www.unece.org/index.php?id=33850

Innovation is traditionally thought of as the province of the business sector, with the government responsible for creating a business climate friendly to innovators. However, public expenditure accounts for between a third and over half of Gross Domestic Product in the countries of the UNECE region. Innovation, therefore, has to be a policy focus in the public sector as well, if countries want to reap the full benefits innovation can provide in terms of sustainable prosperity and better solutions for social and environmental challenges.

To promote innovation in the public sector, UNECE organized an international conference in Geneva on 10-11 October 2013, as part of its programme on knowledge-based development.

Some of the key policy messages from this conference included:

High-level political backing is essential to drive innovation in the public sector – possibly more so than in the private sector.
Public sector innovators, or public "intrapreneurs", often face constitutional, legal and political constraints which reduce their willingness and ability to bear risks and to tolerate failure.
Innovation in the public sector, therefore, requires appropriate institutional and organizational incentives and safeguards, including "hold harmless" structures which ensure that failure will not cause unacceptable losses or costs.
To unlock the full potential of public sector innovation, the public sector needs to engage end users in both design and implementation of policies (co-creation and co-production). There is a need to be citizen-centric, and to embrace a culture of transparency and accountability.
The most advanced public sector innovation programmes use electronic means of communication to create platforms for genuine two-way interaction between the public sector and citizens.
Citizen participation holds the promise of not only delivering public services more efficiently, but also of creating public services which meet the real needs of citizens, of identifying "chain deficiencies" which may compromise service delivery, and of enabling citizens to create their own services based on government inputs (such as open government data).

Conference discussions covered the main motivations for the public sector to innovate; the main differences between innovation in the private sector and innovation in the public sector, and their implications for policies to promote innovation in the public sector; as well as the need to measure the extent and impact of innovation in the public sector and the conceptual and data limitations facing this effort.

Case studies were presented: on the use of new electronic technologies to increase efficiency and to improve design and delivery of public services; on design as a method of innovation; on innovation in government-citizen transactions, procurement, health, and mobility; and on community involvement and citizen participation.

Discussions showed that there are considerable differences across countries regarding policies to promote innovation in the public sector. Some are at relatively early stages where, for instance, information and communication technologies are deployed to improve the delivery of selected public services. Others have embraced new ways of designing public services, and have begun to create systematic innovation programmes, some of them led by dedicated entities at a high government level. However, it was clear that, overall, innovation in the public sector is still a relatively young field. This is reflected in the fact that public sector innovation has yet to be fully integrated into national innovation policies - even in the most advanced countries. Most countries also have yet to mainstream innovation across all departments and levels of government. This diversity of experiences underlines the importance of international cooperation to provide a platform for cross-border policy learning.

The Conference on Innovation in the Public Sector brought together some 90 experts from almost 30 countries, as well as representatives of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social

Affairs, the International Telecommunications Union, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Trade Organization, and the European Commission.

Conference materials are available at: http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=33189

For more information, contact: Ralph Heinrich +41 (0)22 917 1269