Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies

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Background Information

The Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies was adopted by the OECD Council on 15 July 2014 on the proposal of the Public Governance Committee. The Recommendation is the first international legal instrument on digital government and offers guidance on how best to keep pace with technological change and make the most of digital opportunities. It aims to enable Adherents to adopt more strategic approaches to digital government – supporting their use of digital technologies and data to achieve more open, participatory and innovative governments.

The need for a standard on digital government strategies

The rapid development of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, has transformed economies and societies. This transformation has had a significant impact on governments and public sectors, as they seek to implement reforms in policymaking and public service design and delivery, and foster more collaborative forms of governance. As service providers, governments have had to adopt more user-centred services, driven by network effects and data, to deliver an effective and personalised user experience.

Digital government strategies help countries improve governments' capacity to transform public sector operations and decision-making processes, as well as to design and deliver services that meet evolving needs and expectations of users. A successful digital government strategy should align with public expectations, emphasising economic and social value creation, innovation, personalised and proactive service delivery, as well as the relevant engagement of citizens and businesses.

Since 2000, the PGC has developed an extensive evidence base on digital government in the form of data, analytical work and country reviews showing that governments were looking for ways to align technological opportunities with public demands for better performance and more openness and to strengthen the ties between digital government and the broader reform agendas. The Recommendation builds on this work and advocates for a shift towards digital government that requires more than just transferring analogue processes to online platforms. It was developed as a complementary instrument within an ecosystem of OECD legal instruments on digital and public governance policy (see Related Instruments).

An inclusive process for developing the Recommendation

In 2012, the OECD Network on E-Government of the Public Governance Committee (now renamed Working Party of Senior Digital Government Officials (E-Leaders)) established an informal task force of 13 OECD Members to develop a legal instrument on digital government. The first draft was discussed by the E-Leaders in Bern, Switzerland on 29-30 October 2013 [GOV/PGC/EGOV(2013)1] and was subsequently informed by consultations across the OECD policy communities, and notably the Committee on Digital Economy Policy (now renamed Digital Policy Committee) and a public consultation held between November 2013 and January 2014.

Scope of the Recommendation

The Recommendation offers a whole-of-government approach that addresses the cross-cutting role of technology in the design and implementation of public policies, and in the delivery of outcomes. It demands a digital by design approach that prioritises the use of data and technologies to transform internal process and improve the design and delivery of public services. This shift involves using digital tools and data to simplify processes, increase transparency and convenience in public interactions, and improve efficiency. The process of transformation is meant to also empower citizens and businesses to participate in designing services that meet their needs, moving away from a top-down approach.

In particular, it recommends that Adherents ensure the strategic use of technologies and data in the public sector through the development and implementation of digital government strategies, focusing on three pillars:

- **Openness and engagement to secure public trust**: the first pillar offers guidance on how to incorporate the principles of transparency and collaboration in the use of digital technologies and data. They outline how digital government can promote increased openness in government and facilitate collaboration among both internal and external stakeholders to create mutual value.

- **Governance and co-ordination**: the second pillar emphasises the importance of governance and co-ordination by highlighting the need for effective frameworks to ensure the co-ordinated implementation of digital government strategies.

- **Capacities to support implementation**: the third pillar underlines the need for developing skills, business processes, and legal and regulatory frameworks that can effectively support the implementation of digital government strategies, including the commissioning of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Follow-up and support for the implementation of the Recommendation

Since its adoption, the Recommendation has been the main policy instrument used in digital government reviews conducted by the OECD to formulate actionable policy recommendations that support governments in advancing their digital transformation.

The **OECD Digital Government Policy Framework (DGPF)** and its thematic frameworks on key policy areas have been developed to support the implementation and dissemination of the Recommendation. As an OECD policy guidance, the DGPF is meant to assist governments in identifying the key determinants for an effective design and implementation of strategic approaches to transition towards higher levels of digital maturity of their public sector.

In 2018, the E-Leaders also approved the **OECD Digital Government Index (DGI)** which was developed as a measurement tool to help monitor and evaluate progress against the Recommendation. The PGC, through the E-Leaders, will continue to support the implementation and dissemination of the Recommendation, including via the analysis provided with each release of the DGI.

For further information please consult: https://www.oecd.org/digital/digital-government/.
Contact information: eleaders@oecd.org.

Implementation

2017 Report to Council

The first Report on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the Recommendation assessed the progress of Adherents in implementing the provisions of the Recommendation between its adoption in 2014 and 2017 [C(2017)139] (hereinafter the "2017 Report").

The 2017 Report concluded that "Adherents have generally taken important steps towards aligning broad strategic frameworks, raising awareness, and implementing innovative practices across the public sector based on the Recommendation. However, additional efforts are needed to establish robust policy frameworks, strengthen institutional capabilities, and enhance dissemination of the Recommendation at the subnational level".

When noting the 2017 Report, the Council encouraged Adherents to continue efforts to "…(i) strengthen the implementation of the Recommendation by fostering peer learning and sharing of experiences through further developing the Digital Government Toolkit; (ii) develop digital government indicators to support the monitoring of the implementation of the Recommendation, and (iii) raise awareness of the Recommendation nationally and internationally (…)". It also instructed the PGC to "continue promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation, including supporting dissemination efforts at all levels of government, and to report to the Council thereon in five years".

2024 Report to Council

A second Report on the implementation, dissemination, and continued relevance [C(2024)70] (the "2024 Report") was presented to Council in 2024, assessing the efforts made by Adherents following the 2017 Report, during the period from 2017 to 2022.

The findings of the 2024 Report demonstrated that Adherents have made significant progress in aligning their digital government strategies and other related strategic frameworks with the provisions of the Recommendation. However, further efforts and investment are needed to better leverage the use of digital technologies in the public sector. Strengthening governance and co-ordination for digital government and enhancing related institutional capacities would be important to support further the implementation of the Recommendation.

As the digital transformation of the public sector remains a high priority for governments (particularly demonstrated by its critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic), the 2024 Report concludes that the provisions of the Recommendation remain relevant for Adherents. The digital environment continues to advance rapidly, and governments are still looking to the OECD on the best ways to respond to it and transform alongside it. The Recommendation continues to provide over-arching principles and guidance for Adherents. When noting the 2024 Report, the Council invited the PGC to continue supporting its implementation, notably through the Digital Government Index and the OURdata Index.

The next reporting to Council is scheduled to take place in 2028.

THE COUNCIL,

HAVING REGARD to Article 5 b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14 December 1960;

HAVING REGARD to the Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines Governing the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data [C(80)58/FINAL, as amended]; the Recommendation of the Council on Improving the Quality of Government Regulation [C(95)21/FINAL]; the Recommendation of the Council on Improving Ethical Conduct in the Public Service Including Principles for Managing Ethics in the Public Service [C(98)70/FINAL]; the Recommendation of the Council Concerning Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks - Towards a Culture of Security [C(2002)131/FINAL]; the Recommendation of the Council on Electronic Authentication [C(2008)36]; the Recommendation of the Council for Enhanced Access and More Effective Use of Public Sector Information [C(2007)68]; the Recommendation of the Council on Enhancing Integrity in Public Procurement [C(2008)105]; the Recommendation of the Council on the Protection of Critical Information Infrastructures [C(2008)35]; the Recommendation of the Council on the Protection of Children Online [C(2011)155]; the Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Internet Policy Making [C(2011)154]; the Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Public Governance of Public-Private Partnerships [C(2012)86]; the Recommendation of the Council on International Mobile Roaming Services [C(2012)7]; the Recommendation of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance [C(2012)37]; the Recommendation of the Council on Effective Public Investment across Levels of Government [C(2014)32]; the Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Critical Risks [C/MIN(2014)8/FINAL];

HAVING REGARD to the Agenda on "Trust in Government: Evidence, Policies and Decision-making" welcomed by the 2013 Ministerial Council Meeting [C/MIN(2013)4/FINAL, Annex III];

RECOGNISING that public investments on digital government occur at all levels of government thus creating a context of shared responsibility across levels of government;

RECOGNISING a new stage of maturity in the use of digital technologies by governments and a shift from e-government to digital government with a view to opening, innovating and modernising public sectors;

RECOGNISING that both in times of fiscal pressure and of fiscal expansion, governments require improved efficiency and effectiveness of public spending, including for digital technologies;

RECOGNISING the need of a common vision to ensure coherence in the use of digital technologies across policy areas and levels of governments;

RECOGNISING that digital government can make a crucial contribution to sustainable development and growth at the national and sub-national levels, as well as anticipate current and future steps needed to increase citizen trust and well-being;

NOTING that the OECD plays a leading role in supporting the use of technology to promote good governance at national and sub-national levels of government;

HAVING REGARD to the background document on the principles embodied in the present Recommendation noted by the Network on E-Government of the Public Governance Committee [GOV/PGC/EGOV(2013)1];

On the proposal of the Public Governance Committee:

I.   AGREES that, for the purpose of the present draft Recommendation, the following definitions are used:

-        E-Government refers to the use by the governments of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government

- Digital Government refers to the use of digital technologies, as an integrated part of governments' modernisation strategies, to create public value. It relies on a digital government ecosystem comprised of government actors, non-governmental organisations, businesses, citizens' associations and individuals which supports the production of and access to data, services and content through interactions with the government.

- Digital technologies refer to ICTs, including the Internet, mobile technologies and devices, as well as data analytics used to improve the generation, collection, exchange, aggregation, combination, analysis, access, searchability and presentation of digital content, including for the development of services and apps.

- Public value refers to various benefits for society that may vary according to the perspective or the actors, including the following : 1) goods or services that satisfy the desires of citizens and clients; 2) production choices that meet citizen expectations of justice, fairness, efficiency and effectiveness; 3) properly ordered and productive public institutions that reflect citizens' desires and preferences; 4) fairness and efficiency of distribution; 5) legitimate use of resource to accomplish public purposes; and 6) innovation and adaptability to changing preferences and demands.

II.   RECOMMENDS that governments develop and implement digital government strategies which:

1.   Ensure greater transparency, openness and inclusiveness of government processes and operations by:

   i)   adopting open and inclusive processes, accessibility, transparency and accountability among the main goals of national digital government strategies;

   ii)   updating accountability and transparency regulations recognising different contexts and expectations brought about by digital technologies and technology-driven approaches;

   iii)   taking steps to address existing "digital divides" (i.e. the fact that societies can be divided into people who do and people who do not have access to - and the capability to use - digital technologies) and avoid the emergence of new forms of "digital exclusion" (i.e. not being able to take advantage of digital services and opportunities).

2.   Encourage engagement and participation of public, private and civil society stakeholders in policy making and public service design and delivery, through:

   i)   addressing issues of citizens' rights, organisation and resource allocation, adoption of new rules and standards, use of communication tools and development of institutional capacities to help facilitate engagement of all age groups and population segments, in particular through the clarification of the formal responsibilities and procedures (e.g. adoption of guidelines clarifying roles and procedures for establishing and managing official government accounts on social media, norms of data sharing);

   ii)   identifying and engaging non-governmental organisations, businesses or citizens to form a digital government ecosystem for the provision and use of digital services. This includes the use of business models to motivate the relevant actors' involvement to adjust supply and demand; and the establishment of a framework of collaboration, both within the public sector and with external actors.

3.   Create a data-driven culture in the public sector, by:

   i)   developing frameworks to enable, guide, and foster access to, use and re-use of, the increasing amount of evidence, statistics and data concerning operations, processes and results to (a) increase openness and transparency, and (b) incentivise public engagement in policy making, public value creation, service design and delivery;

ii) balancing the need to provide timely official data with the need to deliver trustworthy data, managing risks of data misuse related to the increased availability of data in open formats (i.e. allowing use and re-use, and the possibility for non-governmental actors to re-use and supplement data with a view to maximise public economic and social value).

4. Reflect a risk management approach to addressing digital security and privacy issues, and include the adoption of effective and appropriate security measures, so as to increase confidence on government services.

III.   RECOMMENDS that, in developing their digital government strategies, governments should:

5. Secure leadership and political commitment to the strategy, through a combination of efforts aimed to promote inter-ministerial co-ordination and collaboration, set priorities and facilitate engagement and co-ordination of relevant agencies across levels of government in pursuing the digital government agenda.

6. Ensure coherent use of digital technologies across policy areas and levels of government, by:

i) engaging relevant stakeholders and other levels of government to provide input to the development of the digital government strategy;

ii) integrating the digital government strategy in overall public administration reforms;

iii) identifying the complementarity, alignment and mutual reinforcement between the digital government strategy and other relevant sector strategies;

iv) providing the institution formally responsible for digital government co-ordination with the mechanisms to align overall strategic choices on investments in digital technologies with technological deployment in various policy areas.

7. Establish effective organisational and governance frameworks to co-ordinate the implementation of the digital strategy within and across levels of government, through:

i) identifying clear responsibilities to ensure overall co-ordination of the implementation of the digital government strategy;

ii) establishing a system for "check and balances" of governments' decisions on spending on technology to increase the level of accountability and public trust, and to improve decision-making and management to minimise risks of project failures and delays.

8. Strengthen international co-operation with other governments to better serve citizens and businesses across borders, and maximise the benefits that can emerge from early knowledge sharing and co-ordination of digital strategies internationally.

IV.   RECOMMENDS that, in implementing the digital government strategies, governments should:

9. Develop clear business cases to sustain the funding and focused implementation of digital technologies projects, by:

i) articulating the value proposition for all projects above a certain budget threshold to identify expected economic, social and political benefits to justify public investments and to improve project management;

ii) involving key stakeholders in the definition of the business case (including owners and users of final services, different levels of governments involved in or affected by the project, and private sector or non-for profit service providers) to ensure buy in and distribution of realised benefits.

10.   Reinforce institutional capacities to manage and monitor projects' implementation, by:

    i)   adopting structured approaches systematically, also for the management of risks, that include increase in the amount of evidence and data captured in the course of project implementation and provision of incentives to augment data use to monitor projects performance;

    ii)   ensuring the availability at any time of a comprehensive picture of on-going digital initiatives to avoid duplication of systems and datasets;

    iii)   establishing evaluation and measurement frameworks for projects' performance at all levels of government, and adopting and uniformly applying standards, guidelines, codes for procurement and compliance with interoperability frameworks, for regular reporting and conditional release of funding;

    iv)   reinforcing their public sector's digital and project management skills, mobilising collaborations and/or partnerships with private and non-governmental sector actors as necessary;

    v)   conducting early sharing, testing and evaluation of prototypes with involvement of expected end-users to allow adjustment and successful scaling of projects.

11.   Procure digital technologies based on assessment of existing assets including digital skills, job profiles, technologies, contracts, inter-agency agreements to increase efficiency, support innovation, and best sustain objectives stated in the overall public sector modernisation agenda. Procurement and contracting rules should be updated, as appropriate, to make them compatible with modern ways of developing and deploying digital technology.

12.   Ensure that general and sector-specific legal and regulatory frameworks allow digital opportunities to be seized, by:

    i)   reviewing them as appropriate;

    ii)   including assessment of the implications of new legislations on governments' digital needs as part of the regulatory impact assessment process.

V.   **INVITES** the Secretary-General to disseminate the Recommendation.

VI.   **INVITES** Members to disseminate this Recommendation at all levels of government.

VII.   **INVITES** non-Members to take account of and adhere to this Recommendation.

VIII.   **INSTRUCTS** the Public Governance Committee to monitor the implementation of this Recommendation and to report thereon to the Council no later than three years following its adoption and regularly thereafter, notably in consultation with the Committee on Digital Economy Policy.

About the OECD

The OECD is a unique forum where governments work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

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- **Substantive Outcome Documents** are adopted by the individual listed Adherents rather than by an OECD body, as the outcome of a ministerial, high-level or other meeting within the framework of the Organisation. They usually set general principles or long-term goals and have a solemn character.

- **International Agreements** are negotiated and concluded within the framework of the Organisation. They are legally binding on the Parties.

- **Arrangement, Understanding and Others**: several other types of substantive legal instruments have been developed within the OECD framework over time, such as the Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits, the International Understanding on Maritime Transport Principles and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendations.