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Making Easy for Citizens and Businesses in Portugal
Administrative Simplification and e-Government
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Chapter 2

Policies and Strategies

Portugal is one of the few OECD countries which have chosen to integrate administrative simplification and e-government politically and strategically to achieve the public policy goal of making everyday life easier for citizens and businesses in their interaction with public authorities. By actively seeking the synergies between administrative simplification and e-government – using the latter as a key lever for simplification – Portugal is trying to impose significant and swift changes on its public administration and its administrative culture both at central and local levels.

The expected broad impact of the Portuguese administrative simplification and e-government activities is also indicated by the links to a number of other major reform programmes driving transformation of the public sector:

- *National Action Programme for Growth and Jobs* (PNACE).
- *Restructuring Programme for the State's Central Administration* (PRACE).
- *Technological Plan* and *Connecting Portugal*.

These programmes are strongly interlinked; taken together, they stand as cornerstones in the Portuguese government's strategy to create economic growth and improve public finances.

This chapter presents and analyses Portuguese policies and strategies for administrative simplification and e-government. These include the Simplex initiative and the main measures adopted and approved in the Simplex 2006, Simplex 2007, and Simplex 2008 programmes. Finally, the chapter provides a brief overview and analysis of the simplification efforts at the regional and local levels.

Vision and mission

The vision and mission regarding administrative simplification and e-government is to make everyday life easier for citizens and businesses, and to improve the regulatory framework for businesses by achieving administrative simplification using e-government as a tool. Transformation of the public administration is a "… key item in the growth strategy for the country…" as stated in the Portuguese government's programme.[1] The policies to enhance simplification and e-government are outlined in the Simplex programmes of 2006, 2007, and 2008. Together, they consist of 757 initiatives, which have enjoyed widespread political support at the highest level since their inception. The Simplex programmes are "… undertaken under the Prime Minister's personal political direction, simplification must be a joint obligation and responsibility that each and every ministry shares".[2]

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The objectives of the Simplex programmes[3] cover a number of key areas:

- efficiency and effectiveness of public administration and service delivery such as significant shorter response time on citizens' and businesses' requests to public authorities;
- public trust in the public sector and its service delivery;
- competitiveness and economic development.

The essence of the objectives is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector, and the regulatory environment for citizens and businesses. This is *inter alia* done by providing prompt and effective responses to the needs of these groups and by enabling businesses to obtain permits and other public certificates faster, which in turn will lead to improved trust in the public administration and increase the overall competitiveness of the private sector.

The objectives show that the programmes address a broad range of challenges being faced by the public sector. The objectives are ambitious and far-reaching, and government support is strong. However, the broad objectives entail a risk that the programmes will not be perceived as comprehensive and targeted. To face that risk, Simplex 2008 has defined priority goals taking into account life events – business-related and citizen-related – and has chosen priority areas for simplification like, *e.g.* all import/export procedures.

Key points

- The overall vision and mission of the Simplex programmes are to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector, and to improve the regulatory environment for citizens and businesses.
- The underlying philosophy of change is based on the principle that the public sector must provide a better business climate and liberate private initiative, which implies a shift in the regulatory culture towards accepting a basic level of risk and less regulatory interference in the economy.

Policies and strategies at central government level

The Simplex programmes have been developed at the initiative of the Prime Minister, who had previously announced 10 initiatives for improving the regulatory framework and the business environment, and who now sought to strengthen the focus on administrative simplification and e-government. The Office of Public Services Reform, *Unidade de Coordenação da Modernização Administratva* (UCMA), was put in charge of co-ordinating this programme with contributions from all ministries, which were asked to submit their proposals for simplification projects. Simplex 2006 was launched

in March 2006,[4] Simplex 2007 was published in January 2007, and Simplex 2008 was announced in the beginning of February 2008.[5] Some of the ideas underlying the Simplex programmes had already been under preparation before their launch, but by establishing and launching the programmes, the initiatives were given political priority, a common organisational and governance framework, and a common direction.

Simplification of existing regulation

Simplification of existing regulation – also called *corrective simplification* – consisted of 333 initiatives in the Simplex 2006 programme, of 235 in the Simplex 2007 programme, and of 189 in the Simplex programme of 2008. In Simplex 2006, the initiatives were divided into six "key areas".[6] These were main instruments for achieving the programme's goals, and they ranged from removing regulation to providing better information on how to comply with legal obligations. The six key areas were:

Key area 1: Eliminating certificates

Insufficient sharing of information means that citizens and businesses are asked to submit information that is already held by the same or different authorities. Grouping departments and improving internal communication will reduce the need to ask for information in the form of certificates or other "probative documents". (See examples in Box 2.1)

Box 2.1. **Examples of Simplex initiatives under Key area 1: Eliminating certificates**

- *Online Permanent Certificate:* Whenever a corporate user needs a trade registry certificate, all he/she has to do is to submit the company's Online Permanent Certificate access code to the requesting public or private body which can then find the certificate on the portal Business Online (*www.portaldaempresa.pt*).
- *Elimination of certificates proving the non-existence of debts:* Abolition of the need for taxpayers to ask the social security or tax authorities for declarations that their contributions/taxes are in order, for use in their relationship with other public departments.
- *Elimination of certain certificates for public departments:* Promote communication between departments so that people no longer need to prove information that is available at one public department to another one.

Source: The examples are taken from *Better Portugal. e-Government Strategy*, Presidency of the Council of Ministers and Agency for the Public Services Reform (AMA), Lisbon (2007), and Simplex Programme 2006.

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Key area 2: Eliminating paper/dematerialisation

Digitisation of physical documents opens for wider simplification through improved information and data sharing, use of intelligent and interactive forms that can be submitted electronically, enabling users to follow administrative processes online. A number of larger e-government initiatives are presented in Box 2.2.

Box 2.2. Examples of Simplex initiatives under Key area 2: Eliminating paper/dematerialisation

The most important e-government initiatives from Simplex 2006 and Simplex 2007 are summarised in *Better Portugal: e-Government Strategy* (September 2007). These include:

- *Social Security Direct:* Online service that allows companies to consult their data, to declare remunerations and to register or un-register employers to the social security. Citizens can consult their data, including tax-paying history and state of the installments.
- *Health 24:* A central contact point between users and the health service, via telephone, fax, Internet or e-mail. The aim is to help users gain access to health services and to avoid the "rush" to hospital emergency departments.
- *Business Portal:* An on-line service which enables companies to deal with practically all the legal formalities that apply to companies, including the creation of companies and asking for a trade registry certificate, etc.
- *Citizen's Portal:* The Citizen's Portal is designed to facilitate the relationship between citizens and the state and is a privileged channel for access to the services provided by the public administration.
- *Portuguese State Official Gazette:* The paper edition was abolished and the electronic edition was given full legal force. In addition, an open access policy has been introduced and new services are now provided to citizens and companies. The aim was to provide better and more direct access to legislation and public administration acts and notices.
- *Public E-Procurement Programme:* A programme that has enabled the public administration to start to use Internet for its purchases, thereby making the process simpler and more transparent, saving a great deal of money.
- *Common Service Framework:* The platform for the interoperability of the different public departments.
- *The "Citizen's Card":* The card is an electronic ID card which provides all citizens with a digital signature which can be used for electronic authentication when accessing public e-government services.

Source: Better Portugal. e-Government Strategy, Presidency of the Council of Ministers and Agency for the Public Services Reform (AMA), Lisbon (2007).

Key area 3: Simplification/de-bureaucratisation

Complexity and duplication of procedures lead to excessive administrative work. The aim is to reduce obligations that are disproportionately burdensome or complex for citizens and businesses, and to eliminate unnecessary licences, permits, etc. (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. **Examples of Simplex initiatives under Key area 3: Simplification/de-bureaucratisation**

- *Corporate notarised deeds are no longer mandatory:* Notarised deeds concerning the situation of a company are made optional. In particular the following acts will no longer require notarising: forming a commercial company, altering its articles/memorandum of association, transforming the type of company, or extinguishing it. These actions will simply need to be recorded at the trade registry.
- *Merging and demerging of companies:* A public deed is no longer required for merging or demerging companies and it is sufficient to register the merger or de-merger plans and the actual merger or de-merger at the Companies Registry. These plans, the notice of the general meeting and the merger or de-merger documents are then published online.
- *Simplified company liquidation and dissolution:* These actions take place at the registry, without companies having to go through the courts and with no mandatory public deed.

Key area 4: Deregulation

By stating the principle that the public administration trusts citizens, detailed regulation and multiple controls can be ameliorated. This will also entail use of regulatory alternatives such as self-regulation, co-regulation, etc. (see Box 2.4).

Key area 5: Easier access to public services

This entails improving service integration, and information and data sharing by increasing the co-ordination between public bodies involved in the same procedure as well as transforming the way people are dealt with at physical contact points, by merging those points and co-locating them (see Box 2.5).

Key area 6: Harmonising and consolidating sets of rules

This key area aims at improving access to laws and regulations and at making them easier to understand in order to reduce the costs of using and complying with regulation. This will also lead to efficiency gains within the

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Box 2.4. **Examples of Simplex initiatives under Key area 4: Deregulation**

- *Company ledgers no longer obligatory:* Businesses' lives are simplified by removing the bureaucratic and financial burdens imposed by the need to keep special physical inventory, balance sheet, ledger, and duplicate books that must form part of a company's bookkeeping at present. Books of minutes will remain, but they will no longer have to be legalised by the trade registry in advance.
- *Local authority building permits:* A simplified system for local authorities to issue building permits is created, which (in certain circumstances) will dispense the need for the architectural design to be assessed and licensed, or for work to the inside of buildings to be notified to the authorities in advance.

Box 2.5. **Examples of Simplex initiatives under Key area 5: Easier access to public services**

- *Citizen's Shops:* A new concept for the public sector service was introduced in 1999 with the creation of the first *Citizen's Shops* in Lisbon and Oporto. These single contact points give citizens access to a vast range of public services within a same place. In January 2008, ten Citizen's Shops were operating in more densely populated areas, one of which is a second-generation Citizen's Shop, with multi-service desks, integrated desks and assisted self-service posts. In addition, 77 *Citizen's Contact Points* were established. These are multi-service points that can be found at local town halls and operate as extensions of the Citizen's Shops.
- *Company formalities centres:* For companies, the company formalities centres fulfill the same function as the citizen's shops for citizens. They bring together a whole range of user-reception and information services in single units. Since their launch in 1997, 800 000 companies have consulted the 11 company formalities centres.
- "*Single logistical window*" *for the maritime/port system*: A logistics platform centralises in a common area the information and documentation concerning the various agents in the logistical chain (particularly shipping agents, transit agents, land carriers, logistical operators, logistical park management companies and the companies in such parks). It is a one-stop shop for port issues. The platform also allows paperless procedures for decision-making.

Source: The examples are taken from *Better Portugal. e-Government Strategy*, Presidency of the Council of Ministers and Agency for the Public Services Reform (AMA), Lisbon (2007). Additional information was provided by the Portuguese government in 2008.

administration itself. The problem is said to be related to the volume, opacity, and limited effectiveness of legislation in Portugal. This key area aims at reducing the number of laws by consolidating various statutes on the same issue and by analysing alternatives to regulation (see Box 2.6).

Box 2.6. **Examples of Simplex initiatives under Key area 6: Harmonising and consolidating sets of rules**

- *Simpler building fire safety system:* All the existing regulations that specifically concern fire safety in buildings and other facilities are consolidated in a single statute.
- *Harmonising and consolidating radio and television* legislation concerning licensing and prior authorisations and media registers' legislation.
- *Harmonising and consolidating the legal system governing urban development and building work*, namely by introducing simpler industrial licences and permits and simpler retail licences.

In Simplex 2006, Simplex 2007, and Simplex 2008 a number of initiatives (30, 20, and 14 respectively) were highlighted as particularly important in terms of positive impact on improving the quality of the relationship between public administrations on the one hand, and citizens and businesses on the other (see Annex F). The highlighted measures also serve to illustrate contributions from every ministry involved, by representing their own contribution for simplification.

For each of the highlighted initiatives more detail is provided about what will be done and what the expected impact will be. In some cases this is done by stating how many companies or citizens the simplification will affect, and sometimes an estimate of the savings in time or money is provided. Every measure has a defined timeline for accomplishment and its implementation is internally controlled every month, and publicised every three months. Since 2008, Simplex initiatives are also accompanied by a rather detailed impact assessment, according to Portuguese officials. An evaluation will take place by the end of each year and an overall evaluation will occur at the end of the four-year cycle (governing cycle).[7]

Many of the highlighted initiatives rely on the use of ICT by creating single points of contact or by enabling electronic submission of documents (see Annex C). It is a specific feature of the Simplex programmes – also when compared with simplification programmes from other OECD countries – that administrative simplification and e-government are deliberately merged into one integrated programme.

The six key areas described in Simplex 2006 (see Boxes 2.1 to 2.6) were used to systematise initiatives according to the method for simplification. This was motivated by a pedagogic intention to involve administrative organisations and staff. Simplex 2007 instead groups initiatives according to target group, citizens, and businesses respectively (149 initiatives for citizens

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and 86 for businesses). This change was motivated by an altered perspective, as it was perceived more feasible to let the Simplex programme "turn from the inside to the outside", to its targets groups, seeking to communicate the measures for each of them.

In Simplex 2008, "life events" have entered as the main organising concept. Individual initiatives are now grouped into a cluster of procedures related to a life event. This change has been motivated by an understanding within the Portuguese administration that the simplification effort should not be reduced to a simple add-on of isolated initiatives – like abolishing a certificate in a static context. Simplification should instead be guided by a joint vision, targeting the totality of procedures related to a workflow as experienced by the citizen or the company – like starting a business or buying a house. The 2008 programme is organised around events in the life of citizens or businesses which include several different procedures:

- clusters of procedures for businesses (concerning starting a business, managing and expanding a business, closing a business and selling goods);
- clusters of procedures for citizens (concerning health access; education, science, culture and sports; social security access; tax obligations; documents, house, security, citizenship, emigration and immigration).

For each cluster Simplex 2008 has defined priority areas for simplification and assessment. An assessment of progress will take place by the end of each year and at the end of the four-year cycle (governing cycle).[8]

In the initial phase of the Simplex programmes, the objective was to rapidly remove some of the main bottlenecks in the economy. There was not in the beginning a systematic and comprehensive approach to prioritisation and selection of the initiatives included in the programmes, based on an evaluation of their possible impact. Only now is the government starting to set priorities, for instance licensing in 2008. With the gradual move towards a stronger user focus and the use of life events as an organising principle, prioritisation has gradually improved. Following a more systematic approach is appropriate to continue to gain from the process, once the most obvious problems have been tackled.

Yet, the Portuguese government seeks to maintain a *double strategy* for the Simplex programmes.[9] In this double strategy, one tier of initiatives is open for suggestions from any ministry, agency or other public authority that may be ready to participate in the transformation process, or even to initiatives proposed by citizens during public consultation. With this broader line of action Portugal wants to create and maintain awareness of the simplification agenda throughout the public sector. This follows the initial spirit of Simplex that "better to get started, solving problems and creating momentum, than

wasting time for excessive planning". The political window of opportunity (economic challenges, etc.) existed and had to be exploited.

The Simplex programmes have also been experiencing an increasing focus on selecting initiatives that together will solve the most important problems in the economy and improve service delivery. This means that a second tier of initiatives in the programme is mainly selected top-down and aims at delivering on the main strategic goals of Simplex. The use of life events and the reduction of the number of initiatives have also become important organising principles.

Key points

- The Simplex programmes involve all ministries and collect a large number of initiatives from all economic agents, including the public sector, but also citizens, businesses, and associations, aiming at improving conditions for these target groups.
- There has been a gradual improvement in the prioritisation of initiatives. In Simplex 2006, there was no clear hierarchy of goals for the programmes, and it was not clear how the selection of initiatives was linked to the goals. By shifting to a user perspective and using life events as an organising principle, the selection of initiatives becomes more convincing.
- In the presentation of the programmes, a number of initiatives (30, 20, and 14 respectively) are highlighted. These initiatives demonstrate the range of instruments in use and the broad scope of contributing ministries and authorities.
- In the presentation of initiatives, every measure has a defined timeline for accomplishment. Their implementation is internally controlled every month, and normally publicised every three months, taking due account of the announced deadline for accomplishment.
- For Simplex 2008, an assessment of expected impacts has been made for every cluster.* An evaluation will take place by the end of each year and at the end of the four-year cycle (governing cycle).

* According to Portuguese officials (see Annex A4.1 on methodology).

Improving the quality of new regulation

With the launch of the Simplex programmes, the procedures for ensuring the quality of new regulation were further strengthened by the introduction of the so-called *Simplex Test*. Later in 2006, a general programme for ensuring the quality of new regulation, the *Better Law-making Programme*, was introduced.

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Simplex 2006 introduced the Simplex Test, which is an instrument to assess the administrative burdens imposed by new legal rules. The Simplex Test is inspired by Belgium's "Kafka-test",[10] and is mandatory for all proposals and covers the effects for citizens and companies. It consists of four stages as described in Box 2.7.

Box 2.7. **The Simplex Test**

The Simplex Test aims at preventing administrative burdens when new regulation is being prepared. The test consists of four stages:

- *Identification of administrative burdens*. Assessment of whether or not new burdens will follow from the regulation. If yes, the kind of burdens and alternative solutions are assessed.
- *Cost assessment*. The burdens are quantified by the use of a method inspired by the Standard Cost Model methodology used in many OECD countries.
- *Evaluation of e-government practices*. Assessment of whether the new measure is in accordance with priorities and good practices of digital administration (dematerialising procedures and forms, sharing of information, etc.).
- *Evaluation of consolidation practices*. Promoting legislative consolidation to systematise and rationalise the output of the legislative process.

A summary of the test results – covering the number of people affected, the type of burden, and the expected time consumption for compliance – is included in the explanatory note that accompanies all legislative proposals presented to the Council of Ministers for approval. The explanatory note gives complementary information on the legal draft submitted for discussion and should give justification for the need for new regulation and highlight its expected impacts. Since 2006, a more detailed description of how the new regulation respects criteria of necessity, efficiency and simplification must be included. Finally, gender mainstreaming impact and social impact (improving accessibility and participation of handicapped people) have been included as mandatory elements in the explanatory note.

The Better Law-making Programme

As the functioning of the Portuguese society – like any modern society – relies heavily on formal legislation, achieving better regulation by improving existing legislation and legislative practices for adopting new legislation can significantly contribute to growth and welfare.

The Better Law-making Programme (*Legislar Melhor*) approved by the Council of Ministers and launched shortly after the launch of the first Simplex Programme in May 2006 is the first integrated programme for better regulation in Portugal and is included in Portugal's National Reform Plan (NRP) for meeting the Lisbon Strategy's reform goals. The programme covers all steps in the policy-making procedure, from initial conception to execution, and includes a number of quality assurance tools, such as consultation and impact assessment.

The Centre for Legal Studies (CEJUR) at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers has been given responsibility for implementing the Better Law-making Programme and gives legal support to the Council of Ministers and to the Prime Minister. A guide for regulatory drafting is under preparation; the aim is for it to be a reference tool that can ensure higher regulatory quality. Public consultation procedures have been promoted and reinforced, and the use of electronic resources is being prepared in order to make consultation more effective and open. Consolidation of legislative acts has been increased in order to improve access to legislation and consolidation is now mandatory for the most important legislative acts.

The secretaries of state meet every week to prepare the meetings of the Council of Ministers. The Cabinet of the Secretary of State for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (SEPCM) organises these meetings and has a gate-keeping function with regard to the preparation of laws as it scrutinises the submitted Simplex Tests and explanatory notes. Proposals are rejected regularly because of a lack of compliance with the rules concerning the explanatory note and the Simplex Test. Several legislative proposals have also been rejected or changed because the principles of proportionality and consistency were not thought to have been met, and administrative burdens to citizens or companies were being introduced without proper justification.

There is no publication of the explanatory note nor of the results of the Simplex Test. Experience from other OECD countries shows that making this kind of information available to public scrutiny can increase awareness of the need to provide quality analysis and to take results into account.

Other aspects of the quality of new regulation

The Portuguese government is aware of the importance of risk analysis and is working on setting up a standard. Simplex 2006 addresses the issue of risk in regulation, promoting the principle that a risk-based approach can help reduce the compliance costs for low-risk businesses. It is also stated that if an obligation is disproportionately burdensome to citizens or businesses when compared to the protection it delivers, it must be removed. If the government does not trust the will and ability of its citizens to understand and comply

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with regulation, it can lead to excessive regulation and multiple controls far beyond what would be economically efficient. For example, low-risk businesses could, from a cost-benefit perspective, have less compliance obligations and inspections than businesses with more dangerous activities or with a track record of lacking compliance. This new culture of trust is to be achieved through the elimination of prior licences, permits, and authorisations. Where the risks are greatest, inspection resources, data requests, and obligations should be reinforced. No procedures for systematic risk assessment of new regulation have yet been established in Portugal.

Key points

- Procedures for ensuring the quality of new regulation have been significantly strengthened since 2006 through the introduction of the *Better Law-making Programme* and the *Simplex Test*, and by giving the Secretary of State for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (SEPCM) a clear gate-keeping function for ensuring quality and preventing legislative proposals from being overly burdensome to citizens or companies.
- There is a limited transparency of the achievements and considerations made by the government on administrative burden reduction, as the results of the Simplex Tests are not publicised.

Links to other public sector reform programmes

Achieving the overarching goals of administrative simplification and e-government as stated in the Simplex programmes depends on creating clear linkages to other programmes of public sector reform in general as simplification activities are cross-cutting and transformative by nature. It is therefore important to ensure that simplification objectives are not counteracting other goals of public sector reform, and that the concrete measures taken are pushing the transformation in the same direction.

The National Action Programme for Growth and Jobs (PNACE) was launched in 2005 as Portugal's national reform plan for 2005-2008 in the framework of the European Union's renewed Lisbon Strategy. The main strategic objectives of the plan were to: 1) strengthen budgetary balance; 2) promote economic growth; 3) increase competitiveness; and 4) reinforce social cohesion.[11] A number of the measures in the plan are linked to simplification efforts such as cutting red tape to ensure better conditions for free competition and a more attractive business climate. Public administration reform initiatives are also a key element in the plan.

PRACE, the Restructuring Programme for the State's Central Administration, was launched in 2005 as part of PNACE, and its core lines of action were adopted in 2006. The primary aims of PRACE were to reduce government spending and create an administration that is open to citizens, demand-oriented, and more efficient. It has been co-ordinated by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Internal Administration.

The strategic guidelines in PRACE[12] were focused on:

- **Effectiveness and efficiency of public administrations and service delivery** such as restructuring and rationalising the function of public administrations, rationalising and possibly outsourcing functions and services, and breaking up stove-piped organisations by introducing new organisational structures supporting cross-cutting public projects and tasks, including the use of ICT.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** with a special focus on outcomes such as reinforcing strategic functions and following up on results achieved, strengthening the normative, regulatory and control functions of the state.
- **Sharing of services and resources** such as the development of shared services at the ministerial and inter-ministerial level, and clarifying and standardising public sector functions at the central and regional levels.
- **Simplifying access to public authorities** through deconcentration and decentralisation using a multi-channel service delivery approach and by establishing one-stop-shops for citizens and businesses.
- **Improving skills and competencies of civil servants**, as well as reviewing contracts, careers, and pay in the civil service.

The series of initiatives put into place through PRACE, such as the new organisational model for the state administration which came into force in 2007 and resulted in a 26% reduction in central government structures, have now been implemented. Additional measures included the creation, in every ministry, of a department for planning and evaluation, another for audit and control, and the creation of the Financial Controller.

The political intentions of the government's simplification efforts are also closely linked to the programmes *Technological Plan* and *Connecting Portugal – Mobilising the Information and Knowledge Society,*[13] both launched in 2005. The Technological Plan, consisting of 112 initiatives under the headlines of knowledge, technology, and innovation, is an essential part of the growth strategy. In *Connecting Portugal*, concrete measures to enhance the knowledge society include the promotion of digital inclusion, facilitating broadband connections to homes and schools, improving the availability of online public services, and advancing e-commerce.

The goals of the Simplex programmes are closely linked to those of the PRACE and the PNACE programmes, which since 2004 have been focusing on

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long-recognised challenges in the Portuguese public sector. The Simplex programmes have taken over in terms of importance and political focus, the aim being to significantly change the administrative culture and make visible and concrete the improvement of the public service provision to citizens and businesses.

These challenges will be kept as priorities and are included in the Major Planning Options (*Grandes Opções do Plano* – GOP) for 2008 which will maintain the national overarching goals of administrative simplification and e-government on the government's agenda.

Key point

- The Simplex programmes are closely linked to other major reform initiatives such as *PRACE* – the Restructuring Programme for the State's Central Administration – aimed at reforming the state administration, *Technological Plan* and *Connecting Portugal* with the goal of improving Portugal's position as a knowledge and innovation economy.

Policies and strategies at the regional and local government level

Many of the central government's objectives are shared at the levels of regional and local government. Taking into account that the Portuguese constitution recognises that regions and municipalities have autonomy and independence from the central government in their areas of responsibility, the sharing of goals and means of central government programmes are based on incentives and best practices, and not on imposition (see Chapter 5 for additional information).

Central government bodies like SEAM (the Cabinet of the Secretary of State for Administrative Modernisation) and AMA (Agency for Administrative Modernisation) play an important role in encouraging regions and municipalities to share the vision of public sector reform through administrative simplification and e-government. As such, they function as important drivers for progress at the local level. The regions of Azores and Madeira are autonomous and are not obliged to follow the central government's policies on simplification. They have though locally developed their own programmes for simplification along the lines of the measures in the Simplex programmes.

A number of municipalities – especially the larger cities – have developed their own simplification programmes. Some measures have been recycled from the Simplex programmes. The municipalities are also involved in discussing monitoring and evaluation criteria with SEAM and AMA.

The regional level

Both Azores and Madeira have set up their measures for simplification in regional plans. Target areas include:[14]

- promoting and developing the portals of the regional governments with an integrated platform of services;
- the reorganisation of back-office arrangements through Citizen's Shops, shared service centres, and one-stop shops;
- elimination of duplication of procedures and tasks;
- qualification of human resources, especially of ICT skills.

The Azores have developed their own programme on simplification, *ProSiMA* which includes 210 initiatives, some of which are created by the Azores' administration and others of which are adapted from Simplex.[15]

The local level – municipalities

A number of different simplification activities take place at the municipal level: one example is *Digital Cities and Digital Regions* funded through UMIC with the support of EU structural funds. It consists of more than 32 projects, covering 96% of Portugal, involving e-government solutions for local governments, conditions for reinforcing the competitiveness of small and medium size 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.

Other examples include the larger municipalities of Lisbon and Oporto that have their own simplification programmes aimed at improving service delivery (see Box 2.8).

Box 2.8. **Évora Digital Region**

Évora Digital Region is an example of one of the 32 digital regions and cities established in Portugal.

With a total investment of EUR 6.1 million over September 2004 to March 2007, the Évora Digital Region was established with the participation of 14 municipalities and the Municipal Association of the District of Évora (AMDE).

The larger initiatives in Évora Digital Region consist of:

- the creation of Websites with information on topics concerning the region, tourism, geography, business, innovation and research;

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Box 2.8. **Évora Digital Region** *(cont.)*

- supplying broadband to local governments and creating Websites with online services from the municipalities;
- a Website for e-shopping to foster e-commerce and the creation of Wi-Fi service spots in public spaces;
- establishment of the Digital Technology Centre of Évora which is a data centre infrastructure to support technological projects.

Source: Évora Distrito Digital, 2007.

Key points

- The regions have their own simplification programmes similar to the Simplex programmes. The region of the Azores seems to be particularly advanced in its use of ICT to improve government functions.
- At the local level, there is a large amount of variation in relation to transforming the administration and improving service delivery to citizens and businesses. Some municipalities – mostly larger cities – have come a long way and are thinking strategically on how to transform, while others have done very little. This is to some extent – but not completely – linked to capacity problems (resources and skills) for implementation.
- As the Simplex programmes have been built to be central-level programmes, there is no institutional link between the Simplex programmes at the central level and the programmes and efforts to simplify and introduce e-government at the regional and local levels. There is no formal and specific mechanism for co-ordination of simplification and e-government efforts across levels of government, although close collaboration with municipalities is key for the effective implementation of many measures, such as licensing procedures.
- The European Union's Regional Development Funds are funding a number of initiatives at the local level. Funding from this source requires municipalities to group together and to introduce mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

Notes

1. Stated in the *Programme of the 17th Constitutional Government of Portugal* according to answers to the OECD survey on administrative simplification and e-government. Question 2.2.1.1.
2. *Simplex, Legislative and Administrative Simplification Programme*, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Office of Public Services Reform, 2006.
3. In *Simplex 2006*, page 4, the stated objectives are to provide prompt and effective responses to the needs of citizens and businesses; increase people's trust in public services and servants; enable businesses to quickly obtain permits and authorisations; facilitate the rationalisation and efficiency of the public administration; and help Portugal become more competitive by reducing the costs of economic activities.
4. According to *Lisbon Strategy – Portugal Anew. Report on 1st Years Implementation*, October 2006, p. 11.
5. *Simplex 2006, Legislative and Administrative Simplification Programme*, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Office of Public Services Reform, Lisbon (2006).
6. Questionnaire on administrative simplification and e-government, OECD 2007, response to Question 2.2.2.3, p. 89. Also listed in Simplex 2006.
7. See more on monitoring and evaluation in Chapter 6.
8. Selection of initiatives and use of the life event approach is further described in Chapter 3.
9. *SIMPLEX Double Strategy*, note from the Office of the State Secretary for Administrative Modernisation, 13 March 2008.
10. See *Cutting Red Tape: National Strategies for Simplification*, OECD (2006), p. 30, for a description of the Belgian Kafka Test.
11. *Lisbon Strategy – Portugal Anew, National Action Programme for Growth and Jobs 2005/2008*, October 2005.
12. Questionnaire on administrative simplification and e-government in Portugal, OECD 2007, answers to Question 2.2.1.2.
13. *Technological Plan for Growth – Towards a Knowledge Society*, Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Lisbon (2005) and *Connecting Portugal – Mobilising the Information and Knowledge Society*, Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Lisbon (2005).
14. Questionnaire on administrative simplification and e-government in Portugal, OECD 2007, answers to Question 2.2.2.3.
15. *Memorandum from the Regional Government of Azores* (2007).

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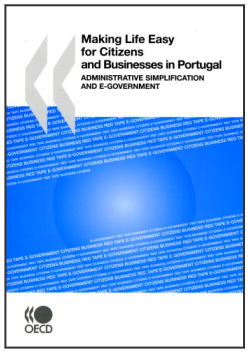

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