

# Open Government Case Study - Sample Case Submission Form

*[Open Data, Participation, Collaboration, Citizen Engagement, and Public Sector Innovation]*

## Important Information

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are conducting a joint study on the economic and social impact of open government for the Arab region. The study will reflect on literature review and previous studies and reports made by OECD and ESCWA and other organizations, and it will consider case studies and best practices from Arab and OECD countries. As such, and for the preparation of the study, this Sample Case Submission Form is intended to help the collection efforts for inspiring case studies and best practices from government entities and agencies in the Arab region. It should be noted that selected cases may be published within the ESCWA portal for the open government, which is under design and implementation, as well as the [OECD Open Government case platform](#)<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the relevant experiences will be featured in the planned Joint OECD-ESCWA meeting of the MENA Working Group on Open and Innovative Government this year, in coordination and collaboration with authorities concerned by these experiences.

The attached form serves as a submission form for open government activities that have been or are currently being developed and implemented at any level of government, and specifically those authorities that are working on open government development in the country, including local levels. The Case Study might cover one of the following topics: Open Government, Open Data, Stakeholder Participation, Collaboration, Citizen Engagement, Transparency, Accountability or Innovation in the Public Sector.

In the context of the attached form, an “activity” refers to any processes and actions taken to work towards the achievement of open government at national, area or local levels. An activity can consist of one or more actions. Participants can submit as many activities they wish, and it is preferable to choose activities with an economic or social impact. ESCWA will make the analysis of the contributions and may contact participants with follow-up questions.

To share a case, please complete the MS Word form, either in English or in Arabic, as many times as you wish. We must receive all submissions no later than [30/06/2020]. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to send an email to Ms. Nibal Idlebi, chief of Innovation at ESCWA (email: [idlebi@un.org](mailto:idlebi@un.org), & [escwa-tdd@un.org](mailto:escwa-tdd@un.org)) and to the OECD Open Government Unit ([Opengov@oecd.org](mailto:Opengov@oecd.org)).

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<sup>1</sup> [https://oecd-opsi.org/case\\_type/open-government/](https://oecd-opsi.org/case_type/open-government/)

## 1. Organisation Details

### 1.1. Organisation Name

*Syrian Virtual University*

### 1.2. Organisation Type

*[Government, NGO, International, Academia, Private Sector]*

*Public State University*

### 1.3. Country

*Syria*

### 1.4. Primary Sector

*[Economic affairs, Education, Public administration, Health, Transport, etc.]*

*Higher Education*

## 2. Activity Case Study

Now, we are going to ask you several questions about your activity. We are very excited to find out what you did, how you did it and who benefited from it. The more comprehensive your answers are, the easier it will be for the reviewers and readers to appreciate the aims and achievements of your activity.

### 2.1. Title

*[a title for your activity]*

*eLearning, Virtual Learning, Developing Digital Content*

### 2.2. Website

*[the website about your activity, if existed]*

*www.svuonline.org*

### 2.3. Year Your Activity was Put Into Practice

*2002*

### 2.4. Which of the following best describes your activity?

*[Please mark the main category]*

*Open Data*

*Participation*

*Collaboration*

*Citizen Engagement*

*Transparency*

*Accountability*

*Public Sector Innovation*

### 2.5. Summary (Short and Simple Explanation)

The summary should describe your activity and be short and simple (few sentences), and it should use clear language, compel the reader to continue reading, use simple, not sector-specific terminology (no idioms, slang, or domain-specific "buzz" words). The summary should answer the following questions:

- What the activity is?
- Why it was developed or the problem/opportunity being addressed?
- And who it benefitted?

*The activity focuses on eLearning, virtual learning and digital content enrichment and development, through Syrian Virtual University (SVU), a public state university with full academic accreditation. Since 2002, SVU introduces a new digital model of education in Syria, self-financed and based on learning with multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and interdisciplinary orientations and specializations. It provides also a model of what we called, fourth generation universities, which are in the heart of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the digital transformation era.*

### 2.6. Case Study Overview

The Overview is an overview of the activity and outcomes. You will have the opportunity to elaborate on some of the details. Please tell us:

- What problem the activity solves or what opportunity was taken advantage of
- What the activity is
- Objectives
- Beneficiaries
- How is it envisioned for the future? For example, how will it be institutionalised in its current context? How will it scale even bigger?

*The activity focuses on eLearning, virtual learning and digital content enrichment and development, through Syrian Virtual University (SVU), a public state university with full academic accreditation. Since 2002, SVU introduces a new digital model of education in Syria, self-financed and based on learning with multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and interdisciplinary orientations and specializations. It provides also a model of what we called, fourth generation universities, which are in the heart of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the digital transformation era.*

*With its slogan (Beyond Space and Time), the activity seeks to spread knowledge on the largest scale in Syria and worldwide, by adopting a new model of lifelong learning, giving opportunity to learners to obtain advanced knowledge and skills regardless their geographical positioning (rural or cities), their ages (All ages), or their gender (female or male). This flexible model allow learners to pursue their studies while keeping their jobs simultaneously since it seeks to transform the traditional teaching mechanisms to a new model of learning that is independent from time and space, based on digital content, open knowledge, and common creative content licensing.*

*Since this digital model of learning is different and unconventional, it faced many difficulties, challenges, rejection and reservation during the last two decades in Syria. This rejection was held mainly by a part of the academic Syrian body that: (1) Rejects transparency, and stand for long time against the digitization that could reveal faults, gaps, and issues; (2) Considers that digital technologies are only used within the limits of culture and entertainment, although it lives in a time when the "genes" of business, economics, science and education have become digital "genes"; (3) Doesn't acknowledge the concept of free information, open science, open content, and common creative, although he lives in an era of digital transformation in which the information (free by nature) is no longer important except in the context of knowledge generated by integrating it with other information.*

*The activity is steadily expanding via new academic and training programs offered by Syrian Virtual University, and through the new initiatives such as SVU open platform for academic content.*

## **2.7. What Makes Your Activity Different, Unique, or Innovative?**

*With its modern structure, its working mechanisms, and its learning approach, the Syrian Virtual University constitutes a new culture within the Syrian educational system.*

*This new culture: (1) Adopts the logic of learning instead of traditional education; (2) Presents an accredited model of e-learning considered as a pioneering model in the Arab region; (3) Guarantees quality standards, academic reliability, and full digital documentation for all kind of quality control measures; (4) Presents a self-financed model that belongs to the new model of digital knowledge economy.*

## **3. Development**

### **3.1. Collaborations & Partnerships**

Were there partners involved? Describe what each brought to the table and why it was important to the case. These may include: Citizens, Government officials, Civil society organisations, and Companies.

*Cooperation and partners:*

- *Ministries (telecommunication, tourism, administrative development)*
- *Syrian public and private universities*
- *Syrian public and private banks*
- *Synergy University (Russian)*
- *Saint Petersburg University (Russian)*
- *Association of Virtual Universities in the Islamic Cooperation Countries*
- *Damascus Centre for Research and Studies*
- *Syrian Computer Society*
- *The National Authority for Network Services in Syria*
- *The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority in Syria*
- *Distinction and Creativity Agency*
- *Academic electronic content development companies*
- *Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization*
- *Arab States Network for Research and Education*

### **3.2. Users, Stakeholders & Beneficiaries**

Who are the users, beneficiaries, and stakeholders targeted? How each group are affected. These may also include: Citizens, Government officials, Civil society organisations, and Companies.

- *Any learner who has the desire to complete his higher education with a focus on those who are present in the labour market and who have no ability to adhere to traditional education, or who have missed the opportunity to join traditional universities.*
- *Employees working in many public and private institutions who have special and favorite admission process at Syrian Virtual University.*
- *Full or partial scholarships (approved in 2017) for:*
  - ✓ *Students performing their military service in the Syrian armed forces.*
  - ✓ *Top graduates/students.*
  - ✓ *Families of martyrs.*
  - ✓ *War wounded.*
  - ✓ *Workers in partner institutions*

## **4. Reflections**

### **4.1. Results, Outcomes & Impact**

- What results and impacts have been observed from the activity so far?
- How have the results and impacts been measured (e.g., methodologies used)?
- What results and impacts do you expect in the future?
- To the extent possible, please indicate the tangible or numeric results.

*After 9 years of war, there are no reliable statistics concerning the Syrian labour Market and the distribution of university graduates within this market. However, in 2018 an internal questionnaire at SVU showed that 70% of SVU students are present in the labour market, which is normal regarding to the preference giving during the admission process -especially in master programs- to workers in public and private institutions and corporates.*

*The steady increase in the numbers of students, which moved from 200 students in 2002 to 12,000 students in 2011 and to 35,000 students in 2020, is a first indication of the spread of this type of activity.*

*The new academic programs opened at SVU during the last decade, is another indication. SVU started its learning activity with a single program of 2 years in Management & Technology (called National Higher Diploma) in 2002. At 2005 SVU started two other bachelor degrees (Information Technology Engineering, and Bachelor in Information Technology). Actually, SVU activity involves 8 bachelor degrees and 8 master degrees and 2 PhD degrees in IT and in Business Management.*

*The University has also provided since 2017, 300 full scholarships and 500 partial scholarships to students belonging different programs.*

### **4.2. Challenges**

- What challenges have been encountered?

- What failures have been encountered along the way (e.g., structural failures or significant setbacks)?
- And how, if at all, have those challenges and/or failures been responded to?

*Since 2002, and relating to its nature, SVU adopted the digitization and the automation of all its administrative and academic activities. However, SVU is not an isolated island but rather part of the Syrian administrative and governmental system. In fact, it was difficult to go always beyond the mechanisms of governmental work and override the administrative standards that govern the work of the public sector in Syria. Thus, SVU was forced to return to administrative paperwork in a part of its administrative activities without achieving the ambition to reach the model of (zero paper).*

*The university suffered from the conservative culture of the Syrian academic system, where important part of professors rejects the e-learning model. It also suffered from the outdated Syrian educational culture based on indoctrination instead of knowledge spreading.*

*To address these challenges, the university mainly seeks to spread the culture of its model in learning and working through its 500 tutors, members of the Syrian educational body from various Syrian universities. Those tutors who are working with SVU and use its learning system, constitute about 5% of the educational body in Syria.*

#### **4.3. Conditions for Success**

What conditions do you think are necessary for the success of your activity? Conditions for success may include:

- Supporting infrastructure and services
- Policy and rules
- Leadership and guidance
- Human and financial resources
- Personal values and motivation

*All the previously mentioned points of supporting infrastructures and services, flexible policies and systems in addition to the human resources that are familiar with the technical and digital environment, are necessary conditions for the success of our system.*

*Actually, it is not possible for Syrian universities to implement large scale eLearning educational system (with virtual classrooms environments) without making considerable development in their IT infrastructure.*

*All of the above is not possible without guaranteeing additional financial resources in order to establish a modern infrastructure and motivating human resources.*

#### **4.4. Replication**

Has the activity been replicated to address similar problems? If so, how? In your opinion, what is the potential for it to be further replicated in the future? You may wish to discuss how the activity has already been used by others, as well as how you believe it could be used by others in the future. These others may be in: Other organisations, within your organisation, larger or smaller agencies, organisations or governments.

*Spreading digital culture in higher education was carried out by supporting other activities where the Syrian Virtual University contributed scientifically, financially and academically. Among these sub-activities:*

- *The local competition of ICPC (International Collegiate Programming Contest) for Syrian universities during 2017-2018, and adopting e-training model as a part of the training process of ICPC. Moreover, SVU wins the ACPC (Arabic Collegiate Programming Contest) 2018, and was positioned in the 23th position between 170 universities in the ICPC competition that took place in Beijing in 2018.*
- *The Second Conference of Arabic digital content which focused on the importance and the role of digital content as a basis for the knowledge industry.*
- *The first Arab digital content competition.*
- *The Programming marathon for children and adolescents.*
- *Providing an open educational content under Common Creative licence.*

#### **4.5. Lessons Learned**

What lessons from your experience would you like to share with others like you? Where there any pitfalls to avoid?

*In any technology-based activity that seeks to be a part of digital transformation, the key word for success remains "digital content," a real treasure that should be considered as the first concern in any development of such activity. The experience of Syrian virtual university proves this idea, since the development of the virtual learning system (with all its component) accompanied the increase in size and quality of the scientific, educational and administrative digital content generated and invested by different stockholders (Students, Tutors, and Administrates). The lesson learned is not limited to the education sector, but could be extended to all economic, cultural, entertainment, and other sectors, This work remains, cumulative, but it can be accomplished in Syria within few years by finding flexible support mechanisms and concerted efforts of several sectors in order to develop a Syrian policy for digital content as part of a national policy for digital transformation and as a support for the e-government project*

#### 4.6. Anything Else

Is there any other information you would like to share about the activity?

*Since the middle of the twentieth century, the world has been aware of the importance of investing in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary education in order to develop researches with hybrid nature such as researches related to bioinformatics and human genome, related to electronic legislation, or related to technology management. The Syrian higher education system with its conservative logic remained out of this development, and remained attached to one form of specialized education that imprison the learner in his unique specialization for many years, in a world of multidisciplinary business. Our educational system also dealt negligently with all types of inter of multi of trans disciplines and considered them as a second-degree specialization. This have actually a very bad result either on the academic or on the professional body in Syria.*

## 5. Materials

### 5.1. Materials

Do you have online materials you would like to include with your submission? Please use the fields below to insert your links.

Link for images

<https://www.svuonline.org/en/svu-media/acnc-opening-ceremony>  
<https://www.svuonline.org/en/svu-media/acnc-lectures>  
<https://www.svuonline.org/en/svu-media/dac-2019-closing-ceremony>

Link for supporting files

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGDo2C5F9-0>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhhwhbCrKpo>

Project-Related Video URL 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdAffZyVa8k>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2CK\\_Jh-DII](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2CK_Jh-DII)  
<https://www.svuonline.org/ar/videos/arabic-digital-content>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ymy\\_cNWtFc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ymy_cNWtFc)

Other related URL

<https://www.svuonline.org/en/svu-activities>

**5.2. Could you give us the permission to republish the data and information, or part of them, included in this form?**

Yes

**5.3. Please provide the correct reference for re-publishing purposes.**

Syrian Virtual University  
[www.svuonline.org](http://www.svuonline.org)  
 Dr. Khalil AJAMI  
 Eng. Salma Kabbani