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Making Life Easy for Citizens and Businesses in Portugal
Administrative Simplification and e-Government
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Chapter 5

Implementation Tools

Implementing simplification in the public sector requires a broad range of management tools; these tools change operational framework conditions, a prerequisite for successful implementation of simplification initiatives with a lasting impact across the public sector as a whole. Operational framework conditions cover a broad range of public management areas such as financial management, human resource management, management of processes and organisations including collaboration and co-operation, and administrative culture.

Simplification activities impact public organisations and how they interact; analysing the use of different public management tools is important to understand the dynamics of implementation. This chapter evaluates the tools used to implement initiatives in the Simplex programmes:

- **Budgetary tools:** Budgetary tools are essential for ensuring proper implementation of initiatives. The key questions are: are the right mechanisms in place for prioritisation of simplification and e-government projects? Is funding adequate?
- **Human resource tools:** Human resource tools – such as training, individual performance contracts and monetary incentives – are important elements in public sector reforms in OECD countries. In the face of challenges which include an ageing population and increased fiscal pressure, human resource tools are becoming increasingly important for improving efficiency and effectiveness. The key question is: which human resource tools are used in relation to the Simplex programmes?
- **Business process re-engineering:** Simplification can be achieved through processes that do not involve ICT, *e.g.* deregulation, thresholds, harmonisation, streamlining, regulatory alternatives, risk-based regulation, scrap-and-build, and information. The key question is: how and to what extent are these tools for business process re-engineering used in the Simplex programmes?
- **Collaboration and co-ordination:** Because of "sector silos", collaboration and co-ordination on simplification and e-government projects is a challenge in many OECD countries. However, it is necessary to work together to reap the full benefits of seamless service delivery. The key question is: are the right mechanisms and frameworks for collaboration and co-ordination between central and local governments in place?

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- **Administrative culture:** Successful implementation requires organisational and management change in the administrative culture. The key question is: which administrative culture tools have been used in relation to the Simplex programmes?
- **Public consultation:** Public consultations improve implementation by engaging citizens and business. Getting input from stakeholders makes policies more user-oriented, improving the quality of decision-making processes. The key questions are: what public consultation mechanisms have been conducted in relation to the Simplex programmes? What have the results been?

Budgetary tools

Portugal experienced severe budgetary problems in the early 2000s, with a widening of the fiscal deficit to 6% of GDP in 2005, followed by a marked improvement in 2006 and 2007. The main factor contributing to the deterioration of public finances has been the upward trend in current primary spending over the years, reflecting inadequate control and erratic consolidation efforts. In addition, the quality of public services did not increase in line with spending, pointing to inefficiency issues.[1] In 2005, faced with an unsustainable fiscal situation that was in breach with the EMU stability and growth pact, the government introduced a consolidation programme and the deficit decreased to below 3% of GDP in 2007. Public administration reform is an important pillar of the strategy to control public spending and increase government efficiency. The reform of human resource management, which seeks to reorganise local and regional services, is an important component of this strategy. Furthermore, there is ongoing work to improve budgeting and public finance management.

Portugal faces the same challenges as other OECD countries of establishing budgetary principles and procedures for simplification and e-government projects. The Portuguese budgetary system is based on a traditional bottom-up process where central government ministries and agencies submit their budget proposals within spending ceilings prepared by the Ministry of Finance and Public Administration[2] and decided by the Council of Ministers (see Box 5.1).

In March 2007, the Minister of Finance nominated a commission charged with preparing the legal and operational conditions for the adoption of programme budgeting.[3] It will lead efforts to change the budget process and move towards performance budgeting with a stronger link between appropriations and activities. The new system is expected to be better suited at handling cross-cutting projects.

Special funding mechanisms have not been established for simplification projects. Investments in such projects are part of the budget preview for the *Central Government Investment and Development Plan (PIDDAC)*, which includes

Box 5.1. **The Portuguese state budget process**

The Portuguese budget process begins in May-June, when the Ministry of Finance presents the main budget guidelines for the following year to the Council of Ministers. This estimate takes into account the forecasted evolution of the major macroeconomic aggregates, commitments to the European Union, and expected taxation revenues. It is used to settle running cost ceilings, as well as the corresponding annual funding for multi-year public investment projects and some specific expenditure such as transfers to the National Health Service and pensions for civil servants. Some expenditure is determined by law, such as fund transfers to regional and municipal administrations.

Based on these general guidelines, the General Directorate of the Budget in the Ministry of Finance prepares an internal circular, which provides detailed guidelines for the elaboration of the budget and sets the deadline for the delivery of each service's budget typically in August.

After submission of these budget proposals, the Ministry of Finance verifies and identifies possible divergences from the general guidelines settled by the Council of Ministers. The Ministry of Finance then holds informal meetings with each ministry to address problems; if this approach is unsuccessful, the necessary arrangements are settled in a new meeting of the Council of Ministers.

The draft budget proposal and the report on the budget are finalised and presented to the parliament before 15 October. The parliament has power to alter the draft proposal; according to the Government Budget Fundamentals Act, the draft proposal or an amended version must be approved by parliament before 30 November.

According to the framework law for the state budget, it is approved annually. For multi-year expenditures, the data on future years are only indicative, and are revised every year with the approval of the new budget act.

Source: Questionnaire on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007. Answers to Question 3.3.3.1.

both national investments and European Union Structural Funds. PIDDAC contains two specific programmes in this area:[4]

1. "Information Society and e-Government" (4.8% of total expenditure) allocated for ICT initiatives to improve the quality of public services. These include contribution to effectiveness of the public administration, promotion of digital culture and economy, promotion of broadband use in safe environments and interoperability of networks, enhancement of e-democracy, and creation of content.

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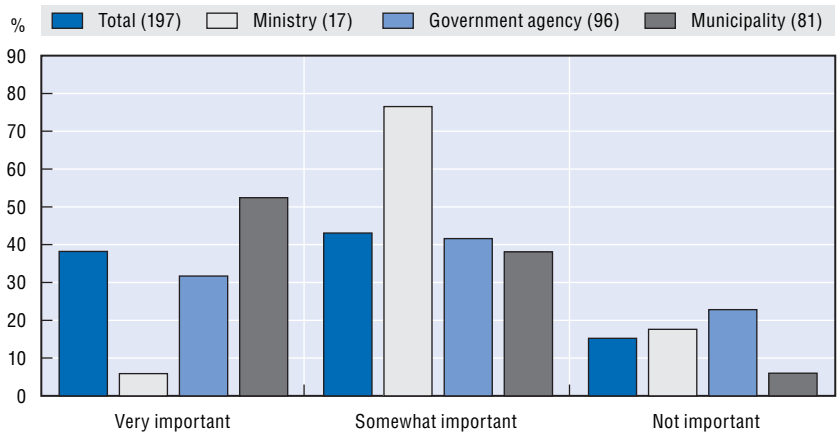
2. "Modernisation and Qualification of Public Administration" (0.6% of expenditure) targeted at public administration reform such as systems and procedures modernisation, improvement of public services and front-office services, and training of human resources.

Although many of the measures in the Simplex programmes are cross-cutting and involve several ministries and agencies, investments in and savings from Simplex initiatives are treated the same way as any other expenditure or investment in the budget process. Initiatives are thus funded on an *ad hoc* basis from each ministry's regular budget allocations. Estimates on expenditures and savings from some of the larger projects in the Simplex programmes have been carried out (*e.g.* for the Online-permanent-certificate, Electronic Official Gazette; Electronic Employment Bulletin, online starting a business procedures, and others), but an overview of overall expenditure and savings from the more than 500 initiatives of Simplex 2006 and Simplex 2007 is not yet available. According to Portuguese officials, the monitoring programme will address this issue in a more in-depth manner in 2008.

OECD interviewees did not reveal lack of funding as a major challenge in central government, although the budgetary situation seems to be a strong driver for simplification projects which may create savings and efficiency gains. This is confirmed by the OECD survey, which shows that lack of funding and lack of long-term funding for multi-year projects are perceived as significant challenges to implementation of simplification projects, particularly in municipalities (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

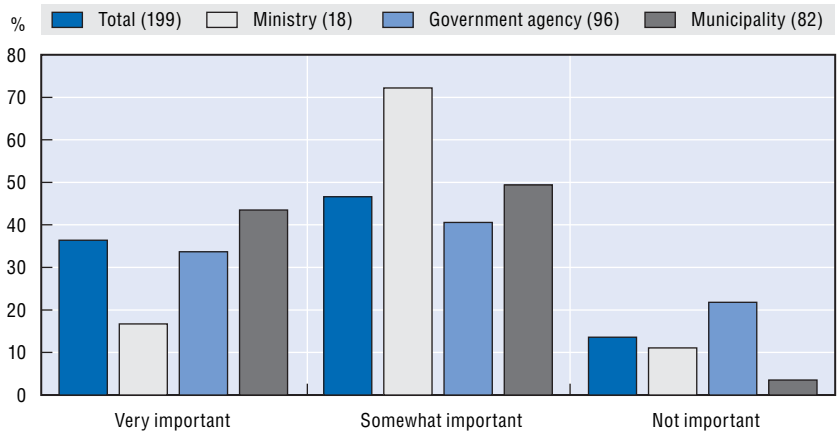
Figure 5.1. **Challenges to implementation: funding**



Note: N = 197 (10 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable" or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Figure 5.2. **Challenges to implementation: long-term funding**



Note: N = 199 (8 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable" or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Simplification measures are a high priority issue for the government, and many OECD interviewees cited European Union Structural Funds as an important funding source. In the period 2000-2006 it was possible for Portugal to use these funds for Information Society purposes (computer equipment, training, Internet access for the general public and schools, modernisation of administrations, etc.).[5] The same parameters are expected to apply for the next programme period 2007-2013.

As a condition for allocation of cohesion funding (Structural Funds), the European Commission must approve a National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) from the member state in question (see Box 5.2). For the period 2007-2013, special funding lines for administrative modernisation projects have been created both at the national, and at the regional and local levels. As a way to improve co-ordination and coherence in simplification and modernisation efforts between the different levels of administration, these funding lines have common basic rules nationwide, which were defined as part of a joint effort. An operational network comprising elements of both levels of administration has been established for this purpose and is expected to be working as a co-ordination platform until the end of the programme period.

OECD interviews revealed that a budgetary mechanism for joint funding of cross-cutting projects involving several ministries and agencies has not been created. Furthermore, no systematic procedures are in place to harvest savings and long-term efficiency gains from simplification projects and there is no policy on whether ministries and agencies can keep saved funding for other simplification projects or other purposes. According to OECD interviews,

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Box 5.2. **Portugal's National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF 2007-2013)**

After the European Council decided in spring 2005 to focus on re-launching the Lisbon Strategy, the Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion (CSG) were adopted in 2006 and required future cohesion policy to target resources on three priorities: improving the attractiveness of member states, regions and cities; encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship, and the growth of the knowledge economy; and creating more and better jobs. In response, all member states have been preparing a National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), which describes how each country proposes to implement these priorities on its own territory.

The European Commission approved Portugal's NSRF on 2 July 2007. Portugal will receive 21.5 billion EUR of European Union cohesion funding over the 2007-2013 programming period.

The Portuguese NSRF proposes five national strategic priorities: to improve the population's skills; to promote sustainable growth; to guarantee social cohesion; to ensure the development of the territory and the cities; and to improve governance efficiency. Five structural principles of investment will apply: concentration; selectiveness; economic viability and financial sustainability; territorial cohesion; and strategic monitoring.

The five national strategic priorities will be implemented through a set of Operational Programmes, some of which are thematic and others targeted at geographic areas (7 Regional Operational Programmes, one for each NUTS 2 region, including the autonomous regions; 2 Regional Operational Programmes, one for each autonomous region; and 6 Territorial Co-operation Operational Programmes (cross-border, transnational, interregional). The preparation of these Operational Programmes has been undertaken in close co-operation among all levels of government.

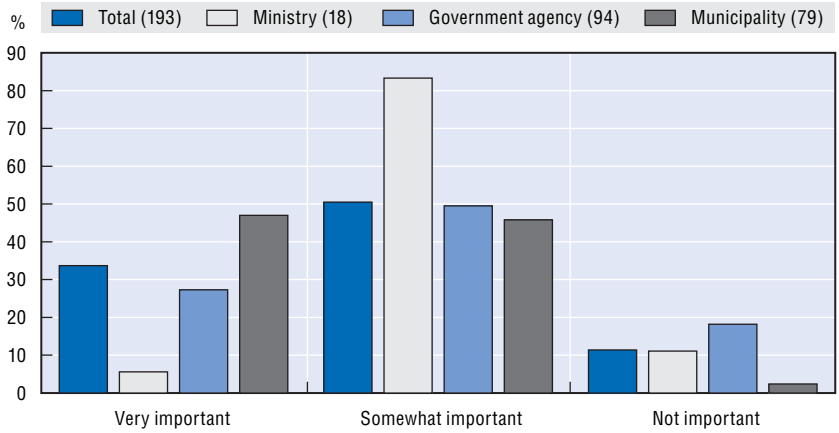
Source: OECD Territorial Review of Portugal (2008).

taxation is a special case: the improvement in tax collection and controls has contributed to the increase in budget revenue, in turn helping reduce the fiscal deficit to below 3% of GDP in 2007.

As the simplification reform progresses, and if savings are generated through efficiency gains, especially in joint projects, the issue of who is allowed to harvest the gains and benefits spread among several organisations will have to be addressed. If not, the lack of common guidelines could weaken the incentives to engage in cross-cutting projects such as sharing e-government services.

84% of respondents to the OECD survey consider the lack of mechanisms for shared/joined funding across organisations an important or somewhat important challenge to implementation (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. **Challenges to implementation: shared funding**



Note: N = 193 (14 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable" or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

An improved multi-year perspective on both expenditures and savings, and the development of clear guidelines and procedures on how efficiency gains are handled would strengthen the role of budgetary considerations in the preparation and implementation of the Simplex programmes. This could facilitate prioritisation and increase ministries' and agencies' incentives for engaging in simplification. Performance budgeting will contribute, but clear guidelines on efficiency gains and a multi-year perspective would increase accountability and improve planning and incentives.

Stronger instruments for budgetary planning and prioritisation should be accompanied by systematic use of cost-benefit and business case analyses of big budget simplification projects. Only 20% of OECD survey respondents say they have guidelines on cost-benefit analysis, and 85% consider the lack of common instruments for cost-benefit analysis as a challenge for the implementation of simplification projects (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5).

The consequence is a lack of instruments for monitoring and evaluation, which weakens the background for decision making and prioritisation among projects. An important first step would be to develop a set of common, mandatory evaluation tools to be used for major projects across the public sector.

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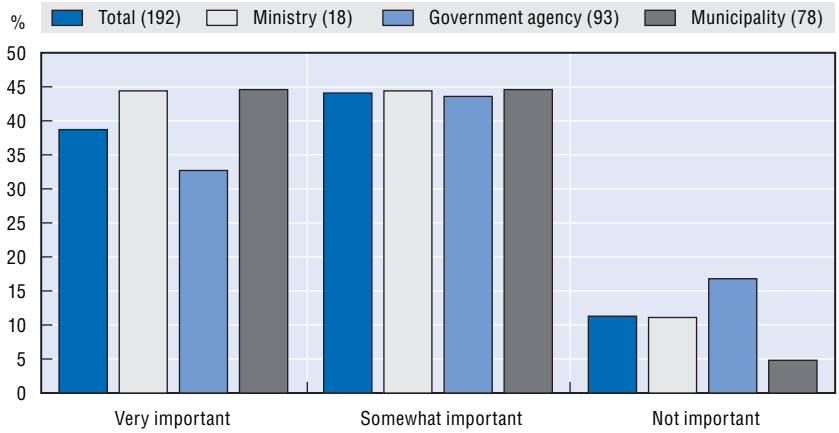
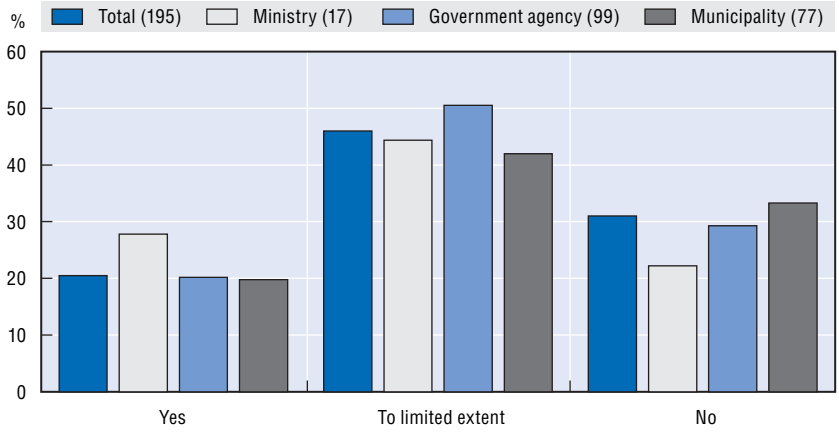
Figure 5.4. **Challenges to implementation: cost-benefit analysis**



Note: N = 192 (15 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable" or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Figure 5.5. **Guidelines for cost-benefit analysis**



Note: N = 195 (12 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable" or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Key points

- The Portuguese system does not have a budgetary mechanism for joint funding of cross-cutting projects involving several ministries and agencies, and there is no systematic procedure to harvest savings and long-term efficiency gains. Clear guidelines and procedures could improve prioritisation.
- For the period 2007-2013, special funding lines for administrative modernisation projects have been created both at national and at regional/local levels. To improve co-ordination and coherence between the different levels of administration, these funding lines have common basic rules nationwide, which were defined in a joint effort by central and local administration in *Quadro de Referência Estratégico Nacional* – the Portuguese National Strategic Reference Framework (NSFR).
- Budgetary considerations could also be stronger in preparation and implementation of the Simplex programmes, for example through an improved multi-year perspective.
- Better instruments for budgetary planning and prioritisation could be achieved through systematic use of robust cost-benefit and business case analyses of more costly simplification projects.

Human resource management

Human resources constitute an important element in any public sector reform. Achieving better service delivery requires more service-oriented and better qualified public employees. Facing an ageing population and increased fiscal pressure, OECD countries have started using human resource tools such as training, individual performance contracts, monetary incentives, and decentralisation of management responsibilities to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector.

Many of the 757 initiatives in the Simplex programmes change working procedures for public employees. It is important that employees feel comfortable with these new procedures and, if possible, be involved in the redefinition of working procedures. New working procedures may require training, new skills and competencies, and may even lead to mobility of staff in some organisations.

ICT skills and competencies are of particular importance when using e-government solutions for both front- and back-office systems, but increased service-orientation and an improved cultural understanding of simplified and more user-focused working methods are also important. Equally essential for managers are skills, competencies, and capacity in project management, *e.g.*

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project selection and planning, cost-benefit analysis, business process re-engineering, and monitoring and evaluation.

Training to improve simplification skills and competencies

Training of public employees is one of the most important human resource tools. A survey conducted by the Knowledge Society Agency (UMIC)[6] shows that 69% of all employees in central government institutions took general training courses in 2007, 23% of which were ICT training. The survey also showed that 15% of central government institutions promoted distance learning (e-learning) training courses. Improving public sector staff's ICT skills and competencies has been a priority of many OECD countries. For example, in 2007 Australia finalised a strategy for improving and ensuring future ICT skills in the Australian public service (see Box 5.3).

Portugal has specialised training centres for public sector staff offering several degrees and training. Universities also provide training to meet increasing demand for ICT expertise; the most important is the National Institute for Administration (INA), which is responsible for the development of training courses, formal certification courses, and academic-oriented education in the Portuguese public administration, including a variety of online degrees in areas such as Information Systems Science and Electronic Business Science.[7]

Box 5.3. **ICT skills in Australia**

In **Australia**, a special task force has developed a strategy for ensuring future ICT skills in the Australian public service. Improving ICT skills in project management, business processes and security is necessary to implement the government's e-government strategy. In order to build agencies' service delivery capability, employees' skills must be increased.

The strategy includes a number of initiatives:

- steps to increase staff mobility;
- accreditation, mentoring and apprenticeship programmes;
- training and workshops in ICT skills;
- development of workforce plans;
- skills and resource sharing between agencies;
- additional remuneration for staff increasing their ICT skills.

The strategy also includes establishing a permanent ICT skills group to plan future work on ICT skills in the Australian public service.

Source: Australian Government (2007), *Meeting the Demand for ICT Skills in the Australian Public Service – Today and for the Future. Report of the ICT Professional and Skills Development Taskforce.*

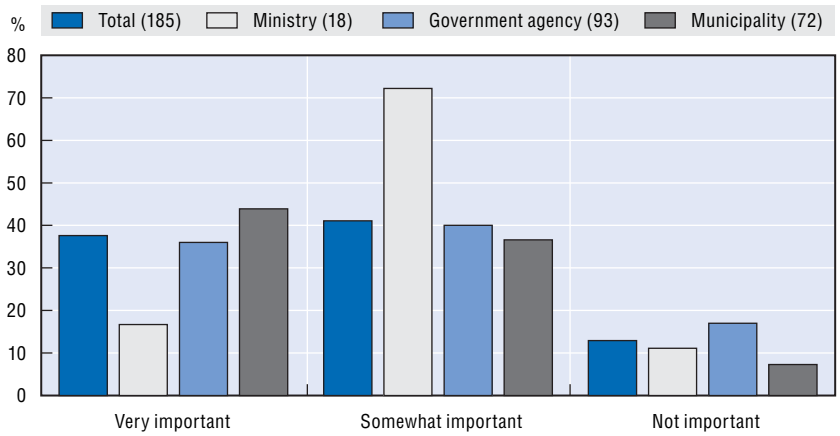
General staff training programmes also exist to reinforce competencies and skills – a number of these are targeted at managers and other senior staff, aiming to improve management and leadership skills. Furthermore, ICT skills are improved through *ad hoc* training workshops, *e.g.* conducted by SEAM and AMA on tools and approaches for simplification.

Special staff training programmes are also organised by ministries themselves. One example is the Ministry of Justice, which has trained almost 10 000 employees in relation to the initiatives on notaries. For the tax administration as well, a number of training programmes have been conducted – some as e-learning courses – according to OECD interviews.

At the local government level, ICT training takes place in connection with projects in the Digital Cities and Regions.[8] One example is the Aveiro Digital Programme, which includes special training programmes for employees in municipalities such as teachers and health and social security workers, as well as citizens wanting to improve their ICT skills. OECD interviews indicated that a low level of competencies and skills are considered one of the most significant challenges to better and more efficient service delivery in the public sector and effective implementation of the Simplex programmes.

Thirty-nine of the OECD survey respondents and 54% of respondents in municipalities cite lack of ICT skills and competencies as a very important challenge to implementation of simplification and e-government projects (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6. **Challenges to implementation: ICT skills and competencies**



Note: N = 185 (22 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable": or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

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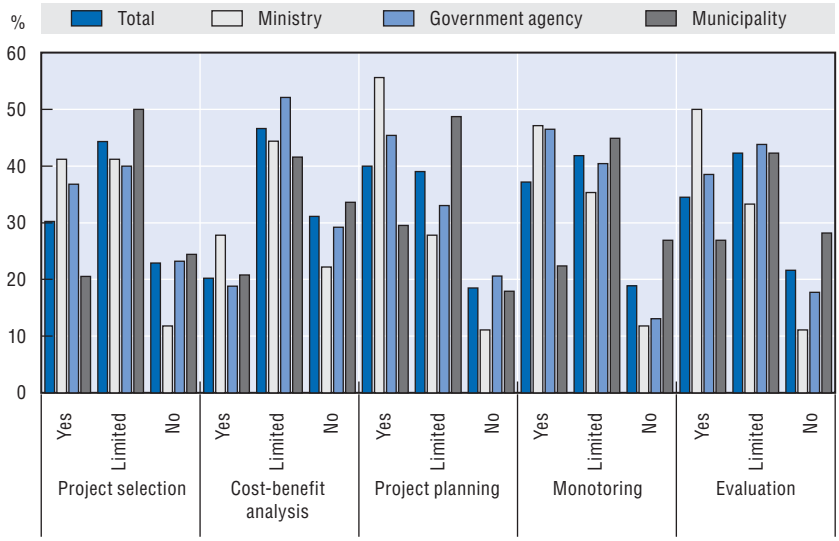
The OECD survey also shows that guidelines and toolkits for project management (project selection, cost-benefit analysis, project planning, and monitoring and evaluation) are limited in the public sector (see Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7. **Existence of guidelines and toolkits within organisations**



Note: N ranges from 197 to 201. Regions are excluded.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Development and implementation of simplification programmes could be further professionalised, especially at the local government level where there is limited capacity to deliver simplification solutions and therefore a particular need for staff training programmes.

Mixed training programmes among levels of government could have the benefit of creating shared knowledge – this option could be further explored. Incorporating staff training measures more explicitly in planning and implementation of Simplex measures could also be considered, as well as training programmes targeted at management and aimed at improving project management skills.

Other human resource tools

Another important human resource tool used for simplification efforts is changing the legal status of employment conditions to promote and reward performance and reinforce management skills, competencies, and leadership.

Today, there are close to 1 470 different professional careers, with almost automatic career progress and pay rise mechanisms independent of

professional performance. A new system of binding contracts, careers and remuneration for public administration employees is currently under implementation, following parliamentary approval of a new law in July 2007. It will introduce some elements of performance-related pay and increase individualisation of employment policies.[9] It will also establish a new evaluation system for public institutions, managers and civil servants. Furthermore, the number of careers will be substantially reduced and career progression will no longer be automatic. The new system is focused on performance, merit, and the principles of management by objectives.

OECD interviews showed that there was a need to improve the performance and incentive systems, which suggests that the government should move ahead in the implementation of the present strategy for human resource management in the public sector. Elements of a performance appraisal system are already in place.[10] From 2008, results-based pay will be introduced in the public sector. This should motivate the civil service to take further steps to recognise good work; steps such as prizes or awards but also competition and benchmarking (possibly linked to measurement of user satisfaction with new services). These instruments could be directly linked to the Simplex programmes by a more coherent integration of human resource tools and simplification policies. This would require stronger and more formalised co-ordination of civil service and simplification policies, *i.e.* between the Ministry of Finance and SEAM/AMA.

Key points

- Portugal has specialised training centres for public administration staff and special training programmes are organised by ministries.
- Low skills and competencies seem to be one of the most significant barriers for more efficient service delivery in the public sector. Simplification development and implementation could be further professionalised, especially at the local government level. Incorporating or co-ordinating staff training measures more explicitly in the implementation of Simplex measures could be considered.
- Elements of a performance appraisal system are already in place. From 2008 results-based pay will be introduced in the public sector.
- Further steps to recognise good work might motivate the civil service. Such instruments could include prizes or awards, along with competition and benchmarking (possibly also linked to measurement of user satisfaction with new services). These instruments could be directly linked to the Simplex programmes by a more coherent integration of human resource tools and simplification policies, *i.e.* through connecting policy and implementation.

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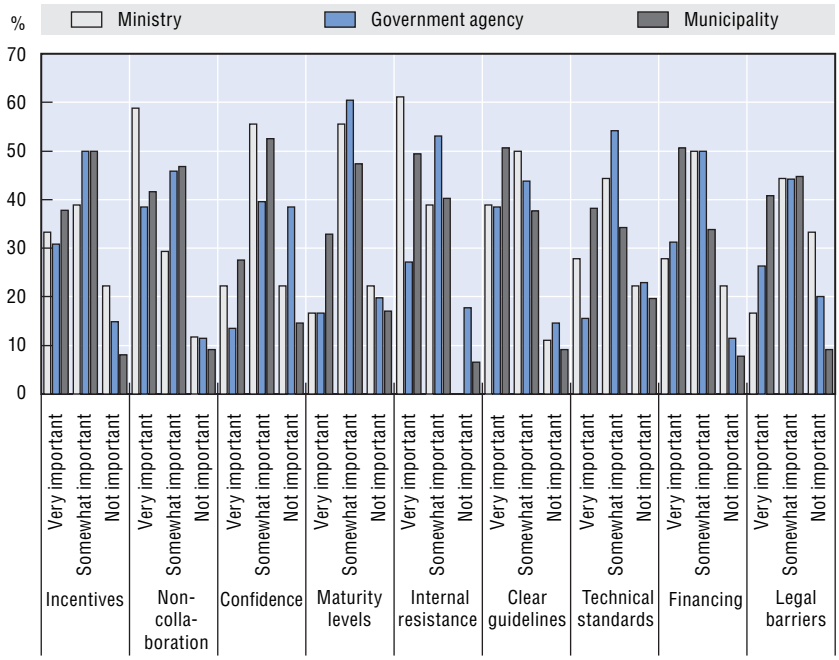
Collaboration and co-ordination tools

Governments in OECD countries are generally characterised by "stove-pipe" structures, where each organisational unit has its own area of responsibility and control. This makes collaboration and co-ordination on simplification projects a challenge; collaboration and co-ordination are, however, necessary to realise the potential benefits of seamless service delivery, and reduce inconsistencies and duplication within and across levels of government.

Collaboration and co-operation across levels of government also contribute to developing services focused on user needs. Users do not care which organisation from what level of government delivers a particular service; rather, they seek convenient access to high quality services.

In Portugal, the main challenges to collaboration and co-operation to deliver simplification solutions are considered to be: lack of clear guidelines; habit of non-collaboration; lack of financing mechanisms for shared funding; and internal resistance to change (see Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8. **Importance of challenges in preventing co-operation**



Note: N ranges from 186 to 199. Regions are excluded.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Co-ordination and collaboration within central government

SEAM and AMA are responsible for co-ordination of the Simplex initiatives at the central government level. Collaboration and co-operation among ministries takes place through the networks for simplification (see Chapter 1) and *ad hoc* inter-ministerial task forces or working groups. OECD interviews revealed that collaboration and co-operation at the central government level generally works well, although there is room for improved co-ordination between Simplex and other programmes and activities for public sector reform, *i.e.* SEAM/AMA and Ministry of Finance.

At the political level the Simplex measures are followed by the Council of Ministers via regular status reports. This has a strong disciplinary effect, preventing project delays and keeping them on track. Further, it seems to foster healthy competition among ministries in implementing programmes.

Because Simplex measures enjoy political attention from the highest level, ministries feel a strong incentive to comply with the initiatives and implement them on time. This political favour also seems to have positive effects on collaboration and co-ordination. Some OECD interviews indicated that an effort to cluster simplification projects, *e.g.* through a life event approach, should be considered. This could contribute to breaking down organisational silos and ensure a more coherent and consistent set of projects with stronger user-focus. This is the exact direction that has now been taken with Simplex 2008.

Co-ordination and collaboration across levels of government

In Portugal, the two autonomous regions and the 308 municipalities are becoming the main entrance to the public sector for citizens and businesses. Today, collaboration and co-ordination between central and local governments are required on a range of initiatives that involve both levels of government. An example is the Citizen's Shops where central services (social security services, tax services, health services, register and notary services, vehicles services, etc.), local government services (retail licensing, camping licensing, building licensing, taxi licensing, etc.), and private services (banking, electricity, gas or cable TV), in a number of areas are offered in one (physical) space. Municipal governments depend mainly on central government for funding, technical support, etc., for these joint projects.

Frameworks for collaboration and co-ordination in Portugal are influenced by the regional and municipal autonomy in a range of areas. Despite Portugal's long tradition of a centralised public sector, deconcentration is increasingly discussed, and further steps to decentralise decision-making power is on the agenda.

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The Secretary of State for Local Governments has overall political responsibility for the co-ordination of the central government's initiatives towards local governments. For concrete Simplex measures, collaboration and co-ordination with regions and municipalities have usually been carried out by each ministry; however, SEAM/AMA have a co-ordinating role as concerns cross-cutting projects and is responsible for the overall dialogue with regions and municipalities on simplification matters.

Relations between central and municipal governments on simplification policies and projects have been characterised by the following:

- As the Simplex programmes are targeted at central administration, regions and municipalities have not been systematically involved in their preparation. Some have been involved on an *ad hoc* basis in individual initiatives; for example, the electronic Citizen's Card was first issued as a pilot project in the Azores.
- Many digitisation and simplification projects are carried out jointly among several municipalities in order to reach the "critical mass" required to obtain funding via European Union Structural Funds (Digital Regions and Cities are the best examples).
- Regions and municipalities have been involved in cross-cutting projects, such as the Interoperability Platform and the Common Services Framework (see Chapter 2), only to a limited extent. Although they are mandatory for central government organisations, municipalities have been left to build their own e-government services and develop their own skills, competencies, and capacities.
- The Association of Municipalities (ANMP)[11] has been involved in collaboration between central and local governments. ANMP can sign agreements with central government, but they are not binding for municipalities and the commitments made cannot be imposed. ANMP has also provided some assistance to municipalities on Simplex measures, such as the Digital Regions and Municipalities initiative.

SEAM/AMA's role towards municipalities has mostly been sharing best practices and technical solutions. A "*Common Knowledge Network*" has been established to collect experiences on transformation, innovation, and simplification initiatives and make them available to all public organisations.[12] Municipalities are thus encouraged to share the central government vision of simplification.

OECD interviews confirmed that sharing knowledge and guidance on simplification is of interest to municipalities and could be developed further. Empowering local government by transferring knowledge and technical solutions would also benefit central government. Benchmarking and publishing performance rankings might also increase competition and

incentives to perform among municipalities. It is expected that municipalities will seek to catch up with the advanced developed local governments in order to deliver the same level of service to their constituencies. (Examples of collaboration and co-operation across levels of government in OECD countries are described in Box 5.4.)

Box 5.4. **Collaboration and co-ordination across levels of government**

Collaboration and co-ordination across levels of government on administrative simplification and e-government can be challenging. Collaboration is a prerequisite for realising seamless services and reaping the full benefits of e-government services. Local and regional governments are increasingly at the forefront of service delivery to citizens and they are expected to deliver user-friendly services. Their capacity to deliver varies considerably, raising issues of equity for citizens. How can governments raise the capacity of local governments that lag behind to improve overall efficiency in public sector service delivery?

Relations between central and local governments vary among OECD countries depending on type of state (federal or unitary), constitutional constraints, culture, and tradition. In some countries collaboration and co-operation are organised in formalised institutional set-ups and agreements.

In **Denmark**, with 5 regions and 98 municipalities, e-government policies are co-ordinated through a formalised institutional agreement between central government and the associations of municipalities and regions, particularly a joint e-government management board with the participation of a number of ministries and the associations of municipalities and regions. The work of the board is supported by a digital taskforce situated in the Ministry of Finance, staffed with secondees from central, regional, and local government organisations. Major e-government initiatives are included in the yearly budget agreements between central and local governments.

There are 12 provinces and 458 municipalities in the **Netherlands**. E-Government policies are co-ordinated via three groups with participation of central government, provinces and municipalities. A statement agreed upon by central government and the associations of regional and local government sets up a strategic framework and outlines the division of responsibilities between central and local governments. Tasks like communication, monitoring and support, and financing are also covered.

Other countries primarily base collaboration on diffusion of best practices and technical solutions.

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Box 5.4. **Collaboration and co-ordination across levels of government** *(cont.)*

In **New Zealand**, the government has set up an e-Government Interoperability Framework (the "e-GIF") to help public sector institutions achieve electronic interoperability through common policies and standards. The e-Gif is a collection of policies and standards which: 1) helps government agencies more easily work together electronically; 2) makes systems, knowledge and experience reusable among agencies; and 3) reduces the effort required to deal with government online by encouraging consistent approaches. State-level agencies are required to use e-GIF, and local governments are invited to do so.

The government in **Australia** facilitates access to open source solutions already developed in government agencies, a practice known as "white branding". Generic services (*e.g.* portals, identity management) are made available for local governments to use and to "brand" with their own regional or local identity. The purpose is to increase interoperability and make content management functionalities available to government agencies with less complexity and lower cost.

Source: OECD, 2007.

Collaboration and co-ordination between central government and local governments on simplification policies in Portugal can generally be characterised as *ad hoc*, not systematically organised. No formal body for dialogue among the parties exists and the central government approach differs from case to case.

Furthermore, the central government primarily uses "soft" management tools, such as *ad hoc* dialogue, diffusion of best practices, and, to some extent, benchmarking. These tools have no formal or legal impact for the parties involved; it could be questioned whether they are the most efficient tools for co-ordination and leadership, particularly for raising standards in less-developed areas with limited experience in administrative simplification and e-government.

The central government could consider developing a framework for collaboration and co-ordination with local governments to replace the existing *ad hoc* stand-alone approach. A formalised and systematic approach to dialogue with regions and municipalities could strengthen a "whole-of-public-sector" perspective.

Key points

- Collaboration at the central government level works well, although simplification projects could be clustered better among several ministries. This would contribute to breaking down organisational silos and ensure a more coherent and consistent set of projects with citizens and businesses at the centre.
- The autonomous regions and municipalities have only been involved in Simplex measures to a limited extent, and some of them have developed their own simplification programmes.
- AMA/SEAM's role towards local governments has mostly been sharing best practices and diffusion of technical solutions to municipalities. Sharing knowledge and guidance on simplification might be developed further.
- Collaboration and co-ordination on simplification between central, regional and local governments is *ad hoc* and not systematically organised. No formal body for dialogue among the parties exists and the central government approach differs from project to project.
- It is important to note that the interaction between central, regional and local levels has become stronger as a consequence of the Portuguese National Strategic Reference Framework (NSFR). In the process of preparing the NSFR, the goals were agreed upon as part of a common framework, and a common regulation has been established.

Administrative culture

Understanding the administrative culture – norms, values, behaviour, and "mind-sets" – is key to achieving the goals of the Simplex programmes. For example, attitudes towards citizens will significantly influence users' perception of and satisfaction with public sector interaction and services. Furthermore, the administrative culture impacts the outcome of collaboration processes among multiple authorities on simplification initiatives. Finally, regulatory quality will be affected by the degree to which public authorities are aware that individual regulations will both contribute to fulfilment of the goals underlying the regulation and also very likely have unintended and negative side effects (for example, a law aiming to protect the environment imposes administrative burdens on companies).

Ideally, the Simplex programmes will lead to positive new experiences for civil servants in Portugal. They will have to break out of compartmental thinking and collaborate more across ministries, as more initiatives are of a cross-organisational nature. Examples of these cross-organisational initiatives are those integrated in life events (clusters of procedures) defined in

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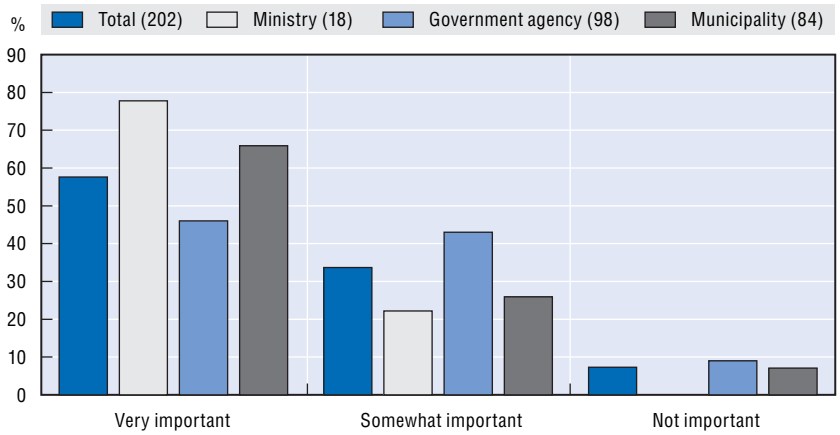
Simplex 2008, multi-integrated services geared towards certain events or processes (*e.g.* "I lost my wallet" desk, "Casa pronta" desk (Fast-track Home Buying Scheme), On-the-spot-firm desk, "Single Vehicle Document" desk, "Retirement" desk; "Divorce" desk, "Succession and Inheritance" desk, or "Born Citizen" desk). This enhanced collaboration across ministries will gradually change the culture in the direction of a stronger willingness to collaborate and co-operate across organisational boundaries.

Similarly, positive or negative experiences drafting new regulation (positive co-operation with stakeholders, negative reactions and even sanctions if new regulation has not been sufficiently scrutinised in order to reduce burdens) will over time influence understanding of and attitude towards the role of regulation in society. This has been the case in the Netherlands, where ACTAL, the independent Dutch Advisory Board on Administrative Burdens,[13] has created several projects aiming to change the administrative culture. ACTAL has also commissioned annual assessments of the administrative culture, examining civil servants' knowledge of the simplification programme, their attitude towards simplification, and their behaviour *vis-à-vis* good regulatory practice.[14]

The OECD survey supports the overall perception that organisational change is a major challenge to simplification (see Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9. **Challenges to implementation: organisational change**



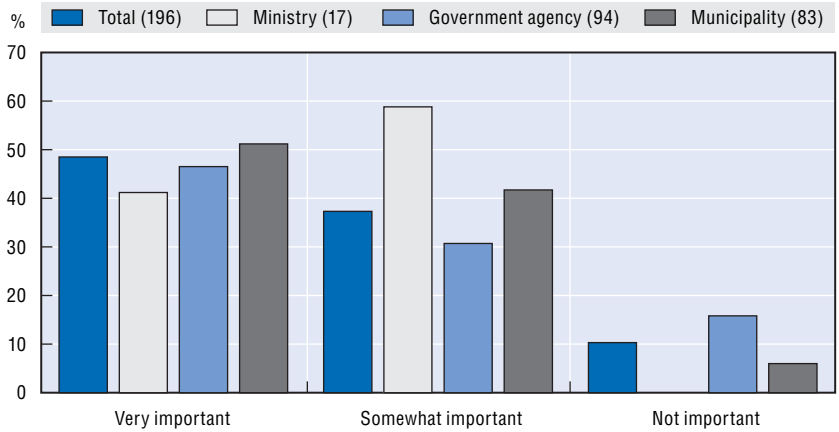
Note: N = 202 (5 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable" or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Ninety one per cent of the total number of respondents identified organisational change as "Very important" or "Somewhat important", while 86% cited the lack of a coherent strategy as a major challenge (see Figure 5.10). This

supports OECD interviewees' statements supporting central government efforts to transform the public sector and improve coherency in strategy and approach.

Figure 5.10. **Challenges to implementation: coherent strategy**



Note: N = 196 (11 have either answered "don't know" or "not applicable" or are missing value). Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.

Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Key point

- Portugal sees cultural change within the public administration as key to the success of simplification efforts. Traditional compartmental thinking and silo-based reactive attitudes are recognised as major challenges.

Public consultation: engaging stakeholders

Public consultations are a means to improve policy by engaging citizens and business to gain their input and support. OECD governments are becoming more responsive and transparent, taking steps to include stakeholder views; they realise that listening to stakeholders and adjusting policies makes policies and their implementation more effective.

Consultation mechanisms allow governments to learn about user needs and integrate this information into policies, improving the quality of decision-making processes. Public consultation is not mandatory and systematic in Portugal, and no formal public consultations were held in preparation for Simplex 2006. However, some simplification measures that required new legislation were submitted to consultation as part of the legislative procedure. The Ministry of Justice included stakeholder participation in the *De-formalisation*

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Commission which conducts prior consultations on all Simplex initiatives related to businesses, registers, and notaries.[15]

In preparation for Simplex 2007, an open and systematic consultation process was conducted to collect suggestions for initiatives from widespread sources.[16] All proposed measures were available for consultation on the Internet. Table 5.1 shows that 274 suggestions were made by citizens, businesses and associations; 86 measures became part of the final version of Simplex 2007, which contained 235 initiatives in total.

Table 5.1. **Results of public consultation on Simplex 2007**

Measures that were taken up:	Measures
Suggestions included in the final version of Simplex 2007	86
• As new measures	13
• As a contribution to improve measures already proposed	24
• By merger with measures that already were part of the programme	49
Measures that were not taken up:	
Suggestions not included in the final version of Simplex 2007	153
• Because they were not simplification measures (complaints, personal matters)	85
• Because they had already been implemented within Simplex 2006	47
• Because their implementation was not feasible	21
Measures to be considered in further programmes:	
Remained under study	35
• Because they require more time to assess	5
• Because they require articulation between various ministries	10

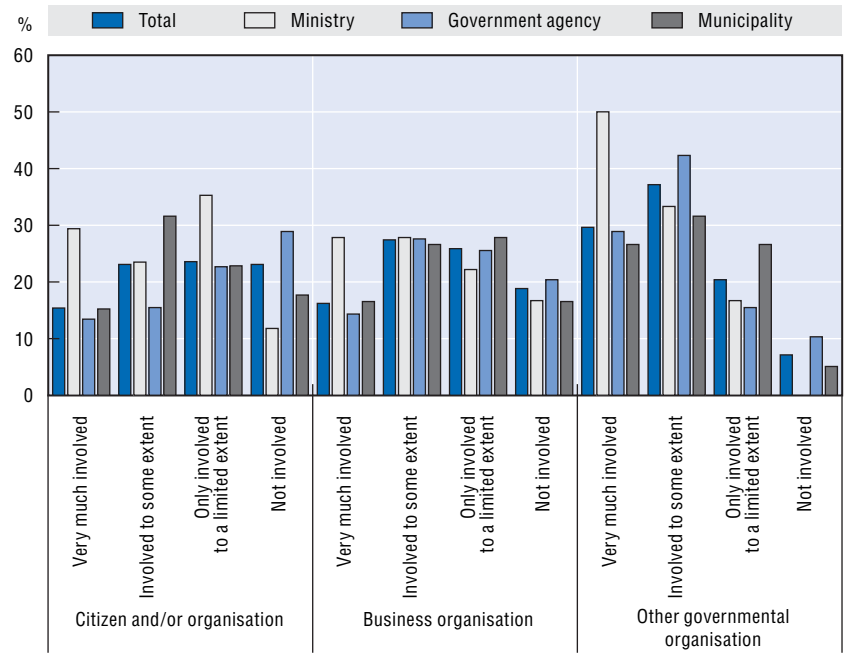
Source: Presidency of the Council of Ministers: Simplex 2007.

In Simplex 2008, a total of 775 contributions were received. Of these, 54% were comments or suggestions made by citizens, businesses and associations on already-proposed measures. After being taken into consideration, more than 60 measures became part of the final version of the Simplex programme, which contained 189 initiatives in total.[17]

OECD interviews indicated that regions, municipalities, civil society, and business organisations would have liked to be consulted more on the Simplex programmes. The OECD survey shows that central government tends to involve stakeholders, citizens and businesses, more than municipalities in policy consultation (see Figure 5.11).

Inclusion of citizens and business organisations in Simplex initiatives should be continued and even strengthened. Public consultation provides stakeholders with an opportunity to impact policies, and provides government with guidance on effective solutions while lowering compliance costs for citizens and businesses. Furthermore, steps to increase openness and transparency would improve government's accountability and legitimacy.

Figure 5.11. **Involvement of external stakeholders**



Note: N ranges from 172 to 191. Regions are included in the total, but are not shown as a category.
Source: OECD Survey on Administrative Simplification and E-Government in Portugal, 2007.

Key points

- Public consultation provides stakeholders with an opportunity to impact policies – and provides government with guidance on effective solutions while lowering compliance costs for citizens and businesses.
- Public consultation was not conducted prior to Simplex 2006, but a public consultation process was carried out in preparation for Simplex 2007 and for Simplex 2008.

Notes

1. OECD, *Economic Survey of Portugal*, 2006 and forthcoming.
2. The Ministry of Finance and Public Administration consists of four departments: Treasury, Tax, Budget and Public Administration.
3. Programme or performance budgeting is a form of budgeting where funds allocated are related to measurable results.

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4. Answers to the Questionnaire on Administrative Simplification and e-Government in Portugal, Question 3.3.3.1.
5. See the "Information Society" Operational Programme for Portugal, a programme which falls within the 3rd Portuguese Community Support Framework (see also the link: *http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/prordn/details.cfm?gv_PAY=PT&gv_reg=ALL&gv_PGM=1999PT161PO004&LAN=5*, accessed 3 January 2008).
6. UMIC, Survey on ICT usage in Central Public Administration, 2000-2006, *www.osic.umic.pt/publicacoes/CapIII_G_Electronico_port_eng.xls* (accessed 3 January 2008).
7. Answers to the OECD Questionnaire on Administrative Simplification and E-Government, 2007, Question 3.1.2.1, and the Website of the National Institute for Administration (INA), see the link: *www.ina.pt* (accessed 20 January 2008).
8. *Cidades e Regiões Digitais* (Digital Cities and Regions) are projects funded through UMIC with the support of EU Structural Funds and involving formalised co-operation between associations of municipalities. All together there are 32 projects, which cover 96% of Portugal, involving e-government solutions for local governments, conditions for reinforcing the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises and a variety of citizen-oriented services such as health, education, social support, culture and safety. These projects have been an effective instrument to mobilise local actors and enhance their qualifications for managing joint local and regional development programmes based on ICT.
9. Answers to the OECD Questionnaire on Administrative Simplification and E-Government, Question 3.1.2.1.
10. Christoph Demmke (2007), *Performance Assessment in the Public Services of the EU Member States, Study for German Presidency,* European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht. See the link: *www.dgaep.gov.pt/docs_down/actividadeinternacional/alemanha/performanceassessment.pdf* (accessed 3 January 2008).
11. The Association of Municipalities (ANMP) is an association with the purpose of assisting municipalities on a range of policy areas and providing technical assistance.
12. Presidency of the Council of Ministers (2007), *Better Portugal – e-Government Strategy*.
13. See the link: *www.actal.nl* (accessed 25 January 2008).
14. *Cutting Red Tape: Administrative Simplification in the Netherlands*, OECD (2007) and *Internalisation of Administrative Burdens: Co-ordinating Report*, IOO bv, Institute for Research on Public Expenditure, Leiden (2005).
15. On 11 July 2005, the Ministry of Justice established the Commission for the Simplification of Registry and Notary Acts, also known as the *De-formalisation Commission*. Its members represented the users of the registry and notary services and were given the mandate to suggest administrative simplification initiatives to the Ministry of Justice. From 2005 to 2008, the Commission has been meeting on a monthly basis, having held 26 meetings by March 2008 and is seen as a permanent and important monitoring element of administrative simplification initiatives.
16. Presidency of the Council of Ministers: *Simplex 2007*.
17. As described in the Simplex 2008 programme.

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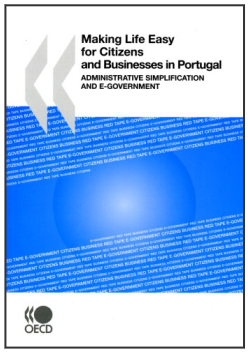

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