

ANEXO XIII

EUROPEAN INTEROPERABILITY FRAMEWORK (EIF)

FOR EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION TO THE EUROPEAN INTEROPERABILITY FRAMEWORK

1.1 Purpose and legal framework

The purpose of the European Interoperability Framework (EIF) is:

- to promote and support the delivery of European public services by fostering cross-border and cross-sectoral¹ interoperability;
- to guide public administrations in their work to provide European public services to businesses² and citizens;
- to complement and tie together the various National Interoperability Frameworks (NIFs) at European level.

This non-technical document addresses all those involved in defining, designing and implementing European public services.

The EIF should be taken into account when making decisions on European public services that support the implementation of EU policy initiatives. The EIF should also be considered when establishing public services that in the future may be reused as part of European public services.

The EIF is maintained under the ISA³ programme, in close cooperation between the Member States and the Commission. They work together in the spirit of Article 170 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Under this Article, to help achieve the objectives referred to in Article 26 concerning the internal market, the European Union should help establish and develop trans-European networks and promote the interconnection and interoperability of national networks as well as access to such networks.

The EIF contributes to the better functioning of the internal market by increasing interoperability among European public administrations.

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 European public service In this document, European public service means ‘a cross-border public sector service supplied by public administrations⁴, either to one another or to European businesses and citizens’.

Although not all European public services are supported by information and communication technologies (ICT), most will rely on the interlinking of software systems which are mainly custom-made⁵ and developed by public administrations.

1 Sector is to be understood as a policy area, e.g. customs, police, eHealth, environment, agriculture, etc.

2 In the context of the EIF, the concept of businesses includes non governmental organisations, not-for-profit organisations, etc.

3 Interoperability solutions for European public administrations (ISA), OJ L 260, 3.10.2009, p. 20, 2009 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJL:2009:260:SOM:EN:HTML>.

4 Refers to either national public administrations (at any level) or bodies acting on their behalf, and/or EU public administrations.

5 Public administrations need custom-made software meeting their specific requirements (tax administration, police cooperation) to complement commercial ‘off the shelf’ software (operating systems, database systems, text processors, spreadsheets, etc.) in order to cover all their needs.

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1.2.2 Interoperability

The EIF addresses interoperability in the very specific context of providing European public services.

Although the provision of European public services almost always involves exchanging data between ICT systems, interoperability is a wider concept and encompasses the ability of organisations to work together towards mutually beneficial and commonly agreed goals.

Therefore, the following definition is used in the EIF⁶:

‘Interoperability, within the context of European public service delivery, is the ability of disparate and diverse organisations to interact towards mutually beneficial and agreed common goals, involving the sharing of information and knowledge between the organisations, through the business processes they support, by means of the exchange of data between their respective ICT systems.’

Interoperability is multilateral by nature and is best understood as a shared value of a community.

1.2.3 Interoperability framework

‘An interoperability framework is an agreed approach to interoperability for organisations that wish to work together towards the joint delivery of public services. Within its scope of applicability, it specifies a set of common elements such as vocabulary, concepts, principles, policies, guidelines, recommendations, standards, specifications and practices.’

1.3 The needs and benefits of interoperability

Interoperability is both a prerequisite for and a facilitator of efficient delivery of European public services. Interoperability addresses the need for:

- cooperation among public administrations with the aim to establish public services;
- exchanging information among public administrations to fulfil legal requirements or political commitments;
- sharing and reusing information among public administrations to increase administrative efficiency and cut red tape for citizens and businesses.

The result is:

- improved public service delivery to citizens and businesses by facilitating the one-stop-shop delivery of public services;
- lower costs for public administrations, businesses and citizens due to the efficient delivery of public services.

6 Article 2 of Decision No 922/2009/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 September 2009 on interoperability solutions for European public administrations (ISA) OJ L 260, 03.10.2009, p. 20.

7 An ecosystem is a system whose members benefit from each other's participation via symbiotic relationships (positive-sum relationships).

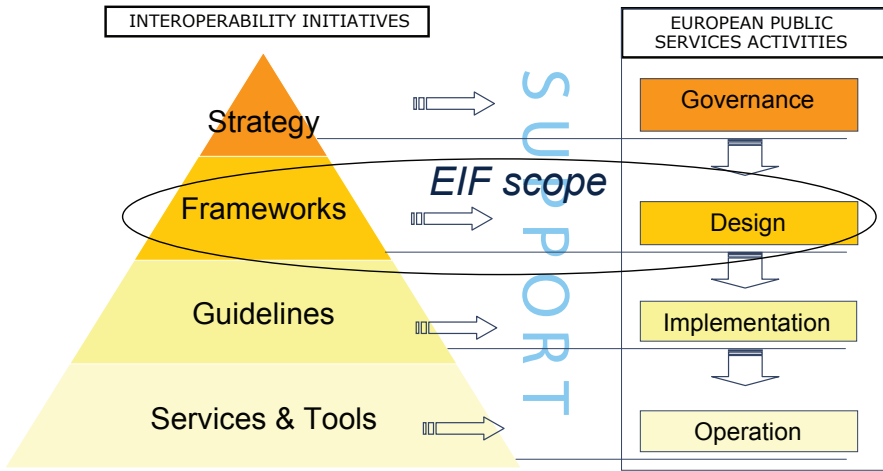
1.4 The EIF's recommendations

The EIF provides recommendations that address specific interoperability requirements. Implementing the recommendations will create an environment conducive to public administrations establishing new European public services. This will help cultivate a European public service ecosystem⁷ with people familiar with interoperability, organisations ready to collaborate, and common frameworks, tools and services facilitating the establishment of European public services.

1.5 Context

The EIF is one of a series of interoperability initiatives that aim to support the establishment of European public services.

The figure below shows the relationship between these initiatives: the European Interoperability Strategy (EIS), the EIF, the European Interoperability Guidelines, European interoperability services and tools and activities to establish European public services.



Interoperability initiatives supporting activities to establish European public services

Figure 11

There should be a systematic approach to governing interoperability at EU level, with specific goals set. To this end, the European Interoperability Strategy (EIS)⁸ provides a basis for an organisational, financial and opera-

⁸ The strategy defines a common vision for European public service delivery, and a set of focused actions at both national and EU level to improve interoperability for public services in Europe.

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tional framework to support cross-border and/or cross-sectoral interoperability. The EIS steers the EIF and all other associated efforts by setting strategic priorities and objectives.

The purpose of the EIF is to help design European public services.

The European Interoperability Guidelines help establish European interoperability services and tools that underpin the delivery of European public services.

1.5.1 The political and historical context of interoperability in the EU

To implement European public services, the public sector must address many challenges. Cross-border and cross-sectoral interoperability is seen as a key factor in overcoming these challenges.

Achieving cross-border interoperability is a political priority in European public service initiatives. The provision of seamless cross-border public services (for which interoperability is a prerequisite) has the potential to have a high impact on businesses and citizens.

The EU initiatives shown below illustrate, from a historical perspective, the support provided at political level for interoperability among public administrations.

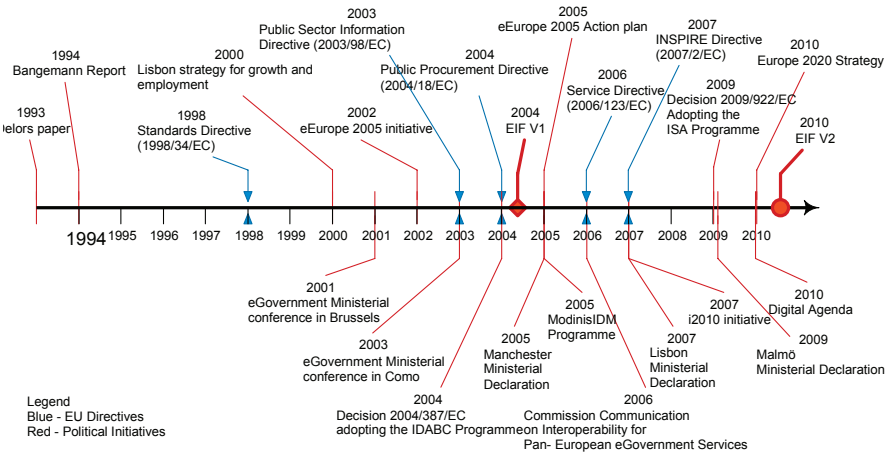


Figure 12

1.5.2 Interoperability frameworks

Many public administrations already have, or are in the process of developing, frameworks addressing interoperability issues at national, regional

or local level. The scope of these frameworks is restricted to the jurisdictions within which they have been developed. However, European public administrations must be ready to work together to deliver European public services to meet the needs of businesses and citizens.

It is important that interoperability frameworks used by public administrations, both national (NIFs) and European (EIF), are aligned as regards how to achieve interoperability so that Member States can agree on the concrete implementation of the EIF recommendations when establishing European public services.

By their nature, NIFs are, in general, more detailed and often prescriptive than the EIF, which operates at a higher level of abstraction, as a ‘meta framework’ and, in line with the subsidiarity principle, does not impose specific choices or obligations on the Member States.⁹

Recommendation 1. Public administrations should align their interoperability frameworks with the European Interoperability Framework to take into account the European dimension of public service delivery.

As the EIF and the NIFs are complementary, the European Commission supports a National Interoperability Framework Observatory (NIFO), whose main objective is to provide information about national interoperability frameworks to allow public administrations to share experiences and knowledge.

1.6 European public service scenarios

Interoperability as covered by the EIF comes into play in a number of interaction scenarios. European public services covered by the EIF can be subdivided into cross-border interaction types, as the following diagram illustrates.

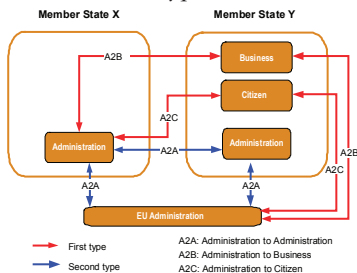


Figure 13

⁹ The principle of subsidiarity applies not just to the EU vis-à-vis Member States, but in some cases within Member States themselves, at federal/national level or at other levels (e.g. regional, provincial, county and municipality).

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The first type is direct interaction between businesses or citizens from one Member State and public administrations in another Member State and/or an EU administration (A2B and A2C) that deliver the public service to those businesses or citizens.

The second type is interaction between administrations from many Member States or EU administrations (A2A). This may support administrations in serving businesses or citizens (A2B and A2C).

1.6.1 Scenario 1: Direct interaction between businesses/citizens and a foreign administration

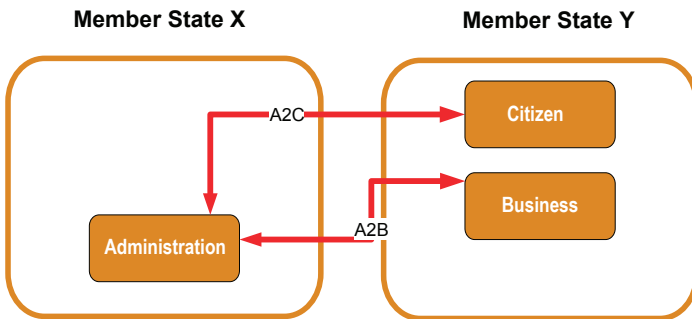


Figure 14

Example: a citizen from Member State Y taking up a job in destination Member State X has to complete a number of formalities in Member State X.

1.6.2 Scenario 2: Exchange of Information between administrations on business/citizen requests

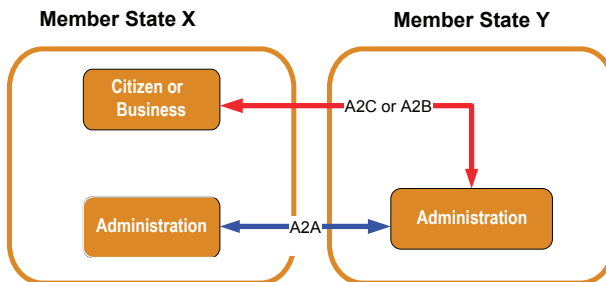


Figure 15

Example: a service provider established in Member State X wishing to establish in Member State Y submits a request for establishment in Member State Y. To process his request and avoid asking the required information to the service provider, administrative bodies in both Member State X and Y could exchange information directly. This requires interoperability between the Member States involved.

1.6.3 Scenario 3: Exchange of information between national administrations and EU institutions

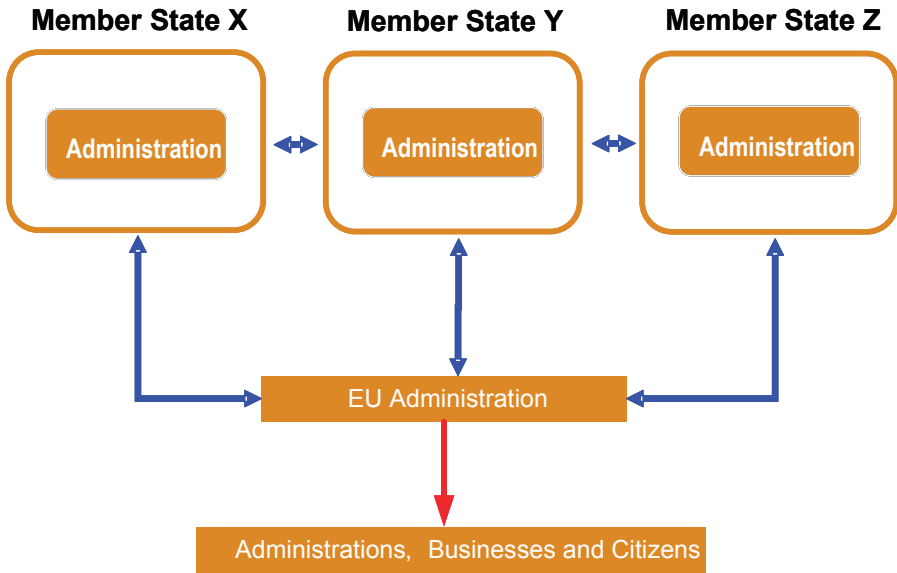


Figure 16

Typically, this scenario involves networks of administrations in a given sector where EU law requires Member State administrations to collect, exchange, and share information with each other, and/or with EU institutions and agencies.

Examples include cases where Member States provide information and statistics to a competent European authority, which then disseminates the aggregated information to the public concerned.

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1.6.4 Examples of European public services

A non-exhaustive list of examples¹⁰ illustrates generic scenarios for the European public services outlined above:

Sector/Area	Service	Sector/Area	Service
Business development (A2B, A2A)	Start-up of a company Public procurement Registration of patents, trademarks, designs Consumer protection, labelling, packaging	Social security (A2C)	Information service for social security systems Unemployment benefits Child allowances Pensions Public health insurance
Certificates and licenses (A2C)	Birth and marriage certificates Driving licences Passports, visas Residence and working permits Car registration	Supply of statistical data (A2B, A2A)	Tax for businesses VAT refunding Information on tax incentives Declaration of excise goods
Education (A2C)	Enrolment in schools and universities Study grants	Work (A2C)	Recognition of qualifications and diplomas Job search
Taxes for citizens (A2C)	Online Tax	Customs (A2C, A2B, A2A)	Information on Customs duties Customs declarations

1.7 Structure of the document

In the following chapters, the EIF addresses a number of key issues for the efficient and effective delivery of European public services.

Chapter 2, dealing with the ‘underlying principles’, sets out general principles underpinning European public services. They reflect the expectations of citizens, businesses and public administrations with regard to public service delivery.

Chapter 3 presents the ‘conceptual model for public services’. It suggests an organising principle for designing European public services, focusing on basic services that can be aggregated to form aggregated services and help establish other European public services in the future.

Chapter 4 on ‘interoperability levels’ covers the different interoperability aspects to be addressed when designing a European public service and provides a common vocabulary for discussing issues that arise.

¹⁰ Study on stakeholder requirements for pan-European eGovernment Services, Final Report v1.3, providing a ranking and description of various pan-European eGovernment services (see: <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Docc7f6.pdf?id=19649>).

Chapter 5 presents an approach to facilitate cooperation among public administrations to provide a given European public service by introducing concepts of ‘interoperability agreements’, formalised specifications and open specifications.

Chapter 6 on ‘interoperability governance’ sets out what is needed to ensure interoperability over time when delivering a European public service and to coordinate interoperability activities across administrative levels to support the establishment of European public services.

2. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVICES

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out general principles of good administration that are relevant to the process of establishing European public services. They describe the context in which European public services are decided and implemented. They complement one another regardless of their different natures, e.g. political, legal or technical.

The twelve underlying principles of the EIF can be broken down into three categories:

- The first principle sets the context for EU action on European public services;
- The next group of underlying principles reflect generic user needs and expectations (2-8);
- The last group provides a foundation for cooperation among public administrations (9-12).

2.2 Underlying principle 1: Subsidiarity and proportionality

The first underlying principle calls for subsidiarity and proportionality as enshrined in the EU Treaty.

The subsidiarity principle requires EU decisions to be taken as closely as possible to the citizen. In other words, the EU does not take action unless this is more effective than action taken at national, regional or local level.

The proportionality principle limits EU action to what is necessary to achieve agreed policy objectives. This means that the EU will opt for solutions that leave the greatest possible freedom to Member States.

Subsidiarity and proportionality also apply to the delivery of European public services and therefore to the exchange of information needed to deliver such services. Exchanging information and the joint delivery of Euro-

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pean public services will either be the result of EU legislation or when public authorities willingly and proactively participate in coordinated initiatives.

2.3 Underlying principle 2: User-centricity

Public services are intended to serve the needs of citizens and businesses. More precisely, those needs should determine what public services are provided and how public services are delivered.

Generally speaking, citizens and businesses will expect:

- to access user-friendly services in a secure and flexible manner allowing personalisation;
- multichannel delivery, allowing access to services anyhow, anywhere, anytime;
- to access a single contact point, even when multiple administrations have to work together to provide the service;
- to provide only the information necessary to obtain the public service and to provide any given piece of information only once to administrations;
- administrations to respect privacy.

2.4 Underlying principle 3: Inclusion and accessibility¹¹

The use of ICT should create equal opportunities for all citizens and businesses through inclusive services that are publicly accessible without discrimination.

Inclusion means allowing everyone to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies to overcome social and economic disadvantages and exclusion. Accessibility ensures that people with disabilities and the elderly can use public services with the same service levels as all other citizens.

Inclusion and accessibility must be part of the whole development life-cycle of a European public service in terms of design, information content and delivery, according to e-accessibility specifications widely recognised at European or international level.¹²

Inclusion and accessibility usually involve multichannel delivery. Traditional paper-based or face-to-face service delivery may need to co-exist with electronic delivery, giving citizens a choice of access.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/accessibility/index_en.htm .

¹² See also EC standardisation mandate No376 on the development of European standards for public procurement of accessible ICT products and services (http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/archive/deploy/pubproc/eso-m376/a_documents/m376_en.pdf).

Inclusion and accessibility can also be improved by the ability of a system to allow third parties to act on behalf of citizens who are unable, either permanently or temporarily, to make direct use of public services.

Recommendation 2. Public administrations should ensure that public services are accessible to all citizens, including persons with disabilities and the elderly, according to e-accessibility specifications widely recognised at European or international level.

2.5 Underlying principle 4: Security and privacy

Citizens and businesses must be assured that they interact with public administrations in an environment of trust and in full compliance with the relevant regulations, e.g. on privacy and data protection. This means that public administrations must guarantee the privacy of citizens and the confidentiality of information provided by businesses.

Subject to security constraints, citizens and businesses should have the right to verify the information that administrations have collected about them and to be consulted whether this information may be used for purposes other than those for which it was originally supplied.

Recommendation 3. Public administrations should consider the specific needs of each European public service, within the context of a common security and privacy policy.

2.6 Underlying principle 5: Multilingualism

Multilingualism needs to be carefully considered when designing European public services.

A balance needs to be found between the expectations of citizens and businesses to be served in their own language(s) and Member State public administrations' ability to offer services in all official EU languages.

Ideally, European public services provided EU-wide should be available in all official EU languages to ensure that rights and expectations of European citizens are met.

Multilingualism comes into play not just at the level of the user interface, but at all levels in the design of European public services. For example, choices on data representation may limit the ability to support different languages.

The multilingual aspect to interoperability again becomes apparent when European public services require exchanges between ICT systems

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across linguistic boundaries, as the meaning of the information exchanged must be preserved. Whenever possible, information should be transferred in a language-independent format, agreed among all parties involved.

Recommendation 4. Public administrations should use information systems and technical architectures that cater for multilingualism when establishing a European public service.

2.7 Underlying principle 6: Administrative simplification

Businesses compile large amounts of information, often solely due to legal obligations, which is of no direct benefit to them and not necessary for achieving the objectives of the legislation imposing the obligations. This creates a considerable administrative burden¹³, which can be expressed as a cost incurred by businesses.

For this reason, the European Commission proposed in January 2007 to reduce the administrative burden on businesses by 25% by 2012. To achieve this target, public authorities across Europe will have to act together when establishing European public services.

This principle is closely linked to underlying principle 2, user-centricity.

2.8 Underlying principle 7: Transparency

Citizens and businesses should be able to understand administrative processes. They should have the right to track administrative procedures that involve them, and have insight into the rationale behind decisions that could affect them.

Transparency also allows citizens and businesses to give feedback about the quality of the public services provided, to contribute to their improvement and to the implementation of new services.

2.9 Underlying principle 8: Preservation of information

Records¹⁴ and information in electronic form held by administrations for the purpose of documenting procedures and decisions must be preserved. The goal is to ensure that records and other forms of information retain their legibility, reliability and integrity and can be accessed as long as needed, taking into account security and privacy.

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/admin-burdens-reduction/faq_en.htm.

¹⁴ As defined by the model requirements for the management of electronic records (MOREQ): a record is (a) document(s) produced or received by a person or organisation in the course of business, and retained by that person or organisation.

In order to guarantee the long-term preservation of electronic records and other kinds of information, formats should be selected to ensure long-term accessibility, including preservation of associated electronic signatures and other electronic certifications, such as mandates.

For information sources owned and managed by national administrations, preservation is a purely national matter. For European public services and for information that is not purely national, preservation becomes a European issue, requiring an appropriate ‘preservation policy’.

Recommendation 5. Public administrations should formulate together a long-term preservation policy for electronic records relating to European public services.

2.13 Underlying principle 9: Openness

In the context of the EIF, openness is the willingness of persons, organisations or other members of a community of interest to share knowledge and stimulate debate within that community, the ultimate goal being to advance knowledge and the use of this knowledge to solve problems.

While respecting data protection and privacy, interoperability involves sharing information among interacting organisations, and hence implies openness.

Applying the principle of openness when jointly developing custom-made software systems, European public administrations generate results that can be interconnected, reused and shared, which also improves efficiency.

Therefore, European public administrations should aim for openness, taking into account needs, priorities, legacy, budget, market situation and a number of other factors.

Recommendation 6. Public administrations should aim for openness when working together to establish European public services, while taking into account their priorities and constraints.

2.13 Underlying principle 10: Reusability

Reuse means that public administrations confronted with a specific problem seek to benefit from the work of others by looking at what is available, assessing its usefulness or relevance to the problem at hand, and deciding to use solutions that have proven their value elsewhere.

This implies that public administrations must be willing to share with others their solutions, concepts, frameworks, specifications, tools and components.

This can be facilitated by applying the principle of openness, as described above.

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Reuse and sharing naturally lead to cooperation using collaborative platforms¹⁵, towards mutually beneficial and agreed common goals.

Reuse is consequently key to the efficient development of European public services.

Recommendation 7. Public administrations are encouraged to reuse and share solutions and to cooperate on the development of joint solutions when implementing European public services.

2.12 Underlying principle 11: Technological neutrality and adaptability

When establishing European public services, public administrations should focus on functional needs and defer decisions on technology as long as possible in order to avoid imposing specific technologies or products on their partners and to be able to adapt to the rapidly evolving technological environment.

Public administrations should render access to public services independent of any specific technology or product.

Recommendation 8. Public administrations should not impose any specific technological solution on citizens, businesses and other administrations when establishing European public services.

2.13 Underlying principle 12: Effectiveness and efficiency

Public administrations should ensure that solutions serve businesses and citizens in the most effective and efficient way and provide the best value for taxpayer money.

There are many ways to take stock of the value brought by public service solutions, including considerations such as return on investment, total cost of ownership, increased flexibility and adaptability, reduced administrative burden, increased efficiency, reduced risk, transparency, simplification, improved working methods, and recognition of public administration achievements and competencies.

3. THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

¹⁵ At EU level, various platforms have been set up to share open source software components (<http://www.osor.eu/>), semantic assets (<http://www.semic.eu/>) and best practices (<http://www.epracice.eu/>). The European Commission has also created EUPL (<http://www.osor.eu/cupl>) in order to facilitate the sharing of software components.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter proposes a conceptual model for public services to suggest ways to organise the creation and operation of these services.

The model is derived from a survey of the implementation of public services in the Member States, and brings together the common aspects and best practices observed. As a blueprint for future implementations of European public services, the model helps develop a common vocabulary and understanding across Member States about the main elements of a public service and how they come together.

The model emphasises a building-block approach to setting up European public services, allowing for the interconnection and reusability of service components when building new services.

The model is generic by nature, so not every existing or future public service will exactly fit into it. However, it is generic enough to be applicable at any level of government providing public services, from local level all the way up to the EU level, and it illustrates the fact that any level of government can be a provider of both basic and aggregate public services. In this sense, the model clarifies and rationalises the relationships among entities that work together to deliver public services.

The aim of the model is to bring practical benefits to establishing European public services. For example, splitting functionalities into basic public services with well-defined interfaces, designed to be reused, will simplify and streamline the implementation of aggregate services and the reuse of service components, avoiding duplication of work.

3.2 The key concepts of the conceptual model

The model promotes the reuse of information, concepts, patterns, solutions, and specifications in Member States and at European level, recognising that European public services:

- are based on information from various sources located at different levels of administration, in different Member States, and
- combine basic public services constructed independently by public administrations in different Member States.

Therefore, the model highlights the need for modular, loosely coupled service components¹⁶ interconnected through infrastructure and for working together to deliver European public services.

It explicitly calls for EU-wide adoption of a service orientation to designing and developing systems, and an ICT ecosystem comprising consistent, and in some cases jointly developed, service components. Its particular ser-

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vice orientation is a specific way of creating and using business processes, packaged as services, throughout their lifecycle.

Recommendation 9. Public administrations should develop a component-based service model, allowing the establishment of European public services by reusing, as much as possible, existing service components.

Public administrations will need to agree a common scheme on how to interconnect service components.

There are well-known and widely used technical solutions, e.g. web services, to do this, but implementing them at EU level will require concerted efforts by public administrations, including investment in common infrastructure.

Recommendation 10. Public administrations should agree on a common scheme to interconnect loosely coupled service components and put in place the necessary infrastructure when establishing European public services.

The basic elements of the conceptual model are depicted in the diagram below:

¹⁶ Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) is an implementation of that concept.

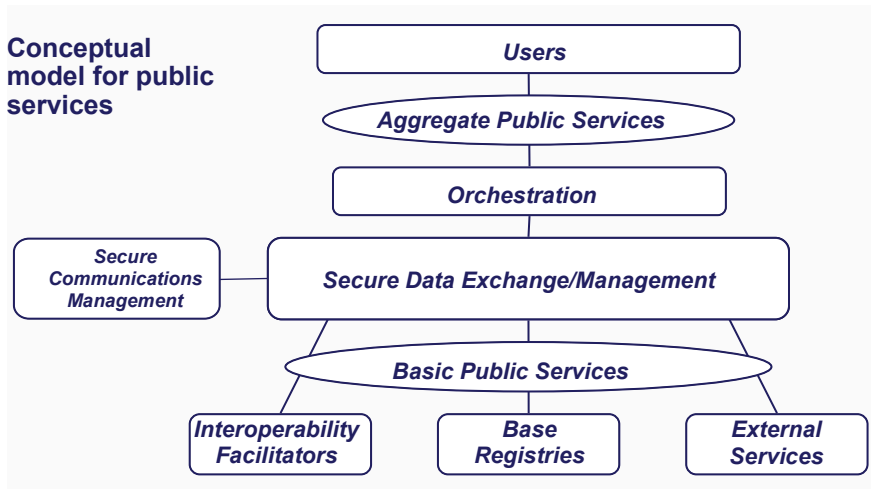


Figure 31

In order to understand this model, it is useful to subdivide it into three layers: basic public services, secure data exchange and aggregate public services, which are detailed in the following sections.

3.2.1 Basic public services

The lowest layer of the model deals with the most basic service components from which European public services can be built. It groups three types of components, namely interoperability facilitators, services based on base registries, and external services, together called basic public services.

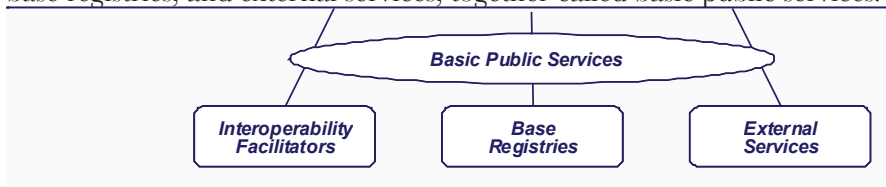


Figure 32

Some basic public services have been developed primarily for direct use by the public administration that created them, or by their direct customers, i.e. businesses and citizens, but are made available for reuse elsewhere with a view to providing aggregate public services. Others are generic and/or infrastructural by nature, while the remainder represent external services, i.e.

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services provided by third parties. The following sections describe in more detail each type of basic public service.

3.2.1.1 Base registries

The most important components are base registries that provide reliable sources of basic information on items such as persons, companies, vehicles, licences, buildings, locations and roads. Such registries are under the legal control of public administrations and are maintained by them, but the information should be made available for wider reuse with the appropriate security and privacy measures.

The common feature of all implementations of basic registries is the fact that they are authentic and authoritative and form, separately or in combination, the cornerstone of public services. Generally speaking, their content is not static: they also reflect the information lifecycle.

Recommendation 11. Public administrations should make their authentic sources of information available to others while implementing access and control mechanisms to ensure security and privacy in accordance with the relevant legislation.

One of the obstacles to adopting the conceptual model for European public services could be legacy systems. These systems, and their underlying data repositories, have specific characteristics limiting the possibilities for reuse (e.g. lack of published interfaces), and they may require extensive re-engineering in order to make their information available for European public services.

Access to authentic data sources across borders will be facilitated if the interfaces to these sources are published and harmonised, at both semantic and technical level.

Recommendation 12. Public administrations, when working to establish European public services, should develop interfaces to authentic sources and align them at semantic and technical level.

3.2.1.2 Interoperability facilitators

Interoperability facilitators provide services such as translation between protocols, formats and languages or act as information brokers.

3.2.1.3 External services

These include services provided by external parties such as — at business level — payment services provided by financial institutions or — at infrastructure level — connectivity services provided by telecommunications providers.

3.2.2 Secure data exchange layer

This layer is central to the conceptual model since all access to basic public services passes through it.



Figure 33

3.2.2.1 Secure data exchange

From a business point of view, administrations and other entities exchange official information that may involve access to base registries. This should go through a secure, harmonised, managed and controlled layer allowing information exchanges between administrations, businesses and citizens that are:

- signed and certified — both sender and receiver have been identified and authenticated through agreed mechanisms,
- encrypted — the confidentiality of the exchanged data is ensured,
- logged – the electronic records are logged and archived to ensure a legal audit trail.

In the proposed conceptual model, these functions are grouped in the ‘secure data exchange’ layer.

This layer should allow the secure exchange of certified messages, records, forms and other kinds of information between the different systems. In addition to transporting data, this layer should also handle specific security requirements such as electronic signatures, certification, encryption and time stamping.

Security is potentially one of the main barriers to interoperability if it is not applied in a harmonised and agreed way among organisations.

The conceptual model highlights this and calls on all service providers to:

- consider the security issues head-on;
- cooperate on a common framework to meet their respective

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security needs via compatible mechanisms and commonly agreed specifications;

- reach a common understanding on essential characteristics such as protective marking levels, authorisation levels and authentication strength.

Therefore, public administrations should agree on a common security framework when establishing a European public service (see Recommendation No 2).

One of the key prerequisites for implementing the functionality expected in secure data exchange involves leveraging national identification and authentication infrastructures in the Member States to reach a working cross-border scheme. This scheme should establish which ICT architectures and data are needed in a cross-border context to make existing Member State electronic identity infrastructures interoperable.

3.2.2.2 Secure communications management

The provision of secure (i.e. signed, certified, encrypted and logged) data exchange also requires several management functions, including:

- service management, to oversee all communications on identification, authentication, authorisation, data transport, etc., including access authorisations, revocation, and audit;
- service registration, to provide (subject to proper authorisation) access to available services through prior localisation and verification that the service is trustworthy;
- service logging, to ensure that all data exchanges are logged for future evidence, and archived when necessary.

3.2.3 Aggregate services layer

Aggregate public services are constructed by grouping a number of basic public services that can be accessed in a secure and controlled way. They can be provided by several administrations at any level, i.e. local, regional, national or even EU level.

A typical aggregate service should appear to its users (administrations, businesses or citizens) as a single service. Behind the scenes, transactions may be implemented across borders, sectors and administrative levels.

Aggregation is accomplished via mechanisms tailored to specific business requirements. In the most general case, some business logic is required

to implement the requirements, and the implementation mechanism could take several forms, such as orchestration or workflow engines, all included in portal-like access infrastructures.

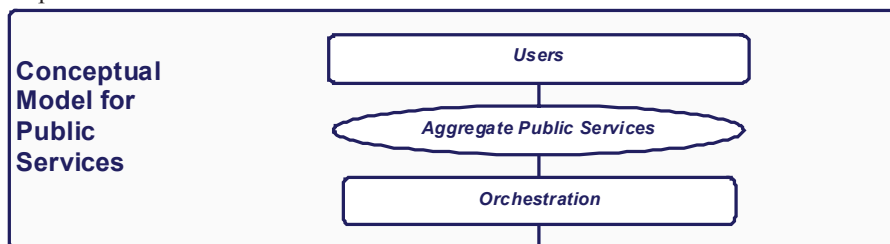


Figure 34

Nowadays, users expect to access public services not solely through government portals or websites but also via intermediaries with whom they are in contact on a regular basis. Therefore, public services should be developed in such a way that they can easily be integrated in intermediaries' websites through mechanisms such as mash-ups and widgets, without government losing responsibility for the service itself and with clear indications enabling users to tell the difference between private and public services.

If aggregate public services are provided by intermediaries, public administrations should establish:

1. a process for authorisation to determine which basic public services may be disclosed to which intermediary, and
2. a process for certifying intermediaries to establish trust between users and service providers.

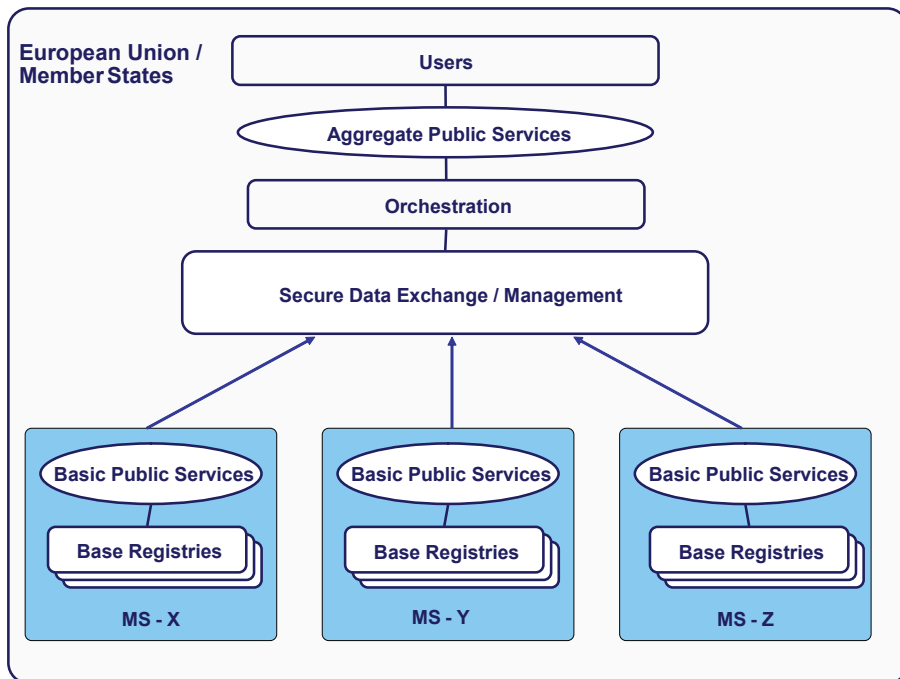
3.3 Applications of the conceptual model

What makes the model powerful is its flexibility in allowing different aggregate services to be created by combining basic public services from multiple providers. The model unlocks the potential for further aggregating and combining the different services available. The sections below describe three cases, all with a high added value in the EU context: the cross-border example, the cross-sectoral example and the cross-administrative boundary example.

3.3.1. Cross-border example

This illustrates a European public service implemented by combining basic public services, in this case access to national base registries, implemented in different Member States.

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The model has been simplified for the sake of clarity.

Figure 35

The situation depicted in the diagram is a variation on the original conceptual model to illustrate its cross-border application by adding national boundaries to indicate where individual sets of basic public services are located.

This raises a number of issues:

Trust: The cross-border application of the model involves allowing external access to national base registries, which requires a high degree of security and trust.

Dependence of European public services and service levels on lower-level services: The aggregated service depends on basic public services provided by different entities.

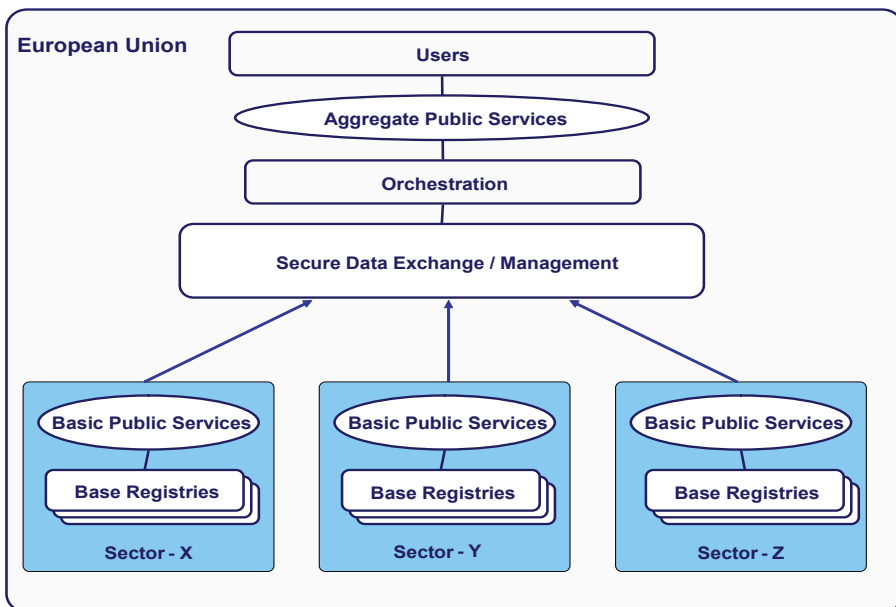
Common specifications for basic public services: The fact that the basic public services on which the aggregated services are based are developed by different public administrations highlights the need for common interface specifications, at technical and semantic level.

Privacy and data protection: Even when personal information is exchanged across borders, national data protection legislations apply. The secure data exchange layer implements and enforces the security requirements for the aggregate service. As data originating from different Member States may be subject to different data protection requirements, a set of common requirements for data protection should be agreed in order to implement the aggregate service.

Recommendation 13. Public administrations, when working together to establish European public services, should use a common taxonomy of basic public services and agree on minimum service requirements for secure data exchange.

3.3.2. Cross-sectoral example

This application of the conceptual model combines basic public services from different sectors to provide new aggregate public services.



The model has been simplified for the sake of clarity

Figure 36

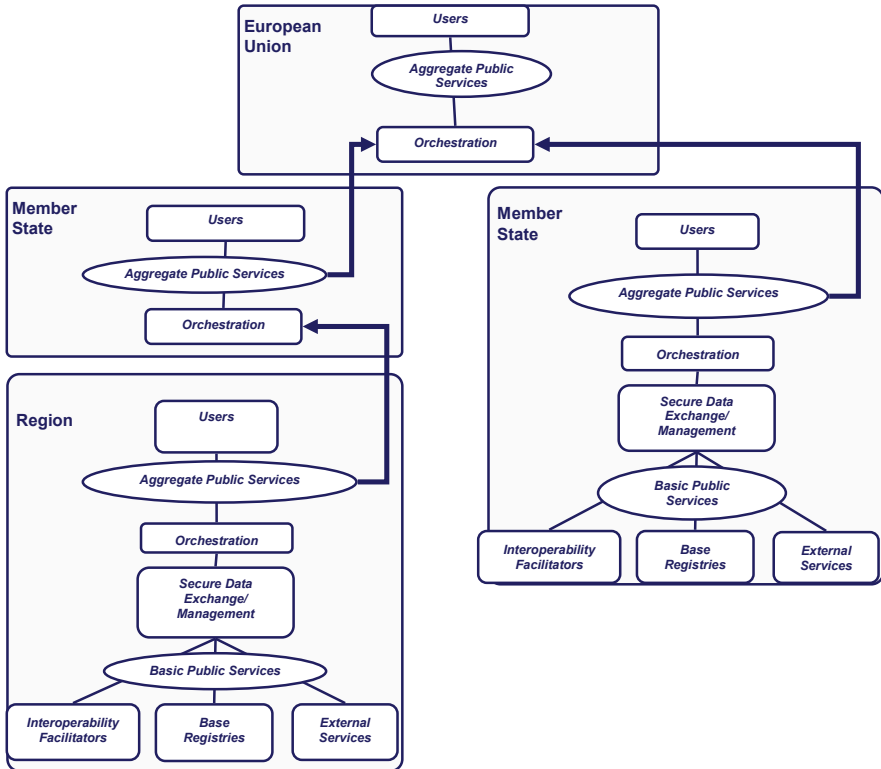
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This application of the model channels interaction between users and aggregated public services provided through cooperation between different sectors via a single point of contact.

To make this approach successful, it is essential that sectors adopt a common approach to service definition.

3.3.3 Cross-administrative boundary example

This case illustrates the aggregation of services originating in different layers of government at local, regional, national and EU level. A hypothetical example is illustrated below.



The model has been simplified for the sake of clarity
Figure 37

The challenge for implementing this application is to master the complexity resulting from multiple service providers. Cooperation among public administrations at each level is essential.

4. INTEROPERABILITY LEVELS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes four levels of interoperability. Each deserves special attention when a new European public service is established. The practical implementation of the conceptual model for cross-border/cross-sectoral services requires each of these levels to be taken into account.

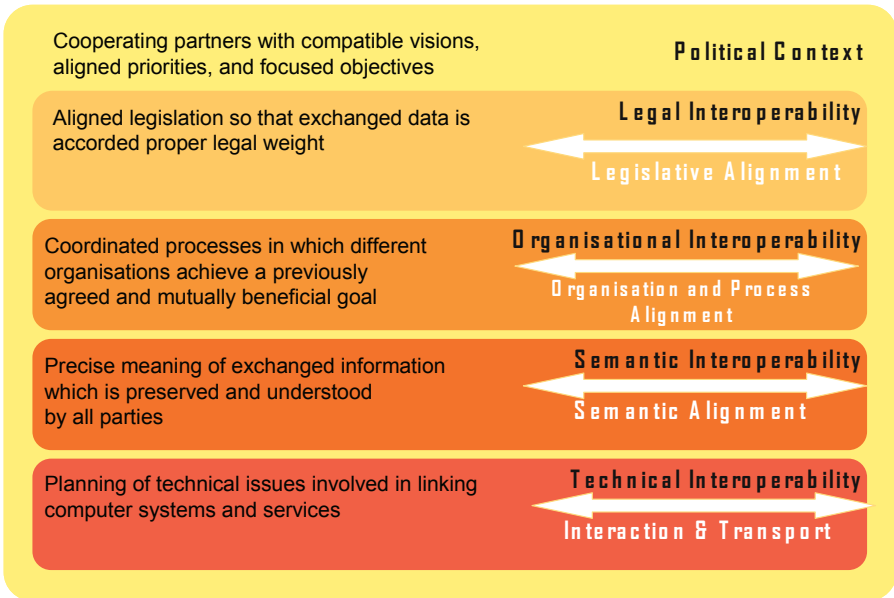


Figure 41

4.2 Political context

The establishment of a new European public service is the result of direct or indirect action at political level, i.e. new bilateral, multilateral or European agreements.

If the establishment of a new service is the direct consequence of new EU legislation, the scope, priorities and resources needed to establish and operate the service should be defined when the legislation is adopted.

However, political support and sponsorship is also needed in cases where new services are not directly linked to new legislation but are created to provide better, more user-focused public services.

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Likewise, political support is also necessary for cross-border interoperability efforts to facilitate cooperation among public administrations.¹⁷ For effective cooperation, all stakeholders involved must share visions, agree on objectives and align priorities. Action at cross-border level can only be successful if all Member States involved give sufficient priority and resources to their respective interoperability efforts towards agreed goals within agreed timeframes.

4.3 Legal interoperability

Each public administration contributing to the provision of a European public service works within its own national legal framework.

Sometimes, incompatibilities between legislation in different Member States make working together more complex or even impossible, even where such legislation is the result of transposing European directives into national law. Legal initiatives may be needed to remedy such situations.

When information is exchanged between Member States to provide European public services, the legal validity of such information must be maintained across borders and data protection legislation in both originating and receiving countries must be respected.

Recommendation 14. Public administrations should carefully consider all relevant legislation relating to data exchange, including data protection legislation, when seeking to establish a European public service.

4.4 Organisational interoperability

This aspect of interoperability is concerned with how organisations, such as public administrations in different Member States, cooperate to achieve their mutually agreed goals. In practice, organisational interoperability implies integrating business processes and related data exchange. Organisational interoperability also aims to meet the requirements of the user community by making services available, easily identifiable, accessible and user-focused.

4.4.1 Business process alignment

In order for different administrative entities to be able to work together efficiently and effectively to provide European public services, they may need to align their existing business processes or even to define and establish new business processes.

Aligning business processes implies documenting them, in an agreed way, so that all public administrations contributing to the delivery of European public services can understand the overall business process and their role in it.

¹⁷ The ISA programme is an example of such political support.

Recommendation 15. Public administrations should document their business processes and agree on how these processes will interact to deliver a European public service.

4.4.2 Organisational relationships

Service orientation, on which the conceptual model for public services is built, means that the relationship between service providers and service consumers must be clearly structured.

This involves finding instruments to formalise mutual assistance, joint action and interconnected business processes in connection with cross-border service provision. Examples of such instruments are Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on joint actions and cooperation and/or Service Level Agreements (SLAs) signed between participating public administrations. For cross-border action, they should preferably be multilateral agreements.

Recommendation 16. Public administrations should clarify their organisational relationships as part of the establishment of a European public service.

4.4.3 Change management

Since delivering a European public service is the result of collective work parties that produce or consume parts of the service, change management processes are critical to ensure the accuracy, reliability and continuity of the service delivered to other public administrations, businesses and citizens.

Recommendation 17. Public administrations working together to provide European public services should agree on change management processes to ensure continuous service delivery.

4.5 Semantic interoperability

Semantic interoperability enables organisations to process information from external sources in a meaningful manner. It ensures that the precise meaning of exchanged information is understood and preserved throughout exchanges between parties.

Achieving semantic interoperability in the EU context is a relatively new undertaking, not achieved before on this scale. However, a number of public administrations have recently acquired experience in this field.

A starting point is to create sector-specific sets of data structures and data elements that can be referred to as semantic interoperability assets. Once these are created, the cooperating organisations will need to agree on the meaning of the information to be exchanged. Given the different linguistic, cultural, legal, and administrative environments in the Member

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States, this poses significant challenges. Multilingualism in the EU adds further complexity to the problem.

In the context of the EIF, semantic interoperability encompasses the following aspects:

- Semantic interoperability is about the meaning of data elements and the relationship between them. It includes developing vocabulary to describe data exchanges, and ensures that data elements are understood in the same way by communicating parties.
- Syntactic interoperability is about describing the exact format of the information to be exchanged in terms of grammar, format and schemas.

Achieving semantic interoperability at European level requires at least:

- agreed processes and methodologies for developing semantic interoperability assets;
- agreement by sector-specific and cross-sectoral communities on the use of semantic interoperability assets at EU level.

Due to the complexity of the task and the large number of interested parties, it will take a concerted effort to harmonise processes and methodologies.

4.5.1 The EU Semantic Interoperability Initiative¹⁸

Several initiatives aim to achieve semantic interoperability, at both national and EU level. The EU semantic interoperability initiative aims to lay the foundations of semantic interoperability for European public services, across all sectors and in close cooperation with national initiatives. It provides coaching services for the design and implementation stages, and a web-based platform for cooperating and sharing solutions to semantic interoperability challenges.

Public administrations establishing public services should verify at an early phase of any given project whether existing semantic interoperability assets can be reused. If not, they can use the EU semantic interoperability platform to advertise their goals and approach to a wider European audience, seeking contact and cooperation with other projects with similar needs.

Recommendation 18. Public administrations should support the establishment of sector-specific and cross-sectoral communities that

¹⁸ SEMIC.EU: Semantic Interoperability Centre Europe.

aim to facilitate semantic interoperability and should encourage the communities to share results on national and European platforms.

4.6 Technical interoperability

This covers the technical aspects of linking information systems. It includes aspects such as interface specifications, interconnection services, data integration services, data presentation and exchange, etc.

While public administrations have specific characteristics at political, legal, organisational and, partly, semantic level, interoperability at the technical level is not specific to public administrations. Therefore, technical interoperability should be ensured, whenever possible, via the use of formalised specifications, either standards pursuant to EU Directive 98/34 or specifications issued by ICT industry fora and consortia.

Recommendation 19. Public administrations should agree on the formalised specifications to ensure technical interoperability when establishing European public services.

5 INTEROPERABILITY AGREEMENTS

5.1 Introduction

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This chapter proposes an approach to facilitate cooperation among public administrations to provide a given European public service.

As stated throughout this document, providing European public services requires cooperation among different public administrations at the different interoperability levels described in the previous chapter. For each level, the organisations involved should formalise cooperation arrangements in interoperability agreements.

Agreements should be drafted with sufficient detail to achieve their aim — to provide a European public service — while leaving each organisation maximum internal autonomy.

At legal level, interoperability agreements are rendered specific and binding via legislation, including European directives and their transposition into national legislation, or bilateral and multilateral agreements, which are outside the scope of the EIF.

At organisational level, interoperability agreements can, for example, take the form of MoUs or SLAs that specify the obligations of each party participating in cross-border business processes. Interoperability agreements at organisational level will define expected levels of service, support/escalation procedures, contact details, etc., referring, when necessary, to underlying agreements at semantic and technical levels.

At semantic level, interoperability agreements can take the form of reference taxonomies, schemes, code lists, data dictionaries, sector-based libraries and so forth.

At technical level, interoperability agreements include interface specifications, communication protocols, messaging specifications, data formats, security specifications or dynamic registration and service discovery specifications.

While interoperability agreements at legal and organisational level will usually be very specific to the European public service concerned, interoperability agreements at technical level and, to a lesser extent, at semantic level can often be mapped onto existing formalised specifications.

Recommendation 20. Public administrations, when establishing European public services, should base interoperability agreements on existing formalised specifications, or, if they do not exist, cooperate with communities working in the same areas.

When trying to implement interoperability agreements, at technical or semantic level, there may be a choice between a number of equivalent, competing specifications, all of which may be able to provide a basis for such agreements.

Public administrations may decide to support multiple formalised specifications or technologies to communicate with citizens and businesses. However, for reasons of efficiency, they should reduce, as much as possible, the number of formalised specifications and technologies when working together to provide a European public service.

Similar decisions are often taken not just to provide a single European public service but within a wider context of cooperation within or among organisations. In this context, they should be aware that internal interfaces may become external in the future when new European public services are created.

Decisions on what formalised specifications and technologies to use to ensure interoperability for European public services should be based on transparency, fairness and non-discrimination. One way to do this is to agree on a common assessment methodology and selection process.

5.2 Assessing and selecting formalised specifications

When public administrations select the formalised specifications or technologies to ensure interoperability, they should assess relevant formalised specifications.

This assessment should be tailored to the specific interoperability needs of the public administrations in question, but based on objective criteria, primarily related to functional interoperability needs. When several formalised specifications meet functional interoperability needs, additional criteria on quality of implementation, market support, potential for reusability and openness can be used.

Recommendation 21. Public administrations should use a structured, transparent and objective approach to assessing and selecting formalised specifications.

5.2.1 Specifications, openness and reuse

The level of openness of a formalised specification is an important element in determining the possibility of sharing and reusing software components implementing that specification. This also applies when such components are used for the establishment of new European public services.

If the openness principle is applied in full:

- All stakeholders have the same possibility of contributing to the development of the specification and public review is part of the decision-making process;
- The specification is available for everybody to study;

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- Intellectual property rights related to the specification are licensed on FRAND¹⁹ terms or on a royalty-free basis in a way that allows implementation in both proprietary and open source software²⁰.

Due to their positive effect on interoperability, the use of such open specifications, characterised by the features mentioned above as well as the sharing and reuse of software implementing such open specifications, has been promoted in many policy statements and is encouraged for European public service delivery. The positive effect of open specifications is also demonstrated by the Internet ecosystem.

However, public administrations may decide to use less open specifications, if open specifications do not exist or do not meet functional interoperability needs.

In all cases, specifications should be mature and sufficiently supported by the market, except if used in the context of creating innovative solutions.

Recommendation 22. When establishing European public services, public administrations should prefer open specifications, taking due account of the coverage of functional needs, maturity and market support.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE STANDARDISATION PROCESS

In some cases, public administrations may find that no suitable formalised specification is available for a specific need in a specific area. If new specifications have to be developed, public administrations may either develop the specifications themselves and put forward the result for standardisation, or request a new formalised specification to be developed by standards developing organisations. The resulting formalised specifications should comply with the characteristics set out in Section 5.2.1.

Even where existing formalised specifications are available, they evolve over time and experience shows that revisions often take a long time to be completed. Active government participation in the standardisation process mitigates concerns about delays, improves alignment of the formalised spe-

¹⁹ FRAND: Fair, reasonable and non discriminatory.

²⁰ This fosters competition since providers working under various business models may compete to deliver products, technologies and services based on such specifications.

cifications with public sector needs and can help governments keep pace with technology innovation.

Recommendation 23. Public administrations should lead or actively participate in standardisation work relevant to their needs.

6 INTEROPERABILITY GOVERNANCE

Due to their cross-border and in some cases cross-sectoral characteristics, European public services operate in a complex and changing environment.

Ensuring interoperability between legal instruments, organisation business processes, information exchanges, services and components that support the delivery of a European public service is a continuous task, as interoperability is disrupted by changes to the environment, i.e. to legislation, the needs of businesses or citizens, the organisation of public administrations, business processes or technologies.

Recommendation 24. Public administrations should ensure that interoperability is ensured over time when operating and delivering a European public service.

Even if interoperability is maintained for a given European public service, its delivery often relies on components that are common to many European public services. These components, which are the results of interoperability agreements reached outside the scope of the European public service, should also be made available over time.

Moreover, as the common components and interoperability agreements are the results of work carried out by public administrations at different levels (local, regional, national, EU), coordination and monitoring this work requires a holistic approach.

Recommendation 25. Public administrations should establish a framework for the governance of their interoperability activities across administrative levels.
