



eGovernment in the European Union

The Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment approved in Malmo, Sweden on 18 November 2009 established the policy priorities for European eGovernment, with the goal of making European governments more open, flexible and collaborative. The subsequent 2011-2015¹ Action Plan, which has just expired, outlined four main political priorities: empowering citizens and businesses through the provision of eGovernment services, enhancing mobility in the Single Market, greater streamlining of administrative processes and improving organisational processes.

As part of the strategy to create a Digital Single Market for Europe unveiled on 6 May 2015², the European Commission began drawing up a new 2016-2020 Action Plan in July 2015.

Governance serving European citizens and the market

Of the numerous eGovernment programmes being launched, the most noteworthy are:

- e-SENS³ (Electronic Simple European Networked Services), involving eighteen EU Member States, Norway and Turkey to facilitate access to online public services, to promote interoperability between the various national systems and to develop generic solutions that can be rolled out and used for eGovernment services.

e-Codex, to facilitate the online processing of the increasing number of cross-border proceedings, especially in civil, criminal and commercial matters. On 10 June 2015, the project's 24 stakeholders announced the launch of the Standalone Connector, a secure solution for the digital transmission of sensitive data in judicial cases. It is especially interesting for small EU Member States with a low volume of cross-border cases that do not have their own transmission system. It has also been decided that citizens may in future use the e-Justice⁴ portal to lodge complaints.

- EpSOS (European Patients Smart Open Services) is designed to promote the cross-border exchange of personal health data and the use of electronic prescription services. It also aims to create patient summaries to avoid repeating diagnostic procedures and to facilitate the treatment of patients when they visit another EU Member State. The Czech Republic is leading the way in this area, introducing eHealthcare⁵ services in 2003. At the end of 2014, 2.5 million people had signed up for the service out of a total population of 10.5 million. This has generated almost 200 million online documents used by 20,000 healthcare professionals. The service really took off in 2009 with the creation of a dedicated website⁶ for patients to register online; smartphone access to the site became available in 2014.

All of these programmes are compatible with the various official document formats, electronic signatures and identity cards that currently exist. Progress can still be made, however, by improving their cross-border interoperability.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0743:FIN:EN:PDF>

² http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/digital-single-market/docs/dsm-communication_fr.pdf

³ <http://www.esens.eu/how-will-e-sens-achieve-its-goals/>

⁴ <https://e-justice.europa.eu/home.do?plang=fr&action=home>

⁵ <http://esante.gouv.fr/le-mag-numero-8/la-republique-tcheque-resolument-sur-la-voie-de-la-e-sante>

⁶ <http://www.izip.cz/system-izip/regitrace/chci-zdravotni-knizku>

ISA Programme⁷: cross-border interoperability solutions

Since the 1980s, ICT systems have been implemented to connect the European Commission to member state governments and businesses in specific areas, including customs documentation, Eurostat and public procurement markets. Interoperability was introduced by the IDABC⁸ Programme between 2004 and 2009. Its successor, ISA 2011-2015, aims to identify and develop the key components of interoperability and to foster a common approach by rolling these components out over the long term. Semantic interoperability is a key area. Based on language barrier statistics, ISA developed the Machine Translation Service (MT@EC)⁹ Programme between 2012 and 2014. The Service can be used to translate official EU documents and is available for use by all EU civil servants.

Another key component of interoperability is opening up access to base registries¹⁰ which contain basic and reliable government data. ISA has so far tested 17 initiatives for opening up access to base registries, including 8 cross-sectoral and 9 cross-national. The next steps will focus on the use of common vocabulary and harmonised, multilingual architectures, and on the promotion of reusable lexical fields, such as “enterprise”, “location” and “person”. As regards electronic payment systems, the programme has discovered that several transnational systems already exist and that an interoperable system must be found among them. The European Commission issued a proposal in May 2014¹¹ to run a second phase of the ISA Programme, known as ISA2, from 2016 to 2020. €131 million has been earmarked for this purpose.

eGovernment in Europe: a mirror for development gaps among Member States

Every year, the European Commission produces an eGovernment factsheet for individual Member States¹². Figures for 2015 point towards a two-speed EU: on average, 47% of citizens use the internet for interacting with public authorities, but in Iceland, Denmark and the Netherlands, this figure rises to 85%, 84% and 75% respectively, compared to 23%, 21% and 10% respectively in Italy, Bulgaria and Romania.

The gap is just as wide if we look at how many citizens use the internet to send official documents or forms to public authorities, or how many use the internet to download official documents. Most Member States in eastern Europe are struggling to keep up with their north-western counterparts in this respect. The European Commission and the ISA2 Programme will both try to help them close this gap in order to improve digital governance across the entire European Union.

Marie Coanet

⁷ ISA: Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations: <http://ec.europa.eu/isa/>
⁸ IDABC: Interoperable Delivery of European e-Government Services to public Administrations, Businesses, Citizens.
⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/isa/documents/publications/brochure-mt@ec-a5-v3_en.pdf
¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/isa/actions/01-trusted-information-exchange/1-2action_en.htm
¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/isa/documents/press-releases/faster-better-public-services-for-businesses-and-citizens_en.pdf
¹² https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/community/nifo/og_page/egovernment-factsheets