation strategy, a digital transformation unit was established, however, the adoption of a digital transformation officer in each public body would further support the strategy's implementation. **Tunisia** highlighted the importance of ensuring that the legal and policy frameworks for the right to access to information and the right to privacy and personal data protection are complementary and coherent to avoid potential infringements of either right.

Unlocking innovation through cross-border collaboration

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how the interconnectedness of countries may have made the world more vulnerable to common threats while exposing weaknesses in international co-operation. In this sense, major challenges today are not limited by national borders but demand collective action.

Mr Jamie Berryhill, Policy Analyst, Open and Innovative Division, OECD, presented the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation's recent series of work on [Achieving Cross-Border Collaboration](#). OPSI aims to equip governments and public servants with fresh insights, knowledge, tools and connections to help them explore new possibilities. In order to do so, OPSI provides a number of platforms and resources, including a [case study library](#), a [public engagement platform](#) and a [toolkit navigator](#). The Secretariat also mentioned the [OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation](#), which supports countries to create a common language on why innovation matters; informs a more strategic use of innovation; and legitimises country action and investment in innovation capabilities. Regarding cross-border innovation, governments are increasingly introducing and leveraging new mechanisms to connect and collaborate in order to tackle issues that cut across borders. OPSI has identified several good practice examples of experimentation and delivering impactful solutions, from the [Open European Dialogue](#) to the [X-Road Trust Federation](#).



See PowerPoint: [OECD OPSI Cross-Border Government Innovation](#)

Mr Yousuf Yacoub Al-Sahlawi, Planning Researcher, e-Government Programs and Standards Department, Qatar, introduced the public administration's efforts in creating a digital workplace that enables collaboration across networks and borders. **Qatar** incorporates a three step approach "listen, design, and define" alongside their core guiding principles of immersive applied design, which is that it must be human centred, analytics-driven, include an industry perspective, and create breakthrough insights. To create the "art of what is possible" and define "the future of work", it is

necessary to examine the changing nature of activities and their value-add, the talent needed to complete them, and the ecosystem in which they are performed. This approach has supported Qatar in confronting the COVID-19 health crisis, and for example, has proved beneficial in the organisation of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.



See PowerPoint: [Unlocking innovation through cross-border collaboration in Qatar](#)

Mr Nasser Israoui, Director, Technical Cooperation Unit, Ministry of State for Administrative Reform, Lebanon emphasised that cross-border collaboration is no longer an option, but is becoming the status quo given the interconnected challenges of climate, migration, and security that countries are now facing, among others. It presents a positive pathway towards fostering innovation both between all levels of government within countries, and between countries. One recent initiative in which Lebanon took part was an open call titled [Thoulathy: Cross Border Collaboration Project](#), co-funded by the European Union. Through this initiative, 20 cultural organisations from the ‘South’ and another 10 from the ‘North’ of the globe were requested to work together on a 15-month project to foster social and economic inclusion of young people. The recently approved digital transformation strategy underlines the importance of interoperability between existing systems and Lebanon intends to establish an Open Government Information Exchange platform within two years. In this sense, **Lebanon** recognises that platforms for data sharing are essential for cross-border collaboration and has also identified several emerging needs, for example, the need to develop an innovation strategy, an open data strategy, and create a secure digital identity.

Mr Jamal Abushanab, Deputy Minister Assistant for Supporting General Administrations, Palestinian Authority presented the **Palestinian Authority’s** initiatives to digitalise the public administration for good governance. The objectives of the General Personnel Council (GPC) in particular include: enhancing the efficiency of procedures, improving data-driven decision-making, and modernising service delivery, among others. In this regard, the Council has created e-archiving systems, an online portal for the civil service, e-recruitment projects, and an award-winning mobile application for e-services offered by the public administration. Lastly, COVID-19 raised awareness of the need to invest in IT infrastructure, develop solutions for online and in-person procedures, and empower GPC officials.



See PowerPoint: [Digitalising the civil service to promote good governance in the Palestinian Authority](#)

Participants enthusiastically emphasised their desire to continue to collaborate with one another and with the OECD on cross-border innovation and the **Palestinian Authority** in particular highlighted their interest in further cooperation with the Caserta Centre on all of the topics under the framework of the MENA-OECD Governance Programme.

Closing Remarks

Dr Eng. Tariq Al Hawi, Director of Digital Adoption and Enablement, Telecommunication Regulatory Authority and Chair of the MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government, United Arab Emirates, thanked all the participants for the wealth of information and experiences shared. Participants highlighted the importance of a user-centric approach to digital public services and a two-way dialogue between citizens and government, all of which is enabled through an ecosystem based on strong legal and policy frameworks alongside initiatives for access to information, open data, interoperability, digital signatures and more. He emphasised the need to maintain the momentum of this platform in future meetings to continue to identify opportunities for further collaboration on fostering open, innovative and digital government.

Mr Francesco Leone, Diplomatic Advisor to the Minister for Public Administration, Prime Minister's Office, and Co-Chair of the MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government, Italy, noted that this meeting is an important stepping stone to further delve into the topics discussed today and re-iterated their broader relevance for reinforcing democracy and building citizens' trust in government. Finally, he expressed his gratitude to all participants for travelling to Italy and thanked the OECD Secretariat for the organisation of this event before closing the meeting.



MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government

The OECD has undertaken a range of capacity-building exercises at the national, regional, and local levels and has consolidated three regional networks in the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. These networks offer countries from each respective region a platform to exchange ideas, experiences, and knowledge on building stronger public institutions with a focus on open government, public sector innovation, and digital government.

The MENA-OECD Working Group II on Open and Innovative Government was launched in 2005 and is currently chaired by United Arab Emirates and co-chaired by Korea, Italy and Portugal. The Network established a community of policy practitioners in the MENA region to promote open

and digital government open data, and public sector innovation and the ways in which they can contribute and add value to the economic, social, and governance goals in the region.

The MENA-OECD Governance Programme

The [MENA-OECD Governance Programme](#) is a strategic partnership between governments in the MENA region and OECD members to share knowledge and expertise, with a view of disseminating standards and principles of good governance that support the ongoing process of reform in the MENA region. The Programme strengthens collaboration with the most relevant multilateral initiatives currently underway in the region. In particular, the Programme supports the implementation of the G7 Deauville Partnership and assists governments in meeting the eligibility criteria to become a member of the Open Government Partnership. Through these initiatives, the Programme acts as a leading advocate of managing ongoing public governance reforms in the MENA region. The Programme provides a sustainable structure for regional policy dialogue as well as for country specific projects. These projects correspond to the commitment of those in the MENA region to implement public sector reforms in view of unlocking social and economic development and of meeting citizens' growing expectations in terms of quality services, inclusive policymaking and transparency.

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