

Section 3: Research methods

The project team have utilized four main research approaches to explore eGovernment barriers in the EU and their legal foundations, guided by a set of research questions (see Appendix).

1. Review and analysis of existing research

The project partners have undertaken a critical review of a wide collection of existing work on eGovernment to assist in the identification and analysis of the key obstacles to eGovernment and their main legal dimensions. They have examined outputs from a number of EC initiatives, including IST (e.g. QUALEG, SMARTGOV, eFORUM, EUSER KEELAN), IDABC, eTEN, i2010, SIMAP, eContentplus, and the Safer Internet Programme. Other sources have included legal doctrine, case law, case studies, research by NGOs (e.g. UNESCO, UNPAN) and companies (e.g. Accenture and the Economist Intelligence Unit), and legislation at national, supranational and international levels. These reviews and analyses have been an ongoing element throughout the project's duration.

2. Online survey of eGovernment stakeholders

A non-probabilistic web-based survey was conducted between May and June 2006 by the Oxford Internet Institute to provide a detailed picture of the perceived barriers to eGovernment in the EU, including how these perceptions might vary across stakeholders and between the regions and nations of the EU.

The questionnaire asked participants to rate the relative severity of thirty barriers to eGovernment that had been identified by the project team. It solicited personal information (e.g. ICT skills, eGovernment experience, date of birth and country of residence) in order to explore the relationships between the respondents' individual experiences and characteristics and their perceptions of eGovernment barriers. It was available in four languages (English, German, French and Spanish) and was advertised widely via numerous eGovernment lists, websites and personal contacts.

The survey was completed by 996 public administration, business and expert stakeholders who are engaged in eGovernment activities at local, regional, national or Pan-European levels. The results complement previous online and offline surveys examining barriers to eGovernment and related areas, such as: the eUSER study that explores online public services in the domains of eGovernment, eHealth and eLearning with a focus on the perspectives and needs of the user; the UNDERSTAND project that investigates eGovernment at the regional level across Europe; a Pan-European Survey of Administrations Officials (Heinderyckx 2002); and a study of eGovernance by UNESCO.

The survey results are available at: http://www.egovbarriers.org/?view=project_outputs

3. Case study research

Case study research was carried out to provide an in-depth understanding of practical examples of barriers to eGovernment and their legal foundations, and to assist with the

development of the solutions to these obstacles. Five broadly defined case studies were examined. They were selected in order to enable the project to cover a range of eGovernment applications (eDemocracy, ePublic Services, eCommerce and eAdministration) and to address the policy objectives of the Commission as set out in the 2006 eGovernment action plan (no citizen left behind; making efficiency and effectiveness in public services a reality; implementing high impact key services; strengthening participation and democratic decision making; and putting key enablers in place).

For each of the five cases the research was carried out in two phases. In the first the research team examined the case study area across Europe. In this phase, the research team began by trawling, collating and analysing all material that was available at a distance, including web-based documentation, audit office reports, cost data, usage statistics, press reports, secondary literature and reports from consultancies, international organizations and national bodies. The expert group was also canvassed for views and any insider knowledge of individual initiatives. This process provided an overview of each of the five cases across Europe and assisted in the selection of the embedded cases in phase 2 of the research. The embedded cases were selected across a range of indicators: geographical location, level of government, administrative law, culture, and level of sophistication of the service; and included examples of relative success and relative failure. These in-depth cases involved further analysis of documents specific to the case and interviews with key stakeholders, including: member state civil servants who have worked on the development of the project (either at national, regional or local level); civil servants from central eGovernment units; private sector personnel where the project has involved contract providers; and EU officials where there has been involvement at the European level.

The case studies are:

- eConsultation (embedded cases: Madrid Participa and Your Voice in Europe)
- Public Registries (embedded cases: GEWAN, Eurodac and X Road)
- Digital Citizen Rights (embedded case: the case of Denmark)
- Cross Border eProcurement (embedded cases: the Northern European Subset and Cross Border Tenders: A Joint Belgian–French initiative)
- Employment Mobility (embedded cases: EURES, Online Job Search in Slovenia and Online Job Search in the UK)

See deliverable 2 for the case study findings. Available at: http://www.egovbarriers.org/?view=project_outputs.

4. Consultation with eGovernment stakeholders

Interaction among a range of eGovernment stakeholders has been encouraged in order to obtain informed feedback on the research findings, via the project website, six-monthly workshops, and the creation of an expert group. These activities are essential to ensure that the research is targeted appropriately and is of value to stakeholders in this field. A broader objective is to raise discussion and awareness of potential difficulties in this area, as failures in eGovernment are not generally discussed openly.

One strategy used to encourage the creation of a community of eGovernment stakeholders was to create a repository of valuable eGovernment resources on the project website, with an online inventory and online forum to store and manage feedback and interaction among the participants. A second strategy was to hold a project workshop every 6 months to enable interested parties to find out more about the research, discuss the findings and share their experiences with the project team. A third strategy was the formation of an expert group. The group comprised around thirty eGovernment specialists from public administrations, business and research across the globe. It advised the project team on:

- identification of key barriers to eGovernment (with practical illustrations of these barriers)
- identification of legal foundations and regulatory issues
- identification of good practice in overcoming barriers (including suggestions for case studies)
- project promotion
- provision of feedback on project findings and draft reports

More details about the inventory, the workshops (including workshop reports) and the expert groups are available on the project website: <http://www.egovbarriers.org>

Sources

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Research projects

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SMARTGOV (<http://www.smartgov-project.org/>)

eFORUM (<http://www.eu-forum.org/>)

eUSER (<http://www.euser-eu.org/>)

KEELAN (<http://www.keelan.elanet.org/home/>)

SIMAP (<http://simap.eu.int/>)

The Safer Internet Programme

(http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/index_en.htm)

eContentplus

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