

Editorial

E-Government Access Remains Top Challenge

The UN's annual E-Government report provides valuable insights into how its 191 members are employing opportunities offered by ICT to improve the "access and quality of basic social services for sustainable human development." Not surprisingly, e-readiness rankings confirm advances by industrialized nations, but reveal that some possibly unexpected countries are in the top ranks, such as Chile, Malta, Estonia, and Iceland. The overall conclusions on the state of E-Government, however, point to several important challenges facing almost all central governments. Briefly, these are: (1) underutilization of ICT for E-Government development; (2) the digital divide is growing not only by regions but also within countries; and (3) the need to rethink development strategies towards building knowledge societies.

The E-APEC Strategy represents more than E-Government, although initially this brings together a comprehensive set of policy actions required to make economies more productive and efficient and more able to provide services to the community. APEC's 23 economies can be seen as a rather diverse group, from the US and Canada to Korea, Chile and Thailand. In addition, the strategy is intended to "provide a means to achieve an open and seamless trading environment, to establish a good governance and transparency, to open

more opportunities for small business and to give more choice to consumers and the labor force." More specifically, E-Government is seen to provide new avenues for delivering information, education, health and other government services to people at lower cost.

A progress report describes advancements in the e-Europe Action Plan and Ministerial declaration confirming commitments to making e-Government a reality. The US Federal Government recently passed the second anniversary of the E-Government Act intended to improve delivery of electronic services. Because e-Government very much impacts traditional government bureaucratic procedures, it comes as no surprise that challenges to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) remain, such as reducing redundancy, facilitating horizontal and vertical information sharing, establishing direct relationships between IT and program missions, and achieving better results from IT investments. Much of the attention in every country involves access to the Internet and indeed to government websites. In this issue the status reports on Europe and the US provide a number of websites offering readers a wealth of information.

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