

## **Working group 23:**

# **eGovernment: Human rights challenges and opportunities**

## **Background**

Initiatives developed within the EU's Digital Single Market strategy have given rise to a plethora of new services and opportunities for citizens, fostering their participation in civil society. Following the implementation of the EU's e-signature regulation (eIDAS), digital identities have spread and eGovernment services are having a greater outreach. However, problems may arise, including tracking, profiling, discrimination and the misrepresentation of identities. This could potentially harm fundamental rights.

To achieve the full inclusion of European citizens in such processes, it is crucial that equal access to the internet is granted and without restrictions. Net neutrality, the principle whereby internet access providers must treat internet traffic equally, must therefore be considered. Currently, an increasing number of mobile internet access providers are discriminating between online services based on the cost of accessing such services. However, following the adoption of a related EU regulation in 2015, the EU is currently defining implementation guidelines that should provide clarity for providers and users alike.

Another important element included in the Europe 2020 strategy is internet accessibility for people with disabilities, older people and others. Inaccessible websites deprive citizens of an essential means of delivering and accessing information and services. They form a barrier to inclusion, as acknowledged in the European Commission's 2015 proposal for a European Accessibility Act and the 2012 proposal for a Directive on the accessibility of public sector bodies' websites.

## **Objectives**

This workshop focused on eGovernment as a way to achieve better inclusion and participation of EU citizens in civil and social life. Stemming from the Digital Single Market strategy, many initiatives have been consolidated in recent times to provide EU citizens with equal and unhampered access to public services. In this regard, the focus was on defining and using digital identities in the context of signature (eIDAS) regulation. Concepts such as net neutrality and accessibility, and the impact on protecting fundamental rights, were also covered.

## **Speakers**

- Reinier van Zutphen, National Ombudsman, The Netherlands

- Peter Kustor, Head of department, eGovernment– Legal, Organisational and International Issue, Federal Chancellery, Austria
- Aikaterini Dimitrakopoulou, Policy officer, Citizenship Rights and Free Movement Unit, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers, European Commission
- Heini Huotari, Head of the Unit for Democracy, Language Affairs and Fundamental Rights, Ministry of Justice, Finland

## Main messages

1. Promote openness, transparency and effective administrative procedures through eGovernment.
2. Monitor and assess the cost-benefit (human resources, economic, technical) balance of eGovernment tools.
3. Ensure equal and unrestricted access to the internet (e.g. people with disabilities; observe functionally exclusive features of eGovernment tools, formalised simplifications of requests).

## Promising practices

- Encouraging active and inclusive citizen participation through eGovernment services (e.g. citizens' initiative), Ministry of Justice/government, Finland.
- Enhancing public discussion as well as cross-sectional interaction and cooperation in administration, Head of Unit for Democracy/ Ministry of Justice/government, Finland.
- Educational and training opportunities for citizens on new eGovernment techniques, civil servants/Ministry of Justice/government, Latvia.

## Next steps

- NGOs, governments and policy makers should work to enhance civil society engagement in eGovernment.
- The media and governments need to further promote eGovernment tools to increase users' participation (awareness raising, education), especially when introducing *mandatory* ('digital by default') eGovernment tools.
- EU institutions and governments should monitor and assess who the users of eGovernment tools are, and what their skills, needs and expectations are.
- National and local governments should assess the impact of new eGovernment tools on fundamental rights (data protection, privacy).
- Governments should address the expectations of citizens, support them to be self-reliant and thus facilitate the exercise of their rights.
- EU institutions and governments should hold public consultations to consult citizens before implementing new eGovernment tools.
- EU institutions and governments should assess the implications and costs of new eGovernment tools.

- EU institutions and governments should make eGovernment tools accessible and user-friendly (e.g. interface).
- EU institutions and governments should provide information in clear language.
- EU institutions and governments should enhance and improve eGovernment tools in the justice sector.