

## **OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation**

### **Meeting of the National Contact Points Network, 15APR**

#### **Minister for Modernization of the State and Public**

#### **Administration**

#### **Alexandra Leitão**

Let me begin by saying how grateful I am to the OECD and the Portuguese Agency for Administrative Modernisation for hosting this Biannual Meeting of National Contact Points of the Observatory for Public Sector Innovation.

Hosting this meeting in our country, even if virtually, allows us to reinforce the Portuguese commitment to innovation in our public administration.

This meeting was supposed to take place in 2020, but in the meantime the world has changed forcing us to delay it. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives, forced us to redefine our work models, changed the way we relate to institutions, but, above all, it has changed the way we look to the future.

I strongly believe that in this time of uncertainty, it is up to the public sector to be a driving force for economic and social development. Therefore, I see with great optimism the way the public administration has responded to one of the greatest challenges of our recent history.

There is no progress without innovation. Portugal has always recognized this and that's why, in 2012, it joined the Task Force to create the OPSI, being one of its "founding members".

OPSI has developed expertise in the analysis of global trends, sustainable development goals, transformative technological impact, public sector innovation systems, and innovation skills, processes and methods. In this context, the OPSI's role as a global forum for public sector innovation gains major relevance.

The Declaration on Public Sector Innovation, signed in 2019, was a historic milestone for the commitment made by 39 countries to support and recognize the value of innovation in the public sector; to encourage and provide the means to enable public administration to innovate; to promote experimentation, iteration, and testing; and to disseminate lessons and share best practices.

Also, from the perspectives opened by OPSI's work on the facets of innovation and, in particular, anticipatory innovation, we have been developing, through AMA and LabX, a starter kit for public organizations. The idea is to put anticipatory innovation into practice by building a starter kit that is actionable, user-centric, and problem-solving oriented. Its main objectives

are not only to reduce the gap between knowledge and action, but above all to create a starting point for capacity building in public organizations, enabling them to embrace the uncertainty of the future, to replace ad-hoc and reactive routines with forward-looking and proactive approaches, to develop and promote future literacy, and to ensure the acquisition of skills by public sector leaders and employees.

As I was saying, 2020 was a test for the resilience and flexibility of public services and it was through innovation that we were able to overcome many of the restrictions that were imposed on presential service, while still responding to a growing number of requests.

The crisis has not only placed public services under time pressure and the imminence of facing the limits of existing resources, but it has also given rise to attitudes that, although spontaneous, deserve attention, especially when they bring unexpected increases in complexity for the future of the Public Administration. On one hand, we had initiatives that promoted the delivery of collaborative and integrated solutions by the Portuguese Public Administration, as happened in the Collaborative Work Plan, capable of orchestrating public sector and civil society organizations in rapid processes to design solutions. However, looking at the world panorama of responses to the pandemic, one can highlight a set of attitudes that brought about many other potential adversities:

When the Public Administration was called to adapt to the constraints caused by the pandemic, had in its favour the fact that it already had a solid infrastructure of digital public services, as a result of the investment made in this area for the last years. Even so, it is undeniable that the pandemic crisis has accelerated the digital transformation and, today, we can say that digital public services become increasingly important for the Portuguese.

The pandemic also led to the creation of 195 SIMPLEX measures - which is an emblematic program for administrative modernization policy in Portugal.

But, as I mentioned, the bet on digital public services it's not new for us, because we are fully aware of its importance. It's no by chance that our Recovery and Resilience Plan foresees an unprecedented investment in the modernization of Public Administration and that the largest share is destined to the reform of Digital Public Services, simple, inclusive and safe for citizens and companies.

This reform aims to strengthen the relationship between the citizen and the State, redesigning the service provided by public services through the creation of the Single Digital Gateway, which aims to aggregate a wide range of digital services.

This reform also aims to invest in sustainable electronic services, based on interoperability and the use of data, to increase transparency and efficiency. In other words, the goal is the digital transition in Public Administration can be made at a single-speed, allowing a transition to a uniform service model using Artificial Intelligence, and based on an omnichannel logic and in the principle of "only once". And, of course, always with the concern of not leaving no one behind - which is one of the biggest commitment of the Portuguese Government.

This commitment to leave no one behind is, in fact, the perfect motto for answering the second question, about how we ensure that technologies do not promote inequality and social exclusion.

It can't be denied that technologies were decisive in the response that the State gave, and give, to citizens and companies, but we are perfectly aware that there is still a considerable fringe of the population that does not have access to technologies, due to many different factors. It is with these people in mind that we have a range of measures and solutions.

We know that for many people, customer service face-to-face and proximity assistance are essential to guarantee access to public services, and that's why the Government has been committed, together with local authorities, to expanding our Citizen Spots network.

The Citizen Spots are physical spaces that bring together, in a single assistance counter, services from different entities, from central services, to local, private, etc., and are concerned in promoting digital literacy, through assisted support. That is to say, a person who goes to one of these Citizen Spots can access services with the support of a worker trained to help them navigate on the websites of public services.

Today, as a result of a fruitful articulation between the Central Administration and the local authorities, there are 742 Citizen Spots all over the country, and they provide around 200 public services.

Still regarding this topic, and mention again our Recovery and Resilience Plan, it also contemplates face-to-face service as a form of inclusion and as a way of proximity. For instance, through the opening of 300 new Citizen Spots and 12 Mobile Citizen Spots, to bring public services closer to those who cannot use digital, while contributing to a stronger territorial cohesion.

It was also thinking on those who cannot use digital services, that we reinforced the investment in communication equipment and infrastructures, such as customer service using phone, email, chat and video call. In fact, last summer we launched a digital service pilot assisted by video call, which had very positive results.

I have more examples to give and more to say on these topics, but, as you know, there is a time limit for Speakers. Allow me, however, and in all due humility, to confess to you that I believe that these examples that I mentioned can be considered good practices, because they effectively make a difference in people's lives and reflect the essence of public policies... and that fills me with pride!

I'm sure technology is an instrument to support the implementation of public policies, but for that, Governments have to use them with a view to social inclusion. And I have no doubt that this is the way, the only way, to follow, in order to achieve a more fair and social Europe.