1 Background and context

This document is the latest in a series of reports produced under the auspices of the OECD Regulatory Policy Committee. As with other "best practice principles" reports, it provides an elaboration of the principles enunciated in the *2012 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance*.

The principles in this document are intended to be of relevance and applicability to all OECD member and partner countries. As such, they offer general guidance rather than providing a prescriptive set or list to follow. Some of them are intentionally ambitious and it is unlikely that few if any countries would consistently meet them all. However, all the principles are based on and supported by the actual experiences of different countries, so they should not be viewed as unrealistic or unattainable.

Background

Business and citizen interactions with governments are becoming increasingly complex. This is simply reflective of economic realities as businesses, citizens and governments become more interconnected, both domestically and internationally. However, governments can unnecessarily hamper growth opportunities where the interface with businesses and citizens is delinked or cumbersome. In an attempt to address this issue, governments have introduced one-stop shops as a means of reducing transaction costs.

Economic prosperity is closely linked to the development of a pro-business environment. Making life easier for existing firms and facilitating the entry of new ones into the marketplace promotes competitiveness and growth. While regulations governing businesses' operation are important, their implementation can sometimes turn into a difficult and costly process, thereby discouraging entrepreneurial activity. Citizen interaction with governments is often at times of heightened stress throughout their lives. For example, citizens generally need to interact with government authorities when they move to a new geographical area, buy a house, or experience a family loss. It is therefore important that the interfaces between citizens and governments are as stress-free as possible. The *OECD 2012 Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance* (OECD, 2012[1]) states that countries should "Review the means by which citizens and businesses are required to interact with government to satisfy regulatory requirements and reduce transaction costs" and that governments should "[e]mploy the opportunities of information technology and one-stop shops for licences, permits, and other procedural requirements to make service delivery more streamlined and user-focused".

The following countries and one-stop shops were selected as the case studies:

- *Canada.* Created in 2005, **Service Canada** serves as a single point of access to citizens for many government services, delivering some of the Government's largest and most well-known programmes and services such as Employment Insurance and the Canada Pension Plan. **BizPaL** was launched in 2005 as a pilot project with a lead group of participating governments. It enables Canadian businesses to easily identify which permits and licences are required from all levels of government and how to obtain them in order to start and grow a business.

- *Germany.* The **Informationsportal für Arbeitgeber** was established in 2017 as part of a strategy to reduce bureaucracy. It provides employers, including SMEs, which are hiring new employees for the first time, with information on their social security rights and obligations.

- *Mexico.* **Tu Empresa** was launched in 2009 and aimed at facilitating the procedures for the constitution and operation of businesses. It provides information on the procedures for opening, operating, and closing a business in Mexico. As part of the National Digital Strategy in 2015, the website formed part of the GOB.MX platform, and since March 2016 its role has expanded to include the authorisation of Corporate Names and Company deeds for certain types of companies.

- *Norway.* **Altinn** is the Norwegian Point of Single Contact responsible for implementing the European Union Services Directive. The Points of Single Contact are e-government portals that allow service providers to get the information they need and complete administrative procedures online. It provides information about the business lifecycle, from establishment to winding up. Altinn is a fully-fledged one-stop shop where businesses can access information regarding formal requirements, funding, and reporting requirements to government entities, and complete applications or reporting online.

- *Portugal.* **ePortugal.gov.pt** is the starting point for over 1 000 essential government services, providing information, guidance and services for citizens and businesses, as well as detailed guidance for professionals and specific groups such as employees, migrants and others and information on government and policy. Organised on a life events approach, the services offered are provided by 590 entities, from both the central government (17 ministries), local government and private entities.

- *United Kingdom.* The **GOV.UK** website is the start place for 152 essential government services. As the website for the UK government, GOV.UK has a very broad scope including many policy areas relating to both citizens and businesses. The UK **Primary Authority** provides legally assured advice that is tailored to businesses' specific needs to give them a better understanding of what they need to do to comply with the law. Advice is provided by local authority regulators, in discussion with the business, or representatives of relevant trade associations or franchises.

Three of the one-stop shops – Altinn, ePortugal, and GOV.UK – are each country's designated Points of Single Contact for the purposes of the European Union Services Directive. They were designed to assist in establishing new businesses in other EU countries, and as part of that, provide for the rules and formalities that apply, as well as to allow for the completion of administrative procedures. More information relating to the Services Directive and related matters are provided in an annex to this report.

After receiving the completed surveys, the Secretariat commenced a series of interviews with government officials in order to better understand particular nuances in the various one-stop shops examined. The survey responses combined with the interviews formed the basis for the case studies and the examples throughout the report.

Introduction

The starting point was to recall the raison d'être of one-stop shops. The literature indicates that there are four potential interrelated reasons for the establishment of one-stop shops:

1. Enhanced co-ordination across and within levels of government
2. Holistic user-friendly, and user-orientated service
3. Integrated multi-policy service delivery
4. As a possible mechanism for joined-up government services (Askim et al., 2011[2])

In addition to the above, one-stop shops are often established in part as a means to reduce both regulatory and administrative burdens. These are rationales as to why governments might introduce one-stop shops to adapt and improve the provision of public services. From an economic perspective, the main rationale for introducing one-stop shops is to improve overall economic welfare, via reduced transaction costs. Transaction costs tend to be disproportionately greater for SMEs, and thus negatively affect competition and societal welfare. Separately, there are costs associated with unstructured, difficult to navigate government services for citizens. These difficulties provide a justification for improving the provision of various government services where appropriate.

The first point to note is that one-stop shops are extremely diverse. They can operate in seemingly quite discrete policy areas or geographical locations for instance; and at the same time there are one-stop shops with more than 10 000 staff responsible for delivering a whole suite of government services. There are additional differences in terms of scope, purpose, and communication tools used by various one-stop shops. The design, operation and improvement of these vastly different models pose a number of unique challenges for governments, as well as for clients, that is, the users of the services. The principles below recognise these often vast differences and should therefore be viewed more as offering general advice to countries rather than anything prescriptive. It also needs to be recalled that the relative importance of particular principles may well change over time. Thus the principles attempt to cover issues associated with the main stages of one-stop shops through their establishment, operation, and continual improvement.

A one-stop shop brings together a range of information requirements in a physical and/or virtual location. Physical one-stop shops can deliver several public services under the same roof. Governments implement a network of offices where citizens and businesses can carry out a number of transactions with the administration. This is the case for example in Hungary where all available services are listed in a government decree (Government of Hungary, 2019[3]). One-stop shop offices can be created at new or existing government facilities, or utilising the network of offices of other public entities.

Some countries have implemented informational one-stop shops that may also provide advice and guidance to carry out various transactions with the administration, but usually the objective of physical one-stop shops is the delivery of public services. Two basic models exist:

- *Individual services* – Different government entities are present at the one-stop shop providing their own services. Normally each entity has its own separate counter where its officials and public servants deliver the services.

- *Integrated services* – The provision of services tend be based on a single life event (e.g. "having a child", "starting a business", etc.), so that a single official can resolve all the transactions with the citizen or the business in a holistic manner.

The main model of online one-stop shops are based on providing either individual or integrated services (or both), based on user needs. They generally tend to be central "umbrella" portals across all government, although more specialised ones can exist in concert with other individually focussed one-stop shops. Usually there is an amount of central management and oversight which ensures that service delivery

transitions seamlessly for users (that is, websites have a similar look and feel), depending on the services required. These types of one-stop shops are the most comprehensive in terms of services offered.

The scope of services is not limited to central governments' procedures – one-stop shop offices can provide services from regional and local governments. The configuration of the offices and the services provided does not necessarily have to be homogeneous across the country, and therefore each office might be adapted to the local demand, the availability of resources and the collaboration with other entities at the local level.

One-stop shops generally provide information and/or serve as a transaction centre:

- Information gateways disseminate information across a physical counter and/or through an online website on the formalities required to deal with the public administration.
- Single authorities or single windows allow users to carry out transactions with the public administration and apply for different services. Users generally do not have to interact with different agencies, as the single window acts as a third-party that provides the services that users require. This model could be physical, with the creation of a network of offices where businesses and users can deal with the administration, virtual, where a unified website provides e-Government services, or a combination of the two.

One-stop shops can be general or specialised in nature. General one-stop shops handle the procedures of a whole domain (e.g. services for businesses), whereas specialised one-stop shops deal with a particular set of procedures (e.g. business start-up). These services can potentially co-exist.

The experiences of virtual one-stop shops in different countries have been diverse and adapted to the structure of the government, the legal framework, the existing ICT infrastructure and other specific characteristics of the country. There are two basic models for the internet one-stop shop:

- Informational websites offering information about the different procedures to be carried out, to comply with the administration's regulations. Additionally, users can interact with the administration in getting answers to their questions, download paper-based forms, and follow links to specific agency websites where they can complete regulatory procedures online. With this model, information can be pooled from different agencies by a central organisation, or a distribution model can be created, in which the different government entities can include information in the system.
- Transactional websites where users can complete procedures online, dealing with several government agencies in a seamless process. Depending on the level of sophistication of the interactions between the IT systems of the agencies involved, several types of solutions can be implemented (Box 1.1).

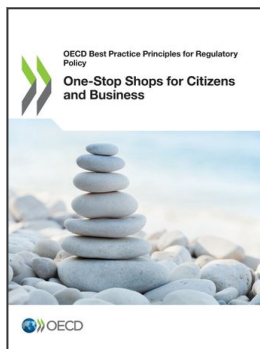> **Box 1.1. Types of virtual transactional websites**
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> Virtual, transaction-based one-stop shops can have the following underpinning features:
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> - *Interconnectivity between e-Government websites* – The one-stop shop service receives information relating to the citizen or business and then redirects the user to different agency websites passing on the received information, so data common to several procedures (general information) is required only once. In some cases, user interfaces can be designed following a set of predefined principles, having a common look and feel, in a way that the users do not realise that they are visiting different agency websites.
> - *Interoperability between e-Government services.* The one-stop shop integrates the systems of the different agencies involved in the process. The user only needs to use the one-stop shop web application, and this application communicates with other government agencies to perform the necessary transactions. Typically, an interoperability model is usually implemented across different agencies, creating common processes, and implementing standard technical infrastructure.
> - *Unified application models.* A more sophisticated approach taken by some countries has been to create a standard model and infrastructure for e-Government services for the different government agencies to use. A government agency creates a set of e Government services, web applications and the technical infrastructure that support these services and applications, and then publishes the specifications, so that other agencies can implement services on this platform following a defined model. In some cases, mechanisms exist to share data, and there can be common databases with standard data about citizens or businesses.
> - *Decentralised application models.* These have aspects of unified application models in terms of the existence of a central model and associated infrastructure for other agencies to use. However they go beyond this by decentralising responsibility for service delivery. This is usually done through providing a common publishing platform for informational content (that is, one website, multiple authors), whilst allowing for customised service delivery comprising one single entry point with organisation-specific responsibility for service delivery. They also adopt a common design language and brand to inform the design of page level service interactions, coupled with the availability of reusable tools and services for dealing with particular parts of users' journeys (e.g. identity, payments, messaging, hosting, appointment booking, performance publishing). Finally, they have a data infrastructure that provides for application programming interfaces (APIs) for retrieving information and/or validating inputs that may or may not include an interoperability platform.

The principles that follow are based on a literature review and input from other international organisations. They have also benefited from work undertaken across the OECD including through reviews of regulatory policy and digital government. A number of the principles are closely related to each other. This reflects the fact that the principles attempt to cover the inception, design, operation, and review of one-stop shops. As a result, the overarching principles are referred to throughout the document, and a number of the specific principles are themselves linked.

References

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