



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Meeting of Arab e-Government Directors #8

Virtual Meeting

23 Sep 2020

Session 2: Global Perspectives		
13:50-14:00	Digital Transformation and e-Government	Mr. Vincenzo Aquaro, Chief, Digital Government Branch, UNDESA

Excellencies

Dear colleagues and friends,

Ladies and gentlemen

I am grateful to participate at this virtual meeting of the 8th Arab e-Government Directors. I thank ESCWA for organizing this session and inviting UNDESA to discuss about digital transformation and e-Government.

We all agree that the COVID-19 crisis is setting the agenda and the priorities of where to focus on digital transformation efforts, such as facilitating the needs of people.

We all agree that throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, digital technologies have enabled governments to respond to COVID-crisis, connecting with people and continuing to deliver services online.

Digital government have been played a vital role in promoting the health and safety of people and in keeping economies and societies working during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

We have experienced years of digital transformation in a few months and this was possible also because of the tireless work done by all of you in handling the crisis.

So allow me to thank you and your teams for this incredible achievement.

In UN-DESA in April we have issued a call for e-government applications and/or cases, targeting the COVID-19.

We have received more than 500 cases from all around the world in less than 2 weeks. So we have turned most of the selected cases into a publication for awareness raising and sharing of best practices. The publication will be launched next week.

And I am impressed for so many innovative cases received from the Arab States. Just few examples: the contact tracing app “BeAware Bahrain” of Bahrain; Shlonik app of Kuwait; telecommuting efforts of Moroccan government; Tarassud Plus app of Oman as well as Droobi app and usage of drones from Oman. Many initiatives from Saudi Arabia including Tawakolna information sharing app, blood donation from home, Tamini app for supplying medical goods.

Same from United Arab Emirates such as AlHosn App for social distancing or “Don’t worry” national campaign for mental support.

These cases include dedicated COVID-19 portals, hackathons with non-government institutions targeting the virus, e-services for supply of medical goods, virtual

doctors, self-diagnosis apps, e-permits for curfews, and of course tracking and tracing apps, and apps for working and learning from home.

In addition to this Compendium, as many of you may be aware, we have recently launched the United Nations E-Government Survey 2020. Thanks to the generosity of UAE the Arabic version will be launched today, after this meeting.

For the preparation of the Survey, we have sent out a Member States Questionnaire (MSQ) in partnership with ESCWA.

I thank again ESCWA colleagues for their coordination efforts.

And out of the 21 Arab Member States we assess in the Survey, I am happy to inform you that 16¹ of them have contributed to the MSQ.

Ladies and Gentlemen

At UNDESA, we believe the COVID-19 crisis is likely to significantly accelerate the shift to digital and fundamentally shake up the digital government landscape.

As highlighted in the 2020 E-government Survey, the COVID-19 pandemic forced governments and societies to turn toward digital technologies to respond to the crisis in the short-run; recover from and resolve socio-economic repercussions in the medium-run; but also reinvent existing policies and tools in the long-run.

This is a wake-up call for many government agencies that have placed too much focus on daily operational needs at the expense of investing in digital government and long-term resilience.

¹ Algeria, Comoros, Djibuti, Libya, Yemen did not contribute to MSQ for the 2020 edition of the UN E-Gov Survey.

Peoples' expectations of governments have already increased during the pandemic and they will expect the same level of e-services in the post-pandemic era.

As policymakers respond to these rising expectations, continuing to innovate and use digital technologies will help to achieve their development objectives.

In this regard COVID-19 can be considered as an opportunity to bridge together the most useful solutions and models currently available, to assist all levels of government in understanding and implementing the necessary steps towards a digitally transformed public sector.

But there's still not a shared understanding of what digital transformation actually means.

It stands for much more than suddenly working from home using web-conference tools. It asks governments to rethink how they deliver value to people in a digital world.

In order to realize the efficiency of digital transformation, governments need to minimize offline steps and adopt a digital-by-design approach that go beyond the digitalization of the existing processes, rethinking the whole organizational model to focus more on people and their needs, treating data as a strategic asset for service delivery and for decision making, and underpinning their organizations with secure, scalable and resilient infrastructures and digital solutions.

Accelerating the implementation of new digital technologies such as 5G, cloud computing, AI, blockchain, and drones are crucial for the future resilience of the economy.

However, at the same time, policymakers need to consider and mitigate the privacy risks and the risks of over-surveillance associated with using new technologies and personal data.

Developing countries, in particular, cannot mitigate the crisis and recover alone. National, regional, and local project-based collaborations with private sector companies, academia, civil society, international organizations, and other stakeholders are necessary.

UN-DESA in partnership with the regional commissions and the other UN sister agencies will continue to support member states to strengthen governments on digital transformation.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of technology, but also the pivotal role of an effective, inclusive and accountable government.

Even though public-private partnerships are essential for implementing innovative technologies, government leadership, strong institutions and effective public policies are crucial to tailor digital solutions to countries' needs as well as prioritize security, equity and the protection of people's rights.

Thank for your attention.