

MATTERS	ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM POLICIES
COUNTRY	FRANCE
TITLE	FORUM ON SIMPLIFICATION

ABSTRACT

Minister for the Civil Service and State Reform Renaud Dutreil and Junior Minister for State Reform Eric Woerth have declared war on needless bureaucratic procedures that generate annoying red tape. They want to make life easier for French citizens, unshackle business creativity, and facilitate the activities of municipalities and community organizations via a sweeping simplification of the legal framework and administrative procedures.

In April 2005, the two ministers convened a “forum on simplification” (assises de la simplification) in order to collect suggestions from civil society – particularly those of very small enterprises, international investors, private individuals, small towns and not-for-profit organizations – to discuss the proposed changes and identify those most in demand through a vote by participants, and, in this way, to develop a prioritized action plan for the government’s third series of simplification measures.

FULL TEXT DOCUMENT

1. The context

Who has never complained about the excessive formality, the slowness or the lack of transparency involved in official administrative procedures? The need for simplification is pressing. The French president and government wish to initiate a far-reaching, sustained and comprehensive process to simplify French law. To this end, a series of bills have been introduced empowering the government to simplify whole sections of legislation.

A first measure (the Act of 2 July 2003) launched the broad process of administrative simplification. It had three objectives: to make daily life easier for French citizens, to unleash the country’s energy, and to modernize the machinery of government, in particular by eliminating various administrative committees that had outlived their purpose.

A second law (the Act of 9 December 2004) continued and extended these simplification efforts: streamlining of procedures for users of government services, such as those involving building permits, individual housing allowances, gifts and bequests to not-for-profit organizations; establishment of an online service for notification of address changes and creation of a single computer file for personal information (in paperless form only); specific measures for companies and improvement of the guarantees provided to taxpayers and contributors to social welfare schemes; and reorganization of public surveys. Other simplification activities are not governed by this law but are implemented through the adoption of better management practices.

A third bill is in the drafting stage, and an unusual method was employed to prepare for this third series of simplification measures: in order not to restrict the process to exchanges of ideas between central government bodies, the Minister for the Civil Service and State Reform and the Junior Minister for State Reform decided to consult users in order to identify the administrative difficulties they face. This consultation focused on a number of target groups: businesses (very small enterprises and international investors), private individuals (homemakers and elderly people), small towns, and not-for-profit community organizations. Committees headed by members of parliament were formed to serve as sources of proposals from outside the government.

The aim of the **forum on simplification** was to present these proposals and to identify those most in demand, via a vote by participants, in order to develop a prioritized action plan for the government’s third series of simplification measures.

2. The results of the participants' vote at the forum on simplification

Very small enterprises and international investors:

Very small enterprises (VSEs) and international investors play a key role in the country's economic development. Although cross-country studies show that France has real assets for attracting foreign capital, particularly its first-rate infrastructure and health system, further progress is needed in relations between private-sector firms and the authorities. The complexity of regulations was the most frequently cited source of administrative barriers, followed by the slow response times of administrative authorities.

Voting results	Actions to be taken
59%	Simplify the labour code for VSEs
19%	Simplify pay slips
11%	Streamline administrative controls on companies
11%	Require prompt written replies that are binding on the public authority

Users:

In general, users want public authorities to listen more closely to their concerns, to use clearer language and provide better explanations, and to pay more attention to special cases. These views were expressed in particular by homemakers and the elderly, two groups that are more dependent on public authorities and often less apt to exercise their rights. The authorities must streamline their administrative procedures by establishing one-stop service points and a single file per individual, by reducing the number of supporting documents required, and by processing cases more quickly.

Voting results	Actions to be taken
46%	Create a single contact point and single file for applications for reduced-rent public housing (<i>habitation à loyer modéré</i> , or HLM)
39%	Harmonize civil periods of limitation for document preservation (currently, the required periods are 10 years for bank statements, five years for electricity bills, four years for municipal water bills, two years for private water bills, and one year for telephone bills etc.)
11%	Modernize the "large families" card (entitling family members to reduced train fares etc.)
4%	Allow users to choose the means of payment with regard to public authorities (cheques or credit/debit cards)

Problems of local elected officials and heads of not-for-profit organizations:

Local officials, particularly small-town mayors, and the heads of small community organizations are particularly affected by bureaucratic complexities, but do not have the resources needed to resolve the resulting problems internally. All official documents, however minor, require at least two signatures (one to validate the document and a second to certify that it has been sent to the prefecture).

Voting results	Actions to be taken
28%	A single subsidy application file that is common to all financing bodies, simplification of administrative formalities, and more flexible attribution rules
24%	Clarify the presentation of small towns' budgets
24%	Clarify tax rules for not-for-profit organizations

17%	Simplify the rules governing small public contracts
7%	Reduce the mayor's signature obligations and broaden clerks' signing powers

3. Conclusion

Administrative simplification is part of a broader process of modernization that seeks to improve the performance of public services to optimize both their quality and the return on every euro expended. The aim is to build confidence in government on the basis of a few simple principles: clear, consistent rules, single application files, streamlined procedures, fewer supporting documents, faster decisions, and facilitation of payments.

CONTACT INFORMATION

<http://www.dusa.gouv.fr/>

E-mail

monique.liebert-champagne@dusa.pm.gouv.fr

yves.gallazzini@dusa.pm.gouv.fr