

e-Government Review 2003-04



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ABSTRACT

Milestones in the development of e-government services in the United Kingdom, Europe and the world throughout the past year.

In July 2003 ministers of EU governments, together with accession countries and members of the European Free Trade Association meeting in Como, Italy, endorsed a pan-European e-government agenda. The Como declaration established priorities and actions for speeding up progress of cross-border e-government services.

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THE YEAR IN EUROPE

In July 2003 ministers of EU governments, together with accession countries and members of the European Free Trade Association meeting in Como, Italy, endorsed a pan-European e-government agenda. The Como declaration (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/como1>) established priorities and actions for speeding up progress of cross-border e-government services.

In July the UK government set up an online forum (<http://www.europe.gov.uk>) to help shape the UK's approach to the EU intergovernmental conference. It allowed citizens to discuss the draft EU constitution with MPs, government ministers and officials leading the negotiations on the future of Europe. The Foreign Office-hosted forum was divided into strands for discussing issues such as rights; constitutional reform; defense and security; foreign policy; terrorism; crime; asylum and immigration; and closer ties between EU bodies and national parliaments.

Local government services are to become accessible to smartcard holders across Europe under a plan announced in September 2003 by eEurope Smartcards (eESC <http://www.eeurope-smartcards.org>), an organization funded by the European Commission to promote international collaboration. Pilot projects in France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Spain and the UK had begun to develop smartcards, which provide access to services such as public transport, leisure, tax payments and digital certificates; and tested secure authentication technologies needed for digital identity cards. The "eEpoch" programme was set to decide on the technology and security standards needed for a demonstrator card to be interoperable across all six countries (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/eepoch1>).

In October 2003 the European Commission said that face recognition should be the standard biometric technology used for travel visas and residence permits. A proposal was submitted to the European Parliament for consideration (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/face1>).

The European Commission's official annual benchmarking survey "Public services in Europe survey" (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/euro3>), conducted by Cap Gemini Ernst and Young and published in February 2004, found that 45% of public services across Europe were fully transactional online.

Of the 18 countries surveyed, sophistication of online services continued to be most advanced in Sweden, followed by Denmark, Ireland, Austria and Finland. However, the rate of progress tended to

vary greatly between countries, and Spain and Greece were both almost static.

Europa, the EU's eight-year-old internet portal, received a face-lift to coincide with the accession of 10 new member states on 1 May 2004. The upgrade involved adding new languages, redesigning the home page and modernizing the site's content management procedures. The site contained some 2.5 million pages of information. One aim of the change was to attract more traffic to the site: the European Commission said the new site would help inform the 72% of Europeans who knew little or nothing about the EU.

AUSTRIA

Citizens with wireless-enabled computers received free wireless access to ".gov.at" government websites early in 2004 via a national network of Wi-Fi hotspots. The country claimed to be one of the world's leaders in the density of hotspots provided, with 350 hotspots, due to grow to 400 by the end of 2004 thanks to a partnership agreement with T-Mobile.

BELGIUM

The Belgian electronic ID card was officially launched in 2003 with the issue of cards to civil servants working on the pilot project. The smartcard was due to replace paper ID cards over five years, making Belgium the first European state to issue electronic ID cards to the entire population. The government estimated the cost at 100 million. The card, containing two electronic signatures, was designed to be the main identification and authentication instrument for accessing e-government services.

DENMARK

The Danish government declared 1 September 2003 to be a special "eDay" in the public sector. On this day a measure came into force thought to be the first of its kind in the world which gives all central and local government organizations in Denmark the general right to communicate electronically with each other through email, electronic document management, and other systems (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/denmark1>).

The Ministry of Finance's Digital Taskforce estimated that the transfer to internal digital communication would save nearly 25 million in the first year, 5.6 million on postage alone. More than 300 tones of paper would disappear from government offices.

FINLAND

Plans to create electronic identities for all citizens have been making progress over the past year. The country's Population Register Centre released open source code to third parties to speed up the use of electronic identities. The Cooperative Banks Group announced that it

would use the identifier in all its smart cards; and mobile phone operator Sonera started test use of the electronic ID in its SIM cards.

Corporate use of public e-services in the country was increasing, with about 50,000 Finnish companies using digital methods to interact with public sector bodies in 2002, according to figures released by the government agency Statistics Finland. Most of the 5.5 million messages exchanged between companies and authorities were for tax administration (*see <http://fastlink.headstar.com/fin2>*).

FRANCE

In February 2004 the government unveiled a new e-government strategy aimed at enabling citizens to conduct all business with government over the phone or online by 2006. The strategy, known as "ADELE" or "ADministration ELEctronique", was first announced by Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, who reproached his civil servants for moving too slowly in this area. Raffarin said that e-government was a "major tool for state reform" and set a target of 5 billion of annual savings for the government by 2007.

The 1.8 billion ADELE programme has three strategic objectives: to simplify administrative procedures for French citizens, businesses and local authorities; to guarantee data security and confidentiality through the use of secure user identification systems; and to modernize public services (*see <http://fastlink.headstar.com/adele1>*).

The Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry said that 601,025 tax returns were submitted online during 2003, a five-fold increase since 2002 and exceeding the target of 500,000 set at the beginning of the year.

Personalized e-government services came a step closer when the Agency for the Development of Electronic Administration began work on a new government portal [mon.service-public.fr](http://www.service-public.fr) (*<http://www.service-public.fr>*).

GERMANY

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and heads of the German Länder or state governments agreed in December 2003 on a common e-government strategy entitled "DeutschlandOnline". The new strategy was designed to overcome the barriers between local, state and federal administrations that had long held up Germany's progress in e-government. Under DeutschlandOnline, federal government, Länder and municipalities agreed to work together to bring faster, more consistent and more efficient services to citizens and businesses.

The strategy identifies five priorities for cooperation: development of e-services for citizens and businesses; interconnection of internet portals; development of common infrastructure; development of common standards; improvement of experience; and knowledge exchange. E-government applications developed by one agency would be made available to all partners, and model solutions created by coordinating procedures and bundling resources.

A mid-term evaluation by the federal government's BundOnline initiative found that 232 of the 440 services due to be online by 2005 were already available by 2004. Göttrik Wewer, the State Secretary responsible for e-government said that the BundOnline initiative was running fully on schedule.

Open source software dominated much of the German government IT agenda, both at local and federal level. The city of Munich decided to migrate its 14,000 workstations to Linux following a vote in the council, controlled by the Social Democratic (SPD) and Green parties.

The decision by Germany's third largest city was expected to lead to a spate of other Linux migrations. Federal Interior Minister Otto Schily backed the use of open source at a 2003 press conference held to mark the first anniversary of an agreement signed with IBM to promote the use of open source software across the German government.

IRELAND

Hopes of creating the "public services broker", a long-delayed one-stop citizen information service in Ireland (<http://www.reach.ie>), came a step closer to reality when the government awarded a contract worth 15 million to BearingPoint (formerly KPMG Consulting) in January 2004.

The Irish government is considering plans to install broadband wireless equipment in its parliament building, which will enable MPs and senators to access the network from their laptops while on the move (see <http://www.europemedia.net/shownews.asp?ArticleID=15493>).

ITALY

In January 2004, Minister for Innovation and Technology, Lucio Stanca, set up a commission for technological innovation to foster cooperation between central government and all local authorities (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/stanca1>). The body is intended to become the single point of contact between municipalities and central government in the field of e-government development. Stanca said that the government wants the country to move towards an "efficient federalism" in which public services will be effective, simple and transparent.

NETHERLANDS

According to "Overheid.nl Monitor 2003", the country's fifth annual e-government progress report, the Netherlands was already ahead of its target to provide 35% of government services online by 2003 (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/neth1>). However, much still remained to be done in areas such as user-friendliness, transactional services and e-democracy.

The report was based on a survey of 1124 government websites that were scored for user-friendliness, general information, government information, government services, and scope for participation (interactive

policy making). Researchers also measured the e-mail response time of government websites and users' satisfaction. It concluded that e-government information and services remained difficult to find and that virtually no full electronic trans- actions were available.

A project to develop artificial intelligence software to analyze the wording of new legislation for internal conflicts, coherence and consistency with existing laws, may be extended to lawmakers across Europe and the European Commission. The E-POWER project (<http://www.lri.jur.uva.nl/~epower>) is run by a consortium that includes the Dutch government, the University of Amsterdam and private sector partners.

PORTUGAL

The Portuguese government conducted its first pilot e-procurement auction in December 2003, for the supply of paper. According to the innovation unit UMIC, the exercise cut the monthly paper bill by 25%. It said the government was in line to cut between 10% and 20% on public procurement costs between 2003 and 2006, by when it would carry out some 50% of its procurement electronically.

SPAIN

Javier Arenas, Minister of Public Administration, launched a new version of the state e-government portal "administracion.es". The content, ergonomics and navigation of the portal were reviewed and enriched, taking into account lessons learned from the previous version, and comments and suggestions from users. The portal had about 30,000 pages and more than 7000 links. The government published a "blitz" action plan ("plan de choque") for the rapid development of online services (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/choque1>).

The action plan is a simplified and strengthened version of its much-criticized predecessor, "Plan de acción info XXI 2001-2003". Some 19 new measures were to be introduced over the next two years, including an electronic identification card, online change-of-address notification, job search facilities, and online applications for passports and driving licenses.

SWITZERLAND

A survey published by the Bern University of Applied Sciences (<http://www.bfh.ch>) and IT company Unisys revealed that, although there is a strong demand for e-government in Switzerland, many citizens were either unaware of the currently available e-services or deterred by persisting privacy and security concerns. The eGovernment Trend Barometer (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/swiss1>) found that although 80% of respondents had access to the internet and more than 75% said they used the internet several times a week, only 12% said they "regularly" used e-government. Only 7% of respondents said they knew of the Federal e-government portal (<http://www.ch.ch>), launched three years previously.

UNITED KINGDOM

This was the year when the government devised a new brand name for itself on the web: Directgov is a new portal containing primary information and secondary links to information and services from across government.

The service was unveiled as a replacement to the previous web portal, UK online. This means that the government's flagship web presence no longer has to carry the embarrassing caveat: "The government-backed service UK online should not be confused with the Internet Service Provider UK Online". The old name had understandably caused a good deal of annoyance to that particular internet service provider. The government also announced that the agency that sponsors UK Online and Directgov, the Office of the e- Envoy, is in line for a name change of its own, to the Office of E-Government. The e-Envoy Andrew Pinder would be replaced by a new appointee, a 'chief information officer' for government with the title 'head of e-government'. However, the exact nature of the role was initially unclear, especially as the appointment was set to coincide with the implementation of major civil service reforms, including the merging of HM Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue.

Although most public bodies remained focused on the target of having all services available electronically by the end of 2005, four local authorities (Birmingham, Newcastle, Surrey and Tameside) announced that they had already reached the target with more than a year to spare. Central government was a little behind, with 66% of services online.

Some long-standing structural obstacles to e-government progress, including electronic authentication of users and data sharing within organizations, continued to frustrate many projects. However, there were encouraging signs that people were starting to use e-government. The Office for National Statistics reported that 47% of Britain's internet users had used the web to contact the government or other public body. The Driving Standards Agency found that 28% of people booked their driving tests online within weeks of the service's low-profile launch. And 25% of self assessment taxpayers filed their return electronically on the Inland Revenue's revamped website.

Other major developments included the steady progress of the NHS national programme for IT, which has overturned past perceptions of the time needed to procure £1 billion worth of government IT systems. The short and tragic life of Victoria Climbié continued to cast a long shadow over health and social care policy, resulting in steps towards the establishment of identification, referral and tracking systems supposed to flag up concerns about the welfare of every child in a geographical community.

And everywhere across the public sector a realization sank in that the e-government story would not end with the delivery targets of 31 December 2005. Major challenges, such as the integration of back-office systems and building sustainability, will be only just beginning as that deadline expires. And then there was the announcement of perhaps the most ambitious IT project of all and one that is sure to interact with many

other e-services: Home Secretary David Blunkett announced plans to introduce national identity cards, including biometric technology. Details of the scheme were to be announced in 2004. Could this be the answer to secure citizen access to services online?

INTERNATIONAL

For the fourth year running, Canada retained its first place ranking in the fifth global survey of e-government progress carried out in 2004 by management consultancy Accenture (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/accnt2>). Singapore and the US tied for second place; and Australia, Denmark, Finland and Sweden tied for fourth, and the UK slipped to ninth. Overall, the survey found that e-government maturity is slowing as most countries have reached 'innovation plateaux.'

The first UN World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS <http://www.itu.int/wsis>), which was designed to bridge the technology gap between rich and poor nations, agreed the common goal of bringing access to information and communication technologies to more than half the world's population by 2015. The summit, in December 2003, brought together 11,000 representatives of government, business, academia and civil society to explore the role of technology as a tool for development and poverty reduction.

The commitment to widen technology access was part of an action plan agreed by delegates, along with a declaration of principles that enshrined the ideals of the summit and the tenets on which an information society should be based (<http://fastlink.headstar.com/wsis3>). However, the document contained little practical guidance on how these targets should be achieved and, crucially, the summit failed to produce agreement on the controversial issue of funding.

African countries such as Mali, Senegal and Mozambique had called for the creation of a special fund to pay for technology-related projects in the developing world. However, European, Japanese and US governments opposed the idea, with the result that a task force has been set up to review the issue and report back to the second stage of WSIS to be held in Tunis in 2005.

AUSTRALIA

Austrade, the Australian Trade Commission, hosted a trade mission to the UK in 2003 to help the country's technology companies win business from local authorities in the UK. The initiative builds on a previous Austrade mission to central government departments, after which the agency reported that 14 companies won sales of about Aus \$100 million.

CANADA

The Canadian federal government said last year that it was putting the citizen at the centre of a "whole-of-government" approach to using information and communication technology. This philosophy

continues to drive its vision for e-government. It said the country was on track to meet its 2005 Government On-Line (GOL) and service improvement targets. However, it found that while more than two thirds of Canadians surveyed reported that they were satisfied with the services they receive from government, more than half expressed dissatisfaction with how government manages its operations, including cost-effectiveness, openness and accountability for public spending.

RUSSIA

The first phase of the government's e-Russia programme has been completed. The \$2.6 billion scheme, scheduled for full completion in 2010, addresses four main areas: regulatory and legal issues; internet infrastructure; e-government; and e-education. The initiative aimed to have up to 40% of all communications between federal, regional and local governments online by 2010. The second phase of the project, which takes place from 2003 to 2004, involved the rollout of feasibility studies and pilot projects. The third phase, from 2005 to 2010, will see the implementation of e-government across all public sector agencies. The government said that the e-Russia programme would reduce bureaucracy for citizens and businesses when dealing with the government and make the federal and local government more efficient.

The government also announced plans to introduce electronic identity cards for its citizens. These would eventually combine identification data with other personal and public service information such as medical records, housing information, and pensions and tax details.

SINGAPORE

In its e-Government Action Plan II (2003-06) the government said that, by 2006, an e-lifestyle would be prevalent in Singapore. "Both individuals and businesses prefer to transact online with the government. Citizens readily provide feedback and actively contribute to the policy review process through electronic consultations and virtual communities. A vibrant infocomm [sic] industry works closely with the Government to transform work processes and service delivery through Infocomm Technology (ICT)."

The focus of the second Plan was "to transform the Public Service into a networked government that delivers accessible, integrated and value-added e-services to our customers, and helps bring citizens closer together."

UNITED STATES

President George Bush set up an Office of Electronic Government in 2003, signaling a permanent commitment to his e-government initiatives. The new office was created under the E-Government Act 2002, which the administration said ensured government-wide IT leadership, created a comprehensive framework for security and privacy, and expanded the use of the internet to deliver services. Karen Evans was appointed administrator of the office. The Administration also

released an e-government strategy (http://www.white-house.gov/omb/egov/2003egov_strat.pdf).

USA Services, the federal government's one-stop shop for citizen inquiries on government services and information via telephone, email, print publications, fax, and the FirstGov.gov website opened for business. Americans were able to access services by placing a single call to 1-800-FED-INFO or writing an email to FirstGov.gov.