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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Regional Workshop on Open Government and Emerging Technologies in the Arab Region  
2-4 July 2019, Beirut, Lebanon

## **Preliminary Information Note**

### **1. Background**

Rapid technological changes are pushing government to develop its internal processes, advance its services beyond e-government services. New digital technologies are bringing more options for effectiveness, transparency, service delivery and engagement with citizens. It is therefore necessary to understand the role of digital technologies and its emerging trends such as big data, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, that could be deployed to strengthen public institutions and enhance their services.

An open government is effective and efficient in the performance of its duties, transparent in and accountable for its actions, and accessible to all through its services. It is also responsive to the needs of its citizens, values their knowledge and expertise in decision-making, while embracing new technologies to enhance its governance. Open government has the potential to increase trust in Government, fight corruption, and improve growth; while citizen engagement through shared responsibilities and open collaboration can lead to tailored policies and services in line with the needs of the people. By developing openness in government, countries create better opportunities achieve inclusive, sustainable development and addressing issues highlighted by the SDGs.

The workshop, its objective and topics stand in direct support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goal 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. Under Goal 16, the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), responsive, inclusive participatory and representative decision-making (16.7), and public access to information is promoted (16.10), are all in-line with the purpose and objectives of open government.

Implementing open government is not an easy task, as it requires changes to long-standing systems, changes in the way government thinks and changes in the way citizens perceive their responsibility and role in governance. To support the transformation towards open government in the Arab region, ESCWA developed a framework for open government. Build on existing systems, the ESCWA four-phased framework, can be used by government institutions, departments, and ministries to systematically and gradually introduce and develop open government. The four phases are openness, participation, collaboration and engagement. It should be noted that legal aspects, such as laws and regulations are necessary to achieve open government; and they should be considered at design, launch and implementation phases of open government programs.

Innovation is essential today for improving effectiveness and delivery of advanced services in the public sector, especially when relying on emerging technologies. Innovation in public institutions can also improve decision-

making and planning and thus leading to better governance. However, activating and sustaining innovation can be difficult due to internal or external factors of the Government. Government can consider several approaches and tools to plan, activate and execute public sector innovation. Being aware and understanding selected approaches will make it possible for Government decision-makers to adopt innovation as a paradigm for a change.

This workshop is the second regional workshop organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) under the broader Development Account project entitled "Institutional development for better service delivery towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals in Western Asia" which was launched in 2016. The overall objective of the project is to build the capacity of ESCWA Member States to utilize emerging technologies for increasing transparency, accountability and to adopt a more effective and efficient participatory approach to governance. In its part of the project, the Technology for Development Division focus specifically on the employment of emerging technologies and embracing the concept of openness and participation to achieve the project objectives.

## 2. Objectives

The main objective of this workshop is to build the capacity of participants on open government, specifically the four phased ESCWA framework with dedicated sessions for the different phases. The capacity building will provide participants with knowledge on options, tools and actions to develop and implementation open government initiatives in the Arab region, especially related to open data and participation. The workshop activities will be based on the capacity development materials developed by ESCWA on open data and on participation, collaboration and engagement, as well as the Commission's study on an open government policy framework for Arab countries.

The workshop also aims to build the capacity of participants on new technological trends, their use and potential impact for enhancing the activities of public service. The workshop will also show various approaches for adopting innovation as a driver of change and development of public sector for improving effectiveness, accountability and citizen-engagement, and thus supporting the achievement of SDG 16 of the 2030 Development Agenda.

During the workshop selected regional and national initiatives will be showcased to stimulate the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned.

## 3. Topics

To support the Arab countries efforts for achieving the 2030 Development Agenda and specifically, SDG 16, the following list of topics will be discussed during the workshop:

- (1) The role of emerging digital technologies for enhancing effectiveness, transparency and service delivery of public sector;
- (2) Fostering open government in the region in the context of the four-phased ESCWA Open Government Framework: Openness, participation, collaboration and engagement;
- (3) Legal and regulatory aspects of open government and open data initiatives;
- (4) Innovation as a driver of change and development in the public sector;
- (5) International and regional experiences as well as national case studies from the region and beyond.

## 4. Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the workshop are:

- (1) Participants have greater knowledge on open government in general and specifically about the ESCWA open government policy framework for the Arab region;
- (2) Participants can develop and implement better strategies on open data, participation, collaboration and engagement needed to achieve open government in the Arab region;
- (3) Participants are familiar with different tools, options and actions that can be used to improve open government, open data and participation (collaboration and engagement).
- (4) Participants formed linkages for greater knowledge sharing on best practices on innovative technological solutions for improving public sector in the Arab region.

## 5. Previous and related work by ESCWA

- ESCWA (2019). *Capacity Development Material on Participation, Collaboration and Engagement*. Available from <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/capacity-development-material-participation-collaboration-engagement>.
- ESCWA (2018). *Fostering open government in the Arab region*. Available from <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/fostering-open-government-arab-region>.
- ESCWA (2017). *Expert Group Meeting on Open Government and emerging technologies in the Arab Region*. Available from: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/open-government-emerging-technologies-arab-region>.
- ESCWA (2017). *Guideline on Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector of the Arab Region*. Available from <https://www.unescwa.org/guideline-public-sector-innovation-arab-region>.
- ESCWA (2017). *Integration of Service Delivery in the Arab region: role of standards and interoperability*. Available from: [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page\\_attachments/integration-service-delivery-arab-region-en.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/integration-service-delivery-arab-region-en.pdf).
- ESCWA (2016). *Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2015*. Available: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-sustainable-development-report-2015>.
- ESCWA (2015). *E-government module in the AIGLE project*. Available from: [http://www.escwa.un.org/sites/aigle/editor/Download.asp?table\\_name=AIGLE\\_Documents&field\\_name=id&FileID=12](http://www.escwa.un.org/sites/aigle/editor/Download.asp?table_name=AIGLE_Documents&field_name=id&FileID=12).

## 6. Participation and registration

Participants of the workshop should be government decision-makers and officials working on enhancing the use of technology in public sector for improving performance, effectiveness, transparency, accountability and enhancing citizen-centric service delivery. **Participation is by invitation only.**

To promote gender equality and achieve greater gender balance in activities, invited institutions and organizations are strongly encouraged to nominate women to participate in the workshop.

Participants should register for the meeting online at <http://reg.unog.ch/e/workshop-second-regional-open-government-arab-region> no later than **24 May 2019**. A guideline for online registration is attached to the invitation, and should you require any assistance, please send an email to Maya Hammoud ([hammoudm@un.org](mailto:hammoudm@un.org)) or Lize Denner ([denner@un.org](mailto:denner@un.org))

## 7. Organization, format, venue and dates

The workshop is organized by the Innovation Section of the Technology for Development Division (TDD) at ESCWA. It will take place between 2 and 4 July 2019 at UN House, Beirut.

It will include several specialised and general presentations focused on building capacity around open government, public sector innovation and technology. It will also include international, regional and national case studies.

## 8. Working language

Arabic and English are the working languages of the workshop. **Simultaneous interpretation between both languages will be provided.**

## 9. Travel and accommodation

All participants are to inquire about their visa requirements from Lebanon and to secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date.

ESCWA will cover the travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of participants from invited organizations in selected countries, especially those coming from least developed countries.

## 10. Additional information

Further information and documentation is available at the following URL:

<https://www.unescwa.org/events/workshop-second-regional-open-government-arab-region>

Address inquiries and requests for additional information to:

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